

WORKLOAD AND BURNOUT

Given the nature of crisis support, working in VAW shelters and transition houses (THs) has always required **long hours and a high workload**. With the pandemic, there have been increased demands on shelters/THs with rising rates of violence, increasing severity of violence, and growing complexity of client cases. Staff¹ reported that their workload and stress increased, and there was a **decrease in overall mental wellbeing**.

HIGH WORKLOADS AND INCREASINGLY COMPLEX CASES ARE CONTRIBUTING TO BURNOUT AND RETENTION ISSUES.

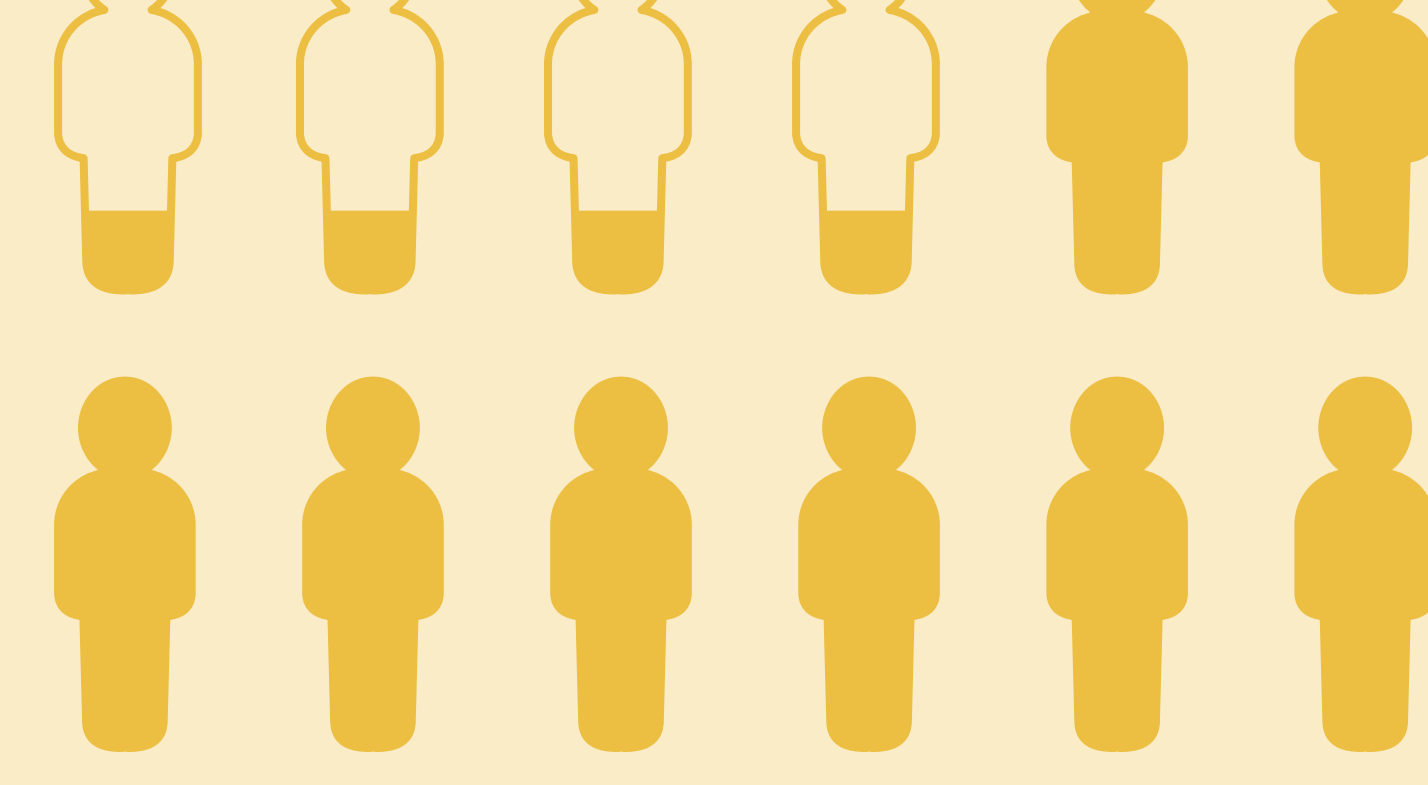
ONE-FIFTH OF STAFF HAVE:



20 OR MORE CLIENTS

31%

FEEL OVERWHELMED



51%

ENGAGING IN ON-CALL WORK

52%

WORKING OVERTIME

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During the pandemic, workloads and stress have skyrocketed and they don't seem to be coming back down. Everyone is overworked and trying to keep up with everyone in need.

—Survey respondent

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The workload of many staff is unsustainable currently. I feel we have a significant amount of support from colleagues, but in general frontline service is not a long-term sustainable position due to burnout and compassion fatigue.

—Survey respondent

STAFF ARE THE BACKBONE OF THIS SECTOR; IF THEY LEAVE OR INTEND TO LEAVE, IT WILL BECOME HARDER TO MAINTAIN SERVICES FOR THOSE FLEEING VIOLENCE.

The consequences of turnover and challenges recruiting new staff include:

- Burnout for existing staff
- Overtime for existing staff
- Less programming
- Reduced outreach services
- Less support for survivors

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We are losing staff almost monthly. Our managers told us yesterday that they spend at least 50 percent of their time on hiring/recruitment, whereas their jobs have a whole range of other aspects that are getting neglected, and we feel it. In addition, the lack of continuity for clients is huge. It's hard to establish rapport with clients when they're always seeing a new face.

—Survey respondent

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I think sometimes people think that our job is easy. But listening to traumatic stories and being present for all women coming to us, it's really not easy. So we need to recognize that we can also suffer burnout from listening to the stories.

—Frontline focus group

WHAT IS NEEDED²

In the long-term organizations need access to stable funding, with increases that reflect inflation and cost of living. In the short-term, shelters/THs can implement the following solutions to support staff:



- End shift rotations, so that staff will always have the same schedules.
- Accommodate work-life balance and provide flexibility. This includes allowing staff to shift hours or make up time for appointments or family events.
- Offer opportunities for hybrid work, especially for administrative tasks.
- Provide emotional and physical space to take timeouts or breaks. This was especially important after working through a difficult circumstance or case.

¹Through the Feminist Brain Drain Study, a national survey and a series of focus groups were conducted. The data is drawn from the results of a national online survey that WSC partnered on with the Victimology Research Centre at Algonquin College. For more information about the study: <https://endvaw.ca/feminist-brain-drain/>. The full report is forthcoming.

²These practices were collected throughout the Feminist Brain Drain Study from shelters/THs across the country, and represent the innovative ways that organizations are navigating labour challenges.

