

Burnout Awareness in the New Workforce: The Role of Workplace Culture and HR Intervention

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
<p>Type: Article Received: 28 March 2026 Revised: 26 April 2026 Accepted: 11 May 2026 Published: 02 June 2026</p>	<p>Intervention: Burnout Awareness in the New Workforce: The Role of Workplace Culture and HR Intervention</p> <p>"Burnout Awareness in the New Workforce: The Role of Workplace Culture and HR Intervention" examines the growing prevalence of exhaustion among young professionals and students. The study investigates how organisational environments and proactive HR strategies influence the mental well-being of the "new workforce."</p>
	<p>Keywords: Burnout Awareness; Employee Well-Being; Work-Life Balance; Workplace Culture; HRM Strategies; HR Intervention.</p>

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Introduction: The Modern Struggle for Balance

In today's hyperconnected world, the lines between professional and personal life have become increasingly blurred. What was once seen as a struggle primarily for healthcare workers and teachers has now spread to every sector, from corporate tech to academia. For the "new workforce" - recent graduates and early-career professionals aged 20 to 30 - the pressure to succeed is often met with overwhelming exhaustion. The World Health Organisation (WHO) now recognises burnout as an "occupational phenomenon" resulting from chronic, unmanaged workplace stress. It manifests in three main ways:

1. Emotional Exhaustion: Feeling drained and "spent".
2. Cynicism/Depersonalization: Feeling detached from one's work.
3. Reduced Professional Efficacy: A decline in the sense of accomplishment and productivity.

Literature Review

The academic foundation for this study draws from the evolution of the burnout concept, shifting from a niche psychological term to a globally recognised occupational phenomenon.

The Evolution of Burnout

The term "burnout" was first popularised in 1974 by psychologist Herbert (Freudenberger, 1974) to describe the physical and mental exhaustion seen in high-stress, interpersonal "helping" professions. This was later expanded by (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), who introduced the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). It identifies three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism), and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. By 2019, the World Health Organisation officially classified burnout as an "occupational phenomenon" resulting from chronic, unmanaged workplace stress.

Awareness and Workplace Culture

Research indicates that early recognition is the first line of defence; individuals who can identify symptoms early are significantly more likely to seek support. However, a gap often remains between knowing what burnout is and taking action, frequently due to the stigma surrounding mental health in professional settings.

The environment itself acts as a primary driver of well-being. A culture characterised by cut-throat competition and unrealistic expectations often breeds exhaustion; conversely, organisations that foster open communication and psychological safety provide a "buffer" that protects employees from the negative effects of stress.

HR Interventions in the New Workforce

Modern Human Resource Management has shifted from administrative tasks to actively shaping employee well-being. HR interventions are generally categorised into three types:

- Preventive: Awareness campaigns and wellness workshops.
- Corrective: Flexible work hours and job redesign.
- Developmental: Leadership training and mentorship.

For the "new workforce" Generation Z and Millennials these interventions are crucial. Recent global surveys show that younger employees report higher stress levels due to workload and career uncertainty. Organisations that prioritise mental health support see higher retention and engagement among this demographic.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyse how the awareness of burnout, the surrounding workplace culture, and specific HR interventions collectively impact the well-being of the modern workforce. To achieve this, the research focused on the following specific objectives:

- Assess Awareness Levels: To evaluate how well early-career employees and postgraduate students actually understand burnout as they enter the workforce.
- Analyse Workplace Culture: Identify the specific links between burnout symptoms and cultural factors, such as long working hours, pressure from managers or peers, and general organisational support.
- Evaluate HR's Impact: Determine the effectiveness of HR interventions such as wellness programs and flexible policies in reducing tendencies toward emotional exhaustion and detachment.
- Develop Strategic Recommendations: Propose actionable HR strategies that can boost mental well-being, improve awareness, and prevent burnout from taking root in professional environments.

Research Methodology

The study used a quantitative, descriptive correlational design to understand the link between workplace stress and burnout symptoms.

- Participants: 123 valid responses were analysed from individuals aged 20–30, primarily postgraduate students and early-career employees.
- Data Collection: A structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") was used to measure burnout awareness, workplace culture, and HR intervention effectiveness.
- Analysis: The researcher used Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) to measure the strength of the relationship between variables.

Key Findings

Category	Key Findings & Data Points
Demographics	The study focused on a young cohort (20–30 years), with 86.99% of respondents falling into the 23–26 age bracket. The sample consisted mostly of early-career employees (73.17%) and postgraduate students (23.58%).
Burnout Awareness	Awareness levels were moderate to high (Mean scores: 3.31 to 3.83). While respondents recognised that burnout is a common issue (Mean = 3.83), their ability to self-recognise specific symptoms was slightly lower (Mean = 3.31).
Workplace Culture	Respondents strongly agreed that organisational culture significantly impacts stress levels (Mean = 4.16). High-performance pressure (Mean = 3.52) was identified as a notable trigger for burnout.
Burnout Symptoms	Physical and emotional exhaustion were the most prominent symptoms, with the highest mean score of 4.19. Emotional exhaustion due to workload also scored high at 3.53.
HR Interventions	There is a very high belief that HR-led initiatives, such as wellness programs and flexible work hours, are effective in reducing burnout (Mean = 4.73).
Correlation Analysis	A Pearson’s correlation of $r = 0.46$ was found, indicating a moderate positive relationship, confirming that as workplace or academic stress increases, burnout symptoms also rise.

(Source: Primary Data)

The research uncovered a clear connection between the environment we work in and how quickly we burn out.

A Clear Link Between Stress and Burnout

The study found a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.46$) between workplace/academic stress and burnout symptoms. Simply put: As stress levels rise, burnout levels rise right along with them.

Workplace Culture as a Double-Edged Sword

- Respondents strongly agreed (Mean = 4.16) that organisational culture directly impacts their stress levels.
- The Triggers: High performance pressure (Mean = 3.52) and long working hours (Mean = 3.18) were identified as major catalysts for exhaustion.
- The Buffer: Conversely, feeling supported by peers and mentors (Mean = 3.83) acts as a protective shield against these pressures.
- The State of the New Workforce
- The data revealed a high prevalence of burnout symptoms among the younger generation:
- Physical/Emotional Fatigue: Scored the highest at 4.19, indicating a significant physical toll on young workers.
- Reduced Productivity: Respondents noted a visible decline in their performance due to stress (Mean = 3.75).

The Role of HR Interventions

- There is a strong belief in the power of institutional support. Respondents showed very high agreement (Mean = 4.73) that HR-led

initiatives can meaningfully reduce burnout. Key interventions that the workforce values include:

- Wellness Programs: Mental health workshops and counselling services.
- Flexible Policies: Flexible work hours and remote work arrangements to support work-life balance.
- Recognition Systems: Regular feedback and appreciation to boost morale.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that burnout is not just an individual's struggle; it is an organisational challenge. To foster a sustainable and healthy workforce, organisations and academic institutions should:

- Normalise Mental Health: Create a "psychologically safe" environment where talking about stress is not taboo.
- Train Leaders: Managers should be trained in emotional intelligence to recognise the early signs of burnout in their teams.
- Proactive Policies: Move beyond awareness to actual structural changes, such as mandatory breaks and realistic workload management.

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