

## Step 2: Designing the change

Designing the intervention may require:

- Culture and attitude change within the organisation.
  - Everybody in the organisation, across levels, influences and is influenced by culture change. Everybody must feel included and supported.
  - Leadership commitment is crucial. The change of culture and attitude must be practised and demonstrated.
- Policy and process changes ought to be made in other functional areas, experiments with alternative methods of working and other such changes should be incorporated
- A pilot plan for a short period of time
- External resources for training and support, such as (but not limited to) counsellors, stress management and self-care consultants, and practitioners of tools and techniques for the management of stress and to strengthen resilience.
- Possible mitigatory measures for sources of stress in the external, socio-political, and macro-environment which may be out of the influence or control of the organisation.

## Step 3: Implementing the change

Initiating conversations on stress management and burnout prevention - especially where such conversations have not happened earlier - is an important part of implementing the change!

**Before, and during the implementation of changes, here are some aspects to keep in mind:**

- Each person understands and approaches stress and self-care in their own unique way.
- People's experiences of burnout, resilience, trauma, support, counselling, and related concepts are to be unpacked.
- Most people may consider stress a good thing. This mindset and understanding need to change. A training workshop may be considered and facilitated by the persons most suited within the organisation for the purpose, or by an external resource person.
- It is important to start building a common vocabulary that includes terms and words in the local language.

**Some points to address during implementation:**

1. Documenting the process will enable monitoring, evaluation, and course correction.
2. Sustained implementation will require time and space for regular discussion.
3. A minimum required result of regular tasks and services meant for clients and the community must be identified and agreed upon even as self-care and stress management interventions are implemented.
4. It should not be taken for granted that team members will be able to handle this change and still continue their routines exactly as before. Managing this change is crucial.
  - They may require support from the organisation and other team members.
  - This will ensure that clients and external service users continue to receive the content and quality of services that are committed to them.
  - Internally, support groups, a buddy system, and self-care opportunities may be useful.
  - External resources, particularly for emotional and psychosocial wellbeing, may be made available.

(v) This intervention will require an investment of money, time, and other resources.

- Expecting team members to invest their own time outside of work to discuss these issues or practice tools and techniques may be counter-productive.

## Step 4: Monitoring outcome

- Self-assessment by each team member.
- Organisational assessment according to existing performance assessment processes.
- The parameters identified for internal assessment at the planning stage may be used for periodic monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- Self-assessment details need not be shared with others but the results of whether team members feel there has been improvement may be shared.

## TARSHI

TARSHI, founded in 1996, has firmly held an affirmative and rights-based approach to sexuality. Our perspective is sex-positive, non-heteronormative, pleasure-affirming, and not fear-based. We strongly believe in each individual's right to make their own choices in freedom and dignity. We work in the best interests of all, aim to be as inclusive as possible, remain non-judgemental, maintain boundaries and confidentiality, and treat each other with respect, in terms of the people we work with, directly and indirectly, or when it comes to reporting about people and incidents related to our work. We strive for high quality in our work, ensuring that the information we give is accurate and easily accessible - that is, readily available to those it is intended for, easy to understand, inclusive and audience-oriented.

## nazariya

Nazariya was formed in October 2014 by a group of queer feminist activists. Located in Delhi/NCR with a South Asian presence, Nazariya was started to sensitise the work and culture of groups and individuals that are working on issues of gender-based violence, livelihoods, education and health from an LBT perspective through research & evaluations, capacity building and advocacy. We believe that queer perspective with a focus on LBT issues will help build linkages between issues of people marginalised on the basis of gender and sexuality with the existing work on violence, livelihoods, education, health etc. and thereby impact the discourse on pleasure, desire, rights and entitlements.



# Toolkit for Organisations on Stress Management & Burnout Prevention

With a focus on organisations  
working on issues of gender  
and sexuality in India

**TARSHI AND nazariya**

**Since 2018, TARSHI and Nazariya Foundation have collaborated to map and document:**

- self-care and burnout prevention needs of human rights activists, caseworkers, and community members who work on gender, sexuality and rights, with a particular focus on issues of sex work, LGBT\*QIA+ issues, gender-based violence and/or Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR);

- unique stressors faced by people working in areas related to sexuality, across different socio-political and regional contexts.

As an outcome of interventions that have included needs assessment workshops on stress and burnout, we have created this easy reference toolkit. It offers checklist templates that may be used by organisations seeking to approach these subjects.

To access the report of our Needs Assessment workshops, please visit [tinyurl.com/TARSHI-Nazariya-report](https://tinyurl.com/TARSHI-Nazariya-report)





## What?

### WHAT IS STRESS?

Familiar ways of referring to stress are - feeling tense or pressured, mentally, emotionally or physically stretched, under-resourced, and unsupported. This may be experienced by an individual due to many life factors.

### WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout may be best understood as the result of prolonged stress, leading to feeling fatigued, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. It is a state of exhaustion and an inability to maintain interest, or motivation, in areas that the individual has been deeply committed to.

## Why?

**Stress and burnout are particularly relevant to activists, rights advocates, and social workers who:**

- are often exposed to stories and experiences of trauma, helplessness, and injustice
- don't have adequate resources or capacity to address these at their root
- are able to connect it to their own life, as survivors or as ally/supporter and witness
- have to meet unrealistic expectations that are associated with their work
- have to contend with constraints and threats particular and unique to India and regional contexts, especially in rights-based work and activism.

**Self-care and burnout prevention needs identified by those working on issues of gender and sexuality are:**

- Non-judgmental, safe spaces where stress and burnout can be discussed
- Learning how to manage one's stress and thrive
- Multiple support systems and a variety of easy self-care tools and techniques

## Insights...

Some aspects of stress are familiar and shared across communities and contexts, but there are also unique aspects arising from individuals' diverse socio-cultural and political environments.

The intersectional nature of stress - i.e. the influence of multiple identities and circumstances that cause a person to be discriminated against, such as race, caste, gender, and social and political situations - causes individuals and groups to experience stress in unique ways.

While individual and organisational actions to manage or prevent stress and burnout are essential, it is crucial to acknowledge the important role of society and environmental systems in alleviating and preventing stress.

Stress management, burnout prevention and self-care are related to the personal, cultural, physical, psycho-social, work-related, and also emotional and spiritual components of life experiences.

## How?

Organisations and teams would need to be prepared for a variety of responses and conversations that will emerge as a result of initiating dialogue on stress and burnout.

### Do's:

- Ensure that all team members involved have the opportunity to participate from the start, including in ideation.
- Come to some agreements together and decide the elements needed to create a safe space for all.
- Make space and time for stress relieving methods; discuss how stress may by itself be stressful.
- Create the opportunity to avail counselling to those who may desire it; access to counselling needs to be
  - culturally appropriate
  - client focused
  - based on experience and best-practices
- Be prepared that this is always work-in-progress, and may require making some changes and out-of-the-box thinking.

### Don'ts:

- Make any assumptions.
- Start such a process unless committed to sustaining it; this is likely to include ongoing learning and exchange.



## Step by step

We suggest 4 steps towards building an organisational environment that promotes stress management and burnout prevention.

### Step 1: Internal assessment

Addressing stress and burnout requires a comprehensive approach. We are looking at the individual as a whole, in the context of the environment and their interactions across individuals and organisations, as well as the issues that are the focus of human rights work.

#### Physical/workspace environment:

- Hygiene
- Physical ambience including the basics, such as lighting, ventilation
- Basic comfort through maintenance of infrastructure, enabling work efficiency and effectiveness

Specific to organisation & work



#### Nature of Work

- Existence of stigma (sex worker rights, LGBT\*QIA rights work)
- Potential for conflict and violence (LGBT\*QIA rights work, civil rights activism)
- Degree of social and emotional interaction and engagement with others (Counsellors, legal aid, first responders/crisis response teams)
- Complex psychosocial issues (suicide, self-harm, mental illness, trauma survivors)
- Community demographics and intersectionality (working with older people, children with disabilities, migrants, LGBT\*QIA issues)

#### Culture of the organisation:

- Flexible / tightly controlled
- Inclusion and acceptance of diversity
- Existence of formal and informal support systems for teams
- Conflict resolution processes
- Do employees feel valued?

#### Profile of team members:

- Age
- Gender identity
- Potential stressors outside the workspace (e.g., childhood trauma; being LGBT\*QIA; facing violence; caregiver)

#### Self-assessment by team members:

- Self-assessment details need to be approached with care as some individuals may feel wary of sharing the truth with those they report to and their colleagues.
- Understanding what is meant by stress, burnout and self-care.
  - Stress check on a 1-10 scale, asking simple questions such as 'How stressed out do I feel on an average day?' and 'I feel overwhelmed by stress' and 'I take time out to rest and do something enjoyable every day'.
  - Support check on a scale of 1-10, asking simple questions such as 'Do I have the support I need at work to help me with my workload?' and 'I have emotional support at work when I feel overwhelmed by my client's trauma.'
  - Self-care reflections based on simple guiding statements such as 'I would be less stressed out if (list three points)' and 'I would be happier if I could (list three points)'

#### Funding and resources:

- Adequacy of infrastructure (availability of tools, supplies and resources)
- Salaries and dues to external service providers
- Programme resourcing
- Quality of engagement with funders

#### Socio-political context of the macro environment:

- Potential for / existence of conflict and violence
- Availability of support and prevention/ protection mechanisms
- Interconnections between rights violations, law and enforcement and the politics of power

Factors external to the organisation

