

Burnout in Veterinary Technicians



The AVMA recently conducted a [study](#), published in 2017, to look into how costs of care and clients' economic limitations might be impacting veterinarians' professional satisfaction and experience of burnout. Over 1100 small animal DVMs in the US and Canada were surveyed.

As part of the survey, participating veterinarians were asked to rate their current experience of professional burnout.

I was struck, saddened, and not all that surprised to find that 49% of respondents reported currently experiencing “moderate-to-substantial” burnout in their work. 49%!!!

Burnout is defined as a prolonged, negative reaction to chronic stress at work. Common responses are:

- physical and emotional exhaustion
- cynicism toward clients, patients, and/or co-workers
- a significant decrease in productivity, effectiveness, and/or self-efficacy

Simply put, burnout sucks the passion out of work and, not surprisingly, contributes to ineffective, inefficient, unpleasant work environments.

49% of veterinarians.

Reading this study got me curious. *What about veterinary technicians?*

I'm familiar with NAVTA's [recent survey](#) suggesting over half of technicians leave the profession within 5 years of graduation. But I haven't come across anything measuring technician burnout rates in a similar manner to the AVMA study.

So I took matters into my own hands and collected the data myself.

Flourish Veterinary Consulting Survey of Veterinary Technicians' Work Satisfaction, Stress Management, and experience of Burnout

In early September, 2019, I created a brief survey specifically for veterinary technicians.

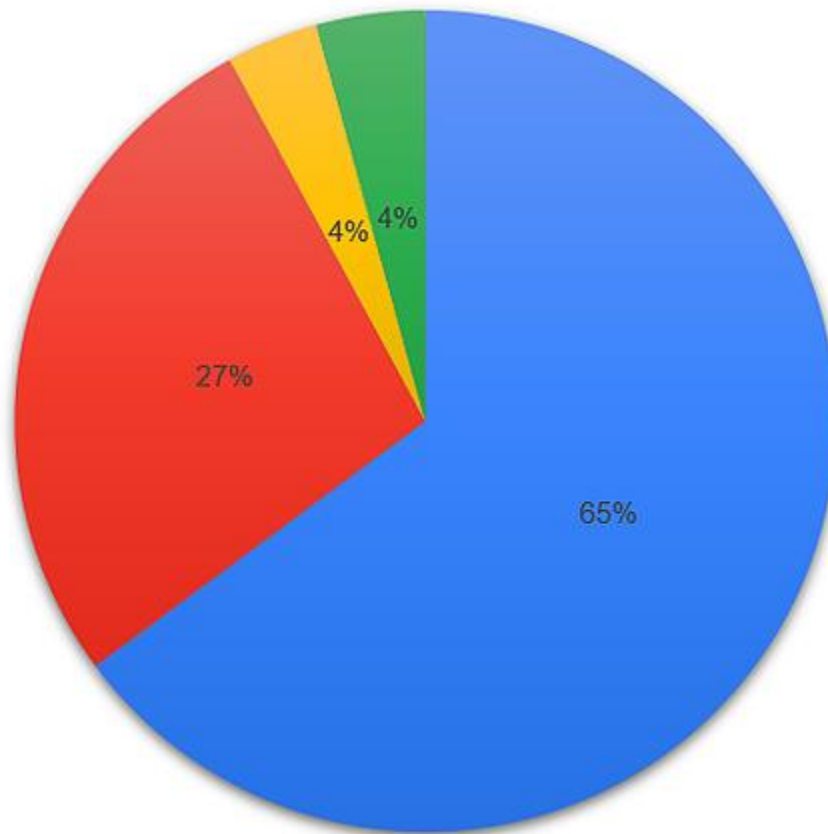
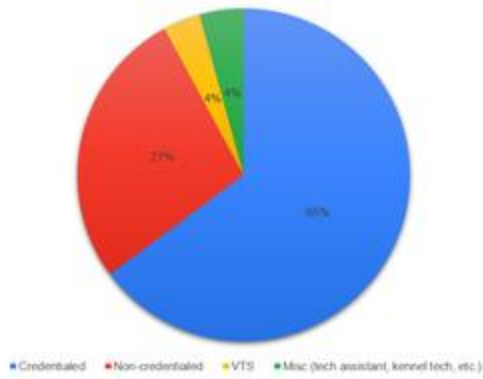
The survey allowed for a relatively loose definition of “technician” to include credentialed (CVT, LVT, RVT), non-credentialed, VTS, and supportive positions such as technician assistant or kennel technician.

The purpose of the survey was to measure veterinary technicians’ current perception of three work-related experiential categories; Work Satisfaction, Stress Management, and Burnout.

The survey was anonymous and voluntary. To solicit participation I shared a link to it across my national (US and Canada) professional network as well as a few large, vet-tech-only Facebook groups with presumed national membership.

The link was open for one week during which I received 1240 responses.

Of the 1240 respondents, the largest group were credentialed (CVT, RVT, LVT) technicians, with a population of 804 (65%). Those identifying as “non-credentialed” technicians were 338 (27%) of the total responses. 45 (just under 4%) participants identified as credentialed VTS (Veterinary Technician Specialist) while the remaining 53 (just over 4%) identified as some other position such as technician assistant or kennel technician.



■ Credentialed ■ Non-credentialed ■ VTS ■ Misc (tech assistant, kennel tech, etc.)

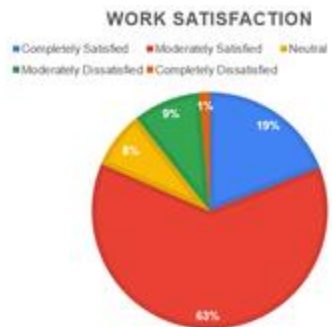
Breakdown of 1240 respondents

I did not collect additional demographic data such as location, tenure, years' experience, etc., though that would be valuable information for future research.

Survey Results

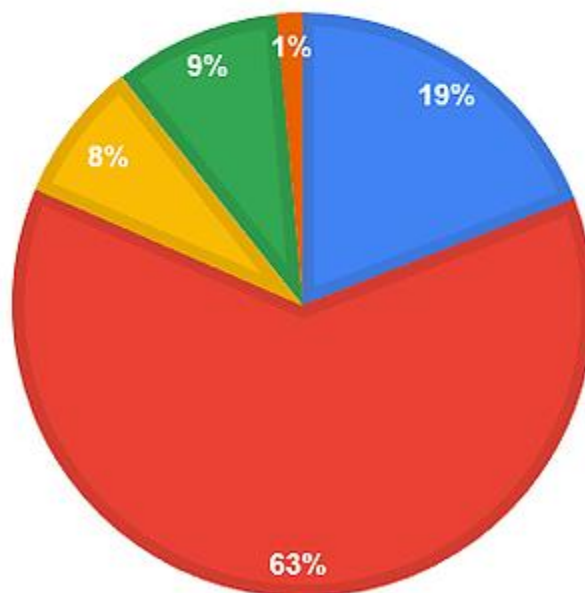
1) WORK SATISFACTION

When asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Overall I find my work as a veterinary technician highly satisfying,” across the entire survey population, 81.5% moderately (62.4%) or completely (19.1%) agreed. Only 1.4% were completely dissatisfied.



WORK SATISFACTION

■ Completely Satisfied ■ Moderately Satisfied ■ Neutral
■ Moderately Dissatisfied ■ Completely Dissatisfied



2) STRESS MANAGEMENT

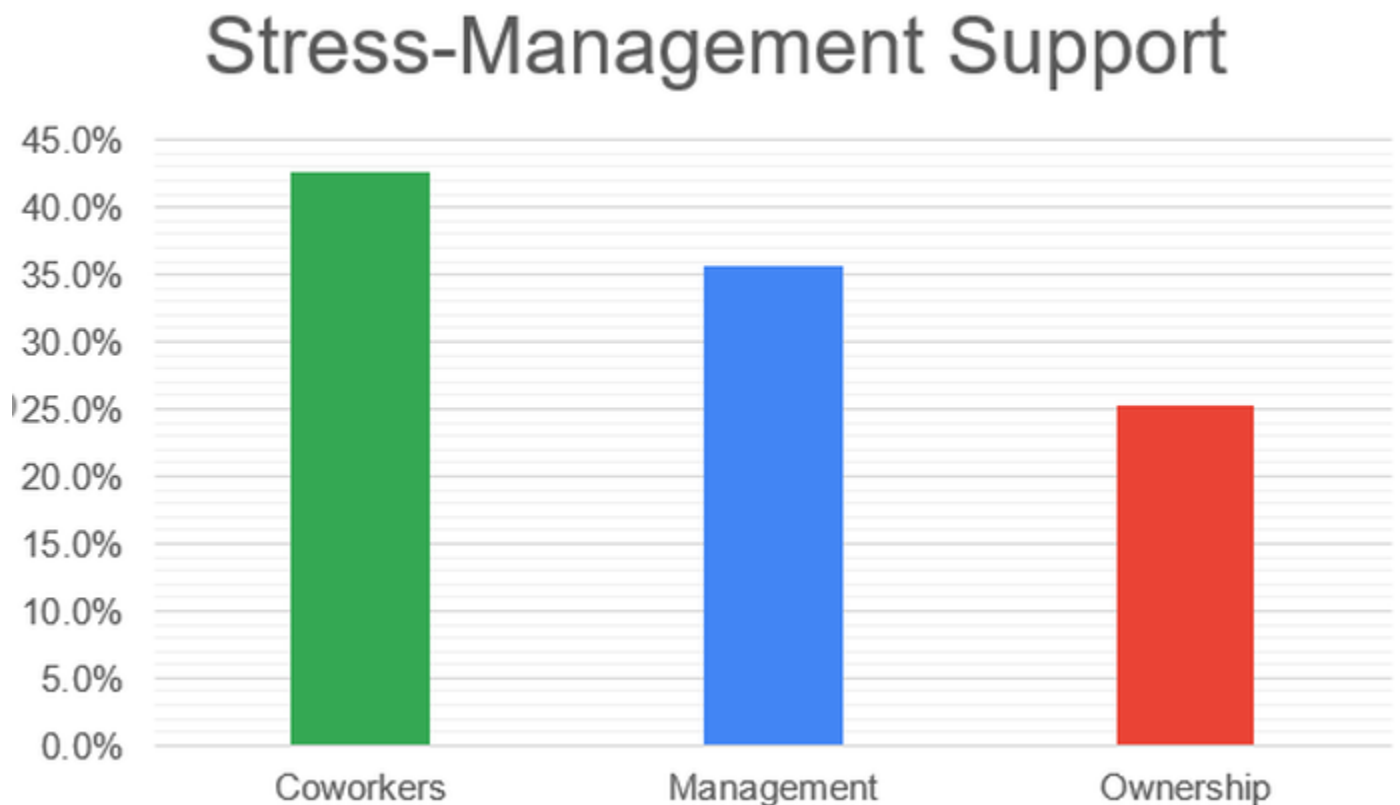
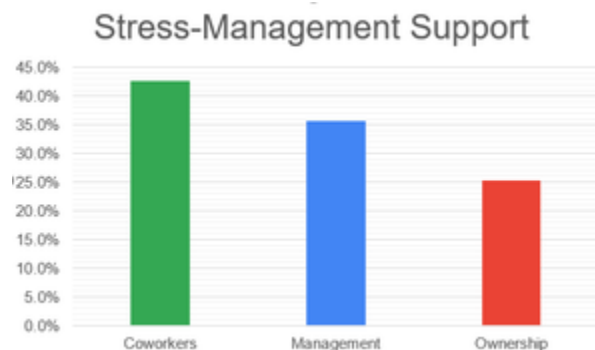
46.3% of respondents believe they are moderately-to-completely equipped to cope with the daily stresses of their work as veterinary technicians while 38.9% reported being moderately-to-completely *unequipped* to cope with work stress.

I also asked respondents to rate the stress management support they receive from co-workers, managers, and hospital owners.

42.6% moderately-to-completely agreed they receive stress management support from their co-workers. 31.3% moderately-to-completely disagreed.

The perception of stress management support significantly decreased as the questions moved up the “chain of leadership.”

35.6% of respondents moderately-to-completely agree they receive stress management support from their manager while only 25.2% believe they receive such support from hospital ownership.

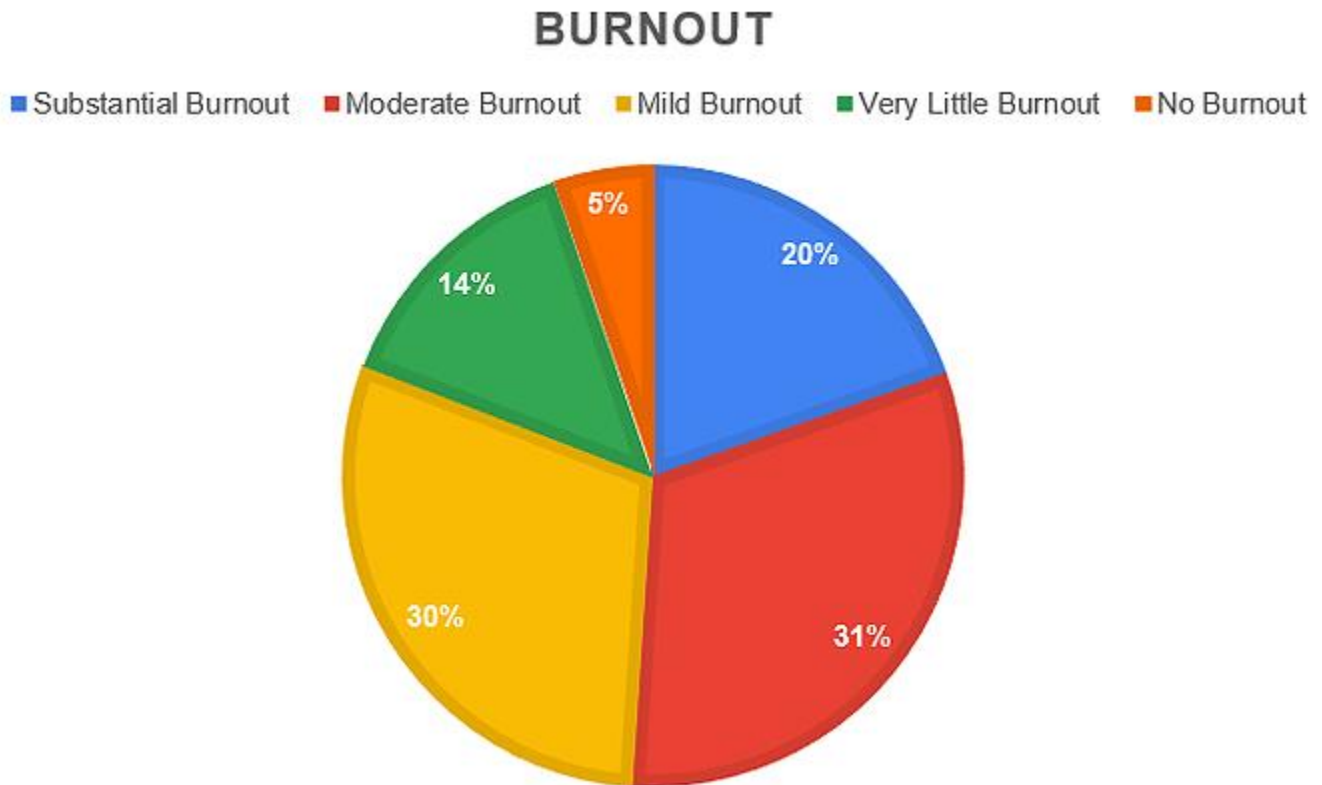


% agree, "my _____ support my stress management at work"

3) BURNOUT

I provided survey participants with a simple, academic definition of burnout derived from the work of [Christina Maslach](#), an expert in professional burnout. I then asked them to rate their *current* experience of burnout as a veterinary technician.

51.1% said they are *currently experiencing moderate-to-substantial burnout* in their work, quite similar to the results AVMA found among veterinarians. Only 5.2% of respondents reported currently experiencing no burnout.



Discussion

I find these results deeply troubling. But, given my experience in the industry and having experienced debilitating burnout in the veterinary field as well, I'm not surprised.

Of course, this data only shows us that, despite high levels of work satisfaction, burnout is happening across the veterinary technician population at disturbing rates. Furthermore, our technicians do not feel particularly equipped or supported in managing the stress of their work.

Veterinary professionals deserve more.

Getting to “more” begs two important questions:

1. “Why is this happening?”
2. “What can we do about it?”

I intend to apply my resources toward answering these two questions and sharing the results of my work with the veterinary community. More to come.