

Description

Research is a rewarding endeavor, but is not without its hardships. One of the biggest problems that researchers deal with is academic isolation. Academic isolation is the feeling of being cut off from social network, friends, and family. There are various factors that contribute to academic isolation. These factors include the tendency of academics to work long hours, spend time alone reading and writing, and have niche interests. Financial stress and overwork are also compounding problems. For those who aspire to become academics, it is critical to learn to cope with and overcome these feelings of isolation. Today we will discuss the impacts of this phenomenon on the research community, and few tips to alleviate academic isolation.

What Causes Academic Isolation?

How do you know if you're experiencing academic isolation? However, isolation and solitude don't mean the same. Solitude is a pleasant and fulfilling feeling of enjoyment one gets when he is alone. On the other hand, isolation stems from negative feelings of being cut off from your surrounding community . Academic isolation is such a widespread problem for many reasons. Firstly, early career academics often find themselves in small communities without many who share their interests. The nature of work requires an irregular schedule and long hours working alone. As researchers progress in their careers, their knowledge becomes more specialized. This can make even finding friends among colleagues difficult. Besides PhD researchers, academic isolation extends among professors and postdocs as well.

A Growing Trend

If you find yourself struggling with academic isolation, research shows you are far from alone. In fact, as many as 40% of academics cite isolation as the biggest factor impacting their mental health. The problem isn't limited to the US— it's found throughout the world. A UK survey found that 46% of researchers feel lonely at work. Social isolation is particularly common among early career academics – 64% of PhD candidates report suffering from academic isolation. The irony of academic isolation is that networking is considered a particularly critical component of building a successful career in research. Your work will bring you recognition, but getting your research in front of the right people is often the key to standing out. Further, isolated researchers may have a harder time finding collaborations and getting in on projects helpful to their careers.

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How to Combat Loneliness and Isolation

Researchers often simply don't know where to go to meet friends. Academia is an increasingly competitive field, which can make expanding your social circle at work challenging. If you find yourself suffering from academic isolation, consider the following tips.

- Interact with your local community. Volunteering, joining meetup groups, or becoming involved with a local hobby group are all great ways to meet new and interesting people.
- Use social media. Besides Facebook and Twitter, Academia.edu and LinkedIn are other great forums. Some academic disciplines have online forums where you can talk to other researchers around the world— join one relevant to you.
- Don't stay stuck in the lab. Conferences, writing groups, seminars, and workshops are a great way not just to network, but also to meet people you can spend time with socially. If nothing around you is interesting, don't be afraid to create your own event! You may find there are more friends around you than you expected.
- Take care of yourself. Make sure you're taking care of yourself by eating, sleeping, as well as exercising. If you're healthy, it will make meeting new people less intimidating and you'll find it easier to keep depression at bay.

What are your tips for overcoming academic isolation? Do you experience academic isolation? Let us know your thoughts in the comments below.

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