

## BURN OUT IN RADIOLOGISTS - NEW TALK OF THE TOWN

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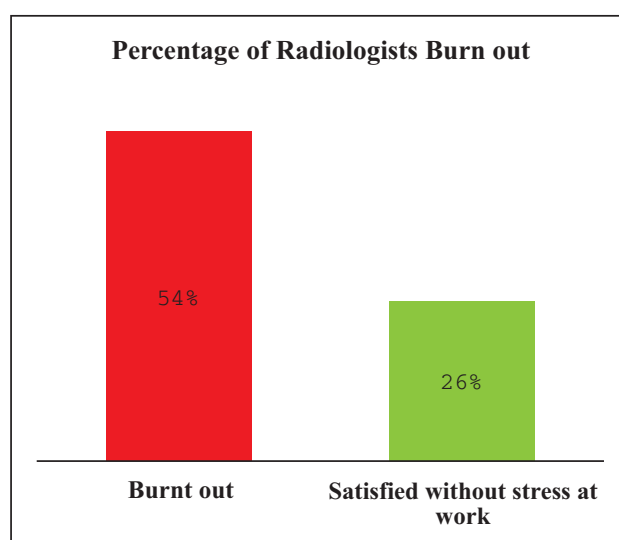
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Physician burnout is a psychological syndrome that is defined as a reaction to chronic occupational stressors resulting in emotional exhaustion, sense of depersonalization and lack of sense of personal accomplishment. Physician burnout can significantly impact personal and professional behaviour. Burnout is a global phenomenon with an upward rising trend and is affecting physicians across all specialities.

Radiology was once considered a comparatively relaxed field of medicine with better working hours and reduced workload. In the last few decades, with the integration of therapeutic radiology and recent advancements in digital imaging, radiology workload has increased multifold. Now, radiology burnout in the West is among the top specialities in medicine. Although burnout is more among interventional radiologists than diagnostic radiologists because the former involve high-risk invasive procedures, emergencies and complications.<sup>1</sup> Many common factors are contributing towards burnout between diagnostic and interventional radiologists such as excessive work hours, lack of respect and autonomy at the workplace, feeling like a cog in a wheel, and excessive administrative work. When compared with the international data for physician burnout, Pakistani radiologists suffer from burnout in a similar way to global trends.

A random survey was done at various tertiary care hospitals to get a comparative analysis of local radiologists burnout from the western figures through a questionnaire twined with Medscape. Age, gender, stress-related contributory factors, the effect of burnout on daily routine, ability to cope workload and possible measures to reduce burnout were taken into account. Out of the total, 42% male and 58% female radiologists of various ranks in radiology departments took the survey with a mean age range of 30-40 years. 54%

of radiologists have felt burnout of workload at some point in their care in comparison to 42-44% of international statistics and only 26% were happy with their working conditions (Fig.1). Rest of the people had neutral comments of neither happy nor burnout.

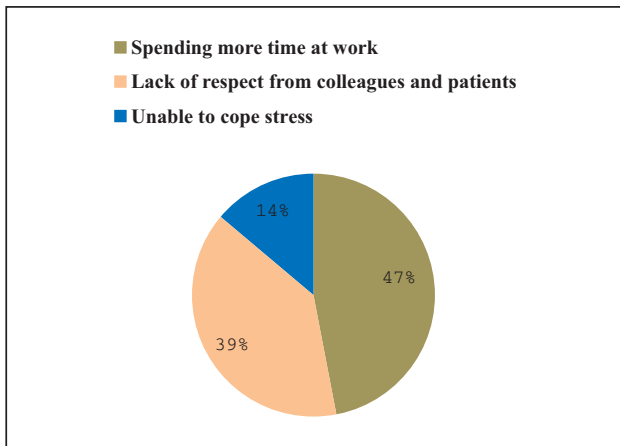


**Figure 1:** Bar chart showing percentages of Radiologists who have experienced burnout during working hours and satisfactory conditions at work without any stress.

Regarding contributory facts, nearly half of radiologists (47%) had a view of spending too many working hours result in burnout while 39% had this feeling secondary to lack of respect from patients and colleagues. 14% radiologists think they are unable to cope with stress which possibly leads to burnout during working hours (Fig.2). Out of all, 13 % are less concerned about the outcome of their scans and may not attend the patient's need appropriately as a reaction to the stressful workload. Burnout can lead to mistakes while reading a scan or reporting it, resulting in harm to the patient. Although burnout is quite prevalent among our radiologists and many

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**Figure 2:** Pie chart showing various causes contributing to burnout in Radiologists

think that administrators can help improve psychological work stress but around two-third radiologist report not seeking help for it.

Physician burnout and awareness regarding it is increasing worldwide. A Canadian survey reports above-average burnout rate in radiologists as compared to the overall physician rate. A US national survey in 2020 shows 42% of physicians reporting burnout and radiology is placed fourth among the most affected speciality with 46%.<sup>2</sup> This development has led to a decrease in job satisfaction and a decline in overall happiness with the working environment. Medscape surveys from the last two years show only one-fourth of radiologists are happy at work and half of the radiologists feel burnt out in their workplace. From a radiologist's point of view, these include work overload leading to excessive working hours, lack of autonomy in their work causing an unhealthy work environment, lack of respect from colleagues causing low self-esteem, excessive bureaucratic work including paperwork and charting. These factors lead to the physician burnout and in turn cause damage at multiple levels to the physician, the patients and the health care facility.

According to a survey, a psychologically burnt out radiologist is more likely to be error-prone, irritable, unprofessional, depersonalized and depressed.<sup>3</sup> The physical symptoms of burnout such as headache, feeling sick or depressed, myalgias, back pain, feeling tired leads to decreased work efficiency and pro-

ductivity or increased sick leaves. Burnout physicians feel a decreased self of accomplishment and it can lead to ending career prematurely. This leads to financial loss to the radiologist and the health system. Depersonalized physicians may feel indifferent towards their patients and act unprofessionally.


Burnout needs to be acknowledged and addressed proactively. Burnout can be reduced by the collaboration of physicians and their workplace administration. A radiologist can develop self-care habits to improve mental health, engage in healthy activities, exercise, take appropriate time off from work to recover from the stressful work conditions, and develop positive psychology to be optimistic and focus on successfully achieved goals and regain a sense of accomplishment. Health care employers can reduce the burnout by facilitating the radiologist by utilizing workplace ergonomics to the reading room structure to encourage team relationship, assigning radiologists with the work they enjoy and reduce the bureaucratic work. Employers should ensure appropriate leadership to enhance conflict resolution and devise assessment methods to detect any early signs of burnout.<sup>4</sup>

Radiology as a field is expanding exponentially and requires more trained doctors to cope up with the increasing demand. A limited workforce overburdens the existing staff and leads to more working hours and burnout. Hence increasing the workforce, reducing working hours and giving autonomy and respect to radiologists can significantly reduce the burnout among them.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

## References

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