

# Emotional Wellness of Current Musculoskeletal Radiology Fellows

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**Rationale and Objectives:** Burnout is a psychological syndrome composed of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and sense of lack of personal accomplishment, as a result of prolonged occupational stress. The purpose of our study was to determine the prevalence of burnout among current musculoskeletal radiology fellows and to explore causes of emotional stress.

**Materials and Methods:** A 24-item survey was constructed on SurveyMonkey using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. We identified 82 musculoskeletal radiology fellowship programs. We recruited subjects indirectly through the program director or equivalent.

**Results:** Fifty-eight respondents (48 male, 10 female) identified themselves as current musculoskeletal radiology fellows and completed the survey. Comparison of the weighted subscale means in our data to the Maslach normative subscale thresholds for medical occupations indicates that musculoskeletal radiology fellows report relatively high levels of burnout with regard to lack of personal accomplishment and depersonalization, whereas emotional exhaustion levels in our sample are within the average range reported by Maslach. Although male musculoskeletal radiology fellows experience relatively high levels in two of the three dimensions of burnout (depersonalization and personal accomplishment), female musculoskeletal radiology fellows experience relatively high burnout across all three dimensions. Job market-related stress and the effort required providing care for dependents significantly affect personal accomplishment. Conversely, imbalances in the work-life relationship and feelings of powerlessness are significantly associated with depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

**Conclusions:** Musculoskeletal radiology fellows report relatively high levels of burnout. Because the consequences of burnout can be severe, early identification and appropriate intervention should be a priority.

**Key Words:** Burnout; emotional wellness; occupational stress.

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## INTRODUCTION

**B**urnout is a psychological syndrome occurring in human service workers and defined by Maslach along three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and sense of lack of personal accomplishment (1). The syndrome is a result of prolonged occupational stress, in which an individual may become increasingly cynical, may become more callous toward those whom they are serving, and may grow increasingly dissatisfied with their accomplishments within the workplace (1,2).

The field of radiology, as in every area of medicine in the United States, has undergone rapid changes in the past decade. Radiologists in both the private and academic sectors have been compelled to adapt to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and accompanying legislation

directed at healthcare reform (3). The resulting effects, such as consolidation in the provider and insurance markets and reduced reimbursement rates, have led to negative personal and work satisfaction for individual physicians (4).

In the ecology of radiologists in the United States, subspecialty fellows occupy a unique niche between residents and practicing academic physicians. We surmised that this intermediate position, subjecting them to the clinical responsibilities of academic practice but the transience, lower pay, and limited autonomy that come with a training position, coupled with the uncertainty of a job search, might result in high levels of burnout. If burnout is prevalent in high proportions, then preventing or ameliorating it in trainees should become an important focus of fellowship program directors.

The purpose of our study was to determine the current prevalence of burnout among musculoskeletal (MSK) radiology fellows, and to explore causes of stress that may contribute to burnout. We were also able to compare the prevalence of burnout and contributing stresses that MSK radiology fellows experience to that of MSK radiology faculty members. MSK radiology fellows were chosen as the specific study population because the authors are affiliated with an MSK radiology section and had access to this population; we did not have access to other populations of subspecialty fellows.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Human Subjects

This investigation of human subjects was granted exempt status from review by the University of Washington institutional review board.

### Population and Sampling

We conducted a survey of current MSK radiology fellows. The survey instrument was created on SurveyMonkey (Professional) (5). MSK fellows are defined as individuals who have successfully completed a residency in diagnostic radiology and are currently engaged in a post-residency structured training program in MSK radiology. We identified 82 different MSK radiology fellowship programs through the Society of Skeletal Radiology web site: [www.skeletalrad.org](http://www.skeletalrad.org) (6). The Society of Skeletal Radiology web site is believed to be the most complete and accurate listing of MSK radiology fellowships. In February 2016, 180 MSK radiology fellowship positions were listed as available for the academic year 2018. Each listing in-

cluded contact information for the program director (an MSK radiologist), for the program coordinator (administrative person), or for both.

We recruited subjects indirectly through the MSK program directors or other program contacts by e-mail, and requested that MSK fellows be made aware of our survey. Participation in the survey by MSK fellows was voluntary. An internet link to the survey was included in the message. Two requests were made to the MSK program directors or other contacts, separated by 1 week. The survey was closed 1 week after the second request. The responses were collected by SurveyMonkey and remained anonymous to the authors. No identifiable information about the respondents was solicited or obtained during the survey process, and there was no contact between the authors and the MSK fellows.

### Survey

A 24-item survey was constructed on SurveyMonkey (Fig 1—sample item). The survey includes demographic questions, questions from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI),

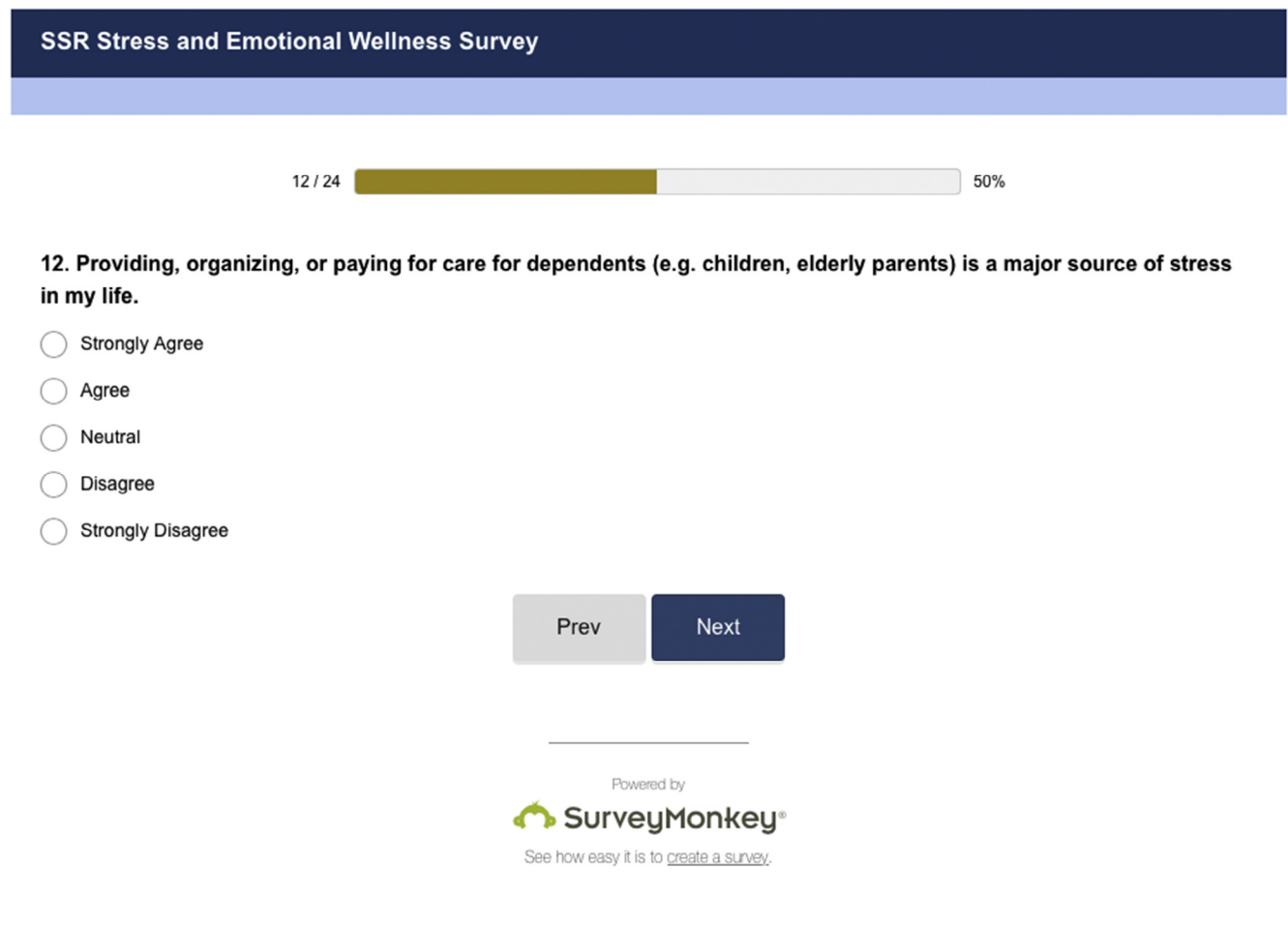


Figure 1. Survey question. Example of survey question as presented to respondents on [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com).

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