



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF WELLNESS OFFICER
and COLLEGE OF NURSING

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New report finds burnout among working parents associated with more mental health concerns, punitive behavior toward children
Ohio State report finds alarming trends, offers strategies and resources to help

COLUMBUS, Ohio – A new report released today by [The Ohio State University Office of the Chief Wellness Officer](#) and [College of Nursing](#) reveals the level of burnout among working parents during the COVID-19 pandemic and the adverse consequences of that burnout for both themselves and their children.

The report is based on a survey to measure not only the impact of burnout on working parents, but also on their children. The survey was conducted between January – April 2021 – in the thick of the pandemic when vaccines were still not available for children – and discovered insights on how much COVID-19 exacerbated working parental burnout.

“‘Parental burnout.’ When I heard that, I thought, ‘That’s it. That’s what I’m feeling,’” said Kate Gawlik, DNP, APRN-CNP, FAANP, FNAP, associate professor of clinical nursing at The Ohio State University College of Nursing, co-author of the report and mother of four children ages 10 and under. **“It’s just this overwhelming sense of having to be on 24/7 in so many different roles and just having to be invested in those roles so intensely.**

“You want to try to be such a great parent; you want to do well at your job; you want to be a good partner; you want to have a clean house,” Gawlik continued. **“There’s just so much being thrown at you with having to do all of that in a pandemic, it’s almost like burnout, to some degree, is inevitable.”**

Working parents with children under the age of 18 living with them self-selected to participate in the survey. Among the key findings:

- Sixty-six percent (66%) of working parents responding met the criteria for burnout. Being female, the number of children living in the home, anxiety in the parent, having children with either diagnosed anxiety or ADHD and parental concern that their children may have an undiagnosed mental health disorder show the strongest associations with working parental burnout.
- Burnout is associated with depression, anxiety and increased alcohol consumption in working parents, as well as the likelihood for parents to be irritable, get easily angered with their children and engage in punitive parenting practices (i.e. yelling, insulting/criticizing, cursing, spanking).
- According to parents’ self-reporting, the presence of working parent burnout has a strong association with attention, internalizing and externalizing behaviors in their children. Examples of these kinds of behaviors include:
 - Attention behaviors: inability to sit still, trouble concentrating, easily distracted
 - Internalizing: feels sad or unhappy, down on themselves, worries a lot
 - Externalizing: fights with other children, does not listen to rules, teases others

“We’re not going to just magically come out of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Bernadette Melnyk, PhD, APRN-CNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN, Ohio State’s vice president for health promotion, university chief wellness officer, College of Nursing dean and co-author of the report. **“We have to do so much more on the prevention side of things and not wait until parents and/or their children are in crisis.”**

Within the report, Gawlik and Melnyk created a 10-item Working Parent Burnout Scale to provide a “self-check” for parents to score themselves and determine their level of burnout. The report also provides parents, with key strategies and resources that both parents and their children can use to understand the steps they can take to prevent or improve the burnout symptoms that are adversely affecting themselves and their families. Among the strategies:

- Committing a few minutes every day to stress relief techniques: “Learn mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral skills, imagery, meditation and put them into practice on a daily basis,” said Melnyk. “Even taking a couple of five to 10 minute breaks out of the day for self-care to do something to relieve stress or that brings you joy is really critical. Self-care is not selfish; it is critical to take great care of others.”
- Being self-compassionate: “That means don’t overcommit,” said Melnyk. “It’s really important to learn to say ‘no’ and don’t feel guilty about it.”
- Find balance to reduce stress: “If you’re feeling really burned out, there are two key places you can look,” said Gawlik. “One is to look at your stressors, and two is to look at your resources and to really evaluate, ‘How can I decrease my stressors and how can I increase my resources?’”
- Have a go-to friend to vent to: “You are not alone; so many other parents feel the same way,” said Melnyk. “The important thing is to stay connected. Let somebody else know how you are feeling.”
- Get help if burnout, depression or anxiety are interfering with concentration, judgment or functioning: “It is a strength to recognize when help is needed, not a weakness,” Melnyk said.

Gawlik reflected on the height of the pandemic and gave voice to what so many working parents felt in real time:

“I was with my husband one day in the kitchen, and I remember it was the end of the day,” Gawlik said, “and he just looked at me and said, ‘Can you believe that we do this every day?’ And I was like, ‘No, I can’t.’”

The full report containing findings, the Working Parent Burnout Scale and strategies and resources to help can be found [at this link](#).