Mental health problems and support needs of PhD students: bottle necks of the PhD trajectory

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RESULTS

- PhD students that score higher on anxiety, are more often international students (β=.09; p<.05), score significantly higher on negative work home interference (β=.46; p<.001), and on negative home work interference (β=.12; p<.01), score significantly lower on social support (β=.19; p<.001) and on self-efficacy (β=-.18; p<.001). [$F_{(15, 413)}$ = 20.00; p = .000]

- PhD students that score higher on depression score significantly higher on negative work home interference (β=-.54; p<.001), and on negative home work interference (β=-.07; p<.05), score significantly lower on social support (β=-.23; p<.001) and on self-efficacy (β=.03; p<.001). [$F_{(15, 416)}$ = 41.68; p = .000]

DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

The bottlenecks that we found to be predictive of a worse mental health status can be addressed in the university context through providing information to PhD students, PhD supervisors and PhD student counselors. Extra attention needs to be paid to international PhD students. The University could offer interventions such as coaching, career guidance, relaxation training, time management, intervision, and sports to meet support needs.
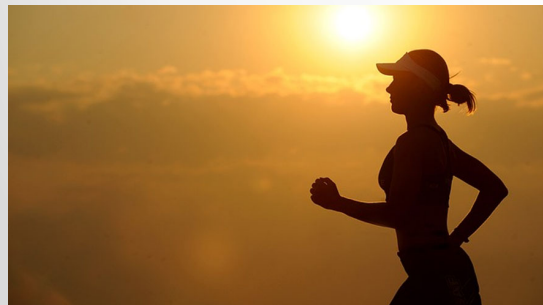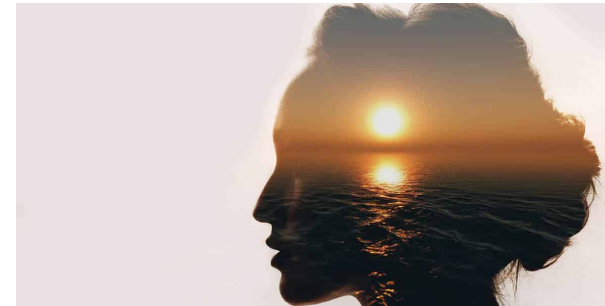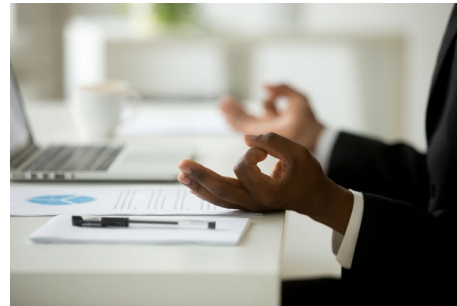
BACKGROUND

A substantial part of PhD students is struggling with mental health problems. These complaints can lead to dropping out and societal costs. Various bottlenecks that students may face during the PhD process can undermine mental health. We aim to test what bottlenecks are predictive of mental health problems. Furthermore, we aim to address the responsibility of the University by evaluating appropriate interventions, so that the support needs of PhD students at the UvA can be met.

METHOD

In a cross-sectional survey design (N=427), both mental health status, and possible bottlenecks of the PhD trajectory were studied amongst PhD students at the University of Amsterdam. Mean age was 29 years; 29% was male; 71% female. Participants were recruited through emails and newsletters (response rate 14%). Regression analysis' were performed with depression and anxiety as dependents (k6, ek10). We controlled for gender, age, international PhD student yes/no. Furthermore, preferences for different types of interventions were monitored.

MAIN MESSAGES

1. Work home interference, home work interference, social support and self-efficacy are important aspects of mental health in PhD students. Extra attention needs to be paid to international PhD students.

2. The University has a responsibility and an interest regarding its PhD students' mental health and wellbeing: appropriate interventions can be deployed for the support needs of PhD students.

Tabel 1: Ranking of chosen interventions (N=427)

Intervention	Mean	SD	Min-Max	Ranking
Coaching	3.41	1.28	1-5	1
Career guidance	3.38	1.35	1-5	2
Time management	3.14	1.39	1-5	3
Relaxation training	3.11	1.35	1-5	4
Mindfulness	3.10	1.35	1-5	5
Method of Levels therapy	2.90	1.32	1-5	6
Assertivity training	2.90	1.43	1-5	7
Running therapy	2.81	1.41	1-5	8
Compassion Focused Therapy	2.59	1.33	1-5	9
Rational emotive therapy	2.38	1.36	1-5	10

REFERENCE

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