

Welcome

Re-thinking burnout

We present some new thinking around the causes of burnout and how employers and employees can break the burnout cycle.

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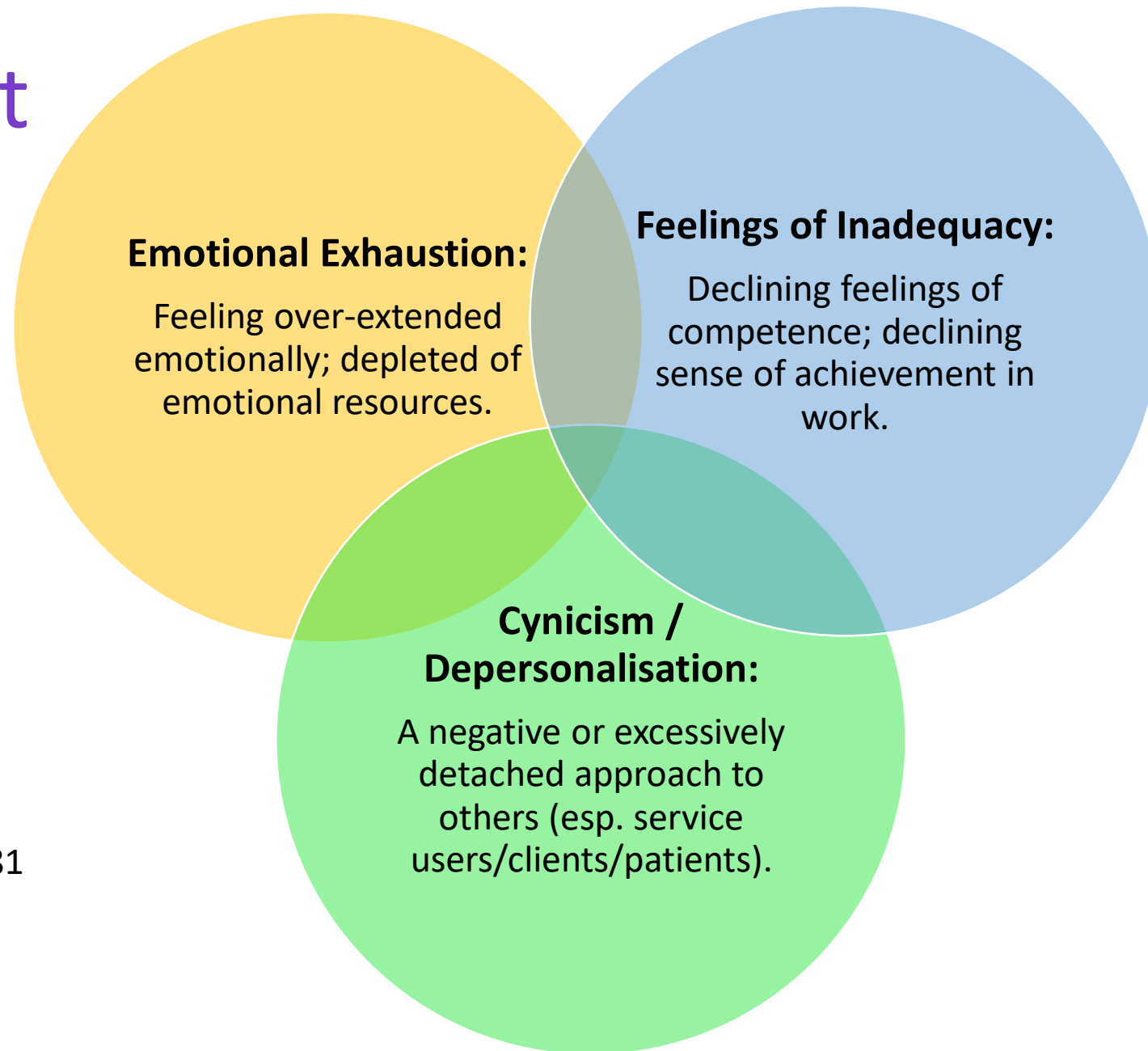
Burnout: New Perspectives

Dr Rachel Sumner – Senior Research Fellow,
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Burnout

- Often described as being a state of occupational associated stress:
 - Has a distinct set of characteristics and pathways
- Burnout and other occupational stress costs the UK economy ~£35bn a year
- Before the pandemic up to 46% of workers were reporting being close to burnout.
- Has been studied since the 1970s, and the main focus was on caregiving and service professions.
- It is a progressive condition that in many ways self-perpetuates and can be spread to others (“burnout contagion”).

Burnout



Maslach & Jackson, 1981

Burnout in the long term

- For mental health:
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
- For physical health:
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Chronic pain
 - Fatigue
 - Gastro-intestinal problems
- It is quite resistant to treatment.

Burnout & Frontline Workers



- The pandemic threw up known triggers to burnout for many:
 - Redeployment
 - Longer working hours
 - More stressful and traumatic conditions
- But there were also new elements to stressful work the pandemic presented:
 - Greater danger (physical health and mental health) to self and loved ones
 - Lack of adequate protection from harm
 - Reduced control in working conditions
 - Sustained open-ended struggle
 - Being put on a pedestal/being our “frontline”
- We set out to find out what predicted burnout, but also what may protect against it.

Leadership and Labels

Early 2020:

- Resilient coping styles and having meaning buffered against burnout and were associated with improved resilience and wellbeing.
- When looking by country, low opinions of government timeliness of action against Covid was a significant driver of burnout in the UK cohort only.
- For those in Ireland, uncertainty around whether they or their families had had CV19 played a part in resilience and burnout.

Being a hero

“And the hero thing, actually, in some way, kind of makes it harder, because we didn’t save anybody.”

“It's convenient to push us out the front when they want to use us but then they don't push us out the front when they want to protect us. We are not afforded the protection.”

“Sometimes you feel like you're just left to fend for yourself, or there's some ridiculous guideline coming out, and I'm thinking, 'Do they really want us all to die?'"



The need for Solidarity

Late 2020:

- Being hailed as heroes and then having public health guidance ignored was described as “a kick in the teeth”.
- The government also reneged on their responsibilities to frontline workers by failing to provide PPE, doubling back on promised pay increases, and seemingly making up their own rules.



“Expendable Workers” Luis Quiles (2020)

Reproduced with kind permission from the artist – see more of his work at <http://luisquiles.art>

@PerterPunk

Solidarity

“In the first wave it showed how the population were standing together, and the generosity given to those who needed it was incredible. The NHS and frontline workers were thought of by all, but after the Government showed the UK how not to stick to the rules, the public started to have enough of the isolation and that’s where it all changed.”

“So there was that sense of we’re all in this together, but the politicians really weren’t in it together because it didn’t kind of apply to them... So, there was that sense that it was one rule for the general population, and I suppose everybody else, the politicians and whatever were able to do really what they wanted.”

“It feels like we were the best thing with the government during the pandemic, but now we are nothing to them. It was the the worst time for frontline staff. We lost friends and colleagues.”



Solidarity and losing meaning

2021-2022

- From our first study, we found meaning in life (both presence and search) to be important in predicting resilience, burnout, and wellbeing.
- Over time, our participants showed a decline in presence of meaning, but this was not being compensated for by an increase in search for meaning.
- This loss of meaning was an important pathway between perceptions of solidarity and welfare markers like burnout.
- Frontline workers were responding to this by shutting down, closing ranks, and losing faith in the society they were supporting.

Meaning



"I feel like I don't matter. Every other person was furloughed for protection and made to stay at home. We go to work for peanuts with our flimsy PPE crossing our fingers we can beat it. The government sicken me with their lack of empathy. 30% payrise for them & a clap for us.... What a mug I was for being a nurse is the way I feel."

"From heroes to zeros"

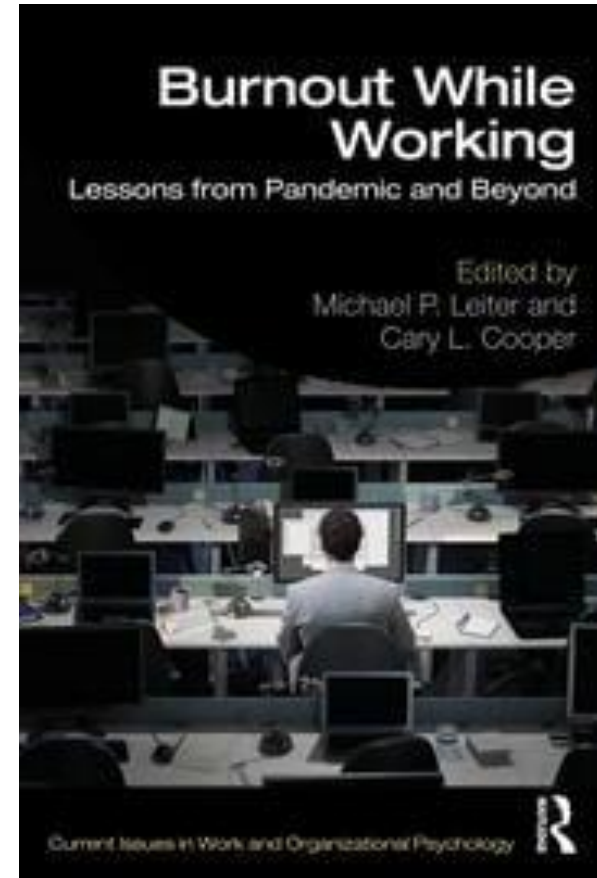
"Every day my team ask me why do they bother? Why do they continue to put their life on the line with no thanks, and to find out that the government have breached so many of their own Covid laws?"

"It is very hard not to take horrid comments on social media, radio, and TV to heart when you come home from a 13-hour day to see people accusing GPs of being lazy, 'hiding behind Covid'...especially when patients get angry and quote these articles on the phone."

A role for meaning

2023

- Bringing this all together, our recent work has looked at the impact of labels (like “hero” or “essential worker”) and how these impact worker meaning.
- Meaning can buffer against stress (and therefore burnout).
- When labels are given, but congruent behaviour is not, workers lose meaning, which can accelerate burnout.



What can I do to help?

Burnout can be caused by issues that exist beyond the workplace as well as conditions within.

- Relationships with colleagues/management/organisational leadership.
- Relationships with public/clients/service users/peripheral others.
- Societal support and esteem for workers and their roles.
- Feelings of solidarity with those they depend on (and who depend on them) is key in protecting against burnout.
 - Advocate and be champions for staff.
 - Take an active role in understanding what staff need to feel from the communities they support.

What can I do to help?

- Consistency with messaging from leadership is vital.
 - Remind staff of the value of the service they provide, what they bring to the world, and how the work they do is meaningful.
 - Be mindful of the meaning of labels and the significance they can carry.
 - Acting on damage from mixed or conflicting messages from broader society.
- Meaningful discourse with staff is critical. Discussing burnout is not admitting fault, it is protecting your staff from serious harm.
 - Noticing signs of burnout early – not being afraid to ask staff how they feel.
 - Address burnout by its name, not simply referring to “mental health”, “wellbeing” or any other euphemism.

“I am proud of myself that I was able to help so many wonderful people cope and live during some of the scariest times in their lives. To bring love, support and a sense of humour to such a bleak time for them will forever make me feel more valuable/heartfelt than any wage could.

It was and is an honour to care for people and help them live longer, healthier lives regardless of the pandemic. It was also heartbreaking to see so many loved ones losing family and friends. But an honour to be there to help and support them to the best of my ability.”

We wish to thank our participants and all frontline workers who continue to work in dangerous and stressful conditions.

For more information and links to papers go to: www.cv19heroes.com



Get in touch

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Any questions??

Upcoming training

Understanding Mental Health: A relational approach and reflective practice

With Dr Sian Edwards

- Explore our understanding of mental health
- Understand relational working and its workplace benefits
- Share and understand our experience of good leadership
- Identify relationally healthy practices
- Understand the impact of blame and shame
- Provide tips on how to support our own mental health and those of our colleagues



Cardiff session:

Tuesday 5th December

Online session:

Tuesday 12th December

Additional dates for
January and February

Get in touch

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