



Australasian Cognitive Neuroscience
Society

HDR/ECR Mental Health & Wellbeing Survey



2020 Report

Dr. Patrick Cooper, Dr. Sean Carruthers,
Dr. Claire O'Callaghan, Dr. Mana Biabani,
Dr. Saurabh Sonkusare, Kristina Sabaroedin,
Tess Nikitenko, Prof. Paul Dux, Dr. Sharna Jamadar
On behalf of ACNS

Executive summary

Key results.



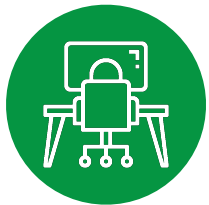
20% report poor or very poor mental health



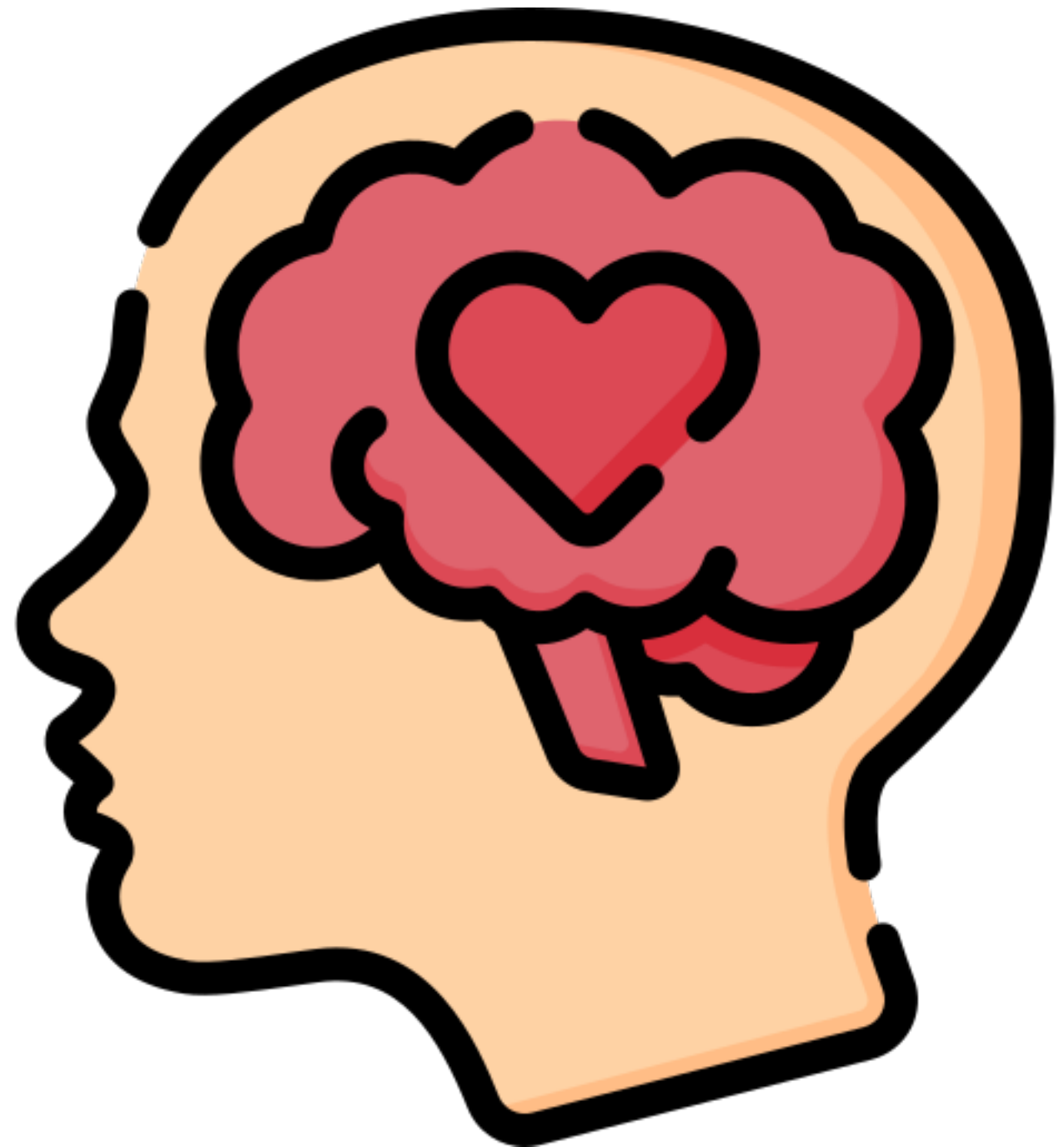
41% have diagnosed mental illness



91% have felt burnt out in the previous 12 months



79% of participants attribute majority of mental health due to work



Background

From October to December, 2020 we sought early career researchers to complete a brief, online survey. The survey aimed to capture a *snapshot* of the current mental health and wellness of our early career membership.

The survey was administered through Qualtrics, hosted at Swinburne University of Technology. Distribution was online via social media, ACNS newsletters and laboratory email lists.

Survey themes

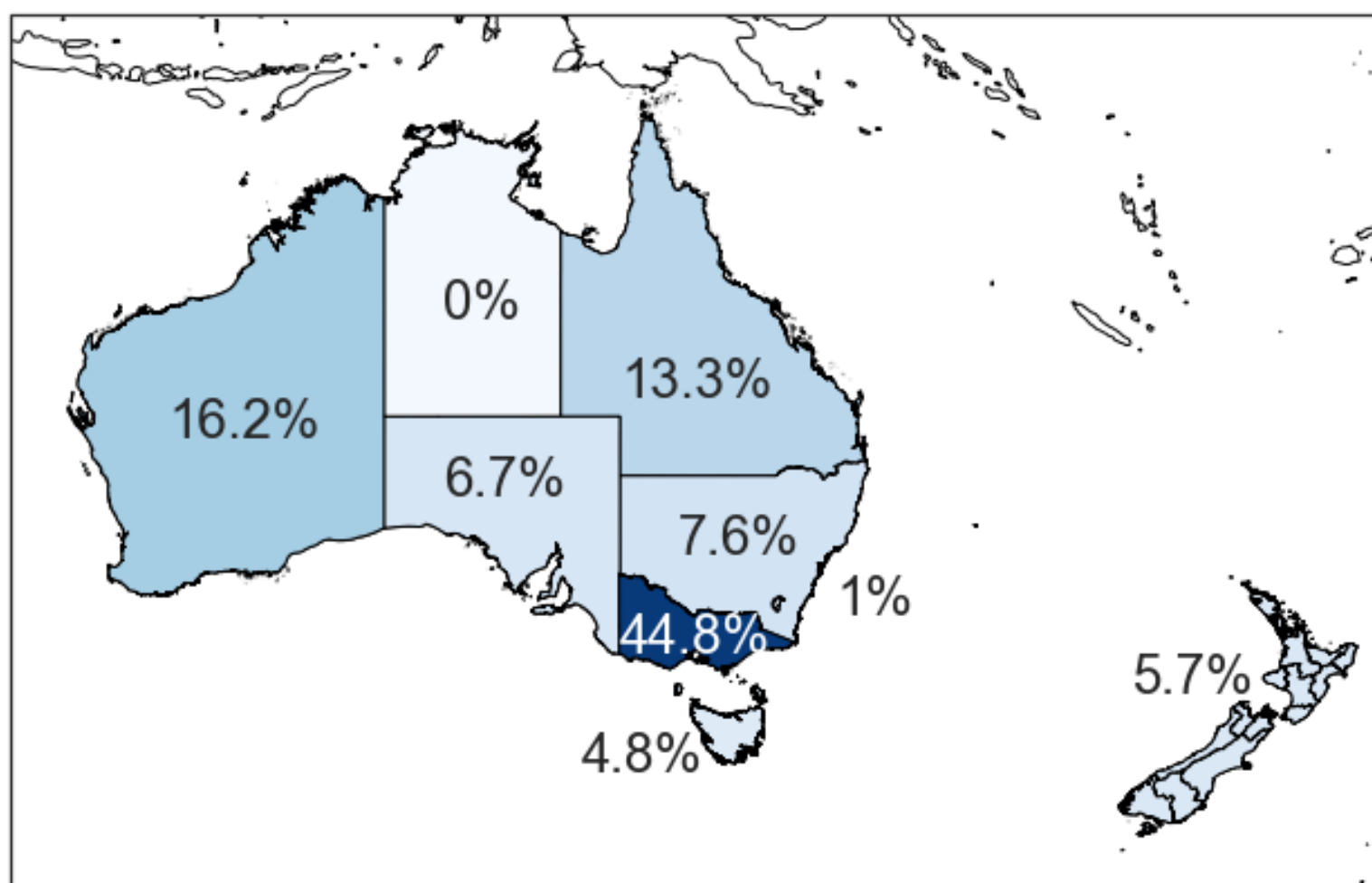
The survey asked participants to rate their own mental health status, including

levels of *stress*, *anxiety*, *depression* and *burnout*. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 on their wellbeing was also assessed.

Survey items were developed through consultation with the 2020 ECR Subcommittee and their networks.

Demographics

- 70.5% of respondents were HDR students, 29.5% ECRs.
- 75% female, 21% male, 2% self-described, 2% prefer-not-to-say.
- Mean age = 29.3 yrs (range = 22 - 47 yrs)
- >94% of ACNS respondents resided in Australia (see geographical distributions).
- 54% were from Group of Eight institutions.



Majority of respondents were from Victoria, which in 2020, underwent a long, restrictive lockdown due to COVID-19.

Mental health

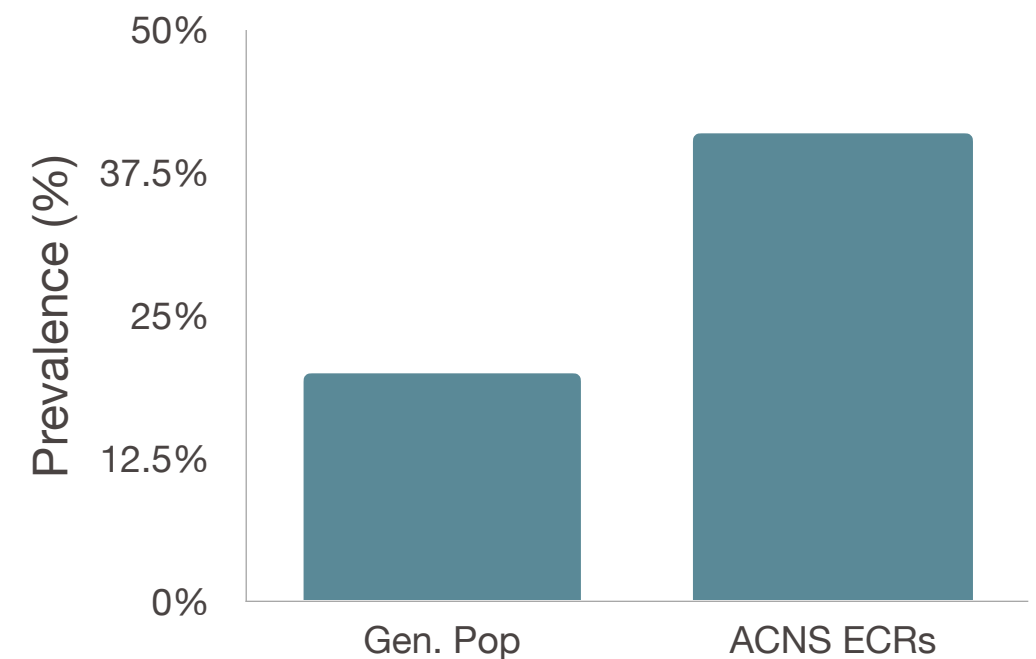
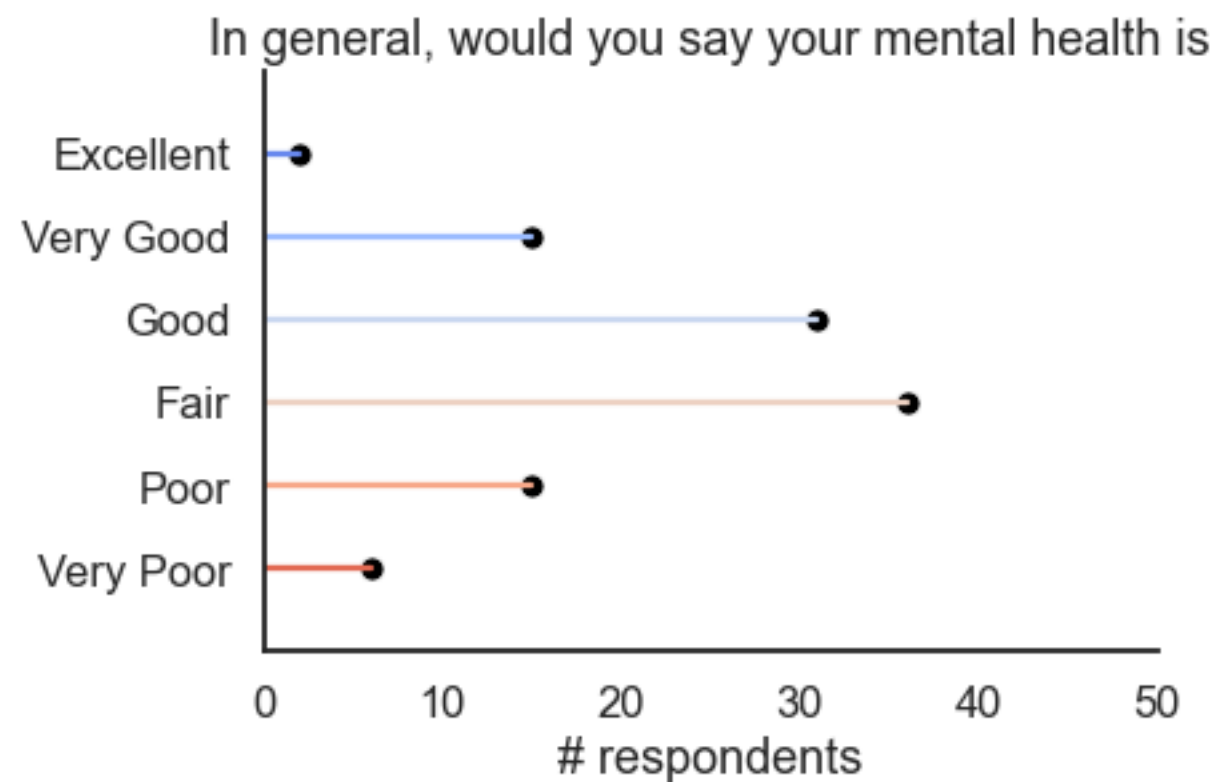
We asked participants to reflect on their own mental health, the impact their work has on their mental wellness and what (if any) self-care strategies they use.

Self-rated

Generally, ACNS ECR members reported *fair* to *good* mental health, with half of respondents falling within this range.

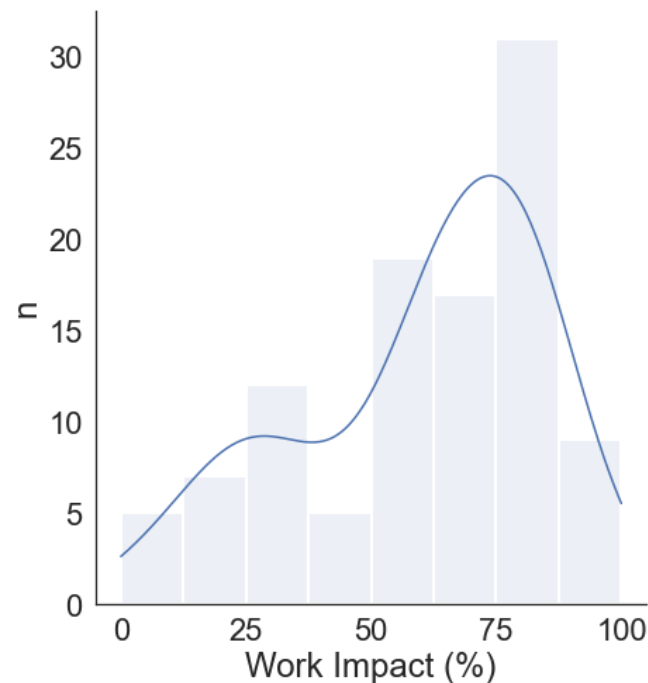
However, 20% of participants reported their mental health as *poor* or *very poor*.

41% of ECR members reported a current mental health diagnosis - double the rate of the Australian population (20% in previous 12 months, ABS).



Impact of work

Respondents reported their work having a substantial impact on their mental health. For 79% of early career researchers, the majority of their mental health was attributed to work.



Respondents generally felt their mental health was accommodated by their research institutions (48.84%), although 34.88% were unsure if their institution would.

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported many of the unique aspects of the early career environment to contribute to their poor mental health, including workload pressures (13%), lack of certainty regarding career prospects (12%) and supervisor relationships (16%).

Burnout

Early career researchers were asked to *indicate how close they were to being burnt out*. On average, respondents were 60% of the way toward a full burnout, with 4% currently burnt out.



Moreover, 91% of participants said they had experienced burnout in the past 12 months.