MENTAL HEALTH DURING YOUR PhD

47%

WHAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING/FEELING (YOU ARE NOT ALONE, I PROMISE)

IMPOSTER SYNDROME
7 in 10 people experience imposter syndrome throughout their careers.

Someone is going to figure out you don't belong here soon. You look good on paper, but passing that exam was a fluke. I don't have what it takes to do these experiments, write a thesis, succeed in academia. These are all classic signs of imposter syndrome. Tip: reframe your thinking. Aim for progress not perfection.

FIRST TIME FAILING
You've always been the best student at school, and you did pretty well at university too. Now your science isn't working and everyone around you seems to be getting on just fine. These feelings can come about as at undergraduate level, (believe it or not) are designed to work. Tip: remember, you are at the forefront of scientific research - if it was easy it would already have been done!

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE
Unfortunately, academia often fosters competition over collaboration, when it should be the other way around. This is made worse by the fact that often the only way to gauge how well you are doing is to compare yourself against others. Tip: no two PhD projects are the same, so avoid comparing them.

NO MORE TICK BOXES
You got pretty good at doing essay and lab reports - they were all short term tasks. You also got good at figuring out what questions might be asked in exams. Now you have an open ended project, with the end no where in sight. You no longer have grades to tell you if you are doing a good job. Transitioning from this undergraduate mentality can be particularly tough. Tip: break down your research into small, manageable goals.

ISOLATION / GUILT
Writing your thesis can be a particularly lonely, isolating task. This can also be coupled with feelings of guilt when going about your daily life as “you should be writing”. Tips to manage this include still attending research group meetings/departmental seminars whilst writing. This can also be coupled with ‘writer’s block’. Tip: when writing, start by making figures - it is far easier to write about what a figure means.

THE WORK / LIFE STRUGGLE
There is an inherent culture of acceptance in academia of long work hours. In fact, 40% of academics report working more than 50 hours a week. This is a fault with the system. Presenteeism is a common trait observed in academia, where people work long hours due to anxiety/stress, but are not being efficient in these long hours. Tip: aim to be efficient inside normal working hours then focus on “you” time.

ARE THOSE AROUND YOU STRUGGLING? HERE ARE SOME POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- INCREASED DRINKING
- INCREASED EATING
- DECREASED EATING
- WORKING LONG HOURS
- BEING ABSENT
- JOKing About suicide
- LOOKING DISHEVELLED

SOME WAYS TO HELP MANAGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE
Talk to a medical professional about how you are feeling. They may be able to offer support such as medication or referring you to help you manage your mental health.

TALK TO YOUR SUPERVISOR
It is not always possible, but try to be yourself and your to your supervisor. They will not think you are underperforming, but underperforming is the opposite of what is required.

TALK TO YOUR PEERS / POSTDOCS
It is not a bad idea to talk to your peers and postdocs about how you are feeling. They may be able to offer advice and support.

CREATE MANAGEABLE CHUNKS
Everything is overwhelming, try to break down your research into manageable chunks. It will help to become familiar with your research and give you a sense of achievement.

READ LITERATURE
There is a large amount of online resources available to help diagnosing mental illness and wellbeing. The most useful, clearly, is not to ignore life and events that may have caused you stress. To help in this situation, here are some resources available to help diagnose, treat, and manage stress.

SELF-HARMING? SUICIDAL THOUGHTS?
CALL FOR HELP NOW
Email us: cc@adm.ittgp.ac.in

REFERENCES

#TIMETOTAL
#RSCPPOSTER

*Although I did survive a PhD