

# Burnout and Work - Life Balance in Surgeons: A Cross - Sectional Survey

Dr. Tanvi Arora<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Chandan S. A.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post Graduate, Department of General Surgery, BGS Global Institute of Medical Sciences, Bengaluru, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of General Surgery, BGS Global Institute of Medical Sciences, Bengaluru, India

**Abstract:** *Burnout among surgeons is a pressing issue that affects their professional performance and personal well - being. This study assesses the prevalence of burnout and perceived work - life balance among surgeons from various specialties. We surveyed 112 surgeons, revealing significant levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement. Findings indicate demanding work schedules and insufficient institutional support for managing work - life balance. These results highlight the need for targeted interventions to mitigate burnout and enhance well - being among surgeons.*

**Keywords:** Burnout, surgeons, work life balance, emotional exhaustion, institutional support.

## 1. Introduction

Burnout is a psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged exposure to chronic interpersonal stressors at work. It manifests in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Surgeons are particularly vulnerable due to the high - stakes nature of their work and demanding schedules. Previous research has shown alarming levels of burnout among surgeons, raising concerns about patient care quality and healthcare sustainability. <sup>1, 2</sup> This study aims to examine burnout prevalence and work - life balance among surgeons across specialties, focusing on contributing factors and potential solutions.

## Patients and Methods

**Study Design:** Cross - sectional survey

**Study Population:** The study included 112 surgeons and postgraduate students from various surgical specialties.

## Inclusion Criteria:

- Surgeons or postgraduate students actively practicing or studying.
- Participants from multiple institutions, including those beyond Bengaluru.

## Exclusion Criteria:

- Surgeons or postgraduate students not actively practicing or studying at the time of the survey.
- Incomplete survey responses.

**Survey Instrument:** The questionnaire was developed based on a review of existing literature on burnout among healthcare professionals. <sup>3,4</sup> A pilot test with 20 surgeons ensured clarity and reliability. Feedback from the pilot was incorporated into the final version.

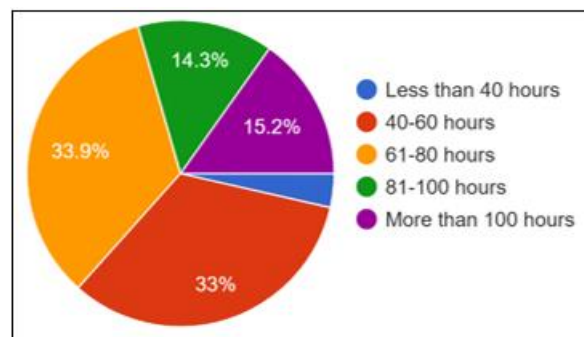
**Data Collection:** The survey was conducted online in the month of April 2024 via Google Forms. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

**Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistics summarized demographic information, work environment, burnout symptoms, and work - life balance indicators. Quantitative data were expressed as means, percentages, and frequencies. Qualitative data from open - ended questions were thematically analyzed.

## 2. Results

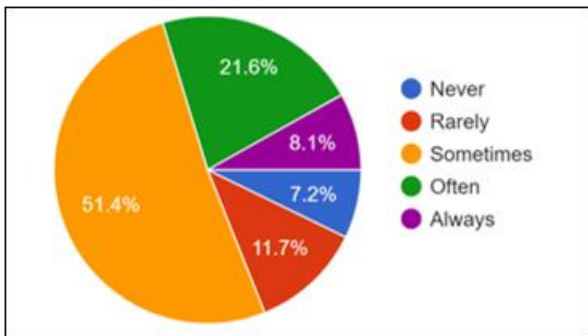
Respondents were predominantly under 30 years old (66.1%), mostly males (65.2%), with less than 5 years of surgical experience (75%). The most common specialties were General Surgery (41.1%) and Orthopedic Surgery (25.9%).

Most respondents worked 61 - 80 hours weekly (33.9%), with frequent on - call duties (75.9%). Staffing was reported as adequate (40.2%) or somewhat inadequate (39.3%). Residents reported higher staffing inadequacy (55%) and emotional exhaustion (65%) compared to faculty (30% and 45%, respectively).

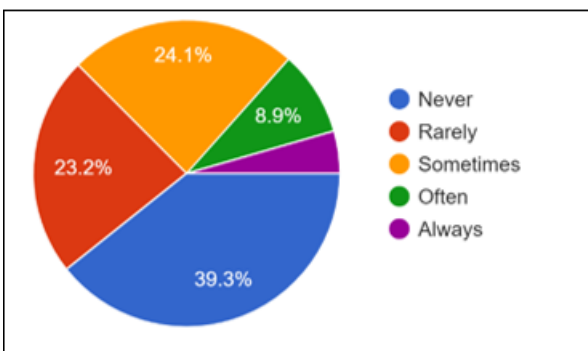


**Graph 1:** Average weekly working hours

The majority experienced emotional exhaustion occasionally (51.4%). About 33.9% felt a diminished sense of personal achievement, and 39.3% experienced no depersonalization towards patients. <sup>3</sup> Many felt overwhelmed by their workload occasionally (38.4%) and rarely considered leaving the profession (37.5%).

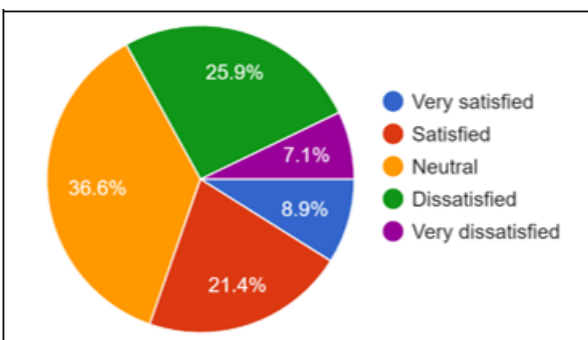


Graph 2: Burnout Assessment: Emotional Exhaustion

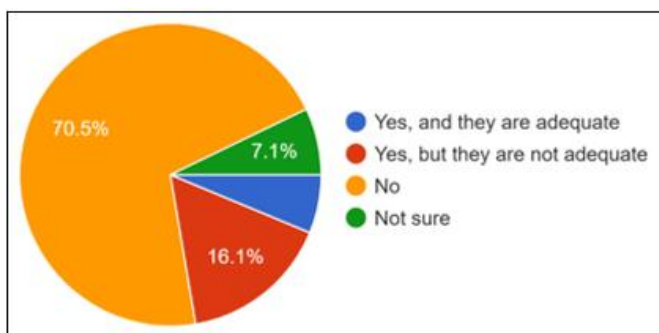


Graph 3: Burnout Assessment: Depersonalization

Satisfaction with work - life balance varied, with 36.6% neutral and 25.9% dissatisfied. Most had occasional time for hobbies (43.8%), and 37.8% felt consistently supported by family and friends. A majority (70.5%) reported inadequate institutional support for work - life balance.



Graph 4: Satisfaction with Work - Life Balance



Graph 5: Institutional Support for Work - Life Balance

Common stress management strategies included time with family and friends (75%), hobbies (47%), and exercise (32.1%). These strategies were generally considered effective (64.3% effective or very effective). Most respondents

(75.7%) expressed interest in institutional programs to improve work - life balance and reduce burnout.

### 3. Discussion

This study highlights the significant issue of burnout among surgeons, evidenced by high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement. The high prevalence of burnout reflects concerns about personal well - being and patient care quality.

#### Prevalence and Contributing Factors

Our findings are consistent with previous research showing elevated burnout levels among surgeons compared to other professionals.<sup>2,4</sup> Residents experience more burnout due to higher workloads and responsibilities. The demanding schedules, with 33.9% working 61 - 80 hours weekly and 29.5% working over 80 hours, along with frequent on - call duties and perceived inadequate staffing, contribute to burnout. Excessive workloads and limited control over work are well - documented contributors to burnout.

#### Work - Life Balance Challenges

The dissatisfaction with work - life balance among respondents indicates a critical area for improvement. With 33% dissatisfied with their balance and 40.2% managing hobbies infrequently, balancing professional responsibilities with personal time remains challenging. This finding aligns with literature suggesting that poor work - life balance exacerbates stress and burnout.<sup>5</sup>

#### Institutional support

Lack of adequate institutional support, including counselling services and flexible working arrangements, is a significant concern. The majority of respondents (70.5%) reported insufficient institutional support for work - life balance.<sup>1,5</sup> Institutional support is crucial in mitigating burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

#### Comparative Analysis

Burnout levels in our survey align with those reported in similar studies across various medical fields, indicating that burnout is a pervasive issue.<sup>3,4</sup> Addressing it requires a broad approach.

### 4. Limitations

Limitations include the potential bias from self - reported data, the cross - sectional design limiting causal inference, and the potential lack of representativeness due to sample size and geographic diversity. The structured survey format may not fully capture individual experiences.

### 5. Recommendations

Systemic changes are needed to address burnout. Implementing structured work hours, ensuring adequate staffing, and providing institutional support, such as counselling services and flexible arrangements, are essential. Promoting open communication about mental health is also important. Further research should evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Burnout is prevalent among surgeons, with residents experiencing higher levels than faculty. Key recommendations include structured work hours, adequate staffing, and enhanced institutional support.<sup>2, 4</sup> Further research should assess the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing burnout and improving work - life balance.

## References

- [1] Shanafelt TD, Boone S, Tan L, Dyrbye LN, Sotile W, Satele D, et al. Burnout and satisfaction with work - life balance among US physicians relative to the general US population. *JAMA internal medicine*.2012 Oct 8; 172 (18): 1377 - 85.
- [2] Elmore LC, Jeffe DB, Jin L, Awad MM, Turnbull IR. National survey of burnout among US general surgery residents. *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*.2016 Sep 1; 223 (3): 440 - 51.
- [3] Dyrbye LN, West CP, Satele D, Boone S, Tan L, Sloan J, Shanafelt TD. Burnout among US medical students, residents, and early career physicians relative to the general US population. *Academic Medicine*.2014 Mar 1; 89 (3): 443 - 51.
- [4] Balch CM, Shanafelt TD, Dyrbye L, Sloan J, Russell TR, Bechamps GJ, Freischlag JA. Surgeon distress as calibrated by hours worked and nights on call. *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*.2010 Feb 1; 210 (2): 225 - 33.
- [5] Williams ES, Manwell LB, Konrad TR, Linzer M. The relationship of organizational culture, stress, satisfaction, and burnout with physician - reported error and suboptimal patient care: results from the MEMO study. *Health Care Management Review*.2007 Apr 1; 32 (3): 203 - 12.