

WOMEN OF STEEL COMMITTEE SPECIAL PUBLICATION #3

HOW BURNOUT COULD AFFECT YOU AT WORK?

THE EVOLUTION OF BURNOUT FROM AN INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSIBILITY
 TO NOW INCLUDE A RESPONSIBILITY OF EMPLOYERS AS CONTRIBUTORS

Generally, members are aware of what **depression, anxiety** and **stress** are. However, workers may not be aware of what **burnout** is. The Women of Steel are releasing four publications raising awareness around some common mental health issues, with a focus on burnout which could be

affecting members. Publication [#1](#) will review general information, [#2](#) how self-help can assist, [#3](#) how burnout could affect you at work, and [#4](#) what to do when self-help is no longer working. All four publications can be found [here](#) if you wish to read ahead, or get further assistance.

BURNOUT IS ABOUT THE WORKPLACE, NOT THE WORKERS

According to the foremost expert on burnout, [Christina Maslach](#), social psychologist and professor emerita of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, we are attacking the problem from the wrong angle. She is one of three people responsible for the gold standard of measuring burnout — the eponymous [Maslach Burnout Inventory \(MBI\)](#) — and the coauthor of the [Areas of Worklife Survey](#).

The “Burnout Is About Your Workplace, Not Your People” [article](#), published in Harvard Business Review, examines accountability for workplace burnout.

We tend to think of burnout as an individual problem, solvable by “learning to say no,” more yoga, better breathing techniques, practicing resilience — the self-help list goes on. But [evidence](#) is mounting that applying personal, band-aid solutions to an epic and rapidly evolving workplace phenomenon may be harming, not helping, the battle. With “burnout” now officially recognized by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), the responsibility for managing it has shifted away from the individual and towards the organization. Leaders take note: It’s now on you to build a burnout strategy.

Maslach worries about the new WHO classification in the ICD11: “Categorizing burnout as a disease was an attempt by the WHO to provide definitions for what is wrong with people, instead of what is wrong with companies,” she explains. “When we just look at the person, what that means is, **‘Hey we’ve got to treat that person.’ ‘You can’t work here because you’re the problem.’ ‘We have to get rid of that person.’ Then, it becomes that person’s problem, not the responsibility of the organization that employs them.**”

To Maslach’s point, a survey of 7,500 full-time employees by [Gallup](#) found the top five reasons for burnout are:

1. Unfair treatment at work
2. Unmanageable workload
3. Lack of role clarity
4. Lack of communication and support from their manager
5. Unreasonable time pressure

THE CANARY IN THE COAL MINE

Picture a canary in a coal mine. They are healthy birds, singing away as they make their way into the mine. But, when they come out full of soot and disease, no longer singing, can you imagine us asking why the canaries made themselves sick? No, because the answer would be obvious: the coal mine is making the birds sick.

Go further: Read the article “[Burnout Is About Your Workplace, Not Your People](#)”



The following factors also increase the likelihood of burnout:

- Large degree of responsibility with time pressure or boring routines
- Unachievable targets
- High expectations of yourself
- Unclear or changing success criteria
- Shift work or highly varying work hours
- Lack of opportunities for influence and control
- Poor working environment
- Fear of losing your job

Based on the HBR article, would you agree work performance metrics contribute to burnout?



CONTINUOUS DEMANDS CONTRIBUTE TO BURNOUT ON THE JOB

According to the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#) (CCOHS), **unreasonable expectations and aggressive changeable metrics/stats can have a direct impact on mental health and well-being. Scheduling, workload, work-life balance, and the continuous demands around productivity and driving metrics that are expected of employees in varying work environments, are contributors to burnout on the job.**

As per the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, the CSA (Canadian Standards Association Group) lists organizational factors that can and do directly contribute to job burnout, such as **growth and development, workload management, lack of work-life balance, organizational culture, clear leadership and expectations.**

Companies have a drive and focus towards growth, their shareholders, and the consumers they support. On the other hand, hyper focusing on productivity and cost efficiency can have a detrimental effect on employees' health. Employees in these work environments are being impacted by continuous changes to their job description, and expectations to meet ever changing targets in a high-performance work environment where jobs are being merged into one.

BURNOUT: THE CONSEQUENCE OF A HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURE

A good example of this is agents being trained to take on additional roles, or sales metrics being introduced in traditionally non-sales roles, essentially adding extra duties and expectations on top of existing metrics alongside new metrics. Many members are struggling in a high-performance culture, where as soon as a benchmark is met, it is then increased, or additional expectations are added on.

These continuous changes and evolving expectations can negatively affect how an individual is able to effectively concentrate on tasks, stay positive with individuals they work with, or those they serve, be alert, and stay engaged and energized on their day to day tasks. The behaviour changes in turn can have an impact on how productive the individual appears to the Company, as well as lead to potential future coaching and discipline.

Burnout has been described as leading to lower performance. One has to question the fairness of progressive discipline if burnout is not given due consideration by an employer.



At any time if you need help, please reach out to the [Union](#). These communication pieces have been created in the spirit of education and empowerment. In Solidarity,

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A HEAVIER BURDEN FOR WOMEN

Additionally, women make up 47.7% of the Canadian workforce and traditionally are in a care role, and can face a challenging balancing act between working to provide for the family, as well as care for elderly family members, and/or looking after the household and children.

According to Statistics Canada and [childcarecanada.org](#), in families where both parents are working, women on average spend 49.8 hours per week on childcare, whereas men spend 27.2 hours per week.

BURNOUT CHECKLIST

If you can check 5 or more, you could be heading toward burnout.

- I have regular difficulty concentrating and staying on task.
- I carry too much responsibility and feel like I'm drowning in work.
- My boss has completely unrealistic expectations of me.
- I worry about work long after the work day had ended.
- At the end of the work day, I feel emotionally zapped.
- I often wake up dreading the thought of going to work.
- I often feel sad – not much seems to interest me anymore.
- It seems like everyone but me is having fun and enjoying relationships.
- Even after 8 hours of sleep I feel tired, and often wake up exhausted.
- I feel myself caring less for other peoples' needs.
- My fuse is much shorter, causing me to snap easily.
- My sex drive is disappearing or is gone altogether.
- I am no longer interested in social activities and rarely go out.
- Life generally seems pointless to me.
- I care less about my appearance and overall wellbeing.
- I get headaches or tightness in my neck, shoulder or back.
- I often binge drink or eat.
- I am often ill and always seem to catch anything going around.
- I often stay up too late working, gaming or surfing the web.
- I often feel the urge to drink or indulge in other forms of escapism.
- My family complains about not seeing enough of me.