

Burnout syndrome and its employment impacts

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Ever since the World Health Organisation (WHO) included the burnout syndrome in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), recognizing it as an occupational disease with effect from January 1, 2022, employment relations specialists have spoken of little else. And with good reason, given the impact for employers. In Brazil, the WHO's decision means that employees suffering from burnout will have the right not only to receive illness benefits from the National Social Security Institute (INSS), but their employers will be required to continue making contributions to the Severance Guarantee Fund (FGTS) and maintain coverage for the employee under any health plan that the employer may offer, apart from offering temporary job tenure when the employee returns to work. Employers could also face liability for damages claims and, in severe cases, even the obligation to pay a lifetime pension, if the employee retires by reason of incapacity. It will also be required from employers to issue Work-Related Accident Notices, known as CATs, for cases of burnout, which will have various other impacts, including an increase in the employer's Accident Prevention Factor (FAP) and a consequent increase in the employer social security contribution.

What is burnout? According to the WHO's concept, burnout is "a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" and has effects such as "feelings of exhaustion, cynicism or negativism related to one's job and reduced professional efficacy." In short, it is psychological exhaustion caused exclusively (or primarily) by the person's work.

Although the WHO's decision has a significant impact for employment relations, and an even greater impact on the Social Security Authority, which is responsible for managing accident and illness benefits, an expert medical examination, and in some cases witness evidence, is needed to establish a causal nexus and determine, with no doubts, that the burnout is directly related to employment¹.

Even so, the impact is immense, given that cases of burnout among employees are increasingly frequent, and have grown substantially during the pandemic. In fact, according to a study by the International Stress Management Association (ISMA-BR) in 2020², Brazil is the country that has the second largest number of people suffering from the syndrome in the world. Another study, conducted by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn and disclosed by Women in the Workplace 2021, shows that women are more affected by burnout than men, with 42% of women suffering from burnout symptoms, in contrast to 35% of men³.

More than ever, employers need to be aware of the importance of eliminating toxic elements in the workplace by strengthen communication with employees, implementing well-being policies, and, especially, avoiding, at all costs, excessive workloads, unreasonable demands and disrespectful

behavior and other conducts that could constitute harassment. At the same time, employers should ensure that employees have the opportunity to “unplug” from work, especially in the current scenario, where the pandemic has made remote work and hybrid work arrangements common.

Dealing with burnout is a challenge for employers, but companies that invest in good people management and measures to maintain a healthy and safe work environment will be best equipped to meet it.

NOTES:

1. According to a recent decision by the 16th Panel of the 2nd Region Labor Appeals Court, written by Appeal Judge Dâmia Avoli and published on 14 December 2021.

2. As reported at
<https://www.folhavoria.com.br/saude/noticia/08/2020/brasil-e-o-2-pais-com-o-maior-numero-de-pessoas-com-sindrome-de-burnout>.

3. For more information, see
<https://veja.abril.com.br/saude/sobrecarregadas-mulheres-sao-principais-vitimas-da-sindrome-de-burnout>.

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