

Social Commitment in the Prevention of Burnout among Coffee Growers

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Introduction

Burnout syndrome, also known as occupational burnout, is a condition that affects individuals subjected to high levels of work-related stress. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Osorio *et al.*, 2024; García & Osorio, 2024). This phenomenon not only reflects the deterioration of workers' mental health but also significantly impacts productivity and organizational performance, highlighting the need to address this issue from multiple perspectives, including individual, occupational, and community dimensions. In this regard, it is essential to recognize that working conditions directly influence overall well-being, making it evident that the development of preventive and intervention strategies is necessary to mitigate its effects (Osorio *et al.*, 2024).

Coffee farming, beyond its economic importance, holds deep cultural roots in many regions of the world, especially in producing countries such as Colombia, Brazil, and Ethiopia (Sacco dos Anjos *et al.*, 2011; Chaves, 2014; Ramírez, 2015). Coffee growers, who form the foundation of the coffee production chain, face numerous challenges that go beyond the occupational sphere and directly affect their overall well-being. Among these challenges are fluctuations in international coffee prices, the effects of climate change on crops, and dependence on a global demand that can be highly volatile (Viloria De La Hoz *et al.*, 2024). These dynamics generate constant economic and emotional uncertainty, affecting both quality of life and the ability to plan for the long term. Moreover, limited access to modern technologies and resources exacerbates the difficulties associated with production, increasing work-related stress among coffee growers.

Additionally, the geographical isolation of many coffee-growing communities limits access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and technology. This isolation not only worsens daily hardships but also reduces opportunities for coffee growers to receive psychological support or stress management training. This context of high vulnerability compromises not only the mental health of workers but also the economic sustainability of rural communities that depend on coffee production as their main source of income. The combination of these factors creates a favorable environment for the development of burnout syndrome, which affects not only coffee growers individually but also their families and communities. The impact on the family unit is particularly concerning, as stress and exhaustion often transfer to the home, generating additional tensions and conflicts. Globally, studies on occupational health in the agricultural sector have revealed that burnout in field workers is an underestimated problem. While there is greater awareness of psychosocial risks in urban and industrial settings, these issues tend to be overlooked in coffee farming and other rural activities. This is partly due to the invisibility of rural communities in public agendas and the mistaken perception that agricultural work, because it takes place in natural environments, is free from stressors. Additionally, the lack of consolidated data on mental health in agricultural communities hinders the implementation of public policies that effectively address this issue. Therefore, more attention must be given to generating scientific evidence that brings visibility to these conditions and justifies the allocation of resources for their resolution.

The impact of burnout is not limited to the individual who suffers from it. Its effects extend to the overall productivity of coffee farms, which in turn affects the competitiveness of the entire production chain

(Ministry of Labor, 2014). A physically and emotionally exhausted coffee grower is less capable of meeting market demands, which affects the quality of the final product and the income generated. Likewise, family and community dynamics are also disrupted, as burnout can lead to interpersonal conflicts and diminished social cohesion in rural areas. Furthermore, the lack of adequate infrastructure to manage mental health issues in these regions complicates the implementation of effective intervention strategies, perpetuating a cycle of exhaustion and low productivity.

Coping with stress involves strategies individuals use to manage and overcome difficulties (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Effective coping skills reinforce a sense of control and autonomy, whereas the absence of such tools can lead to maladaptive responses even to moderate levels of stress. In the case of coffee growers, the lack of psychological and social resources exacerbates their vulnerability to burnout, underscoring the need for interventions that strengthen resilience. This vulnerability is also influenced by the lack of training in psychosocial skills and the limited incorporation of preventive strategies into occupational well-being programs targeted at the agricultural sector. Moreover, promoting community support networks can play a crucial role in stress mitigation by providing a space to share experiences and develop collective solutions.

Given this situation, it is essential to conduct an in-depth analysis of the effects of burnout on coffee growers, understanding that this issue impacts not only workers' health but also the sustainability of coffee production—a key sector for many national economies. This article seeks to contribute to that understanding through a literature review aimed at identifying the most influential factors, coping strategies used, and potential interventions to address this issue. By making the realities of coffee growers visible, it is hoped that a broad dialogue will be encouraged among academics, institutions, and stakeholders in the production sector to generate effective and sustainable solutions. The implementation of comprehensive strategies will not only benefit coffee growers but also strengthen the global competitiveness and sustainability of the coffee sector.

Prevalence of Burnout among Coffee Growers

The prevalence of burnout syndrome among coffee growers is alarming, positioning it as a significant public health issue in regions where socioeconomic conditions are particularly adverse. Various studies emphasize that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment are the main dimensions affecting this population (Fennell *et al.*, 2016; Ordoñez, 2025). A central element is that coffee growers who rely exclusively on coffee farming for their livelihood face significant pressures due to the volatility of international coffee prices, high production costs, and increasing competition in the global market. These dynamics create an environment of uncertainty that intensifies chronic stress. In regions with limited access to economic and technical resources, the impact of burnout is even more pronounced, affecting not only individuals but also their families and communities. Moreover, the long working hours—from sunrise to sunset—combined with the physical nature of the work, increase levels of physical and emotional exhaustion. This generates a vicious cycle where chronic fatigue reduces productivity, which in turn increases stress levels among coffee growers.

Risk Factors Associated with Burnout

Financial stress: Financial stress is one of the main triggers of burnout. Coffee growers' dependence on the income generated by their harvests makes them vulnerable to market price fluctuations, high costs of agricultural inputs, and debt incurred to maintain their farms (Guillén *et al.*, 2017). This constant economic stress generates anxiety and concern, affecting both mental and physical health.

Climate change impact: Climate change emerges as a critical factor exacerbating stress among coffee growers. Alterations in weather patterns, such as irregular rainfall, prolonged droughts, and extreme temperatures, directly affect crop yields (Viloria De La Hoz *et al.*, 2024). Drought, in particular, has been linked to numerous adverse health outcomes, including deteriorated air quality and increased

pollutants that worsen respiratory conditions (Berman *et al.*, 2017; Salvador *et al.*, 2019; Demetillo *et al.*, 2019). It also increases the incidence of mental health issues, such as psychological distress and depressive symptoms. Research suggests that coffee growers' perception of climate change is key to understanding ongoing adaptation strategies, but also reveals many communities' limited capacity for action (Zuluaga *et al.*, 2015).

Recognition and institutional support: The absence of governmental programs and institutional support for coffee growers in times of crisis is another risk factor. Many workers feel their efforts are neither valued nor recognized, increasing demotivation and the sense of isolation.

Health Impact

Physical health: Coffee growers affected by burnout report a higher incidence of musculoskeletal disorders due to the physical demands of their work. Additionally, prolonged exposure to sunlight, handling of agrochemicals, and lack of access to personal protective equipment worsen health conditions (Ramírez *et al.*, 2022).

Mental health: In terms of mental health, anxiety and depression levels are significantly high among coffee growers. However, the lack of access to mental health services in rural areas limits the possibility of early intervention and treatment. Recent studies have shown that agriculture is a high-risk activity in terms of mental health, with alarming rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among this population (Hagen *et al.*, 2019; Jones-Bitton *et al.*, 2020). Particularly concerning is the high incidence of suicide among male farmers, whose rates far exceed those of other demographic groups (Bryant & Garnham, 2015; Barry *et al.*, 2020). This underscores the urgent need to develop comprehensive strategies that prioritize mental health in public policies aimed at the agricultural sector. Other studies point to multiple stressors, including the coffee crisis, access to basic services, and climate (Schroth *et al.*, 2009; Eakin *et al.*, 2011; Frank *et al.*, 2011; Eakin *et al.*, 2014; Bacon *et al.*, 2017). Globally, literature on small producers' adaptation decision-making focuses on perceptions of extreme weather events, climate variability, trends, or a combination of these. This is compounded by the lack of access to modern technologies that could optimize agricultural processes and reduce workloads, leading to emotional exhaustion and low personal accomplishment.

Coping Strategies

Although coffee growers employ various coping strategies to manage stress and burnout, many of these are insufficient to address the structural causes of the problem.

Informal support networks: Community support networks, such as family and neighbors, play a crucial role in providing emotional and material support. These networks are an important source of cultural resilience that enables coffee growers to endure adversity. However, their reach is limited when economic or climatic crises affect the entire community.

Participation in cooperatives: Membership in cooperatives has proven to be an effective strategy to reduce work-related stress. These organizations offer technical training, financial assistance, and access to more stable markets, which reduces economic uncertainty (Villas *et al.*, 2018). In addition, cooperatives foster a sense of belonging and solidarity that mitigates feelings of isolation.

Resilience and active coping: Cultural resilience and active coping are common traits among coffee growers who manage to overcome difficulties. These strategies involve taking a proactive attitude toward challenges, setting clear goals, and seeking innovative solutions to optimize production processes (Maciuba *et al.*, 2013; Bahamon *et al.*, 2022). However, individual strategies must be complemented by structural interventions to achieve sustainable impact.

The analysis of burnout syndrome among coffee growers reveals a multifactorial issue that cannot be understood solely from an individual perspective. It must be addressed within a comprehensive

framework that includes the structural, social, and economic conditions faced by these rural communities. The findings of this documentary research emphasize the importance of linking the identified risk factors with the development of intervention strategies that respond to both the immediate needs of coffee growers and the broader challenges faced by the agricultural sector in the global context (Osorio *et al.*, 2024; García & Osorio, 2024).

A relevant point in the discussion is the impact of precarious working conditions on the development of burnout. Coffee growers, as the foundation of the coffee production chain, bear an intense workload that includes long hours under harsh weather, extreme physical demands, and constant economic uncertainty due to volatile coffee prices in the global market (Viloria De La Hoz *et al.*, 2024). These conditions not only increase occupational stress but also limit workers' ability to develop effective coping strategies. This is further compounded by a lack of access to basic resources such as mental health services, efficient production technologies, and social support networks, which deepens the inequalities affecting this population.

From a psychosocial perspective, burnout among coffee growers should not be understood solely as an individual problem but rather as a manifestation of an agricultural system that has historically prioritized production over human well-being. Economic fluctuations, climate change, and international trade dynamics have created a highly vulnerable environment in which coffee growers face constant pressure to adapt to ever-changing and often unfavorable conditions. This leads to a progressive emotional disconnection from their work, manifested in depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment—key features of burnout (Osorio *et al.*, 2024).

A key finding is the link between the geographic isolation of coffee-growing communities and the lack of access to basic services. The remoteness of these areas from urban centers limits access to health, education, and technologies that could alleviate work-related stress. This isolation not only increases barriers to implementing effective public policies but also reinforces the perception of invisibility and abandonment by institutions, worsening mental health problems among coffee growers (Ramírez, 2015).

Another central issue is the need for intersectoral approaches that integrate intervention strategies from multiple fronts. Public policies must focus on ensuring decent working conditions, including fair wages, access to mental health services, and comprehensive well-being programs. Additionally, it is essential to promote mental health education within coffee-growing communities, emphasizing the destigmatization of mental illnesses and the development of stress management skills (Sacco dos Anjos, 2011; Chaves, 2014). Technology can also play a transformative role by implementing digital platforms that facilitate communication and access to psychosocial support resources. It is crucial to recognize the role of community networks and cooperatives as mechanisms of resilience against burnout. These organizations not only provide spaces for mutual support but also enable the sharing of resources and knowledge, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration. However, their effectiveness depends on institutional support and the ability of coffee growers to actively participate in their management (Hernández *et al.*, 2014). Strengthening these networks requires joint commitment from governments, non-governmental organizations, and the coffee industry, ensuring that interventions are adapted to local realities and promote the comprehensive sustainability of the coffee sector.

Conclusions

The documentary analysis of burnout syndrome among coffee growers reveals that this issue is a manifestation of the adverse structural conditions under which the agricultural sector operates. Coffee growers face multiple challenges—from financial stress and climate uncertainty to the lack of access to healthcare services and modern technologies. These factors contribute to the high prevalence of burnout, affecting not only their physical and mental well-being but also the sustainability of coffee

production.

One of the main conclusions is that burnout among coffee growers cannot be addressed solely as an individual problem, but rather as a phenomenon that reflects systemic inequalities in rural areas. The absence of comprehensive public policies, the limited recognition of psychosocial risks in the agricultural sector, and the lack of effective intervention programs exacerbate this issue.

Addressing this challenge requires adopting multidimensional strategies that include interventions at the individual, community, and institutional levels. At the individual level, it is essential to promote mental health education and access to specialized services. At the community level, strengthening support networks and cooperatives can be a key tool for fostering resilience and improving working conditions. In this sense, research on burnout among coffee growers must continue to expand, incorporating empirical studies that deepen our understanding of the specific dynamics in each region and evaluate the effectiveness of different intervention strategies. Moreover, it is crucial to integrate the perspectives of coffee growers in the design of such initiatives to ensure that the proposed solutions respond to their needs and realities. One of the main challenges for the state, occupational health and safety professionals, and psychologists specializing in human talent within the agricultural sector is to develop and implement strategies that include campaigns and activities aimed at promoting mental health care and reducing stress and burnout syndrome.

Recognizing these symptoms early enables the adoption of effective measures, seeking professional support, and significantly improving job satisfaction in this sector. The well-being of coffee growers is an essential component for ensuring the sustainability of the coffee sector, which is not only economically relevant but also socially and culturally significant in many regions of the world. Therefore, addressing burnout syndrome is not only an ethical responsibility but also a strategic investment in the future of this activity.

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