

## THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CORPORATE REPUTATION

Jose Luis Estremadoyro Masias

Today, it matters to people how businesses treat the environment. From oil spills in Peru to wildfires in California, damage to nature affects everyone. Companies can show they care by taking responsibility for protecting the planet. This not only helps the environment but also increases their public trust. When people see a business doing its part to help the planet, they are more likely to buy from and endorse them.

Being responsible for the environment means more than just following the rules. It's about doing things that reduce harm like using less energy, recycling, or finding new ways to make products that don't hurt the planet. For example, in Peru, most companies don't have any specific plans to protect the environment. Less than 2% do, says Héctor Miranda from Red Regenerativa. Many businesses don't know how important it is or think it's too hard, but things are starting to change. Big international agreements like COP 21 are encouraging companies all over the world to take better care of nature and work in ways that are better for the planet.



When businesses take care of the environment, people notice and appreciate it. This helps the company's reputation. Movistar is a great example of a business that has made big changes. Since 2015, they've cut their carbon footprint by 95% by using renewable energy. This means that most of the energy they use comes from clean sources like wind or solar power. Another good example is Sinba, a Peruvian company that finds new uses for organic waste. They turn leftover food into animal feed and fertilizers, which are good for farming. They also recycle materials to stop pollution. Both of these companies have been praised for their efforts. Movistar and Sinba show that protecting the environment can also improve a company's reputation and help them gain more respect.

Even though some companies think being green is too expensive or difficult, stories like Movistar and Sinba show that it's possible and worth it. These companies prove that businesses can help the planet while still making money. Around the world, companies like Patagonia and Tesla are examples of how this can work. Patagonia makes eco-friendly clothes, and their customers trust them because they care about the environment. Tesla is known for making cars that run on electricity instead of gasoline, which helps reduce pollution. These companies show that helping the planet can also make a company successful and respected.



Taking care of the environment isn't just a nice thing to do. It's something businesses need to do if they want to stay trusted and successful. When companies protect the planet, they also protect their reputation. People want to support businesses that do good things for the world. Companies around the world can learn from these examples and make protecting the planet part of how they work. When they do, they'll help create a better world and build stronger, more respected brands.

It's important for businesses to understand that taking care of the environment helps everyone. It helps the planet, it helps people, and it helps the company's image. When a business chooses to be responsible, it sends a message that it cares about the future. This inspires others—both customers and other companies—to do the same. By working together, businesses can make a big difference and help create a world that is healthier and happier for everyone.

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## REFUGEES AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN TÜRKİYE: CHALLENGES AFTER THE SYRIAN CRISIS

Saide Zülal

Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011, Türkiye has been hosting millions of Syrian refugees. Türkiye has been one of the countries most affected by the refugee crisis due to its geographical location and regional policies. This situation has not only strained Türkiye's humanitarian capacity but also made the integration of refugees into social life an important agenda item. The integration of millions of people fleeing war and civil unrest into social life in Türkiye has become a critical issue, not only economically, but also culturally. This paper examines the challenges and measures taken to integrate Syrian refugees into social life in Türkiye.

### **Education: A Fundamental Step for the Future of Refugees**

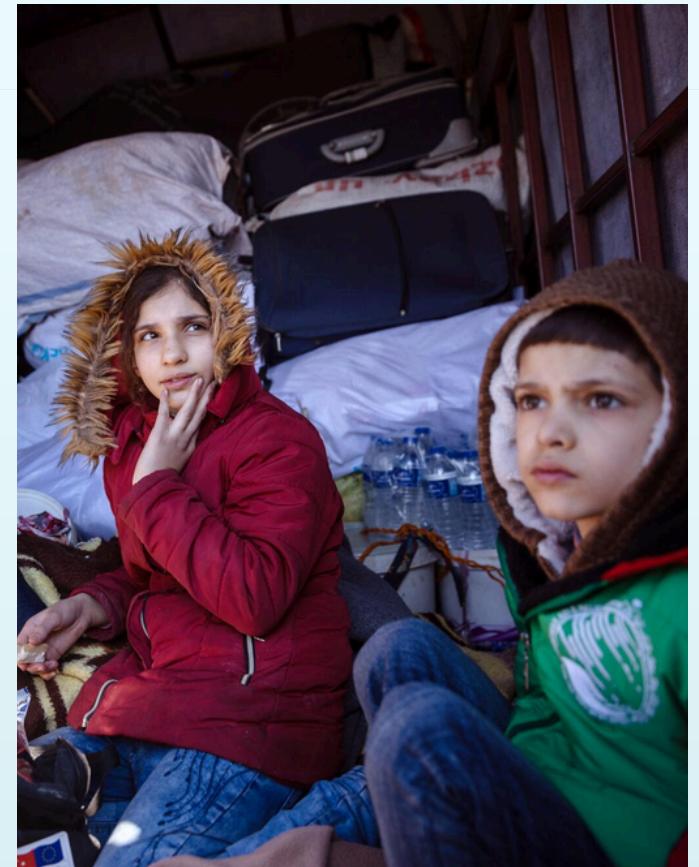
Türkiye opened schools in 2014 to meet the educational needs of the hundreds of refugee children. However, one of the biggest barriers to education for Syrian refugee children is the language barrier. For children who were forced to leave their country at a young age and do not speak Turkish, education in such a situation is seriously challenging.

**As of 2020, approximately 600,000 Syrian children were reported to be receiving education in Türkiye, but this number does not include all children who fled the war.**



The language barrier and the lack of instructors and materials have made it difficult for refugee children to adapt to social life with their peers in Türkiye.

Refugee children striving for education in Türkiye are taking an important step in the integration process. However, inadequate infrastructure in residential areas has made this process more difficult. Preventing inequality of opportunities in education is a critical point in accelerating the integration process of refugee children.



### **Health: A Fundamental Human Right**

The right to health is something that people must have to be able to lead a healthy life. Syrian refugees' access to health services is another important point in the integration process. Türkiye has taken various measures to facilitate refugees' access to health services. While it is much easier for refugees living in camps to access health services, it has been much more difficult for refugees living in cities to access them. The lack of health insurance for refugees, who already have language problems, has also made it difficult and complicated for them to benefit from services.

In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic made it even more difficult for refugees to access health services and increased social tension.

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### Employment: How do Syrian Refugees Make a Living?

One of the biggest problems faced by refugees who had to leave their countries as a result of war and civil unrest has been the inability to make a living. Türkiye has issued work permits for the employment of refugees and tried to create employment opportunities in some sectors, but most refugees have been forced to work in low-paid and precarious jobs to support their families. Moreover, competition between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens in the labor market has at times led to social tensions. Organizing training programs to help refugees adapt to the labor market will play an effective role in addressing this problem.

### Economic Impacts: How Türkiye is Affected Economically?

The refugee crisis has put strain on Türkiye's financial resources. Large amounts of resources have been allocated for refugees and investments have been made to facilitate life in the camps. A large number of Syrian refugees work informally in cities, which has had a significant impact on the Turkish labor market. In addition, the high number of Syrians requiring health services creates an additional burden on the public health system, while the need for investments in education is also increasing. This situation has increased the investment that local governments need to make in basic needs such as education, health, and shelter and has created a burden on these governments.

### Cultural Integration

Culture plays an important role in ensuring the social integration of refugees. Cultural exchange should be encouraged for refugees and Turkish society to live in harmony. To facilitate this process, both communities need to be understanding and open-minded. However, language barriers and cultural differences sometimes lead to tensions.

Children are likely the most difficult group in the cultural integration process. In order to ensure the cultural adaptation of children affected by wars and civil unrest, actively integrating them in daily life and providing rehabilitation services will facilitate this process.



### Conclusion

The challenges that Türkiye has faced with the influx of refugees from Syria have required a major effort in many areas. Türkiye's refugee policies should be structured to support social peace and economic development beyond basic humanitarian necessities.

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## THE CONTROVERSY BEHIND MICHELIN STARS: PRESTIGE OR POISON?

Hoang Nam Phu

The Michelin Guide is considered the highest achievement in gastronomy, awarding stars to restaurants that meet its stringent requirements. However, controversies always surround these types of honors. There are claims of favoritism, bias, inequalities, and even that it brings immense pressure to cooks. Michelin Stars have their share of criticism from insiders and food critics, and justifiably so. This article will delve deeper into the controversies and the effect of having such an award for chefs and restaurants.

The pressure that comes with having a Michelin-starred restaurant has caused mental health breakdowns for countless chefs. An example of a notable incident is when Bernard Loiseau, a French chef, committed suicide in 2003. He was suspected to be a victim of the fear of losing a star. The same stress can be recognized in other famous chefs like Marco Pierre White and Sébastien Bras.



Sébastien Bras, who gave back three Michelin stars in 2017, stated that the Michelin stars restricted him and his restaurateurs from focusing on more creative dishes and caused huge amounts of pressure. His situation is not the only one where chefs have given back or denied Michelin stars.

However, the main criticisms raised against the Michelin Guide concern the selection process. Unlike any other culinary award, the inspectors do not reveal their identity. Furthermore, restaurants do not know the frequency or timing of the inspectors' visits. This has resulted in allegations of inconsistency and favoritism.



Many chefs and critics believe Michelin prefers French cuisine. Cooking traditions from countries like India and most of Africa have long been underrepresented in Michelin's rankings. Furthermore, the 2021 Michelin Guide Thailand incident aggravated the issues for those who claimed bias, for it was shown that well-known street vendors were omitted, although they captured high regard locally.

The mysteries concerning Michelin's assessment methodology add to the skepticism. Restaurants know when their inspectors evaluate the establishment or how often they get rated. Although this is supposed to keep fairness, it has raised more doubts about whether bias and hidden standards impact who gets or keeps the stars. Some chefs argue that Michelin's evaluations fail to consider the cultural and geographical aspects of what represents a culinary masterpiece in other parts of the globe.

## THE CONTROVERSY BEHIND MICHELIN STARS: PRESTIGE OR POISON?

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A Michelin star is a form of prestige, which to some eateries can be a gift and a curse at the same time. On the one hand, the profits and the fame are unparalleled, but on the other hand, they bring unrealistic expectations. It is hard to maintain the standard of a Michelin-rated restaurant, as it comes at a high financial cost that includes many expensive ingredients, a large number of staff, and constant dish variations.

Due to the financial burden, some restaurants have had to shut their doors. Chef Marc Veyrat even sued Michelin in 2019 after his La Maison des Bois restaurant was demoted from two stars to one. L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in New York City closed in 2020, despite having two Michelin stars, due to financial struggles.

Although Michelin Guide claims to be the authority in fine dining, its reputation is being challenged continually. Most recently, the awareness of mental health issues among chefs, the claims of bias, and the volatility that comes with permanently changing restaurants have led to much questioning of the system's value. Some chefs have outspokenly bashed Michelin, while the rest have chosen to dismiss or return their stars for a semblance of creative and financial compromise.



If Michelin claims to stand by its credibility, it should start responding to these issues. Trying to incorporate a wider range of cuisines, more objective restructuring, and acknowledgment of the processes involved in selection could potentially restore the lost faith. Unfortunately, because of the internal workings of Michelin being as tightly held, such substantial modifications seem implausible anytime soon. Foreseeably, there will always be controversy about Michelin being one of the most prominent authorities in the industry, which, for reasons unabashed, chefs around the world admire but fear.

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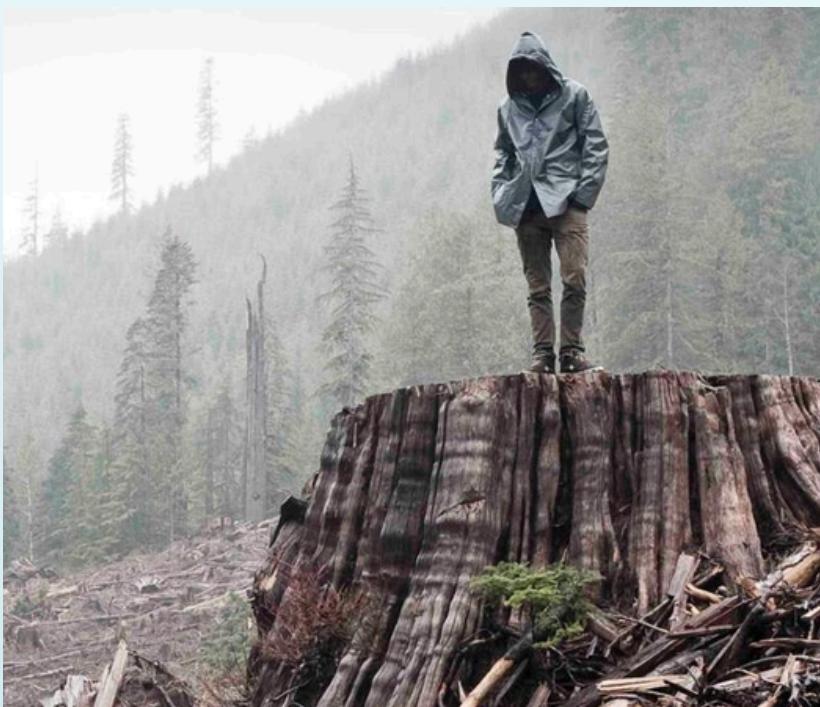
## IS ECO-TERRORISM JUSTIFIED? AN INVESTIGATION BEHIND THE POLITICAL USE OF VIOLENCE

Teu-Khanh Phuong

***In 1998, Earth Liberation Front (ELF) members were linked to an arson attack which resulted in the destruction of the Vail Ski Resort in Colorado and caused damages of up to 12 million dollars.***



The ELF's are known for their strong advocacy to prevent human exploitation of Earth and the environment. The attack on Vail Ski Resort was carried out in protest against the expansion and encroachment of the resort into a lynx habitat. Having claimed responsibility for their violent acts, several members of the environmental group had charges pressed against them for their wrongdoings and were arrested for multiple crimes due to the incident. This was considered the "costliest act of eco-terrorism in American history at the time," and was widely criticized by environmental groups and citizens alike, who viewed this act as an outright crime. However, ELF members defended their acts and claimed that this resistance was necessary to gain massive attention, as well as spread awareness of the human-caused devastation to the natural world.



This incident raised concerning questions related to the issue of saving the environment, especially on what is considered right and wrong when one wants to protect nature and has good intentions. The question of how far environmentalists should go to conserve resources and preserve the environment is important to determine the most effective way of living sustainably and raising awareness on environmental issues. We call the above example "eco-terrorism."

### What is Eco-Terrorism?

When talking about eco-terrorists, it typically refers to disruptive activities such as destroying property, hindering development, and even injuring people for the sake of saving the environment. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines eco-terrorism as "the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally-oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature." However, eco-terrorism is also referred to as "ecotage" or "civil disobedience" and is a notion that has been thoroughly debated by different groups, each with their own beliefs and perspectives. To understand the different views on eco-terrorism, let's break down the meanings behind "ecotage" and "civil disobedience".

The term "ecotage" is a combination of ecology and sabotage, which simply describes the act of sabotage being carried out for environmental saving reasons. Civil disobedience on the other hand, is a form of political protest in which individuals intentionally break laws they consider unjust simply to draw public attention and potentially pressure authorities and the government to change policies and regulations.

While the FBI considers eco-terrorism as against the law and chooses to criminalize it, other radical environmental groups and individuals seem to perceive this method as acceptable and effective.

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### The Motives Behind the Acts of Eco-Terrorists

To address whether or not eco-terrorism is justified, one must dive deep into the real question: What exactly are the motives behind the act of eco-terrorism?

Firstly, eco-terrorism is controversial and draws significant attention from the public and the rest of the world. That's one of the main goals of eco-terrorists, to gain massive popularity from citizens and the government in order to achieve environmental sustainability. Moreover, these eco-terrorists raise awareness through shock tactics. This means that by intentionally harming the surrounding environment, destroying property, and the people around them, they hope to protect the environment in return.

Secondly, eco-terrorists hold a debatable belief: Nature should be protected at all costs, even if it means harming others. They usually target people who work for companies they believe harm the environment and animals. Earth Liberation Front (ELF), also known as Elves or The Elves, accurately exemplifies this claim. They are a group of people who resort to economic sabotage, mostly known for arson attacks to protest environmental destruction. According to the Anti-Defamation League,

***"ELF first claimed sole responsibility for an attack in the U.S. in 1997, when activists burned down a Bureau of Land Management horse corral in Oregon (previous attacks had been claimed in conjunction with ALF)."***

### The Possible Benefits of Eco-Terrorism

Historically, environmental groups and individuals have shown clear beliefs on the importance of eco-terrorism in achieving environmental goals. They often claim that legal and peaceful methods such as peaceful protests and negotiations are not usually paid attention to and are ineffective in directly solving ecological harm. Below are some possible reasons why a group of people might view eco-terrorism as advantageous in solving climate change.

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Secondly, eco-terrorism can be a forceful deterrent against companies that are engaging in environmentally degrading activities. Corporations are more likely to be held accountable for their unethical practices toward the environment (i.e., illegal logging, oil drilling, or overusing resources) if they face constant sabotage, property destruction, or disruption to their businesses. Consequently, companies may, over time, find it difficult to make profits as a result of these damages.

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Lastly, drawing public and media attention is one of the biggest initiatives for any radical environmental resistance. To those eco-terrorists, making global headlines means making environmental issues more urgent in the public eye. They often hold a belief that evoking anger from public discourse will bring more support and awareness to ecological concerns worldwide. According to Psychology Today, "Anger raises awareness to address systemic and social issues and spark public debate." Therefore, anger can be a powerful tool to motivate people to take action, address wrongdoings, and demand accountability.

### How is Eco-Terrorism Not Justified?

Eco-terrorism in itself is a crime. If one is found guilty of participating in eco-terrorism activities, the consequences are spending time in prison and being unable to take part in any environmental movements in the future. What is less apparent, however, is to what extent eco-terrorism truly benefits sustainability. At the micro-level, it may only benefit the environment by putting an end to certain small-scale development. However, the violence enacted by eco-terrorists has led to far-reaching impacts.

Eco-terrorism can harm innocent people and property as it often involves violence or property destruction tactics, which isn't a justifiable way to achieve long-term sustainability.

Moreover, it can undermine the environmental cause since it holds a risk of alienating some supporters and potentially creating a negative association with environmental activism.

Overall, eco-terrorism is an ineffective way to gain long-term sustainability and solutions, as a harmful, illegal, and undemocratic ideology, eco-terrorists won't change the minds of the people. What the world needs is innovation and a true step ahead that completely transforms how people view the environment. The answer to this is only "Cooperation" and "Non-violence."



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## WHAT THE WORLD CAN LEARN FROM SINGAPORE'S CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC COLLABORATION

Fikry Muraza



World attention has been directed at the start of 2025 to the official proclamation of the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ). Implementation of this historic agreement between Malaysia and Singapore is intended to catalyze economic cooperation, foster world investment, and enable cross-border trade and movement.

Prior to the signing, economic policies in Singapore and Malaysia were pursued separately, leading to the uneven development of border areas. The JS-SEZ sets forth a mechanism that strives to integrate Singaporean capital and technological know-how with Malaysian land and labor resources. The zone covers over 3,500 square kilometers in Johor—the southernmost state of Malaysia—with strategic targeting for investments in manufacturing, logistics, aerospace, and healthcare.

***Within the time frame of five years, the JS-SEZ is expected to create close to 20,000 skilled white-collar jobs.***

The two countries have set themselves the target of attracting 50 new projects during the period, granting tax incentives in the form of a 5 percent corporate tax rate and a 15 percent personal income tax for eligible sectors and workers. These two countries also seek not just economic growth from this collaboration but also the status of regional players in the world economic system.

From this initiative, other countries can learn of the advantages of cross-border cooperation, especially in regions with shared economic interests. By converging their policies, sharing resources, and offering mutual incentives, countries can create integrated economic zones that will attract international investments, create jobs, and improve the regional competitive edge. This is an example of transformation through strategic partnerships, showcasing the kind of improved economic landscape neighboring countries can create for each other.

In conclusion, the JS-SEZ signifies a dramatic change toward integrated economic development between Singapore and Malaysia and can stand as a worthwhile case study for other countries in that it demonstrates how such efforts can drive economic opportunities, stability within the region, and strength in a larger, commonly joined global economy.

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## THE ETHICS OF AI IN HIRING: FAIR OPPORTUNITY OR ALGORITHMIC BIAS?

Mahin Kashyap



One of the most contentious uses of artificial intelligence, which is changing industries all around the world, is its increasing influence on recruiting practices. Businesses seeking efficiency, cost savings, and objectivity are embracing AI-powered recruitment solutions for everything from resume screening to initial interviews. However, does AI actually promote fair employment practices, or does it exacerbate covert prejudices that disfavor particular groups?

### The Promise of AI in Hiring

AI-driven recruitment advocates contend that it does away with the human prejudices that have long tainted hiring procedures. Unconscious biases based on gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status might have an impact on traditional recruitment. AI, on the other hand, is able to do objective data analysis, concentrating just on credentials, experience, and abilities.

For example, take companies like HireVue and Pymetrics. HireVue uses artificial intelligence to analyze video interviews, while Pymetrics uses neuroscience-based games to assess applications.

The purpose of these tools is to clear the clutter and focus on the skill, which is what matters most. This may lead to more diverse workplaces, according to advocates, where people are judged on their abilities rather than their backgrounds.

***"AI has the potential to level the playing field," says Dr. Michael Carter, an AI ethics expert. "If done right, it can make hiring decisions based on merit alone."***

### When AI Gets It Wrong

The issue is that the quality of an artificial intelligence depends on the data it is trained on. If the data has biases, so will the AI.

For example, even if no one specifically intended it to prefer male candidates, an AI trained on data from a company that has continuously hired more men than women may come to favor male candidates.

An example of this is the 'AI recruiting tool' offered by Amazon. Instead of evaluating applications and choosing the best candidates, it criticized resumes that used the word "women's," such as "women's chess club." Why? Because it had been trained on years' worth of recruiting data that was biased in favor of men. Amazon later threw the tool away, but the damage had already been done.

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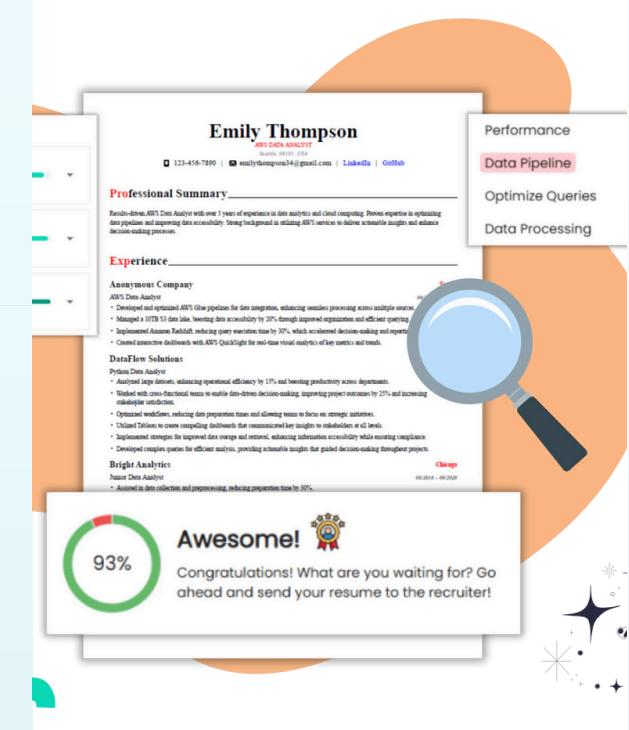
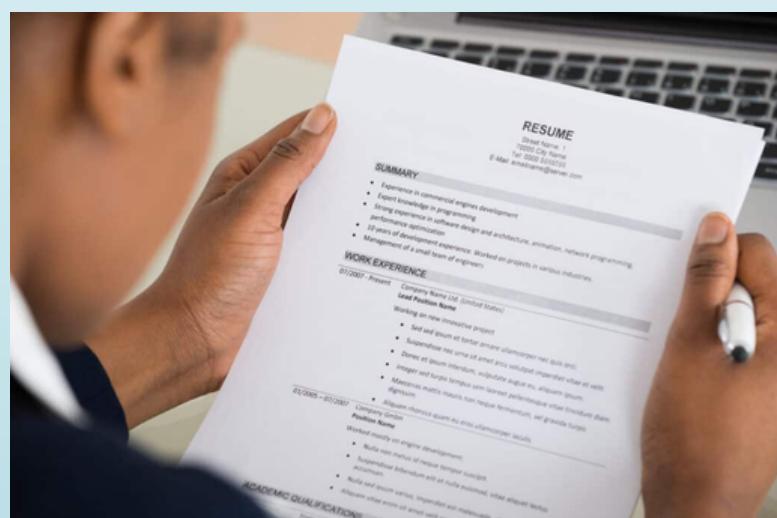
***"This is a perfect example of how AI can backfire," says Amira Patel, a data ethics researcher. "AI doesn't think ethically—it just follows patterns. And if those patterns are biased, the AI will be too, often in ways that are hard to catch."***

The fact that AI judgments might be opaque is another important concern. A lot of organizations utilize these tools without completely grasping how they operate. If you are turned down for a job, you may never find out if it was due to your ability or some algorithmic bias.

### Can We Make AI Hiring Better?

Thankfully, people are becoming more conscious of these issues. Governments and IT experts are calling for more regulation. For example, the European Union's **\*\*AI Act\*\*** proposes strict regulations for high-risk AI, such as hiring tools. US authorities are debating whether or not AI-using employment companies should be required to notify candidates and give a reason for their rejection.

Additionally, some companies are doing something about this issue. The goal of "explainable AI," which is being developed by big IT companies like Google, IBM, and Microsoft, is to be transparent and have verifiable decision-making. Others are combining AI and human judgment, with AI conducting the initial evaluation and people making the ultimate choice.



### So, What's the Answer?

There are benefits and drawbacks to AI hiring. It could lead to quicker, fairer, and more effective hiring. However, if we're not careful, it can potentially worsen existing biases rather than eliminate them. Open procedures, human supervision, and well defined boundaries are necessary for the proper application of AI.

In the end, artificial intelligence is only a tool. We need to ensure that it is applied in a fair manner. While artificial intelligence will play a significant role in the future workplace, human skills and contributions will remain more valuable than technology alone. It is crucial to ensure that AI is implemented fairly so that everyone has equal opportunities.

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## 700 KILLED AND 500,000 DISPLACED AS FIGHTING IN DR CONGO RAGES

Ken-Nhat Hoang

***On January 31, 2025 (Goma), the capital of North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo fell into the hands of the March 23 Movement (M23), which declared that troops would march into DRC's capital Kinshasa. M23's advance faced little resistance as Congolese troops, who on the way also looted shops and raped civilians, fled en masse.***

### Recent Developments

The Goma offensive was completed in only a week (January 23 to January 31). Thousands of Congolese soldiers—not well-trained or well-paid—quickly surrendered in Goma after a series of intense battles with M23 rebels. The resistance in Bukavu—100 kilometers south of Goma—was insignificant to the point that residents witnessed troops fleeing immediately when M23 rebels arrived.

It is worth noting that the M23 rebels were previously a defeated ethnic-dominated group of Tutsi fighters, but it later regrouped and intensified its activities. It is part of the larger Congo River Alliance led by Corneille Nangaa. The alliance's destabilizing actions have raised international concerns and condemnation, notably with US sanctions.

Yet, the capture of two major Eastern Congo cities by Rwanda-backed M23 rebels took less than a month after the escalation and was achieved, overall, with relative ease. The conflict reignited from past tensions and now threatens regional stability. Neighboring Rwanda is accused by US and UN experts of supporting the rebels despite its denials. On the other hand, Rwanda's president Kagame criticizes DRC president Felix Tshisekedi for failing to protect and address the concerns of ethnic Tutsis while violating peace agreements.



### Rwanda's Incentives

"We witnessed history repeating itself worryingly," said Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region. The clash between the aforementioned nations traces back to the first Congo war in 1996 and the second Congo war (Africa's "World War"). Perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide fled to the DR Congo and formed armed groups such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), whom the DRC is accused of supporting. M23 aims to defend ethnic groups like the Tutsi who are attacked by the FDLR, a goal which Rwanda affirms. Moreover, the mineral-rich provinces in Eastern DR Congo economically incentivize Rwanda, who by supporting M23 facilitates their access to these minerals. UN experts reported in December that M23 made a lucrative business from the Bibatama mine through coltan exports to Rwanda. "Mineral exports from Rwanda are now over a billion dollars a year. That's double what they were two years ago," stated Simon Fraser University political scientist and former U.N. investigator Jason Stearns, who claimed "a fair chunk" of that to be from the DRC. Despite the absence of involvement in international transparency initiatives, which made tracking Rwanda's minerals harder, there is sufficient evidence to suspect a surge in the nation's minerals. For example, \$885 million in gold from Rwanda is exported to the UAE in 2023, nearly double the previous five-year average when Rwanda is not a major gold producer.

## 700 KILLED AND 500,000 DISPLACED AS FIGHTING IN DR CONGO RAGES

Ken-Nhat Hoang

### Humanitarian Impacts

Soldiers have fled, leaving behind their families who became new targets of the rebels. Relatives are killed and children are compelled to join the rebellion. Those who have escaped have taken refuge in cramped classrooms and sold everything they have to afford basic necessities for the next day. News sources claimed that M23 leaders have promised to "cleanse" the cities due to "bad governance and insecurity". Congolese authorities estimated 2,000 people killed in and surrounding the city as M23's troops advanced. 500,000 people in the region have been displaced, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation, according to the Forum of International Non-Governmental Organizations. According to *Le Monde*, more than 700,000 people have been displaced since the start of 2025. The unilateral ceasefire declared by M23 did not stop the fighting, locals said, as the rebels turned southwards towards Bukavu.



Human Rights Watch declared the rebels responsible for multifarious war crimes such as execution and rape. The rebels have killed 15 civilians in areas of their control since June. Those who came back from government-controlled areas, who fled recruitment, or just spoke against them (local leaders and activists) were mercilessly put to death.

One victim—a 32-year-old woman—described the fighters as breaking into her home, beating her teenage son to death, kidnapping her husband, and gangraping her, as well as setting her legs on fire with gasoline.

***The crisis extends beyond the DRC. An influx of 40,000 people fled to Burundi in just two weeks; more than 9,000 people crossed in a single day.***

These refugees moved several times (even in their new place), some were injured and plagued by diseases like measles, the UN documented.

### Solutions

UNHCR planned to move refugees into appropriate locations with humanitarian support and provided \$40.4 million to the potential refugees in Burundi, Tanzania, and Zambia. The East African Community and African Union should ensure that adequate aid and access to justice is provided to victims.



## 700 KILLED AND 500,000 DISPLACED AS FIGHTING IN DR CONGO RAGES

Ken-Nhat Hoang



In ending the war itself, regional countries called for immediate ceasefire; other delegates urged collective action in resolving the situation. One political researcher debated that peace must go hand in hand with taking regional countries seriously and fulfilling the interests of all parties, including taking the Tutsi citizenship seriously, before history repeats itself again.



***It is important for both parties to negotiate before further escalations, and for countries, especially influential ones, to end support of Rwanda or the rebels irrespective of existing relations or benefits.***

Will Tutsis be respected? Will atrocities end? The fate of countless individuals rests on every decision of political figures and is impacted by every action we take.

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## AIR POLLUTION CHALLENGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Hai Lam (Apple) Ngoc

### The Status Quo

*"In the Thai capital, a thick smog was seen covering the city's skyline. Workers, especially those who spend most of their time outdoors, were suffering," said Reuters.*

*"The level of fine inhalable particles in Ho Chi Minh City was 11 times higher than the recommended level by the World Health Organization," said IQAir.*



Air pollution in Southeast Asia is reaching new highs, more than anyone has ever seen. If measures are not taken, there will be drastic consequences.

### Health Impacts

Air pollution is not just an environmental issue; it poses severe risks to human health. Constant exposure to high levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) has been linked to harmful respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and even premature death. Children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions are particularly vulnerable in these kinds of environments. When air pollution reaches a certain extent, it can contribute to deaths, millions of them, worldwide each year. It's an extremely sad statistic that Southeast Asia accounts for a significant portion of these fatalities.

### Economic Impacts

The economic burden of air pollution is immense. Healthcare costs surge due to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases caused by the bad air around us, while worker productivity declines from the suffering of these illnesses. The World Bank estimates that air pollution costs some countries in Southeast Asia billions of dollars annually due to premature deaths, medical expenses, and lost labor output. Another important factor is tourism—a key economic driver for many nations in the region—which faces significant threats as travelers avoid destinations known for poor air quality. Moreover, tourists tend to utilize non-sustainable transportation options such as motorcycles and cabs to travel around, leading to more carbon emissions being released into the air. Not to mention that the travel of airplanes also burns fossil fuels, adding to the dire outcomes of air pollution or just pollution overall.



## AIR POLLUTION CHALLENGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Hai Lam (Apple) Ngoc

### Government and Regional Responses

Governments across Southeast Asia have to start implementing policies aimed at mitigating the effects of air pollution. Thailand has introduced measures to regulate emissions from factories and vehicles, while Indonesia has increased its efforts to control forest fires that contribute to haze pollution. Vietnam has also committed to promoting green energy and expanding public transportation systems to reduce reliance on personal vehicles—which are the most commonly used transportation in the country.

However, regional cooperation is crucial to addressing transboundary haze pollution, which affects multiple countries simultaneously. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has initiated agreements such as the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, but enforcement remains a challenge.



### The Role of Technology

Fortunately, innovative solutions provide hope in combating air pollution. Smart monitoring systems, developed by companies like IQAir, can provide real-time air quality data, allowing the government and citizens to take precautions when necessary. Investments in renewable energy, public transportation, and urban green spaces are also significant components in reducing pollution levels over time. In addition, researchers should keep exploring advanced filtration systems, pollution-absorbing material, and more to fight toxic air in densely populated areas.



### Call to Action

While progress is being made, we will be nowhere near the finish line without the help of the people. The contribution of the citizens in solving worldwide problems is of the utmost importance when it comes to achieving a common goal. Individuals can start simply by going by bus to school or work and supporting businesses that prioritize environmental responsibility. Let's work together towards a clean world!

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## STUCK IN THE IN-BETWEEN: THE PARADOX OF YOUTH

Alia Gupta

What exactly is youth? The answer should be simple, yet definitions vary wildly. The United Nations defines youth as individuals between 15 and 24 years old. The African Youth Charter, on the other hand, extends it to 35. Meanwhile, most countries set 18 as the legal threshold for adulthood, treating anybody younger as not “fully capable” of making decisions, even though they do still make choices for themselves. These inconsistencies are not just theoretical; they have real consequences that shape how young people experience life, as well as their expression, opportunities, and limitations.

Before turning 18, young individuals often feel like they exist in limbo. They are not considered independent, yet they are expected to prepare for adulthood. Many laws restrict their ability to partake in diplomacy, make financial decisions, or even have a say in policies that govern their lives. In many countries, they cannot sign contracts, or make medical decisions without parental consent. This lack of control fosters frustration among youth. They are told to act responsibly but are simultaneously denied the respective autonomy to do so.



Then comes the paradox after turning 18. Suddenly, they are legal adults: with an influx of responsibilities, expectations, and opportunities placed on them all at once. Education systems often do too little to prepare them for this transition. One day, they are considered too young to handle legal responsibilities; the next, they are expected to navigate taxes, employment, and long-term financial commitments. This abrupt shift increases stress, making young adults feel like they are constantly trying to catch up.



The employment landscape further complicates this transition. Many jobs require “experience,” but where can young people gain it if they are excluded from the workforce until adulthood? Unpaid internships, which disproportionately favour those who can afford to work for free, become one of the only ways to gain experience. This leaves many young people, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, struggling to enter the job market.

Another pressing issue is the lack of youth representation in policy making. Laws that affect young people, ranging from education to empowerment policies, are often crafted without their input.

***The global average age of parliamentarians is 53-about the ending age of the productive population—and only 2.6% of legislators are under 30, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.***

This means that policies affecting education, the internet, and even the mental health of teenagers often fail to reflect reality. The disconnect is staggering. How can lawmakers who grew up decades ago truly understand the challenges of today's digital era, economic instability, or mental health crises that affect all young people, especially adolescents?

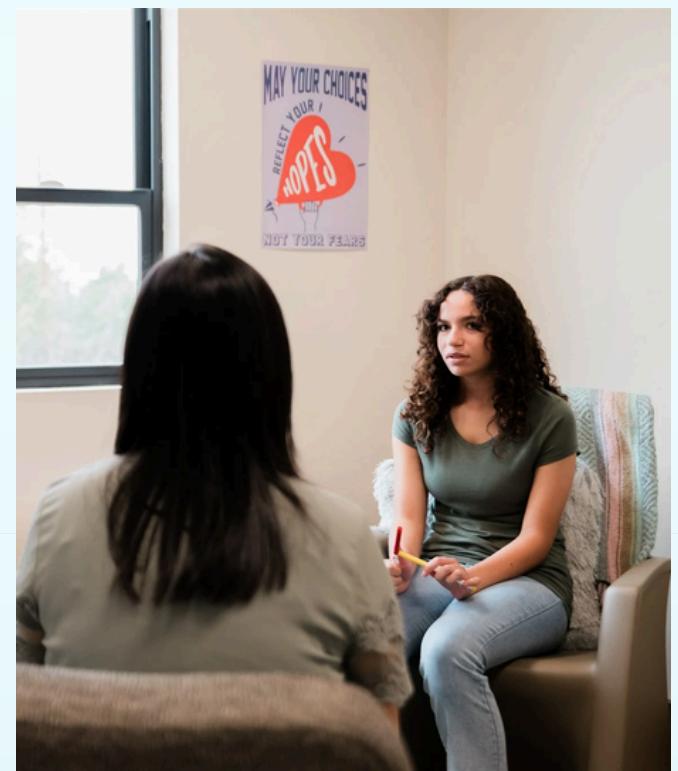
## STUCK IN THE IN-BETWEEN: THE PARADOX OF YOUTH

Alia Gupta

Mental health is an overlooked crisis. Youth are often dismissed as being "too young to be stressed," yet studies consistently show that mental health issues peak during adolescence and early adulthood. The World Health Organization reports that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds. Despite this, mental health services remain largely inaccessible to them. Either they require parental consent, or they are simply too expensive.

***Youth are expected to be resilient, but when they seek help, they often find limiting barriers instead of support.***

Education systems also play a role in amplifying these challenges. Schools focus heavily on academic achievement while neglecting instruction of essential life skills. Financial literacy, emotional intelligence, and civic engagement are often absent from the curriculum. Young people are expected to understand taxes, legal responsibilities, and career planning with little to no formal guidance. They are told to prepare for the future, yet the very institutions designed to educate them often fail to give them the necessary skills for real-world challenges.



So, what needs to change?

First, definitions of youth need to be more flexible and inclusive. Instead of rigid age-based classifications, policies should recognize that maturity and capability develop at different rates for different individuals. Second, there must be greater youth involvement in governance. Young people should have a say in decisions that affect them; whether through youth advisory councils, or representation in political bodies. Third, the education system must prioritize real-world skills alongside academics, ensuring students graduate with practical knowledge. Paid internships, youth-specific work policies, and better transition programs from school to the workforce can help young people gain experience without fear of exploitation. Mental health services should be made accessible and affordable.

The misconceptions surrounding youth

***"too old to be considered children yet too young to be taken seriously"***

create unnecessary obstacles. A more balanced, supportive approach would allow young people to transition into adulthood with confidence rather than anxiety. Society must recognize that youth are not just the future; they are the present, and their voices matter now.



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## THE BRAVERY OF AFGHAN WOMEN

Moska Ahmadzai



When you think of Afghan women, do you picture warriors, leaders, and visionaries? Throughout history, Afghan women have embodied these roles. Yet, their stories are often overshadowed by stereotypes that reduce them to victims of oppression. It's time to remember the legacies of Afghan women whose courage and leadership have shaped Afghanistan's history.

Afghan women have shown an unwavering spirit throughout history, using knowledge as their sword and courage as their shield. This strength and resilience are imprinted in the lives of many, including, but not limited to, Malalai of Maiwand, Gohar Shad Begum, and Zarghona Anaa. This article seeks to honor these extraordinary women's legacies by showcasing their courage, leadership, and historical impact on Afghanistan. They have served as a symbol of determination for many generations and continue to inspire courage in Afghan hearts.

### Malalai of Maiwand

Malalai of Maiwand was a courageous, selfless Afghan woman during the Second Anglo-Afghan War in the battle of Maiwand, which took place on the 27th of July, 1880. Despite the fact that Ayub Khan was the military commander, it was Malalai of Maiwand who saved the day.

When the battle intensified, she was there to tend to the wounded and provide water to Afghan fighters, including her father and fiancé, on the day that was supposed to be her wedding. Eventually, there came a point in the battle where the Afghan army, despite its superior numbers, started to lose morale, and the tide seemed to be turning in favor of the British. Seeing this, Malalai took off her veil and shouted out:

***“Young love! If you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand, by God, someone is saving you as a symbol of shame!”***

Her words reignited the fighting spirit of Afghan fighters and resulted in Ayub Khan's army winning the battle. She was struck down and killed by a British soldier, but her bravery and resilience continue to be a beacon of hope to the hearts of the Afghan nation.

### Gohar Shad Begum

Gohar Shad Begum was a 15th-century queen of the Timurid Empire. She made Herat, the capital of the Timurid Empire, a center of cultural renewal by passionately promoting Persian culture, the arts, and education. The construction of a magnificent architectural complex, including a madrasa (school), library, hostel, mosques, and a hospital, was initiated by Gohar Shad Begum in 1417 (Zhwak 14). She promoted Persian language and culture to the forefront of the Timurid Empire and supported poets and painters, such as the female poet Mehri Herawi ("Her Story"). After her death in 1457, various institutions and structures, such as Gohar Shad University in Herat and Gohar Shad Mosque in Mashhad, have been established across Afghanistan and beyond to honor her legacy and celebrate her contributions to art, culture, and the emancipation of women in Afghan history.

## THE BRAVERY OF AFGHAN WOMEN

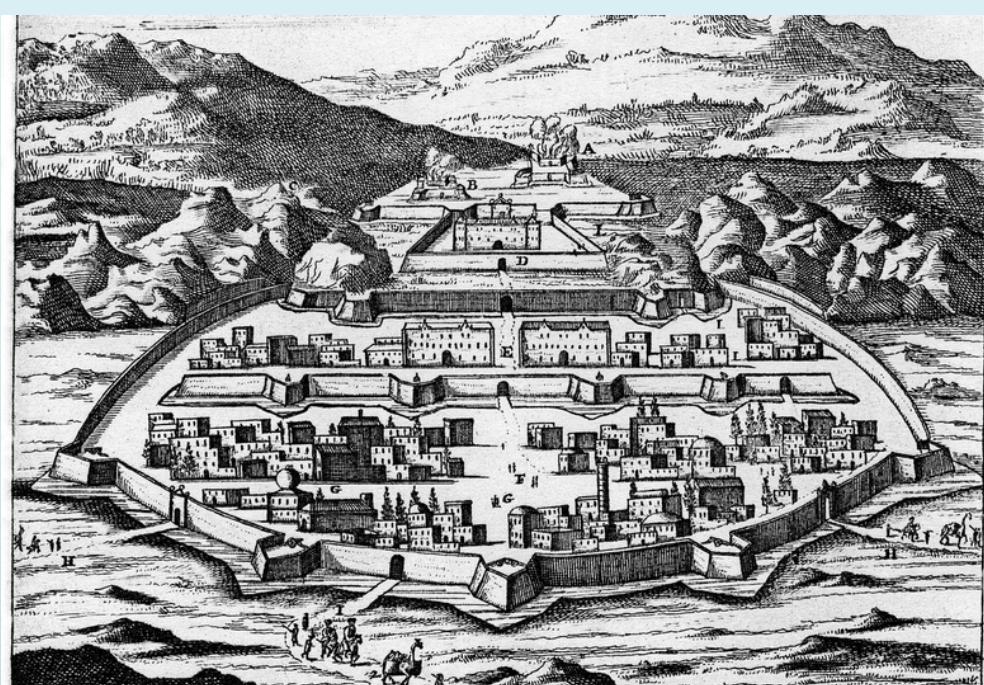
Moska Ahmadzai

### Zarghona Anaa

Zarghona Anaa, the mother of Ahmad Shah Durrani, was an influential figure and key advisor to her son during the Durrani Empire. She not only raised a great leader but also actively supported him throughout her lifetime. Her thoughts and words influenced Ahmad Shah Baba's decisions in leading the empire. For instance, when Ahmad Shah Baba gathered government officials to plan the construction of a new city in Kandahar and discuss measures to avoid potential enemy attacks, they all agreed to build seven walls and moats around the city to ensure the safety of the citizens. However, after Zarghona Anaa heard about this news, she summoned Ahmad Shah Baba and told him:



***"My son, always remember that Afghans never rely on earthen walls or water-filled moats for protection. These defenses might save you and me, but what about your brothers and sisters outside these walls? Don't they deserve your protection? And another thing is that you should not wait so long that the enemy passes the borders of the country and reaches your city."***



Her words inspired Ahmad Shah Baba to change his decision and led him to build a simple fort (Gaheez). Zarghona Anaa's remarkable leadership can be seen from her words and decisions.

Although Afghanistan has long faced severe wars, economic instability, and conflicting societal norms, Afghan women have continued to stand strong in the face of adversity. From the Afghan-Anglo War until today, Afghanistan has been the land where women have been historical warriors, great leaders, and changemakers. Afghanistan's history shows the bravery of Afghan women, their resilience, and the continued efforts of all Afghan women in building a brighter future for their beloved country.

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## DISEASE PREVENTION - UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE IN NIGERIA

Peace Eze

The World Health Organization explains that Universal Health Coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, whenever and wherever they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care that may be needed throughout one's life.

Nigeria generally recognizes the importance of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) but faces challenges due to poor policy implementation, lack of trained health workers, security issues and, unfortunately, the large number of sick individuals compared to some countries.



Thus, achieving Universal Health Coverage in Nigeria will involve investing in domestic resources, using mobile health technology, enrolling more people in health insurance, increasing government budget commitments, training healthcare workers, upgrading healthcare facilities, exploring innovative financing mechanisms, improving governance, and most importantly, making health a priority.

It is important to note that attaining universal health starts with the prevention of disease. Economically, it is more reasonable to provide health care for thousands using the available funds than to extend the same funds to millions.

### ***We should therefore strike at the root of the problem—the diseases themselves—that lead to financial constraints.***

By simply minimizing minor health problems, we can make it much easier to achieve universal health coverage since there will be fewer patients.



Now, let us consider proper disease prevention.

A country can't strive towards universal health coverage without first considering a sufficient water supply to its rural communities. Therefore, advocating and implementing strong policies on disease prevention is the key to universal health coverage. In Nigeria, we can do the following:

1. Provide a dependable clean water supply to rural communities, since many diseases emanate from consuming contaminated water.
2. Conduct regular inspections and extensive education for vendors in abattoirs. Hazardous substances used as fresh food preservatives in the market should be controlled. These substances are capable of causing genetic mutation and other chronic diseases. This issue has manifested itself in some states in Nigeria and must be mitigated. Also, licensing should be mandatory for those involved in the sale of raw food products, especially animal products, to ensure that only those properly trained in food health and sanitation are allowed to distribute such products. An annual renewal of licenses would also be of great importance.

## DISEASE PREVENTION - UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE IN NIGERIA

Peace Eze

3. Implement obligatory disease prevention programs in schools, as well as for the general public. Children and adolescents are among the most vulnerable populations to diseases that could have been prevented, especially when they lack basic health skills, such as proper hand-washing technique or preparation of oral rehydration solutions, which could be lifesaving in cases of severe acute diarrhea until medical intervention does arrive.

4. Develop applications that can help provide first aid information until professional health interventions are available. Development of software or programs that help non-medical individuals differentiate between severe and non-severe issues, while primarily instructing them on first aid measures to take before receiving medical attention can reduce disease complications and the financial burden associated with these complications.

5. Invest in medical research and give adequate funding to help curb the increase of certain diseases in Nigeria such as Malaria, Tuberculosis, Lassa Fever, and Yellow Fever. Identifying a problem is one thing, but understanding the cause is quite another. Full comprehension of disease aetiology and risk factors aids in the prevention of disease.

***As such, there is a need for more research and funding of prevalent diseases in Nigeria, which in turn would aid the prevention of these diseases.***

6. Give assurance of clean roads and proper sanitation. The less garbage present in our surroundings, the less chance that infections spread.

7. Prevent air, water, and land pollution. Pollution may be defined as the emission of substances that are harmful to the environment and that could pose risks to humans, plants, and animals. The risks to humans can be either direct or indirect. Whatever the situation may be, the emission of pollutants like oil spills or black carbon must be strictly regulated and controlled. Further, awareness about pollutants through online and offline media should be raised.

8. Establish primary health centers with well-trained doctors on regular supervision.

9. Use appropriate vaccines as preventive measures and to promote herd immunity.

In conclusion, working towards Universal Health Coverage leads to a change in the quality of life and economic growth of a nation. However, in Nigeria, I believe that Disease Prevention is a golden step, and more likely, a rate-limiting step towards achieving this goal: Universal Health Coverage.



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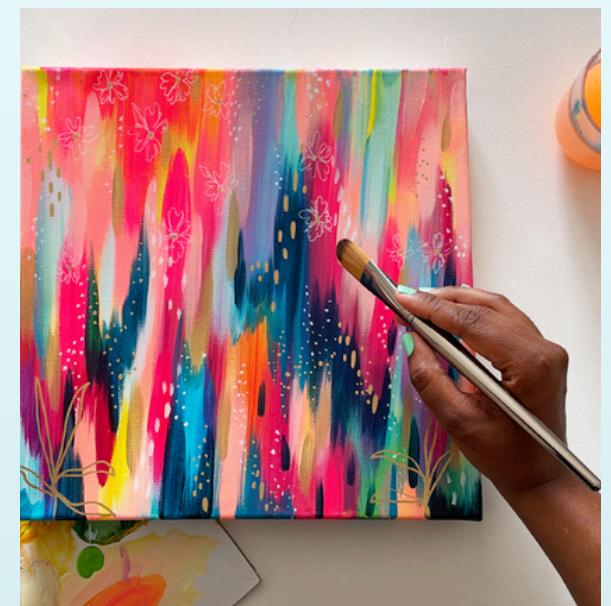
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## AI AND ART: HOW AI IMPACTS YOUNG ARTISTS

Nguyen Ngoc Linh Chi

In this day and age, when many new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) are being developed, many processes that have persisted for centuries are being altered. These changes are causing a lot of worry among young artists. In this article, we will discuss how AI influences the job market for these artists. In the past, when an artist wanted to create a work of art, it took them many days or even many years to finish. But now, with the help of AI, it just takes them a few minutes to generate a picture. They can easily create high-quality images in just a few clicks. AI bases its creations on the user's requirements (styles, colours, patterns, etc.) and its data sets to create paintings. Due to the current growth of AI in art, many companies are using AI to generate images instead of leasing artists. It creates pictures faster and at a lower cost than humans since many AI art creation apps are free and available to use. The technology can also generate ideas that artists can use as inspiration for their own pieces. Moreover, because AI tools are accessible, they allow people who don't have a lot of artistic talent to be able to generate beautiful artwork. However, it learns from the work of real human artists and becomes capable of accurately copying their styles. This has caused public backlash and many artists think that AI will take their place in the job market. A student from Milpitas High School—Misha Chaturabul—with a passion for drawing, painting, and digital art, wants to pursue art as her job in the future. She pointed out that real artists' works are made with a genuine passion and love that cannot be copied or replicated by a computer or any type of technology. Time is also responsible for the quality of a picture. The effort artists put into each piece gives it a special quality—a human spirit or essence that's able to evoke emotions—which AI cannot replace. Although AI can create pictures faster than humans, its pictures cannot show the unique personalities and stylistic choices of artists, which make the picture become special.

According to the BBC, AI-created artworks are destroying the accepted norms of the art world. AI is one of contemporary society's current fears with the rise of job-snatching AI algorithms and potential robot domination. Although it can generate ideas for artists to use as inspiration for their own pieces, in the long-run this could cause a shortage of creativity. AI could lead to a decrease in individual motivation to engage in the processes of artistic creation. Each artist has his or her own process which is part of what makes each piece different. If AI becomes an easy solution to create art, we could lose the ability to create it by ourselves and pictures may even become valueless. If fewer people feel motivated to create, we will risk losing these valuable perspectives and voices. Creating art is often a hard and laborious task, but it is also deeply satisfying and fascinating. Knowing that one's efforts could be eclipsed by a machine could undermine the motivation to create.



In this period of technological developments, AI is a pressing problem in the art field. Despite being a great tool, it may actually be creating more of an issue than what it's trying to solve. The use of AI should be considered for the lasting impacts it could have on art.

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## BROKEN PROMISES

Anh La

### ***In the growing danger of human trafficking in Vietnam, victims are those who bear the blame.***

When Pham Thi Cai turned 26, she was promised better employment in Laos by a distant relative and a woman named Loan. Yet upon arrival, she found herself stranded in a remote area inhabited by a predominantly Chinese-speaking population. She was then forced to marry a Chinese man who she later learned had bought her bondage for the meager price of 3,500 Chinese yuan (\$486 USD).



The Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security reports that from 2018 to 2022, approximately 1,200 people fell victim to human trafficking in Vietnam, exemplifying the Vietnamese proverb "Thân em như tấm lụa đào/ Phất phơ giữa chợ biết vào tay ai," which speaks about the uncertainty in a woman's life by comparing her to silk ("lụa") as they are both beautiful and desirable yet easily traded in the market ("chợ"). Vietnamese women are the most vulnerable victims of human trafficking, accounting for 58 percent of all cases. Of that, 85 percent of the time they are trafficked across Southeast Asia to become brides for Chinese men or sex workers.

Due to the one-child policy, which is no longer enacted, China became a skewed population of largely men, leaving many unable to find a wife. This fuelled the human trafficking market in Vietnam with a staggering 71 percent of victims sold into forced marriages there.

### ***In the mountainous regions of northern Vietnam where trafficking is prevalent, ethnic minority girls as young as 13 are in danger of being kidnapped and sold to China as brides.***

Vietnam is considered a major hub for commercial sexual exploitation in the Asia-Pacific region. Victims often meet their traffickers through the Internet and social media where they are lured by false promises of better career prospects overseas. China and Malaysia are two of the main destinations for victims trafficked as sex workers, but many also end up in Cambodian brothels.

Even for the few lucky survivors, their ordeal continues long after their escape. "Survivors are often questioned or second guessed about what they could (or should) have done differently to keep the trafficking from happening," explains Executive Director of the Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault Micheala Denny.



Today, victim blaming is endemic, and recent studies suggest that psychology may be behind this. According to The Express Tribune, Pakistan's only internationally affiliated newspaper in partnership with the New York Times, this behavior stems from the hindsight bias and just-world phenomena. Hindsight bias is the belief that victims should be able to predict the outcome of a crime or accident and thus prevent it from occurring. Similarly, the just-world phenomenon describes how people are inclined to believe that the world is just, so misfortune happens only to those who deserve it.

## BROKEN PROMISES

Anh La

Victim-blaming prejudices should not be condoned, especially when the mental toll they inflict on trafficked victims can deepen their psychological trauma. "Many people still label the victims as 'bad girls who deserve to be trafficked,' or 'lazy, greedy people who want to earn money easily,'" says Dang Thi Thanh Thuy, a case manager at International Hager in Vietnam, an NGO that aids human trafficking survivors.



***"Such reactions exacerbate their past traumas, and can easily traumatize them again. They come to perceive themselves the way the society does, and start blaming themselves."***

Furthermore, accusations against trafficked victims are far from the truth. Controversy often arises over whether consent has been granted. Nonetheless, even when victims have initially consented, traffickers usually do not follow the terms they had set in the beginning and thus a breach of consent occurs, which nullifies that initial consent. Consequently, many women become entangled in the human trafficking chain through broken promises of better jobs. Sometimes, their online "boyfriends" persuade them to move abroad. When these women step foot in the foreign country, they are immediately sold off to traffickers who then determine their fates. In other cases, victims are pressured into signing employment contracts in foreign languages that they cannot comprehend, leading to misinformed consent.

Fortunately, brighter futures await women who might become victims. Between 2016 and 2020, the Vietnamese government's anti-trafficking program has successfully reduced over 40 percent of human trafficking cases, and Vietnam's police forces are taking an active role in rescuing trafficked victims. However, this does not solve the problem of attitudes toward those who are rescued. Much more needs to be done to educate people about the reality of trafficking and how innocent women find themselves caught in its trap.



The story of Cai has a happy ending. Twenty-four years after her capture, Cai was finally reunited with her family in Quang Binh, who welcomed her with open arms. Very few women who share Cai's plight are as fortunate as she—most remain captive indefinitely, and those who escape often find themselves in a new kind of hell. Disadvantaged women become easy targets for traffickers who capitalize on their desire to build a better life for themselves and their families. No one should be blamed or shamed for that.

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## DEALING WITH ACADEMIC BURNOUT: HOW TO IDENTIFY, REVERSE, AND TAKE CARE

Donya Fournier

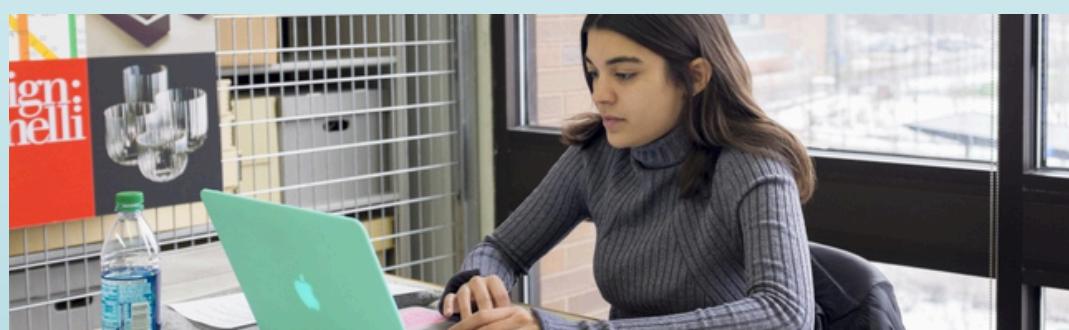
### What is Burnout?

People are overworked, chronically exhausted, isolated, and anxious due to burnout, and are seeking solutions to feel better. The key to preventing burnout is understanding what it is, identifying its source, and then, finding appropriate solutions.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, burnout is “physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.” In a burnout, some may feel trapped and in a chokehold of all the responsibilities and stress they carry with them. These responsibilities can range from cleaning, going to work, doing hours of homework on end, or being in an emotionally taxing situation at school or work. Research suggests the best way to reduce your exposure to the stressor is by changing your mindset, prioritizing self-care, and seeking out connections.

### What Causes Burnout?

One of the sources and results of a burnout can be a lack of personal organization. A study analysis by Zeinab Rahmati from the Department of Psychology at Allame Tabatabaee University explained the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout. People with lower self-efficacy are more likely to experience burnout because they have less ability to adjust to changes compared to those with a higher self-efficacy. In other words, if someone is less organized, they have a higher chance of being overwhelmed by what they have to do, which then leads to mental exhaustion, resulting in burnout. It is also possible that while experiencing burnout, one may have lower self-efficacy due to mental exhaustion (Leiter). In the workplace, causes include having a boss that doesn't respect your boundaries, or having an extremely demanding job that is mentally and emotionally draining, like sales or nursing, or physically demanding, like a construction worker.



These ideas align with an article by Harvard Business Review and another one by Messina et. al from PubMed Central that proposed three components of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, which are all caused by extreme pressure on oneself. Exhaustion is mainly how most people describe a burnout. Cynicism goes hand in hand with lack of hope and distrust. Inefficacy is, by definition, the inability to produce the desired result. These three factors can then lead to a negative feedback loop if no initiative is taken to change it.

## DEALING WITH ACADEMIC BURNOUT: HOW TO IDENTIFY, REVERSE, AND TAKE CARE

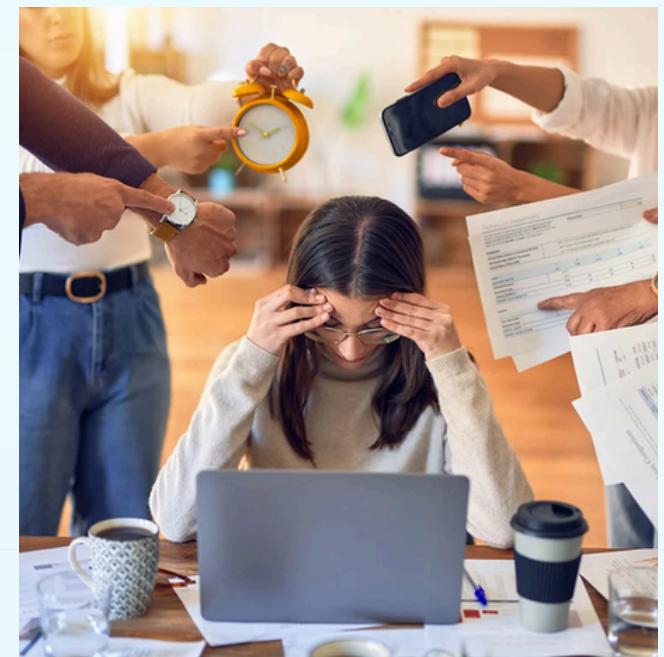
Donya Fournier

### How Can We Prevent a Burnout?

When one is in a state of constant and extreme mental exhaustion, at times, it can lead to a lack of hope and wondering if it is even possible to get out of this state. Cynicism occurs with the lack of hope. Tools like positive affirmations, shifting mindset, gratitude journaling, and trauma work, could all be starting points for mindset correction. According to an article by the University of New Hampshire, being kind to yourself by using positive self-talk, forgiving yourself, staying present, and focusing on what you can control are also good means of helping with a mindset change. If self-efficacy is the problem, to prevent or reverse a burnout, it is suggested to increase organization in a way that is not too overbearing. For example, making different types of lists that feel more enjoyable than overwhelming (Gupta). An idea could be writing individual or small groups of tasks on sticky notes or simply including more breaks in your schedule.

The hardest thing is to find an effective way to rest as burnout exhaustion is more than physical fatigue. Examples of this may be making time for at least one activity a day that soothes the brain or brings you joy. Whether it be secretly racing the person in front of you at the gas station to see who can finish putting gas in first or making time to go to the gym with your friends, the activity you choose can be as simple and short or as long and complicated as you'd like. It is also essential to set boundaries in your workplace as the excessive negativity and rudeness of others can also lead to mental exhaustion.

Time needs to be put more frequently towards doing little things that don't feel like a chore but bring joy, perhaps things you enjoyed as a child (Novotney). The question is - what will you change in your routine to live a burnout-free life?



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# MICROPLASTICS INSIDE OUR BRAINS

## Truong Bao Ngoc

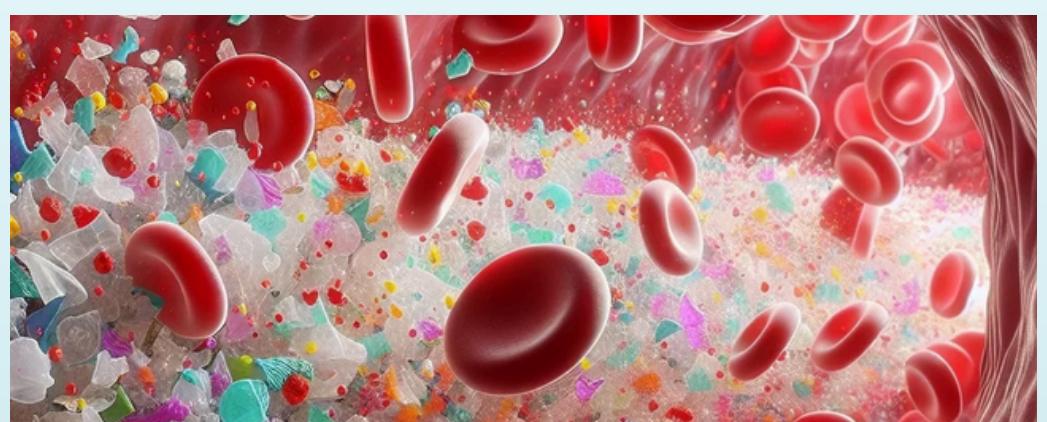
Microplastics are invisible to the human eye, less than 5 millimeters in size, and have infiltrated the environment at an alarming rate as worldwide plastic use continues to increase. Research entitled “Human Consumption of Microplastics” by Cox et al. found that the average person eats, drinks, and breathes between 78,000 and 211,000 microplastic particles annually—which is even considered an underestimated number. Between 200,000 and 500,000 tons of microplastics from textiles enter the global marine environment each year.



It is impossible not to acknowledge the amount of microplastics that are slowly taking over our world today. A new study in *Nature Medicine* finds that microplastics and nanoplastics, which are even smaller at 1 to 1,000 nanometers in size, are found at even higher levels in the human brain than in the liver and kidneys. Despite the study not linking plastic exposure to life-threatening diseases, higher levels of microplastics exist in the brains of people diagnosed with dementia. Study author Matthew Campen, professor of pharmaceutical sciences at the University of New Mexico, says, “We think this is simply mirroring the environmental buildup and exposure. People are being exposed to ever-increasing levels of micro and nanoplastics.”

The 14 million tons of microplastics on the seafloor and the estimated 200,000 to 500,000 tons of microplastics in the ocean are already enough evidence to understand how plastic finds its way deep into our food chain through marine food sources. By eating contaminated fish that have absorbed ocean water, marine animals have been found with microplastics dating back two decades in their bodies. Microplastics also accumulate in the tissues of land animals that people consume, such as pigs, cows, and chickens. According to scientists at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA) in the Netherlands, microplastic particles exist in three-quarters of the meat and milk products tested and every blood sample in their pilot study. For the first time, microplastic contamination has been reported in beef and pork, as well as in the blood of cows and pigs on farms. We aren't entirely safe from microplastics in our homes either; indoor air tends to contain more microplastics than outdoor air due to shedding particles from plastics in polyester clothing, furniture, and household products.

After we absorb these particles through different pathways, they can travel through the body and end up in various organs. Studies have found plastic in human lungs, placentas, blood vessels, and bone marrow. In 2024, a study found concrete evidence that microplastics can pass through the blood-brain barrier, a selective filter that controls what can enter the brain from the bloodstream. While it was previously thought that only the smallest nanoplastics could pass the barrier, this study shockingly found that larger microplastics can enter the brain too.



The study from *Nature Medicine* examined 52 samples of the human frontal cortices—the brain area responsible for decision-making and muscle movement—from 2016 to 2024. Liver and kidney samples from the same bodies were also analyzed in the study using microscope imaging and molecular analysis to identify the chemical composition and pinpoint the presence of microplastics. They found that brain and liver samples from 2024 had significantly higher concentrations of microplastics compared with those from 2016. Even more concerning, the amount of microplastics in our brains increased by 50% between 2016 and 2024 and researchers suggest that rising microplastic concentrations in our homes, air, and water may be responsible.

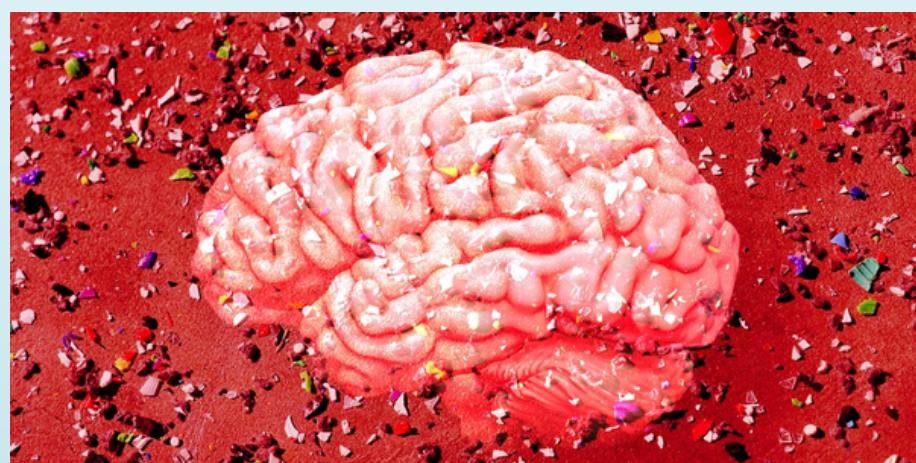


## MICROPLASTICS INSIDE OUR BRAINS

Truong Bao Ngoc

The brain samples overall had 7 to 30 times more plastic compared with liver and kidney samples. Particles found in the brain were mostly tiny shards or flakes of polyethylene, one of the most common plastics in the world, often used in packaging. From previous research, it makes sense that the brain collects more plastics than other organs, as inhalation through the nose provides a more direct route to the olfactory bulb. In people who had been diagnosed with dementia, the amount of plastics was about three to five times higher. The researchers clarify that this does not necessarily mean microplastics cause dementia, but there may be an association between the two that should be studied further.

There is still little knowledge about the influence of microplastics on the brain and the scientific community is calling for more research to better understand whether they are harmful. Studies have shown that microplastics in arteries can be a factor increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease and that cancer cells in the stomach can spread faster after contact with microplastics. "More and more studies show that plastic is present in the brain, including this new one, and they shouldn't be there," says Kasteel, a neurotoxicologist at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. "We don't know that much about the health effects, but the presence of plastic in the brain alone is concerning."



There is no way to avoid microplastics or accidentally absorbing them completely; however, there are small choices you can make to reduce the amount of microplastics you are exposed to. For example, many scientists suggest that we should minimize using single-use plastic, especially plastic bottles—the largest contributor to microplastics on the planet.

To prevent inhaling microplastics, we should ventilate our homes and vacuum regularly to remove dust and plastic debris. It is also important to avoid using products that intentionally contain microplastics, such as facial scrubs with polyethylene beads. Instead of using these products, we can choose alternatives that use apricot rinds, cocoa beads, walnut rinds, jojoba beads, sugar, and oatmeal soap to replace these plastic pieces.



For the time being, complete recovery for the environment might seem impossible to achieve. However, with small actions from each person, we may be able to rebuild what we have destroyed. Every action that betters the environment betters your life in exchange. Even though they are silent, changes happen and affect us often without us realizing. With that in mind, it is necessary for all of us to be aware of climate change and microplastics that affect our lives unknowingly.

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## MUSIC AND EMOTIONS

Esther Ankra

### Introduction

Music is a universal language that transcends borders and generations, from lullabies sung to children during infancy, to energizing anthems. Throughout history, music has played a significant role in shaping and reflecting cultures; ancient civilizations like the Greeks, Egyptians, and Chinese used music in rituals, celebrations, and daily life. For instance, in ancient Greece, music was an integral part of education, theatre, and religious ceremonies. The universality of music is not just a cultural phenomenon, it has a scientific basis as well. Neurological studies reveal that the human brain processes music in remarkably similar ways across different cultures. Research on infants shows that they respond to music with a sense of recognition and enjoyment regardless of their cultural background. Music can influence our moods and emotions. The connection between music and mood is both profound and complex, with different types of music triggering various emotional responses. Listening to different types of music can evoke distinct emotions. For example, soft and slow music such as classical music, is often better for managing negative emotions. On the other hand, upbeat music, particularly songs with a fast tempo and major key, can stimulate feelings of happiness and excitement.

### The Science Behind Music and Emotions

Listening to or making music increases blood flow to certain brain regions that generate and control emotions. The limbic system, which is involved in processing emotions and controlling memory, lights up when our ears perceive music. As your brain becomes familiar with a particular song, your body may release dopamine upon hearing just the first few notes. Specific parts of the brain respond to music together. The entire brain is active when music is played; there aren't certain parts that respond to music. Several networks, or linked groups of brain regions, become more active. Music also lights up the hippocampus and amygdala, which activate emotional responses to music through memory; the limbic system, which governs pleasure, motivation, and reward; and the body's motor system. Music can affect our mood in different ways; hearing a particular sound can make us happy, sad, or even nostalgic.

***Music can also transport us to a different headspace, like those songs that each time they come on they evoke fond memories, and this is caused by the release of dopamine.***

Research shows that music has benefits, making people happier, lowering stress, and improving health. It helps with sleep disorders; a study showed that students who listened to relaxing, classical music for forty-five minutes before bedtime slept significantly better than those who slept with an audiobook or listened to nothing at all. Music also increases verbal intelligence; a study has shown that after one month of music lessons with children between the ages of 4 and 6, 90% significantly improved their ability to understand words and explain their meaning.

### Music Therapy

The effects of music on humans have been considered phenomenal from antiquity to the nineteenth century, mainly from the medical point of view, according to Kümmel (1977). The clearest biblical example of the healing power of music refers to King Saul, who was tormented by an evil spirit, and relief came to him when David played the lyre. Following this, several religious leaders, teachers, philosophers, and physicians like Asklepiades, Johannes Tinctoris, Agrippa von Nettesheim, and Johann Wittich have stated the health benefits of music. The Great Physician Asklepiades was said to have used music as a remedy for mental illness. Johannes Tinctoris listed twenty effects of music, such as curing diseases. In today's modern world, many people still believe in the healing power of music and find benefit in music therapy. Music therapy uses a wide range of music experiences to meet the specific goals of clients. Music therapy offers a versatile and effective tool for promoting health, enhancing the quality of life, social interaction, gross motor skills, expression of emotions, and a reduction of problem behaviours. When starting music therapy, clients set goals with their therapist, such as using music to improve mood or address symptoms like anxiety, dementia, insomnia, stress, obsessive-compulsive disorder, communication issues, or low self-esteem. Sessions may involve listening to music, playing instruments, composing songs, singing, or dancing. Music therapy can have a positive impact on various aspects of one's life as music can be a great way to bring out any suppressed emotions that a person may be feeling. It also allows a person to take charge of their senses, feelings, and communication methods. It also offers a positive environment, reduces stress, and lifts one's mood.

### Conclusion

Music as a universal language has a great influence on one's emotions that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers. Music is a powerful tool that can uplift spirits, soothe souls, and help us navigate complex emotions, serving as a source of joy and a therapeutic tool.

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## WORK-LIFE BALANCE: HOW AND WHY?

Lucie Kealey

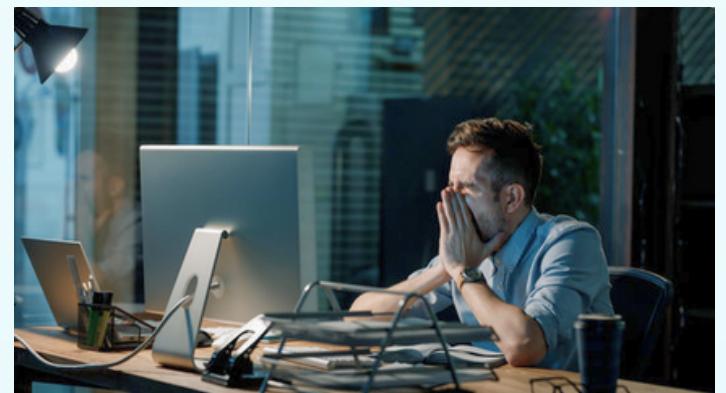
In a world where constantly being on the move is often expected, it is not surprising that so many individuals have difficulty in ensuring that a work-life balance is achieved. Too often we give ourselves colossal amounts of work with little time for self-care and reflection. This article will demonstrate the processes and importance of an adequate balance between both work and leisure.

***“Balance is not something you find, it’s something you create.” Jana Kingsford***

### What is Work-Life Balance?

It is crucial to note what qualifies as work-life balance. Is it taking time to go outside, go shopping, or leave the office a little bit earlier? It's hard to tell, as everyone has their own subjective opinion when it comes to a topic like this, but for the purpose of this article, it's important to come up with a definition that reflects the general meaning. The 'Mental Health Foundation' outlines a healthy work-life balance as an umbrella term, falling under three specific categories:

1. "Meeting your deadlines at work while still having time for friends and hobbies"
2. "Having enough time to sleep properly and eat well"
3. "Not worrying about work when you're at home"



With this in mind, it is quite clear to see what classifies as a work-life balance. What is not so transparent is how these characteristics map onto different professional occupations; how can work-life balance be achieved the same way across all disciplines?

### Variation across disparate occupations

Take professional industries such as medicine, law, and finance in comparison to more freelance roles such as journalism and social media content creators.

In terms of the more demanding job roles, "Legal 500" addresses concerns around the work-life balance of a lawyer, battling common public assumptions on the physical experience of working in a legal firm. The business, dedicated to supporting aspiring lawyers, argues that although legal professionals are notorious for working long hours—particularly during the early stages of their career—firms are generally successful in providing a healthy work-life balance for employees. However, this is said to differ based on the culture of the firm itself, as well as the number of enrolled lawyers at any given time. A firm with a sufficient number of lawyers will be able to distribute their workload evenly, allowing for an appropriate amount of leisure time for their employees. This same approach applies to many other taxing jobs, where although achieving a work-life balance may be more difficult, the organisation will often do their best to prioritise this where they can.

Comparatively, exploring what may be deemed as more lax and freeing jobs, Beqiri comments on how a work-life balance is achievable, with a required emphasis on time management and organisation. Being an independent content creator may be viewed as having a healthier work-life balance since you can decide your own working hours; however, Beqiri indicates that many content creators (around 21%) find it difficult to establish a clear work-life balance. This is because the lines between work and personal life often become blurred.

Thus, the fight for a healthy work-life balance is universal across all professional occupations, including those who are under their own rules and regulations or those working as part of a company.

***“It’s not the daily increase but daily decrease. Hack away at the inessentials.”***  
***Bruce Lee***



### How to maintain a work-life balance

With all of this in mind, it is important to establish how a healthy work-life balance can be achieved. Pointing to an expert on the subject, "Health Direct" lists their tips for making sure that you are successful at this task, notably:

1. Set boundaries
2. Focus on your health
3. Have down time
4. Enjoy your work
5. Review your finances

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE: HOW AND WHY?

Lucie Kealey

Each of these tips emphasise the necessity of routine and prioritisation of self-care to ensure that a healthy system is established in and outside of the workplace. For example, a simple task such as setting boundaries will allow you to distinguish the quantity of work that you are able to deliver to a high standard, whilst also making sure that you are leaving enough time for yourself. A key area of this advice is to focus on your health, whether it be mental or physical. In practice, this could involve implementing more exercise or hobbies into your working day—during your lunch break or equivalent—and taking time to go outside to break up the working day. Simple tasks such as these will allow your mind to be more at ease whilst at work, as well as ensuring that work boundaries are being set, so that your professional occupation does not hinder your personal life.

### Practices That Can be Implemented to Ensure Work-Life Balance

When instilling work boundaries into the everyday working lifestyle, here are a few other key practices that will lead to a healthy balance:

- Setting a time to finish work and log off
- Incorporating exercise into your working day
- Meditating
- Making plans with friends and family
- Budgeting efficiently
- Utilising your lunch and other breaks

While these only point to a few specific routine changes, implementing habits such as these into your working day will allow for a healthier balance and more of a wellness approach to the professional sector.

### Statistics Addressing Attitudes Towards Work Boundaries

Emphasising the cruciality of a healthy work-life balance must be supported with adequate evidence, and that is no struggle in today's society. In fact, in the United States, "79% of US workers believe that flexible work would create a better work-life balance", and "72% believe a work-life balance is crucial". This same consensus is shared in the United Kingdom, as "two thirds of employees (66%) feel that work-life balance is a crucial consideration when applying for a job". A further "65% of job seekers prioritised work-life balance over pay and benefits". Thus, it is evident that even on a global scale, work-life balance is prioritised by employees, and thus, this same perspective should be shared amongst further individuals and employment sectors themselves.

***In prioritising healthy work boundaries, industries will ensure that their employees are performing their jobs to the best of their abilities, whilst also allowing time for them to be mindful and enjoy their own personal lives.***

### The Link Between Health and Positivity

Focusing on your health at any point in time, whether to separate your work life from your personal life or even just to improve your mood more generally, is extremely vital. Focusing on your physical health is proven to ameliorate both your mental state as well as bodily health and scientific research has found a direct correlation between having a positive outlook and improved physical health. Benefits include lower blood pressure, reduced risk for heart disease, healthier weight, better blood sugar levels, and even a longer life. Thus, it is both interesting and crucial to observe how the prioritisation of work-life balance, ensuring that you are carrying out activities to better both your mental and physical health, is proven to have a substantial impact on an individual.

### Conclusion

Having provided a brief insight into the positives of ensuring a work-life balance is met, as well as various expert tips on how to achieve this, it is important to understand and practice a mindset that will improve your physical and mental health. Try to ensure that there is an equal distribution between your work and your own personal life.

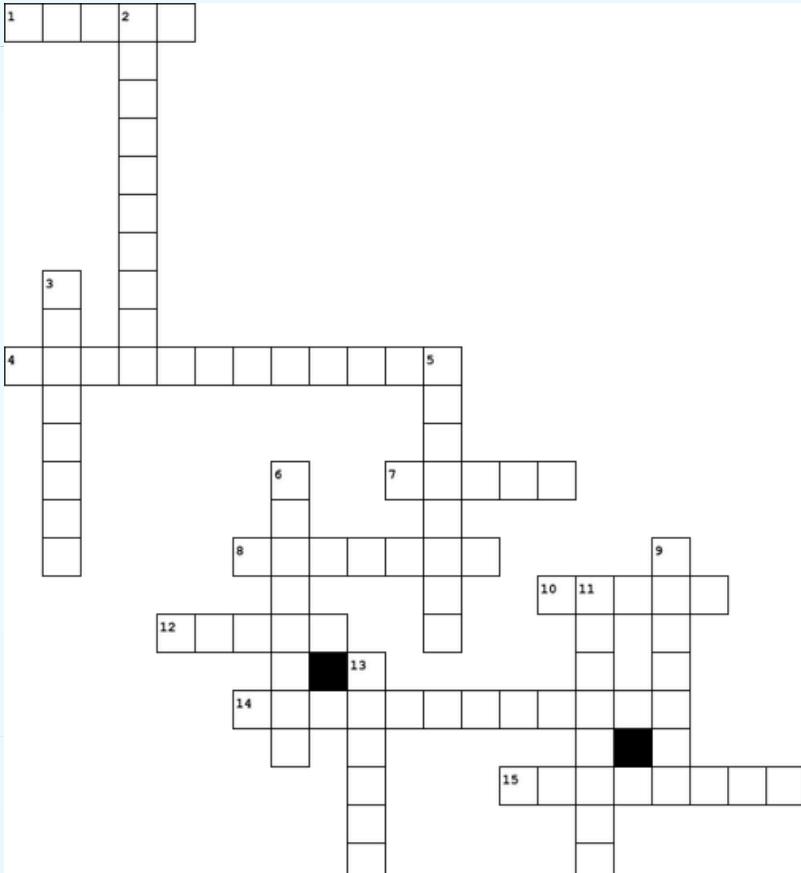
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- <https://www.legal500.com/future-lawyers/survey/future-lawyers-winners/how-would-you-rate-the-work-life-balance-at-your-firm/>
- <https://www.fangage.com/blog/checking-into-self-care-and-work-life-balance-for-independent-creators>
- <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/work-life-balance>
- <https://hubstaff.com/blog/work-life-balance-statistics>
- <https://standout-cv.com/stats/work-life-balance-statistics-uk>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/worklife/article/20230227-what-does-work-life-balance-mean-in-a-changed-work-world>
- <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2015/08/positive-emotions-your-health>

## Crossword: Work Limits



### Across:

- When you drop a plate it will \_\_\_\_\_.
- Physical exercise and spending time with friends are both ways to improve this.
- See 6 down.
- Someone who has used up all of their energy when it comes to work and/or life.
- What people generally intend to do on vacation.
- What you should probably do when you have an upcoming test.
- The O in NGO.
- A well learned person.

### Down:

- What you might need to make for a crooked painting.
- What one does at the gym.
- Something done regularly that may be hard to give up.
- ie. an edge.
- \_\_\_\_ beam: a type of gymnastics event.
- The ability to achieve something to a high quality.
- Despite appearances, this is not a verb for completing yearly government payments.

## Word Search: Mayhem in Africa

L O W T P W U F Z E E T B W O  
O A Z V O Y R Q E X V R P T Y  
E Z R X Z E H G E O I E V S T  
X Q G E E K U L G O S A I E S  
K O I Z N F L T J S N T A D Y  
R K E Z E I I C P L E M Y M A  
B G X R Y Q M T L P F E F Y K  
P T R M A D B H P K F N B D Z  
I S P E U I Z E Z G O T X R O  
X D C R D W D S I A E L H V Y  
S D N U F R H T L C W E D L Z  
E K I Y F P O W V W S V E S E  
H H Z V X O N B W Q Q G O M A  
H H B F L R F L R I I Q D F Q  
A D N A W R U D K Y D S P N P

## Word Bank:

aid	offensive
freeze	order
funds	refugee
goma	rwanda
mineral	treatment

## Crypto-Quote: Mineral Misgivings

**"HABCFKY CEOZFQW PFZH  
FGKBXK KFC BZG ZUCF K  
IAYYAB XZYYKFW K LCKF"  
-- RKWZB WQCKFBW**

### Rules:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFFRFLP = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.