

The Prevalence of Burnout in the Optometric Profession and Strategies for Management

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Introduction

- Burnout is a type of chronic stress experienced as a result of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion.
- This state of prolonged pressure has become a troubling issue in the medical community with a growing number of physicians experiencing symptoms.
- Research has demonstrated the damaging consequences of physician burnout, including detriment to patient care, decreased workforce effectiveness, and higher rates of medical errors and dishonesty.
- The purpose of this study is to determine the prevalence of burnout within a subset of Michigan Optometrists, to describe its effects on the management of patient care, and to provide resources for optometrists dealing with this growing mental health challenge.
- The outcomes of this research study will allow optometrists a better understanding of burnout and how it affects their daily lives. Guidelines for management strategies can then be postulated in order to alleviate these profound feelings of fatigue and burnout in the optometric profession.

Methods

- Participants included members of the Michigan Optometric Association (MOA) Member Database. This survey required the members to be licensed Michigan optometrists.
- The survey was sent to 914 Michigan Optometric Association members. Out of 914 members, 121 optometrists of all ages, genders, and practice modalities finished the survey in its entirety.
- The survey consisted of nineteen questions.
- To ensure response anonymity, an online software service, QuestionPro, was used to create the survey and collect the data.
- Participants agreed to an informed consent prior to starting the survey.
- Participants were asked a series of questions about personal and practice demographics, what factors and how much those factors contributed to feelings of burnout, and what kind of management strategies are used, if they are used.

Results

Figure 1: Numbers of Years Respondents have been in Practice

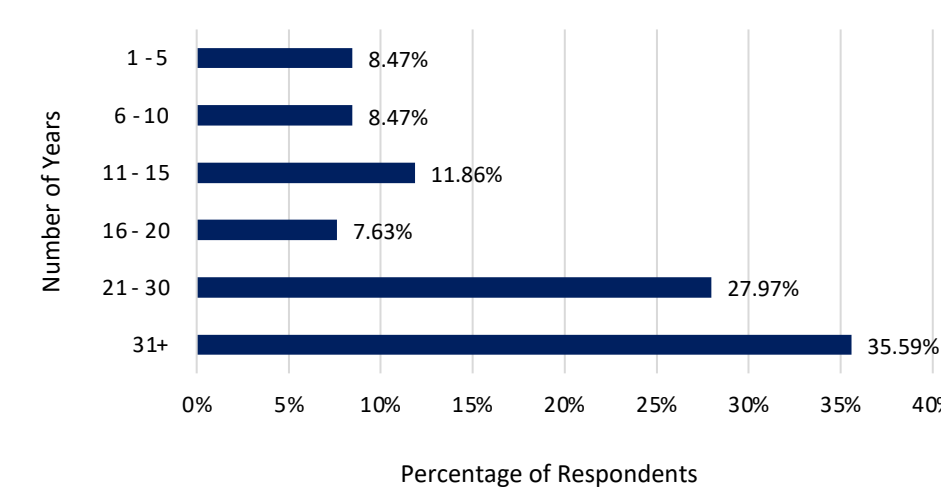


Figure 2: Current Practice Modality of the Respondents

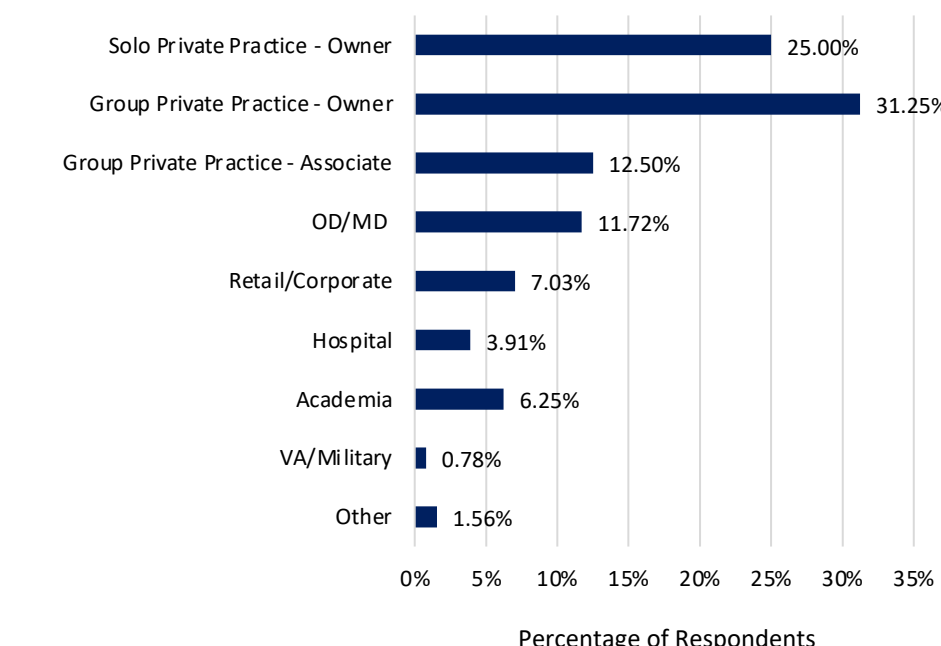


Figure 3: Number of Years into Career in Which Respondents Began to Experience Burnout

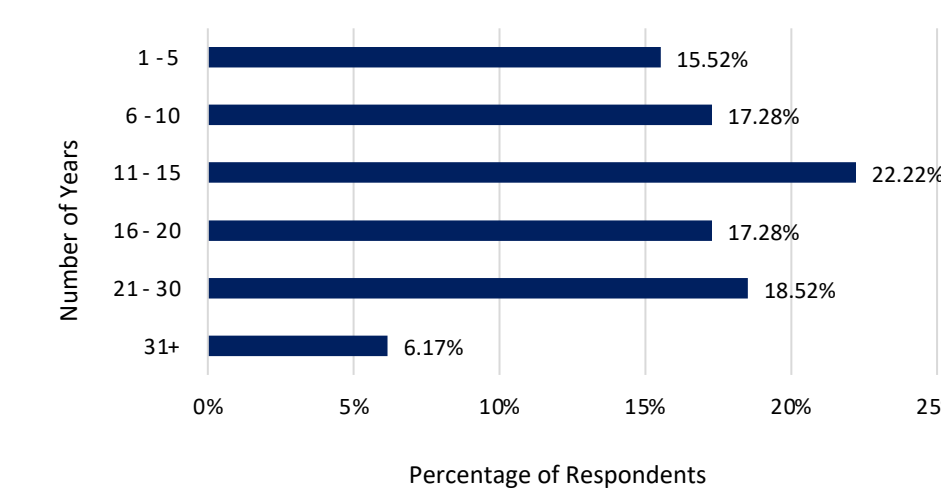


Figure 4: Prevalence of Management Strategies Amongst Respondents

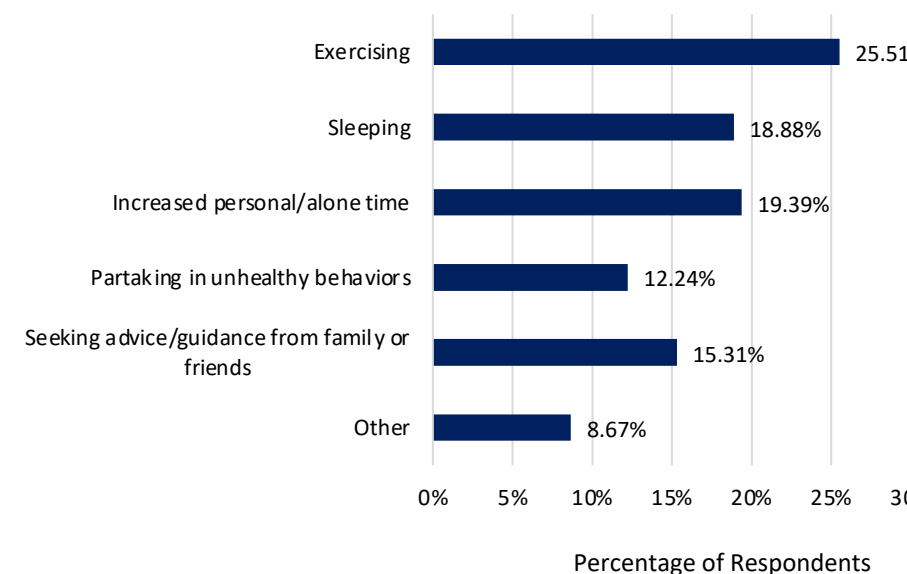


Figure 5: Ranked Scale of Factors that Contributed to Burnout

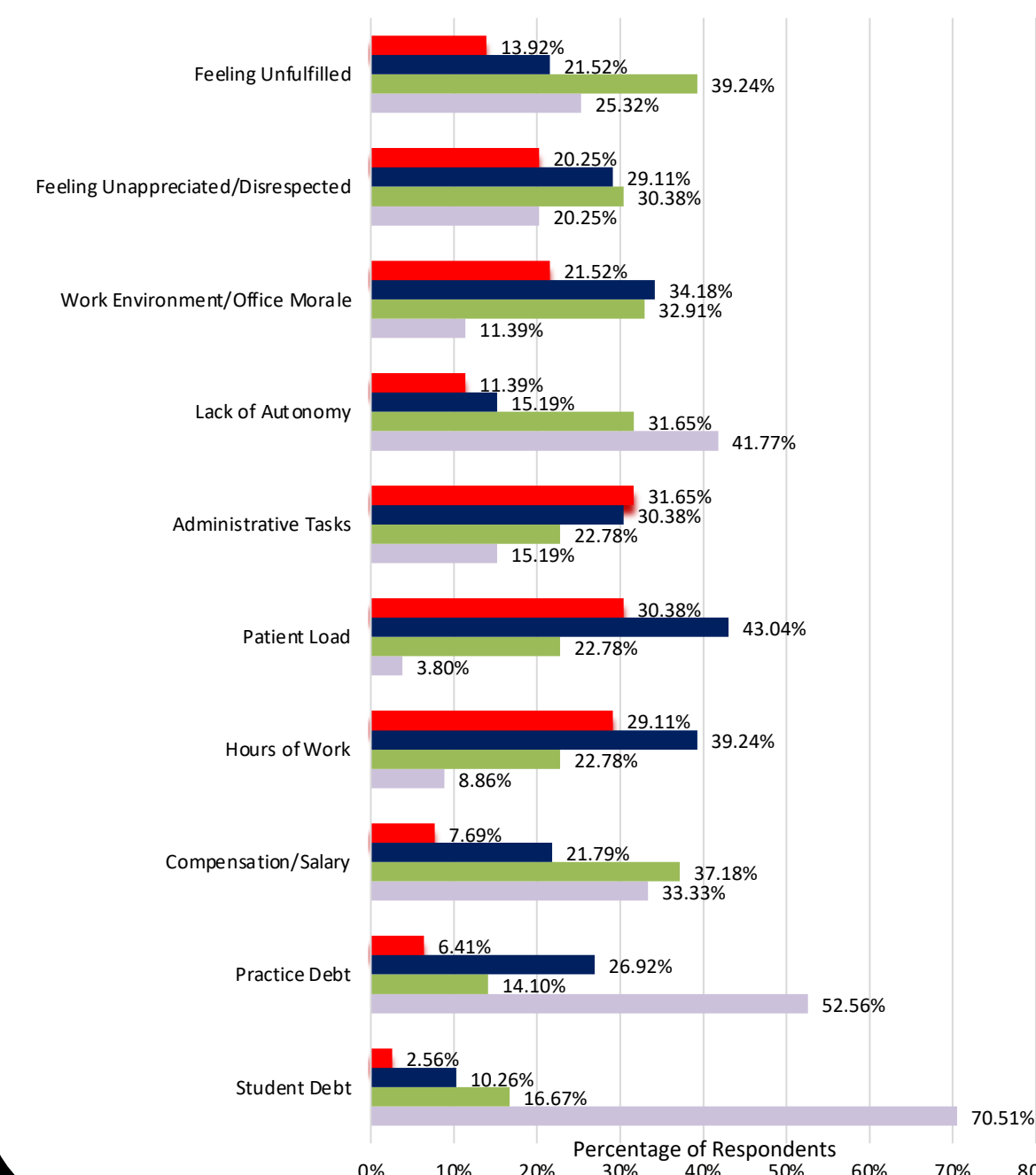
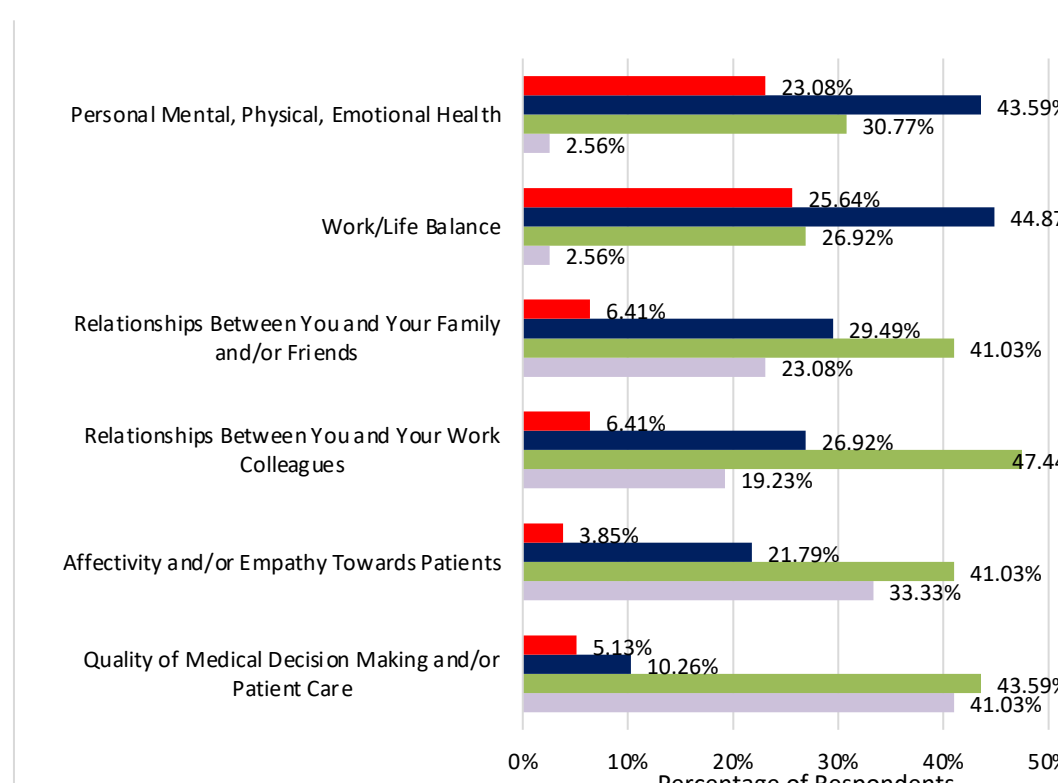
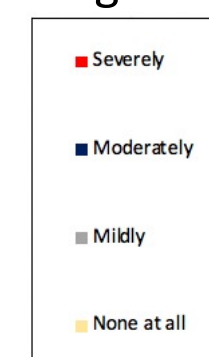


Figure 6: Ranked Scale of Factors that have been Affected Due to Burnout



Legend



Conclusions

- Out of a total of 121 respondents, two-thirds have experienced burnout at some point in their professional careers. 33% of participants classified their burnout symptoms as mild, 49% as moderate, and 18% as severe.
- Administrative responsibility, patient load and the number of hours worked were the most significant variables contributing to burnout symptoms. Student debt and practice debt were the least significant factors.
- Half of optometrists believe their work-life balance was severely impacted. Burnout also affected their relationships with family and/or friends, as well as relationships with their colleagues. It had minimal effect on the optometrists' quality of patient care.
- Taking a salary reduction and working less hours were the most used methods by optometrist to combat burnout (44%), followed by changing practice modalities (39%), and seeking professional mental health guidance (14%).
- Most participants used healthy coping strategies to combat their symptoms, such as exercise and seeking advice from family or friends. A small percentage of optometrists admitted to partaking in unhealthy behaviors.
- Most employers do not have helpful programs in place to manage burnout at their practice. Three out of four optometrists experiencing symptoms of burnout are potentially open to receiving help and participating in management strategies that are not currently being offered to them. This demonstrates a window of opportunity to control the widespread prevalence of burnout.
- As a total of 67.95% of respondents felt their burnout has been exacerbated by COVID-19, future studies could explore the effects of the pandemic on burnout in the optometric profession.
- Guidelines for coping and management strategies must be implemented for optometric physicians to offer mental health support, allowing optometrists to continue to provide quality patient care in the healthcare setting.

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