

## Burnout Syndrome in Dental Profession

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### Abstract:

Dentistry is a profession demanding physical and mental efforts as well as personal contacts, which can result in a condition known as "burnout". This is true for all stages of dental career and even dental students. This may have negative effects on their personal and professional life and well-being. Burnout is characterized by 3 key aspects: Emotional Exhaustion (mental fatigue) Depersonalization (psychological distancing from others) and Reduced personal accomplishment or inefficiency. The aim of the review is to provide the clinician with information to recognize the onset of burnout, the psychological and physiological effects, the effect on the dentists and the provision of practical methods to address the problem.

**Key Word:** Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Diminished Personal Accomplishment

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### I. Introduction

In the past decade epidemiological studies have found a high prevalence of professional stress syndrome of burnout in the developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Burnout is a public health issue due to its physical and mental health, and social implications for individuals. Many researchers have pointed out that burnout is an occupational health issue of a psychological nature which is one of the most important work related problems in today's society.<sup>2</sup>

Dentistry is considered as an inspiring, awarding and challenging profession because of the physical and mental diversity it produces on dentists. And hence has a reputation of being a stressful occupation.<sup>3,4</sup> Burnout is a public health issue due to its physical and mental health, and social implications for individuals.<sup>5</sup> Salanova and Lorens stated that burnout is an occupational health issue of a psychological nature which is one of the most important work related problems in today's society.<sup>6</sup>

Dentists experience numerous professional stressful situations, as they take intricate work on patients who are frequently in a highly anxious state. In addition to that, usually excessive prolonged working hours - beginning from education to clinical practice build up and academics, all the way through their professional carrier, lead to emotional, mental and physical exhaustion. Such high levels of stress tend to have a negative impact on their professional as well as personal lives, eventually resulting in professional burnout.<sup>7,8</sup>

Burnout is an accumulative, gradual and continuous process that occurs over an extended period of time. It does not happen overnight, but it can creep up on the individual if he or she is not paying attention to the warning signals, which are subtle at first but get worse as time goes on.<sup>7</sup> Thus, burnout syndrome is a malady, putting a person into a downward spiral from which it is hard to recover.<sup>1</sup>

The term Burnout was first coined by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger.<sup>9,10</sup> Many researchers have tried to define Burnout as a response of a "normal individual" to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems and he rephrased "BURNOUT" as an "erosion of engagement with the job."<sup>11</sup>

Burnout "is a persistent, negative work related state of mind of "normal individuals" primarily characterized by emotional exhaustion and accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work."<sup>12</sup>

But the most acceptable definition was written by Maslach and Jackson in 1981 as a working environment syndrome, characterized by a process of chronic response to occupational stress, when coping methods fail or are insufficient, thus having negative consequences, both at the individual and the professional level, and further affecting the family and social interactions.<sup>13</sup>

Maslach and Leiter 1997, stated that "Burnout" is the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents erosion in value, dignity, spirit, and will.<sup>5</sup>

Recent studies have shown that professional workload ,time constraint, patient and professional relations ,work organizations ,price hike ,job insecurity, competition in practice and in big cities -commuting lead to more exhaustion and are the important stressors in the development of Burnout syndrome.<sup>13</sup>

As the result of all the above mentioned factors ,Burnout syndrome is associated with distress, inability to change the situation or to adjust, exhaustion, sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation ,loss of joy at work, negative evaluation of oneself, loss of mastery, loss of professional efficacy and self esteem and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work, leading to negative outcome on quality of work, affecting both personal and professional interests of an individual person [dentist].<sup>4</sup>

Burnout may also affect physiological and psychological health of an individual. As a result work disability due to mental health—depression ,anxiety or physiological problems like high blood pressure, angina complaints may occur [Ahola et al.2009].Musculoskeletal disorders-back pain and a stressful work environment are also important causes of work sick leave, and low decision attitude[detaille et al.2009]

The aim of the article is to review the available literature to provide the clinician with information to recognize the onset of burnout ,the psychological and physiological effects ,the effect on the dentist-patient interaction and the provision of practical methods to address the problem.

According to Maslach ,Burnout is a multi dimensional syndrome and is characterized by three key aspects core dimentions

1.Emotional Exhaustion[EE],i.e. mental fatigue.

A typical stress reaction due to prolonged exposure to work and continuous interpersonal interactions.

2.Depersonalization [DP]or Dehumanization or Psychological distancing from others.

It is believed to be a way of coping with exhaustion by mentally isolating oneself from work and others. Thus negative attitude and cynical responses towards the patients and colleagues.<sup>11</sup>

3.Reduced Personal Accomplishment[RPA]or inefficiency

As a consequence of exhaustion and depersonalization ,a sense of reduced professional accomplishment, associated with loss of self confidence, low self esteem tendency to negatively evaluate one’s work and inefficiency might develop.<sup>11</sup>

## II. Causative Factors/Risk Factors

Burnout is commonly considered to be a result of the chronic occupational stress, basically interplay of many factors one’s lifestyle and personality traits can also contribute to Burnout syndrome. Causative factors are considered under three headings as shown in table 1.<sup>2,13,14</sup>

Sr no	Type	Causative factors/Risk Factors
1	Work Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ working in a chaotic or high pressure environment, so that one can’t concentrate on work</li> <li>✓ having poor self esteem , feeling like you have little or no control over your work or input.</li> <li>✓ doing work that is unsuitable ,monotonous or repetitive and unchallenging work</li> <li>✓ long working hours without adequate rewards or satisfaction or appreciation.</li> <li>✓ in recent years deficient career opportunities and limited work but more competition among each other.</li> <li>✓ Younger adults with an idealistic world view with unrealistically high expectations ,not getting fulfilled.</li> <li>✓ Financial and practice management issues</li> <li>✓ Unclear or overly demanding job.</li> <li>✓ Conflicts with co-workers.</li> <li>✓ Rapid institutional changes.</li> </ul>
2	Life style related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Working too much ,without enough time for socializing or relaxing.</li> <li>✓ Lack of close, supportive relationships at work place and even at home.</li> <li>✓ taking on too much responsibilities, without enough help from others.</li> <li>✓ Not getting enough rest and sleep</li> </ul>
3	Personal Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Perfectionist tendency: so taking long time to complete task and then also not satisfied, like nothing is ever good enough.</li> <li>✓ Pessimistic view of yourself and the world.</li> <li>✓ The need to be in control of every thing and every one around at work place and also at home.</li> <li>✓ Patient and professional relations and conflicts</li> </ul>

**Table 1.Causative factors of burnout syndrome**

### III. Signs and Symptoms

Burnout syndrome is a gradual process and is considered to have a range of symptoms which are a result of excessive stress at work or elsewhere including home.<sup>15</sup>

Onset of stress not only affects the body, mind and thoughts of an individual, but also involves a combination of hereditary, psychological and environmental factors, affecting every-day task at work and home as well.<sup>16</sup>

Symptoms are categorized into three main areas, that are considered to be the signs of burnout syndrome.<sup>9,12,14,15,16</sup>(Table 2)

Sr.no	Category	Signs & Symptoms
1	Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Feeling emotionally exhausted, drained, down, as if do not have enough energy.</li> <li>✓ Getting sick a lot :-experiencing frequent headaches, muscle pains,</li> <li>✓ Change in appetite-resulting in digestion problems or stomach pain.</li> <li>✓ Change in sleep habits-insomnia.</li> </ul>
2	Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Sense of failure and self doubt -that nothing is going well at home and at work place.</li> <li>✓ Feeling helpless, trapped, and defeated as if loosing one's grip on reality.</li> <li>✓ Develop cynical attitude towards work, environment, and colleagues.</li> <li>✓ Decrease satisfaction and decrease sense of accomplishment</li> <li>✓ People [individual] with Burnout syndrome have negative outlook about everything around, so find their job increasingly stressful and frustrating, find it hard to concentrate, are listless, and lack creativity, and are unable to cope.</li> <li>✓ They have interpersonal problems at work place as well as at home</li> <li>✓ -There is detachment from work, family and friends, and personal interests, so that feeling alone in the world. And start feeling numb about their work.</li> </ul>
3	Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Withdraw themselves from responsibilities towards work, family and society</li> <li>✓ leading to isolating from others. So loss of any achievement in life and in some extreme cases thinking of suicide also.</li> <li>✓ Procrastinating, taking longer to get things done.</li> <li>✓ consuming excess amount of food, alcohol or drugs to cope</li> <li>✓ -Taking out frustration on others.</li> <li>✓ -Skipping work, or coming late or leaving early.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Sign and symptoms of Burnout Syndrome.**

Along with all these symptoms, burnout syndrome has also been linked to risk factors of cardiovascular disease, high levels of cholesterol, glucose, triglycerides and marginally with ECG abnormalities.

Burnout has often been mistaken for stress. Stress involves too much: too many pressures that demand too much physically and psychologically. Stressed people can still imagine, though, that if they can just get everything under control, they will be better.

On the other hand, Burnout, is about not enough, feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring, no hope of positive change in the situation. If excessive stress is like drowning in responsibilities, Burnout is all dried up.<sup>2</sup>

Stress can intensify Burnout with time. And the two can be differentiated retrospectively.<sup>10</sup> Difference between stress and burnout is given in table 3.<sup>1,2,11,14,17</sup>

Stress	Burnout
Characterised by over engagement	Characterised by disengagement
Primary damage is physical	Primary damage is emotional
Leads to overactive emotions	Leads to more blunted state.
Produces urgency and hyperactivity	Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy	Loss of motivation, ideas and hope
Leads to anxiety disorders	Leads to detachment and depression
Stress refers to temporary adaptation to changing conditions which can be performed successfully	Burn reflects a breakdown in adaptation, causing structural deviation from normal functioning

**Table 3 : difference between stress and burnout.**

Many researchers have analysed the relationship between burnout Syndrome and depression and concluded that both are different conditions. Depression usually extends over every life domain i.e. work, family, leisure, while Burnout is specific to work context.<sup>4</sup>

Another entity that should also be considered is, the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD], because of the exposure to traumatic episodes, where as Burnout occurs in response to stressors [interpersonal or emotional] in the work place and is characterized by different reactions e.g. exhaustion.<sup>2,9</sup>

**IV. Measurement Of Burnout**

Several instruments have been used to measure Burnout in health professionals such as Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, and Freudenberger Burnout Inventory, But the Maslach Burnout Inventory [MBI] is considered to be the gold standard for assessing the Burnout syndrome.<sup>3,8</sup> and is widely used It is a 22 item self report questionnaire that consist of three dependently scored dimensions: Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Symptoms of Burnout syndrome can be same as that of mental or psychosomatic illnesses like Mental or psychological disorders like ,depression ,anxiety disorder, or chronic fatigue syndrome .Likewise physical illness or certain medications can also cause symptoms such as exhaustion and tiredness. It is important to look for the other possible causes together with the physician and with the help of MBI, one can measure or detect Burnout syndrome or to diagnose for the effective treatment.<sup>3</sup>

**V. Prevention Of Burnout Syndrome.**

The key to the management of Burnout Syndrome is early recognition and prompt effective intervention .Unfortunately many times it goes unnoticed and people continue to work under stressful conditions making it worse.<sup>6</sup>

Preventive approaches include both modifications in the work environment and also improvement in the individual’s ability to cope with the stress.<sup>1,2</sup>

The levels of prevention can be divided into:<sup>2,7,10,16,17</sup>

1. Primary preventive measures: [avoidance, removal of burnout factors.]
2. Secondary measures: early recognition/intervention, and
3. Tertiary measures: coping with the consequences, rehabilitation and relapse prophylaxis.(Table 4)

Sr. No	Level Of Prevention	Measures For Prevention
1	<b>Primary</b> (avoidance, removal of burnout factors)	Ergonomics, work and environmental design modification, and organizational and management development.
2	<b>Secondary</b> (early recognition and intervention)	Reduce work stress and burnout include worker education and training
3	<b>Tertiary</b> (coping with the consequences, rehabilitation and relapse prophylaxis)	Reduce the impact of stress and burnout by means of a more sensitive and responsive management system and enhanced occupational health provisions.[Ieka et al.2004 ]

**Table 4: level and measures of prevention of burnout syndrome.**

Preventive approach can be

1. individual /person directed,
2. organization directed or
3. combination of both.[ I ] (Table 5)

Sr.no	Preventive Level	Strategies	Measures
1	Individual or Personal level		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ set boundaries and do not overextend yourself</li> <li>✓ invest in your closest relationship .interpersonal relationship should be fostered with partner, children or friends.</li> <li>✓ try to be more social with co-workers, and make friends at work.</li> <li>✓ concrete support from management , co-workers and friends and family in everyday life may improve individuals ability to cope with the stress.</li> <li>✓ take time off /set aside relaxation time; take breaks from work , go outside for a walk or fresh air.</li> <li>✓ Improve your relationships at work and home and with Social contact</li> <li>✓ Make exercise priority—exercise, yoga, meditation and good night’s sleep are antidote to stress and are known to enhance physical state of mind.</li> <li>✓ focus on your interests and passion .</li> <li>✓ rediscover joy and meaning that makes work and life worthwhile.</li> <li>✓ find balance in life by managing work ,friends, family, hobbies, so as to avoid monotonous nature of work and long working hours.</li> <li>✓ try to find some value in what you do</li> <li>✓ family and community support is also important [cassito et al. 2003]</li> <li>✓ support your mood and energy level by eating healthy food.</li> <li>✓ increase your overall health and happiness o self care strategies to maintain personal, physical and mental health.</li> </ul>
2	Organization Directed		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Safe working organization ,change in the working environment.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>✓ Completing understanding of the work to be carried out and assessment of physical risks involved at the work place.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Acknowledgement and treatment of work related problems</li> <li>✓ Reframing the way to look at work to avoid monotonous nature of work</li> <li>✓ Distribution of high work load to avoid long working hours thereby exhaustion.</li> <li>✓ Evaluation of the priorities of the tasks or work</li> <li>✓ Use of flexible working times and provision of child care facilities and transportation facilities ,when needed ,may help to fascilitate the work- home interface [burton 2008]</li> </ul>
3	Combination of both	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ by using both measures at random</li> </ul>

**Table 5: Preventive Strategies of Burnout Syndrome**

There is no single strategy to prevent Burnout .it is proved that the best way to prevent Burnout syndrome is to reduce stress within individuals self confidence ,self management and self care. Self confidence is considered as an antecedent of burnout. Self confidence is the belief or degree of certainty, individual possesses about their ability to be successful in tasks. Self management means the interventions, training and skills by which people with Burnout Syndrome can effectively take care of themselves and learn how to do so .Self -care strategies to maintain personal, physical and mental health should also be promoted and include to stay physically and mentally fit.In addition to all these above mentioned interventions/strategies/preventive measures at different levels ,educational programs on Burnout Syndrome and its risk factors are necessary.<sup>18</sup> .

### VI. Discussion

Dentistry is recognized to be a physically and mentally demanding activity and is one of the most stressful healthcare profession due to its challenging working conditions and patient based nature.<sup>5,6</sup>

Stress has been described as an epidemic of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today humans are exposed to more stress than ever due to increasing competition and various environmental factors .Dentist [dental professionals] are not exempted from this scenario.<sup>3</sup>

According to Dr Langde et al,[IDA times Feb 17]Burnout among dental professionals is an important social issue because it directly affects patient ‘care and individuals health care .and it is worrying because doctors suffering from Burnout may lack empathy towards their patients, or have impaired judgment. Moreover according to Dentists often report physical problems induced by job strain and unhappiness.<sup>2,7</sup>

Burnout Syndrome is a condition where unrelieved stress and frustration often caused by long term involvement in demanding work situation creates a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion for the individual. These problems include an alarming high incidence of cardiovascular disease, ulcers, colitis, hypertension, lower back pain, eye strain marital disharmony, alcoholism, drug addiction mental depression and suicide. Dentists are believed to suffer from higher rates of mental illness due to stress, but are less likely than average to seek out help for their condition. Suicidal ideation in the dental students was significantly associated with burnout, and depressive symptoms dentists experience a variety of stressful factors all through their career One of the consequences of chronic occupational stress is Burnout<sup>17</sup> this is true for all stages of the dental career ,i e. for established dentists, young dentists, and even dental students . Dentists suffer from especially high degree of stress even when compared with the other health professionals.

Majority of dentists suffer from BOS after many years of practice management. BO risk increases with advancing age especially among male dentists, while recent information states that younger dentists show the first sign.

Several studies have reported a high prevalence of BO in Dentists.<sup>4,7,9,12</sup> In recent practice ,knowingly or unknowingly a competition has developed among dentists for achieving peak of success. This in turn may cultivate the first seed of BO among dentists.[dental professionals]that further leads to exhaustion and frustration.<sup>19</sup>

Either diverse and extreme demands or a lack of resources which exceed the person’s coping capacities can be viewed as the sources of occupational stress. Daily interactions with patients ,colleagues, and staff, time pressure ,paper work, defective equipmentsOr problems in the treatment of patients etc. are potential stressors in dentists.<sup>20</sup>

The average dentist spends most of his or her life confined to a small ,sometimes windowless ,7ft by 9 ft operatory ,which is smaller than the cells in our penal institutions .The work is intricate and meticulous and is performed in a small ,restricted oral space. The procedures are both physically and mentally taxing and, as a result strain back troubles and fatigue are common .It is relatively easy ,over a period of time ,for a dentists to become both physically and emotionally “burnout”.<sup>21</sup>

The expectations of the newly formed professionals are not “down to earth”, as they tend to expect more or less like fairy tales .This is called “reality shock”, which may end up in frustration consequently leading to discomfort and emotional diversion from the job ,one that was aspiring.<sup>13,22</sup>

Economic factors including the cost of a dental education and the start up cost of a practice can seem overwhelming if they are not considered as an investment in the professional future of the practitioners.

Economic pressure forces many dentists to work through their lunch, an hour that is the single most imp period of the work day. Instead of using the time to get proper nourishment and much needed rest, he or she will often accommodate an additional point or two. this inevitably leaves the dentist tired and exhausted by the end of the day .Another result of the economic press of practice is that dentists often feel that they literally cannot afford to be sick or take holidays .When a dentist is absent from the office ,the income totally stops ,but the high overhead expenses continue to grow relentlessly. The dentist who works all the time and never takes time off , there is a high price to pay i.e. BURNOUT.(BO) <sup>23</sup>

Most dentists practice alone ,consequently, they do not have the opportunity to share and solve problems with their colleagues, the way other professional groups do through peer support. It is then reinforced after graduation by the intense competition created by the surplus of dentists that now exists in many cities.mob

The professional image or status of dentistry as a health care professional can cause stress to some practitioners. This is particularly true of dentists who feel compelled to practice in a less than desirable environment and those who feel professionally isolated.

Burnout level increases with deficient career opportunities and limited work. Stress and difficulty to get sufficient patients in the clinic have relatively high BO risk. According to Deepak Langade, his study noted an increase in the incidence of BOS among more senior doctors .This increase in age means, more time spend working in the profession, compounding the effect of disturbed work -life balance ,resulting in higher **BO** levels .

Academicians who also had private practice were having longer working schedules as they have to balance dual workload of academic work and private practice. Whereas the dentists who are only academicians tend to have a specified working time, thus they tend to have more time for themselves. Marion Vogt observed that a key factor influencing the risk of job burnout is working time.

Dental education induces considerable stress on students.<sup>1,5</sup> so students are also not exempted from BOS.bo rate is high among post graduate doctors than under graduates.<sup>23</sup>

For becoming a responsible dental professional ,students have to reach high levels of knowledge and professional skills ,as well as developing good attitudes towards patient's care ;all in a short period of time .Students are exposed to a new dimension in education. students who were forced by their parents had more perception of stress than those whose first choice was dentistry. Students staying in hostel are under elevated level of stress than their counterparts those who stay at their homes, due to in times of emergency and hardship lack of emotional and material support students are exposed to a new dimension in education .<sup>19</sup>

Typical sources of stress in dental students are frequent exams, fear of failure, reduced leisure time ,anxious patients, time limits, possible conflicts which can lead to high stress levels with regards to personal factors ,examination phobia, fear of failure ,a lack of self confidence and the vast difference between the student's expectation and the reality they are confronted with frequently prove to be considerable stressors for dental students .

Stress due to financial concern was also high in the students which can be explained by the fact that ,admission in the dental college needs a immense tuition fees, and many parents finance their children's education through bank loans ,sturdy interest on loans, instruments books gives the students an anxiety about financial sources.<sup>10</sup> BO rate is higher among post graduate doctors than undergraduates.

Advanced training and specialization in health sciences is a complex educational procedure which poses unique challenges to young professionals Residents of all specialties often have multiple clinical ,teaching and research assignments ,long work hours and additional strains that typically accompany a young individuals life.<sup>1</sup>

According to Acharya et al and Kumar et al, males perceived more stress than female students, This may be due to ,in India men's income is considered the primary source of earning in the family and he has to take care of parents ,wife and children .because of such responsibilities and long tenure of dental profession men could be under considerable stress <sup>3,9</sup> according to Embriaco N.et al study showed that BO was worse among females and senior doctors .A study of French intensivist reported a higher level of BO among females as compared to their male counterparts; could be because of 'higher expectations' from them at both home and work <sup>21</sup>

Thus the source of stress may be the working environment i.e. work-place, financial and practice management issue, and type of the personality of the individual [personal trait]

## VII. Management

Early recognition, efficient coping strategies and valuable prevention of professional BO are strongly and urgently recommended.<sup>6,9</sup> According to Maslach et al, BO can be most effectively addressed using a combination of individual and organizational interventions with engagement as a positive goal for intervention.<sup>1</sup>

Significant reduction in BO by means of person-directed intervention and organization- directed intervention.<sup>16</sup>

According to D S Aulak, B Quinn and Wilson, relatively few dental professionals and dental Students are alert about the sign and symptoms, implications and don't know how to avoid BOS and hence it goes unnoticed.<sup>20,22</sup> hence Educate students and professionals on the risk factors, sign and symptoms of BO.<sup>22</sup>

Recognition of daily stressors. A stress response may be physical, behavioral, emotional or cognitive. should be recognized and taken care off.<sup>6</sup>

Dentists should be aware of these stressors and attempt to manage them in order to avoid becoming occupational dissatisfied. Debt reduction and income goals should be set and periodically evaluated to keep the cost of entering and conducting business in perspective.<sup>25</sup>

According to Wasoski RL Active membership in local, state and national organizations can lessen the feeling of professional isolation. And can provide contacts who can help starting practitioners improve their practice management.<sup>21,22</sup>

It is important that the students should be provided stress free college environment, so that the students can concentrate more on their studies in the curriculum. And the parents also need to be counselled against forcing their children to join an educational program of their choice.<sup>1,23,24</sup> Resting, taking time out rather than just reducing working hours, is widely accepted as being an effective treatment.<sup>26,27</sup>

## VIII. Conclusion

Raising awareness Of Burnout Syndrome is important and one should understand the causes, consequences and cost of Burnout, as well as solutions to the problems. For future and practicing dentists, these findings highlight the importance of striking a health balance between work and [personal] life, and maintaining supportive social network to handle the work related stress. This may limit the amount of stress experienced, increase the feeling of personal accomplishment and make one more resilient to BOS.

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