

## European Report: Development of Burnout

### Special thanks!

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You can find all the resources and information about the project at  
<https://beatburnout.eu/>



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## Introduction

During these two years of research, we have gained significant insights into the complex issue of burnout. Our findings highlight that women, as a group, face unique challenges in the workplace that may have been previously overlooked. Gender roles play a crucial role, and understanding how biases impact individuals requires examining both external expectations and internal perceptions.

Our research has concentrated on work-related burnout, although it is evident that workplace stress affects personal life and vice versa. Historically, burnout has been recognized as an occupational phenomenon for several decades. However, it was not until the World Health Organization (WHO) defined burnout in 2019 because of unmanageable workplace stress that it gained broader recognition.

What we know is that there are several factors that can increase the risk of getting burnout as anxiety issues, diagnoses as ADHD and autism, previous trauma, perfectionism and compulsory disorder to name a few. Estimated roughly it's about 30-40% of the workforce that has an increased risk of getting burnout, meaning for any workplace it's crucial to understand and work against. We'll further discuss triggering factors at work but generally you can say that the perfect cocktail for burnout is prolonged stress exposure combined with insufficient recovery.



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## Background and historical perspective on burnout

### 1990s: Early Recognition and Initial Research

- **Recognition:** Burnout began gaining recognition in the 1990s as researchers and clinicians observed rising stress levels in various professions.
- **Initial Research:** Early studies focused on high-stress professions like healthcare and education, identifying core symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.
- **Workplace Changes:** The 1990s saw significant shifts in workplace dynamics with the rise of globalization and technological advancements, leading to increased job demands and stress.

### 2000s: Increased Awareness and Broader Research

- **Expanding Scope:** Research expanded to include a wider range of professions and industries, recognizing that burnout was not limited to high-stress jobs.
- **Work-Life Balance:** The concept of work-life balance gained prominence as a critical factor in preventing burnout. Organizations began to explore flexible working arrangements.
- **Psychological Models:** Development of psychological models to understand burnout better, such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which emphasized the balance between job demands and available resources.

### 2010s: Recognition by WHO and Growing Concern

- **WHO Classification:** In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) included burnout in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition.
- **Digital Transformation:** The digital transformation of workplaces led to an always-on culture, contributing to increased stress and burnout.
- **Mental Health Initiatives:** Growing recognition of mental health issues led to more comprehensive wellness programs in workplaces, aiming to address burnout through various initiatives.

### 2020-2024: The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Aftermath



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- **Pandemic Impact:** The COVID-19 pandemic significantly exacerbated burnout levels, particularly among healthcare workers, educators, and remote workers.
- **Remote Work Challenges:** The rapid shift to remote work introduced new stressors, such as isolation, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and digital fatigue.
- **Increased Research:** An influx of studies during this period aimed to understand the specific impacts of the pandemic on burnout and develop targeted interventions.
- **Policy Changes:** Many European countries and organizations implemented policies to support mental health, such as mandatory mental health days, better support systems, and flexible working conditions.

### Results from our two-year study BeatBurnout

In our two reports, we have gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, which has highlighted the complexity of the issue. From the first report [Uncovering the Hidden Struggles: Examining Remote Work Challenges and Burnout Risk for Women in the Modern Workplace](#), we have understood that personal experience has a significant impact. For instance, if an employee feels that their employer treats them unfairly or that their manager does not care about them as an individual, it will affect their feelings, regardless of the employer's efforts to prevent burnout. This indicates that focusing solely on structures and processes is insufficient. A quote from one of our interviews illustrates this problem,

*"This is the irony of it, we are getting many company emails about well-being, how to relax, how to handle work-life balance, but at the same time we are buried under so much work that I have zero time to even read it. So, everything with an e-mail subject wellbeing goes directly into trash."*

We began our research with the understanding that women, as a group, are at a higher risk of experiencing burnout. However, throughout the project, we discovered that today's working environment demands a high degree of self-leadership. Employees must set boundaries, prioritize mental well-being, and effectively communicate their needs. This creates a complex relationship where both employees and employers need to engage in discussions about expectations, boundaries, feelings, and mental states—an ongoing dialogue that requires mutual effort. Additionally, employers must recognize and understand



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the specific reasons why women are more susceptible to burnout and remain vigilant for any warning signs.

In our second report, [Leading through distance](#) which focuses on the managers' perspective, we found that managers themselves are under considerable pressure, 63% of managers reported personal encounters with burnout. They are aware of their responsibilities but often lack the knowledge, tools, and sometimes the time and resources to effectively prevent burnout. The context and culture in which managers operate significantly influence their behavior. Many work overtime without adequate structures, policies, or guidelines, making it challenging to be supportive, present, and understanding leaders.

We observed variations across different countries involved in the project, with differing legislation and norms affecting working conditions. Despite these differences, several common factors emerged. The rise in flexible working conditions has blurred the boundaries between private life and work, technological advancements have increased efficiency but also fostered an always-on culture, and economic pressures, including those from the pandemic and financial instability, have heightened stress levels. These factors present both challenges and opportunities for employers, who must address them proactively. Our research indicates that environmental changes have occurred so rapidly that many companies have struggled to adapt their cultures accordingly and establish necessary support systems.

## **Second phase of our project - Creating support tools for employers**

During our second year we've been analyzing our data, to create tools that help companies better support employees in remote work settings. Since it's a complex topic that doesn't have one solution, the modules that we've created reflect many ways of working to promote well-being, creating resilience, gaining knowledge as well as structures, policies, inspiration of programs to develop and ways of talking about well-being, burnout and psychological safety at work.

The tools we've created are based on the fifteen challenges we defined during our first year,



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where each of these include tree activities, in total 45 activities developed. We've also created a self-assessment tool for employees and as well as a checklist for managers to use, these are made to help increase self-reflection.

As mentioned, the topic is complex and requires a multifaceted approach. Key strategies include implementing realistic workload expectations, providing adequate resources, and fostering a supportive work environment. It is essential to offer access to counseling and stress management programs while promoting a culture of openness around mental health issues. Encouraging flexible working arrangements, mandatory rest periods, and policies that support a healthy work-life balance is crucial. Additionally, providing training for

employees and managers to recognize signs of burnout and implement effective coping strategies is vital for long-term sustainability.



## Signs of burnout

### Physical symptoms

Fatigue, Sleep problems, Headaches, Digestive issues, Infections

### Emotional symptoms

Irritability, Anger, Frustration, Depression, Anxiety

### Cognitive symptoms

Difficulty concentrating, Memory problems, Impaired decision-making, Difficulty prioritizing

### Behavioral symptoms

Withdrawal from social activities, Increased alcohol consumption, Drug abuse, Relationship problems

## Conclusion

Burnout is a complex and persistent issue that requires ongoing efforts from both employers and employees. Preventing burnout involves continuous effort, raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and fostering a work environment that is sustainable in the long run. Our research also underscores the unique challenges faced by different groups, both women and managers in our case and highlights the necessity for robust support systems. It's a phenomenon that is increasing across Europe and requires attention.

