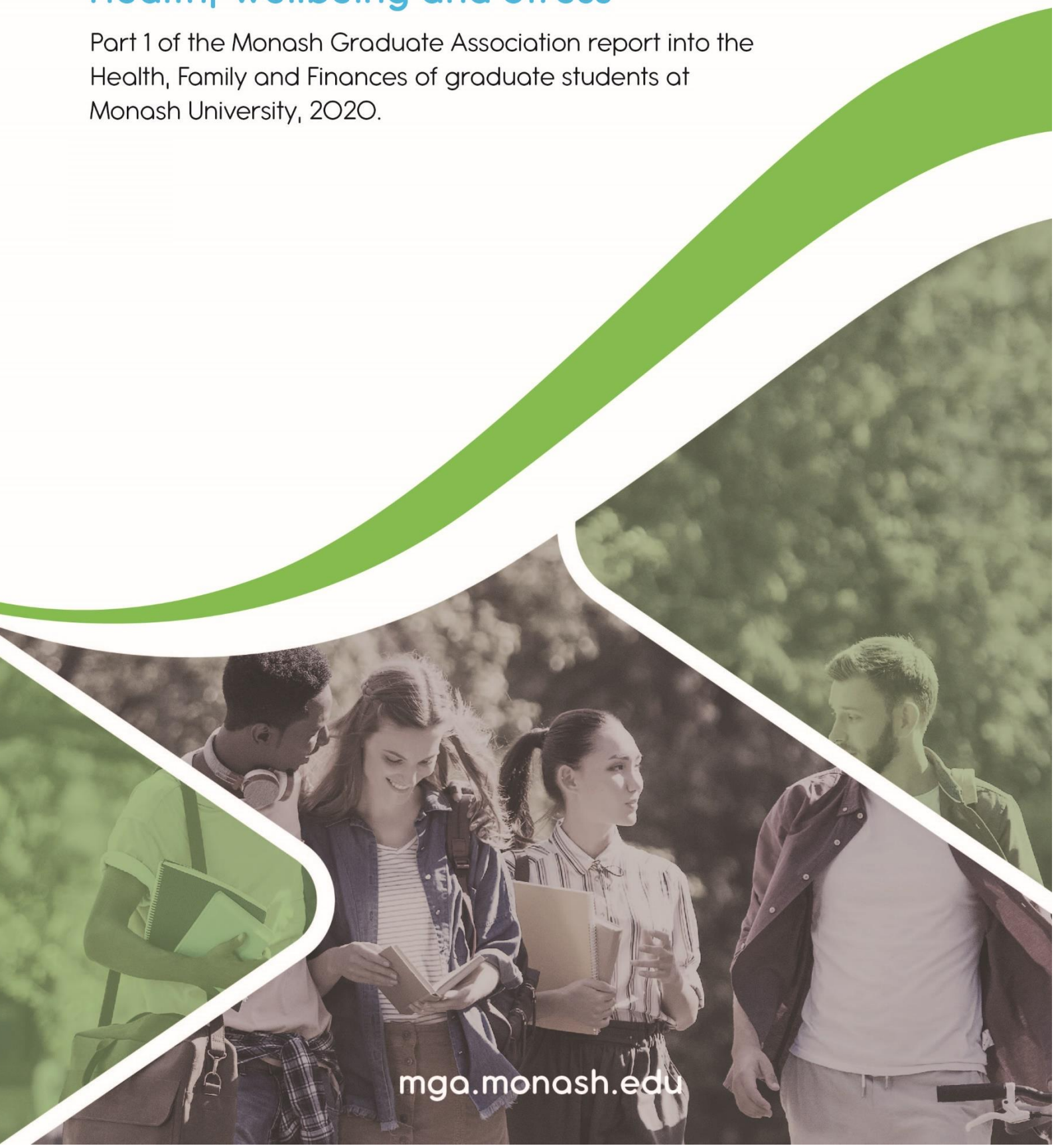



Health, Wellbeing and Stress

Part 1 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.





The MGA would like to thank the graduate students who participated in this survey. 2020 was undoubtedly a challenging and stressful year and we greatly appreciate you taking the time out to help us better understand your situation and needs.

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Table of Contents

(i) Executive Summary.....	1
(ii) Introduction	3
1. General wellbeing and social support.....	5
1.1 Wellbeing	5
1.2 Satisfaction with health and life	6
1.3 Meaningful academic and social contact.....	6
1.4 Social support.....	7
2. Stress.....	8
2.1 Temporary or chronic stress	8
2.2 Level of stress.....	8
2.3 Origin of stress - Comments.....	9
3. Mental wellbeing	11
3.1 State of mind.....	11
3.2 Wellbeing and work-life balance	12
3.3 Graduate student mental health – Comments.....	13
3.4 Accessing mental health services.....	15
3.5 Preventative factors in seeking help.....	16
3.6 Maintaining wellbeing - Comments.....	17
4. Discrimination	18
4.1 Discrimination at university	18
4.2 Discrimination by demographics	19
4.3 Discrimination and state of mind.....	20
4.4 Discrimination – Comments.....	21
5 Conclusion.....	23
Key findings.....	23
(iii) Recommendations.....	25
Recommendations for Monash University	25
Recommendations for the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)	26
Appendix 1: Demographics.....	27

(i) Executive Summary

In 2020, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) conducted a survey of Monash graduate students in regards to their health, family and finances. The main findings as they relate to graduate students' health, wellbeing and stress are presented in this report.

General wellbeing and social support

Monash graduate students indicated that their general wellbeing was worse off in May/June of 2020 than upon commencement of their degree, with the COVID-19 pandemic having a substantially negative impact on the general wellbeing of many respondents.

Monash graduate students were more likely than not to be satisfied with their health and life.

Monash graduate students predominantly agreed that they were comfortable with their social support network; however, domestic students were seemingly better-off than international students.

Stress

COVID-19 was a major source of stress for Monash graduate students; however, academic stress and the prospects of finding a job upon completion of their course were also prominent sources of stress.

Approximately three in every five respondents maintained that their main source of stress was *temporary, due to a specific incident or situation*; however, 32% referred to their main source of stress as *chronic*.

Mental wellbeing

Monash graduate students indicating that their mental health was either *extremely poor* or *poor* rose from 9% at commencement of their course to 31% at this point in time (May/June 2020).

International students (28%) were more than twice as likely as domestic students (11%) to describe themselves as lonely either *always* or *most of the time*.

Respondents who declared that they were in a poor mental health position were substantially more likely to also state that their work-life balance was poor. The reverse was also true, with those declaring themselves energetic, relaxed, motivated, and happy, substantially less likely to state that their work-life balance was poor.

Just under half (45%) of Monash graduate students declared that they had previously accessed support for a mental health problem.

The cost of seeking professional help was, by some distance, identified as the most-relevant preventative factor.

Discrimination

Approximately 40% of Monash graduate students reported experiencing discrimination either *sometimes* or more often.

Of the demographic groups analysed, parents reported experiencing some form of discrimination more than any other group.

Those who had experienced discrimination were less likely than those who had not to be satisfied with their health and lives, and were also more likely to have worse mental health outcomes.

(ii) Introduction

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) ran a survey of Monash graduate students in May-June 2020. The aim of the survey was to explore and measure the experiences of graduate students at Monash University, with a specific focus on three key areas: health, family and finances. The survey was advertised in the MGA newsletter, the MGA website, electronic posters across campuses and through contacts with Monash faculty groups and associate deans, many of whom agreed to forward the advertising of the survey to their entire cohorts. Participants were self-selecting, so an incentive scheme (comprising the opportunity to win gift cards worth up to \$100 in value) was used to assist in attracting a representative sample.

A total of nine-hundred and one partially and fully completed responses were received.¹ The demographics of the respondents are outlined in the Appendix.

This report presents both quantitative and qualitative data from Monash University graduate student respondents as it relates to their **health, wellbeing and stress**. It is the first report of a four-part series detailing the results of the MGA's Health, Family and Finances Survey 2020. This series includes:

HEALTH, WELLBEING AND STRESS

Part 1 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

PARENTS AND CARERS

Part 2 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

FINANCES

Part 3 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

SATISFACTION WITH MONASH

Part 4 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

Graduate students were asked to respond to a series of multiple choice and Likert-scale questions,² with open-ended questions presented as an opportunity for participants to expand on their responses. Comments were analysed and coded into common themes with some responses coded under multiple themes, if relevant.

In order to better comprehend the quantitative and qualitative data and determine trends, a number of comparisons were run based on a student's characteristics, such as gender, or responses

¹ Not every respondent who commenced the survey went on to complete it, while those who did were not necessarily required to answer every question. As a result, the number of respondents to each question varies. Please see the individual graph/table for number of respondents to that specific question.

² Where responses were under 5% (e.g. the total number of students responding 'extremely poor' to a question/statement was less than 5%), the figure has been removed from most tables to avoid that table becoming incomprehensible.

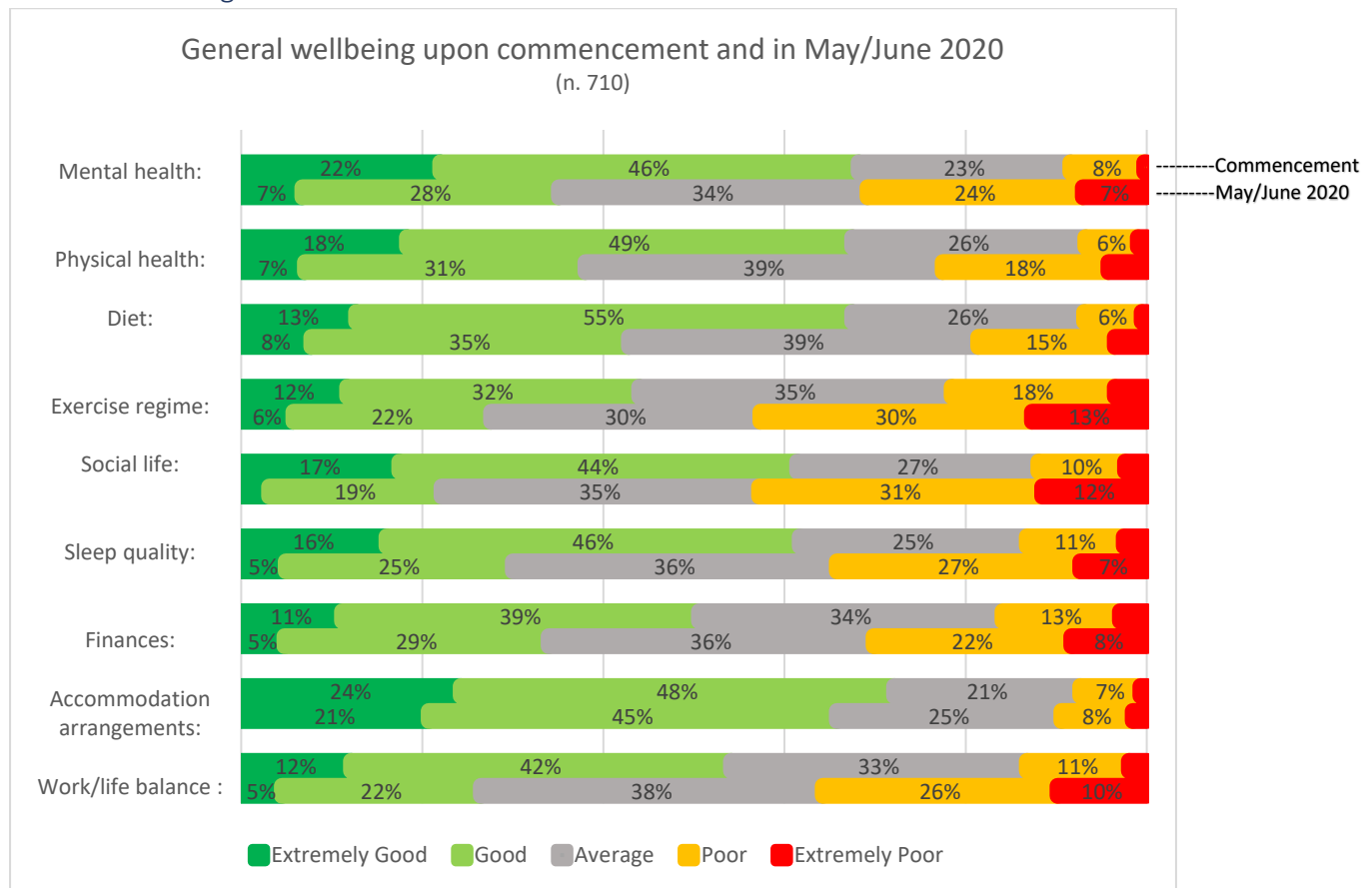
to certain questions e.g. have you experienced discrimination at the university. On occasion and when relevant, these comparisons are provided in graphs; however, often graphs are not provided.

All faculties were represented, while overall respondents were skewed towards full-time (90%), Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students (68%). Female (64%) and male (35%) genders were well represented, as were international (53%) and domestic students (47%). Appendix 1 provides the demographics of respondents in greater detail.

This research has been approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.

1. General wellbeing and social support

1.1 Wellbeing



Across the board, graduate students at Monash indicated that their general wellbeing was worse off in May/June 2020 than it was upon the commencement of their degree.

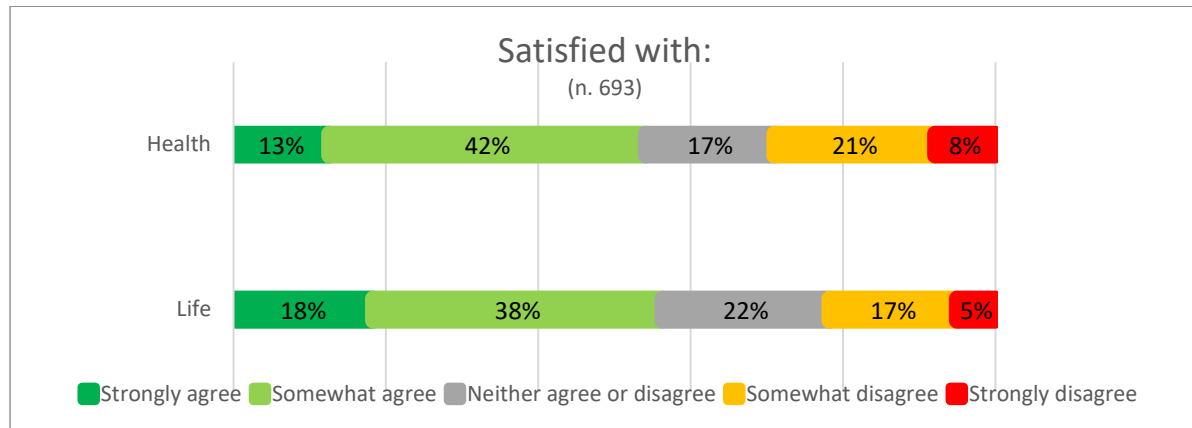
Those indicating that their mental health was either *extremely poor* or *poor* rose from 8% at commencement to 31% at the time of the survey (see 3. *Mental Wellbeing*). Similarly, having an *extremely poor* or *poor* social life rose from 12% to 43%, sleep quality from 13% to 34% and work/life balance from 13% to 36% (see 3.2 *Wellbeing and work-life balance*).

This survey was completed during May and June of 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and during what has been described as Melbourne’s “first-wave” lockdown. It is worth noting that mental health and wellbeing issues increased for students during Melbourne’s “second-wave” lockdown between July and October.³ The pandemic had a substantially negative impact on the health and wellbeing of Monash graduate students. For more information on the extent to which COVID-19 specifically impacted Monash graduate students, please see *The COVID-19 pandemic and Monash graduate students: MGA 2020 Survey on Health, Family and Finance*.⁴

³ Jeremy Cass. “International Students: Mental Health Impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic 2020-21 and beyond,” *Live, Learn, Thrive: IEAA Student Life Forum 2021 (Conference)*, Melbourne, 24 February 2021.

⁴ <https://mga.monash.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/COVID-19-Pandemic-and-Monash-University-Graduate-Students.pdf>

1.2 Satisfaction with health and life

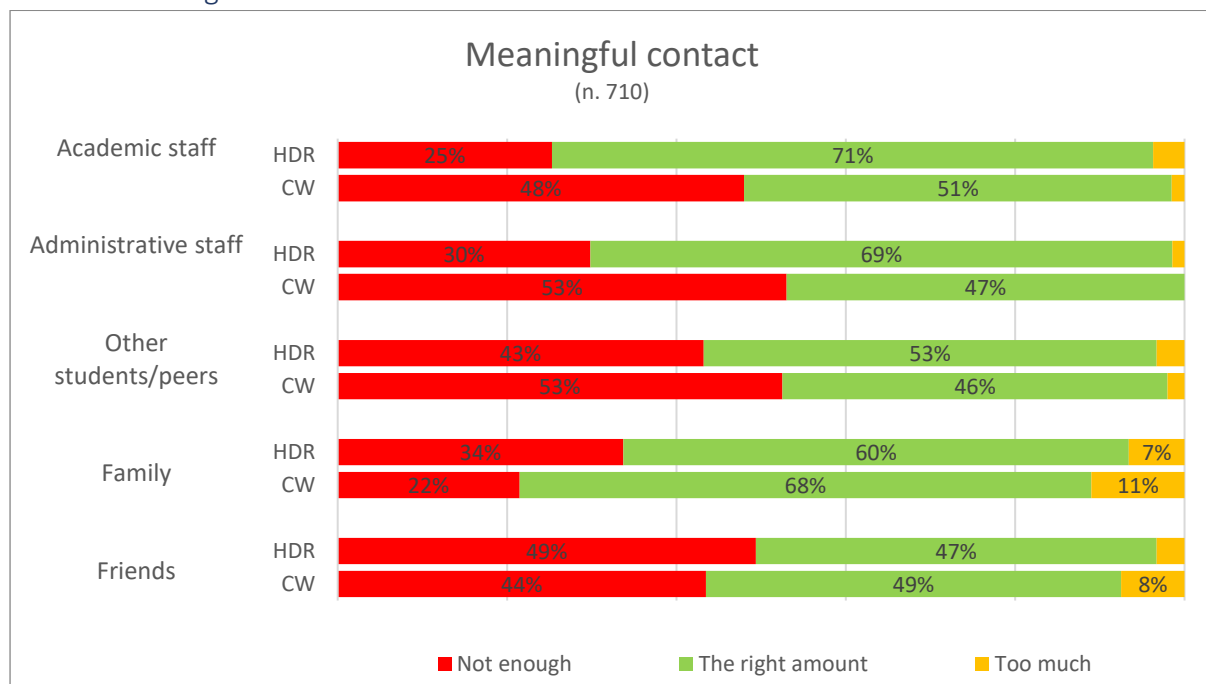


Monash graduate students were more likely than not to be satisfied with their health and life.

There were limited discrepancies between demographic groups regarding their health satisfaction with the only notable difference being between LGBTIQ+ respondents (37% of whom either *strongly* or *somewhat* disagreed that they were satisfied with their health) and those who did not identify as such (27%).

Meanwhile, coursework students (30%) were more likely than HDRs (19%) to disagree that they were satisfied with their lives, as were non-parents (24%) in relation to parents (14%).

1.3 Meaningful academic and social contact

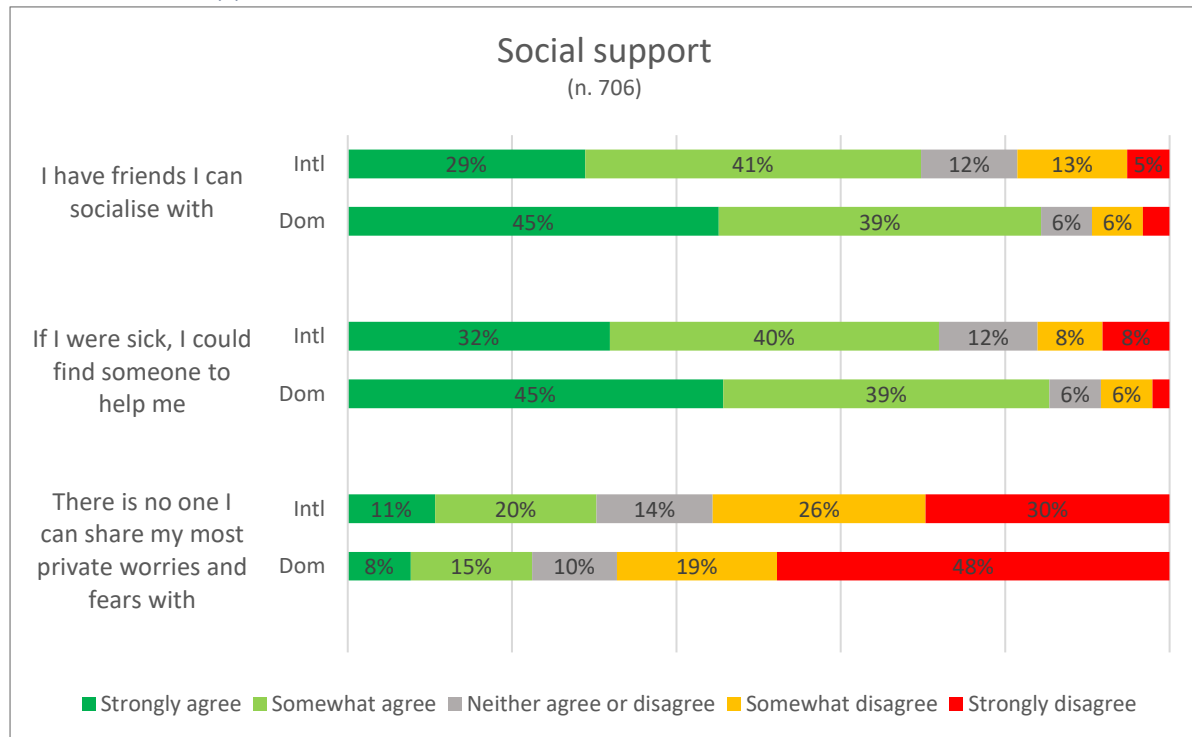


As indicated in the table above, coursework students were far more likely than HDRs to indicate that they were not having enough meaningful contact with university staff. This was also true (though slightly less prominent) of HASS students in comparison to STEM students.

It is also worth noting that there was a major discrepancy between international and domestic coursework students regarding meaningful contact with administrative staff. Almost two-thirds

(62%) of International coursework students indicating that they were not having enough meaningful contact with administrative staff compared to 34% of domestic coursework students.

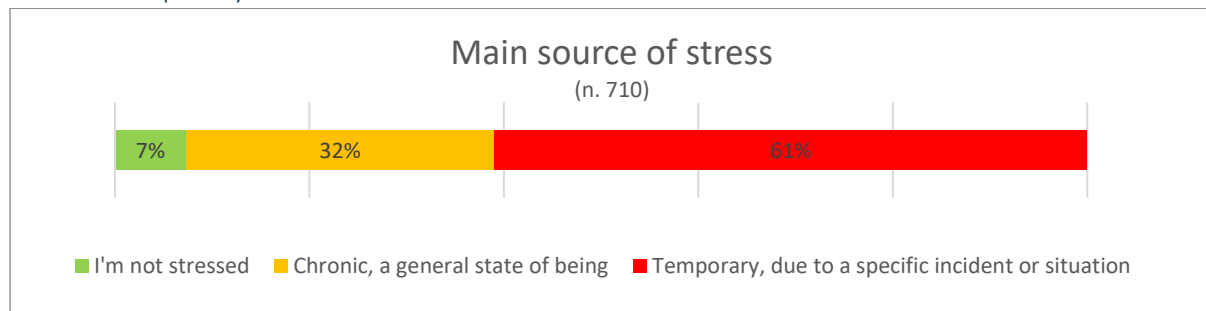
1.4 Social support



Monash graduate students predominantly agreed that they were comfortable with their social support network; however, domestic students were better-off in this area than were international students.

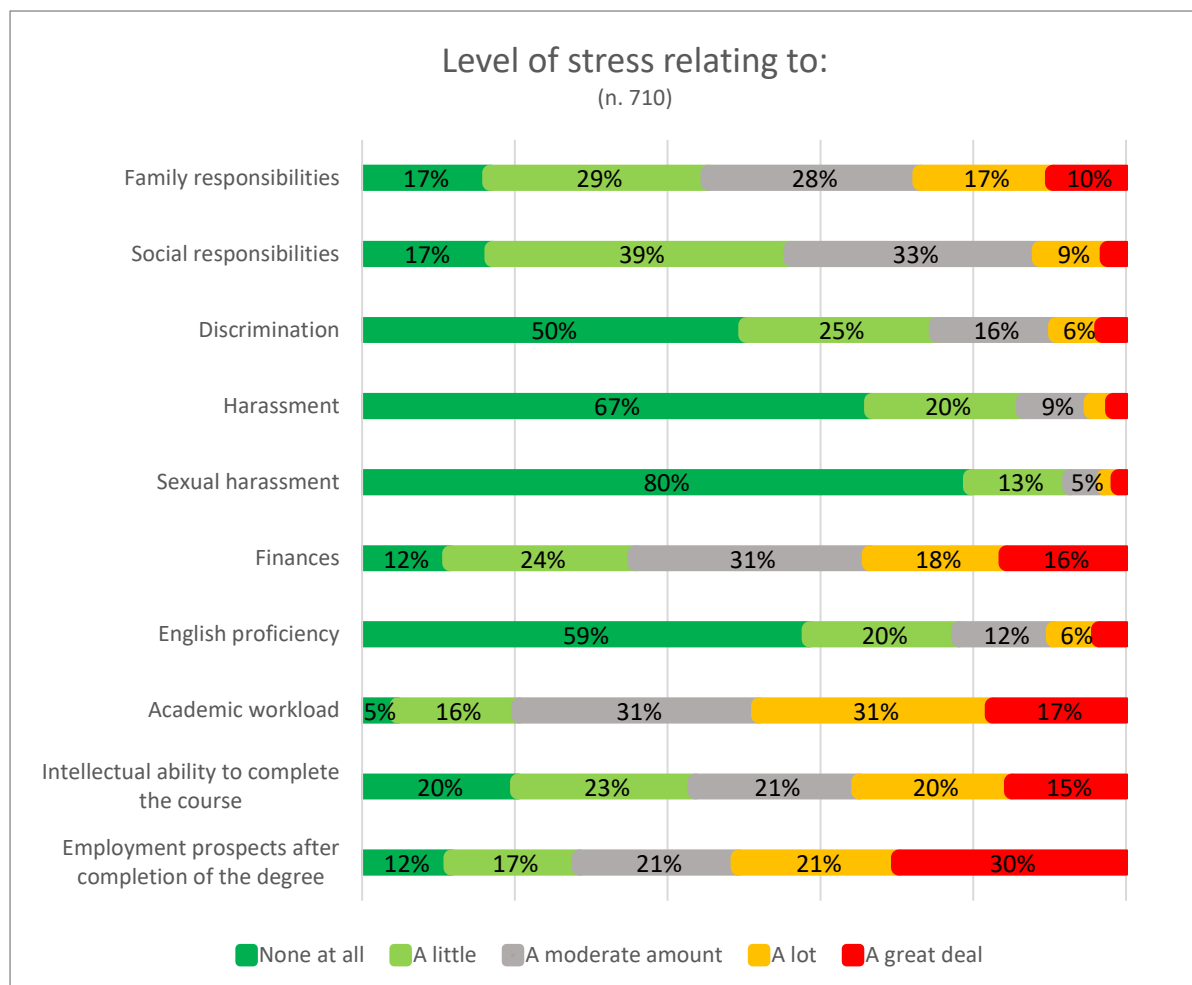
2. Stress

2.1 Temporary or chronic stress



Only 7% of the 710 respondents to this question said that they were not stressed, while 61% reported that their main source of stress was temporary. Given the survey was administered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a significant number of respondents identified it as the origin of their stress (see 2.3 *Origin of stress – Comments*), it can be assumed that the pandemic was a major reason why more than three in every five students said their stress was temporary.

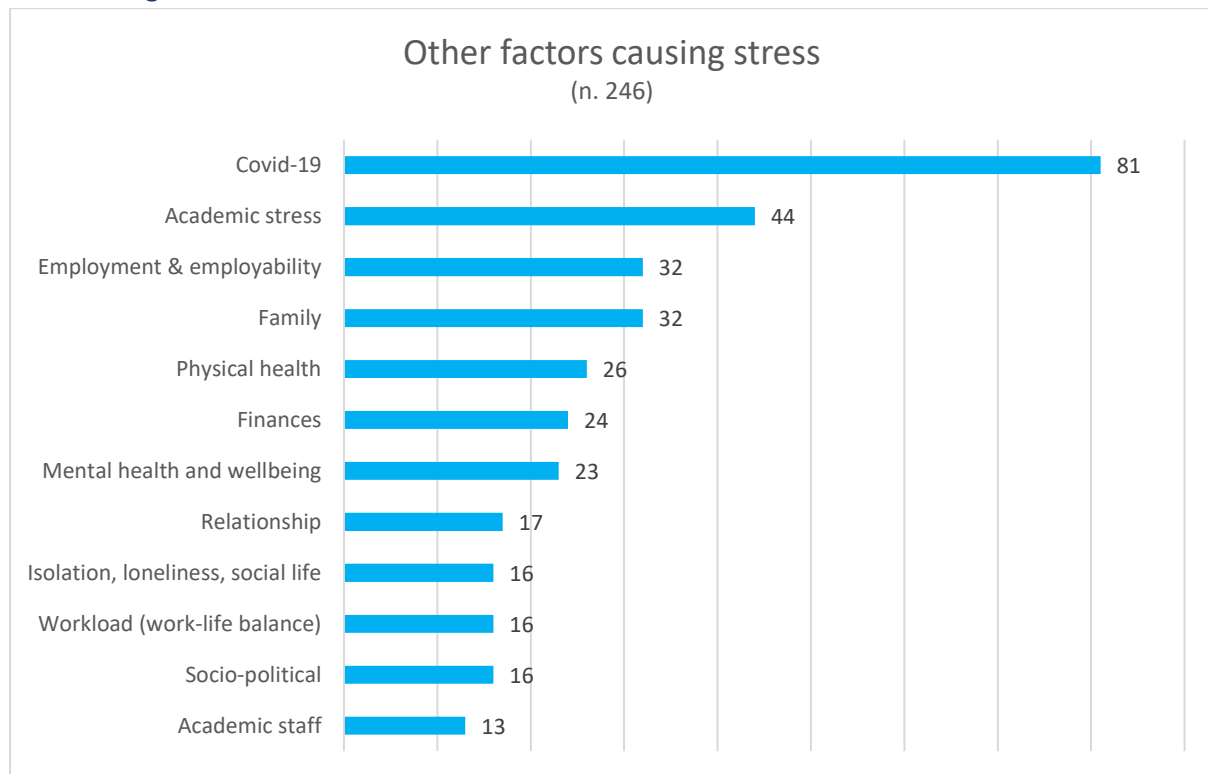
2.2 Level of stress



Monash graduate students were most-stressed about their employment prospects after completion of their degree and their academic workload, while they were least-stressed about being sexually harassed.

Regarding their employment prospects after completion, graduate students under the age of 30 had a lot more stress (59% *a great deal or a lot*) than those over the age of 30 (36%), while non-parents (55%) were more stressed than parents (34%), internationals (56%) were more stressed than domestic students (46%), and coursework students (58%) were more stressed than HDRs (48%).

2.3 Origin of stress - Comments



The **COVID-19 global pandemic** was the primary source of stress for Monash graduate students in May/June of 2020. Interesting comments, included:

“My mother is seriously sick back home and shut down because of COVID is preventing me to make that trip to go visit her. It is a long flight back home and I am also worried about catching corona on my way there. Worse would be if I expose her to it when she is already immunocompromised. I have been finding myself in a very stressful situation for last 3 months. No option is good for my mental health. But I am still trying to somehow keep going with my daily life even when sometimes I feel I have a lot of ... stress.”

“Anticipating the end of my stay here since covid-19 has pretty much impacted my country.”

“Worrying about older, immune suppressed family members getting sick/getting COVID.”

“Missing family overseas and with corona not knowing when I can go back.”

Many graduate students were also dealing with **academic stress**. These comments included:

“There are so many assignments and with everything being online, it's causing a lot of stress.”

“Workload of my current course is extremely high plus too stressed about my financial status. Have no part time job and even no time for doing it because all the time I have to do are assignments.”

“Politics between members of the research group - especially people who don't contribute evenly or reliably to the required tasks to run a laboratory.”

“PhD deadlines. Fieldwork cancelled due to COVID-19.”

As mentioned in 2.2 *Level of stress*, many respondents were stressed about their **employment and employability**. Interesting comments included:

“Uncertainty of job market after COVID-19, not knowing where I will end up after my PhD (whether to make it a goal to stay in Australia).”

“The Australian government is gutting Humanities departments. There are no job options for when I graduate.”

“Lack of shifts at work due to Covid-19.”

Stress about **family** was also prominent among respondents. These included:

“Limited childcare during Covid and feeling guilty that my 3yo has a lot of screen time.”

“Responsibility for my elderly mother. A sibling with mental health issues.”

“Covid-19 has brought my parents here living in same home as my immediate family for an extended period of time.”

“Being apart from family (which is in Brazil) + pregnancy in the current circumstances (COVID).”

Other interesting comments included:

“Isolation made me sick.”

“Medical conditions encounter during my studies which affect both my physical and mental health.”

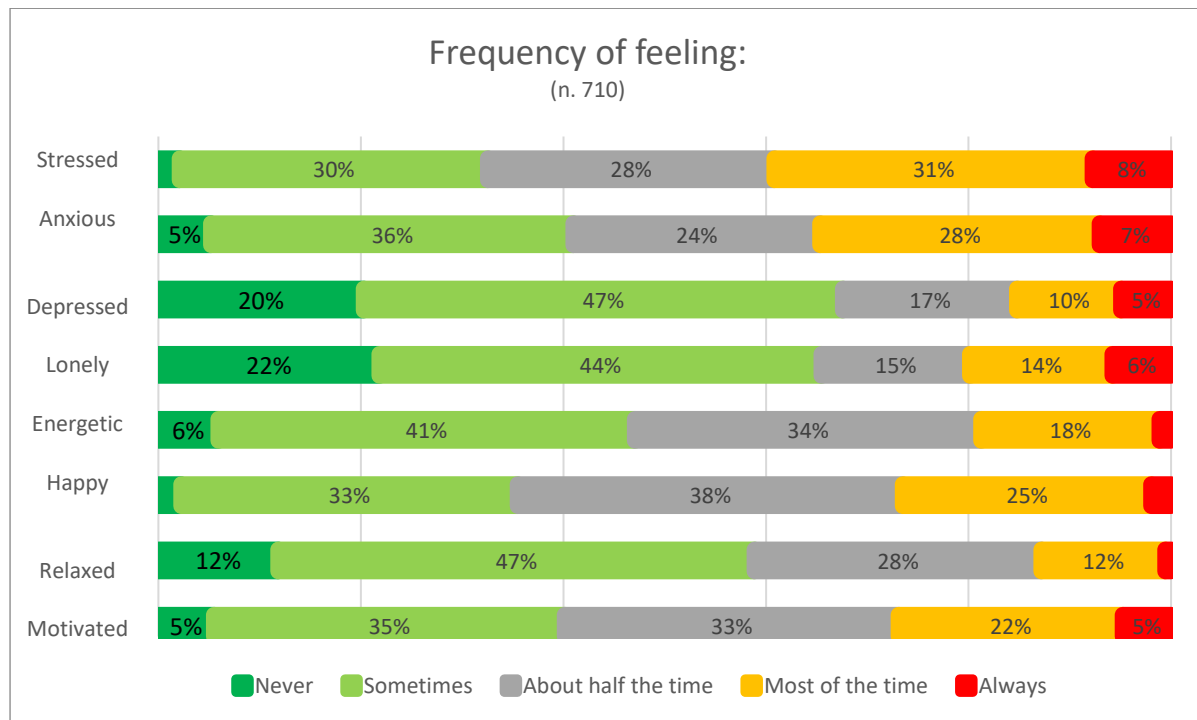
“My partner had a serious work accident and I am caring for him. Also I am working full-time.”

“As international student (with temporary Visa) during Covid-19, being trapped in Australia, can't return to Australia if I want/decide to visit loved ones. Feeling of discriminated from government.”

“Being in a long distance relationship with no certainty of when I will next be able to see my girlfriend.”

3. Mental wellbeing

3.1 State of mind



Graduate students have been determined to be up to more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety as the general population.⁵ As this was not a clinical study, the extent to which Monash graduate students were suffering from these conditions was not scientifically measured; however, respondents were asked to self-identify if they considered themselves to fall into these categories, while also reflecting on their state of mind through measurements such as their stress and motivation levels.

Almost two in every five Monash graduate students (39%) indicated that they felt stressed either *always* or *most of the time*, while 35% said that they either *never* or only *sometimes* feel happy.

More than one in three Monash graduate students (35%) self-identified as being anxious *always* or *most of the time*, while 15% said the same in relation to feeling depressed.

International students were far more likely than domestic students to describe themselves as lonely either *always* or *most of the time* (28% to 11%).

Previous studies have highlighted that stress may be perceived with greater frequency by underrepresented students in STEM fields, such as women.⁶ This was reflected in the results of this survey with female STEM students having significantly higher levels of perceived stress compared to that of their male colleagues. Almost half of female STEM respondents (46%) reported feeling stressed *always* or *most of the time* compared to 30% of male STEM respondents. While female HASS students also identified with being stressed either *always* or *most of the time* more so than male HASS students, the gap between the genders was not as substantial (40%/32%).

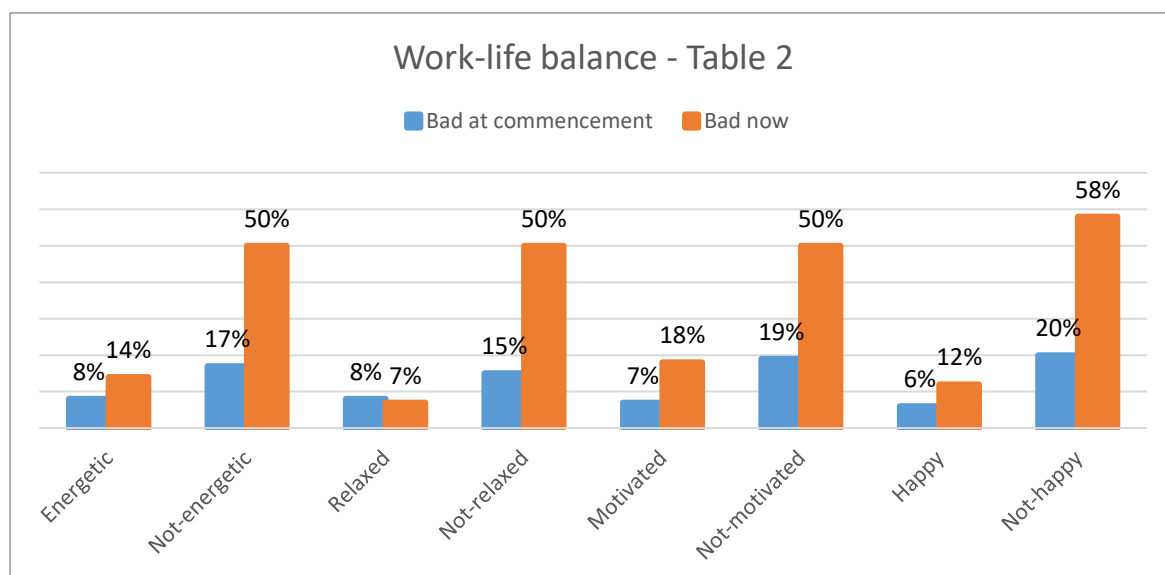
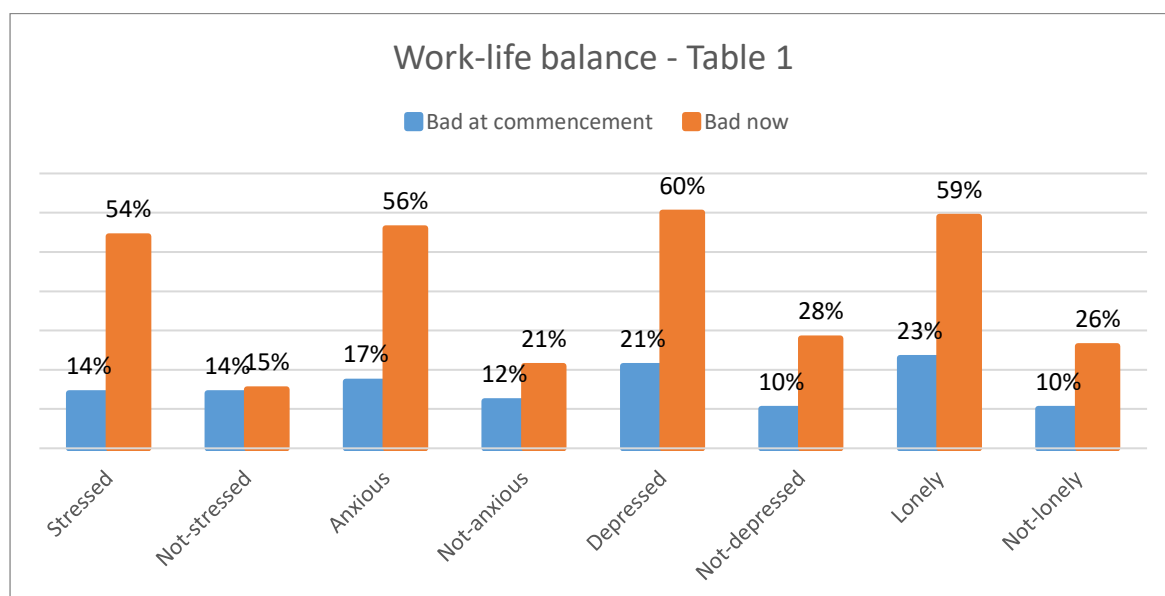
⁵ Teresa M. Evans, Lindsay Bira, Jazmin Beltran Gastelum, L. Todd Weiss and Nathan L. Vanderford, "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education," *Nature Biotechnology* 36, no. 3 (2018): 282-84.

⁶ Kenneth G. Rice et al., "Perfectionism and longitudinal patterns of stress for STEM majors: implications for academic performance," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 62, no. 4 (2015): 719.

3.2 Wellbeing and work-life balance

In the work-life balance tables below, respondents who had answered either *always* or *most of the time* to an option in the statement “how often do you feel?” (e.g., stressed, energetic) were grouped, as were respondents who had answered either *never* or *sometimes*. Then each group’s responses regarding their general wellbeing at commencement and in May/June 2020 were analysed. If a student had responded that their work-life balance was either *extremely poor* or *poor*, it was defined as “bad”.

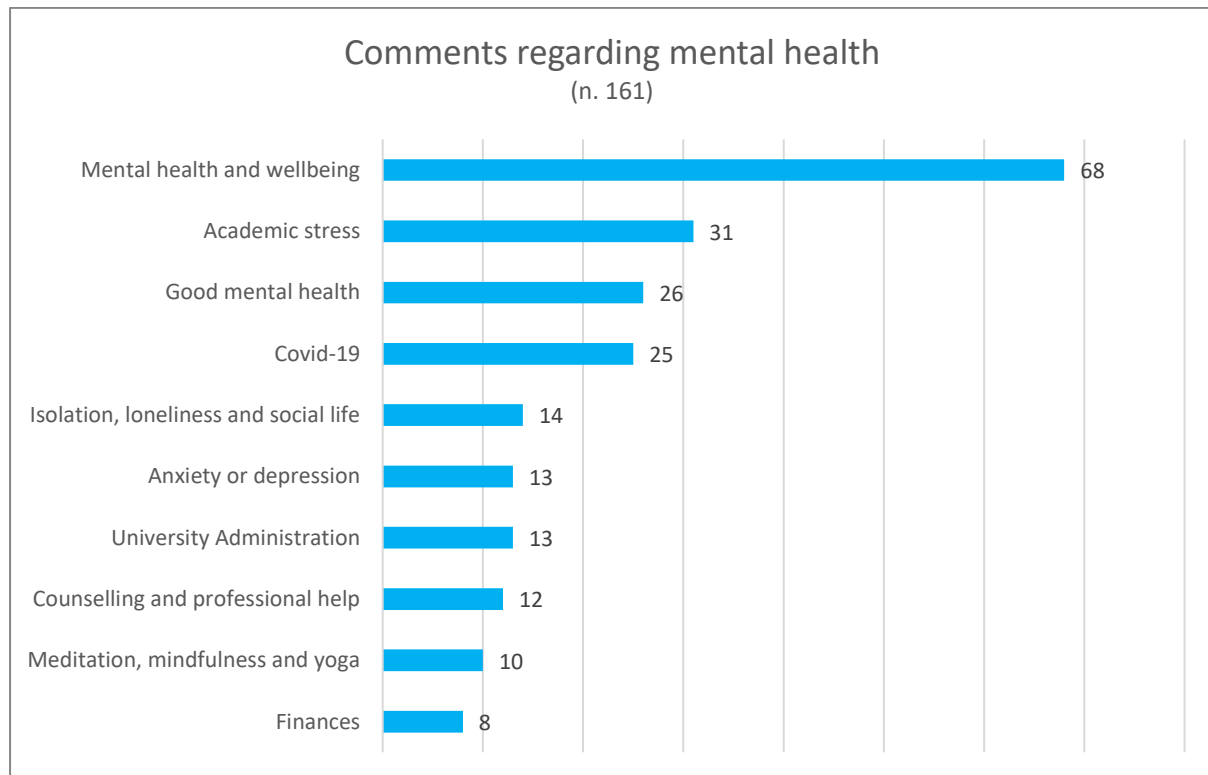
For example, of those who were stressed (i.e. *always* or *most of the time*), 14% rated their work-life balance poor at commencement, with this rising considerably to 54% at the time of the survey. Of those who were not stressed (i.e. *never* or *sometimes*), 14% rated their work-life balance poor at commencement, with this rising only marginally to 15% at the time of the survey.



Good work-life balance has been shown to be correlated with better mental health outcomes.⁷ The results of this survey seemingly add substance to this theory.

Respondents who declared they were in a poor mental health position were substantially more likely to also state that their work-life balance was poor. The reverse was also true, with those declaring themselves energetic, relaxed, motivated, and happy, substantially less likely to state that their work-life balance was poor.

3.3 Graduate student mental health – Comments



The majority of comments from Monash graduate students related to **their own mental health condition or struggles**. Some of the more-detailed comments included:

"I feel kind of anxious and depressed sometimes, or like I don't have energy or will to do things, but I always think these are transitory feelings and not worth of seeking professional help. Maybe I should, not sure."

"It is a temporary stress based on certain conditions and situations. It has been pretty bad because of COVID 19, since you don't have certainty on anything."

"Usually characterised by ups and downs."

Several respondents took this as an opportunity to discuss their **academic stress**. These included:

"Probably have a constant low level of research-related stress that is now the new 'normal'."

⁷ Evans *et al*, "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education," 282.

"PhD was the worst thing I could have done for my mental health and sometimes I wonder if I'll ever recover."

"That if I push too hard and start having panic attacks the impact on my productivity is devastating. Takes months to get well again. So managing my stress levels is sooooo important, so I swim and go to the gym and went part time and make sure I catch up with friends. But the stress of the PhD stops me from sleeping well so I never feel totally okay and well and strong. Many times I've wondered if better to quit the PhD but I'm stubborn and determined to finish. But Monash treats mental illness as if like a cold, not the chronic ongoing condition/disability that it is."

"Monash needs to provide post-fieldwork debriefing services for graduates."

Other students were keen to highlight the progress that they felt they were making and outline their **satisfaction with their mental health**. Comments included:

"I believe my mental health is reasonably good right now, with occasional lapses of self-doubt that comes from within rather than from external sources. I appreciate the counselling service Monash offers to me to deal with this problem."

"I do actually get annoyed that everyone assumes your mental health is poor just because you are a PhD student! I love my work and really enjoy my experience, and this is almost looked down upon. I think we should celebrate our wins, and help those who need the support- rather than assume all HDR students cannot/are not able to cope."

"My mental health is excellent, thankfully. Great family and friends, but am unable to see friends due to work and study commitments as well as isolation during the pandemic (we have an immune-suppressed family member, so we're all isolating together). I think my concern for family and friends during the pandemic is healthy and understandable."

Other interesting comments included:

"The university's handling of COVID-19 arrangements, in particular the alternative exam arrangements, has caused an undue amount of stress and was a significant roadblock to me being able to study effectively for many weeks. As a result, I was very worried about my grades. I have deferred a subject in order to avoid undertaking any further invigilated exams in these circumstances."

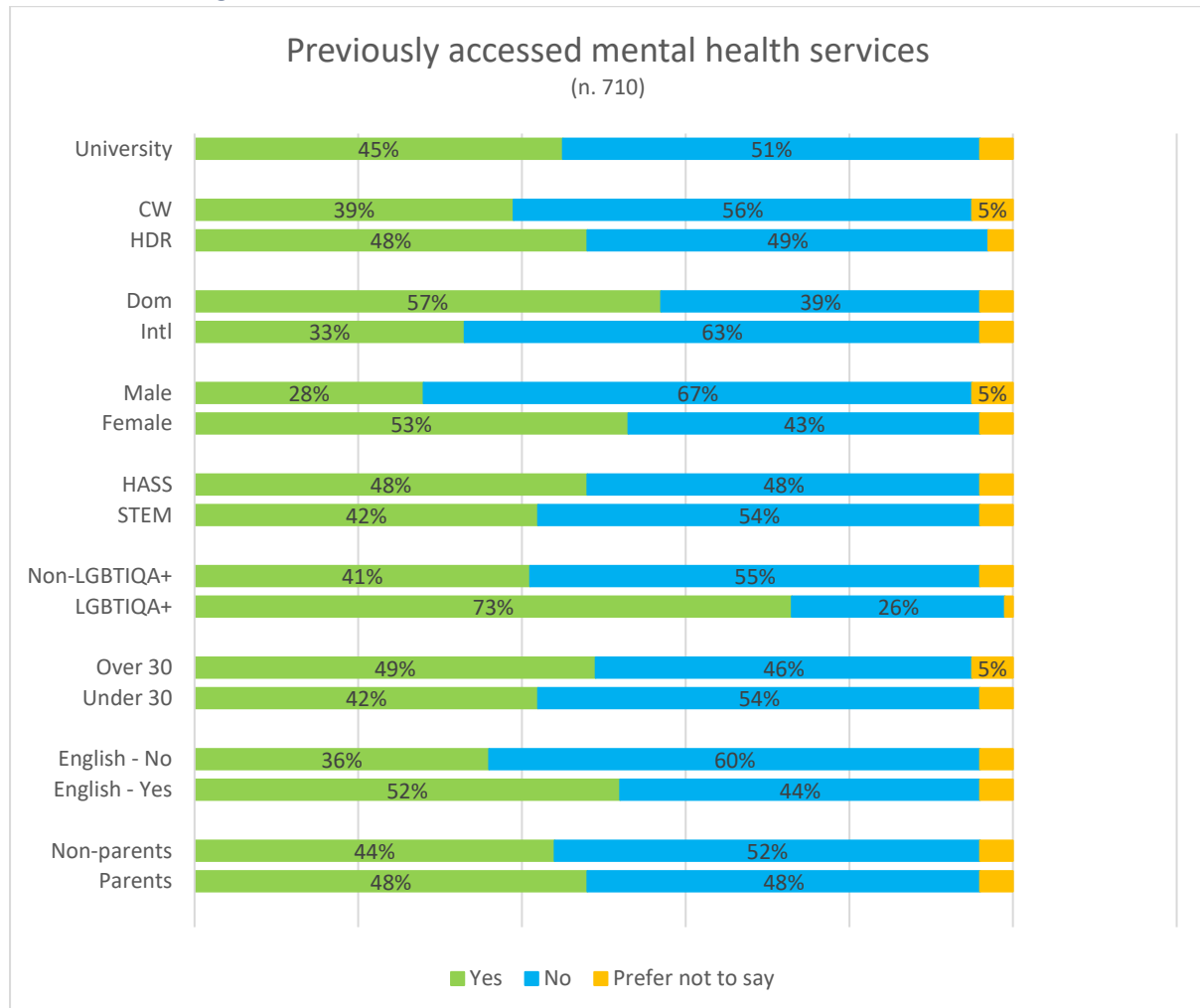
"I feel the university's PhD provisions for sick leave are incredibly insufficient, especially given the poor mental health rates of PhD candidates. The part time sick leave provisions are also not fair. No separation of sick and carers leave is not ideal either. Over my near 5 years since enrolling in my PhD, a number of events have happened to my health and family, none of which are particularly extraordinary, yet the sick leave provisions have not covered these."

"Mindfulness and meditation exercises, as well as physical exercises help quite a lot! (not only in this time ;)"

"I live with my family, I brought my wife and two kids to Australia. Their support is very helpful for me."

“I think the primary factor is work/life imbalance. The large workload to complete the PhD significantly digs into the life part of living, and this lack of balance then contributes to deteriorating mental health.”

3.4 Accessing mental health services

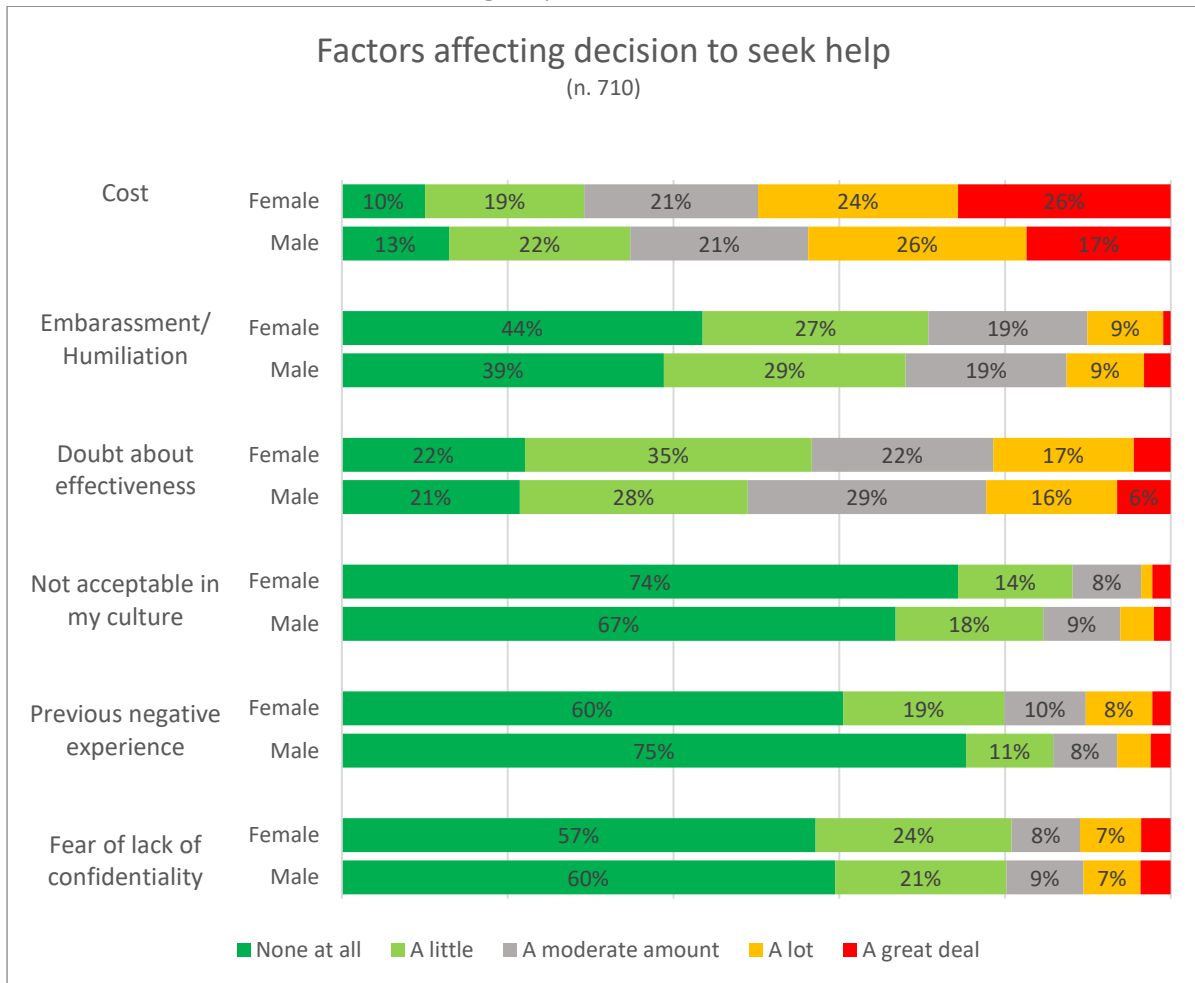


Just under half (45%) of Monash graduate students declared that they had previously accessed support for a mental health problem.

Men were the demographic least likely to have accessed a mental health service, followed by international students.

Meanwhile, those identifying as LGBTIQA+ were the group most likely to have accessed a mental health service, followed by domestic students.

3.5 Preventative factors in seeking help

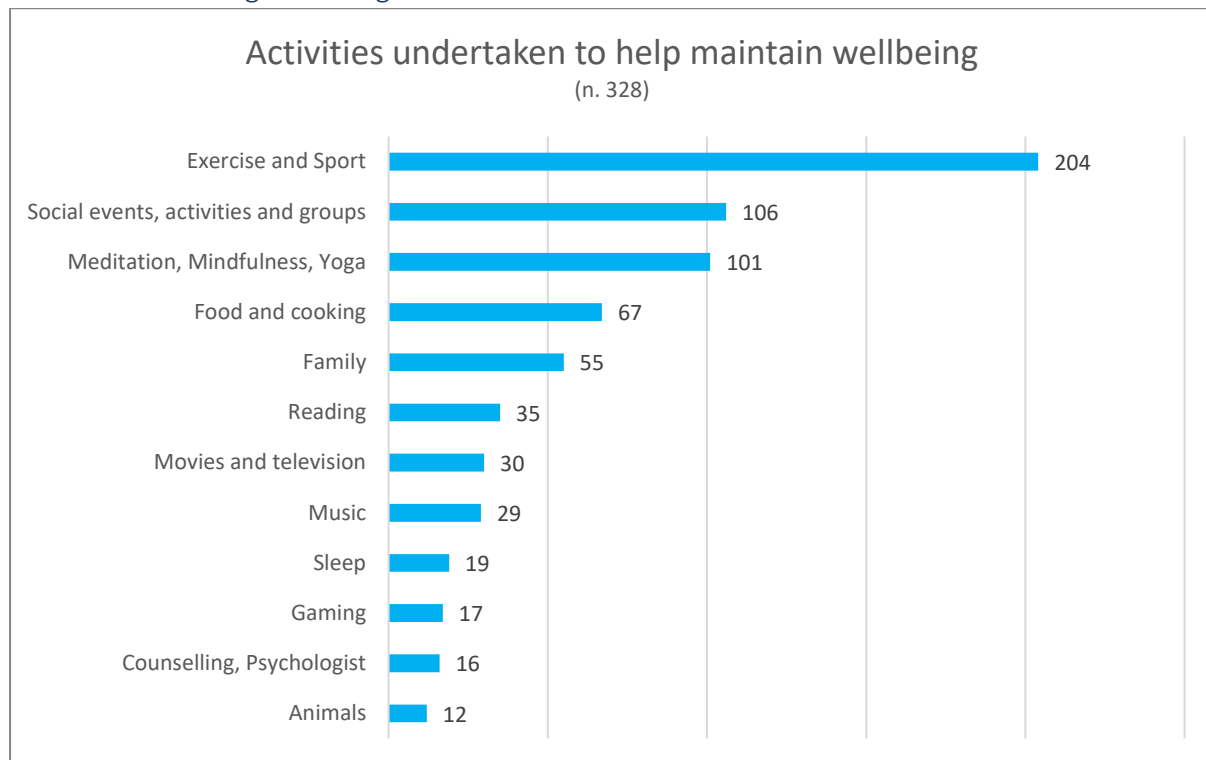


The cost of seeking professional help was, by some distance, identified as the most-relevant preventative factor. Age was a factor here, with those under 30 years of age (52%) more likely than those over 30 (41%) to say that cost would impact their decision *a great deal* or *a lot* (not shown in graph).

Seeking help not being considered acceptable in one's culture was seen as the least relevant of the stated options.

Nothing in the responses above is overly revealing as to why female graduate students were almost twice as likely as male students to have accessed mental health support.

3.6 Maintaining wellbeing - Comments



Monash graduate students primarily exercised and/or played sport to help maintain their wellbeing, while socialising and practicing some form of meditation, mindfulness or yoga were the second and third most-popular methods respectively. Most comments were succinct; however, some of the more detailed comments included:

"I exercise regularly and try to eat well. I have a strong support network of family nearby as well as friends I message regularly and can video call with if I wish. I have been trying to get outside for regular iso walks and take breaks from study to read and do other things."

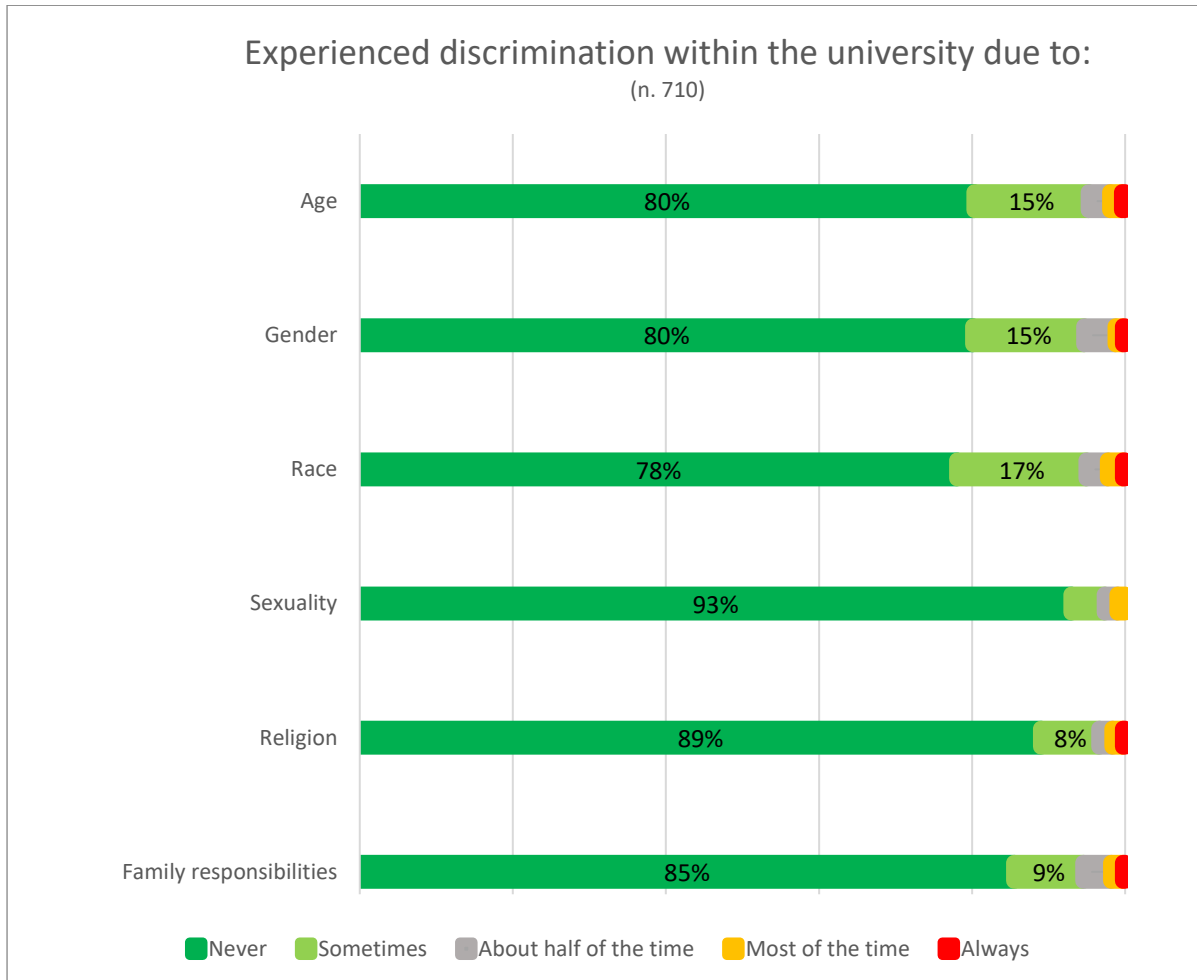
"I exercise in a variety of ways, I meditate, I eat mainly healthy foods, I don't do work outside of work hours (including checking emails etc - once I've knocked off I've knocked off completely!), I see a psychologist, I reach out to loved ones when I need support, I socialise with people I want to spend time with, I give myself time for myself."

"Binge watch Netflix (I know it's not good for health, so i also make a cup of green tea with that :P)"

"Swimming at the local community pool, going on walks in the neighbourhood, driving out to large parks for walks there too."

4. Discrimination

4.1 Discrimination at university



Experiencing discrimination has been shown to negatively impact academic performance.⁸ This survey did not directly track academic performance; however, those that had experienced discrimination within the university at least *sometimes* (40%) were less likely than those who had *never* experienced discrimination within the university (52%) to be satisfied with the progress they were making in their course.

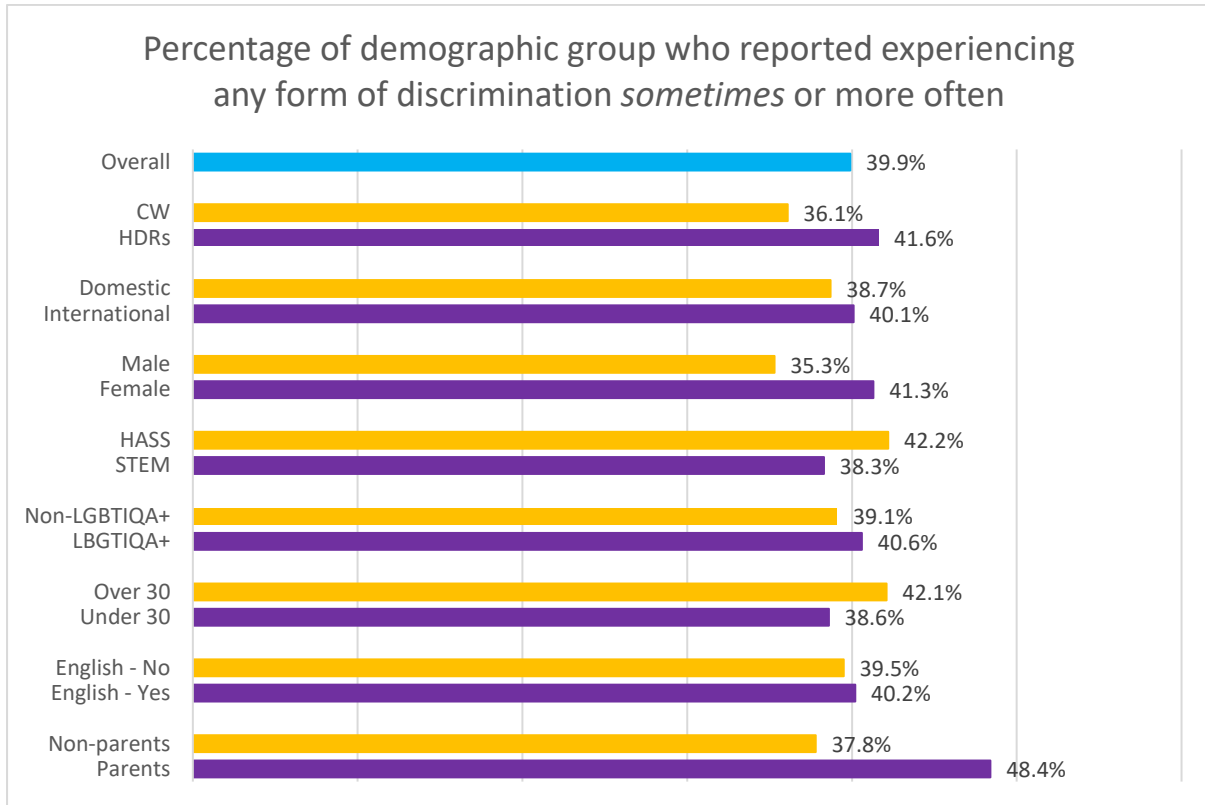
There were some concerning differences between the responses of certain demographic groups. For instance, international students were less likely (67%) than domestic students (90%) to express that they had never experienced discrimination at the university because of their race.

Furthermore, respondents identifying as LGBTIQ+ (71%) were less likely than those who did not identify as such (82%) to say that they had never experienced discrimination within the university due to their gender. Interestingly, HDRs (76%) were also less likely than coursework students (89%) to have never experienced gender discrimination at the university.

⁸ Courtney Stevens, Cindy H. Liu, and Justin A. Chen, "Racial/ethnic disparities in US college students' experience: Discrimination as an impediment to academic performance," *Journal of American College Health* 66:7 (2018): 665-73.

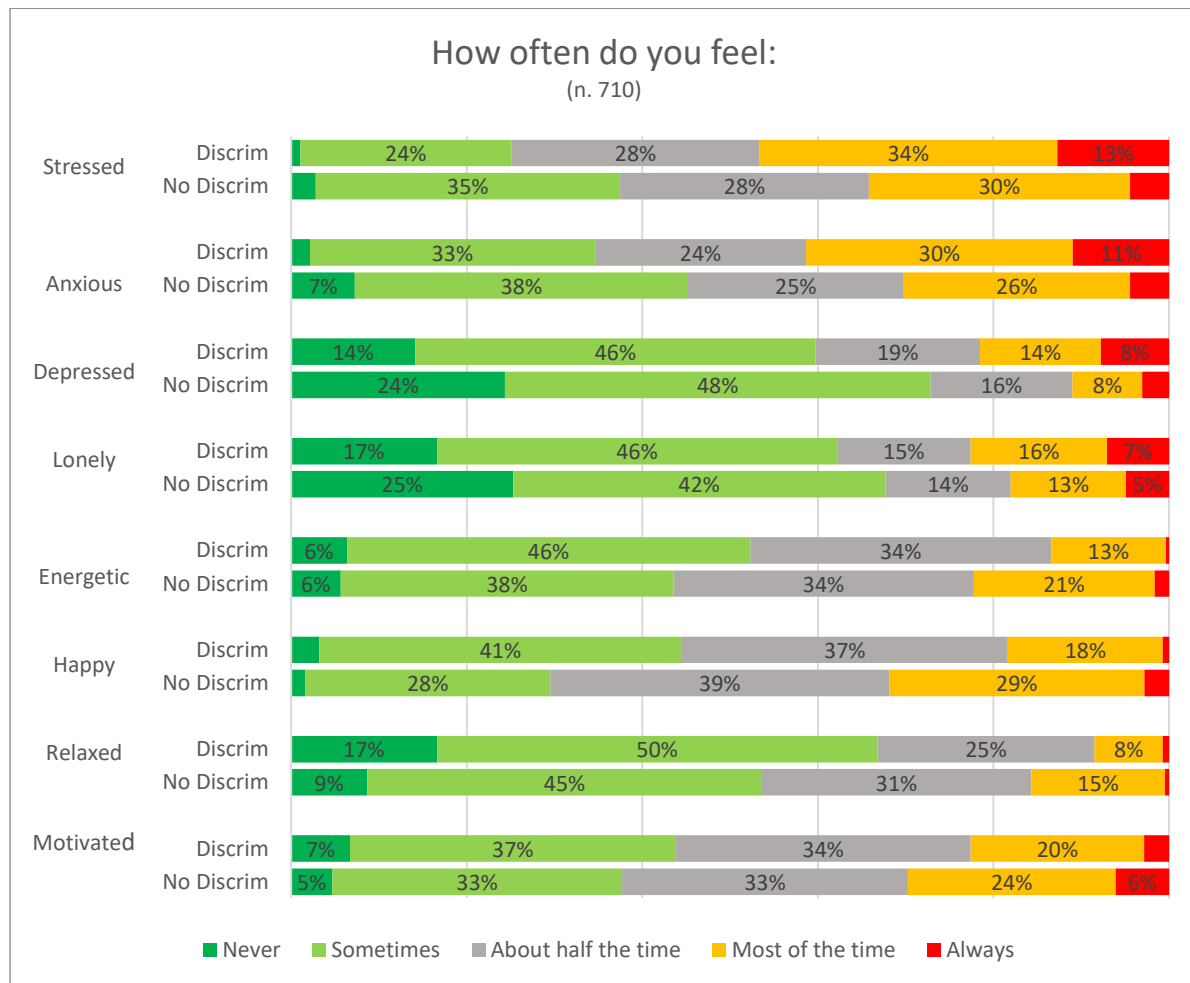
Meanwhile, those over 30 were less likely (73%) than those under 30 (84%) to have never experienced discrimination within the university due to their age.

4.2 Discrimination by demographics



Of the demographic groups analysed, parents reported experiencing some form of discrimination more than any other group – well ahead of HASS students in second. On the other hand, men reported experiencing the least discrimination – slightly less than coursework students.

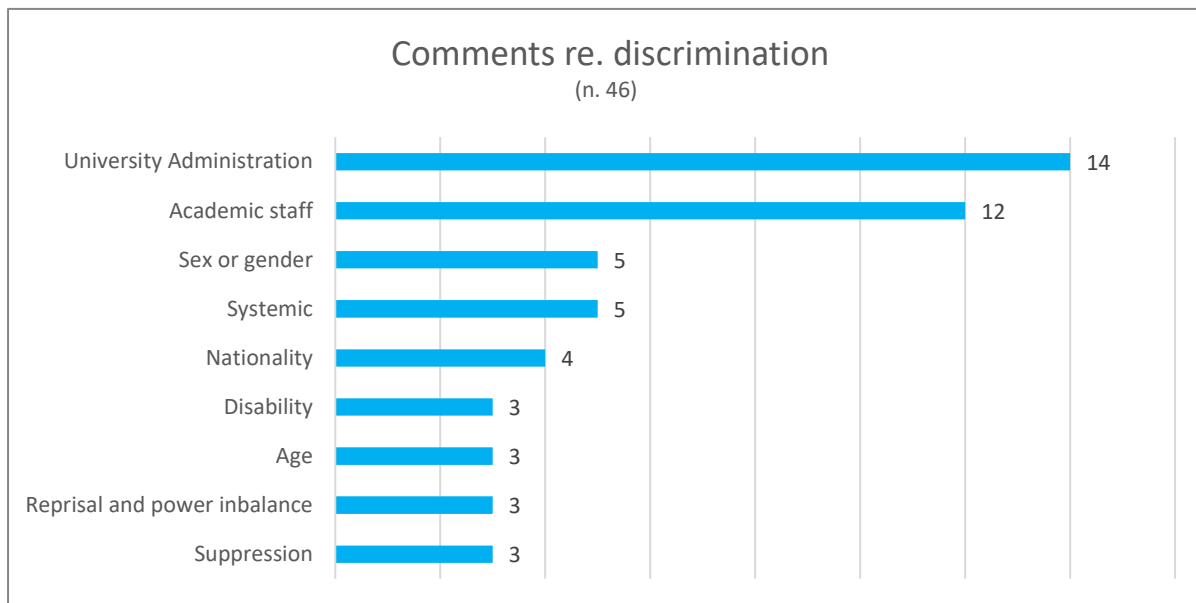
4.3 Discrimination and state of mind



Those respondents who had never experienced some form of discrimination at the university were more likely to have better mental health outcomes than those who had experienced discrimination at least sometimes. This was pronounced in relation to their perception of stress with 47% of those who had experienced discrimination indicating that they were stressed either *always* or *most of the time* compared to 34% of those who had not experienced discrimination.

Those who had experienced discrimination were also less likely than those who had not to be satisfied with their health and lives.

4.4 Discrimination – Comments



Graduate students taking issue with their **treatment by the University** was the primary response received to this question. Interesting comments included:

“My discrimination is related to disability and I did not feel supported by staff nor was able to identify any means (such as through the DSS) to report my experience.”

“It took too long to get a resolution. The discrimination did not end for over 6 months even though it was continuously reported. It was documented with Monash connect and nothing happened.”

“I feel that the University do what they have to do, but more for compliance than care.”

References to **academic staff** were also prominent in the responses of Monash graduate students. These included:

“Academic staff could be more open in telling students directly, to speak to them if they face discrimination. Most of the time, students face discrimination but do not know if their supervisor would care, or want to hear about these.”

“I was harassed and bullied by my supervisor and head of school during my ... milestone presentation and panel meeting. After reporting this harassment to the graduate coordinator, the head of school agreed to not attend any seminars I give in the future. This was all verbal, and I was not given an apology from them. I have also since changed supervisor, however they showed up [to another milestone] and made disparaging comments about my person again. I have been discouraged to formally report this by staff members who were witness, so I do not feel supported by the university.”

Other interesting comments, included:

“It is more day-to-day subtle things, like being spoken over or my opinion being deemed less valuable on a topic I may know more about. Nothing that would be worth reporting as it

would be difficult to investigate and people are largely unaware that they do it. It is a fact of life regardless of the space or workplace, I think.”

“I think senior staff in academic positions need anti-racism, discrimination and sensibility training and they need their biases and the way they think to be actively challenged as they are usually white older men who seem to lack empathy for others, including women. I, as one of the only non-white people within the department, end up feeling a lot of pressure to stand up for myself and it has affected my mental health. The university also seems to hold a lot of social events that are only centred around alcohol and bars and this does not include everyone from every religious background.”

“It was such a long time ago, it doesn't matter. I'd forgotten it until I was filling in this survey. I just chose different subjects the next semester and it was fine.”

“The student body is majority young and undergrad; this conditions expectations and approach to students of both academic staff and other students; older postgrads can be a bit invisible, but also not really factored in to what's provided.”

5 Conclusion

The results of the MGA Health, Family and Finance Survey 2020 have provided valuable insights into the health, wellbeing and stress levels of Monash graduate students. It has allowed us to better understand the mental condition of our diverse graduate student population as they commence and conduct their studies, while also better comprehending the ways in which they attempt to maintain their health and how they seek support when it is necessary.

Key findings

The general wellbeing of graduate students deteriorated substantially between the commencement of their course and May/June 2020

As this survey was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and during what has been described as Melbourne's "first-wave" lockdown, it is difficult to determine whether the deterioration of wellbeing among graduate students is primarily the result of the pandemic or issues emerging from and related to their studies. Given the main source of stress of respondents was regarded as *temporary* and the prominence of comments in the survey relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the origin of a student's stress, it is likely that the pandemic was paramount to the considerable decline in wellbeing experienced by graduate students at Monash University. That is not to say, however, that academic stressors have not played a role in this deterioration. Stress relating to academic workload and a student's intellectual ability to complete their course were both prominent, as too was the prospect of finding employment upon completion (though this could also be linked to COVID-19 and the perception that a weakening global economy would increase the difficulty in finding a job).

Graduate coursework students lacked meaningful contact with the university community

Coursework students were far more likely than HDR students to express that they were not getting enough contact with academic and administrative staff, as well as their fellow students/peers. Much as with wellbeing, it is likely that this result was impacted by the COVID-induced pivot to online learning.

It is worthy of noting that international coursework students were substantially more likely than domestic coursework students to feel like they were not experiencing enough meaningful contact with administrative staff. Given international coursework students were much more likely than domestic coursework students to express that they felt lonely, this difference in meaningful contact may have more to do with a perception of a lack of communication from Monash or perhaps a variance in their expectations.⁹

⁹ The expectations of graduate coursework students will be explored in the 2021 MGA Research and Coursework Survey.

There are large discrepancies between demographics when it comes to seeking mental health support

Men were the group least likely to have previously accessed support for a mental health problem, with international students tracking closely behind. Meanwhile those identifying as LGBTIQ+ were the group most likely to have sought support.

While cost was clearly the biggest preventative factor in seeking help (of those surveyed), the reasons as to why men were almost half as likely as women to seek support for a mental health condition was not immediately clear. Likewise, it was not clear why international students were substantially less likely than domestic students to seek support.

Good work-life balance is connected with good mental health outcomes

Respondents who declared they were in a poor mental health position were substantially more likely to also state that their work-life balance was poor. The reverse was also true, with those declaring themselves energetic, relaxed, motivated, and happy, substantially less likely to state that their work-life balance was poor.

Parents experienced discrimination at the university more than any other group

Of the demographic groups analysed, parents reported experiencing some form of discrimination more than any other group, while men were the group which experienced discrimination the least.

Those respondents who had never experienced some form of discrimination at the university were more likely to have better mental health outcomes than those who had experienced discrimination at least sometimes.

(iii) Recommendations

Based on the findings of the 2020 *Health, Family and Finances* survey, the MGA has recommended actions for the University that would improve the graduate student experience and increase satisfaction. There are also specific areas where the Monash Graduate Association could improve.

Recommendations for Monash University

Encourage exercise opportunities to improve and maintain wellbeing

- Promote walking meetings.
- Outdoor tutorial spaces.
- Running/bike track around campus.

Targeted promotion of existing time management and career counselling services

- Lecturers (as appropriate) to be encouraged to promote these services in lectures.
- Tutors to include links to services in tutorials and in response to extension requests.

Revitalise University Counselling

- Replicate La Trobe University's "[Wellbeing Check-In service](#),"¹⁰ which allowed for students to "request a call" from a support team member to discuss their wellbeing.
- Partner with international providers to assist international students studying off-campus.

Promote health and wellbeing to men and international students

- When promoting the Thrive mental health online portal, specifically target men and international students.

Improve access to academic and administrative staff

- Provide more formal and informal opportunities for graduates to access lecturers and tutors.
- Provide opportunities for graduates to access relevant professional staff e.g. fortnightly or monthly school/faculty administrator briefings and/or Q&A via zoom.

¹⁰ Sarah Power and Georgina Hanna, "The 'Wellbeing Check-In' service: Establishing, developing and tailoring a new program to offer a student-centred response to COVID-19," *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association* Vol. 28, Iss. 2 (2020).

Recommendations for the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

Improve graduate student connectivity

- Casually employ a dedicated coursework and HDR graduate student at each of the 10 faculties at Monash to organise, coordinate and run social events aimed at facilitating social connections, improving morale and alleviating stress.

Support buddy program

- For graduate students in need of urgent support over the lockdown periods in 2020, the MGA offered a support buddy program whereby students could anonymously contact an MGA advocate via *WhatsApp*. In some form, this should be made permanent so that, should they wish, graduate students can contact and receive support anonymously.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Campus	Respondents¹¹
Clayton (including AMREP, MMC, Law Chambers and affiliated institutions)	606 (68.7%)
Caulfield	144 (16.3%)
Parkville	76 (8.6%)
Peninsula	26 (3.0%)
Malaysia	12 (1.4%)
Other	18 (2.0%)

Faculty	Respondents
Art, Design and Architecture	9 (1.1%)
Arts	112 (13.6%)
Business and Economics	67 (8.1%)
Education	107 (13.0%)
Engineering	110 (13.3%)
Information Technology	74 (9.0%)
Law	19 (2.3%)
Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences	141 (17.1%)
Pharmacy	75 (9.1%)
Science	98 (11.9%)
Monash Sustainable Development Institute	8 (1.0%)
Monash University Accident Research Centre	4 (0.5%)

Mode of attendance	Respondents
Full-time	618 (90.0%)
Part-time	69 (10.0%)

Course type	Respondents
Graduate Coursework	253 (31.9%)
Higher Degree by Research (PhD/Masters by Research)	539 (68.1%)

Domestic/International	Respondents
International student	419 (52.9%)
Local student (Australian or New Zealand citizen/permanent resident)	373 (47.1%)

¹¹ Not every respondent answered every question, and not every respondent completed the survey; hence, total respondents vary between questions.

English primary language	Respondents
Yes	428 (54.0%)
No	353 (44.5%)
Prefer not to disclose	12 (1.5%)

Gender	Respondents
Female	505 (63.8%)
Male	275 (34.7%)
Prefer to self-describe	4 (0.5%)
Prefer not to say	8 (1.0%)

LGBTIQA+	Respondents
Yes	70 (8.8%)
No	688 (86.8%)
Prefer not to disclose	35 (4.4%)

Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	Respondents
Yes	1 (0.1%)
No	785 (99.0%)
Prefer not to disclose	7 (0.9%)

Disability	Respondents
Yes	32 (4.0%)
No	750 (94.6%)
Prefer not to disclose	11 (1.4%)

Age	Respondents
18-25	240 (30.3%)
26-30	274 (34.6%)
31-40	191 (24.1%)
41-50	52 (6.6%)
51-60	20 (2.5%)
60+	15 (1.9%)