



Mental Health of Ryerson Graduate Students



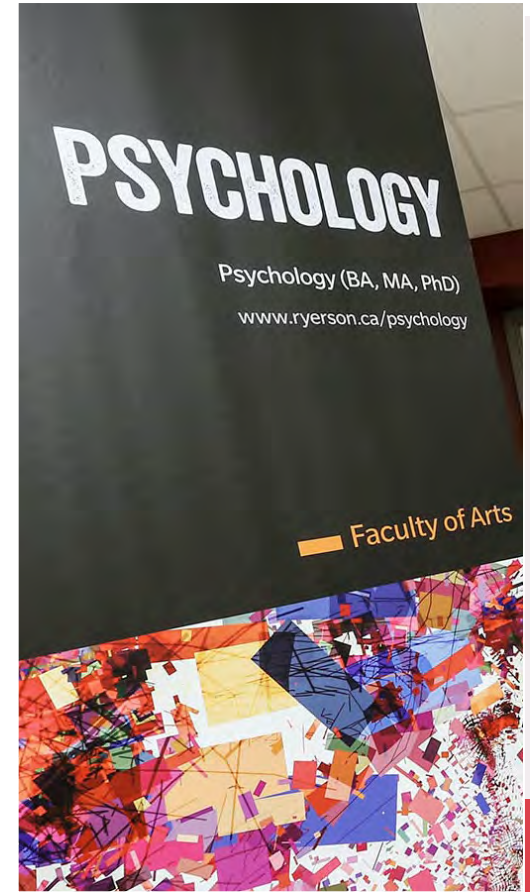
Who we are



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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

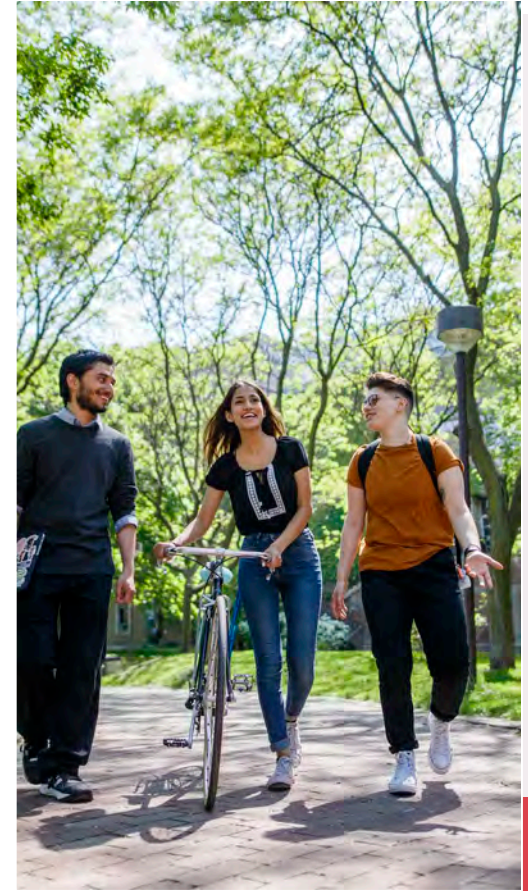
- Graduate students report **higher stress** compared to population norms (Hazell et al., 2020) and undergraduate students (Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013)
- **Heightened risk for developing mental health disorders**, such as anxiety and depression, compared to similarly educated working professionals (Levecque 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





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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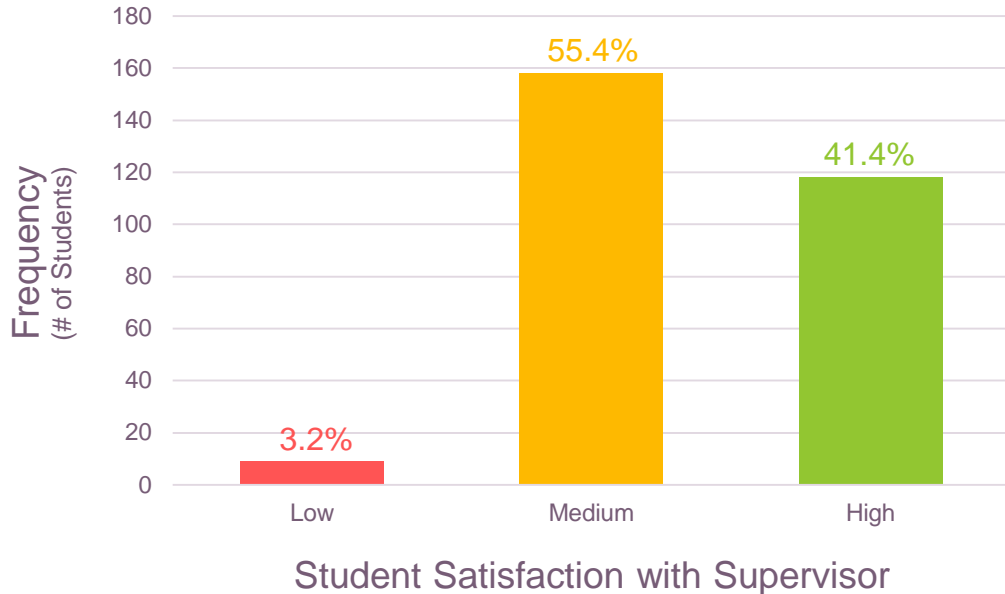
Student - Supervisor Relationship



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

Acknowledgements

Dr. Nancy Walton

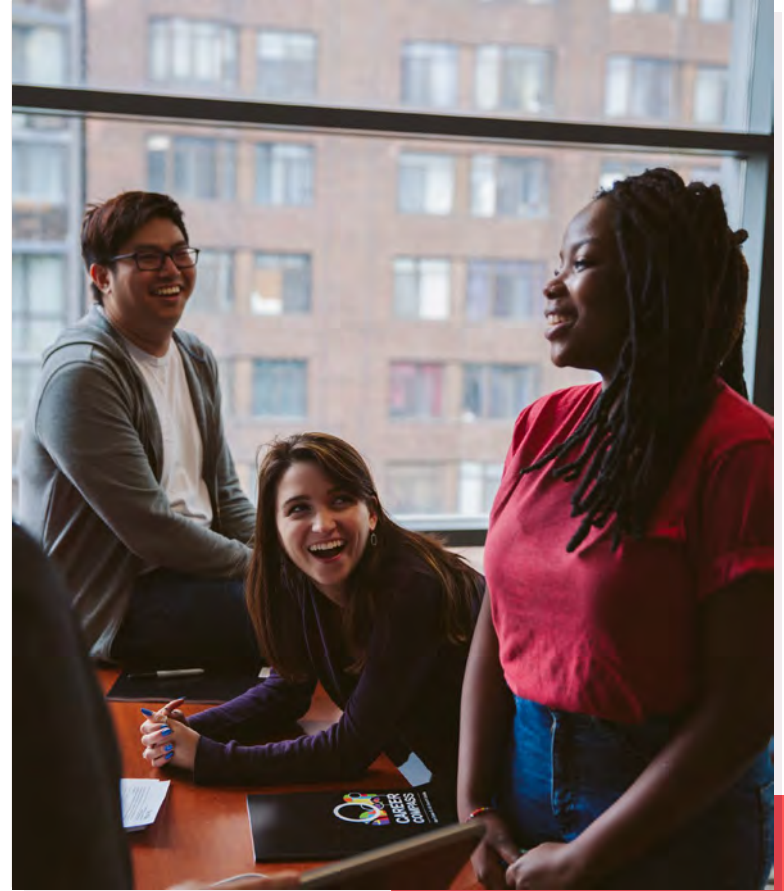
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YSGS Associate Deans

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Thank -you!