

Burnout in UK Registered Veterinary Nurses: A grounded theory study exploring the experience and factors that contribute to it

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Abstract

This study explored the experience of burnout in RVNs and the contributory factors. A questionnaire was analysed using a grounded theory methodology. Most perceived themselves to have become burnt out within the preceding 12 months. Thematic analysis revealed that the signs and consequences of burnout impacted on the individuals emotional, mental, and physical health, and on their ability to carry out their role. The main contributing causes of burnout were working conditions, a lack of professional respect, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The professional consequences of which were work absences and potential reduced retention in specific clinics and the profession. This study has increased our understanding of how RVNs experience burnout and the multifaceted and interrelated factors which contribute to it.



Introduction

RVNs have been reported to experience burnout. Burnout occurs when occupational stress arises in the face of discrepancy between job requirement and available resources (Weintraub, et al., 2016). Burnout syndrome comprises emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of personal accomplishment and depersonalisation. It causes negative changes in nurses' attitudes and behaviours toward work and can adversely affect the quality of patient care and job satisfaction (Zhang, et al., 2018).

Objectives

- To explore how RVNs in clinical practice experience burnout.
- Identify factors that contribute to burnout and the consequences of this phenomenon.

Materials and Methods

- A mixed methods questionnaire was administered to RVNs from March-April 2021. Open questions were thematically analysed using a grounded theory methodology.
- Interested participants completed the British Medical Association's Self-Evaluation Burnout Survey (2020), and only those scoring 'high' and 'very high' were eligible for inclusion.
- 428 respondents met the inclusion criteria.

Results

- The majority were female (97.9%), aged 18-45 (93.7%), qualified <10 years (60.5%) and had become aware of their burnout within the preceding year (78%).
- Symptoms included exhaustion and a dread of coming into work.
- The majority (82%) believed burnout affected their ability to do their job citing detachment, reduced self-confidence, making mistakes, and reduced patient care.

"Quality of nursing care deteriorates to the point that it's not satisfactory for patient or nurse."

Three main themes of contributing causes were identified (Figure 1).

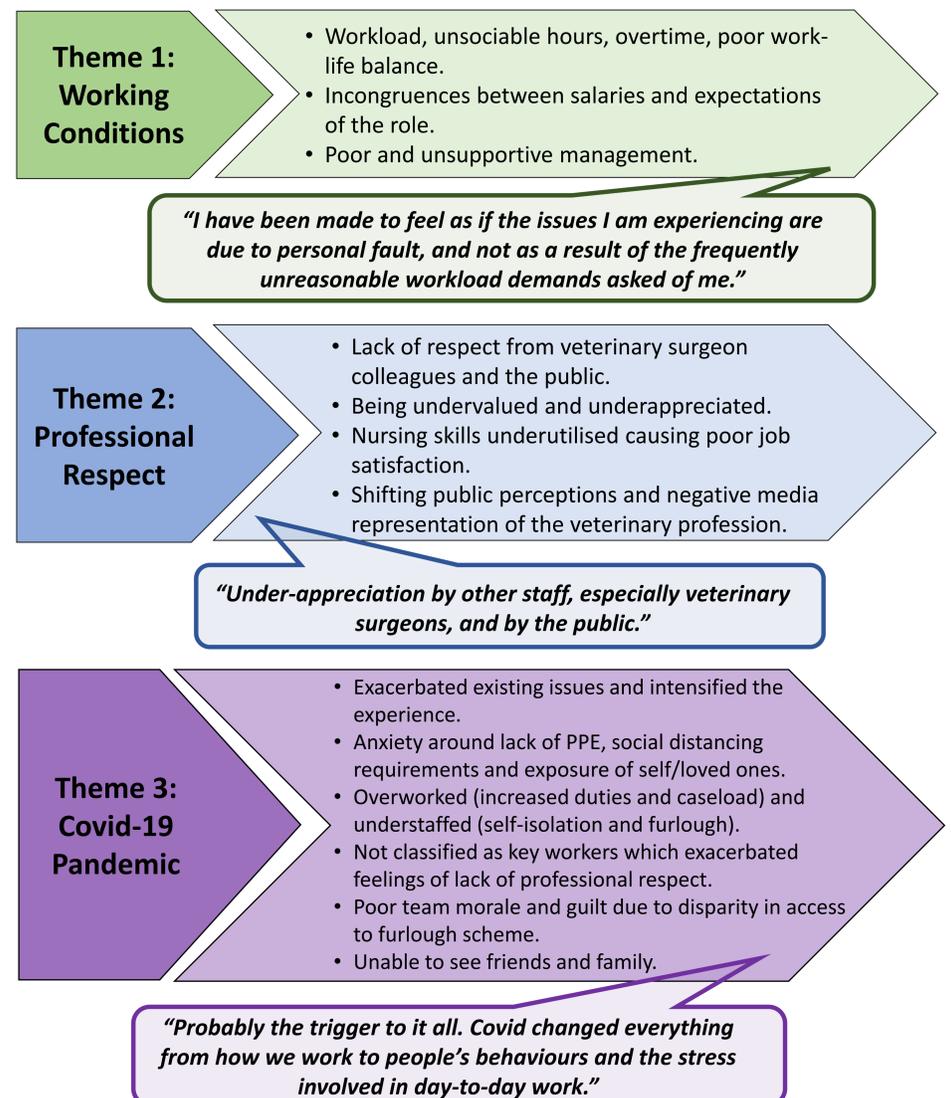


Figure 1: Themes of contributing factors

- 49.5% reported taking a work absence, with 22.3% taking multiple absences.
- 44.3% of absences were <1 week, 30.6% 1-3 weeks, and 20.7% >1 month.
- Actions being considered were leaving current practice (41.4%) and leaving the profession completely (36.9%).

Discussion

The signs of burnout for these participants was similar to what has been described in the literature, with mental and physical exhaustion being the most cited symptoms. Many of the identified contributing factors are experienced by all veterinary professionals and the exacerbating effect of the Covid-19 pandemic was clear. Burnout was reported to negatively impact on work and personal life, with work absences required. There is a clear risk to professional retention.

Conclusion

- These findings have increased our understanding of how RVNs experience burnout personally and professionally.
- The factors which contribute to burnout are multifaceted and often interrelated, with this complicated issue having been amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The consequences of burnout are potentially significant for practices with work absences and possible impact on retention.
- Further research is required to devise solutions to this problem.

References

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