

Correlates of Researcher Mental Health: An Exploratory Study

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1. Scientific and practitioners' research presentations
  - a. Bottom-up and community-driven interventions
  - b. Institutional interventions and policies
  - c. Policy-Level insights
2. Workshop/hands-on practices for enhancing researcher mental health and well-being

## Purpose

Researcher mental health is a pervasive yet complex and multifaceted issue that has only recently gained greater traction in the academic community. A rapid evidence assessment study indicated university staff and postgraduate students are exposed to a higher risk of mental health disorders and burnout than people in other working populations, with the prevalence of such disorders equivalent to that of more prototypical high-risk jobs such as healthcare workers (Guthrie et al., 2017). While there are various sources of stress - ranging from the “publish or perish” work climate, insufficient resources, and difficulties in balancing teaching and research, to unsupportive leadership, lack of involvement in decision-making, and a heavy administrative burden (Franco-Santos & Doherty, 2017; Guthrie et al., 2017; Kinman & Johnson, 2019; Miller et al., 2011), most studies on the antecedents of researcher mental health so far have tended to focus on working conditions, as opposed to examining other potentially relevant correlates, such as academic productivity, perceived career success, or demographics such as career stage, organizational rank, family characteristics, and immigration status.

A comprehensive understanding of the nomological network of researcher mental health may contribute not only to the development of practical interventions but also to theory building. To illustrate, we still need to gain a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between productivity and mental health. On one hand, it could be argued that this relationship is likely to be positive because researchers with a higher level of academic output (i.e., a large number of publications) tend to be more content and healthy since they have more confidence in job security, may receive more grants, have higher perceived career success (De Rond & Miller, 2005). On the other hand, since research encompasses long working hours, a heavy workload,

and constant competition (Flaxman et al., 2012; Ogbona & Harris, 2004; Richards et al., 2016), extensive academic productivity may bring about increases in experienced stress and anxiety. Furthermore, as the academic output closely links to years of experience, career stage, and organizational rank, exploring possible conditioning effects of these variables may provide more contextualized insights into the relationship between productivity and mental health. For instance, under which circumstances does productivity positively correlate with mental health? It may well be the case that the relationship between productivity and mental health is conditioned by other variables, such as immigration status, family characteristics, and exposure to harassment in the workplace.

Overall, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationships in the data collected through a large-scale international survey, focusing on the relationships among academic productivity, mental health, and previously indicated demographic variables. It is our aim that the identified trends will serve as a starting point for more explanatory efforts that would deepen the understanding of the contextual antecedents of researcher mental health.

## **Design**

The data consists of self-rated responses from 1185 international MSCA alumni - collected through an online survey, and matched with 625 corresponding researcher profiles scraped from ORCID that are used to operationalize academic productivity. The age of survey participants ranges from 23 to 73 years ( $M=38.02$ ,  $SD=8.59$ ), 49.3% of participants are female (46.3% male and 4.4% non-binary/prefer not to say). A large proportion of participants come from Italy (15.7%), Spain (11%), India (7.5%), Germany (5.7%), France (4.1%) and a moderate percentage from Argentina (1.8%), Brazil (2.1%), China (2.1%).

The dataset is unique in that it contains data not only of academic staff but also of people whose current job is non-academic (15.9% of the sample size). Besides, the dataset is multi-dimensional with different variables pertaining to marital status and children, perceived success and employability, and work barriers. The richness of the data set gives us the freedom to touch upon

different constructs and hypotheses, particularly those pertaining to novel comparisons between people who work in academia vs. people that have left, and the impact of organizational status.

## Results

Data analysis is currently underway, however some noteworthy correlations of gender, marital status, and having children with well-being and depression/anxiety can already be shared (see Table 1).

	Gender	Married	Has child/children
Wellbeing	Male	.172**	.150**
	Female	.140**	.087
Depression and anxiety	Male	-.105*	-.108*
	Female	-.132**	-.076

*Table 1. Comparison of the correlations between family-related variables and wellbeing of male and female participants. Stars indicate significance on the level  $p < .001$  (\*\*\*),  $p < .01$  (\*\*) and  $p < .05$  (\*).*

Productivity measures	Current position	Wellbeing
Articles	Academia	.110*
	Non-academia	-.076
Books published	Academia	.135**
	Non-academia	-.402*
Grants received	Academia	.016
	Non-academia	-.370*
Awards	Academia	.007

	Non-academia	-.313
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*Table 2. Comparison between people currently working in academia and those who left, on the correlations between productivity and wellbeing. Stars indicate significance on the level  $p < .001$  (\*\*\*),  $p < .01$  (\*\*) and  $p < .05$  (\*).*

Table 2 shows a positive correlation between productivity and well-being for MSCA alumni who are currently working in academia. However, it should be noted that the relationship between productivity and well-being is not consistent across all measures, with no significant correlation, for instance, between grants and awards received and well-being.

For those who have left academia, the data is more mixed. Former researchers who have moved into non-academic positions exhibit a moderate negative correlation between productivity (articles, books, and grants) and well-being, in contrast to the positive patterns found for their academic counterparts. These findings suggest that the relationship between productivity and well-being may vary depending on the context of the work and career goals, specifically between people who stayed and people that left academia.

## **Implications**

By the time of the ReMO conference we expect to have more complete results pertaining to relationships among a range of different variables that were measured. During our presentation we hope to engage in lively discussions around these data in an effort to make sense of them, and work towards a shared understanding of researcher mental health. Finally, the findings have the potential to inform the development of more effective interventions and policies that dissect and are customized based on different social characteristics and backgrounds revolving around the issue of researchers' mental health.

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## Resources

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