

Almost half the nursing staff in Andalusia present high levels of 'Burnout Syndrome,' study finds

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Research news

- Male, single, childless nurses have higher levels of 'burnout'—an occupational phenomenon recently included by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)

Almost 40% of the nursing staff working for the Andalusian Health Service (known as SAS) have high levels of psychological burnout—an occupational phenomenon that affects many workers who live in a permanent state of stress and anxiety.



This is the finding of a study conducted by Lucia Ramírez Baena, a researcher at the University of Granada (UGR), who wrote her doctoral thesis on this syndrome as part of her doctoral studies in Psychology at the UGR's International School for Postgraduate Studies.

The WHO recently included occupational burnout in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). Although as early as 2005 both the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the WHO raised concerns about this serious health problem, it was not until 2010 that the International Labour Organization (ILO) included it in its list of occupational illnesses.

Until now, there has been no medical diagnosis recognizing this syndrome in Europe, except in countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands, which joined forces to have it recognized. But thanks to new research findings that have corroborated the seriousness of the current state of affairs among workers—such as those contributed by this doctoral thesis—from 2020, burnout will be a recognised reason for granting sick leave (according to the WHO).

The syndrome is characterized three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and low professional efficacy among workers suffering from it. It can affect all professional groups, although those who provide services to the public are at most risk.

A public health concern

“Nursing professionals are one of the most widely affected by burnout, and this constitutes a genuine public health concern, as it impacts on healthcare professionals, institutions, and companies, as well as patient safety,” explains Ramírez Baena.

Furthermore, there are several personal risk factors that can lead to occupational burnout sooner rather than later, or to a greater or lesser degree—such as gender, marital status, the number of children, or the personality of the professional concerned. Thus, according to the results of this UGR research, it can be concluded that male nurses who are single and have no children experience higher levels of burnout.

“All this points to the major protective factor provided by the family and/or the partner as a motivational factor to go to work. Neurotic personality traits can also predispose a person to experience burnout at work,” says the UGR researcher. It is essential to continue investigating burnout syndrome, as predictions point to an “avalanche of burned-out professionals,” who require an appropriate response and a holistic therapeutic approach to enable them to recover and return to work as soon as possible, says the author.

Lucía Ramírez Baena is, herself, a nurse with the SAS and also a lecturer at the Red Cross University Centre for Nursing, linked to the University of Seville.

Her doctoral thesis, entitled “Prevalence of Burnout and Identification of At-Risk Groups among Nursing Staff of the Andalusian Health Service (SAS),” was supervised by Professor Emilia Immaculate de la Fuente (Faculty of Psychology, UGR) and Guillermo Cañadas (lecturer at the UGR’s Faculty of Nursing).

The thesis was conducted under the auspices of Research Group HUM-183 of the

UGR, which has spent several years investigating burnout syndrome.

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