INVISIBLE BURNOUT: THE UNSEEN IMPACT OF ALWAYS-ON CULTURE IN KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

K. M. Faisal Reza
Politeknik Akamigas Palembang, Indonesia
Email: reza@pap.ac.id

Abstract

The phenomenon of an always-on culture, characterized by the expectation to be constantly connected and responsive to work, has become a hallmark of the modern workplace, particularly among knowledge workers. This culture gradually creates psychological stress that is difficult to immediately recognize but has a significant impact on mental health and productivity. This study aims to uncover and analyze the phenomenon of invisible burnout, a hidden but persistent mental exhaustion caused by the pressure of working without clear time limits. Using a literature review method, this study examines various previous studies that discuss the correlation between digital technology, continuous workloads, and their impact on worker well-being. The results show that invisible burnout often goes undetected because it is masked by a culture of high productivity and the normalization of working outside of office hours. This research highlights the importance of healthy work policy interventions and organizational awareness of work-life balance as preventative measures against the risk of long-term, invisible burnout.

Keywords: invisible burnout, always-on culture, knowledge workers, mental health, work-life balance

INTRODUCTION

In a digital era that continues to advance at breakneck speed, the world of work has undergone a massive transformation. One of the most significant changes is the emergence of an always-on work culture, the expectation that workers must be available, connected, and responsive anytime, anywhere (Mdhluli, n.d.-a). This culture is closely associated with knowledge workers, individuals who rely on knowledge, information, and creativity as their primary assets in carrying out their work. Professions such as data analysts, academics, consultants, designers, software developers, and project managers are clear examples of this group of workers. With the advancement of communication technology and increasing work flexibility, the boundaries between work and personal time are increasingly blurred. As online connections become permanent and work devices become part of everyday life, the pressure to remain active and productive becomes almost unavoidable.

The phenomenon of invisible burnout emerges as an unseen consequence of this always-on culture (Othman & Conbere, n.d.-a). Unlike conventional burnout, which is often accompanied by obvious physical symptoms, invisible burnout is more subtle, appearing in the form of emotional exhaustion, loss of meaning in work, cognitive exhaustion, and a gradual but significant decline in engagement. Many knowledge workers experience feelings of depletion but are unaware of it or fail to identify it as a serious form of burnout. This is exacerbated by a popular narrative that glorifies extreme productivity and multitasking as benchmarks of professional success. In this context, workers tend to feel guilty if they take breaks and feel obligated to respond to messages, emails, or work requests even outside of formal working hours. The consequence is a never-ending cycle of work that leads to internalized exhaustion (Thomson et al., 2017).

Although the concept of burnout has long been discussed in the literature on organizational psychology and human resource management, studies on invisible burnout are still relatively limited, especially in relation to knowledge workers. Much previous research has focused on burnout in service sectors such as healthcare workers, educators, and social workers, who tend to experience direct emotional distress from interactions with clients or patients. Meanwhile, knowledge workers face different challenges: hidden mental burdens in the form of expectations for constant productivity, pressure to continuously develop competencies, and demands for a near-constant digital presence. As a result, burnout in this context often goes unrecognized as a pressing issue because it doesn't produce obvious physical or emotional symptoms (Stone et al., 2013).

Furthermore, invisible burnout not only impacts individual well-being but also has systemic consequences for organizations and society at large. Decreased productivity, increased employee turnover, weakened innovation, and a damaged collaborative work climate are all long-term impacts of unaddressed burnout (Lewis, 2025). At the macro level, an always-on work culture also has implications for social norms regarding work-life balance, gender roles, and healthy lifestyle values. When workers continually sacrifice personal time for work, they risk losing space for psychological recovery, family time, and personal development outside of their professional roles.

The transformation of the workplace accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic further reinforces the urgency of this research. The massive surge in remote work adoption has further expanded the always-on culture, where the boundaries between personal and professional spaces have become

increasingly blurred (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). While flexible work is often lauded for its freedom, the reality is that many workers feel more constrained as work "follows" them into their personal spaces. Workspaces are no longer confined to the physical office, but have shifted to living rooms, bedrooms, and even vacation spots. In this environment, many knowledge workers are unaware that they are experiencing chronic burnout because the symptoms don't always manifest in explicit forms, such as physical exhaustion or interpersonal conflict, but rather in apathy, decreased intrinsic motivation, and a sense of alienation from the work itself (Duffy & Rhodes, 2025a).

This phenomenon becomes even more complex when faced with the dynamics of the modern labor market, which demands workers remain relevant through continuous learning and independent skill development. In a digital-based work environment, productivity is often associated with speed of response, long working hours, and constant engagement across various communication platforms. Data-driven performance appraisal systems, for example, can stimulate workers to remain active to maintain an image of high-performing individuals (Manley et al., 2025). Furthermore, organizations often lack support systems or mechanisms for early recognition of latent burnout. When fatigue is not physically visible or does not result in explicit absence from work, this phenomenon is often overlooked or considered a personal problem, rather than a structural one.

Against this backdrop, the study "Invisible Burnout: The Unseen Impact of Always-On Culture in Knowledge Workers" is highly relevant. This study aims to explore in depth the hidden impact of an always-on culture on the psychological well-being and performance of knowledge workers, using a literature-based approach. This research aims to broaden the discourse on burnout by highlighting aspects that have previously been overlooked, primarily because they do not produce visible symptoms. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide a richer understanding of the relationship between technology, organizational expectations, and mental health in the modern work context.

It is important to recognize that invisible burnout is a growing phenomenon within the broader social and technological ecosystem. Therefore, understanding this phenomenon cannot be separated from an analysis of power dynamics within organizations, employment policies, and the role of technology as a mediator between individuals and institutions. This research aims not only to identify risks and impacts but also to raise awareness of the importance of redesigning work culture to be more humane and

sustainable. This can be achieved through the development of policies that facilitate psychological recovery, the establishment of healthy work boundaries, and training organizational leaders to be more sensitive to the invisible signs of exhaustion.

Thus, this study is expected to make theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of burnout in the digital age. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature by proposing the concept of burnout, which is not always physically visible but has a significant impact on quality of life and work productivity. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a basis for organizations in formulating more inclusive strategies oriented towards the long-term well-being of employees. In an increasingly digitalized workplace, recognizing human limits and the need for work-life balance are key to building a healthy and resilient workplace. Therefore, delving deeper into invisible burnout is not only a scientific imperative but also an ethical imperative to ensure that technological advancements do not compromise the mental health of workers, the pillars of economic productivity and social innovation.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a literature review, which focuses on searching, sorting, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant scientific literature to understand the phenomenon of invisible burnout among knowledge workers in the context of an always-on culture. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore and evaluate various empirical and conceptual findings from previous research without the need for direct data collection in the field. Through an in-depth review of scientific journals, academic books, institutional research reports, and reputable articles published over the past two decades, this study seeks to build a comprehensive framework for understanding the invisible impacts of constant connectivity demands on the mental health, work-life balance, and productivity of knowledge workers.

The literature collection process was conducted systematically through academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest, using keywords such as invisible burnout, always-on culture, knowledge workers, digital fatigue, and occupational stress. The selected literature was screened based on topical relevance, methodological quality, and its contribution to theoretical and practical understanding of the research problem. Following the selection process, the literature was analyzed thematically to identify conceptual patterns, interrelationships between

variables, and open research gaps. This approach allows researchers to present a critical and structured knowledge mapping of the phenomenon of hidden burnout in the context of constantly connected digital work.

In the final stage, all findings from the reviewed literature are consolidated to construct a conceptual narrative explaining how an always-on culture latently impacts the psychological well-being and performance of knowledge workers. Through this method, the research not only offers a strong theoretical foundation but also provides a critical reflection on contemporary work practices that often unknowingly create chronic and hidden emotional workloads. By addressing the issue of invisible burnout from a literary perspective, this study is expected to broaden scientific discourse and provide a rationale for developing more sustainable work policies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Characteristics of Knowledge Workers in a Digital Context

In the increasingly digitalized modern workplace, knowledge workers play an increasingly central role in maintaining organizational competitiveness. They are individuals whose jobs depend on the use of knowledge, information, and intellectual abilities to complete complex, high-value tasks. In the current era of digital and hybrid work, their characteristics have undergone significant shifts, along with technological changes, organizational dynamics, and increasing productivity expectations (Nelson et al., 2017). Within this framework, a thorough understanding of the roles, demands, and psychosocial pressures faced by knowledge workers is crucial for designing sustainable human resource management strategies.

The role of knowledge workers in the digital era is no longer limited to administrative or technical activities, but also encompasses the generation of new ideas, business process innovation, and data-driven strategic decision-making (Oesinghaus et al., 2024). They are not only expected to process and synthesize large amounts of information but are also required to collaborate across teams and time zones through ever-evolving digital platforms. Digital transformation has expanded access to information resources and accelerated workflows, but at the same time, it also demands constant adaptation to changing work tools, new systems, and higher performance expectations. This condition shapes the new identity of knowledge workers as flexible, independent actors, and lifelong learners.

However, the flexibility offered by digital and hybrid work also presents its own challenges. One of these is the blurring of boundaries between personal

and professional life, resulting in the phenomenon of an always-on culture (Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier: Field Experimental Evidence of the Effects of AI on Knowledge Worker Productivity and Quality by Fabrizio Dell'Acqua, Edward McFowland III, Ethan R. Mollick, Hila Lifshitz-Assaf, Katherine Kellogg, Saran Rajendran, Lisa Krayer, François Candelon, Karim R. Lakhani: SSRN, n.d.). In a work environment that makes extensive use of communication technologies such as email, instant messaging, and video conferencing, knowledge workers often feel compelled to be responsive and available whenever needed. This creates subtle yet very real psychosocial pressures, as workers must maintain performance, respond quickly to superiors' and clients' expectations, and manage domestic responsibilities, especially in a work-from-home environment. This situation gradually erodes work-life balance and leads to mental fatigue that is not easily identified by the work environment.

Another psychosocial pressure arises from the increasing reliance on dynamic and complex technology. Knowledge workers are required to master various software, collaboration platforms, and even artificial intelligence (AI) tools integrated into daily work systems. The rapid pace of technological updates creates continuous learning pressure. Those unable to keep up with these developments risk being left behind or even losing relevance within the team (Cetindamar Kozanoglu & Abedin, 2020). On the other hand, pressures from results-based management systems, such as digital productivity monitoring, performance analytics, or real-time key performance indicators (KPIs), add a new dimension to work stress. Continuous evaluations based on numbers and algorithms often ignore the complexities of the work context, pushing workers into transactional and competitive work environments that can undermine their collaborative efforts and emotional well-being.

In the era of hybrid work, where some work is done online and some is done physically, the challenges of collaboration and connectedness between team members are also important issues. Although technology has enabled virtual meetings and asynchronous work, many knowledge workers feel they miss the social closeness and emotional support they typically derive from in-person interactions. This feeling of isolation can lead to decreased motivation, a sense of belonging to the organization, and even difficult-to-detect burnout (Determinants of 21st-Century Skills and 21st-Century Digital Skills for Workers: A Systematic Literature Review - Ester van Laar, Alexander J. A. M. van Deursen, Jan A. G. M. van Dijk, Jos de Haan, 2020, n.d.). Knowledge workers generally have a high degree of autonomy in managing their tasks, but in a hybrid

context, this autonomy often comes with a burden of responsibility that is disproportionate to the support they receive. They must decide for themselves how best to complete their work, prioritize their time, and cope with the distractions of a less conducive home-based work environment, without a clear supervisory structure. Furthermore, key characteristics of knowledge workers, such as proactivity, creativity, and an orientation toward continuous learning, make them individuals who deeply value the meaning and purpose of their work (Nouwens & Nylandsted Klokmose, 2021). Therefore, the psychosocial stress they experience stems not only from workloads or long hours, but also from a lack of clarity of direction, inconsistent organizational values, or a lack of recognition for their contributions. In a fast-paced and transformative digital context, if knowledge workers feel their roles are irrelevant or neglected, emotional exhaustion and decreased commitment will be unavoidable consequences. This sense of loss of meaning often triggers invisible burnout, as it is not always directly related to performance but rather to psychological and emotional attachment to work (Nouwens & Nylandsted Klokmose, 2021).

Therefore, understanding the characteristics of knowledge workers in digital and hybrid work contexts must holistically encompass technological, psychological, and social aspects. They are not only users of technology but also key drivers of organizational transformation. However, to sustainably optimize their potential, organizations need to seriously address their mental and emotional well-being. This includes flexible yet fair work policies, ongoing training support, and inclusive and empathetic communication systems. Without attention to these aspects, the risk of developing invisible psychological distress increases, ultimately hampering productivity and innovation in the long term.

Burnout Factors in an Always-On Culture

In the digital era, characterized by relentless connectivity, burnout no longer arises solely from physical stress or excessive workload in the traditional sense, but rather from the dynamics of a constantly connected and boundaryless work environment. The "always-on" work culture has created a new landscape where expectations to be available, responsive, and productive create psychosocial pressures that are often invisible but highly damaging. The factors causing burnout in this context are complex, involving intertwined cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Mounting mental workloads, blurred boundaries between work and personal time, and performance pressures

internalized through digital devices are the primary causes of hidden burnout, often unnoticed by individuals and their organizations (Mdhluli, n.d.-b).

The mental workload in an always-on culture stems not only from the sheer number of tasks but also from the nature of work, which requires continuous information processing. Knowledge becomes a primary commodity, and knowledge workers are required to think, analyze, and respond quickly. This demands constant attention, increasing the risk of cognitive fatigue. There is insufficient downtime for mental recovery because work often intrudes into personal space through email notifications, instant messages, and online meetings that occur outside of normal working hours (G et al., 2025). As a result, attention spans decrease, concentration problems arise, and anxiety increases because work never feels truly finished. This pressure slowly erodes an individual's psychological balance and paves the way for chronic burnout.

Furthermore, the loss of a clear boundary between work time and personal time is a significant factor that exacerbates burnout in an always-on culture (Bilowol et al., 2024). The concept of work-life balance is significantly disrupted when technology enables individuals to work from anywhere and at any time. In many cases, the flexibility of time, which was expected to provide freedom, turns into a trap of permanent attachment to work (Albers, 2020). People feel guilty if they don't immediately respond to messages or emails outside of work hours for fear of being perceived as unprofessional or uncommitted. Organizational culture implicitly reinforces these expectations through unwritten norms that glorify speed of response and constant availability. In the long term, this situation creates alienation from aspects of personal life such as social relationships, quality rest time, and space for emotionally enriching activities.

Digital performance pressures also contribute significantly to hidden burnout. In a digital work environment, performance is judged not only by final results but also by responsiveness, participation in various collaborative platforms, and constant online presence. Performance indicators become blurred, as individuals tend to judge themselves based on symbolic digital interactions, such as the number of messages replied to, how quickly they respond to video calls, or how actively they engage in online conversations. This creates additional stress because workers are not only working but also must constantly demonstrate that they are working. As a result, the phenomenon of digital performativity emerges, namely the need to appear busy and productive despite experiencing significant burnout. In such an environment, recovery

becomes impossible because the pressure comes not only from outside but also from within the individual, who constantly feels the need to prove their competence (El Halabi, 2025).

Work and organizational psychology literature suggests that burnout arising from an always-on culture tends to be latent, as its symptoms develop slowly and often go unrecognized until they reach a severe stage. Unlike easily identifiable physical exhaustion, mental burnout in this context hides behind seemingly efficient digital work routines. Workers may appear productive, but are actually experiencing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decline in personal accomplishment. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of adequate support systems within the organization to manage mental stress and provide healthy recovery space. Many organizations lack clear policies regarding digital work hours or digital disconnection protocols that protect workers' mental health.

Much of the cause of burnout in an always-on culture stems from the rapidly changing relationship between technology and social expectations, but with insufficient understanding of their psychological consequences. Knowledge workers now live under dual pressure: to be productive and responsive. While technology is designed to speed up and simplify work, expectations are also rising dramatically. This creates a perpetual cycle of stress, where work success is often determined by the capacity to stay active and connected, rather than by the depth of reflection or the quality of output. In this situation, burnout is not the result of personal weakness, but rather a consequence of a work system that does not allow for equitable mental recovery.

Therefore, understanding the causes of burnout in an always-on culture requires a deeper approach than simply looking at quantitative workload. There must be a collective awareness, both from individuals and organizations, that hidden burnout is a significant signal of systemic imbalance. Reforms to how we design work, build healthy work cultures, and set humane digital boundaries are essential to avoid a broader mental health crisis among knowledge workers. Without these fundamental changes, burnout will remain an inevitable consequence of a modern, constantly connected work style that is increasingly disconnected from the fundamental human need to rest, recuperate, and find meaning in our work.

Short-Term and Long-Term Impacts of Invisible Burnout

Invisible burnout, or hidden psychological exhaustion, is a complex phenomenon that often goes unnoticed in modern work dynamics, particularly

in the context of an always-on culture and intensive digitalization (Mukendi, 2024). This condition develops slowly and silently, affecting workers without any noticeable external symptoms, but has serious consequences in both the short and long term. In the short term, invisible burnout begins to subtly but significantly impact an individual's well-being. Knowledge workers experiencing this type of burnout often feel constantly mentally exhausted, lose focus, and struggle to manage their time and emotions, even though they appear physically well. The imbalance between work demands and cognitive capacity leads to decreased motivation, a reluctance to engage in collaboration, and a loss of interest in work they previously enjoyed. They begin to exhibit irregular sleep cycles, increased anxiety, and a feeling of being trapped in an endless work routine. However, because burnout is not physically visible or recognized as a pressing psychological problem, many workers and organizations fail to recognize that declining productivity is caused not by a lack of skills, but by internalized exhaustion.

These short-term impacts then extend to the organizational level. When invisible burnout is not systematically addressed, companies begin to experience a decline in work quality, an increase in errors, and a decline in collaborative spirit among teams (Lund et al., 2022). What should be a supportive and productive work environment instead becomes a hidden stress field tolerated as "part of the job." Unopenness in expressing emotional exhaustion becomes the norm, leading workers to suppress their emotions to maintain a professional image. This hinders open communication, decreases teamwork effectiveness, and exacerbates psychological isolation among employees. Within a short time, companies may begin to see an increase in unauthorized absences, such as sudden leave or a decrease in initiative on strategic projects. While not directly visible in monthly performance reports, invisible burnout infiltrates the way employees interact, make decisions, and respond to pressure.

If left untreated, invisible burnout has far more serious long-term impacts, both for the individual and the organization (Mukendi, 2023). At the individual level, prolonged, hidden burnout can develop into chronic mental health disorders such as clinical depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and even adrenal fatigue. Quality of life declines drastically, not only in the workplace but also in personal, family, and social relationships. Individuals experiencing invisible burnout tend to withdraw emotionally, feel a loss of direction and meaning in their work, and potentially experience a loss of professional identity. (Wang et al., 2023) When this phase of burnout continues without

intervention, they may decide to resign abruptly, even if they are considered top performers in the eyes of the organization. This kind of loss is not only painful for the individual but also costs the company in terms of re-hiring costs, training, and the loss of institutional knowledge.

The long-term impact on organizations is equally concerning (Conbere & Swenson, n.d.). A work culture that allows invisible burnout to flourish creates a dysfunctional work system, where apparent success is built on hidden exhaustion (Vinter et al., 2021). This reduces organizational competitiveness because companies lose the innovation, creativity, and courage to experiment—attributes typically associated with emotionally and psychologically well-off individuals. When hidden burnout becomes an invisible part of organizational culture, companies slowly erode employee loyalty and emotional engagement. Retention becomes a major challenge, and employer branding is at risk. Younger, more mentally health-conscious workers tend to distance themselves from companies that lack progressive well-being management mechanisms, and a preference for a supportive work environment is growing among the new generation of the workforce.

Furthermore, invisible burnout also has long-term effects on interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Kelly et al., 2022). When individuals operate in a state of hidden exhaustion, empathy and sensitivity toward coworkers decrease. Small conflicts can easily escalate due to an inability to respond emotionally. Teams lose harmony, trust between members declines, and work dynamics become rigid and prejudiced. In the long run, this creates social fragmentation that weakens team cohesion, leads to a perpetual cycle of dissatisfaction, and ultimately disrupts the overall work climate. Trust, the foundation of collaboration, begins to erode when people feel unable to understand or support one another as they all struggle with their own invisible burnout.

Therefore, it is crucial for organizations and stakeholders in human resource management to understand that invisible burnout is not merely a personal issue, but a systemic problem that requires collective awareness, proactive intervention, and the establishment of a work culture that is mindful of mental health. Prevention and recovery strategies must be directed not only at the individual but also at redesigning work patterns, managerial expectations, and how the organization creates space for recovery and healthy work time boundaries. Investing in employees' long-term well-being, both emotionally and structurally, is not an added burden but a strategic step that determines the organization's future productivity and resilience. Invisible

burnout is a crisis that is invisible, but its impact is real and far-reaching if left unacknowledged and unaddressed.

Organizational and Individual Strategies for Mitigation

Organizational and individual strategies for mitigating burnout, particularly in the context of invisible burnout developing in an always-on culture, are an urgent response to the psychosocial pressures that are increasingly pervasive in modern digital work patterns (Othman & Conbere, n.d.-b). Invisible burnout, due to its undetectable nature, demands a mitigation approach that is not only curative when symptoms appear, but also preventative from the onset. In this regard, the roles of organizations and individuals must synergize to create a work ecosystem that supports mental health and work-life balance, while maintaining productivity and innovation. One key approach is the design of flexible work policies that take into account the cognitive and emotional capacities of knowledge workers. Policies such as flexible working hours, hybrid or remote work options, and the use of work results as a measure of performance rather than attendance are essential for creating a humane work rhythm.

Organizations that are adaptive to their employees' well-being needs will be better able to foster loyalty, retention, and creativity in their workforce. One concrete form of support is providing space for digital detox, a period of rest from unnecessary digital connectivity. Digital detox isn't simply a vacation or leave, but rather a conscious strategy driven by company policy, such as prohibiting work emails or messages outside of office hours, establishing a workday without virtual meetings, or establishing a screen-free physical space in the office (Duffy & Rhodes, 2025b). This practice helps individuals reset their focus, restore their attentional capacity, and foster self-awareness of the boundaries of digital wellness. When organizations not only allow but also encourage a culture of digital detox, they contribute to building a resilient environment against the invisible pressures of contemporary work.

On the other hand, individuals, as key actors in the digital work experience, must also develop awareness of the importance of maintaining mental health and work-life balance independently (Galanxhi & Nah, 2021). Mitigation strategies at the individual level can begin with realistic time management, prioritizing tasks, and disciplined practice in maintaining boundaries between professional and personal life. Technology, while often a source of stress, can also be used as a tool to facilitate recovery strategies, such as using mindfulness apps, digital schedules that incorporate breaks, or even

"do not disturb" features that help maintain focus and personal time. Individuals also need to develop good emotional literacy to recognize the early signs of psychological exhaustion and take proactive steps to take breaks or seek help when needed (McConnell, 2021).

A curative approach should also be an integral part of a comprehensive burnout mitigation strategy. Organizations can provide access to psychological support services, whether in-house counseling, collaboration with external professionals, or mental health insurance. This is crucial given that many workers don't realize that the stress they're experiencing is an early form of burnout or fear being perceived as weak if they seek help. Therefore, it's crucial for organizations to foster a culture of openness and non-stigmatization regarding mental health issues. Training line managers or team leaders on recognizing the signs of mental exhaustion in team members is also a highly effective strategy. Empathetic and communicative leaders can act as initial protectors for workers experiencing hidden psychological stress (May, 2023).

This overall strategy will be more effective if supported by a transformation of organizational values and culture that prioritizes work sustainability and human well-being. Organizations that are overly focused on short-term performance and rapid response will easily fall into the trap of an always-on culture that actually damages their human capital. Conversely, organizations that build a work culture based on trust, flexibility, and empathy will be more resilient to massive waves of burnout, both visible and hidden. The synergy between the organization's structural approach and the psychological preparedness of individuals will create a workplace that is not only productive but also emotionally and socially sustainable. In an increasingly complex and connected workplace, burnout mitigation efforts can no longer be a side agenda but must become a strategic element of visionary human resource management.

CONCLUSION

The study, "Invisible Burnout: The Unseen Impact of Always-On Culture in Knowledge Workers," concludes that a work culture that demands constant connectivity and uninterrupted responsiveness has created a form of exhaustion that is not easily recognized but has a serious impact on the mental well-being and productivity of knowledge workers. This invisible burnout phenomenon is characterized by decreased motivation, hidden emotional exhaustion, and a feeling of disconnection from the meaning of work, even though individuals appear to be functioning normally.

A literature review found that an always-on culture blurs the boundaries between professional and personal life, causing workers to feel guilty for not responding promptly or remaining productive. Reliance on digital technology accelerates expectations of a constant virtual presence, but organizations often fail to provide support mechanisms to manage this psychological distress. This increases the risk of undetected burnout because it is not always accompanied by obvious clinical symptoms.

Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to recognize the existence and risks of invisible burnout in today's digital work environment. Strategic interventions should focus on creating healthy work boundaries, developing humane flexibility policies, and raising awareness of the importance of mental health in knowledge-based workplaces. A human-centered approach and work-life balance are key to minimizing the long-term impact of an always-on work culture.

REFERENCES

Albers, K. (2020). Always on Mentality: The Effects of Workplace Telepressure on Health and Motivation of the Dutch Young Workforce Examining the Moderating Role of Workplace FoMO and Social Comparison Orientation [Master Thesis]. https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/36173

Bilowol, J., Robinson, J. A., Wise, D., & Sison, M. (2024). 'Always Being On': Exploring the Experience of Burnout Among Female Professionals in the Australian Public Relations Industry. In E. Bridgen & S. Williams (Eds.), Women's Work in Public Relations (p. 0). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80455-538-520241007

Cetindamar Kozanoglu, D., & Abedin, B. (2020). Understanding the role of employees in digital transformation: Conceptualization of digital literacy of employees as a multi-dimensional organizational affordance. Journal of Enterprise Information Management, 34(6), 1649–1672. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEIM-01-2020-0010

Conbere, J. P., & Swenson, D. X. (n.d.). Hidden Costs, Unintended Consequences, and Complex Organizational Problems, and Why Leaders Often Ignore Them.

Determinants of 21st-Century Skills and 21st-Century Digital Skills for Workers: A Systematic Literature Review—Ester van Laar, Alexander J. A. M. van Deursen, Jan A. G. M. van Dijk, Jos de Haan, 2020. (n.d.). Retrieved August 4, 2025, from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244019900176

Duffy, A., & Rhodes, R. (2025a). How institutional and cultural dynamics converge to create paradoxical experiences for academic dance leaders

in the United States. Research in Dance Education, 26(1), 103–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2025.2456147

Duffy, A., & Rhodes, R. (2025b). How institutional and cultural dynamics converge to create paradoxical experiences for academic dance leaders in the United States. Research in Dance Education, 26(1), 103–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2025.2456147

El Halabi, N. (2025). The Anti-Burnout Mindset Strategies for Sustainable Success (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 5252960). Social Science Research Network. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5252960

G, S., V, A. M., K, K. H., Joseph, D., Reddy, P. C., Bharath, K. S., L, A. B., Pratyusha, K., Bibiyana, D. J., Kanammai, B., Santhiya, R., D, B., K, M., & C, C. (2025). Triadic Integration for Business Excellence via Human Capital, Marketing Dynamics, and Profit Maximization. Deep Science Publishing.

Galanxhi, H., & Nah, F. F.-H. (2021). Addressing the "Unseens": Digital Wellbeing in the Remote Workplace. In F. F.-H. Nah & K. Siau (Eds.), HCI in Business, Government and Organizations (pp. 347–364). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77750-0_22

Hawkins, P., & McMahon, A. (2020). EBOOK: Supervision in the Helping Professions 5E. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Kelly, A. L., Brown, T., Reed, R., Côté, J., & Turnnidge, J. (2022). Relative Age Effects in Male Cricket: A Personal Assets Approach to Explain Immediate, Short-Term, and Long-Term Developmental Outcomes. Sports, 10(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.3390/sports10030039

Lewis, E. (2025). Blurred lines: Navigating work, home, and non-work in the lives of professional football coaches [Thesis, Cardiff Metropolitan University]. https://doi.org/10.25401/cardiffmet.29223371.v1

Lund, S., D'Angelo, J. D., Jogerst, K., Warner, S. G., Busch, R., & D'Angelo, A.-L. D. (2022). Revealing hidden experiences: Gendered microaggressions and surgical faculty burnout. Surgery, 172(3), 885–889. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.surg.2022.04.032

Manley, A., Millington, B., & Williams, S. P. (2025). "It is an Incredibly Painstaking, Time-Taking Domain to Work in": Examining the Work-Life Tensions and Meaningful Experiences of Data Work in Elite Sport. Communication & Sport, 21674795251363839. https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795251363839

May, V. (2023). Unregulated social care workers: Their lived experiences in the workplace and the development of a new conceptual approach to supervision support [Doctoral, Plymouth Marjon University]. https://marjon.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/id/eprint/17779/

McConnell, J. (2021). The Gig Mindset Advantage: Why a Bold New Breed of Employee is Your Organization's Secret Weapon in Volatile Times. Figure 1 Publishing.

Mdhluli, N. I. (n.d.-a). Perils of perpetual connectivity: Navigating the 'always-on' culture in the modern workplace. SA Journal of Human Resource Management, 23(1), 3019. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.3019

Mdhluli, N. I. (n.d.-b). Perils of perpetual connectivity: Navigating the 'always-on' culture in the modern workplace. SA Journal of Human Resource Management, 23(1), 3019. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.3019

Mukendi, A. M. (2023). THE HIDDEN STRUGGLE OF OVERWORKED UROLOGY RESIDENTS "THE HOUR": THE OVERLOOKED BURNOUT, A NARRATIVE REVIEW. Preprints. https://doi.org/10.22541/au.169029168.83011483/v1

Mukendi, A. M. (2024). The hidden struggle of overworked urology residents "the hour": The overlooked burnout, a narrative review. UroPrecision, 2(1), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/uro2.44

Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier: Field Experimental Evidence of the Effects of AI on Knowledge Worker Productivity and Quality by Fabrizio Dell'Acqua, Edward McFowland III, Ethan R. Mollick, Hila Lifshitz-Assaf, Katherine Kellogg, Saran Rajendran, Lisa Krayer, François Candelon, Karim R. Lakhani: SSRN. (n.d.). Retrieved August 4, 2025, from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4573321

Nelson, S. B., Jarrahi, M. H., & Thomson, L. (2017). Mobility of knowledge work and affordances of digital technologies. International Journal of Information Management, 37(2), 54–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2016.11.008

Nouwens, M., & Nylandsted Klokmose, C. (2021). A Survey of Digital Working Conditions of Danish Knowledge Workers. Proceedings of 19th European Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work. https://doi.org/10.18420/ecscw2021_n24

Oesinghaus, A., Elshan, E., & Sandvik, H. O. (2024). The Future of Work Unleashed: Generative AI's Role in Shaping Knowledge Workers' Autonomous Motivation. ECIS 2024 Proceedings. https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2024/track04_impactai/track04_impactai/12

Othman, S. M. E., & Conbere, J. (n.d.-a). Uncovering the Hidden Costs of Continuous Work Intrusions in the "Always-On" Culture.

Othman, S. M. E., & Conbere, J. (n.d.-b). Uncovering the Hidden Costs of Continuous Work Intrusions in the "Always-On" Culture.

Stone, S.-D., Crooks, V. A., & Owen, M. (2013). Going through the back door: Chronically ill academics' experiences as 'unexpected workers.' Social Theory & Health, 11(2), 151–174. https://doi.org/10.1057/sth.2013.1

Thomson, P., Johnson, M., & Devlin, J. M. (2017). Conquering Digital Overload: Leadership strategies that build engaging work cultures. Springer.

Vinter, K., Aus, K., & Arro, G. (2021). Adolescent girls' and boys' academic burnout and its associations with cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Educational Psychology, 41(8), 1061–1077. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1855631

Wang, Q., Wang, F., Zhang, S., Liu, C., Feng, Y., & Chen, J. (2023). Effects of a mindfulness-based interventions on stress, burnout in nurses: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Frontiers in Psychiatry, 14. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1218340