

Balance to Burnout: What 90 Practitioners Taught Us in a Single Quiet Moment

Over two days, 90 mental health practitioners paused at the Interwoven booth at the NASW conference to complete a simple reflection: *Where have you been in the past two weeks—closer to balance or closer to burnout?*

They wrote down a number from 1 to 5, placed it in a box, and moved on. It took less than ten seconds.



But the story those slips of paper told was profound.

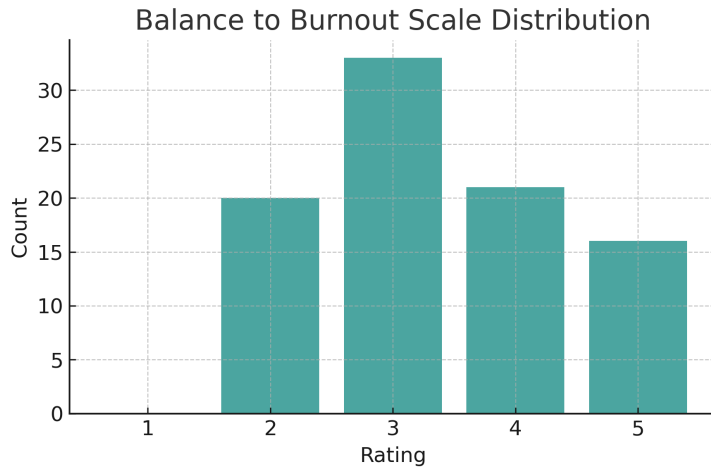
What the Numbers Revealed

Not a single person chose **1 — fully in balance (calm, steady, replenished)**. Instead, the landscape of responses clustered in the middle and toward depletion:

- **20 people selected 2 — mostly balanced (managing well, some stress but grounded)**
- **33 people selected 3 — in the middle (giving a lot, starting to feel drained)**
- **21 people selected 4 — feeling depleted (tired, stretched thin, running low)**
- **16 people selected 5 — in burnout (exhausted, overwhelmed, needing rest + care)**

In other words, **over half** of those who participated placed themselves at 3 or higher. And nearly **40%** identified as being depleted or in burnout.

This wasn't a scientific study. It was a moment of honesty in the middle of a busy conference. But even a brief pause was enough to reveal what so many in our field already know: people are showing up every day with full hearts and *tired systems*.



A Field That's Functioning — And Fraying

The numbers—3s, 4s, and 5s—tell the most striking story. They represent practitioners who are still doing the work, still holding space, still showing up for others...

but often without the replenishment that real balance requires.

The fact that no one selected “1” is meaningful. It suggests that deep balance, in this moment, is not the dominant experience in our professional community. Many are managing. Many are coping. Many are compensating. But very few are truly restored.

Why This Matters for Interwoven

Interwoven is an emerging idea — a space of care for those who give care. It's being shaped through moments just like this one, through real voices and lived experiences.

These numbers aren't data points to be analyzed and filed away. They are **a collective signal**: Our field is in need of gentleness, spaciousness, community, and places to be held.

This activity reminded me that people don't need grand interventions to reflect on their wellbeing. Sometimes they just need an invitation — a point of pause, a small container of honesty, a question that meets them where they are.

Interwoven is being formed by these moments. It's taking shape in the stories, patterns, and truths we gather. And this is one of them:

We are a community in motion, in service, and in need of care.

An Invitation Forward

If you took part in this reflection, or if these findings resonate with you, I'd love for you to stay connected as Interwoven continues to grow. This space is being co-created — one conversation, one insight, one honest number at a time.