

Young doctors working in infectious diseases suffering burnout and bullying

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One in five physicians working in medical microbiology and infectious diseases is suffering from burnout, bullying and poor work-life balance, according to a study published in *European Journal of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases*.

The findings, which come from a survey of more than 400 young doctors working across Europe, also show that women's experiences are worse than men's, and that the situation is worse for doctors working in southern and eastern European countries.

Overall, the survey reveals that nearly 22% have experienced bullying at work. Many also reported burnout, including feeling worn-out (63%), unappreciated (48%) and frustrated (68%). Women, in particular, were more likely to feel that they were 'achieving less than they deserved'.

Men, on the other hand, were more likely to turn to alcohol, as were doctors working in northern or western European countries (34%).

Around 63% reported having to work beyond their normal hours on a regular basis, and the survey suggested that this is having an impact on their ability to meet personal commitments.

The study also shows a mixed picture in terms of parental leave allowance for clinicians during training for [clinical microbiology](#) and infectious disease specialisms. Those working in southern and eastern Europe were less likely to be allowed parental leave during training.

Overall, women were less satisfied with the [parental leave](#) they were allowed to take.

The survey, which included responses from 416 participants with an average age of 32, was conducted anonymously online by the Trainee Association of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID).

The leading authors of the report were Dr David Ong, president of the Trainee Association of ESCMID and resident in clinical microbiology at University Medical Centre Utrecht, The Netherlands and Dr Alberto Enrico Maraolo, vice-president of Trainee Association of ESCMID and research fellow in infectious diseases at University of Naples Federico II, Italy.

Dr Ong said: "This survey suggests less than ideal working conditions and worrying levels of dissatisfaction among young clinicians working in clinical microbiology and infectious diseases. It's notable that, while the situation in some parts of Europe is worse than others, even high-income countries seem unable to create good working conditions for staff in this area.

"Parenthood is perceived by a number of study participants as having a negative impact on the professional career of young physicians, and this seems especially pronounced for women.

"This is a growing and worrying issue since the number of women entering the medical profession is rising, and this includes women working in clinical microbiology and infectious disease specialisms. One solution might be providing mentoring programmes, role models and flexible career structures, which can better support female physicians."

The study was funded by ESCMID. It was supervised and co-authored

by three members of the ESCMID Executive Committee: Prof. Evelina Tacconelli, ESCMID Education Officer; Prof. Maurizio Sanguinetti, ESCMID Professional Affairs Officer and Prof. Mario Poljak, President of ESCMID.

Prof. Tacconelli said: "Having an adequate [work-life balance](#) is important for individual physicians, but it is also important because it affects the quality of the medical care they give to patients.

"This survey suggests that conditions vary within Europe with worse conditions in southern and eastern European countries. This is a risk because it could mean doctors choosing to work in countries where working conditions are better, with shortages in other countries.

"It's important to acknowledge that the issues raised in this research are also affecting young doctors working in all specialties. However, ESCMID is one of only a few international medical societies investigating these factors and seeking solutions."

Prof. Sanguinetti added: "Issues of equality and professional development are major concerns to ESCMID and its members, and we will use the finding of this research to guide our discussions at national and European levels."

Medical microbiology and infectious diseases are still not recognized as individual medical specialties in all European countries.

Prof. Poljak said: "We are already lobbying the governments of European countries where these medical specialties are not yet recognized and seeing progress, for example, recently in Spain and Romania. We believe better recognition would raise the profiles of these specialties, improve professional development and improve job satisfaction. All these will ultimately improve medical care of patients

suffering from [infectious diseases](#)."

More information: A. E. Maraolo et al, Personal life and working conditions of trainees and young specialists in clinical microbiology and infectious diseases in Europe: a questionnaire survey, *European Journal of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10096-017-2937-4](#)

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