# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN ACADEMIA

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# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

# Session Overview

- Higher education in the 21$^{st}$ century

- Introduction to academic mental health

- Activity 1: Common stressors

- Activity 2: Coping strategies

- Support Your Mental Health

# Higher Education in the 21st Century

- Structural changes in universities internationally have led to greater quantification of academic output, increasing casualization, reduced autonomy, and increased workload pressures (Sang, Powell, Finkel & Richards, 2015)

- *Times Higher Education* survey (2018) of academics highlighted workload, difficulty maintaining friendships, carer responsibilities, and work-life balance as areas of concern

- Increasing student entitlement associated with faculty stress, exhaustion and burnout

- High rates of adjunct appointments and casualization across the world
  - The consequences of casualization include lack of time for professional development (Klopper & Power, 2014) perceived marginalization (Loveday, 2018), and poor working conditions (Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa, 2010)

# Academic Mental Health

- Strong evidence worldwide for a mental health "crisis" in universities

- University and College Union survey (2013, UK)
  - Nearly three-quarters of faculty in the sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I find my job stressful" and more than one third said they "often" or "always" experienced levels of stress they found unacceptable

- Academics and postgraduate students are at increased risk of having or developing a mental health problem relative to other populations (Guthrie et al., 2017)

- Nottingham Trent University UCU survey (2018) revealed that 41% of academics believed that their workload had a negative effect on their mental health; 18% worked a full unpaid day on weekend

- Teaching evaluations are often stressful for faculty and can lead to heightened anxiety; abusive anonymous comments can be highly distressing (Heffernan, 2021)

# Mental Health in Business Schools

- Lacking discipline-specific research in this context!

- Some evidence for poor mental health in undergraduate students; limited research with postgraduate students and faculty (see Edwards, Martin & Ashkanasy, 2021 for a review)

- Considerable anecdotal evidence that many academics in business schools experience high levels of stress and reduced well-being overall

- Greater managerialism linked to increasing work demands and lower resources; in turn, this is associated with burnout and turnover among academic staff (McCarthy & Dragouni, 2020)

- High rates of depression, anxiety and impostor syndrome in PhD students (Pervez et al., 2020)

# Mental Health in PhD students

- A major survey at the University of California, Berkeley revealed that almost 47% of PhD students reported symptoms of depression, as compared to 37% of Masters students (University of California-Berkeley Graduate Assembly, 2015).

- In a review, Sverdlik et al. (2018: 363) noted that "... [even] studies that aim to explore the positive emotions associated with the doctoral experience unfortunately tend to report negative emotions as the dominant affective state for PhD students."

- Nature (2019) international survey of doctoral students revealed 71% were generally satisfied with their experience, but 36% had sought help for anxiety or depression related to their PhD

- One in two PhD students experiences psychological distress; one in three is at risk of developing a mental illness (Levecque et al., 2017)

- In an international study, around 40% of doctoral students met the provisional criteria for a mental illness (Evans et al., 2018)

# Activity: Common Stressors

- What challenges have you faced as a HDR student?
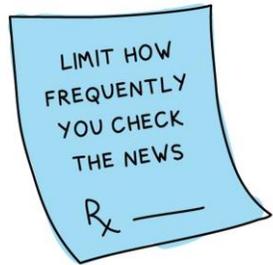
# Activity: Coping Strategies

- How do you prefer to cope with these challenges?

# Support Your Mental Health

| | Seek professional help if you are struggling |
|---|---|
| | Prioritize sleep, nutrition and exercise |
| | Nurture important relationships |
| | Practice self-care |
| | Join a social group (or two… or three) |
| | Identify and challenge unhelpful thinking patterns |
| | Build an identity outside of your PhD |

# Contact Details

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BE KIND TO YOUR MIND

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