

Burnout and Satisfaction Level Among General Surgeons: A Preliminary Survey

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of burnout among healthcare providers has been increasing recently. Several studies and surveys have shown these high levels of burnout, but none of them have asked about the primary cause of it. We sent an online survey to 800 general surgeons across India and received 221 unique and complete responses that we used for analysis. Almost 50% of the surgeons responded that insufficient work-life balance and high workload are their primary reasons for burnout. Most of them responded that they were unsatisfied with the compensation and medical infrastructure, but they believe that they get adequate chances to learn and upskill in their field. More research needs to be done to explore other medical specialties as well.

Keywords: *Burnout, Survey, Stress, Satisfaction, Surgeons, Doctors*

Burnout, a stress-related condition, is closely related to a person's occupation and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal fulfillment. In the past decade, the prevalence of burnout among healthcare providers has significantly increased, bordering on epidemic. Extended working hours, often unattainable productivity goals, and the increasingly difficult task of balancing professional and personal life manifest these challenges. These factors serve as significant catalysts for healthcare provider burnout. Failure to address this problem can quickly result in conditions such as depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts. The consequences of provider burnout are detrimental to the well-being of healthcare workers, the quality of care provided to patients, and the overall results of healthcare organizations. [1] A significantly higher proportion of doctors in India experience stress, depression, and burnout. This is associated with long working hours, negative patient-related outcomes, adverse doctor-patient relationships, and interpersonal interactions among colleagues. [2] Past surveys concluded

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high levels of stress or burnout among doctors, but they didn't ask about what can be the primary reason for this burnout among doctors. Some studies have shown the possible reasons for such high stress levels after correlating stress levels with other factors such as smoking, alcohol, or sleep quality. This survey has accounted for all these possible factors and assessed the primary reason for burnout among general surgeons. The survey also sought information on their satisfaction with current compensation, infrastructure, and growth opportunities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We sent a survey questionnaire containing ten different questions using Google Forms to 800 general surgeons across India through WhatsApp. We collaborated with Lybrate, A mobile healthcare communication and delivery platform, to find the contact details of all these doctors. We used Microsoft Excel 2019 to record the responses and conduct the analysis. The survey form had questions related to the type of surgeries, emergency cases, the primary reason for burnout, and the satisfaction level with respect to compensation, infrastructure, growth opportunities, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We received a total of 266 responses from 26 different states and union territories. Some of those responses had inadequate or missing information or multiple responses. After excluding these, we considered 221 unique responses for the analysis. Table 1 represents the questions and options given in the survey and the recorded responses.

Table 1. Recorded responses to the survey questionnaire

Survey Questions	Responses	
	Count	%
1. How many years of work experience do you have as a general surgeon?		
(a) Less than 10	29	13.12%
(b) 11-20	12	5.43%
(c) 21-30	5	2.26%
(d) More than 30	10	4.52%
(e) No response recorded	165	74.66%
2. Which is the most frequently performed general surgery in your practice?		
(a) Appendicitis	24	10.86%
(b) Kidney Stones	2	0.90%
(c) Hernia	60	27.15%
(d) Proctology (Hemorrhoids/ Fissures/ Anal fistula)	50	22.62%
(e) Gallstones	82	37.10%
(f) Others	3	1.36%
3. In a given week, what percentage of your procedures are emergencies?		
(a) less than 20%	146	66.06%
(b) 20 to 40%	54	24.43%
(c) 40 to 60%	16	7.24%
(d) 60 to 80%	3	1.36%
(e) More than 80%	2	0.90%

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Survey Questions	Responses	
	Count	%
4. What do you think is patients' biggest fear about surgery?		
(a) Pain & discomfort	117	52.94%
(b) Surgical complications	75	33.94%
(c) Scarring & physical changes	10	4.52%
(d) Complications related to anesthesia	19	8.60%
5. Which minimally invasive technique have you incorporated in your practice?		
(a) Single-incision laparoscopic surgery	5	2.26%
(b) Laparoscopic surgery	172	77.83%
(c) Robotic surgery	6	2.71%
(d) Laser surgeries	23	10.41%
(e) Other	15	6.79%
6. How do you ensure your patients are fully informed and educated about their surgical options and potential risks?		
(a) Written materials and resources	47	21.27%
(b) Verbal discussions with the patient and their family	135	61.09%
(c) Visual aids such as videos or diagrams and 3D models	38	17.19%
(d) Referral to a specialist for further consultation	1	0.45%
(e) Other	0	0.00%
7. What is the primary reason for doctor burnout in general surgery?		
(a) Insufficient work-life balance and high workload	110	49.77%
(b) Administrative burden and paperwork	28	12.67%
(c) Lack of support and resources	43	19.46%
(d) Emotional and psychological stress	26	11.76%
(e) Other	14	6.33%
8. Do you think that general surgeons receive satisfactory compensation in India?		
(a) Yes	32	14.48%
(b) No	189	85.52%
9. Are you happy with the current medical infrastructure available in Indian hospitals?		
(a) Yes	83	37.56%
(b) No	138	62.44%
10. Do you get adequate chances to learn and upskill about recent techniques in general surgery?		
(a) Yes	128	57.92%
(b) No	93	42.08%

Out of all the types of general surgery, nearly 50% of the surgeons most frequently performed Hernia or Proctology (hemorrhoids/ fissures/ anal fistula). More than 77% of the doctors opted for Laparoscopic surgeries as their most common minimally invasive procedure, while only six doctors out of 221 chose robotic surgery as their response. Only 10% of the general surgeons had more than 40% of weekly surgeries as emergencies. Most general surgeons (~61%) ensure that their patients and attendants are well informed about the surgical options and potential risks by verbally discussing with them. In comparison,

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some doctors use written materials and resources (~21%) or Visual aids such as videos or diagrams and 3D models (~17%).

Almost 50% of the respondents believe that Insufficient work-life balance and high workload is the primary cause of burnout among them, while 20% felt a lack of support as their primary reason (Fig. 1).

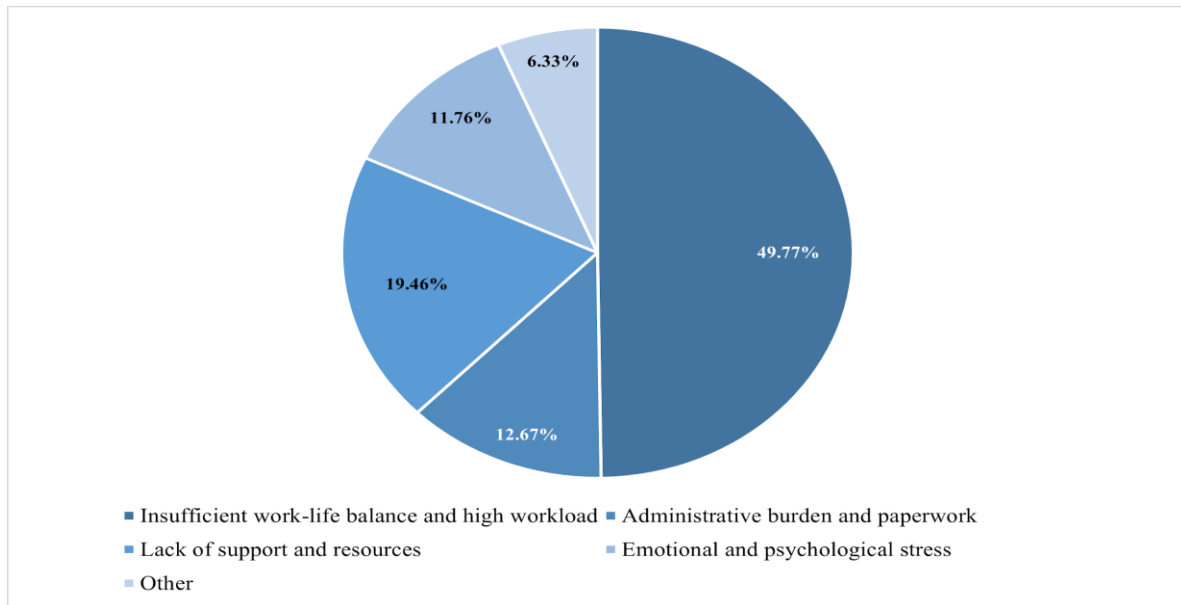


Fig. 1. Primary reason for burnout among General surgeons in India

Surgeons' satisfaction with the compensation and medical infrastructure provided to them was low. Most survey respondents (~86%) were unsatisfied with their current salary, while around 62% were unsatisfied with the medical infrastructure. Interestingly, approximately 58% of those doctors believe they get adequate chances to learn and upskill about recent advancements in their practice. (Fig. 2).

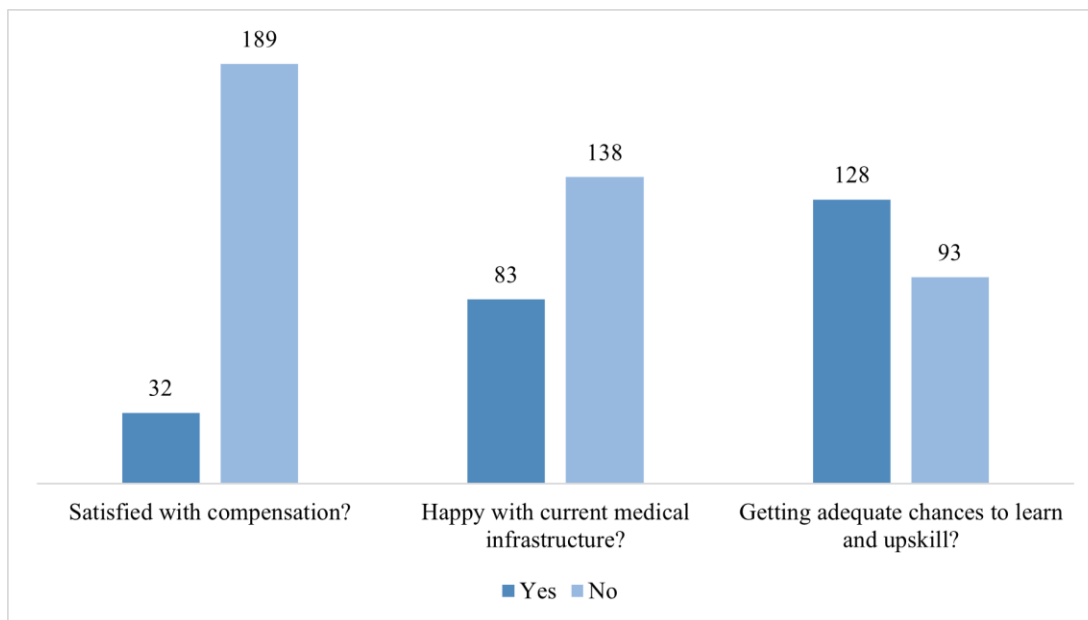


Fig. 2. Satisfaction level among general surgeons for compensations, medical infrastructure, and growth opportunities

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Due to the nature of a doctor's profession, their mental health is not only of concern to them but also to the greater society they serve. [3] Doctors often experience increased stress levels due to the profound responsibility of holding patients' lives in their hands. Providing intensive care can lead to physical, psychological, and emotional exhaustion for healthcare providers, potentially culminating in burnout. [4] Virmani et al. (2022) conducted an online survey to analyze doctors' stress levels. They estimated the prevalence of stress among the survey participants and found that 60% of the respondents faced some type of stress. [5] Grover et al. (2018) conducted an online email survey to assess various psychological problems among medical professionals in India. They found that more than 90% of the respondents faced some kind of burnout. [2] Saini et al. (2010) assessed the prevalence of stress among resident doctors in India by conducting a cross-sectional study and found that around 33% of those faced some kind of stress.[3] While multiple studies assessed stress levels among doctors and generated good insights, one limitation was that they did not address the causes of such high stress levels. With this survey, we evaluated the primary reason for burnout among general surgeons and found insufficient work-life balance and high workload to be the primary cause. However, these results only include responses from general surgeons and not all doctors, and they can't represent the whole community of doctors. In the present study, around 86% of the general surgeons were unhappy with the compensation received. However, approximately 75% of the doctors responded that they were satisfied with the compensation, according to the study by Virmani et al. (2022). [5] The difference in the responses might be due to the differences in survey participants. We sent the survey form to only general surgeons to generate more reliable insights, as different specialty areas might have varying workloads.

A limitation of this study is that only a few respondents revealed their years of work experience. Level of work experience data could provide significant insight related to possible reasons in different work experience groups. However, since 75% of the respondents did not reveal their years of experience, it was impossible to correlate the data and find a relationship. Another limitation to consider is that since this is a survey study, the insights generated from this study are purely based on the participants' responses. Hence, the results of this study can only be considered preliminary data, not the representation of the overall scenario. Further studies may be required to explore other medical specialties and to know more about the factors that may have a direct or indirect impact on these stress levels, which will further help in the betterment of the doctors and the patients.

CONCLUSION

The primary reason for around half of the general surgeons' burnout was poor work-life balance. Most general surgeons were not satisfied with their compensation and the infrastructure. At the same time, most of them believe they get adequate chances to learn and upskill during their medical practice.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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