



FACTSHEET: SPOTLIGHT ON BURNOUT

WHAT IS BURNOUT?

The [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) defines burnout as: “a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”. It is characterised by three dimensions:

- **Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion.** As emotional resources are depleted, the individual feels they are no longer able to contribute to their work at a psychological level.
- **Increased mental distance from one’s job.** The individual becomes disengaged, developing negative feelings or cynicism related to their job and their clients.
- **Reduced professional efficacy.** There is an increased tendency for the individual to evaluate themselves negatively, particularly regarding their work. They may feel unhappy about themselves and dissatisfied with their accomplishments in their job.

WHY IS BURNOUT RELEVANT FOR BUSINESSES?

Burnout has negative long-term health implications on an employee’s physical and mental health and negatively impacts many business priorities. This includes employee productivity and retention, taking sick leave and presenteeism. To prevent burnout, businesses must seek to understand the chronic job stressors employees face and how to alleviate them. Interventions should be focused on improving job conditions and providing employees with: **sustainable workload, choice and control, recognition and reward, supportive work community, fairness, respect and social justice, meaningful work, clear values and purpose.**

SPOTTING THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

Recognising the signs of burnout early can help to prevent symptoms from exacerbating and encourage individuals to seek the necessary support. Look out for the following physical and emotional changes:

- Lack of concentration
- Feeling helpless, trapped and demotivated
- Feeling overwhelmed and unproductive
- Change in sleeping habits and exhaustion
- Feelings of detachment and loneliness
- Lowered immunity
- Frequent headaches, muscle aches or gastrointestinal issues

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON CHRONIC JOB STRESSORS?

In order to more effectively prevent and manage employee burnout, employers need to look at the root causes of burnout and address structural and cultural issues that contribute to the following chronic job stressors:

1. High-pressured environment and unmanageable workload
2. Lack of control at work, including around role clarity
3. Lack of recognition or reward
4. Isolated and unsupportive working environment; lack of communication and support from management
5. Unfair treatment; favouritism and discrimination

Find some practical tips on how to manage and prevent employee burnout [here](#).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Addressing employee burnout: are you solving the right problem? – McKinsey Health Institute](#)
- [CMHA HK Guide to Thriving at Work](#)
- [Global Thriving at Work Guide – CMHA](#)
- [Burnout: The Ugly Truth - Central Minds Hong Kong](#)
- [Job burnout: How to spot it and take action - Mayo Clinic](#)
- [How to Recognise Burnout Symptoms - verywellmind](#)
- [Harvard Business Review - Burnout Resources](#)



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City Mental Health Alliance HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

CONTACT

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