

# Nature Ph.D. survey puts spotlight on mental health, harassment and student debt

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The fifth biennial survey of Ph.D. students, conducted by the journal *Nature* in conjunction with UK education market research company Shift Learning, provides insight into the challenges and concerns currently faced by Ph.D. students worldwide. The survey, which was completed by the highest number of respondents since its inception,

included for the first time questions on mental health, bullying, harassment and student debt. Respondents were self-selecting, based all over the world and represented the full spectrum of scientific fields. In addition to English, the survey was also available in Chinese, French, Portuguese and Spanish.

Overall, the results indicated that most Ph.D. students were satisfied with their decision to pursue a Ph.D. (75 percent) and were also generally satisfied with their Ph.D. experience (71 percent). However, further questions that explored students' concerns revealed that uncertainty with career prospects, maintaining a [work-life balance](#) and funding were important issues.

Some key findings from the survey include:

- 21 percent of respondents reported experiencing bullying, and the main perpetrators were supervisors, other students or staff.
- Discrimination or harassment in their Ph.D. programme was experienced by 21 percent of respondents.
- 36 percent of respondents sought help for anxiety or depression caused by their studies.
- 27 percent of respondents reported that they spend 41-50 hours per week on their Ph.D. programme, with a quarter saying that they spend 51-60 hours per week.
- Just under 50 percent of respondents reported a long-hours culture at their university.
- Almost 20 percent of respondents said they have a job alongside their Ph.D. studies and the main reason given was to help make ends meet (53 percent).

Detailed analyses of the survey results will be published in the careers section of three upcoming editions of *Nature*. The first gives a general overview of the results, the second focuses on the mentoring of Ph.D.

students and the third explores the Ph.D. experience in China. The full data set of the survey is also available [here](#).

David Payne, Managing Editor at Springer Nature, said: "Many people assume that once someone has enrolled on a Ph.D. programme they are set up for life, but sometimes reality can be quite different. Polls like *Nature's* Ph.D. survey allow us to understand the challenges students face and can be invaluable to institutions when they are considering the needs of their students. We are particularly pleased that this year's survey—the fifth in a decade—included important questions about mental health and well-being. We hope that these results will serve as a guidance for decision-makers at universities as well as prospective and current Ph.D. students."

Provided by Springer

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