

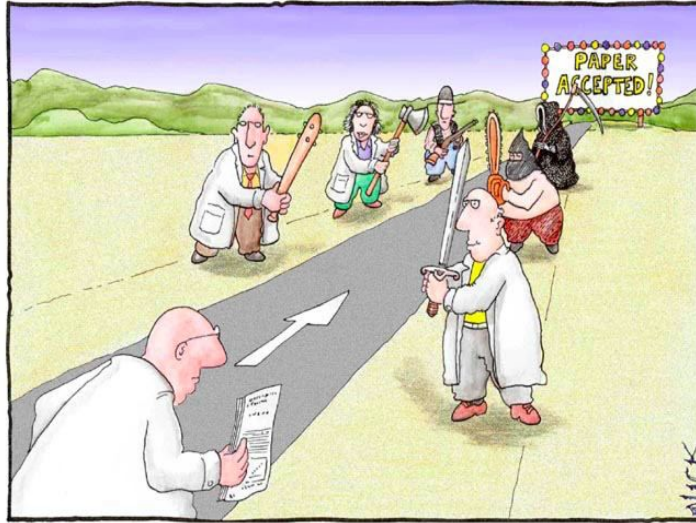
Researchers and Mental Health

Gareth O'Neill
EURAXESS BHO Meeting
02 December 2021

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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






(46) I would like to work/continue working in academia (e.g. at a university or research institute).

		Answers	Ratio
strongly agree		323	35.77 %
agree		305	33.78 %
neutral		173	19.16 %
disagree		77	8.53 %
strongly disagree		25	2.77 %
No Answer		0	0 %






(56) My institution provides adequate career development. : via training courses

		Answers	Ratio
strongly agree		45	4.98 %
agree		224	24.81 %
neutral		237	26.25 %
disagree		201	22.26 %
strongly disagree		196	21.71 %
No Answer		0	0 %

(56) My institution provides adequate career development. : via career counselling

		Answers	Ratio
strongly agree		31	3.43 %
agree		134	14.84 %
neutral		227	25.14 %
disagree		256	28.35 %
strongly disagree		255	28.24 %
No Answer		0	0 %

(56) My institution provides adequate career development. : via contact with future employers

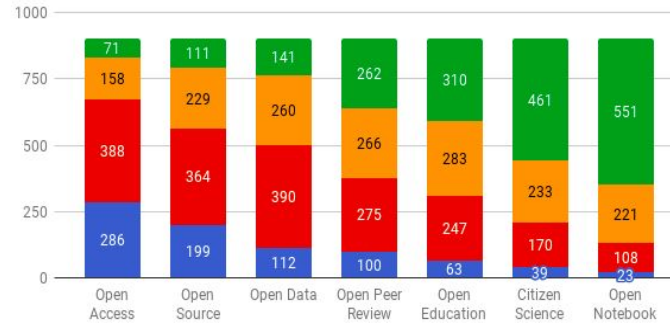
		Answers	Ratio
strongly agree		35	3.88 %
agree		121	13.4 %
neutral		259	28.68 %
disagree		227	25.14 %
strongly disagree		261	28.9 %
No Answer		0	0 %

[O'Neill et al \(2017\)](#) | [Eurodoc \(2017\)](#)

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■ nothing ■ a little ■ some ■ a lot



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What are Issues for Researchers?

- Urgent need to address mental health issues

Graduate survey: A love–hurt relationship

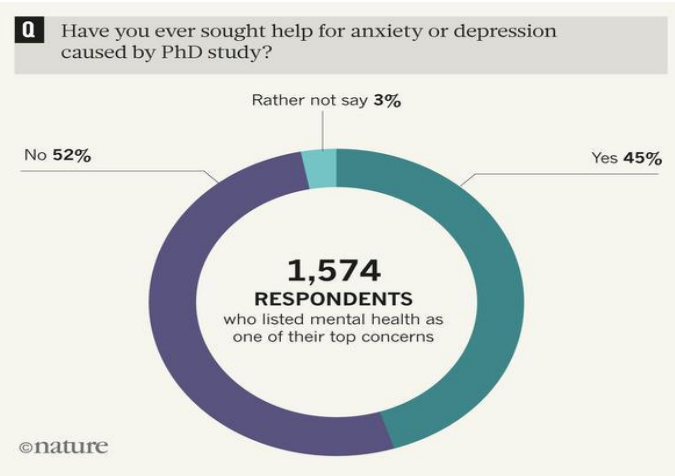
Chris Woolston

Nature 550, 549–552 (2017) doi:10.1038/nj7677-549a

Published online 25 October 2017

This article was originally published in the journal *Nature*

Nature's 2017 PhD survey reveals that, despite many problems with doctoral programmes, PhD students are as committed as ever to pursuing research careers.

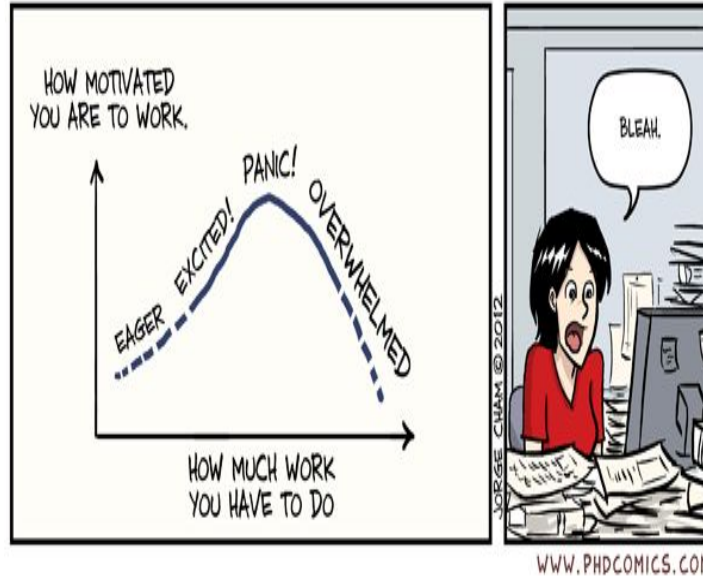


[Woolston \(2018\)](#) | [Eurodoc \(2017\)](#)

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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?



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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?

Flanders

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.

	SJR %	HIS %	Adj. RR ¹
Felt under constant strain	40.8	27.5	1.4
Unhappy and depressed	30.3	13.6	2.1
Lost sleep over worry	28.3	18.1	1.6
Could not overcome difficulties	26.1	12.0	2.4
Not enjoying day-to-day activities	25.4	13.1	2.2
Lost confidence in self	24.4	8.0	3.5
Not playing a useful role	22.5	9.2	2.3
Could not concentrate	21.7	10.7	1.9
Not feeling happy	21.2	11.1	2.2
Felt worthless	16.1	5.3	3.4
Could not make decisions	15.0	6.0	2.8
Could not face problems	13.4	4.3	3.7
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 \(2016\)](#)

41% under
constant strain!

30% unhappy
and depressed!



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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?

Leiden

	Leiden University PhD candidates	PhD candidates in Flanders	Highly educated in Flanders
	%	%	%
GHQ4+ / risk group	38.3	31.8	14.0
Well-being indicators (GHQ-12)			
Tension, feeling under constant pressure	46.8	40.8	27.2
Unhappy or depressed	32.8	30.3	13.7
Lack of sleep	32.8	28.3	18.1
Unable to overcome difficulties	31.5	26.1	10.7
Concentration problems	29.8	21.7	11.8
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	18.3	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!

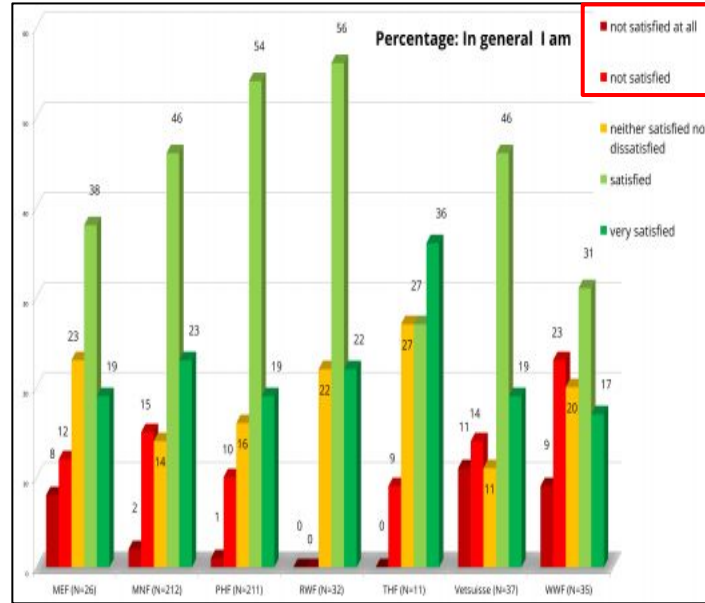


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Why Talk about Mental Health Issues?



Zurich



Vaux (2018)

**16% not
satisfied (at all)!**

**15% indifferent
on satisfaction!**

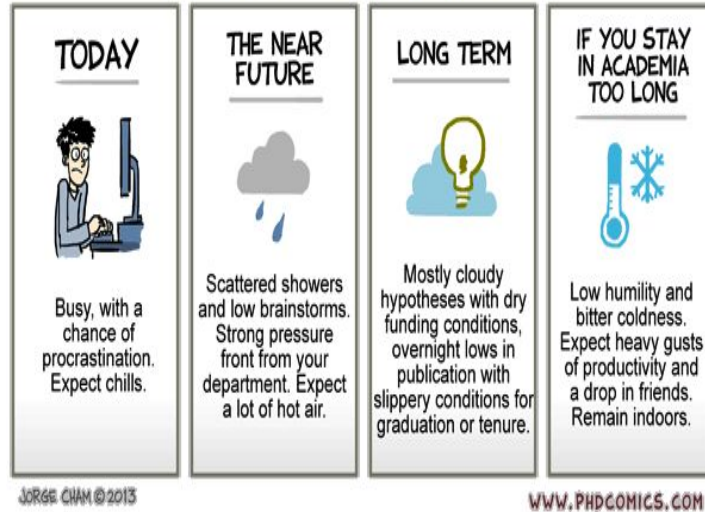


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What Causes Mental Health Issues?

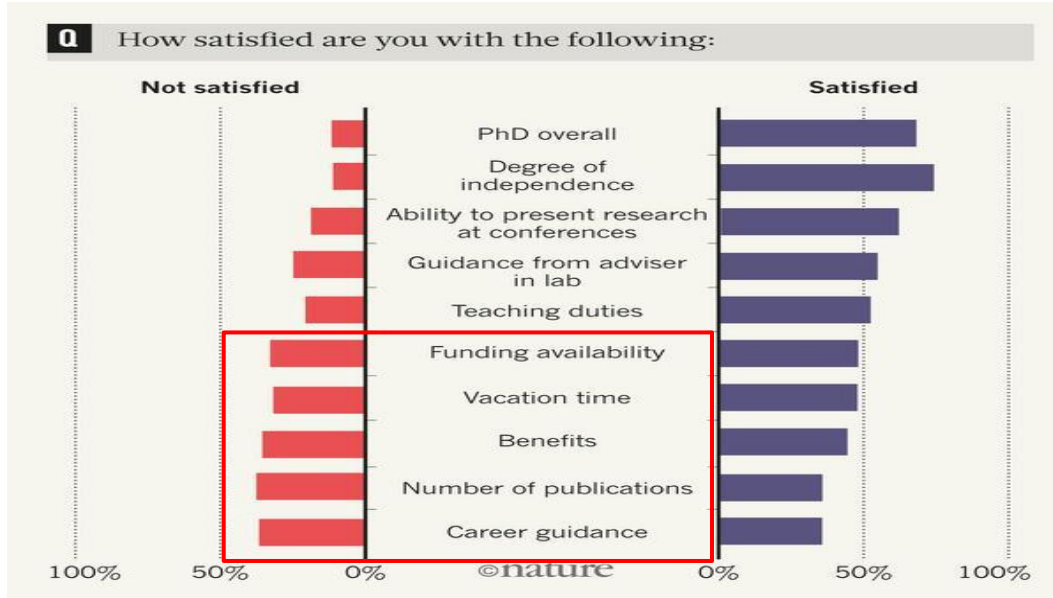


Your Academic Forecast



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What Causes Mental Health Issues?



Not satisfied:

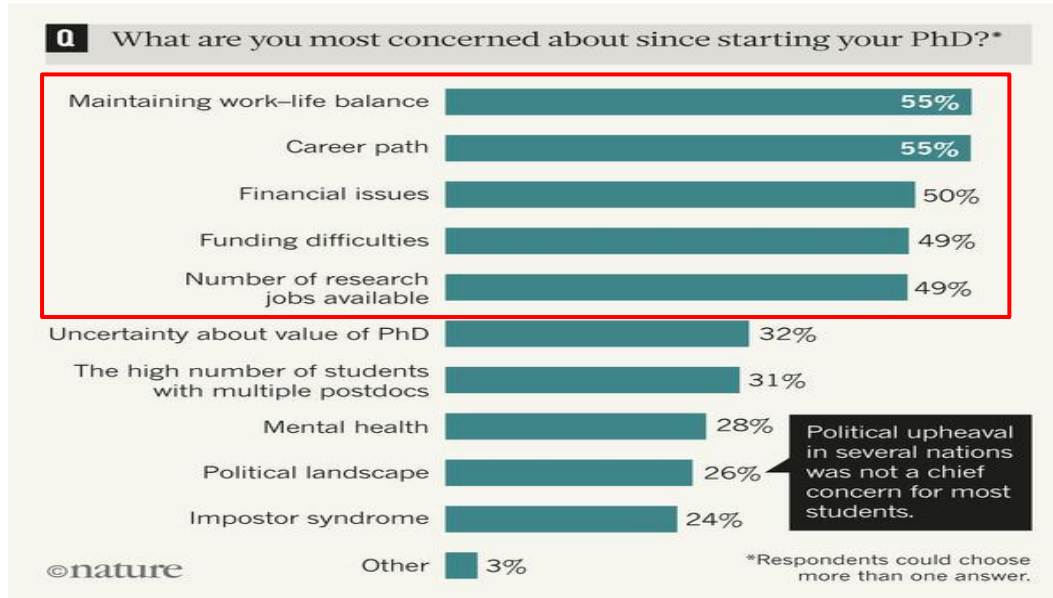
- Funding
- Work-life
- Benefits
- Publishing
- Careers



[Woolston \(2018\)](#)

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What Causes Mental Health Issues?



Concerned:

- Work-life
- Careers
- Finances
- Funding



[Woolston \(2018\)](#)

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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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How to Address Mental Health Issues?



Impact Outlook

- We do not know how prevalent mental health issues are amongst early-career researchers in Europe, what the exact causes are, or how to tackle these issues. Our priority is therefore to raise awareness and further to investigate these questions.
- We need widespread awareness raising and research into mental issues amongst early-career researchers, as well as organisational support and implementation of policies for mental health. For this to happen, all stakeholders in higher education and research in Europe need to work together.

Early-career researchers and mental health

Gareth O'Neill, President, and Malin Schreijen, Policy Officer, explain the steps that European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) is taking to protect and promote the mental wellbeing of early-career researchers.

Why are mental health issues so prevalent among early-career researchers (ECRs) in Europe?


ECRs are not alone in facing mental health issues. In fact, mental health issues are becoming more prevalent among all age groups. However, the early in life they do it for more than just academic reasons. They are exposed to intense training programmes, publish articles, attend conferences, and meet and supervise students. They are under constant pressure to produce and publish, and are highly motivated and have a strong desire to succeed. This can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety, which can in turn lead to mental health issues. ECRs are also often working in isolation, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. This can be exacerbated by the fact that ECRs are often working in a highly competitive environment, where they are constantly being compared to their peers. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, which can further exacerbate mental health issues.

What are the current challenges associated with addressing ECR mental health in Europe?

One of the main challenges is a lack of awareness of the scope of mental health issues in Europe. Eurodoc and its member organisations are working to raise awareness of mental health issues among ECRs and the wider academic community. Another challenge is a lack of resources and support for ECRs. Many ECRs do not have access to the same level of support and resources as their more established colleagues. This can make it difficult for them to manage their mental health issues. A third challenge is the stigma associated with mental health issues. Many ECRs are reluctant to seek help or support for fear of being judged or stigmatised. This can lead to mental health issues worsening over time.

eurodoc

The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers



How to stay sane in academia? Ways for combating stress and uncertainty

Join the webinar via youtu.be/m09v4TYd348

EURODOC WEBINAR

**07 March 2019
at 15.00-16.30 CET**

Join our experts for a webinar and open discussion on mental health issues and how to stay sane in academia!

Gareth O'Neill
Mental health issues for early-career researchers

Inge van der Weijden
Survey on mental health of doctoral candidates

Ekaterina Vinnik
Interpersonal communication under stress

Joaquim Alves da Silva
How to recognize warning signs of a breakdown?

Panel and audience
Q&A and a round table session

O'Neill & Schreijen (2018) | Eurodoc (2019)

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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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