

Motionens nummer 38

Motion till SULF:s kongress 2021

Mental health problems: a hazard in the work environment

Work-related mental health risks have been proliferating in the academic environment on all levels of employment. Multiple studies show that the situation is already alarming and needs immediate attention¹. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated these effects causing social isolation, stress, and fear of uncertainty². While this applies to all categories working in academia, it has struck doctoral candidates particularly hard due to the inherent vulnerability of their employment and the high levels of stress. SULF--DCA conducted a survey among doctoral candidates in February 2020 asking how they cope with work-related mental health problems and whether they are aware of, and have access to, university health services. Key findings from our survey, illustrated below, confirm that an already problematic situation was substantially aggravated by the pandemic.

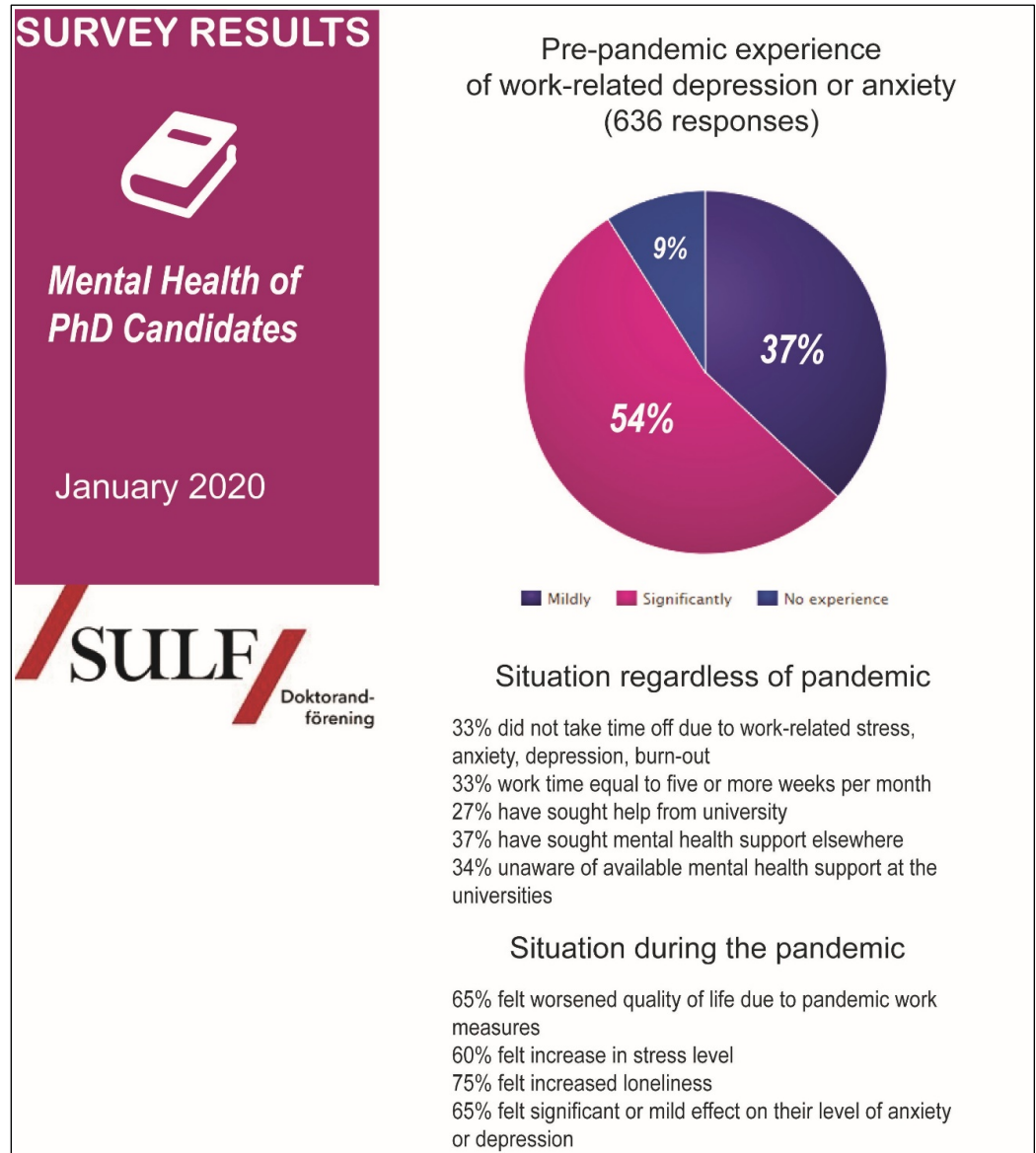
The results show that doctoral candidates experience high levels of work-related stress, even before considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. One-third of respondents needed to take time off work to recover. The scale of unpaid overtime on their work-related projects is also very alarming, with one-third of doctoral candidates working five or more weeks per month. Our survey results confirm the results from all other pre- and post-COVID studies on work-related stress, which have also shed light on gendered dimensions with more women researchers and doctoral candidates taking longer sick leave due to work-related situations.

Urgent measures are needed to address the mental health crisis in academia, and SULF should work together with higher education institutions to achieve this. Outcomes should include: (1) enhanced awareness and accessibility of professional mental health services, online resources, awareness training and workshops; (2) improved routines for documentation of mental health risks in the workplace, in the same way as other risks are routinely assessed, discussed and documented (e.g. financial, ethical); (3) urgently exploring further regulatory measures, in collaboration with the Government, Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslersämbetet*) and Work Environment

¹ Universitetskanslersämbetet. Rapport 2016:18 "Doktorandspegeln, en enkät om doktorandernas studiesituation". <https://www.uka.se/download/18.67d7db0e1598fa32b7fadbc6/1487841858377/rapport-2016-12-08-doktorandspegeln-doktoranders-studiesituation.pdf>

² Universitetsläraren. University teachers worked overtime – without pay. <https://universitetslararen.se/2021/06/17/university-teachers-worked-overtime-without-pay/>

Authority (*Arbetsmiljöverket*) to advance mental health practice at national and local levels.



The SULF Doctoral Candidate Association therefore submit:

- that SULF investigate the current impact of mental health problems, including the underlying systemic issues, and identify best practices for prevention and support;
- that SULF work together with higher education institutions to implement best practices for prevention and support regarding mental health risks, care and recovery.

For the SULF Doctoral Candidate Association
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