

Statement

Akava students and other student
and youth organisations
19. 4. 2021

The statement has been signed by

- Akava's Student Council
- Social Democratic Youth
- Christian Democratic Youth of Finland
- Finnish Centre Students
- Youth of the National Coalition Party
- Student Union of National Coalition Party
- Finnish Student Sports Federation
- Swedish Youth of Finland
- Social Democratic Students (SONK)
- National Union of Vocational Students in Finland
- STTK Students
- Union of Upper Secondary School Students
- Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi
- Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland
- Finnish National Union for Students
(Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi – OSKU)
- Left Youth of Finland
- Left Students
- Green Youth and Students

The student and youth organisations demand:

The livelihood of burnout sufferers must be secured during a sick leave, also without a separate mental health diagnosis

Work-induced burnout and mental health symptoms are becoming so common that they can almost be referred to as chronic conditions that affect public health and the national economy. The recovery and return to working life after a period of burnout is a long and arduous process. Struggles to secure one's livelihood further complicate the recovery process. We propose a change to the sickness allowance practices which would safeguard one's livelihood during a sick leave caused by work-induced burnout.

Hectic workdays, excessive workloads, insecurity about one's level of competence and equality issues within working life increase work loading and weaken work efficiency and well-being at work. Already prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the situation could be seen in the results of the Quality of work life surveys conducted by Statistics Finland. For example, in 2018, up to 43 per cent of employees felt that their workload was at risk of increasing beyond the level of tolerance. In comparison to the results in 2013, this figure represented an alarming 16 per cent increase.

The pandemic has added to the mix its own loading factors that present challenges, particularly for those already at risk of fatigue. Uncertainty about future job opportunities and reduced recreational outlets due to pandemic restrictions, for example, signify additional loading pressures. According to the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, well-being at work has weakened during 2020 and work-induced burnout has increased, especially among young people.

Kela views work-induced burnout primarily as a problem to be solved within the workplace and, therefore, a diagnosis of work-induced burnout does not currently entitle one to the sickness allowance provided by Kela. Many employers concur with Kela's way of thinking and do not necessarily pay wages to an employee suffering from burnout during absences, which, in the end, raises the threshold to treat fatigue to the required extent. In order to secure one's livelihood during a sick leave, work-induced burnout is often classified as other diagnoses such as, for example, mental health problems or mental disorders. Because of the inconsistency in the diagnostics, there is no way to compile any statistics concerning the prevalence of work-induced burnout and its impacts or to monitor any changes in the situation. Since health care professionals are not able to classify work-induced burnout as its own diagnosis, the real reasons for the state of fatigue may never be resolved and the proper methods for supporting the situation are not taken into use.

The student and youth organisations would like to see work-induced burnout treated precisely as fatigue brought on by work and not masked as a mental health problem. The underlying reasons for work-induced burnout should be resolved within the workplace by adapting the individual's job tasks and working conditions and by fixing problems within the work community, such as those concerning work organisation and management practices. Both levels are vital in terms of promoting future well-being. At the same time, the livelihood of the employee in question must be secured during the period of recovery. A diagnosis of work-induced burnout should, therefore, be sufficient grounds to receive the sickness allowance paid by Kela. When concerns about livelihood are alleviated, the individual can focus fully on recovering their capacity for work. The recovery of work ability also requires changes within the workplace.

'Assurance that an employee will have a livelihood also during a sick leave facilitates the process of regaining one's capacity for work. In its spending limits discussion, the government should make a far-reaching resolution to improve working life by changing the sickness allowance policy related to work-induced burnout', emphasises Veera Nyfors, Chairperson of Akava's Student Council.

Signatures, additional information



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