

Key regional differences

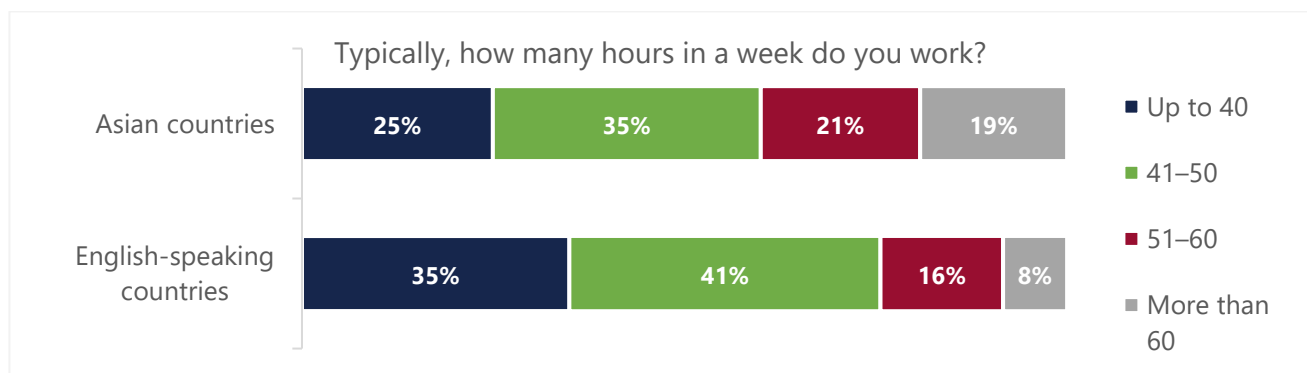
Analysis revealed some stark differences in responses from around the globe – particularly between researchers based in English-speaking countries (the US, UK, Australia and Canada) and those in South and East Asian countries

(specifically China, Japan, South Korea and India). This section explores the key differences between these two groups specifically.

Working long hours and feeling overwhelmed

There was a clear contrast in the number of hours typically worked per week. Researchers based in Asian countries appeared to be working considerably longer hours, with

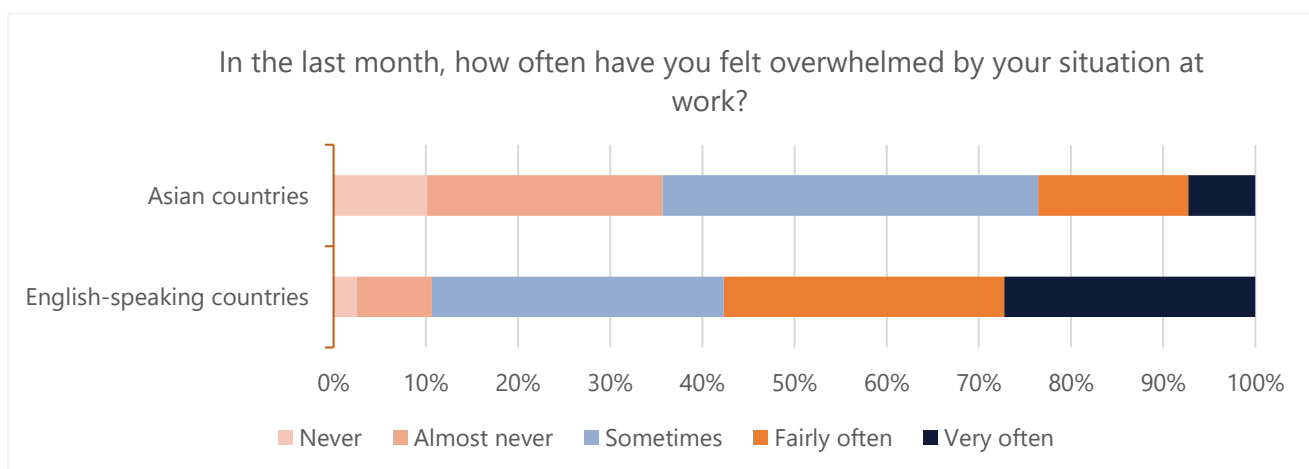
40% of this group indicating that they typically work more than 50 hours per week, compared to 24% of those in English-speaking countries.



Base n = 8,148

Despite these reported long working hours, researchers in Asian countries were far less likely to say they had felt overwhelmed at work in the last month. In fact, 36% of this group indicated that they had never or almost never felt

overwhelmed at work in the last month. Contrastingly, the vast majority (58%) of those in English-speaking countries said they had felt overwhelmed fairly or very often.



overwhelmed by their situation at work over the last

It is difficult to ascertain from survey results the cause of this overwhelmed feeling in English-speaking countries, though it is possibly linked to a general disillusionment with research work culture amongst this group. The majority (70%) of respondents in English-speaking countries either agreed or strongly agreed with the

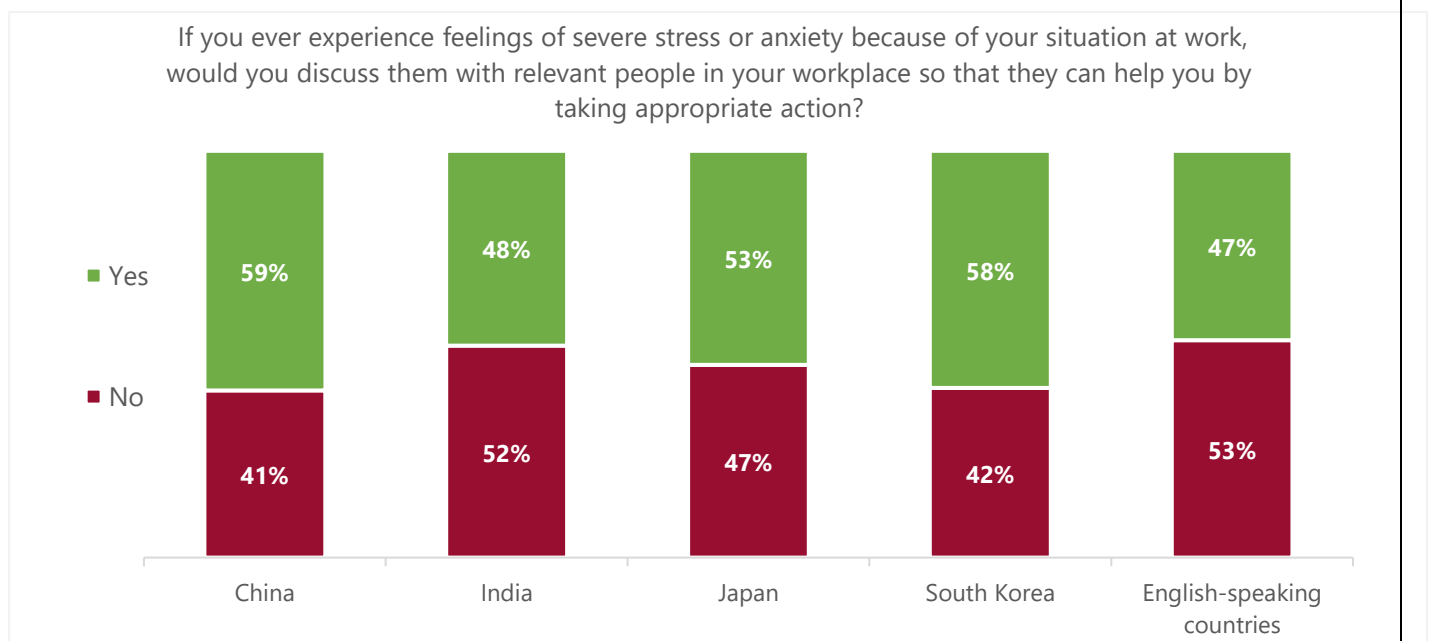
statement 'I am unhappy about the overall culture in academia', compared to 37% of those in Asian countries. Similarly, 52% of those based in English-speaking countries agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I doubt my work achievements and feel like I do not belong in academia', while just 30% of those in Asian countries said the same.

Differences in approach to seeking help and support

Some interesting differences were also found between researchers based in Asian and English-speaking countries in their approach to seeking help and support for stress or anxiety associated with their situation at work.

As a whole, researchers based in Asian countries were more likely than those in English-speaking countries to suggest that they would discuss their feelings of stress or anxiety with relevant individuals at their workplace, in

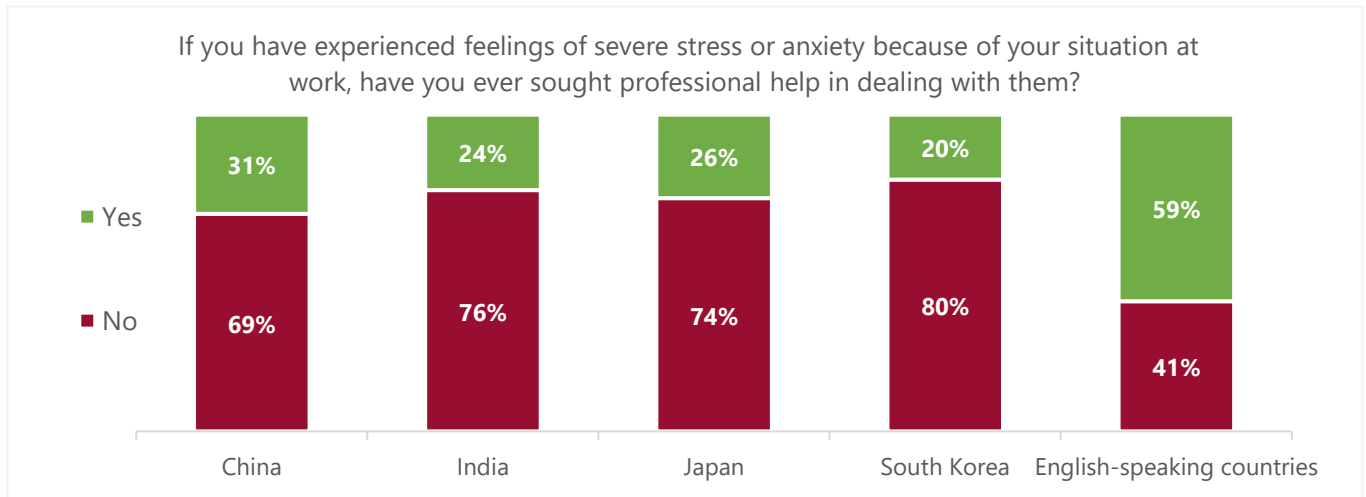
order to receive help for these issues (54% versus 47%). However, a deeper look at how specific countries responded to this question revealed that researchers based in India were actually found to be less inclined than respondents overall to speak to individuals in their workplace about experiences of stress and anxiety, whilst those in China and South Korea appeared more likely.



Base n = 6,923

However, when asked whether they had ever sought professional help for these work-related issues, 74% of

those in Asian countries said they had not, compared to 59% of those in English-speaking countries.



Base n = 6,884

Researchers working in South Korea were the least likely to have sought professional help to deal with feelings of severe stress or anxiety at work. As mentioned earlier, cultural differences in the stigma attached to mental health is likely to play a role here.

When asked why they would not seek professional help, over half of respondents from Asian countries said they felt

they should manage work-related

pressures alone since they are part of academic life. It may be in Asia in particular that a move away from the normalisation of feeling overwhelmed, stressed or anxious in the research environment is important in order to address issues around researcher mental health and well-being.

Concluding thoughts

In common with other recent studies in this area, the data collected paints a picture of research careers that have both fulfilling and rewarding elements, but also bring considerable strain for a large minority of researchers. Patterns and causes are complex, but the following all appear to contribute long working hours; discrimination, harassment, and bullying; pressure to perform; and a culture in which stress and anxiety are normalised. This appears to be particularly the case in academic settings and English-speaking countries, as well as with younger researchers, women and ethnic and sexual minorities.

There is plenty to think about here – for individuals, institutions and other stakeholders in the research ecosystem – and some key potential areas for action, as discussed below.

Key take-aways

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We need to do better to understand and include POC and other minority groups. We need to fight the stigma on mental illness and provide better resources for mental health that go beyond telling someone to take a few deep breaths to calm down. People need genuine long-term emotional support... Stress and burnout come when you give and give and get next to nothing in return and made to feel guilty that you're never enough.



What immediate issues need to be addressed?

Addressing bullying, harassment and discrimination: A worryingly high proportion of researchers are experiencing these issues at work, or have done so in their careers. This appears to be an immediate issue requiring serious discussion and recognition at the highest levels.

Improving work-life balance: Working hours appear to be extremely long, with 31% reporting typically working more than 50 hours a week, while 43% disagreed that they had sufficient time for recreation / other activities. The data points to a link between work-life balance and mental health. This is not a simple relationship and working hard may often be internally driven, rather than externally prescribed. However, working long hours may still have consequences for researchers and needs to be addressed by the sector.

Changing expectations: There is evidence here of a normalisation of high levels of stress and anxiety as just being part of normal academic life. Leadership is required here to change academic culture, with role-modelling from senior academic leaders required. Without the academic community as a whole addressing the idea of what is acceptable or not acceptable, changes to researcher well-being look likely to be slow – with consequences not only for individual researchers, but for the sector in terms of losing contributions from talented but more vulnerable individuals.

How can institutions respond?

The research indicates that well-developed institutional policies do make a difference. In particular the research points to: **Stricter discrimination, bullying and harassment policies:** The research appears to show a link between having strict discrimination, bullying and harassment policies, how often these types of situations are experienced and researcher mental health. Involving groups that may be at risk of experiencing discrimination and harassment in the development of these policies seems important. They may see areas of weakness that are not witnessed by other parts of the researcher community and so ensure they are fit for purpose.

Work-life balance policies: Researchers are working long hours and a perceived lack of sufficient institutional policies around work-life balance appeared to be related to whether respondents had felt overwhelmed by their situation at work in the last month. Structured policies around this are likely to have a positive effect on improving researcher mental health.

Developing confidential support within institutions: Many respondents accessed support outside their institutions and some expressed concerns that seeking support might either be ineffectual or reflect poorly on them. A range of highly confidential spaces for researchers to access support to reduce stress and improve well-being seems needed, or supported access to spaces outside the institution. Those offering support perhaps need to be highly trained in researcher practices in order to support researcher needs fully.

Support for specific groups Particular types of researcher appear to be disproportionately likely to be overwhelmed at work – particularly PhD scholars and those who are more likely to suffer discrimination, including women. Those who were working outside their country of origin also appeared more vulnerable. Institutions might need to consider reasons for this internally and seek to develop more targeted support for these groups.

Promoting researcher resilience: The resilience of some researchers is reported to be low, particularly in early career. Institutions might consider adding training around resilience in doctoral training, supporting these researchers to stay motivated and handle the inevitable setbacks of a life in research.

Creating inspiring work environments: There appear to be indications here that an inspiring work environment can be protective of researcher mental health. Working on these positive elements of a researcher's working life may reap rewards for institutions and individuals.

What else needs to change?

Reducing the stigma around mental health: Attitudes towards mental health may to some extent be culturally determined and not specific to the sector. Research such as this is a useful starting point for discussions around mental health in the sector, giving a range of stakeholders a fuller understanding of the stresses that many researchers experience. The research community globally might also have a role in helping to reduce stigma amongst the wider communities in which they operate.

Better career stability: Feelings of career instability and stress are prevalent, particularly amongst early career researchers, and appear to be linked to feeling overwhelmed at work. There are issues for the sector as a whole to consider around the way in which younger researchers are employed, in addition to issues around fairness in credit for outputs.

Reducing pressure to perform: Many of our respondents indicated that they were under tremendous pressure to publish papers, secure grants, complete projects, and maintain their current good standing or reputation. These pressures were particularly strong in academic settings. The sector could perhaps reflect on the ways in which current systems of research evaluation impact on the mental health and well-being of researchers, and the impact that this may have in turn on the quality of research outputs.