

Research Report

The Burnout Epidemic Report 2021





The burnout epidemic

Burnout is the buzzword of summer 2021. After more than a year of higher workloads due to layoffs, hiring freezes, and The Great Resignation¹, employees are feeling the strain. That's not to mention juggling added pressures, like managing at-home childcare and e-learning, with the requirements of a full-time job, and distressing world events including protests and climate disasters.

The World Health Organization defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- Reduced professional efficacy

In recent months, burnout has gotten so bad, some organizations have mandated their workers take time off.

LinkedIn, Hootsuite, and Bumble all shuttered their doors for a week to give employees time to decompress and recuperate from chronic work-induced fatigue². Yet these efforts may be too few and far between: Resignation rates are spiking³.

To better understand this alarming trend, we surveyed 1,000 full-time employees across the U.S. about their experiences with workplace burnout. Our findings revealed that burnout has become an epidemic in the U.S., with the vast majority (89%) of employees reporting they've experienced it over the past year. By uncovering the root causes of burnout, employers can better support their employees, reduce voluntary turnover, and improve employee engagement.





The overwhelming majority of employees are burnt out

A whopping 89% of employees said they've experienced occupational burnout over the past year. Of those, more than a quarter (27%) said they experience burnout "all of the time." Beyond this being an issue of productivity and workplace wellness, it can be a significant driver of resignations. More than two-thirds (70%) of employees would consider leaving their current company for a different one that offered comprehensive resources, benefits, support, and/or policies intended to reduce burnout.

Younger generations in particular are taking on the brunt of higher workloads. Higher-ups may view employees newer to the workforce as needing to "earn their keep" and therefore, pile more work on their plates. Additionally, younger workers without dependents may have had to pick up the slack for older coworkers stuck juggling work and at-home childcare. Not surprisingly, younger generations report higher experiences of occupational burnout.

27% said they experience burnout "all of the time."

30% said they experience burnout "most of the time."

32% said they experience burnout "some of the time."

Just 11% said they experience burnout "none of the time."

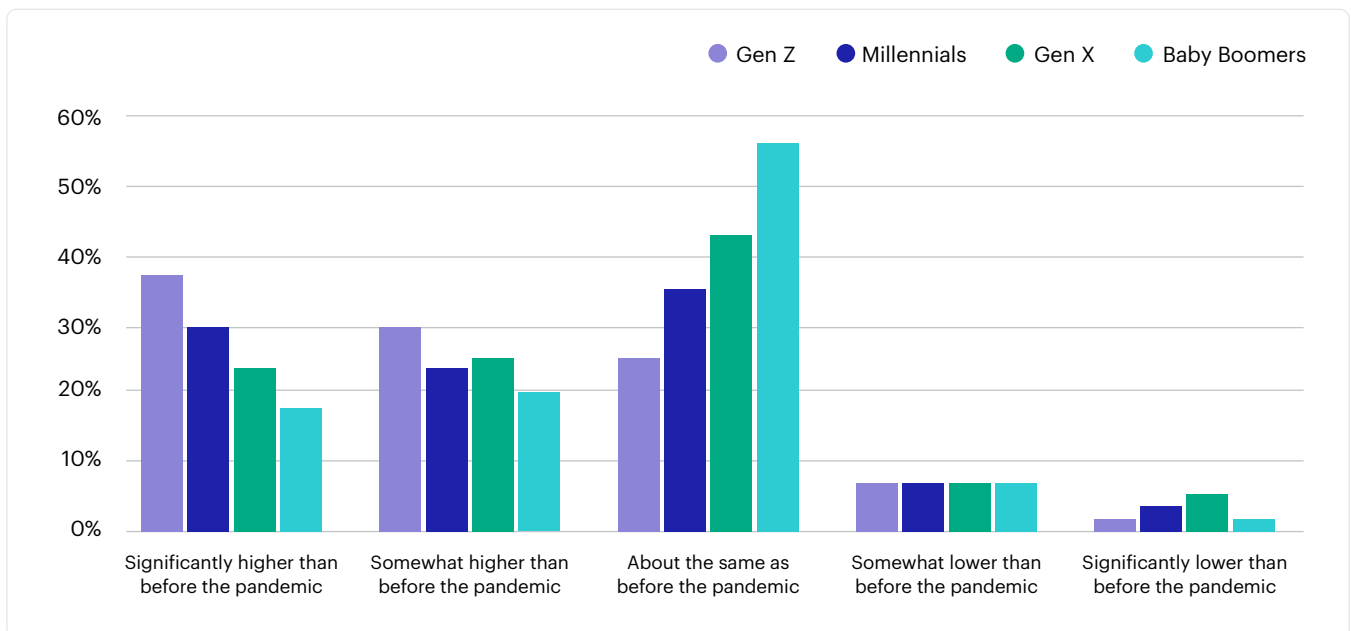


Figure 1: How each generation rates their current workload

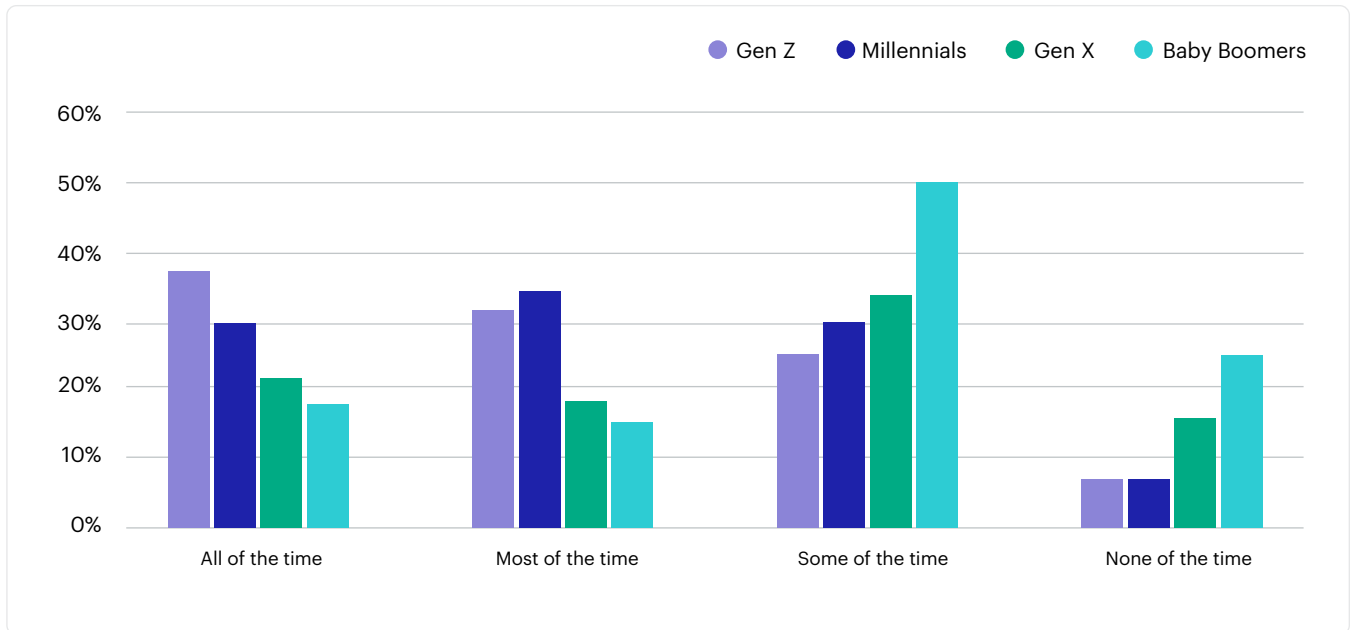


Figure 2: How often each generation experiences occupational burnout

When we asked all employees to rate their current workload, 55% said it's higher than before the pandemic. Of those, 28% said it's "significantly higher." All that extra work is exacerbating burnout: Employees reported their number one burnout contributor is being asked to take on more work. Other significant contributors include a toxic workplace culture, being asked to complete work faster, being micromanaged, and a lack of control in the workplace.

Top 10 factors that contribute to employees' feelings of burnout:

1. Being asked to take on more work: 44%
2. Toxic workplace culture (e.g., office gossip, sexism, excessive office politics, office bullies, etc.): 33%
3. Being asked to complete work faster: 30%
4. Being micromanaged/excessively observed on the job: 24%
5. Lack of control (e.g., inability to influence your schedule, assignments, workload, etc.): 23%
6. Physical demands (e.g., being required to stand all day, being required to lift heavy objects, being required to sit all day, etc.): 22%
7. Lack of support at work (e.g., unhelpful managers, coworkers, etc.): 20%
8. Being forced to return to the office: 19%
9. Work-life imbalance (e.g., expectation to work late hours and/or weekends, expectation to respond to work messages immediately and/or around-the-clock, etc.): 18%
10. World events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, police killings, climate disasters, etc.): 18%





Employees feel the burden of addressing their burnout falls squarely on their shoulders—not their employer's

More than one-third (37%) of employees said they're not comfortable talking to their supervisor about their burnout. When asked why, employees' top reason was a fear of being seen as incapable of doing their jobs.

Employees also may not talk about their burnout with their managers because most (73%) believe it's their responsibility to manage it.

But considering that burnout is heightened by broader workplace issues, it's clear leaders have a role to play in fostering or mitigating burnout too. Employees feel alone in managing this burden, indicating opportunities for employers to provide better support and engage in more direct conversations around burnout.

To alleviate their burnout, employees mainly turn to support from others, relaxation techniques, PTO, and exercise. But more than one in ten employees resort to alcohol or recreational drugs to treat their burnout, echoing recent Nielsen data⁴. Just 7% of employees ask for deadline extensions, in line with the finding above that many employees fear being seen as incapable if they talk to a manager about their burnout.

Why employees don't feel comfortable talking to their managers about their burnout:

1. Fear of being seen as incapable of doing my job: 50%
2. There's no point/nothing will change: 46%
3. Fear of being fired: 24%
4. Don't know how to start the conversation with my supervisor: 23%
5. Fear of being passed up for a future raise or promotion: 18%
6. Mental health stigma: 17%
7. Poor relationship with my supervisor: 13%

Ways employees address their feelings of burnout:

1. Seek support from friends, colleagues, family, etc.: 47%
2. Relaxation techniques (e.g., meditation, stretching, etc.): 44%
3. Take time off: 42%
4. Exercise: 40%
5. Take a short break during the work day: 31%
6. Talk to my supervisor: 24%
7. Delegate work tasks to other team members: 15%
8. Religion/spirituality: 15%
9. Alcohol and/or recreational drugs: 13%
10. Talk therapy: 12%
11. Psychiatric medication: 9%
12. Ask for deadline extensions: 7%



Women are more burnt out than men—and more hesitant to talk about it

When we analyzed this data by gender, we found that women (91%) experience slightly higher rates of burnout compared to men (86%). Women also feel significantly less comfortable talking to their supervisors about their burnout than men.

When asked how they address feelings of burnout, men were more likely than women to report delegating tasks and asking for extensions, in line with the finding above that women fear being seen as incapable of doing their jobs more than men—and thus, wary of asking for help.

30% of men are not comfortable talking to their supervisor about their burnout compared to 42% of women.

When asked why they're not comfortable talking to their supervisors about their burnout, women indicated they're more fearful of being seen as incapable, experiencing mental health stigma, and being passed up for career growth than men. They're also more jaded than men, believing nothing will change. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to say they don't know how to start the conversation about their burnout.

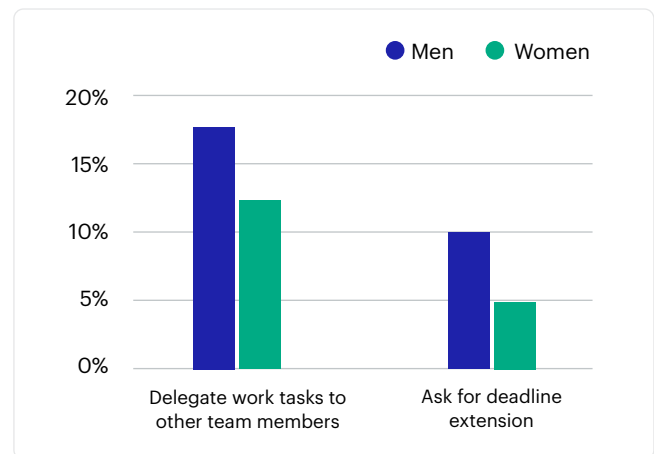


Figure 3: How employees address feelings of burnout

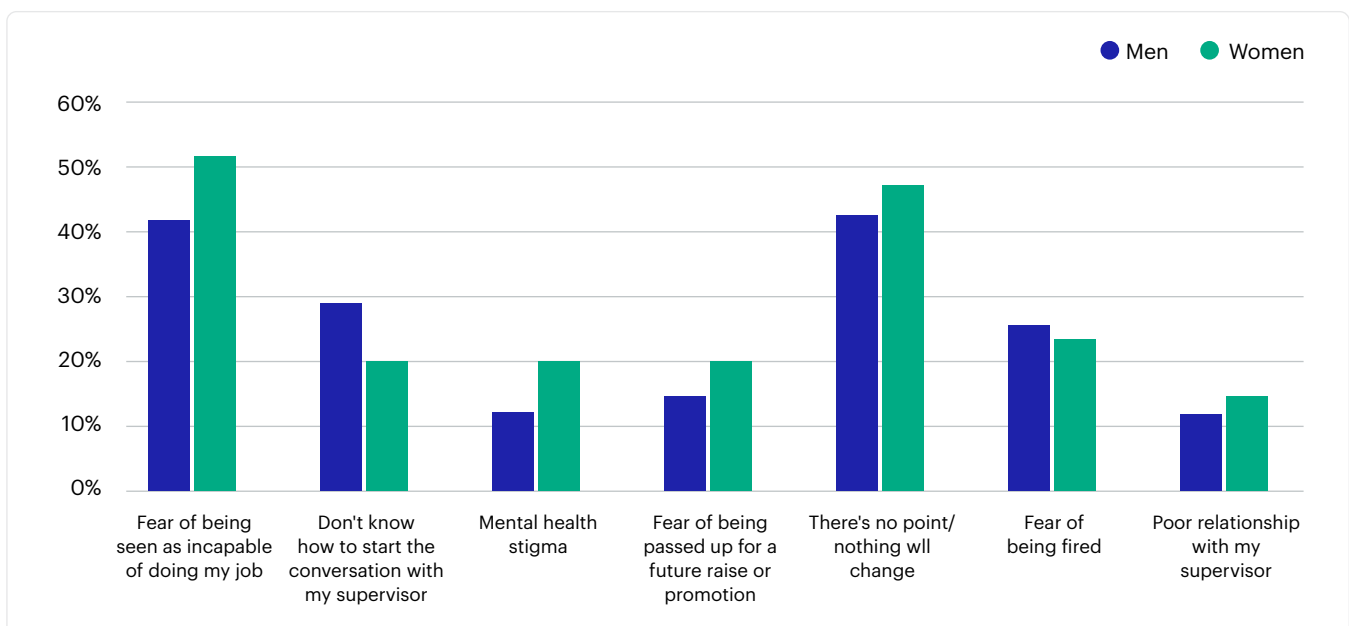


Figure 4: Why employees are not comfortable talking to their supervisors about burnout



Vacations alone aren't enough to alleviate burnout

Time off work, often seen as the best way to recharge, isn't enough to alleviate the chronic burnout the majority of employees are experiencing. While more than half (54%) of employees anticipate taking more time off this year compared to last year, one-third report they're expected to check in on work while on vacation. Additionally, nearly half (49%) of employees said PTO only temporarily relieves their burnout.

Employees' experiences taking time off from work:

- I fully disconnect from work: 48%
- I'm expected to check in on work: 33%
- I'm not expected to check in on work, but I feel pressured to do so: 19%

Employee sentiment toward PTO and burnout :

- Taking time off alleviates my feelings of burnout for a significant period of time: 42%
- Taking time off alleviates my feelings of burnout temporarily, but the prep work and catch-up work required to do so takes a toll: 49%
- Taking time off does not alleviate my feelings of burnout: 10%

When asked what benefits would most alleviate their burnout if provided by their employers, employees mostly indicated they simply want more flexibility and support.

Benefits that would most help employees alleviate burnout if provided by employers:

1. Flexible work hours for all employees: 39%
2. Mental health resources/support: 31%
3. Paid sick days: 25%
4. Wellness program: 24%
5. A 4-day work week: 24%
6. Gym/fitness membership or discount: 22%
7. Telecommuting options (work from home): 21%
8. Employee care and appreciation gifts/programs: 21%
9. Unlimited paid time off policy: 20%
10. Flexible work hours for parents/guardians: 20%





Supporting overworked and overwhelmed employees

While giving employees a week off to recharge is a step in the right direction, addressing the burnout epidemic requires a more strategic, holistic approach. Our data indicates almost all employees struggle with burnout from time to time, so it's crucial to have the right policies, processes, and technologies in place to support them.

By engaging employees in conversations about their burnout and using workplace tools to gauge their stress levels, managers can help their direct reports cope and develop action plans for alleviating work-related fatigue. Most importantly, these strategies ensure employees don't feel solely responsible for addressing a problem that is, in many instances, triggered by their work—not their own shortcomings.

Additionally, “workations”—working during paid time off—are not restorative. Even if you don't require employees to check in during their vacations, many employees feel pressured to do so anyways. Organizations must shift their cultures away from this expectation by explicitly instructing employees, including managers who lead by example, to disconnect while taking time off.

People analytics helps employers better predict key burnout indicators like absenteeism, turnover, and lower customer satisfaction are common symptoms of burnout⁵. Predictive and prescriptive analytics enable employers to identify employee burnout and frustration early—and act on it before it leads to voluntary turnover⁶.

Alleviating burnout isn't just good for your people, it's good for your business. Organizations that don't address burnout will see top talent leave for companies with better benefits and support, driving up turnover and recruitment costs.



Endnotes

- 1 visier.com/blog/trends/trends-in-employee-resignation-rates-watch-out-for-summer-2021/
- 2 fortune.com/2021/07/01/companies-shut-down-for-a-week-burnout-linkedin-hootsuite-bumble/
- 3 visier.com/blog/trends/trends-in-employee-resignation-rates-watch-out-for-summer-2021/
- 4 axios.com/americans-drinking-alcohol-pandemic-29ee70d7-40ae-4e71-807a-3f4ad2ee19b8.html
- 5 visier.com/blog/culture/workations-employee-absenteeism/
- 6 visier.com/blog/news/the-4-ai-categories-that-put-employees-first/

About Visier

Visier's purpose is to help people see the truth and create a better future—now.

Visier was founded to focus on what matters to business people: answering the right questions, even the ones a person might not know to ask. Questions that shape business strategy, provide the impetus for taking action, and drive better business results.

Visier delivers fast, clear people insight by using all the available people data—regardless of source. With best-practice expertise built-in, decision-makers can confidently take action. Thanks to our amazing customers, Visier is the market leader in Workforce Analytics with more than 8,000 customers in 75 countries around the world.

For more information, visit visier.com

The Visier logo is written vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are 'V', 'I', 'S', 'I', 'E', 'R'. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the bottom left of the letter 'R'. The background is a light blue gradient with large, rounded, abstract shapes in darker shades of blue.

Visier[®]

**Have questions?
Ask Visier.**

VISIER.COM | INFO@VISIER.COM | 1.888.277.9331

© 2021 Visier Solutions Inc. All rights reserved. Visier, Visier People, and the Visier logo are the trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Visier, Inc. and Visier Solutions Inc. All other brand names and logos are the trademarks of their respective owners.