

**An Analysis  
of Job Burnout Risks  
and Symptoms  
in Health Care.**

For: Department Managers

MDR

Lab

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Constant daily stressors, if unaddressed, can lead to symptoms of burnout. The most prevalent and measurable symptoms include exhaustion and disengagement. Employees whose symptoms are not dealt with can have higher levels of absenteeism causing unnecessary strain on the department.

A survey was sent to employees in MDR and the Lab, identifying risk factors, current levels of burnout and personal activities (including physical activity, sleep, and self-care practices). Of the 6 most common risk factors, the top two as identified in the survey were high workload and lack of autonomy.

The Burnout inventory showed a relatively even spread of engagement to disengagement in survey respondents, but a high prevalence of exhaustion.

Due to the high levels of exhaustion and high identification of two risk factors, the following recommendations are made:

1. Identify the issues/symptoms
2. Identify the problem areas
3. Address the issues/share with staff/provide information/be open and honest
4. Work as a team and utilize available resources to come up with creative solutions to dealing with risk factors.

## Introduction

Prolonged exposure to daily work stressors can negatively affect an individual and if not addressed, can lead to burnout. Burnout includes characteristic signs of physical and mental exhaustion and disengagement. Mental and Physical symptoms can affect an employee's productivity and absenteeism; A 2013 Canadian report noted that Canadian companies lost an estimated \$16.6 billion in productivity per year due to workers calling in sick, as a result of mental health issues (Stewart). A natural consequence of high absenteeism is working short-staffed in the departments - employees are expected to do the work of two or sometimes three different employees. This then creates an environment high in stress, causing a self-perpetuating phenomenon. Fortunately, identifying risk factors and subsequent symptoms of burnout allows for the environment to be modified and allows staff to begin to grow into a place of engagement.

An online survey was sent out to the employees working in MDR and the Lab which asked questions pertaining to common risk factors and symptoms of burnout, as well as personal activities that are known to aid in stress relief. In order to measure rates of exhaustion and disengagement, the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, which is an accepted alternative to the commonly used Maslach Burnout Inventory (Halbesleben, 48), was incorporated into the survey.

This report will highlight common risk factors that have been identified in MDR and Lab and will provide an examination of the data provided by employees via the burnout survey. Based on the collected data and subsequent analysis, the conclusion of the paper will offer an overview and recommendations on how to proceed.

## Data Section

### What is job burnout

Burnout is described as a “a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity” (Mayo Clinic Staff). In short, burnout is disengagement of an employee – they no longer gain any satisfaction from their work and it may suffer as a result.

### Symptoms of job burnout

Burnout symptoms are typically classified into three categories: Exhaustion, Disengagement and reduced personal accomplishment (Halbesleben, 33). Symptoms may include, but are not limited to:

#### **1. Exhaustion**

- Chronic fatigue
- Insomnia
- The feeling of having “nothing left to give”
- Absentmindedness/forgetfulness

#### **2. Disengagement**

- Cynicism
- Isolation
- Detachment

#### **3. Reduced personal accomplishment**

- Reduction in performance or ability
- Irritability
- Lack of accomplishment
- Feelings of hopelessness

Burnout was also found to be a significant predictor of physical symptoms such as diabetes, heart disease, GI issues and respiratory issues. (Salvagioni, 1)

## Risk factors for job burnout

### 1. Work overload

- Not enough time to complete a task
- Understaffed; employee is expected to work on more than one task
- Do not have the tools needed to complete the job
- Employee does not have the skills to perform or complete the task

### 2. Lack of control

- Staff have no autonomy or say in how to structure their day/environment
- Employees feel their voices or opinions are not considered
- Feelings of being “micromanaged”

### 3. Insufficient reward

- Not feeling personally satisfied by the work
- Feeling of putting more in than one is getting in return
- The sentiment that, “I don’t get paid enough for this”

### 4. Absence of fairness

- Inequality in workload or pay
- Seeming ‘favoritism’ among employees
- Poor resolution of conflict scenarios

### 5. Lack of community

- Incoherent community
- Negative work culture
- Feeling unsupported
- Lack of trust in management/supervisors

### 6. Conflicting values

- Personal values are not aligned with company values

## Steps to Wellness - How to combat burnout

### What can individuals do?

1. Identify the problem: This is a crucial first step before creating any actionable steps towards fixing a problem.
2. Sleep: Sleep is important for both mental and physical well-being and 7-8 hours is recommended per night for adults.

#### Some tips to help sleep:

- Shut off all electronics an hour prior to sleeping
  - Have a warm cup of tea or water before bed to help relax
  - Invest in black-out curtains if outside light is a problem
  - Do not keep cells phones directly beside the bed at night
  - Natural sleeping aids such as Melatonin or CBD oil may be used upon advisement by a doctor or pharmacist
3. Exercise: Cardiovascular exercise has been shown to decrease symptoms of burnout. Regular exercise will also contribute to better sleep.
  4. Try mindfulness techniques: Activities such as yoga, meditation, journaling or even walking can improve mental clarity and aid in calming the body.
  5. Seek help or guidance: Talk to trusted friends or family members or seek the help of a professional, such as a counsellor.

### What can employers do?

1. Identify risk factors: Identify areas of improvement and create steps to eliminate or help employees deal with common risk factors, as outlined above.
2. Encourage engagement: One of the characteristics of burnout is disengagement, try to move to a place of engagement with staff. Engagement is described as a “persistent, persuasive and positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees.”
3. Be honest and open with employees.

## Survey Data and Analysis

### Survey

A survey was sent out to 130 employees in the MDR and Lab departments. A total of 45 surveys were returned and 2 surveys were discarded due to unanswered questions (n=43).

*Part 1:*

- Identifying work environment (department, title, hours worked, etc.)

*Part 2:*

- 7 questions identifying common risk factors

*Part 3:*

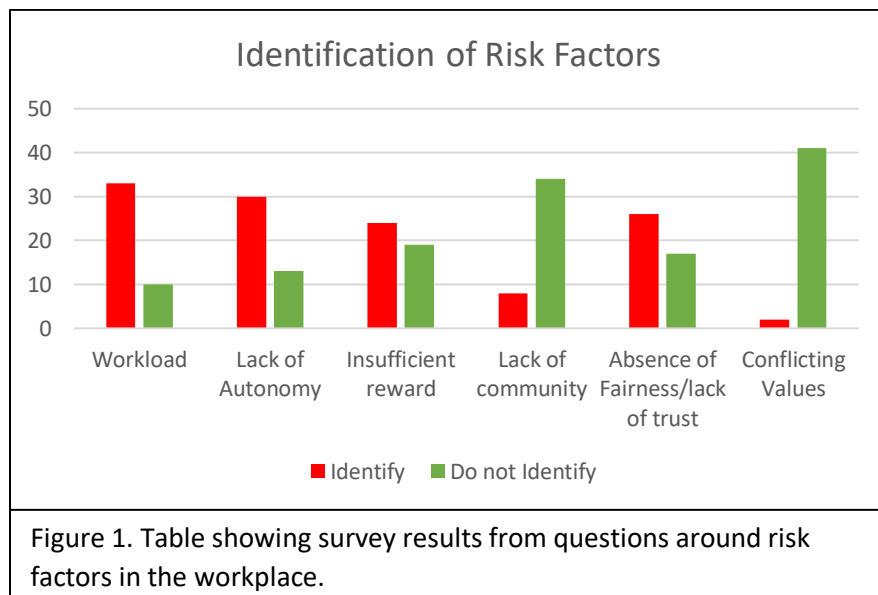
- 16 questions identifying levels of burnout (disengagement and exhaustion)
- This section was taken directly from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti, 2002) which measures levels of disengagement and exhaustion.

*Part 4:*

- 7 questions identifying participation in activities that may mitigate risks of burnout (sleep, physical activity, self-care etc.)

Data and Interpretation

7 questions were formulated to identify which, if any, of the 6 common risk factors employees feel they are currently experiencing in the workplace. Figure 1 shows the data from these questions.



As seen in the graph, the most prevalent risk factors include high workload and lack of autonomy. The lowest identified risk factors included conflicting values and lack of



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community; survey participants take great pride in their jobs and seem to have a great rapport with colleagues.

The Oldenburg burnout inventory was used to measure levels of exhaustion and disengagement in employees. The lowest possible score is 8 (lowest level of burnout) and the highest possible score is 32 (highest level of burnout) with 20 points being the midpoint. Using this point scale, twenty points and over is classified as “high” and less than 20 points is “low. A summary of results can be seen in figure 2.

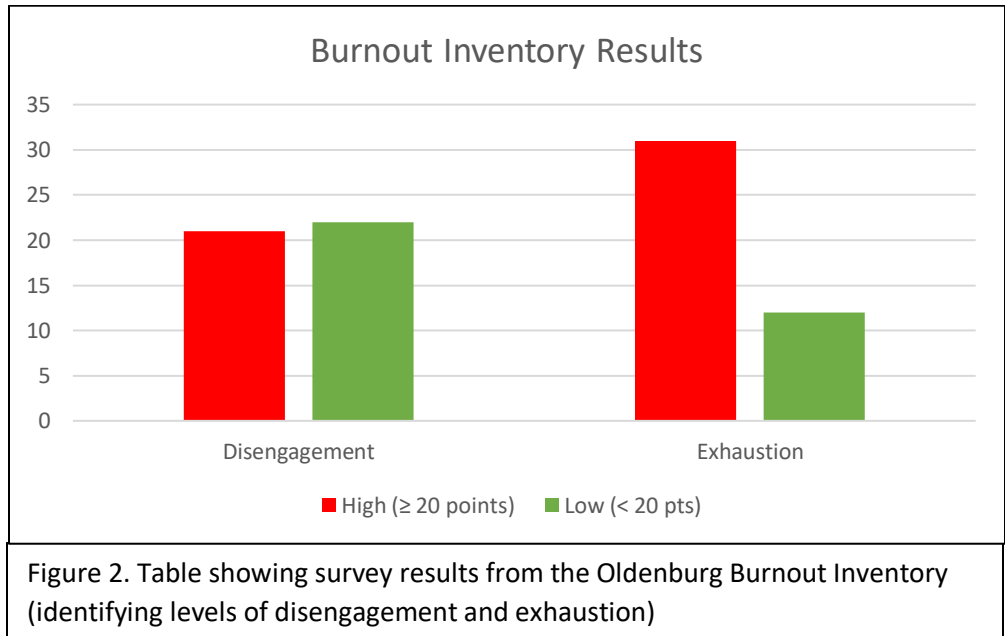


Figure 2. Table showing survey results from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (identifying levels of disengagement and exhaustion)

High levels of exhaustion (72%) are identified in the workplace and there was a relatively even distribution in scores measuring disengagement.

7 questions were asked around personal habits or self-care routines that may mitigate risk of burnout. Physical activity is a great way to improve overall health. Respondents were asked to identify how many days a week they participated in a physical activity for greater than 20 minutes. Results can be seen in figure 3.

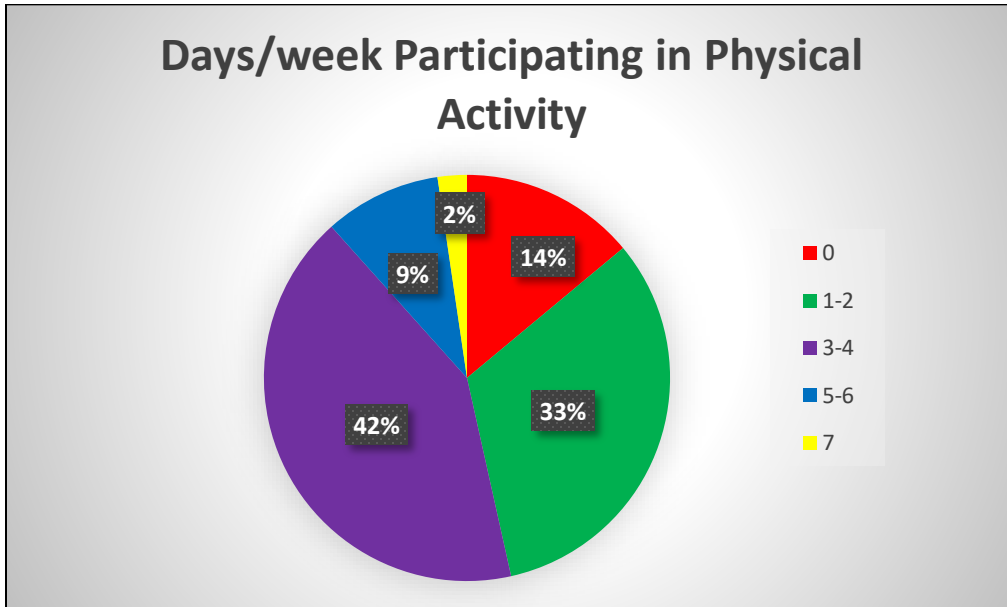


Figure 3. Pie chart showing the amount of physical activity employees are partaking in on a weekly basis.

Respondents were also asked to identify how many hours of sleep they were getting per night, on average. Results are summarized in figure 4.

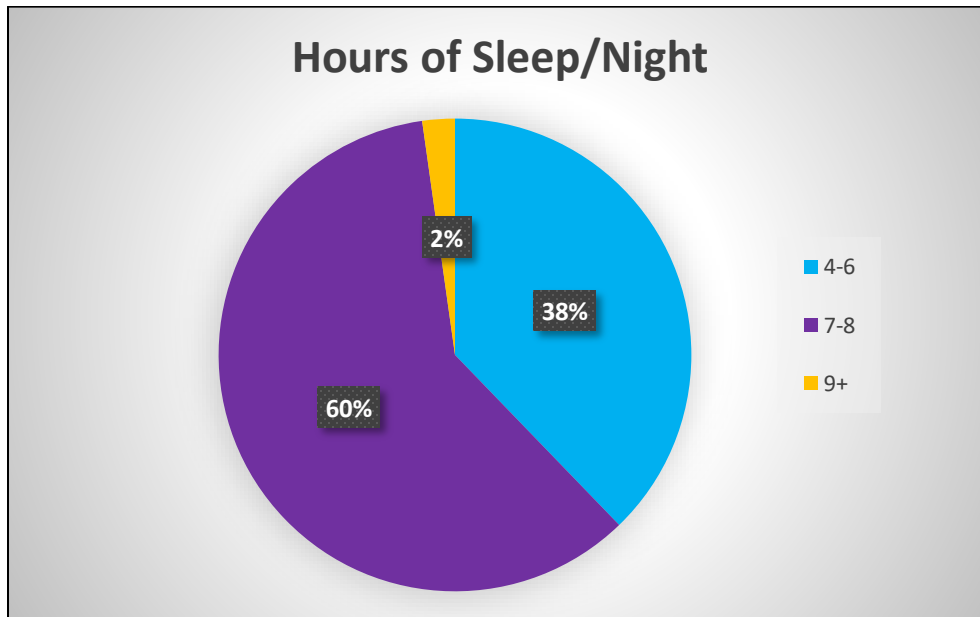


Figure 4. Pie chart showing amount of sleep that employees are getting per night.

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Respondents were asked to identify if they are currently participating in any self-care activities. Self-care activities are identified as practices such as mindfulness, meditation, journaling, yoga, massage etc. Results are summarized in figure 5.

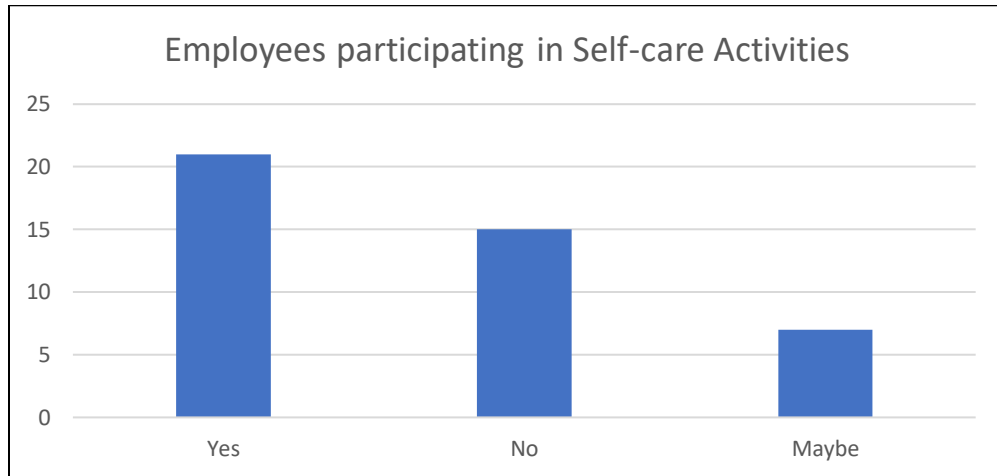


Figure 5. Employees currently participating in self-care activities (including mindfulness, meditation, journaling, yoga, massage etc.)

Data was used to correlate any relationships between personal activities and levels of burnout. Figure 6 shows relationships between burnout scores and self-care practices.

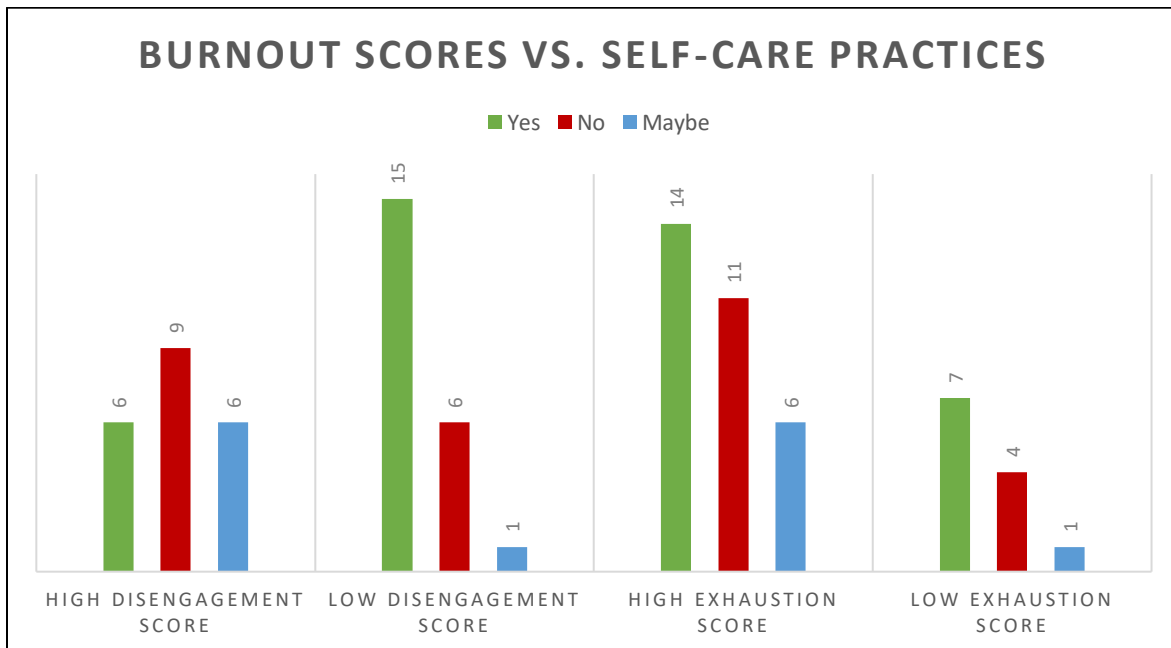
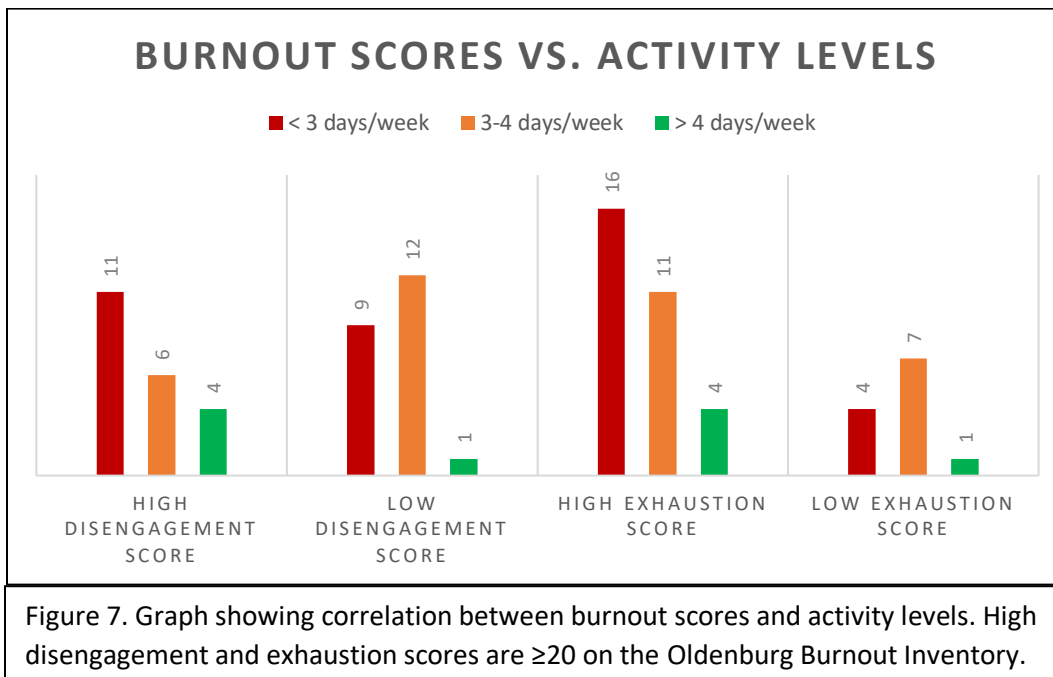


Figure 6. Graph showing correlation between burnout scores and self-care practices. High disengagement and exhaustion scores are  $\geq 20$  on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory.

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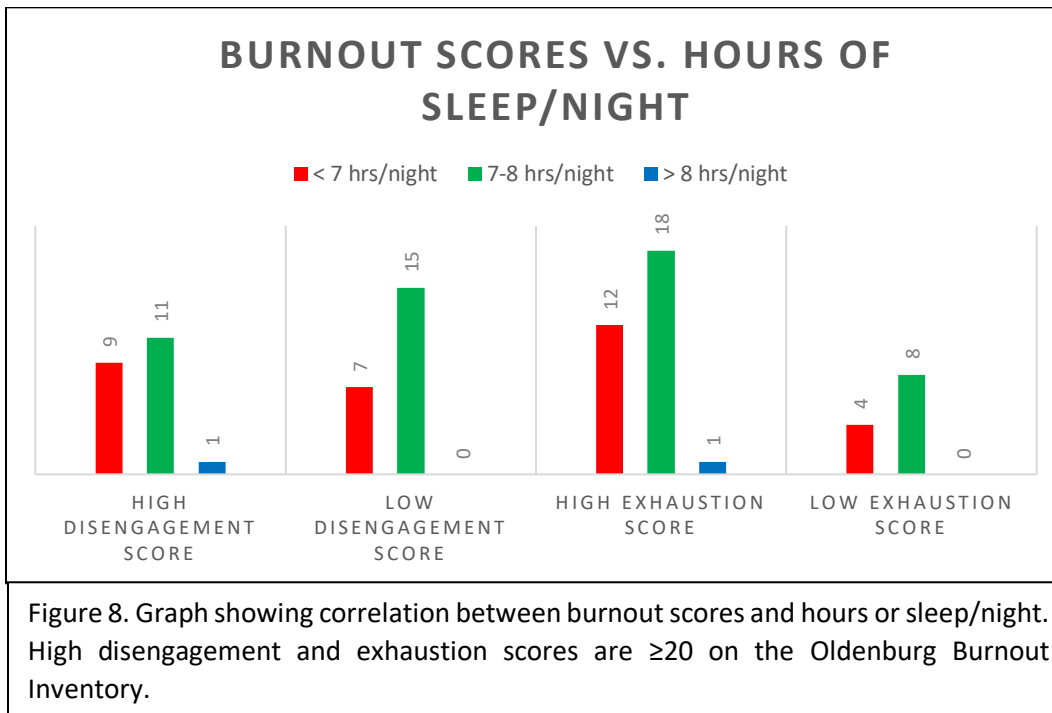
There may be some correlation between self-care activities and engagement; A high number of respondents in the low disengagement category also participate in self-care activities.

Activity levels were also compared with the burnout scores, as can be seen in figure 7.



In both the low disengagement and low exhaustion groups, a greater percentage of people participated in physical activities than in the higher scoring groups. It may also be noted that people exercising more than 4 days a week are more highly represented in the high disengagement and high exhaustion groups. This may indicate that there is an ideal mid-range (3-4 days/week) for activity when it comes to combatting symptoms of burnout.

Sleep also impacts a person's ability to perform at their best. Burnout scores were contrasted with the number of hours a person sleeps per night. Results are summarized in figure 8.



There may also be a relationship between sleep and employee engagement. As seen in the graph, most employees with low disengagement scores get an average of the recommended 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

Completing the survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to attend employer provided educational sessions pertaining to wellness. Responses are summarized in table 1.

	Willing to attend on own time	Willing to attend on work time
Yes	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>67.4%</b>
Yes, if compensated for my time	<b>25.6%</b>	<b>n/a</b>
no	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>
maybe	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>

There was very wide distribution in the numbers of employees who would be willing to attend on their own time. Most agreed, however, that they would attend on work time, with only a small percentage not willing to attend at all.

## Summary of IH Provided Resources Available

### For employees

- inet > Employee Wellness
- IH library: There are many resources available to cope with stress
- See your department manager for help locating appropriate resources

### For employers

- IH Library: There are many resources available for leaders
- inet > Employee Wellness > Engagement Tools for Managers: There is an extensive list of resources to facilitate employee engagement
- Spiritual Care Department can put on a presentation on ways to avoid burnout and handle stressful situations.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings

Overall, employees identified two common risk factors that are prevalent in their respective departments, high workload and lack of autonomy. The other commonly identified risk factors (lack of community, absence of fairness, insufficient reward and conflicting values) were not highly reported in this survey. Survey participants responded that most felt pride in their work and felt a strong sense of companionship with their co-workers.

The burnout inventory suggested high rates of exhaustion among employees with only about half showing symptoms of disengagement. Low rates of disengagement may be because employees take great pride in their work and are committed to high value output.

There is a possible correlation between employee engagement and self-care practices. Out of the 22 people in the low disengagement category, 68% reported that they were currently practicing self-care or relaxation activities, and 68% also reported as getting 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

Another possible relationship may be seen with physical activity. Those reporting participation in activity 3-4 days/week were highly represented in both the low exhaustion and low disengagement categories. An interesting finding is that those who exercised the most (> 4 days/week) were more highly represented in the higher burnout categories. This may suggest that a moderate activity level is best suited for combating stress.

## Recommendations

From the collected data, I have the following recommendations:

1. Identify the issues: From the collected data, high levels of exhaustion are reported in employees, this is one of the identifying features of job burnout.
2. Identify problem areas: Two main areas of concern, as identified in the survey are high workload and lack of autonomy.
3. Address the data with your employees: Most employees are willing to attend a wellness seminar during work time. A short presentation of the data and how to increase self-care would be beneficial for all staff.
4. Come up with creative solutions on how to mitigate risk factors: Work as a team with staff members to address issues together.

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