

# Retrospective study: incidence of burnout syndrome after the COVID-19 pandemic

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted, after more than 3 years of declaration, not only in the emergence of a “new normal” but in a change in the paradigm of 21st century medicine, going from providing our patients with comprehensive care, holistic and personalized, to a “war medicine”, leaving behind a deterioration in the functioning of the Spanish public health system and a wound of wear and tear that is difficult to heal among the health workers who fought during this international emergency. The present study has demonstrated a high incidence and prevalence of Burnout Syndrome among the health workers surveyed, an exhaustion that has affected their work and the quality of care that they provide to users of the Spanish health system.

**Keywords:** emotional work, fatigue, hospitalization

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## Introduction

Burnout syndrome among healthcare professionals in Spain has increased since the declaration of SARS-CoV-2 infection as a public health emergency of international concern. The lack of foresight on the part of the health authorities, as well as those responsible for the management of Spanish hospital centers, and the pandemic condition itself, led to a situation of physical, mental and emotional work overload, which led to these professionals to a level of stress never before addressed.

## Material and methods

A descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out through a survey among 50 health workers (doctors, nurses, nursing assistants and orderlies) from public hospitals in two different regions of Spain, selected at random and who, during the pandemic situation (according to the WHO, from March 2020 to May 2023) carried out their work in hospital emergency services, ICUs and conventional hospitalization wards in charge of internal medicine and pulmonology, among other. The data were transferred to the statistical program and are presented below.<sup>1</sup>

## Results

A total of 50 subjects were included (64% women and 36% men), with an average age of 37 years. Only 18% of those interviewed remained in a single service during the entire pandemic, the rest rotated or developed their work in two or more different units. In addition to the epidemiological data, the results obtained were extracted from an adapted questionnaire of more than 20 items whose answers ranged in an ascending range of numerical scale that went from “never” (numerical value 0) to “every day” (numerical value 6).<sup>2,3</sup>

Almost all of those interviewed (just over 95%) felt tired at the end of the work day “a few times a week or every day”; in the same proportion between “a few times a month and every day” they felt emotionally exhausted as a result of their work. More than 75% of them felt fatigued “a few times a week or every day” when they woke up in the morning and faced another day of work. And all of them said they easily understood how their colleagues felt each day at work, and more than half answered that on some occasion “systematization, workload or fatigue” led them to treat some colleagues or patients as if

they were objects. Impersonal. A small part (less than 5%) considered that working all day as a team sometimes involved great effort and fatigue (scale 2 or more). Most workers indicated that they “rarely or never” (scale 2 or less) learned how to effectively deal with problems that their teammates might experience. All of them report having experienced burnout from their work at some point, “feeling burned out.” Just under half of those interviewed say they have become more insensitive towards people since they have worked during the pandemic, and the same proportion believe that the work they have done has hardened them emotionally. During the pandemic, only 2% felt energized in their work every day, and all of them say they have at some point felt (scale 1 or more) frustrated in the position they held.<sup>4</sup>

Everyone believes that too much work was done at some point. They were all constantly worried about what might happen to their peers; and in this same percentage they were concerned, for different reasons, about working directly with patients with positive SARS-CoV-2. Many of them felt difficulty in easily creating a pleasant atmosphere with the rest of the team members; On the contrary, the majority say they have felt motivated after working as a team.

All of them believe they have achieved valuable things with the work they have done, although they consider that greater support from material and human resources and foresight would have helped to obtain better results.

## Conclusion

100% of those questioned presented some degree of Burnout during their professional practice during the pandemic stage. The distribution of Burnout intensity according to the questionnaire adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was: 45% had low Burnout, 40% had medium Burnout and 15% of these healthcare workers had severe Burnout. These are very worrying figures, which affect not only the health of workers, but also the quality of care provided to the sick.

## Acknowledgments

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## Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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