

Mental Health of Ryerson Graduate Students



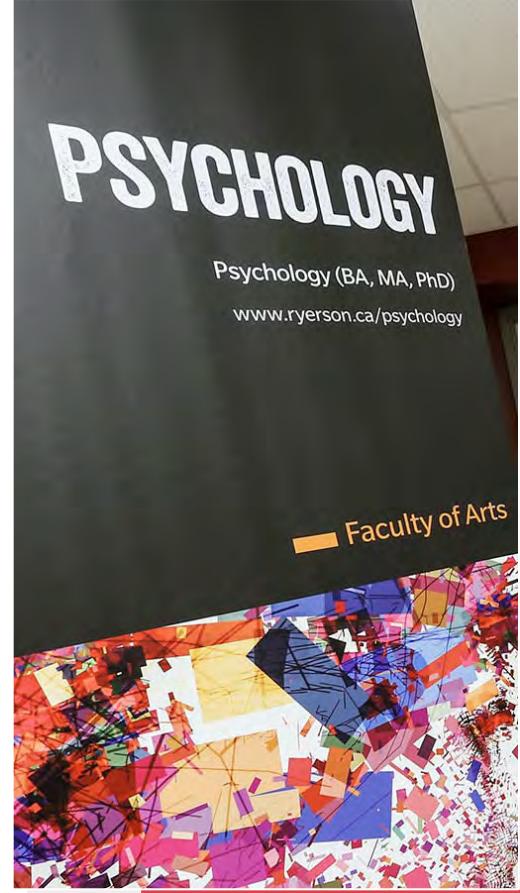
Who we are



Katey Park
PhD Candidate
Department of Psychology



Annabel Sibalis
PhD Candidate
Department of Psychology





How this project came to be





Timeline

Psychology Department
2019



Global Pandemic
March 2020



Data Collection
Nov-Dec 2020



Connected with
YSGS Associate Dean of
Student Affairs
2020



Connected with
YSGS Vice Provost Dean &
Graduate ADs
June 2020



Data Analysis & Dissemination
Jan– June 2021



Graduate Student Mental Health

- Graduate students report **higher stress** compared to population norms (Hazell et al., 2020) and undergraduate students (Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013)
- **Heightened risk for developing mental health disorders**, such as anxiety and depression, compared to similarly educated working professionals (Levecque et al., 2017)
- 72% of Canadian graduate students report worsening mental health during the pandemic (Toronto Science Policy Network, 2020)



Context of the Present Findings

- Current study is not a pre/post design
- Finding suitable comparison studies in the literature proved difficult
- Undergraduate and graduate students are often grouped together in research about student mental health
- Most published COVID-19 work collected data during the early weeks/months of the pandemic (present study Nov/Dec 2020)
- Canadian samples are rare

Overview of Findings

- 1 Demographics
- 2 Mental Health Findings:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Burnout
- 3 Financial Strain
- 4 Student-Supervisor Relationship
- 5 Participant Recommendations



1

Demographics

Demographics

- A total of 515 responses out of 2,926 eligible participants (17.6% response rate)
- Age, $M = 28.19$ (6.11)
- Predominantly women (71.1%)
- Ethnically diverse
- Masters (78.2%), enrolled full-time (91.8%)



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Mental Health

Anxiety
Depression
Burnout



Anxiety: Canadian General Population

- Unusually high levels of persistent and excessive worry
- Pre-pandemic, **2.5%** of the general population reported symptoms compatible with generalized anxiety disorder (Pelletier et al., 2017)
- During COVID-19 pandemic, **13%** of the general Canadian population report moderate-to-severe anxiety (Statistics Canada, 2021)

Anxiety: Graduate Students

- Pre-pandemic, previous research found that between **14-23%** of American graduate students reported moderate-to-severe anxiety (Hoying et al., 2020; Jones-White et al., 2021)
- During the pandemic, **39%** graduate students in an American sample reported symptoms of anxiety (Chirikov et al., 2020)



Anxiety

54% report moderate
to severe anxiety



Depression: Canadian General Population

- Persistent and chronic sadness or feelings of “emptiness”
- Pre-pandemic, **5.4%** general population report moderate-severe depression (Statistics Canada, 2013)
- During COVID-19 pandemic, **15%** of the general Canadian population report moderate-to-severe depression (Statistics Canada, 2021)



Depression: Graduate Students

- One study reported that **13%** of American graduate students report depression prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Jones-White et al., 2021)
- A smaller Canadian sample of psychology graduate students found that **33%** reported symptoms of depression (Peluso et al., 2011)
- During the pandemic, **32%** graduate students in an American sample reported depression (Chirikov et al., 2020)



Depression

43% report moderate to severe depression

Burnout

Exhaustion

Cynicism

Professional
Inefficacy



Burnout

61% report
experiencing burnout

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Financial Strain





Financial Strain Scale

- Sample item: Are you often not able to do the things you need to do because of shortages of money?
- Possible scores range from 5 to 25
- Mean = 12.12 (5.92)
- **18% of students are highly strained** (top 25% of scale)

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Student - Supervisor Relationship

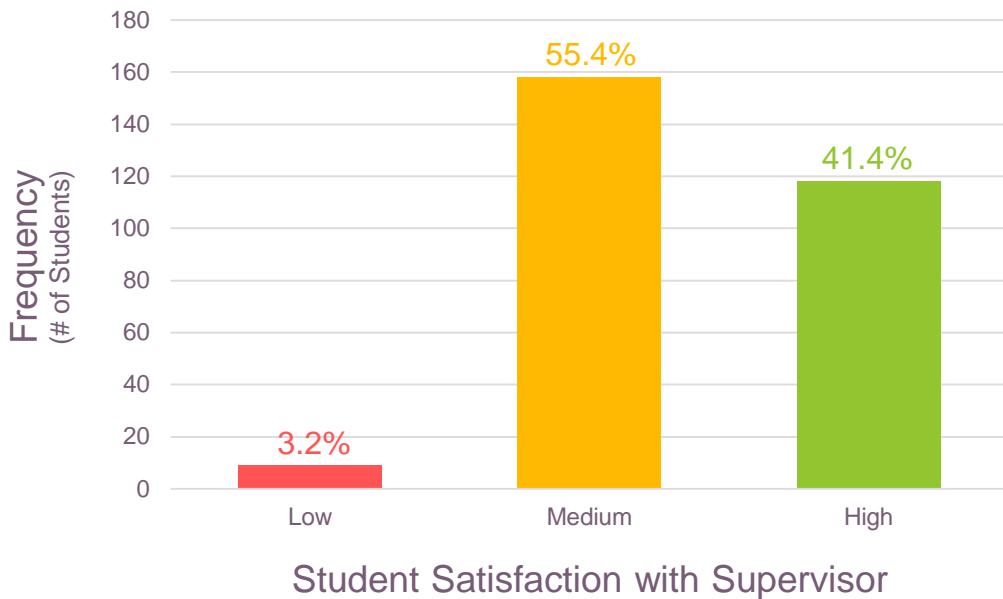




Student -Supervisor Relationship

- 17.5% of students ranked “Relationship with Supervisors” in their top 3 most stressful aspects of graduate school
- 4.5% ranked it as their #1 stressor

Student -Supervisor Relationship



Key finding:
Generally satisfied

Present Study: Interpretation & Limitations

- Selection bias
- Small sample size ($n = 515$)
- Over representation of women in our sample. Research suggests women report higher rates of anxiety and depression (Statistics Canada, 2017)
- Comparison Canadian studies would not yet have been published

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Participant Recommendations

Participant Recommendations

- 1 Tuition decrease or tuition waiver
- 2 Additional bursaries for students in financial need
- 3 Graduate student psychological services

Strategies Implemented

- Tuition voucher for graduate students impacted by COVID-19
- Several million dollars in emergency bursaries (e.g., Ryerson Relief Fund)
- Enhanced counselling services (e.g., Keep.meSAFE 24/7, graduate student counsellor)





Take Home Considerations

- Enhance our current psychological services to target graduate students
- Reflection: Where are the sources of stress and support for graduate students in your programs or units? What changes are feasible within your program, with well-being in mind? What policy revisions might be considered?
- Taking a **preventative** approach rather than an **intervention** approach

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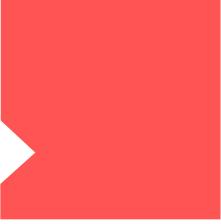
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Thank -you!