

PhD Candidates as Informal Caregivers

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Methods

Definition

Providing care to any dependent family member or friend who needs special medical and personal attention or assistance with daily living as a result of injury, aging, illness, disability or other health condition

Online Survey

242 respondents
28 years
65% female
68% Dutch
various disciplines

Interviews

16 interviewees
12 females, 4 males
7 care for parent
5 care for family member
4 care for partner

Results



Prevalence

29%
family member/partner/friend



Time

5.5 h/week
43% > 4 h/week



Care Activities

- taking care of household
- organisational & administrative tasks
- giving emotional support



Working Strategies

- working from home
- flexible working hours
- taking sick or care leave
- putting less priority on doctoral study



Supervisor

33% informed their supervisor(s)



Impact

- 36% delay: limited focus & distraction
- mental health problems

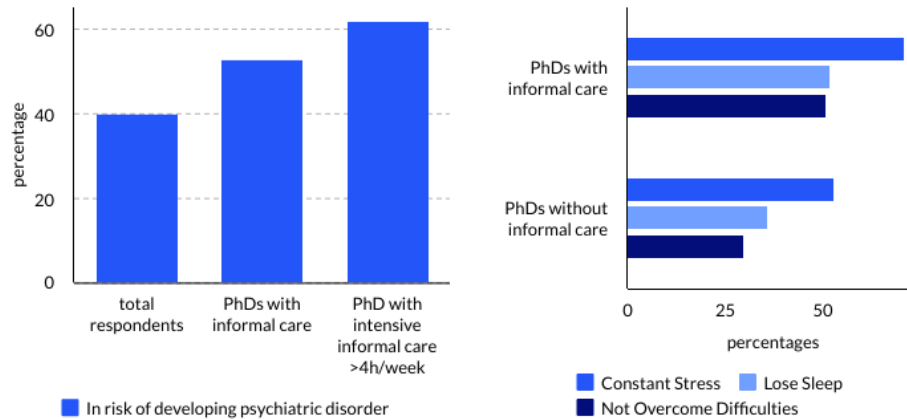
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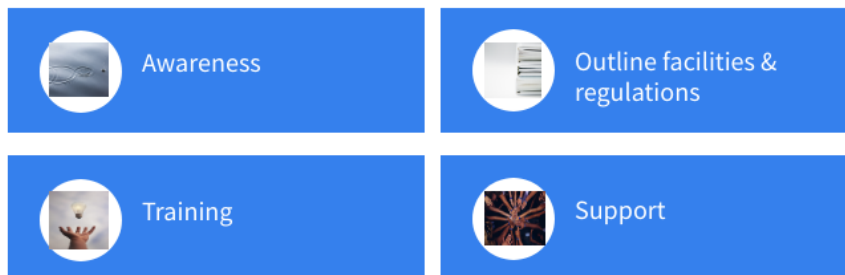
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Mental Health

Our survey study showed that informal care responsibilities have a negative impact on the mental health of doctoral candidates. Informal care contributed to feelings of constant strain, inability to overcome difficulties, and resulted in sleeping problems due to worries. The interviews showed that especially the combination of informal care responsibilities, doing a doctoral study and having a private and family life at the same time could result in mental health problems.



Implications for practice



- Make all employers aware about the combination of work and informal care;
- Outline available facilities and regulations in place in the HR policy of the organization;
- Train supervisor how to identify informal caregivers and how one can deal with this situation in relation to the PhD trajectory;
- Start conversations between PhDs and supervisors: combination of work and informal care should be open for discussion in a safe environment;
- Assure working caregiver friendly in the organization. Working informal caregivers need to be supported in this combination.

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