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Imposter syndrome, burnout, and maladaptive perfectionism among oncology professionals: A global cross-sectional study

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Background

Oncology professionals face high emotional and cognitive burdens. Imposter syndrome (IS), burnout, and maladaptive perfectionism (MP) are interrelated psychological challenges with potential to affect well-being and patient care. Despite global relevance, large-scale studies on their prevalence and predictors remain limited.

Methods

A global cross-sectional survey was conducted with oncology professionals across 55 countries. Participants completed validated scales: Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS). Sociodemographic and occupational data were analyzed. Multivariate regression using a causal framework explored the controlled and natural direct effects on burnout.

Results

Among 542 participants, 34.1% had high CIPS scores, 56.1% met criteria for burnout, and 38% were identified as maladaptive perfectionists. Younger age ($p=0.006$), female gender ($p=0.001$), and not having children ($p=0.007$) were associated with high CIPS scores. Burnout was most frequent among younger participants ($p=0.010$) and those with longer working hours ($p<0.001$). Multivariate models estimated the controlled direct effects of gender ($p<0.001$), CIPS scores ($p<0.001$), academic title ($p=0.044$), private hospital setting ($p=0.01$), income level ($p<0.001$), personal standards ($p<0.001$), and discrepancy ($p<0.001$) on burnout by intervening on their respective mediators. Parenthood ($p=0.013$) and formal mental health training ($p<0.001$) remained protective. The direct effect of age became insignificant ($p=0.495$) under the controlled environment.

Conclusions

Psychological distress is common among oncology professionals globally and is influenced by both structural and psychological factors. Imposter syndrome and maladaptive perfectionism were associated with burnout, especially in younger professionals. These findings highlight the importance of developing targeted, evidence-based interventions aimed at preventing burnout and imposter syndrome.

Legal entity responsible for the study

The authors.

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Disclosure

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