Personal factors
STAFF BURNOUT

This evidence theme on personal factors contributing to staff burnout in aged care is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a scoping review of staff burnout research.

Key points

- Personal factors include individual aspects of life, such as cultural background, health conditions, and unique experiences.
- Personal factors can contribute to burnout among aged care workers.
- Findings categorised personal factors into demographic, health, self-perception and attitudes, and coping strategies.
- Examples of personal factors included having English as a second language, poor sleep quality, negative perceptions of older adults, using dysfunctional or avoidance coping strategies and having unresolved grief.

What are personal factors?

Burnout is a complex occupational phenomenon that is influenced by personal, interpersonal, and organisational factors. [1] In this theme, personal factors refer to elements of an individual's life and experiences, which contribute to their unique background. [2] These features, whether positive or negative, play a role in influencing an individual's overall functioning. [2] Personal factors play a crucial role in shaping how individuals, like aged care workers, perceive and respond to the demands of their work (i.e. high self-expectation), which can be a contributing component to burnout. [3] Understanding these personal factors allows organisations to tailor interventions and support systems that address the specific needs of aged care staff, promote resilience and wellbeing in the face of challenging work environments. [3, 4]

Interpersonal and organisational and factors are discussed in separate evidence theme reports.

Personal factors

What do we know about personal contributing factors of staff burnout in aged care?

The 2022 scoping review found 17 studies on personal factors contributing to burnout amongst aged care workers. [5-21] The 2023 update found an additional two studies that contributed to this theme. [22, 23] Personal factors influencing staff burnout can be categorised into demographic, health, self-perception and attitudes, and coping strategies.

Demographic

- Having English as a second language. [20]
- Age (younger personal care workers). [17, 23]
- Civil status (being single and not being married). [12, 17]
- Education (higher level of education). [12]
- Longer-term employee. [17,18]

Health

- Experience shorter sleep duration [5]
- Low self-care capabilities [9]

Self-perceptions and attitudes

- Low self-esteem and self-compassion [9, 14, 18]
- Lack of resilience [15]
- Scoring high on extraversion [11]
- Have negative attitudes and stereotypes towards older adults. [22] Interestingly, aged care workers with high levels of age-related stereotypes often adopt avoidance coping strategies and aggressive reactions, attempting to shield themselves from negative emotions. [22]
- Low levels of self-efficacy and helplessness [11, 19]
- Not seeing the meaning in work (i.e. low levels of professional-efficacy) [6, 13, 16]
- Lack of commitment to the job [18]
- Low levels of intrinsic (i.e. self-development) and altruistic (i.e. contribution to the organisation) work values [21]

Experiences of complicated grief, for example, unexpected death, can be a burden for aged care workers. [7] Another study suggest that caring for 11 or more dying residents over six month period can increase risks of burnout. [8]

Coping strategies

- Respond to events with negative emotions (i.e., high neuroticism). [11]
- Using dysfunctional or avoidance coping strategies (i.e., giving up, constant venting, or substance use) [5]
- Lack of emotion regulation [10]
- Having self-endangering coping behaviour (i.e. lack of goal-reaching behaviours) [9]

What can an individual do?

- Prioritise personal health and wellbeing through proactive measures, including regular health check-ups, mental health support, and strategies to improve sleep quality.
- Engage in reflective practice to identify and manage emotional responses to workplace challenges.

What can an organisation do?

- Foster an ethical work environment by addressing moral distress factors. Provide avenues for employees to express and discuss ethical concerns, ensuring that the organisation's values align with those of its staff.
- Establish comprehensive support systems to foster psychological safety within the workplace, for example, providing access to counselling services, support groups, and training on effective coping strategies.

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