

## BURNOUT SYNDROME AND COVID – 19

### Definition of Burnout

As today's living conditions have become stressful, the feeling of burnout has become a concept we hear frequently. The intensity of life in crowded cities, traffic, long working hours, and similar factors, when combined, pave the way for individuals to get tired more quickly, both physically and emotionally.

By definition, burnout can be expressed as the feeling that occurs as a result of insufficient internal resources people use to cope with difficult moments. It often occurs when people attempt to do more than they are capable of. Burnout syndrome manifests when feelings of exhaustion persist for a certain period, and existing resources become inadequate to meet the individual's needs. This syndrome presents with both physical and psychological symptoms. The most obvious symptoms include depressed mood, intolerance, irritability, and resulting difficulties in performing daily tasks. It is observed that burnout syndrome is most commonly experienced by individuals with stressful working lives and those providing intensive care.

Although the symptoms of burnout syndrome may differ from person to person, the common and most prominent features are loss of motivation, feelings of failure, feeling tired and intolerant, impatience, irritability, malaise, and pessimism. Burnout syndrome, which has both physical and psychological effects, is a slow process its beginning is uncertain. When it starts to become evident, it can bring with it situations such as feeling worthless, low professional self-confidence, low job satisfaction, and alienation from work. People who feel burnt out may tend to be more lonely by isolating themselves from their social environments and relationships.

People who must navigate intricate processes in their professional lives, shoulder significant responsibilities, contend with time constraints to meet deadlines, juggle multiple tasks simultaneously, and struggle to decline additional commitments are at a heightened risk of experiencing burnout syndrome. Healthcare professionals and individuals involved in caregiving, particularly for children or the elderly, are recognized as being within the primary demographic susceptible to burnout syndrome. Factors associated with organizational cultures, including individual and emotional traits, work hours, workload, recognition systems, institutional affiliation, and fairness, also play crucial roles in anticipating burnout.

Burnout occurs in four stages;

- I. Enthusiasm phase: In this period, there are high expectations and enthusiasm for the job, and the employee tries to adapt to the job/situation.
- II. Stagnation Phase: As the person's expectations are not met, their enthusiasm for work begins to decrease, and the discomfort felt due to the difficulties encountered gradually increases.

- III. Frustration/Disappointment phase: The person who realizes that the working/situation conditions are not suitable for him/her experiences disappointment and frustration due to being unable to change the conditions.
- IV. Indifference phase: During this stage, decreased job satisfaction, a diminished sense of belonging, and feelings of hopelessness are observed. The employee loses motivation and continues to work solely to meet economic needs.

### **Burnout and Covid – 19**

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began last year and impacted the entire world, brought forth a plethora of unknowns and uncertainties upon its emergence. Being a disease that poses a significant threat to human health and life, it instills feelings of being threatened, insecure, and helpless in many individuals. As we grapple with understanding the modes of transmission and ways to safeguard our physical well-being, stress, anxiety, and fear also take a toll on our mental health at a secondary level, leading to effects such as despair. The introduction of the concept of "social distancing" swiftly became a part of our lives due to this menacing virus, precipitating significant changes in both business and family dynamics. While a majority of people transitioned to remote work, certain professional sectors continued to operate face-to-face, and unfortunately, there were those who faced unemployment. The effort to adapt to and comprehend these drastic changes, coupled with the necessity to maintain work performance, often led to feelings of burnout becoming an unavoidable reality from time to time. Balancing our familial and professional responsibilities within the confines of our homes, which serve as our comfort zones, inevitably gave rise to role conflicts at the individual level. Constant exposure to the same environment and routine may lead to a decrease in our tolerance for various stimuli, resulting in quicker fatigue, while diminishing social support resources may prolong feelings of pessimism.

In addition to the physical and mental symptoms mentioned above, symptoms of burnout syndrome during the pandemic period may manifest themselves in situations similar to the following;

- Ignoring messages/calls from people close to you,
- Expressing the feeling of "longing" feels monotonous,
- Feeling easily frustrated about anything,
- Cancel video calls/attend meetings late,
- Continuous search for control/security.

### **What can be done to cope?**

In this period, when we are going through extraordinary conditions, accepting that it is normal and understandable to feel these emotions and experience difficulties will be the best help you can give yourself.

***At the individual level;*** Making arrangements for people's business and social life, paying attention to their spiritual well-being and care in short, making depleted internal resources available for reuse will make a significant difference. It may be recommended to spend more

time on social support resources, determine the boundaries between work and private life, and, if possible, introduce new routines into life with minor changes. During the pandemic, as we feel that our connection with the outside world and social environment has been cut off, it will be helpful to think about solutions that will help us maintain our connection and try to incorporate them into our lives.

***At the organizational level;*** Making arrangements that provide fair, permanent solutions to conflicts, diversify the sources of appreciation/reward, and support staff in orientation/supervision areas may be beneficial in reducing burnout.

Trying to cope with the feeling of burnout alone can sometimes be difficult. Getting support from an expert will help you understand the process better and develop coping skills. You need support for this or any other issue that affects your mood. If you're interested, you can request an appointment at [psikolojikdestek@altinbas.edu.tr](mailto:psikolojikdestek@altinbas.edu.tr).

Clinical Psychologist:  
Elif Tuğçe ÇOLAKOĞLU

### **Source**

Kaçmaz, N. (2005). Tükenmişlik (Burnout) Sendromu. İstanbul Tıp Fakültesi Dergisi, 68: 29 – 32

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