Researchers and Mental Health

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EURAXESS BHO Meeting
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What are Issues for Researchers?

Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as "quite an improvement."

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What are Issues for Researchers?

- Need to prepare for (non)-academic careers


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What are Issues for Researchers?

- Need to train, support, and reward openness


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What are Issues for Researchers?

- Urgent need to address mental health issues


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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?

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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?

41% under constant strain!
30% unhappy and depressed!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flanders by Flanders Levecque et al (2016)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table1. The prevalence of common mental health problems in PhD students (SJR) compared to the highly educated general population (HIS) in Flanders 2013: %, age and gender adjusted risk ratio's.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SJR</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt under constant strain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy and depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost sleep over worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not overcome difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enjoying day-to-day activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost confidence in self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not playing a useful role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not feeling happy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felt worthless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could not make decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could not face problems</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Risk of a mental health disorder (GHQ4+)

31.8 | 14.0 | 2.4

1 all RRs were significant at the p<0.001-level.

Levecque et al (2016)

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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?

Leiden University PhD candidates  | PhD candidates in Flanders  | Highly educated in Flanders  
--- | --- | ---  
GHQ4+ / risk group  | %  | %  | %  
Well-being indicators (GHQ-12)  
Tension, feeling under constant pressure  | 46.8  | 40.8  | 27.2  
Unhappy or depressed  | 32.8  | 30.3  | 15.7  
Lack of sleep  | 32.8  | 28.3  | 18.1  
Unable to overcome difficulties  | 31.5  | 26.1  | 10.7  
Concentration problems  | 29.0  | 21.7  | 11.0  
Not enjoying normal day-to-day activities  | 26.4  | 25.4  | 13.0  
Lack of self-confidence  | 26.4  | 24.3  | 8.1  
Not feeling happy  | 23.0  | 21.2  | 11.3  
Sense of not playing a useful role  | 22.6  | 22.5  | 9.0  
Difficulty in making important decisions  | 22.1  | 15.0  | 6.0  
Not able to face problems  | 19.3  | 13.4  | 4.4  
Feeling of worthlessness  | 14.0  | 16.2  | 5.4  

Table 2: Mental well-being of Leiden University PhD candidates

Van der Weijden et al (2017)

47% under constant strain!  
33% unhappy and depressed!

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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?

Zurich

Vaux (2018)

16% not satisfied (at all)!

15% indifferent on satisfaction!

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What Causes Mental Health Issues?

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What Causes Mental Health Issues?

Not satisfied:
- Funding
- Work-life
- Benefits
- Publishing
- Careers

Woolston (2018)

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What Causes Mental Health Issues?

Woolston (2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerned:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Work-life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Funding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining work-life balance</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial issues</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding difficulties</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of research jobs available</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty about value of PhD</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The high number of students with multiple postdocs</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political landscape</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposter syndrome</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents could choose more than one answer.
What Causes Mental Health Issues?

Wide range of potential stressing factors:

- Career prospects
- Imposter syndrome
- Institution support
- Publish or perish
- Supervision
- Working conditions
- Funding
- Independence
- Mobility
- Social Support
- Teaching
- Work-life balance

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How to Address Mental Health Issues?

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Mentimeter Results from Stress & Well-Being @ KU Leuven 2018

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How to Address Mental Health Issues?


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How to Address Mental Health Issues?

Mental health should be a top priority:

- Raise awareness of mental health issues
- Identify many stressors and risk factors
- Fund research into mental health issues
- Offer policies and good practice examples
- Train and support early-career researchers
- Rethink research careers and assessment

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Thank you for listening!

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