



## Description

One of the different ways in which the pandemic has affected us is the Work from Home situation. With the strict social distancing norms coming into effect, we have been restricted to remain within our homes, precisely work from homes. While work from home is common in several corporate companies, researchers were not quite aligned with this system.

## Why is Mental Health of Researchers at Stake?

PhD and post-doctoral researchers often [feel exhausted, overworked, and worry about their future](#). The stress and pressure of academic life can be relentless, leading to depression and anxiety. Disturbingly, it is becoming common for young researchers to battle with mental health issues, especially prevalent in life sciences and engineering. However, the situation has worsened with the pandemic and the consequent lockdown taking over.

## What do Studies Say?

Coronavirus and the imposition of lockdown this year 'significantly raised' mental health challenges, particularly so for the most vulnerable groups, including those shielding, according to the first study to look at people's coping styles in face of the pandemic. A new research, published recently in the journal *American Psychologist*, draws on survey responses from over 800 people recruited online and via social media who answered questions over a ten-day period when the UK was in full lockdown (from 17- 26 April 2020).

The study clearly substantiated the extensive media debate that [health anxieties were heightened as a result of the pandemic](#), and it is also the first study to indicate that those in vulnerable groups are clinically more distressed as a result. Results suggested that a quarter of all participants revealed significantly elevated anxiety and depression, exacerbated by lockdown and isolation. Nearly 15% reached clinical levels of health anxiety, which reflects that health-related anxiety has become distressing and is likely to be causing preoccupation and disruption to normal activities. Health anxiety focuses on the fear of having or contracting a serious illness despite medical reassurance.

This is not the first instance thought. Researchers tend to be passionate and enthusiastic about their work. They want to make a meaningful contribution to their field, thereby resulting in the anxieties,

depression and mental health issues. According to [2018 and 2019 student surveys from the American College Health Association \(ACHA\)](#), about 60% of respondents felt “overwhelming” anxiety, while 40% experienced depression so severe they had difficulty functioning. A 2019 Pennsylvania State University study noted that demand for campus mental health services spiked by 30-40% during a period that saw only a 5% increase in enrollment.

## What Has Been Stressing Out the Researchers During the Lockdown?

Following are a few factors that have contributed to stress and lead to anxiety and depression to the researchers during this period:

1. **Disrupted work-life balance:** Balancing the work and personal life has become a major issue during this period. Extended hours of work just to finish off the task has led to work-life balance going into a toss.
2. **Uncertain future:** Uncertainty about one’s career prospects for the future can be frustrating and worrying. The [uncertainties have been heightened due to decreased research funding](#), laboratories closing down etc., all resulting due to the pandemic.
3. **Financial uncertainty:** Often, in academia, researchers are underpaid and funds are available for short time periods, leading to financial insecurity. This is one of the major unfavorable outcomes of the pandemic.
4. **Frequent evaluation:** The constant reports to faculty and funders put extra pressure on researchers. While working from home, researchers are facing constant monitoring which might be giving them anxiety and extra pressure.
5. **Competitive atmosphere:** Resources are scarcer and limited due to the locked down condition. Besides this, the competition for funding is enormous. Postdocs and PhDs are under more pressure to be productive while working from home.

## Here’s How You Can Beat the Anxiety & Depression

Here are a few tips as to how you can [preserve the mental health while working from home](#)

1. **Have separate areas for work and play:** It is recommended to have a dedicated workspace to help you stay focused when working remotely. Having separate areas for work and play also makes it easier to mentally move from work mode to home mode.
2. **Don’t use your work computer in your free time:** Just like having different locations for work and private life, it’s important to separate your work tools from your play tools. The most obvious example is your laptop. Make sure you don’t use the laptop where you are drafting your manuscript for any other activity.
3. **Go for a walk after the workday is over:** Unless you live in an area where you’re not allowed to go outside during the lockdown, [go out for a walk or for a bike ride](#) as soon as the workday is over. This will help you mentally switch to “home mode” by getting you focused on a different activity, thereby relaxing your mind.
4. **Do some free-hand exercise to keep both your body and mind healthy:** If you cannot go out, do some exercises or stretches at home. Not only will physical activity help you divert your mind from work, but it will help you stay in shape and help you relax.

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5. **Plan your after-work time:** When everyone is locked in and there isn't much life outside your home, it's difficult to break yourself away from work. So it is very essential to keep a check on what you are doing after work. Make plans beforehand so that it makes you look forward to finishing off the work.

Finally, we have to remember we are in this together. So we have to make sure that our as well as other's mental health is also being protected. In order to do that, we have to stay in touch, keep connecting and talking to each other. Please let us know your thoughts in the comments section below.

### Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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