

## BURNOUT AMONG HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON CAUSES AND COPING STRATEGIES

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### ABSTRACT

Healthcare professionals face various stressors, such as long working hours, limited resources, traumatic situations, and insufficient institutional support, factors that contribute to the development of burnout syndrome. This condition is characterized by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal and professional accomplishment. It is associated with a higher incidence of depression, suicidal ideation, absenteeism, occupational accidents, and a decline in the quality of care provided. This study conducted an integrative review aiming to identify the causes of burnout among healthcare professionals and analyze the coping strategies adopted. The research was carried out in the PubMed database between 2020 and 2025, using the descriptors "Burnout" and "Healthcare Professionals" in both Portuguese and English, from which eight articles were selected. The studies showed that ineffective coping strategies increase vulnerability to burnout, whereas individual interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques proved effective in reducing stress, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and improving well-being. However, there is a highlighted need for institutional measures that reorganize work routines, enhance organizational support, and promote practices that foster mental health, engagement, and resilience among healthcare professionals. Thus, integrating individual and organizational strategies is essential for the prevention and management of burnout.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Occupational stress, Mindfulness, Health personnel, Mental health.

### INTRODUCTION

Healthcare professionals face numerous challenges and stressors in their daily practice, such as time constraints, inadequate support, and frequent exposure to trauma, morbidity, and mortality. In addition, they often work with limited resources and insufficient infrastructure, which compromises their ability to provide the quality of care they strive to offer their patients.<sup>1</sup> These conditions can lead to burnout, depersonalization, and exhaustion.

Burnout syndrome is defined as a chronic response to workplace stress, characterized by

physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that diminishes the sense of personal and professional accomplishment. Risk factors may include workplace conflicts and financial pressures, task overload, and communication or organizational problems. Some professions are more susceptible than others, and healthcare professionals—who are the focus of this work—face daily contact with severely ill individuals and stressful, urgent situations.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, healthcare professionals may be more susceptible to burnout due to exhausting workloads and situations that demand significant mental and emotional effort.

This syndrome is considered a complex and multidimensional problem because of its wide range of symptoms, such as depersonalization, anxiety, lack of motivation, mental fatigue, and diminished personal and professional fulfillment.<sup>2</sup>

Several studies demonstrate the relationship between burnout, depression, and suicidal behaviors, highlighting the interconnectedness of these conditions. Burnout syndrome has been consistently associated with a higher risk of suicidal ideation among healthcare professionals.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, among healthcare workers, burnout not only results in negative consequences for the individual's health but also leads to reduced patient safety, poorer quality of care, decreased professionalism, a higher incidence of workplace accidents, and increased absenteeism.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, coping mechanisms are essential to manage stress and its associated factors.<sup>2</sup>

## OBJECTIVES

To identify and analyze the causes of burnout episodes among healthcare professionals.

To investigate coping strategies used to manage this syndrome.

## METHODOLOGY

Foreign Data collection was carried out in 2024 using the PubMed database, including studies indexed within a 5-year time frame (2020 to 2025). For this study, the following descriptors were used: "Burnout" and "Healthcare Professionals", along with their corresponding English terms. These descriptors were extracted from the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) and combined to identify high-quality articles relevant to the study.

The inclusion criteria were: articles written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese; articles published between 2020 and 2025; and studies containing the descriptors listed above. Exclusion criteria included: undergraduate theses, simple abstracts, reviews, manuals, letters, news articles, editorials, case studies, and narrative literature reviews. A total of 6,976 studies were retrieved, of which 8 articles were selected for analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Healthcare professionals are exposed to a wide range of stressors in the medical environment, encompassing both traditional stressors inherent to clinical practice (long working hours, night shifts, contact with patients' pain and suffering, caring for individuals with potentially fatal illnesses, among others) and those that have emerged more recently (shortage of human resources, an increasing number of patients with complex clinical conditions, diversification of healthcare financing models, rapid technological and regulatory changes, etc.). Continuous exposure to these stressors may lead to the development of burnout syndrome, professional withdrawal, depressive symptoms, and manifestations of aggressive behavior. The occurrence of burnout and the

consequent reduction in quality of life among physicians and nurses negatively affect individual well-being, professional performance, and the quality of patient care.<sup>5</sup>

Coping is defined as the set of cognitive and behavioral efforts directed at managing specific internal and/or external demands perceived as taxing or exceeding the individual's available resources. Psychological vulnerability to a given situation arises when a person lacks sufficient coping resources to manage it adequately, while simultaneously assigning high relevance to the perceived threat implicit in the potential consequences of ineffective management.<sup>2</sup>

A variety of strategies may be adopted to deal with stress, including cognitive or behavioral coping, cognitive or behavioral avoidance, emotion-focused coping, or the use of substances. From this perspective, burnout syndrome can be understood as a progressive condition resulting from the adoption of ineffective coping strategies, through which professionals attempt to shield themselves from stressors inherent to the work environment.<sup>2</sup>

Mindfulness can be defined as the process of intentionally directing one's attention to the present moment with curiosity, openness, and acceptance of each experience, without judgment. This state is achieved through an attitude characterized by acceptance, clarity, non-evaluative awareness, patience, authenticity, openness to the unexpected, kindness, care, and compassion toward one's lived experience. Such practice facilitates the transition from habitual patterns of automatic reactions to more conscious and deliberate responses, enabling a greater understanding of oneself and the surrounding environment.<sup>5</sup>

The use of mindfulness techniques helps reduce the so-called "autopilot mode," which is often associated with rumination—that is, the recurrence of negative thoughts about oneself related to the past or the future. Evidence shows that attributes related to mindfulness are associated with lower levels of stress, depression, and anxiety, while training in this approach enhances emotional awareness, increases the use of stress-coping strategies, improves judgment in diverse situations, and results in more effective responses to stimuli. Together, these elements can positively impact professional performance in healthcare settings and within medical education.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, individual-level interventions using cognitive-behavioral therapy or other psychotherapeutic approaches, as well as relaxation techniques, may be considered effective in reducing stress and can be easily applied in the workplace.<sup>6</sup> A study conducted by Micali and Chiarella<sup>7</sup> in 2023 confirmed this by showing that healthcare professionals felt more attentive toward patients and reported better interpersonal relationships, improved problem-solving, and fewer workplace conflicts after using the described techniques.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that burnout syndrome and its treatment are often approached at the individual level, it is essential that the issue be addressed as a broad organizational problem within healthcare institutions. While the acute management of burnout is indeed linked to the individual needs of the affected professional, this integrative review makes it clear that reducing the occurrence of the syndrome requires interventions that reshape how work is conducted on a systemic level. Burnout stems from causes that affect all - or at least the vast majority - of healthcare workers, meaning the solutions must also be collective and institutional.

In the short term, burnout can be effectively managed through simple strategies such as psychological support, art therapy, and moments of relaxation in the workplace. Similarly, scheduled retreat periods

- short vacations or time off - have shown significant benefit in both treating and preventing burnout. However, despite their effectiveness, such measures often clash with market-driven dynamics that aim for maximum productivity at minimal cost. Therefore, it is crucial that management bodies and institutional leaders engage in proactive planning to prevent burnout rather than merely respond to it.

This review highlights the urgent need to promote activities that mitigate burnout in healthcare work environments. Exhausting routines, high-pressure situations, and lack of self-care are key contributing factors. Consequently, initiatives that foster well-being, resilience, and group engagement have been shown to reduce burnout and improve overall workplace climate.

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