

Burnout among Canadians

A Brief Report on Findings from the 2021 Canadian Social Connection Survey

About this Brief Report

This brief provides an overview of results from *the 2021 Canadian Social Connection Survey (CSCS)*. The overall purpose of this report was to examine experiences of burnout among Canadians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that our findings will support post-pandemic recovery efforts by promoting investments in supports and services that will address burnout. To this end, we identified the following four aims for this report:

- 1) To estimate the prevalence of burnout among Canadians;
- 2) To examine drivers of burnout among Canadians;
- 3) To assess the role of social connection in reducing or preventing burnout; and
- 4) To identify the impacts of burnout on health and wellbeing.

Our findings highlight the wide ranging negative impacts of burnout on the health and wellbeing of Canadians. Furthermore, our results show that burnout appears to be driven by a variety of factors related to our experiences in the workplace, at home, and in our communities. While burnout scores are clearly influenced by individual personality traits, the quality of social interactions we enjoy, and key demographic characteristics, financial and workplace factors are also demonstrated to be key contributors to burnout. These findings thus highlight the importance of (a) work-life balance, (b) healthy workplace environments that foster support and dignity for employees, and (c) generous compensation packages that ensure individuals have sufficient resources to meet their financial needs.

About the Canadian Social Connection Survey (CSCS)

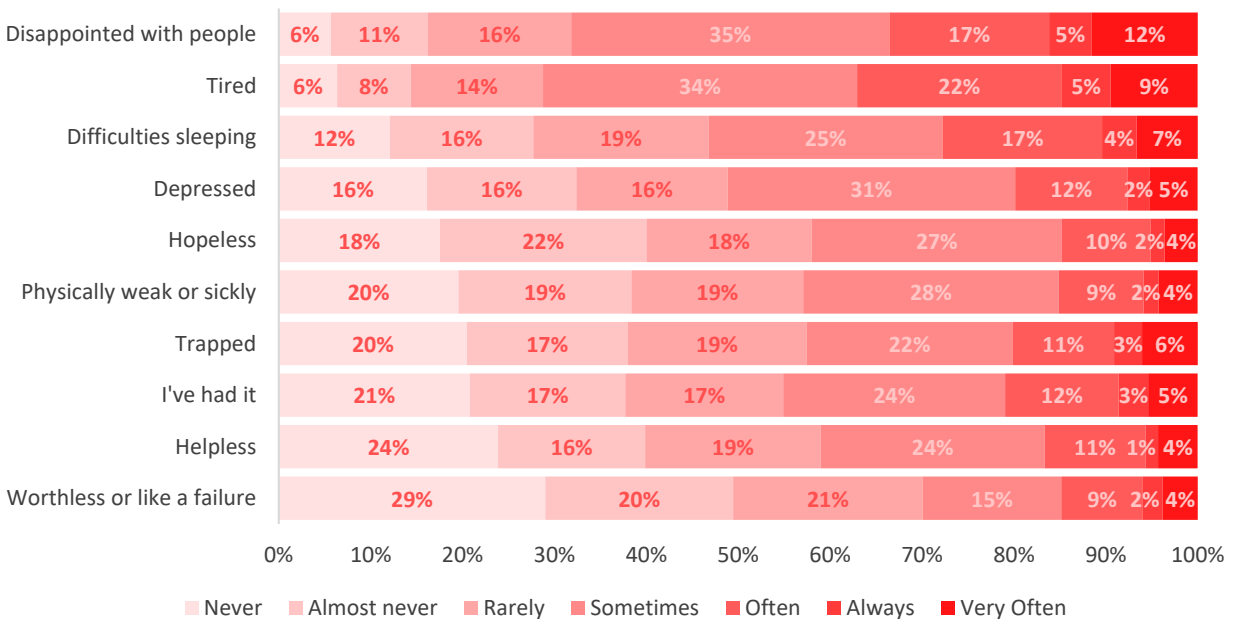
The CSCS is a serial cross-sectional survey with a longitudinal sub-cohort that aims to study the social health and wellbeing of Canadians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSCS is administered by Dr. Kiffer Card at the School of Public Health and Social Policy at the University of Victoria. The CSCS was supported with generous contributions from [The GenWell Project](#), a Global Human Connection Movement that wants to help Canadians and people around the world build healthier connection habits.

Data from wave 1 of the CSCS was collected between April 21st, 2021 and June 1st, 2021, during the third wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada. Throughout this period, participants were recruited using paid advertising in French and English on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google. Advertisements were targeted to people aged 16 years of age or older across Canada. Participants were eligible to participate if they were 16 years of age or older, lived in Canada, were able to complete the survey in English or French, and provided informed consent. Upon completion of the survey, participants were eligible to enter a prize draw for a \$200 VISA gift card. Ethics review for the CSCS was conducted by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria (Ethics Protocol Number 21-0115).

Key Findings

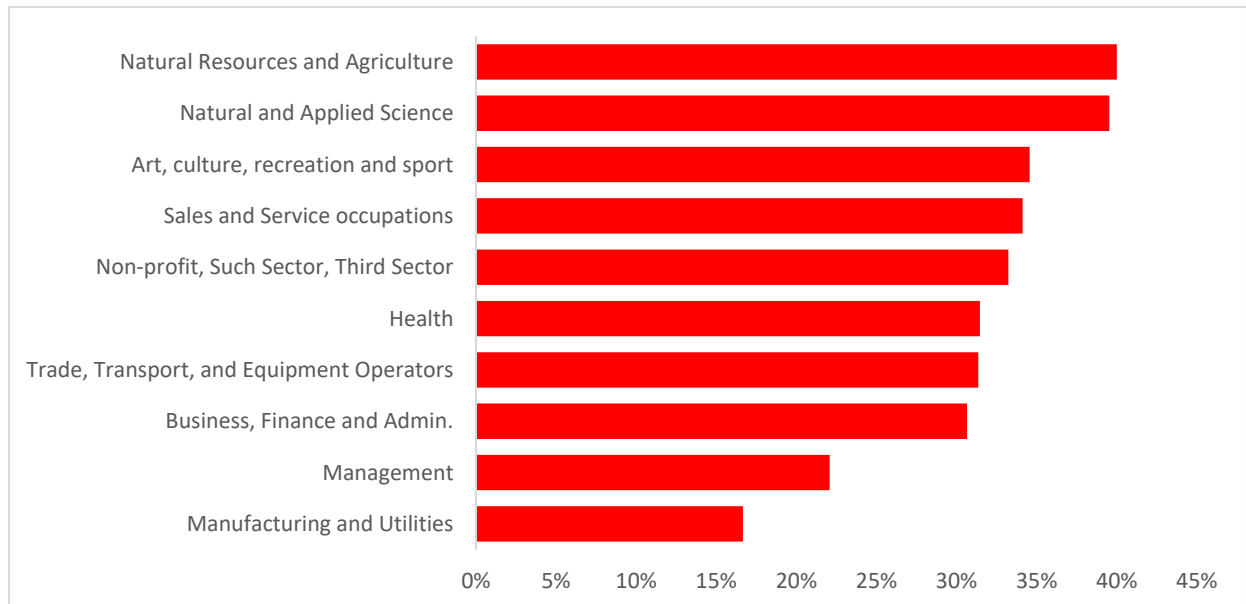
Approximately, 29.7% of participants were classified as experiencing burnout. We assessed burnout using the 10-item Malach-Pines Short Burnout Measure (BM-10), a scientifically validated and reliable scale used to assess the level of an individual’s physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion.¹ For each of the 10-items, participants were asked to rate how frequently they felt a given burnout symptom on a 7-point Likert scale from “Never” (1) to “Very Often” (7). Total burnout scores were calculated by taking the average of item scores and ranged from 1 to 7, with a mean score of 3.42 (sd = 1.10). For ease of interpretation, scores of 4 or more were used to indicate that a person was “burnt out” and scores below 4 were used to indicate that a person was “not burnt out.” The stacked bar chart below shows the sample response patterns on each of the 10-items.

When you think about your life overall, how often do you feel the following?



While burnout scores varied considerably across demographic groups, levels of burnout were high across most groups. Individuals experiencing burnout were, on average, younger than those who were not burnt out ($p = 0.001$). Ethnicity was associated with higher burnout scores ($p = 0.018$). In particular, Chinese (39%), Indigenous (43%), Latin American (72%), South Asian (45%), and West Asian (45%) participants were experiencing high levels of burnout. For comparison only 27% of White participants were burnt out. Similarly, sexual orientation was associated with burnout ($p = 0.024$), with gay/lesbian and straight people having similar rates of burnout (29%) and bisexual or pansexual individuals experiencing elevated burnout (43%). Men (28%) and women (32%) had similar rates of burnout.

Work life and employment was a key factor in shaping burnout scores. Students (46%, $p = 0.003$), people who had been temporarily laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic (46%, $p = 0.011$), and those who started a new job during the COVID-19 pandemic (50%, $p = 0.008$) were more likely to be burnt out. As shown in the bar graph below, burnout also varied significantly across occupation groups ($p = 0.033$)



Financial strain is a key factor in shaping burnout. Those who felt that their money situation prevented them from having the things they wanted in life were more likely to experience burnout ($p = 0.008$), as were those who felt they were just getting by financially ($p = 0.022$), were concerned that the money they had wouldn't last ($p = 0.001$), and those who did not ever have money left over at the end of the month ($p = 0.006$).

Workplace conditions were also notable drivers of burnout. Those who felt they were treated with dignity and respect in the workplace were less likely to experience burnout ($p = 0.019$), as were those who felt supported by their coworkers ($p = 0.046$). Those who felt stress about their jobs even when they were not at work experienced more burnout compared to those who were not stressed ($p = 0.02$).

Time management was an important factor shaping burnout experiences. Burnout was higher among people who were spending either too much or too little time sleeping ($p = 0.001$), working ($p = 0.001$), hanging out with friends ($p = 0.009$), getting "me time" ($p = 0.001$), winding down ($p = 0.001$), reading news or social media ($p = 0.002$), or thinking about things important to them ($p = 0.001$). Conversely, talking with others, especially talking with others who understand them ($p = 0.005$) or engaging in hobbies ($p = 0.036$) were only associated with higher burnout scores if participants were spending too little time doing these things. These factors highlight the importance of time management and work-life balance.

Burnout was also associated with participant's personality traits. To assess the relationship between burnout and personality traits we used the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI). People who were less agreeable ($p = 0.049$; *e.g., are critical and quarrelsome vs. warm and sympathetic*), less conscientious ($p = 0.001$; *e.g., are disorganized and careless vs. dependable and self-disciplined*), and less emotionally stable ($p = 0.001$; *e.g., anxious and easily upset vs. calm and emotionally stable*), were more likely to

experience burnout. Extravertedness ($p = 0.938$; e.g., are extraverted and enthusiastic vs. quiet and reserved) and openness to experience ($p = 0.122$; e.g., are open to new experiences and complex vs. conventional and uncreative) were not associated with burnout. Individuals with lower self-esteem scores ($p = 0.001$) were also more likely to burnout out.

Social connectedness appeared to play a protective role in preventing burnout. People who lived with a husband, wife, or common law partner ($p = 0.001$) or with roommates ($p = 0.018$) were less likely to be burnt out compared to those who did not live with a partner or roommate(s). Overall, those more satisfied with their living arrangements were less burnt out: Only 17% of those very satisfied with their living arrangements were burnt out compared to 50% of those who were very dissatisfied. Similarly, burnout was lower among those who felt more connected to and satisfied with the neighbourhood they lived in ($p = 0.001$).

Regarding social connectedness more generally, lower burnout scores were observed among those who were less lonely ($p = 0.001$; e.g., *didn't feel left out, isolated from others, or lacking companionship*).² In fact, only 12% of those who were not lonely experienced burnout compared to 45% of those who felt lonely. Similarly, 17% of those with high social support were experiencing burnout compared to 38% with moderate social support and 69% of those with low social support ($p = 0.001$). Those with more friends experienced lower burnout ($p = 0.001$) as did those who had more frequent meaningful social interactions with others ($p = 0.012$). People who experienced lower existential isolation ($p = 0.001$; e.g., *like they were part of a community and shared the perspectives of those around them*) were less burnt out. It is also notable that negative social interactions, such as experiencing more frequent discrimination, were associated with greater burnout ($p = 0.001$).

Personal relationship attachment styles were also associated with burnout. Attachment styles are typically formed in early childhood and have an important influence on the capacity of individuals to form intimate relationships with others. We found that burnt out individuals were less likely to be securely attached and more likely to be avoidantly or anxiously attached ($p = 0.001$). These results suggest that those with the ability to form intimate and meaningful secure relationships were protected against burnout, while those who feel uncomfortable with social connection or who feel insecure in their relationships were more vulnerable to burnout. Supporting these results, burnout was also associated with greater social anxiety ($p = 0.001$) and social phobia ($p = 0.001$).

Burnout was associated with poor health and wellbeing. Participants who were burnt out were much more likely to rate their physical and mental health as fair or poor ($p = 0.0001$), were less likely to be happy ($p = 0.001$), were less likely to be satisfied with their lives ($p = 0.001$), and were more likely to be depressed (66.1% vs. 21.6% $p = 0.0001$) or anxious (67.7% vs. 24.7%; $p = 0.001$). These factors suggest that burnout has far reaching physical and mental health consequences and that people with health problems are at especially high risk for burnout. Indeed, people living with a disability (42%, $p = 0.014$) or a mental health condition (66%, $p = 0.001$) were statistically more likely to experience burnout compared to others.

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Dr. Kiffer G. Card. The Canadian Social Connection Survey was funded with support from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and the GenWell Project.

Suggested Citation

KG. Card (2021) "Burnout Among Canadians: A Brief Report on Findings from the 2021 Canadian Social Connection Survey." The GenWell Project.

Data Availability

Data for the Canadian Social Connection can be found at <https://www.socialbubbleproject.ca/cscs>.