

## **PRINT SCRIPT-Feeling the burn: National survey finds employees depleted by work-related stress**

This might be one of those studies that results in people responding, “They spent money on that? I could have told them that!”

[The study](#) by Indeed, one of the largest online websites for employers and job seekers, found alarmingly high levels of employee burnout. More than half (52%) of respondents are feeling burned out, and more than two-thirds (67%) believe burnout has worsened throughout the pandemic.

Those who work virtually are more likely to say burnout has worsened over the pandemic (38%) than those working on-site (28%). Kaleena Williams, LCSW, a psychotherapist for OSF HealthCare, says that’s not surprising because the lines between work and personal life have been blurred for those working from home.

“Home is now work. Work is now home, and how do we keep that separated? So the idea of boundaries has been significantly impacted across the board for individuals who are working in the home environment.” (:13)

The “do more with less” approach to work has been amplified by the economic stressors from stay-at-home orders and mitigation factors that significantly impacted some business sectors. Some employers have not brought back all furloughed employees.

Conversely, some workers have reassessed their jobs while at home. More focused on family, some have decided to switch careers or stay at home to care for children due to child care shortages that resulted from the pandemic. Often, it seems, those employees are not replaced, forcing remaining employees to pick up the slack.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially classified burnout as a medical diagnosis. It describes burnout as a state of emotional and physical exhaustion brought upon by long periods of unrelenting, work-related stress. It results in a person feeling depleted and dejected.

Williams says burnout can cause a regular release of stress hormones that can wreak havoc on the body’s various systems.

**“We might see rapid breathing and increased heart rate which could lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol; now we’re looking at the onset of what could be diabetes. All those categorizations (of issues) could take place with prolonged exposure to any kind of stressful environment, burnout included.” (:17)**

Williams says sleeplessness, headaches, increased irritability and being quick to anger are all symptoms of burnout. It can also look very much like depression, with employees feeling unmotivated and unable to rally to meet work demands.

The pandemic also forced many workplaces to add new safety protocols and other business processes. That kind of change can add stress.

So what's the anecdote? Williams says employees should talk with their supervisor to find solutions to reducing workload and stress.

“Can we change deadlines? Can we change the way we are responding to things? More importantly, can we change the communication that we have with our employees to allow them to know how valuable they are, to let them know they are essential, and the work they are doing is appreciated?”

Employers also bear responsibility, now more than ever, to get to know the challenges each employee faces and, when possible, make accommodations to meet their needs, such as a more flexible work schedule or additional bereavement time as delayed memorials are now being scheduled. Additionally, higher-level employees need to model self-care and have one-on-one discussions with workers.

“Encourage people in that timeframe to utilize, whether it is their PTO, or encourage them to be taking care of themselves. From an employer perspective, if you are encouraging your team to do so, they are going to feel more comfortable to take that time and to be more attentive to themselves.”

The more traditional causes of burnout include unclear job expectations, a dysfunctional workplace or monotonous work. But, the world of work has changed forever because of the COVID-19 pandemic. If employers are not willing to be more mindful of the impact, Williams says they will continue to lose employees to businesses that have been able to pivot and put more time into engaging with workers to see how they can feel more supported.

Williams says employees need to advocate for themselves and find professional help if their symptoms impact their health or personal relationships. OSF HealthCare offers free [behavioral health navigation services](#) to help understand all resources available in your area. [OSF SilverCloud](#) is also available. The free mental health digital support tool is available in communities served by OSF.