

Mental Health CAREERS





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Coping with Burnout

Working in the mental health care field can be emotionally demanding, which means burnout is a significant concern for workers.

Here's a look at the research and some tips for preventing and coping with burnout.

WHAT IS BURNOUT?

According to the World Health Organization, burnout is an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been

successfully managed. Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Mental health care workers must invest a lot of empathy and emotion in their work, putting them at higher risk for burnout on the job.

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Self-care: Regular self-care is crucial. A 2019 study in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* emphasizes the importance of self-care in maintaining mental health and preventing burnout. Exercise, meditation and spending time on hobbies can help

reduce stress.

Professional boundaries: Setting boundaries is essential not just in our personal lives but in our professional lives as well. The American Psychological Association recommends setting clear boundaries between work and home to help reduce burnout. Set limits on working hours and be mindful of not taking work-related stress home.

Peer support: A 2021 study in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* found that peer support can help mitigate burnout. Look for peer support groups for emotional relief and practical advice. Sharing your experiences with colleagues can help you feel less isolated and help you dis-

cover new ideas for coping with stress.

COPING WITH BURNOUT

Regular supervision and counseling: Access to regular supervision and counseling can help mental health care workers process their experiences and emotions. This support is critical in managing the emotional toll of their work.

Mindfulness and relaxation: Practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, can significantly reduce stress levels. A 2020 study in *Mindfulness Journal* found that mindfulness interventions effectively lower burnout symptoms among healthcare professionals.

Specialties in Mental Health

The field of mental health care offers a range of career specialties, each providing unique opportunities to make a significant impact on people's lives.

If you're considering a career in mental health, consider whether any of these areas of specialization appeal to your interests and strengths.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Clinical psychologists assess, diagnose and treat mental health disorders through using therapeutic techniques. They work in settings such as hospitals, private practices and academic institutions. According to the American Psychological Association, clinical psychologists address issues such as anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses.

PSYCHIATRY

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who diagnose and treat mental illnesses, often using a combination of medication and psychotherapy. They can prescribe medications and are trained to understand the complex relationship between mental and physical health. According to the American Psychiatric Association, psychiatrists play a critical role in managing



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severe mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

COUNSELING

Counselors provide support and guidance to individuals dealing with a variety of mental health issues, including stress, grief and relationship problems. They typically hold a master's degree in counseling and are licensed to practice therapy. Counselors use therapeutic techniques to help clients develop coping skills and improve their overall well-being.

SOCIAL WORK

Clinical social workers assist individuals and families in coping with mental health challenges by providing therapy and advocacy, and connecting them to resources in their community. You will find social workers in schools, hospitals and community agencies, focusing on both clinical and social aspects of mental health.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY

Marriage and family therapists specialize in addressing

mental health issues within the context of family dynamics. They work with couples and families to improve communication, resolve conflicts and strengthen relationships.

CHILD AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

A child psychologist uses psychological evaluations and various forms of therapy to help children and adolescents learn to better cope with life and relationship issues and mental health conditions, according to the Cleveland Clinic. They help treat mental,

emotional, social and behavioral health conditions.

School psychologists work with students in educational settings to support their mental health and academic success. They conduct assessments, provide counseling and collaborate with educators and parents to create supportive learning environments.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, school psychologists focus on addressing students' emotional and behavioral health.

Technology in Mental Health Careers

If you're training for a career in mental health, technology is likely to be a big part of your training and will play a large role in your day-to-day work as a future health care worker.

Technology is revolutionizing the field of mental health care, providing innovative tools to help diagnose and treat mental health conditions.

Here's a look at the ways technology is changing mental health care.

TELETHERAPY

The COVID-19 pandemic made us all aware of how useful teletherapy can be. Mental health professionals provide therapy sessions via video conferencing, making mental health services more accessible to people with geographical, physical or scheduling constraints. According to the American Psychological Association, teletherapy is effective for treating a wide range of mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression and PTSD.

MOBILE HEALTH APPS

We've all seen advertisements for apps such as Calm and Bettr, which offer help with mindfulness and

meditation, and teletherapy, respectfully.

Mobile apps can also provide tools for mood tracking and cognitive behavioral therapy exercises, which help support users between sessions with professionals. A 2020 study published in JMIR mHealth and uHealth found that mobile health apps can significantly improve mental health outcomes by promoting self-management and providing immediate support.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI is changing the way we accomplish many day-to-day tasks, and mental health care is no different. AI is being used to develop advanced diagnostic tools and personalized treatment plans. Machine learning algorithms can analyze large amounts of data to identify patterns and predict mental health conditions, allowing for early intervention. For instance, an AI-powered chatbot could provide immediate support and

monitor users' mental health through natural language processing. According to a 2019 article in the World Psychiatry journal, AI could even enhance the accuracy and efficiency of mental health diagnostics and interventions.

VIRTUAL REALITY

Virtual reality is emerging as a powerful tool for mental health treatment, particularly in exposure therapy for anxiety disorders, PTSD and phobias.

In a VR environment, patients can confront and manage their fears in a controlled, immersive setting that can feel very real.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

Electronic health records streamline the management of patient information, allowing caregivers to access and share patient data easily. This enhances communication among providers and improves continuity of care.



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Getting an Internship

An internship is a critical step in preparing for your future career in the mental health care field.

Internships help students reconcile their classroom learning with real-life experiences on the job. They also provide opportunities for networking and making connections that can help you throughout your career.

FINDING AN INTERNSHIP

Start by contacting your college or university program of study or career center about internship opportunities. Typically they will keep a list of organizations they've had success with placing interns with in the past. These might include hospitals, clinics, schools, non-profit organizations and private practices.

You can also research opportunities on websites such as the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers.

APPLYING

Your application for an internship program should include a well-crafted resume, a cover letter tailored to the specific internship and letters of recommendation. You should showcase relevant experiences you've had through your coursework, volunteer work and any previous



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internships.

Emphasize skills such as empathy, communication and critical thinking, which are essential for success in the mental health care field. According to the American Counseling Association, strong candidates show a genuine passion for mental health and a commitment to helping others.

Volunteer work in the

mental health field can also make your application stand out. Consider volunteering with a crisis hotline, support group or mental health advocacy organization.

NETWORKING

Making connections with other professionals in the mental health field is an effort that will reward you throughout your career. Attend

industry conferences, workshops and seminars whenever possible to meet and connect with new people in the field. Join professional organizations, such as the APA or ACA, and take advantage of networking events and mentorship programs.

PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS

If you are selected for an

interview, be sure to do your research before the big day arrives. Familiarize yourself with the organization and be prepared to discuss how your skills and experiences align with their needs.

The APA suggests being prepared for interview topics such as confidentiality, ethical practices and your approach to building therapeutic relationships.

Exams and Certifications

Achieving certification and licensure in the mental health care field requires passing rigorous exams and fulfilling state-specific requirements.

These tools are meant to ensure that professionals working in the field meet rigorous standards of competency and ethics.

Here's a look at what you need to know.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Clinical psychologists must obtain a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.) and pass the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology. The EPPP, which is administered by the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, evaluates a student's knowledge in content areas such as assessment, diagnosis and intervention. Candidates must also fulfill state-specific licensing requirements, which may include additional exams or supervised practice hours.

PSYCHIATRISTS

Psychiatrists are medical doctors and must complete a residency in psychiatry after medical school. They must pass the United States Medical Licensing Examination like all doctors, and the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology certification exams.



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The ABPN exam assesses a candidate's knowledge in clinical psychiatry and neurology, and certification must be renewed every 10 years.

LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

Licensed professional counselors typically hold a master's degree in counseling and must

pass the National Counselor Examination or the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination, both administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors. These exams test a candidate's knowledge in counseling theories, assessment and case management. They may also need to meet state licensure requirements,

such as supervised clinical hours and continuing education.

LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKERS

Licensed clinical social workers must obtain a master's degree in social work and pass the Association of Social Work Boards Clinical Exam. This exam evaluates a

candidate's skills in clinical practice, including diagnosis, treatment planning and therapeutic interventions. To be licensed at the state level, they must meet requirements such as supervised clinical experience and continuing education.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS

Marriage and family therapists need a master's or doctoral degree in marriage and family therapy and must pass the National MFT Exam, administered by the Association of Marital and Family Therapy Regulatory Boards. This exam covers topics such as family systems, ethical practice and clinical interventions. Licensure requirements vary by state but often include supervised clinical hours and continuing education.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

School psychologists typically hold a specialist-level degree (Ed.S.) or doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.) and must pass the Praxis School Psychologist test, administered by the Educational Testing Service. This exam assesses knowledge in areas such as assessment, intervention and consultation. Certification through the National Association of School Psychologists also requires supervised practice and continuing professional development.

By meeting these standards, mental health professionals ensure they are well-equipped to provide high-quality care.

Expected Job Growth

Mental health care careers have been in high demand for some time, and the demand is expected to continue growing.

THE DEMAND

The trend is driven by greater awareness of mental health issues among the population, increased access to mental health care and ongoing efforts to reduce stigma surrounding receiving mental health treatment.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five adults in the U.S. experiences mental illness each year, highlighting the pervasive need for mental health services.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act require insurance plans to cover mental health services on par with physical health services. This has helped to greatly expand access to care.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects demand in this career field to continue to grow at least through 2032. The BLS website lists projected employment growth of “faster than average” or “much faster than average” for every sector of the field.

In 2022, the BLS projected that substance abuse, behavioral disorder and mental health counselors were projected to grow the fastest among mental health



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occupations, increasing 18% between 2022 and 2032.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Also driving demand for mental health care workers is the integration of mental health care with overall health care. Healthcare providers and policymakers increasingly

understand that mental health is crucial to overall well-being, leading to a more integrated approach to health care. According to the National Institutes of Health, this approach increases the demand for mental health professionals who can work collaboratively with other health care providers.

JOB SETTINGS

People receive mental health services in various settings, including doctors’ and counselors’ offices, outpatient centers, hospitals and residential facilities. The BLS expected employment in all of these settings to grow, with outpatient substance abuse and mental

health facilities projected to see the biggest growth.

Mental health care careers are particularly in demand in rural and underserved urban areas, according to the Health Resources and Services Administration, due to significant mental health provider shortages in these areas.

Equity in Mental Health Care

Despite advances in mental health awareness and treatment, significant disparities persist across different populations based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender and geography.

Addressing these disparities is crucial to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality mental health care.

UNDERSTANDING DISPARITIES

Research shows that marginalized and underserved communities face significant barriers to accessing mental health care. According to the American Psychological Association, racial and ethnic minorities, including African Americans, Latinx individuals and Native Americans, are less likely to receive mental health services compared to their white counterparts. When they do receive care, it is often of lower quality.

Socioeconomic status also is also a factor in access to mental health services. According to 2020 data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, people with lower incomes are more likely to experience mental health issues but are less likely



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to receive treatment due to factors such as lack of insurance, transportation and availability of services in their communities.

BARRIERS TO EQUITY

Several factors contribute to these disparities. Stigma surrounding mental health, particularly in certain cultures, can deter individuals from seeking help. Language barriers and a lack of culturally competent care providers further

complicate the issue. The mental health workforce often lacks diversity, which can lead to misunderstandings and mistrust between providers and patients from different backgrounds, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING EQUITY

To promote equity in mental health care, a multifaceted approach is required.

Competency training:

Health care providers should receive training to understand and respect cultural differences and address biases. This can improve patient-provider communication and trust, according to the APA.

Expanding access: Increasing funding for community mental health centers, telehealth services and sliding scale fee structures can help make mental health care more accessible to underserved populations, according to SAMHSA.

Policy advocacy: Advocating for policies that address social factors such as housing, education and employment, can help reduce the socioeconomic barriers to mental health care, says the World Health Organization.

Diversifying the workforce: Encouraging diversity within the mental health profession can help create a workforce that is more representative of the populations it serves, fostering better understanding and care, according to NAMI.