

**Skeletons In The Closet:
How Much Do We Know About Entrepreneurial Stress?**

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What do we know about entrepreneurial stress? Depression, alcoholism, health problems, and burnouts are just a few similar terms we hear while interviewing entrepreneurs regarding their life and work stress. Yet these words do not surprise us much. The physical and psychological well-being of entrepreneurs is already a hot topic of discussion. Social media offers plenty of personal stories of entrepreneurs sharing the darkest moments of their lives. Now, the scholarly community is also catching up. As such, there are special issues, articles, and book chapters dedicated to the topic of entrepreneurs' health, along with several conferences organized around this issue.

The awareness of an entrepreneur's mental health makes us believe that we are on the right track and there is still a need to address the problem of stress among entrepreneurs. Yet as our project progressed, we became aware that entrepreneurs might experience similar stress factors differently. Moreover, it also became evident that the hardship of entrepreneurship is taken for granted to such an extent that entrepreneurs would prefer to sacrifice their health in order to maintain the image of the "perfect" entrepreneur.

Work overload, believed to be one of the most common stress factors among entrepreneurs, appeared in a differing light throughout several interviews. "The workload as an entrepreneur, it's endless", claims one of our interviewees. Yet entrepreneurial freedom allows him to be efficient and complete all tasks. As such, he does not consider it to be a stress factor. At the same time, another respondent is currently in a period of recovery from burnout due to high pressures from work and family. These opposite experiences make us wonder whether we do understand what work overload really means. Is it a situation in which one does not have enough time to complete all tasks? Or, is one simply not qualified enough to complete a task? Does it mean that one does not have enough time to achieve what he or she desires? Or, is it the burden of numerous tasks laid upon the entrepreneur's shoulders? As questions continue to rise, it becomes quite clear that there is a big need for better ways to examine the issue of entrepreneurial stress in addition to the traditional methods of questionnaires and surveys.

There is one more thing that strikes us as we progress with our research project. “I can’t fail other people. I don’t want to fail other people here, in the company. I need to do a great job,” says one of the interviewees. “Our financial situation is so bad! But I have to do what I have to do”, we hear during the other interview. “I was proud to juggle work and school like I did”, exclaims the other entrepreneur. It is common to assume that when hard times come, most people tend to flee. Yet it appears that entrepreneurs might prefer to continue working despite negative consequences of their actions. As such, do entrepreneurs consciously accept the price they need to pay in order to maintain the image of a “perfect” entrepreneur? While the answer can be quite unpleasant, it also becomes clear that entrepreneurs prefer to carry personally the hardship of entrepreneurship.

Over the course of the project, it became evident that there is already quite great awareness surrounding entrepreneurs’ mental and physical health. Moreover, the public has also accepted the fact that not only is entrepreneurship a fruitful activity, but also its fruits can be quite poisonous. Yet entrepreneurs still pressure themselves to work regardless of the price they pay. The way things stand, we might need to start educating entrepreneurs on their health. By raising health awareness among entrepreneurs, we have an opportunity to show them that it is normal to rely on other people. It is normal to be just a human. Moreover, we should start talking about the dark side of entrepreneurial activity when teaching entrepreneurship at universities. By doing this, we can create a more realistic picture of an entrepreneurial journey and what specific obstacles young entrepreneurs might face on their way. Revealing hidden skeletons of entrepreneurship can be a bitter pill to swallow, but that is what we need in the era of worshipping entrepreneurs.

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