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## Introducing the "PhD Journey"

Andy writes about the challenges faced by students embarking on a PhD course

-Andy Rowe

everyone who is accepted onto a PhD programme has a certain perception as to what it will be like: having your own office, jet-setting across the world and presenting numerous papers at conferences in glamorous locations (although this is usually not the case).

What is not well documented is the mental turmoil that one can face throughout the "PhD journey." It's difficult, really difficult in fact, and there are constant set-backs which student's face particularly with workload and managing demanding supervisors. Not only this, but there are also issues in trying to find  $time\ to\ socialise,\ dealing\ with\ obnoxious\ peers,\ managing\ your\ own\ workload\ and\ supervisory\ issues.\ The$ fact is mental illness is all too common, but not well reported, and so people start a PhD with a degree of

home, but my tip is to never cut yourself off completely from training sessions and the chance to meet others. Use those more sociable occasions to create your own 'harness' or support network if you find you

Unfortunately, there is a culture of acceptance around mental health issues in academia, a point raised by an anonymous academic through the Guardian website in March 2014 and the constant work load causes students to burn out; exacerbating mental illness. It's a common problem and something which I have experienced on several occasions and there is an element of guilt which creeps in if you are not doing work.

My advice is not to be afraid of taking regular breaks, exercising, and taking days off and holidays. These can all help reduce stress and improve mental well-being. That's actually one of the advantages of doing a PhD: flexibility – you manage your own workload and you are afforded time off, just as you would be if you

Posted by Student Minds Blogging Editorial Team at 13:26 Labels: Finding support, Postgraduate study, Stress

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I cast my mind back nearly four years ago and the elation of being awarded funding to do a PhD. I think

false pretence. Moreover, these issues need reporting to show what the PhD journey is really like.

I compare the journey to climbing a mountain unharnessed; its precarious, you're on the edge and there are many ascents and descents. But the support (the harness) comes from family, friends, loved ones and of course peers and supervisors. These are the people you rely upon to get you through it: to be there in both the good and bad times. However, not all PhD students have a supportive network around them and can often feel isolated and alone. Isolation is common, very common in fact, during a PhD. There are those who work from home, who have families, who are carers, who may be ill themselves (either physically or mentally) and who don't live in close proximity to their university.

From my own personal experience, the PhD journey is an isolating experience, particularly working from do not have support from family or friends.

It's a vicious circle and one which is notoriously difficult to break out of.

worked, so don't be afraid to allow yourself to unwind.

## more here. Search the blog

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Student Minds is the UK's mental health charity. W

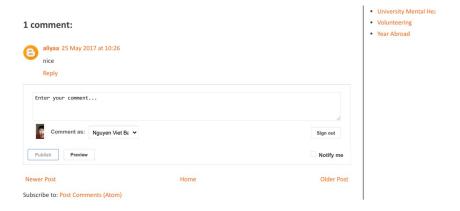
students and members o university community to their own mental health.

others and create change

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