#### **SOURCES**

Statistics are mixing many studies from US/UK/France/Wordwide, see here for all the detailed references, additional ressources and editable version:

https://not-in-our-labs.github.io/



If you are suffering or overthinking,

For doing something about it, you are not alone.

# REMEMBER

We can fight back!

We are all in this together. We can spread awareness, support and ressources. We can refuse to normalize toxic behaviours and denounce them. We can join our local PhD association to set up social events or discussion groups. We can set up reading groups in our team. We can join a union to help those abandoned by institutions, or to fight back about the big political things like academic freedom or the « publish or perish » culture. And even if sometimes we do make sacrifices and follow the « publish or perish » mentality to get a position, we must keep talking about it, and keep saying it is not normal. And for those that want and get a permanent position, we can fight this in every comittee we set foot.

## **DISCLAIMER**

Booklet by Charlie Jacomme, heavily inspired by work from Dr Zoe Ayres (the Toxic Mix poster and her book). Similar to her, I am not a medical professional, this was put together from a mix of scientific ressources and experiences. I am responsible for any innacuracies.

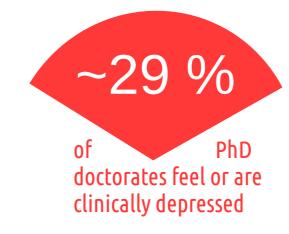
Suggestions of ressources, modifications and anything are more than welcome at charlie.jacomme@inria.fr

# THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE PHD





# ...but harder than it should :(





Why the heck, and what to do?

# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT – Part 1: any PhD is <u>HARD</u>

## **IMPOSTOR SYNDROM**

You may think you are not good enough, or don't belong here. It's not the case, but half of the doctorates at a Belgium University suffer from it.

# **OVERWORK**

Half of doctorates work over 50 hours per week. Is it too much? Yes! Your PhD is not your whole life.

## PAPERS PLEASE

pressure to publish. Doing a thesis should not feel like a border control. Find and discuss some reasonable goals.

#### BAD CAREER ADVERTISEMENT

36% of doctorates worry about their carreers, 29% percent are given usefull advice on it, 50% don't feel they can talk about not pursuing academia, ~17,5% of computer science PhDs can get an academic position.

# FIRST TIME FAILING

It's maybe the first time you face failure, and there is no actual correction or boxes to tick....

Chill out! A good researcher is wrong many times a day!

CULTURE OF SILENCE & SUFFERING



42% of doctorates think it's normal to suffer mentally. But it's not! 8% feel well prepared about mental health issues

# **ISOLATION**

29 % of doctorates suffer from it. You are not alone!



# FINANCIAL CONCERNS

~46% of doctorates are at least sometimes put in difficult position due to an insufficient salary.

# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT - Part 2: Advisors

OVERCONTROLING

A thesis must give you the opportunity to become autonomous!

WORKAHOLIC

Maybe your advisors dedicate their life to their work. That might be their choices, but it does not have to be yours. For instance, you can ask to not receive mails outside of office hours!

**GHOST** 

Your advisor does not owe you instant reactivity, but they owe you overall disponibility! Once a week for research is often good, and every few months for a step back and overall discussion sounds good.

**SURVIVOR BIAS** 

Your advisors represent the small percentage of people who did get a permanent position with a follow up promotion, and they may have forgotten it. You may need to filter their advices, and typically to turn to other people to get non-academic career advices.

SINK AND SWIM

This is a toxic mentality, that should be left to history. A PhD is hard, you deserve to be helped through it, and you need to be given the means to rise and emancipate yourself.

**IRRESPONSIBLE** 

Your advisors may not feel responsible about your well-being.
This is legally and morally wrong, they must at least give you the ressources available locally to help.

THE RITE OF PASSAGE

Another toxic belief: depression, mental health issues, intense stress and such should not be part of the journey.

HARASSMENT

The RED line, no matter the form (mental, sexual, ...). Try to seek help and support, and don't tolerate if you witness. Such behaviours often start with small things, you can learn to detect the signs, e.g., with the tool described just below.

A helpful tool - The Violence Meter (french, translation pending)

It is a scale of acceptable/inacceptable behaviours, at first on sexual harassment, and with an academic version.



# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT – Part 3: Inequalities



**RACIALIZATION** 

UK university professor are 5 times less likely to be black compared to the overall population.

GENDER

UK/FR university professor are 1.8 time less likely to be women compared to the overall population.

**CULTURE** 

US faculty are up to 25 times more likely to have a parent with a Ph.D, and it's ~similar for french doctorates.

**CLASSISM** 

UK working class are 3 times less likely to get a PhD compared to the overall population.

**ABLEISM** 

UK univerity staff are 4 times less likely to declare a disability compared to the overall population.

LGBTQIA+

They are 1.5 time more likely to develop mental difficulties. Existing can also be illegal in some conference countries...

Any of these, especially when Impostor syndrom combined, increases the likelihood of suffering from



Bullying Harassment

# A FEW IDEAS

**ACCEPTANCE** 

There will be some scientific difficulties: if your project was easy, it would already be done. Do not be ashamed to struggle and don't isolate yourself.

**FUN** 

A PhD can be an awesome experience, full of learning, discoveries, emancipation and... fun! It can be a very special work environment where you may be free to have fun and be full of quircks, so do use this freedom!

# **GROW TOGETHER**

Your advisors will not be perfect. Encourage them to follow a course on advising if they never did. If they are bad at communicating, conflicts may arise from basic miss-understanding, don't hesitate to ask for clarifications. Talk to them about what you can accept or not, what are your limits, what bothers you in this relationship. If you have specific needs, try to be open about it.

**BIG CHANGES** 

If nothing works, your doctoral school must help you change your advisor. Finally, stoping your thesis is always an option, and honestly not such a big deal.

LEARN

Many methodologies can
help you through the scientific parts of
your PhD, with often dedicated courses. Also, redaction group where
you write and criticize between doctorates are known to help. And
Some books are dedicated to help you. See next page for ressources.

# **BASIC NEEDS**

It's basic but we forget it when we are low. Take care of yourself, food/sleep/free time all affect directly mental health.

TALK!

## **TOGETHER**

Share and compare experiences to understand what is normal and what isn't. If needed, you can set up dedicated groups, such as those for doctorate or groups where certain identities feel more comfortable participating.

## INSTITUTION

Your lab/uni must provide official points of contacts, and unions can also help.
Institutions may also help the previous point, by organizing meetings, seminars, pizza time, WEI, ...

**MEDICAL** 

Most people would benefit from seeing a therapist, and there is no shame in doing so. Friends and colleagues cannot do nor provide what professionals can.

# **CONTACT POINTS?**

As mentioned your lab/uni should provide official points of contacts. If as a newcomer, you don't get such a list, complain to people, and ask why! This page can be edited and used by instutions to provide this. A QR code to some easy access webpage summarizing the local informations is great!

Harassment hotline: Harassment institutional mail support:

Mental health hotline:

University occupational health-care professional:

University therapist:

University social worker:

Informal trained listeners:

Local doctorate association:

Doctorate/student/researchers unions:

Example webpage for my lab, the LORIA!

https://intranet.loria.fr/vss/



## **RESSOURCES**

- Managing your Mental Health during your PhD: A Survival Guide. Dr Zoe Ayres.
- Comment l'université broie les jeunes chercheurs. Précarité, harcèlement, loi du silence. Adèle B. Combes.
- Guide to a Doctorate in France ANDès & CJC. French: <a href="https://spartacus-idh.com/076.html">https://spartacus-idh.com/076.html</a> English: <a href="https://spartacus-idh.com/104.html">https://spartacus-idh.com/104.html</a>
- Doctorate schools often have charters/guideline, to which the advisors officialy commit. It can actually be an interesting read. French example:

http://doctorat.univ-lorraine.fr/sites/default/files/user/futurs%20doctorants/charte\_du\_doctorat.pdf