



## Prevalence and screening of burnout among Belgian population

De Cia, J\*, Mairiaux, P., Schippers, N., Panda, J.P., Braeckman, L., Cobbaut, L., Firket, P., & Hansez, I\*.

(\*) Human Resources Development Unit, University of Liège



**Introduction :** Burnout is usually considered as a response to chronic exposure to job stressors, and is defined by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a sense of reduced effectiveness.

**Aim of this study :** to estimate the prevalence of burnout among Belgian workers through the identification of burnout cases within the practices of general practitioners (GP) and the health surveillance carried out by occupational health physicians (OP) .

**Methodology :** Based on literature and focus-groups meetings, a diagnosis form was developed to help health professionals screening job-related ill-being and burnout symptoms when they examine workers. The form was also designed to discriminate the early onset stage cases and the more severe burnout cases. This diagnosis form was used by 178 GP (3% of Belgian GPs) and 168 OP (12,5% of Belgian OPs) to collect burnout cases during a three months period.

### Case Analysis :

#### The most frequent symptoms associated with burnout

	N	%
Sleep disorders	607	60,8
Decreased energy	529	53,0
Neurovegetative/functional complaints	525	52,6
Reduced motivation	483	48,4

#### The most frequent job characteristics associated with burnout

	N	%
Lack of social support	629	63,2
Workload	577	57,9
Time pressure	411	41,3
Organizational changes	382	38,4

**Survey results :** 135.131 patients-contacts were registered during the survey period. Out of them, **1089 burnout cases** were identified. The prevalence may thus be estimated at about **0,8 % of the Belgian population**; this figure is similar among workers consulting GP and OP.

#### GP (631 cases)

	Cases	Contacts patients	Prevalence
More severe	493	76300	0,6 %
Early onset stage	99	76300	0,1 %
Unspecified *	39	76300	0,1 %
Total	631	76300	0,8 %

#### OP (458 cases)

	Cases	Contacts workers	Prevalence
More severe	308	58831	0,5%
Early onset stage	98	58831	0,2%
Unspecified *	52	58831	0,1%
Total	458	58831	0,8%

\* The physician did not specify if it was an early onset stage or a more severe case.

**Discussion:** These results can hardly be compared to others studies based on burnout self reported measures (prevalence 30% to 40%). This is the first study using diagnosis by health professionals. 0,8 % of the Belgian population accessing the health system corresponds to +-19 000 workers annually. The population concerned with burnout is probably larger because the affected workers express complaints to the physician at a rather late stage when they are aware of their symptoms.

**Practical implication :** The observed prevalence rate should be validated in other study populations in the future but it may be of great significance if secondary prevention strategies have to be developed within the health care system and/or occupational health care. The diagnosis form can be a valuable tool for health professionals in this regard.