



Burnout: Managing your global risk

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It is hard to pin down, that state of exhaustion, both physical and mental, caused by excessive and sustained stress. That will soon change. “Burnout” will be a world-recognised “occupational syndrome” from 2022, the World Health Organisation (“WHO”) has announced – a decision signalling its emergence as a new-age employment risk and one that is bound to fuel interest in burnout-related claims and regulation.

What is burnout?

Burnout has triggered widespread public, media and social partner interest, but, as a legal concept, its boundaries are blurred. It has been raised in the context of mental health at work, stress, excessive working hours and health and safety but there is still little “hard” law or policy tackling it directly.

The WHO has now clarified that burnout is a syndrome “resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” which is characterised by feelings of exhaustion, depleted energy, increased “mental distance” from, or negative feelings about work, and reduced “personal efficacy”.

Although the concepts overlap, burnout goes beyond stress (being the chronic mental and physical consequences of unmanaged stress) and mental ill-health (which may have non-work-related causes). Aside from job demands and excessive working hours, the causes can be as diverse as work conflicts and lack of autonomy, to bullying and being undervalued.

What is employers’ risk exposure? – A&O survey

There have been multiple surveys evidencing the scale of workplace stress as a global issue, and the WHO predicts burnout to be a future global pandemic. The costs can include worker disengagement, sick leave, lower productivity, recruitment and retention issues, collective disputes and reputational harm – but what are the legal risks?

In our latest briefing, we highlight employers’ risk exposure for burnout in a survey of local laws. We look at why this risk exposure could increase following the WHO’s decision, and at how to manage the risks in your global workforce. Click [here](#) to request a copy of our briefing and an extract from our survey.

Allen & Overy LLP

One Bishops Square, London E1 6AD United Kingdom | Tel +44 (0)20 3088 0000 | Fax +44 (0)20 3088 0088 | allenoverly.com

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