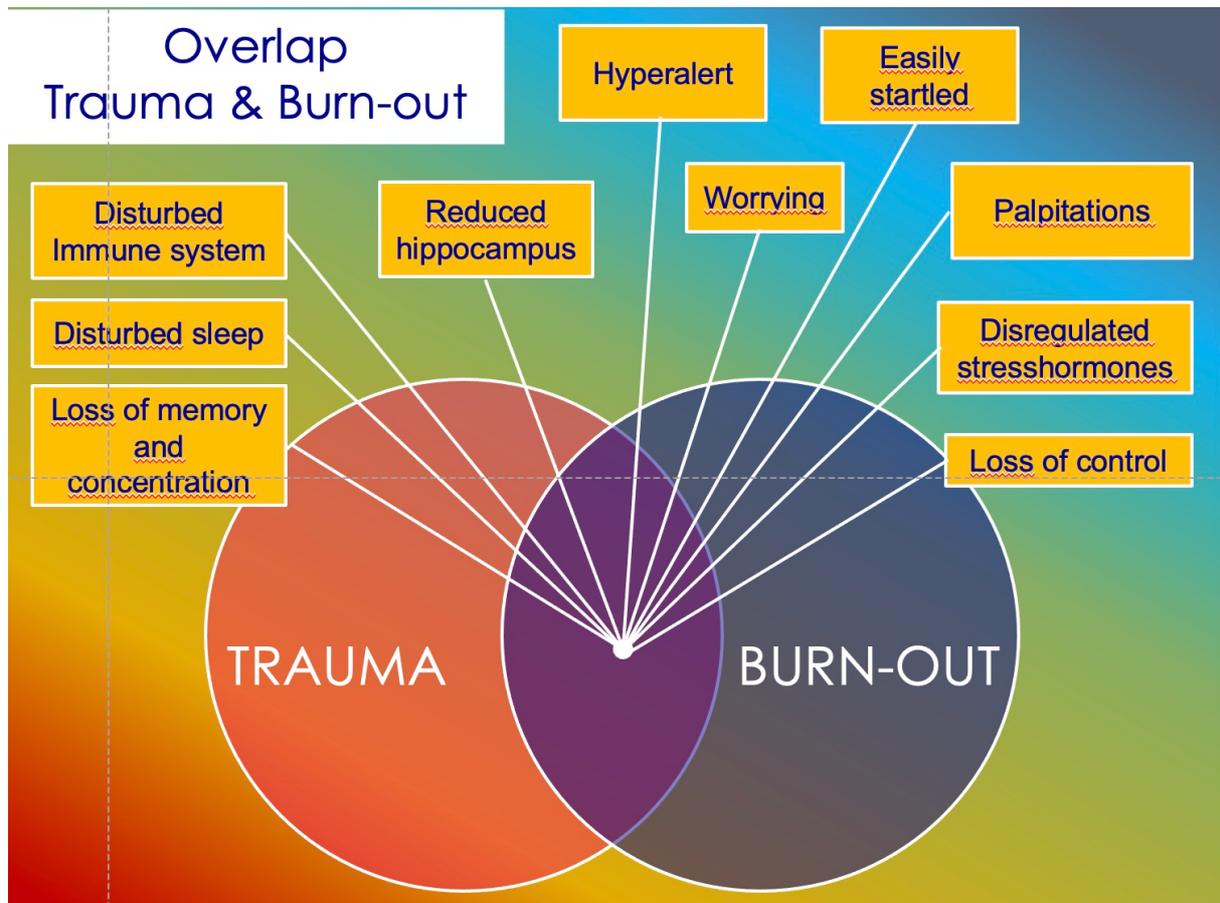


How to overcome burnout with EMDR



Some have considered burnout to be just a fad. Now we know it is here to stay. The World Health Organization's (WHO: ICD-11) has included burnout in the international classification of diseases. In the mean time quite a bit of people are suffering from burnout. Only in the Netherlands 1.3 million employees according to the latest figures from TNO. That leads to 11 million days of absenteeism. That costs the employer €2.8 billion. So it would be nice if there is a proven effective treatment for burnout. How far are we?

First there are some problems to cope with.

Problem number one: there is no agreement on what burnout is. According to the WHO, it is a syndrome caused by chronic stress at work with the following characteristics: feeling of exhaustion, mental distance from work, and declining efficiency.

Problem number two: when treating burnout, it is assumed that you have to treat the cause. There is nothing wrong with that, but it does not help people to get rid of their complaints. It is as if you were saying to road accident victims: we must promote road safety. Good idea, but it will not help the patient.

So how can you overcome burnout?

If a therapist wants to help the patient, he or she has to look at the nature of the injury. Just look at the neurobiological consequences of burnout: disrupted autonomic nervous system, more adrenaline and cortisol, shrunken hippocampus and thicker amygdala. See, for example, the YouTube video *Stress and Your Body* by the recently deceased neurobiologist Bruce McEwen.

These are the same symptoms as with a complex post-traumatic stress disorder (cptss), a classification that is also in the ICD-11 of the WHO. That's a good thing, because cptss can be effectively treated with EMDR or cognitive behavioral therapy, according to research by clinical psychologist David van den Berg, among others.

But isn't it a bit crazy to treat people with burnout as if they were suffering from trauma? As if the problem lies with them, and not with the organization of work. We were just as happy that the WHO description of burnout got us rid of the victim blaming.

But wait a minute: we don't say that people who suffer from a war trauma are to blame for not functioning well, do we? And you don't help these people by banning a war, but by effectively treating their trauma.

In Belgium, Professor Elke Van Hoof, clinical psychologist specialized in psychodiagnostics, trauma, stress and burnout, has shown, that people suffering from burnout that were treated with the trauma therapy EMDR, returned twice as quickly to work as on average.

Van Hoof focused the EMDR on the experiences in the work that evoke fear, such as loss of control, and the feeling that you fail, make mistakes, work too slowly and not efficient.. So you can get rid of those fears. And as a therapist you can go further, as I experienced in my own practice. EMDR also works well in dealing with attachment trauma's as a cause of burnout, negative self-esteem and guilt and shame.

Now that there is a clear view on a clear way of diagnosing burnout, it seems smart to investigate which therapeutic treatment methods works best. The first to consider are cognitive behavioural therapy, and EMDR. For cognitive behavioral therapy, the guideline is that people with burnout can be treated in fourteen sessions. With EMDR less sessions are needed. One session is sometimes enough.

Does that mean that anyone who walks around with burnout symptoms for a long time and recover in one session is a sissy? No, of course not. To someone who is relieved of a war trauma in one day, you would not dare to say that he is an imposter. The same goes for burnout. Even if you were on sickleave for months for burnout reasons, it does not hurt to visit an EMDR therapist. In Holland you can find them on www.emdr.nl.