

# Review of Interventions to Reduce Burnout among Nurses

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## ABSTRACT

This review article examines the prevalence, causes, and interventions for burnout among nurses in healthcare settings, highlighting the multidimensional nature of this enduring occupational syndrome as defined by Maslach and Leiter. The analysis reveals that burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, rooted in the unique challenges faced by nursing professionals such as high workload, emotional demands from patient care, and insufficient support. Global prevalence rates suggest that approximately 11.3% of nurses experience burnout symptoms, with significantly higher rates reported in specific regions, particularly the Middle East. The article identifies key factors contributing to burnout, including excessive workload, lack of control, inadequate recognition, and emotional strain. These elements not only impact the well-being of nurses but also compromise patient safety and quality of care, leading to increased medical errors and healthcare costs. In response, effective holistic interventions are discussed, including mindfulness training, self-care promotion, mental health resources, and the establishment of supportive work environments. By fostering a culture of open communication and professional growth, healthcare institutions can enhance nurse resilience and engagement, ultimately mitigating burnout and improving both nurse satisfaction and patient outcomes.

**KEYWORDS:** burnout; contributing factors; management; nurses; staff productivity.

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of burnout was initially introduced by Herbert Freudenberg in the 1970s, describing it as a collection of vague physical and psychosocial symptoms arising from excessive energy demands at work. This early definition was instrumental in recognizing, characterizing, and naming an existing social issue based on observational data. However, these observations lacked systematic and standardized methodology. With the advent of standardized tools in the 1980s, like the Maslach Burnout Inventory and Burnout Measure, empirical studies on burnout began to emerge [1].

Maslach and Leiter further developed the notion of burnout, redefining it as a crisis in the interactions related to work rather than merely a problem concerning workers themselves. It is thought that burnout stems from ongoing exposure to work-related stressors. Maslach and her associates noted that burnout research is primarily focused on caregiving and service professions, where the relationship between the caregiver and the person receiving care is fundamental to the role. Occupations requiring human interaction often involve emotional investment, particularly in scenarios where the individual receiving care requires aid and support, which is a primary focus in the nursing field [3].

According to Maslach and Leiter [4], burnout is characterized as a syndrome with three dimensions: 'emotional exhaustion', 'depersonalization', and a 'lack of personal accomplishment at the workplace' that occur when functional coping strategies fail. These dimensions are further explained.

Concerning 'emotional exhaustion,' it occurs when healthcare professionals reach their capacity limits. Consequently, they experience a deficiency in emotional energy and a sense that their emotional resources are dwindling. This depletion inhibits their ability to respond emotionally. 'Emotional exhaustion' is a consequence of chronic workplace stressors, such as excessive workload, which persist over time and exert pressure on individuals' daily lives, leading to emotional fatigue. The core issue is not a direct physical fatigue from strenuous tasks; rather, it is the emotional drain stemming from insufficient resources to manage demands and stressors. This exhaustion heightens the likelihood of emotionally and cognitively distancing oneself from work, seemingly as a coping mechanism for work overload. This perceived lack of energy, viewed as an additional loss of resources, may result in maladaptive coping strategies, such as emotional detachment from work or depersonalization [5].

As for 'depersonalization,' it is characterized by impersonal and detached interactions, where, for instance, a nurse may adopt a remote approach towards patients and colleagues, actively overlooking their unique and engaging qualities while developing negative emotions and cynical attitudes. This is why 'depersonalization' is frequently equated with cynicism in burnout research. Typically, depersonalization arises from heightened exhaustion, initially serving as a self-protective measure—an emotional defense mechanism known as 'detached concern.' It functions as a coping strategy by creating distance between workers and their job, as well as between themselves and others, including colleagues and patients. In the context of healthcare professionals exhibiting depersonalization in

their work, these individuals strive to block negative emotions, thereby reducing emotional exhaustion and replenishing their resources, which ultimately enhances their energy [6].

Distancing arises as a coping mechanism to emotional exhaustion, disengaging the person from work and preventing additional emotional exhaustion. An attempt to cope with emotional exhaustion by becoming emotionally detached using distancing occurs. However, the consequence is that the detachment is capable of causing the loss of idealism and the dehumanization of others. With time, the nurse is not only creating a shield and cutting back on the amount of work but also creating an adverse response to others and to professional tasks and responsibilities. As a result, the nurse shifts from trying to do his/her very best to doing the bare minimum [7].

The ‘lack of personal accomplishment’ usually refers to negative feelings about competence and professional success, evidencing a lack of motivation and decreased productivity at work. This dimension represents the self-evaluation component of burnout. For example, an expectable part of a nurse’s job is to care for others. Still, if the nurse is emotionally exhausted and depersonalizing his/her surrounding, he/she will perceive the tasks as inadequate, lacking in personal accomplishment, and reducing one’s perceived professional efficacy [8]. This sense of inefficacy may lead nurses affected by burnout to a severe dislike of the kind of person they think they have become, leading to a loss of confidence and an increased risk of having negative self-esteem.

Objectives:

We aimed in this review to:

1. Determine the current prevalence and severity of burnout among nurses in various healthcare settings to establish a baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.
2. Analyze the key factors contributing to burnout among nurses
3. Assess the effectiveness of specific interventions

The prevalence and severity of burnout among nurses:

The healthcare field, and in particular the nursing environment, could be a highly stressful workplace due to its demanding responsibilities, almost diminished control over work nature, lack of social support, and long working shifts. Additionally, there are other stressors facing nurses in their working settings, such as dealing with pain, patient deaths, and breaking bad news to patients. Nurses can also get exposed to emotionally demanding circumstances in their personal life. This work-life interference can lead to emotional exhaustion, which in return result in burnout. As a meta-analysis of a global sample of 45,539 nurses of different specialties highlighted, the prevalence rate of burnout symptoms is about 11.3% among nurses [9].

In the Middle East, nurses reported the highest level of burnout among healthcare providers. Rates of burnout among nurses of primary care centers of Saudi Arabia reached up to 89% of nurses exhibiting at least one subscale of burnout, where the

Latefah Abdullah Alshamri, Almaha Muwaffaq Al-Ruwaili, Nawal Asam Wadi Al-Anzi, Afaf Alnashmi Juhayyim Alruwaili, Swera Hassan Alsubaei, Swera Hassan Alsubaei, Sheikha Saud Awad Al-Bishi, Talal Mohammed Daij Alenazi, Iman Nadi Al-Ruwaili, Fatimah Mohammed Alamari, Mufida Ibrahim Al-Subaie most common work-related stressors were high workload and shortage of staff. Such factors can result in emotional exhaustion and burnout in nurses, which have proven adverse effects on the quality of care provided, patient safety, and job satisfaction. Moreover, Burnout has not only adverse influence on individual providers and patient care, but it can also adversely affect the entire healthcare system [10].

Research has identified several factors contributing to the high prevalence of burnout among nurses. These factors include excessive workload, emotional strain from patient care, inadequate staffing levels, and insufficient support from management. Moreover, the psychological toll of facing critical and life-threatening situations regularly can exacerbate feelings of helplessness and empathy fatigue [11].

The effects of burnout extend beyond the individual nurse and can have profound implications for patient outcomes. A systematic review indicated a strong correlation between nurse burnout and increased rates of medical errors, poorer patient satisfaction, and higher instances of patient complications. Consequently, the healthcare system can face escalated costs associated with extended hospital stays and readmissions. Furthermore, burnout can lead to a cycle of attrition, as experienced nurses may choose to leave the profession, thereby worsening staffing shortages and increasing the burden on remaining staff [12].

Causes and outcomes:

Work overload contributes to burnout by depleting the capacity of people to meet the demands of the job. When this kind of overload is a chronic job condition, there is little opportunity to rest, recover, and restore balance. A sustainable and manageable workload, in contrast, provides opportunities to use and refine existing skills as well as to become effective in new areas of activity [13].

A clear link has been found between a lack of control and burnout. On the contrary, when employees have the perceived capacity to influence decisions that affect their work, to exercise professional autonomy, and to gain access to the resources necessary to do an effective job, they are more likely to experience job engagement [14].

The area of reward refers to the power of reinforcements to shape behavior. Insufficient recognition and reward (whether financial, institutional, or social) increases people's vulnerability to burnout, because it devalues both the work and the workers, and is closely associated with feelings of inefficacy. In contrast, consistency in the reward dimension between the person and the job means that there are both material rewards and opportunities for intrinsic satisfaction [15].

In terms of outcomes, burnout has been frequently associated with various forms of negative reactions and job withdrawal, including job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, absenteeism, intention to leave the job, and turnover. For example, cynicism has been found to be the pivotal aspect of burnout to predict turnover, and burnout mediates the relationship between being bullied in the workplace and the intention to quit the job. On the other hand, for people who stay on the job, burnout leads to lower productivity and impaired quality of work. As burnout diminishes opportunities for positive experiences at work, it is associated

with decreased job satisfaction and a reduced commitment to the job or the organization [16].

Effective holistic approaches in reducing nurse stress and burnout:

Prolonged exposure to work-related stress can lead to nurse burnout, potentiating clinical and medication errors and low-quality patient care. The demanding nature of the nursing profession, with its long hours, high patient loads, and emotional intensity, can lead to chronic stress and burnout if not properly addressed. Recognizing the importance of addressing these issues, healthcare institutions and nursing professionals have been exploring effective holistic approaches to reduce nurse stress and burnout. Holistic approaches (such as mindfulness training, "zen rooms," and massage chairs, among others) have been shown to reduce nurses' anxiety, stress, and burnout [17]. By addressing all aspects of a nurse's health and well-being, these approaches aim to not only alleviate stress and burnout but also promote overall wellness and resilience. One key aspect of effective holistic approaches to reducing nurse stress and burnout is promoting self-care and work-life balance. Nurses often prioritize the needs of others over their own, leading to neglect of their own well-being. Encouraging nurses to engage in self-care activities such as exercise, mindfulness practices, and hobbies can help them recharge and prevent burnout. Additionally, promoting work-life balance by ensuring adequate time off, flexible scheduling, and supportive work environments can also contribute to reducing stress and burnout among nurses [18]. Another important component of holistic approaches to reducing nurse stress and burnout is providing access to mental health support and resources. The emotional toll of caring for patients, particularly in high-stress environments such as intensive care units or emergency departments, can be overwhelming for nurses. Offering confidential counseling services, peer support groups, and mental health resources can help nurses cope with the emotional challenges of their work and prevent burnout. Additionally, training nurses in stress management techniques, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction or cognitive-behavioral therapy, can equip them with the tools to better handle stress and prevent burnout [19]. Incorporating wellness programs and initiatives into the workplace can also be an effective holistic approach to reducing nurse stress and burnout. Wellness programs may include activities such as yoga classes, nutrition workshops, or stress reduction seminars. By promoting healthy lifestyle choices and providing opportunities for relaxation and self-care, these programs can help nurses manage stress and improve their overall well-being. Additionally, creating a positive work environment that values and supports nurses' well-being, recognizes their contributions, and fosters a sense of community and camaraderie can also go a long way in reducing stress and burnout among nursing staff. Furthermore, fostering a culture of open communication and transparency within healthcare institutions is essential for addressing nurse stress and burnout. Nurses should feel comfortable expressing their concerns, sharing their experiences, and seeking help when needed without fear of judgment or reprisal [20]. Encouraging regular feedback from nurses about their work environment, workload, and stress levels can help identify areas of improvement and implement targeted interventions to reduce stress and prevent burnout. Additionally, involving nurses in decision-making processes, providing opportunities for professional development and career advancement, and recognizing

Latefah Abdullah Alshamri, Almaha Muwaffaq Al-Ruwaili, Nawal Asam Wadi Al-Anzi, Afaf Alnashmi Juhayyim Alruwaili, Swera Hassan Alsubaei, Swera Hassan Alsubaei, Sheikha Saud Awad Al-Bishi, Talal Mohammed Daij Alenazi, Iman Nadi Al-Ruwaili, Fatimah Mohammed Alamari, Mufida Ibrahim Al-Subaie their achievements can help boost morale and job satisfaction, ultimately reducing stress and burnout [21].

## 2. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical issue of burnout among nurses, which has profound implications for both their well-being and the quality of patient care. The prevalence of burnout is alarming, with many nurses experiencing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of diminished personal accomplishment. These symptoms are exacerbated by several contributing factors, including excessive workloads, lack of control over work processes, inadequate recognition, and the emotional toll of high-stress patient interactions. Effective interventions, particularly holistic approaches that emphasize self-care, flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and a positive work environment, are essential for mitigating burnout. As healthcare systems face heightened pressures and workforce challenges, prioritizing the mental health and job satisfaction of nursing staff will not only improve individual nurse resilience but will also enhance patient outcomes and overall healthcare quality. Continued research and targeted initiatives are vital in addressing and alleviating burnout to ensure that nurses can perform their critical roles without the crippling effects of stress and emotional fatigue.

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