

# Despite millennial stereotypes, burnout just as bad for Gen X doctors in training

May 5 2020

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Despite the seemingly pervasive opinion that millennial physicians are more prone to burnout and a lack of empathy compared to older generations, a new study by researchers at Northwestern Medicine and

Cleveland Clinic found that no such generational gap exists.

According to the study of 588 [millennial](#) and Generation X residents and fellows, millennial physicians in training did not show increased vulnerability to [burnout](#) or different [empathy](#) skills compared to a demographic-matched sample of Generation-X physicians.

It is the first study to evaluate the impact of [generation](#) affiliation (millennial vs. Generation X) on [physician](#) qualities, specifically empathy and burnout—a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. Both empathy and burnout have been demonstrated to impact the quality of patient care.

The study was published today, May 5, in the journal *Academic Psychiatry*.

This study's findings cannot be extrapolated beyond the context of physicians in training. However, the [statistical approach](#) used in this study, controlling for other factors like level of experience in the field, could be used in studies of other professional fields to provide further clarity on the broader impact of generation affiliation on professional qualities.

"As millennial physicians are increasingly entering the workforce, people seem to be wondering what millennial doctors will be like, and I've heard older physicians opine that physician burnout is a bigger problem now due to generation vulnerability," said lead author Dr. Brandon Hamm, instructor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Hamm conducted the research while he was at Cleveland Clinic.

"Our study provides a little more transparency that it's medical-system exposure—not generational traits—that is more likely to contribute to

the burnout seen in today's doctors," Hamm said.

Consistent with other studies, this paper found empathy decreases over the course of physician training, Hamm said. Additionally, Hispanic/Latino physicians in training demonstrated higher empathy scores and lower depersonalization burnout experience than Caucasian physicians in training. Depersonalization includes psychological withdrawal from relationships and the development of a negative, cynical or callous attitude.

## **What can be done to slow physician burnout?**

"The first year of residency can be really rigorous and have a negative psychological impact on physicians in training, which can lead to dysfunctional coping strategies like substance abuse," Hamm said. "We need to be researching interventions that not only slow this empathy decline but bolster physicians' communities so they feel supported and less isolated."

**More information:** Brandon Hamm et al, Comparison of Burnout and Empathy Among Millennial and Generation X Residents and Fellows: Associations with Training Level and Race but Not Generation Affiliation, *Academic Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s40596-020-01226-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-020-01226-9)

Provided by Northwestern University

Citation: Despite millennial stereotypes, burnout just as bad for Gen X doctors in training (2020, May 5) retrieved 21 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-millennial-stereotypes-burnout-bad-gen.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.