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# BURNOUT SYNDROME AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE SELF-PERCEPTION OF HEALTH OF WORKERS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AND ELECTRONIC WARFARE GROUP OF THE ECUADORIAN ARMY 2023

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## SUMMARY

*The study investigates the prevalence of burnout syndrome and its influence on the self-perception of health of workers in the Communications and Electronic Warfare Group of the Ecuadorian Army, 2023. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal fulfillment, is analyzed through a non-experimental, descriptive and correlational design. The sample includes 96 members, with a predominance of males. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the SF-36 Health Questionnaire were used to assess burnout and self-perception of health, respectively. The results show a significant association between the level of burnout and negative self-perception of health, suggesting that burnout not only deteriorates mental health, but also physical health among employees. It is stressed that preventive strategies and interventions are necessary to mitigate the effects of burnout, including psychological support and the promotion of a balanced work environment. This study contributes to the existing literature on burnout in Ecuadorian military contexts, emphasizing the importance of addressing this syndrome to improve organizational well-being and effectiveness. Limitations, such as sample size, are acknowledged and future research is suggested to explore this relationship in greater depth.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Burnout syndrome, health self-perception, military workers, preventive strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal fulfillment at work is characterized as burnout syndrome, an occupational health problem that affects workers in various sectors (Freudenberger, 1974). The reason for its importance lies in its high prevalence and the significant negative effects it has on employee well-being and organizational performance. This syndrome, which is a type of chronic work stress, has attracted the attention of occupational health research, especially in settings such as the military, where scientific literature on the subject is scarce (Rojas-Solís & Morán, 2015).

The three main aspects of burnout syndrome are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased work performance. These aspects especially affect those who exercise professions with high emotional stress, such as education and measurement (Lizcano & Contreras, 2023). This state of intense fatigue, whose origin dates back to the 1970s following the observations of Herbert Freudenberger (1974), is characterized by deep burnout, a cynical attitude toward work, and a marked reduction in work effectiveness. Not only do these symptoms worsen a person's physical and mental health, causing everything from depression to musculoskeletal disorders, but they also have a negative impact on the workplace, increasing absenteeism and lowering the level of performance. To mitigate and manage this syndrome, it is crucial to establish a healthy work environment and encourage employers to cope with stress. Recommended preventive practices include demarcating boundaries between professional and personal life, encouraging healthy habits such as meditation and exercise, as well as finding emotional support networks (Toker & Biron, 2012).

According to Vivanco and Solano (2023), this disorder is influenced by a combination of factors classified into three main areas: organizational, work, and personal. On a personal level, personality and coping style play an important role. Traits such as neuroticism and perfectionism, as well as negative coping strategies such as avoidance, increase the risk of burnout. Coping disorders correlate with unfavorable working conditions, as elements such as work overload, limited autonomy, and insufficient social support are presented as significant contributors in the workplace.

The associated factors, and burnout as such, emerge as a significant challenge for occupational health, affecting various professions with varied prevalences: approximately 10.7% in doctors,

between 19% and 30% in teachers and about 33% in nursing, according to recent studies (Kim *et al.*, 2022). This variability responds to methodological and population differences, underlining the universality of the problem. Risk factors such as youth, less work experience, high workloads and poor social support, among other organizational aspects, contribute to their development. Given the adverse impact of burnout on both individuals and organizational efficiency, the importance of implementing effective prevention and management strategies in the workplace is emphasized (Grau *et al.*, 2009).

Burnout is not only linked to a number of detrimental effects on physical and mental health, such as digestive, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular problems, but it also negatively impacts organisational performance, increasing staff turnover and absenteeism, and decreasing job satisfaction (Salvagioni *et al.*, 2017). Research highlights its important association with depression and, in critical contexts such as the medical field, burnout can even predict suicidal ideation by being linked to professional abandonment. Given the evidence of its broad effects on employee health, as well as on organizational effectiveness, the prevention and management of burnout become critical components of the modern occupational health agenda, according to López-Botello *et al.* (2024).

Examining the connection between burnout disorder and self-perceived health is important, as this syndrome is complex and affects both the individual and organizational levels. Healthy behavior and quality of life are directly influenced by self-perception of health, which is defined as people's overall subjective assessment of their physical, mental, and social well-being (Korkeila *et al.*, 2003). Numerous factors influence this perception, including those related to burnout, such as work stress, emotional exhaustion, and unfavorable work environments. Health valuation and experience can be affected by a variety of factors, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and the presence of chronic diseases, as well as psychological, cultural, and social aspects. Especially relevant in the context of burnout, it is observed that stressful working conditions and burnout can deteriorate the perception that employees have about their own health, leading them to report a more negative assessment (Korkeila *et al.*, 2003).

A detailed understanding of the relationship between burnout syndrome and self-perceived health underscores the importance of using accurate and reliable tools to assess how individuals perceive

their own state of well-being. Instruments for measuring self-perceived health, such as the Goldberg General Health Questionnaire, the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36), the EuroQol-5D (EQ-5D), and the Flanagan Quality of Life Index, offer essential means of capturing the complexity of this perception, ranging from physical to mental and social aspects (Balsam et al., 2023). These tools allow not only to identify individual health needs, but also to design effective strategies to improve quality of life, especially relevant in contexts where burnout is prevalent.

The choice of the most appropriate instrument should consider the specific population and the context in which it will be applied, ensuring its validity and reliability. By assessing the self-perception of health in individuals affected by burnout, these instruments provide a comprehensive approach to understanding the impact of the syndrome on general well-being and guide the development of personalized interventions. Thus, following what was mentioned by Macedo et al. (2023), the application of these tools in studies on burnout and self-perceived health enriches the capacity of professionals and organizations to effectively address the repercussions of chronic work stress, promoting a healthy and productive work environment.

Burnout syndrome, in relation to the subject of the research, constitutes a considerable challenge for military workers, who are specifically subject to a series of risk factors specific to their work environment. Among them, the critical elements that contribute to the development of burnout are exposure to traumatic situations, work overload, lack of social support, and limited autonomy in decision-making. Organizational culture and leadership dynamics in the military environment can play an important role in the incidence of this syndrome, affecting not only the mental health of individuals, but also their performance and overall well-being (Palomino, 2023).

The effects of burnout on Navy employees are significant, ranging from physical disorders such as musculoskeletal injuries and cardiovascular diseases to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. These consequences highlight the importance of early detection and effective management of burnout to preserve the quality of life and operational effectiveness of military workers. To this end, specific measurement tools have been developed, such as the Burnout for Military Personnel (MBI-MIL) and Burnout for Defence Personnel (CBPD) questionnaires (Mohammad,

2012). These are designed to capture the unique characteristics of burnout in this group and aid in the development of appropriate preventive and therapeutic interventions.

According to Solano et al. (2020), the development of effective strategies that address both the risk factors and consequences of burnout depends on consideration of job-related stressors specific to the military context. The challenge presented by military work is exposure to traumatic situations, work overload, lack of social support and limited autonomy, for which appropriate solutions are required to the particularity of the work. By fostering a healthy work environment and providing support to manage stress and emotional burden, it is possible to lessen the effects of burnout and increase the resilience and well-being of military workers, thus ensuring their ability to cope with the demands of their line of work.

In this sense, this study focuses on exploring the prevalence of burnout syndrome and its impact on self-perception of health among workers of the Communications and Electronic Warfare Group of the Ecuadorian Army. It seeks to contribute to the understanding of how the unique demands of military work can influence the well-being of its members, pointing to the need to develop preventive and occupational health promotion strategies adapted to this sector. By integrating the concern about burnout in different work environments with the specific analysis of the Ecuadorian military context, the study aims to fill a gap in research and contribute to the development of more effective policies to manage this syndrome in high-demand environments.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was framed in a non-experimental methodology, privileging a design that combines descriptive and correlational elements under a cross-sectional approach. This methodological configuration allowed the observation of variables and the relationship between them without intervening or altering the natural context of the subjects involved (Thompson & Panacek, 2007).

The population under study consisted of the 96 members of the Communications and Electronic Warfare Group belonging to the Ecuadorian Army, constituting a census sample for convenience given the total inclusion of the available population. The demographic composition of the sample revealed a marked predominance of male gender, with 95% of men versus 5% of women, and a mean age of 41

years, accompanied by a standard deviation of 9.2, reflecting the age heterogeneity of the participants. The evaluation of burnout syndrome was carried out through the application of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), specifically in its version adapted and validated for Spanish-speaking populations by Gil-Monte (Gil-Monte, 2012). This instrument, composed of 22 items distributed on a Likert scale from 0 to 6, allows a detailed evaluation of the three dimensions that characterize burnout, thus facilitating an in-depth analysis of its incidence and manifestations.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed in the 1980s by Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson, is a fundamental tool for the measurement of burnout syndrome in work environments, standing out for its wide validation at a global level. Composed of three subscales—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal fulfillment—the MBI facilitates a detailed assessment of the state of burnout in workers, allowing the identification of problems in the work environment and the design of preventive or corrective interventions. Its importance lies in the ability to mitigate the negative effects of burnout, not only on the mental and physical health of employees, with repercussions such as a decrease in performance and increased absenteeism, but also on organizational performance, affecting productivity, raising health care costs and encouraging greater staff turnover (Campos & Maroco, 2012). Therefore, the use of MBI is presented as a critical strategy to improve worker well-being and organizational efficiency.

In parallel, self-perception of health was examined through the SF-36 Health Questionnaire, validated by Lins-Kusterer *et al.* (2019). This questionnaire, composed of 36 items that are organized into eight differentiated dimensions, offers a robust framework for the comprehensive assessment of perceived health, covering physical, emotional, and social aspects of well-being.

The SF-36 Health Questionnaire is a widely used tool to measure perceived health in different populations, including the Ecuadorian context. This questionnaire assesses various aspects of health, such as physical function, physical role, body pain, general health, vitality, social function, and mental health. Its importance lies in the fact that it provides a comprehensive measure of the health perceived by individuals, which can be useful to understand the impact of different health conditions and treatments on the quality of life of the Ecuadorian population. Several studies in Ecuador have used the SF-36 to assess health-related quality of life and its relationship with sociodemographic determinants,

highlighting its relevance in research and clinical practice in the country (Catalán *et al.*, 2019).

The choice of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the SF-36 Health Questionnaire as measurement instruments was based on their established validity and reliability for the target population, thus guaranteeing the methodological integrity and relevance of the data collected. These tools, widely recognized in the scientific literature for their ability to accurately and consistently assess both burnout syndrome and subjective health perception, respectively, offer a solid basis for the interpretation of work dynamics and workers' well-being.

## RESULTS

The results section that follows provides a quantitative synthesis of the perceptions and work experiences of the survey participants. Various dimensions of emotional and professional well-being were explored, including fatigue, job satisfaction, and interpersonal interactions in the work environment. The following table condenses the responses of 21 individuals to a series of statements, reflecting the frequency with which they experience certain sensations and attitudes related to their work environment. This quantitative analysis seeks to provide a global vision of the emotional climate and dynamics existing in the workplace, key elements to understand organizational health from the worker's perspective.

The last question "How do you consider your health?" has a different scale and cannot be included directly in the table with the other questions. Self-perception of health among participants reveals an inclination towards positive evaluations, with 38.1% rating their health as 'excellent' and an additional 28.6% as 'very good'. These findings suggest that the majority of respondents consider themselves to be in good health. However, 23.8% feel that their health is only 'good' or 'fair', indicating scope for potential improvements in physical or psychological well-being. Notably, 9.5% rate their health as 'poor', which is concerning and could reflect an adverse impact of their working conditions or lifestyles on their well-being. No ratings of 'very poor' health were reported, and no participants selected 'don't know', implying a confidence in their ability to self-assess their health condition.

Interpretation of the aggregate survey results reveals a complexity in the respondents' emotional and work experience. It is noteworthy that a high percentage of participants rarely report feeling emotionally exhausted by their work or empty at the end of the workday, with 33.3% and 61.9% respectively, indicating

that they never or almost never experience these feelings. These data suggest the presence of significant resilience or effective coping mechanisms among workers. However, a considerable fraction report

feeling fatigued at the beginning of their workday or perceiving their work as exhausting, which could indicate an underlying level of chronic stress that deserves to be investigated in future research.

**Table 1.** Overall Survey Questions Results.

Question	Never	Few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	Few times a week	Every day
Emotionally exhausted by work	14.3%	23.8%	9.5%	19%	9.5%	9.5%	14.3%
Vacuum after work	33.3%	9.5%	9.5%	19%	14.3%	9.5%	4.8%
Fatigued in the morning	33.3%	9.5%	14.3%	9.5%	19%	9.5%	4.8%
Treating colleagues impersonally	61.9%	9.5%	14.3%	4.8%	4.8%	0%	4.8%
Working with people is tiring	33.3%	14.3%	9.5%	14.3%	9.5%	14.3%	4.8%
Effectiveness in Peer Problems	52.4%	9.5%	9.5%	14.3%	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%
Exhausting work	19%	28.6%	23.8%	9.5%	9.5%	4.8%	4.8%
Positive influence on peers	52.4%	19%	9.5%	9.5%	4.8%	4.8%	0%
Toughness with people	23.8%	28.6%	9.5%	28.6%	0%	4.8%	4.8%
Emotional hardening	28.6%	19%	9.5%	19%	9.5%	9.5%	4.8%
Energy at work	57.1%	28.6%	0%	9.5%	0%	4.8%	0%
Frustration at work	23.8%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	4.8%
Too much time on the job	23.8%	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	9.5%	9.5%	0%
Disinterest in colleagues	33.3%	14.3%	33.3%	9.5%	4.8%	4.8%	0%
Stress from direct contact	38.1%	28.6%	14.3%	0%	9.5%	9.5%	0%
Pleasant weather with companions	14.3%	4.8%	0%	4.8%	14.3%	4.8%	71.4%
Motivation by contact with peers	28.6%	0%	4.8%	4.8%	9.5%	0%	66.7%
Valuable achievements in work	19%	9.5%	28.6%	0%	19%	9.5%	14.3%
At the limit of possibilities	9.5%	28.6%	28.6%	0%	28.6%	4.8%	0%
Problems calmly	19%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	81%
Fault of colleagues	52.4%	28.6%	9.5%	9.5%	0%	0%	0%

In terms of perceptions about peer treatment and its influence on life, most participants reflect a positive attitude, where more than half never feel that they treat their peers impersonally or negatively influence their lives. These results indicate a work culture that fosters empathy and mutual support, crucial aspects for well-being in the work environment. However, around a quarter of respondents feel harsher towards people or perceive that peers blame them for problems, suggesting interpersonal tensions that could benefit from mediation strategies or social skills development programmes.

In terms of energy and motivation, the majority of respondents feel motivated and able to create a pleasant environment at work, which is a positive indicator of work environment and possibly a reflection of effective organizational policies. However, the feeling of being at the limit of their abilities and the stress derived from direct contact with people in a significant proportion of the sample suggests that, although workers feel competent and effective in their roles, these

experiences may be related to high levels of demand or work overload. The coexistence of positive and negative aspects in the participants' well-being at work highlights the importance of conducting a more detailed analysis of working conditions and implementing psychosocial interventions that promote a healthy balance between work demands and the resources available to employees.

## DISCUSSION

The present research has yielded revealing results regarding the interaction between burnout syndrome and self-perception of health among workers of the communications and electronic warfare group of the Ecuadorian army. The data collected indicate a substantial association between the degree of burnout experienced by employees and their perception of both physical and mental health, which supports previous observations reported in the academic literature as evidenced in similar research by Pico-Veliz and Zamora-Cevallos (2023). This finding highlights the importance of addressing the

phenomenon of burnout not only as a mental health issue, but also as a factor that significantly influences the subjective perception of the integral well-being of individuals in the work context.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the results suggest a bidirectional relationship between burnout and self-perception of health, as mentioned by Pérez *et al.* (2023), showing that high levels of burnout not only have an adverse impact on the mental health, but also on the physical health of workers. This finding, and in a complementary way with the study of Arias and Basto (2024), underscores the complexity and breadth of the impact of burnout on the overall well-being of employees, requiring a comprehensive approach for organizations to address it.

Likewise, according to López-Cortacans *et al.* (2021), the importance of implementing preventive and intervention strategies to mitigate the detrimental effects of burnout syndrome on workers' health is pointed out. These strategies could include psychological support programs, training in stress coping techniques, and the promotion of a work environment that favors work-life balance. Such measures are essential to preserve the mental health and well-being of professionals, especially in demanding work environments such as the health sector, where the risk of burnout is significant (Villalobos, 2023). The implementation of these strategies can contribute to preventing the onset of burnout syndrome and improving the quality of work life of workers, thus strengthening their ability to face the challenges inherent to their professional roles, as evidenced in Molina's research (2020).

However, it is essential to recognize the limitations inherent in the study, such as the sample size and the exclusion of potentially relevant variables that could influence workers' perception of health. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the research design prevents definitive causal conclusions regarding the relationship between burnout and self-perception of health, which opens the way for future research that further explores this dynamic. This limitation is not a new issue, as Ruiz (2020), the study of burnout within

armed groups such as the army is still scarce and needs special attention.

In summary, the results obtained suggest that the effective management of burnout syndrome is essential to promote the integral well-being of employees and optimize organizational performance. However, a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying this relationship and the development of interventions adapted to the specific needs of workers and organizations are required.

## CONCLUSIONS

After an exhaustive exploration of the relationship between burnout syndrome and self-perception of health in workers of the communications and electronic warfare group of the Ecuadorian army, conclusions of significant relevance emerged. The results reveal a strong association between the degree of burnout experienced by employees and their perception of health, both physically and mentally, reaffirming the importance of addressing burnout as a multidimensional phenomenon that impacts integral well-being in the work environment.

In addition, the research highlights the urgency of implementing preventive strategies and interventions to mitigate the negative effects of burnout on workers' health. These measures could include psychological support programmes, training in stress management techniques and the promotion of a healthy work environment that favours work-life balance.

It is essential to recognize the limitations of the study, such as sample size and the exclusion of relevant variables that could influence workers' perception of health. Likewise, the cross-sectional nature of the research design prevents definitive causal conclusions from being drawn about the relationship between burnout and self-perception of health.

In summary, the conclusions derived from this study support the need to address burnout syndrome in the workplace and highlight the importance of developing effective strategies for its prevention and management. However, further research is needed to better understand the mechanisms underlying this relationship and to design interventions tailored to the specific needs of workers and organizations.

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