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Student wellbeing: Managing your PhD journey

Dr Diane Rasmussen Pennington FHEA FRSA
Lecturer in Information Science and Course Director
Digital Health and Wellness Research Group
Strathclyde iSchool Research Group (SiSRG)
diane.pennington@strath.ac.uk / @infogamerist

SICSA PhD Conference 2018
28 June 2018
Workshop agenda

• Introductory exercise
• Information sharing/lecture
• Reflective exercise
• Discussion and questions
Amber’s PhD timeline (15 minutes)

Amber is a first year PhD student studying information engagement at Strathclyde. In an attempt to manage costs, she is living at home in Stirling (30 minutes away) with her parents, her younger brother, and her grandparents. She has EPSRC studentship funding for three years, with an optional fourth year for writing up if necessary. Make a timeline showing how Amber might progress through her PhD. Especially consider important milestones that could be really stressful. What challenges will she face? How is she going to deal with stress? After you draw her timeline, pair up with a partner and share your timeline with each other.
What happens when you do a PhD?

- Submit a proposal
- Get accepted
- Find funding
- Do lots of reading and writing
- Run some original research
- Meet with your supervisor and your examiner on time
- Write it up and submit it
- Pass the viva!
- Make corrections, probably
- Final approval
- You are now a PhD!
Right. But, what *really* happens? My story:

- I lost my original supervisor
- I worked full-time and paid my own way
- I lost people important to me
- Illness
- I had amazing supervisors in the end 😊
The importance of wellbeing (and, conversely, stress)

• What is stress? How do we know when we’re stressed?
  – Worried, annoyed, angry, can’t sleep, can’t stay awake, can’t focus, helpless, panic attacks, heart beating fast, crying, physical illnesses like stomach pain, colds, headaches…

• A certain amount of stress can make us productive
• But too much stress does bad things to our physical and mental selves (and we still don’t like to talk about it)
• Increased risk for turning into mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, unhealthy choices, and so on
  – ~ 25% (or more) of people will have a diagnosable mental health condition in their lives
  – 2/3 of them don’t seek treatment (World Health Org.)

• YOU are the only person who can take care of yourself
From Scotland’s Health and Social Care Delivery Plan

- ‘Empowering people to more actively manage their own health means changing and investing in new technologies and services…’
- ‘People will have access to more and more effective services across the health system to support mental health … as important as physical health.’
- Mental health is also a priority for UK universities
We’re all computing types here, so let’s start with online resources.

Please note: NOTHING is a replacement for professionally qualified help, such as therapists, counsellors, or psychiatrists, if you need it.
Online help for stress? What’s available? What help is out there? How can you find it?
Where is “the good stuff”?

http://ayemind.com/resource-map/
What is depression?

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects your everyday life.

In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. It doesn’t stop you leading your normal life but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make you feel suicidal or simply give up the will to live.

It feels like I’m stuck under a huge grey-black cloud. It’s dark and isolating, smothering me at every opportunity.

When does low mood become depression?

We all have times when our mood is low, and we’re feeling sad or miserable about life. Usually these feelings pass in due course.

But if the feelings are interfering with your life and don’t go away after a couple of weeks, or if they come back over and over again for a few days at a time, it could be a sign that you’re experiencing depression.

It starts as sadness then I feel myself shutting down, becoming less capable of coping. Eventually, I just feel numb and empty.
Quizzes to evaluate issues

http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/mildmoderate/home2.asp
Personal stories

my struggle with depression

By James • abuse, depression, mood disorder

I have struggled with depression for longer than I can remember and and it all started when I was younger I was 2 years old and my uncle was "bored" his words not mine but so he touched me and raped me. even now I have night terrors but they don’t scare me anymore they make me stronger and that's all thanks to my friends they help me thru so much and im thankful. a message to people struggling.... it gets better there are people that want to help you just have to let them. there is always someone that can help you and wants to.

Submitted by james, age 17.

https://mindyourmind.ca/expression/stories/my-struggle-depression
Personal stories (with interactions?)

Aidan’s Story

Story submitted by: Aidan

“There is this external stigma on guys that we don’t have feelings – the fact is, we do.”

Chapter 1: “I felt lost.”
Chapter 2: The Physical and the Mental
Chapter 3: Hitting Rock Bottom
Chapter 4: The Rear View Mirror
Chapter 5: Guys and Stigma
Chapter 6: Friends and Teams

http://www.brotalk.ca/Real-Life-Stories/Aidans-Story
Videos featuring others who have “been there”

http://mindyourmind.ca/interviews
Others who have been there

- [https://thesiswhisperer.com/](https://thesiswhisperer.com/)
- [https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk](https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk)
- [https://patthomson.net/](https://patthomson.net/)
Interactives/games

Squish 'Em

Annoying stress trogs are on the loose! Squish 'em, and get some stress tips along the way!

If you have a QR reader you can scan the code and quickly access the tool on your mobile device.

https://mindyourmind.ca/interactives/squish-em
Social media awareness

https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealthOnTheMighty
Apps (mood tracking, meditation, inspiration) – Headspace is popular for meditation

Stress is a designer ailment that many of the so-called afflicted suffer from with pride.

-Janet Street-Porter
Chill Panda!

Find digital tools to help you manage and improve your health

Find out more

FILTER BY CATEGORY

All
Cancer
COPD
Dementia
Dental
Diabetes

Cove
Being Tested in the NHS
Create music to capture your mood and express how you feel with the Cove app.

CHILL PANDA
Being Tested in the NHS
Learn to relax, manage your worries and improve your wellbeing with Chill Panda.

MENTAL HEALTH
Online communities and self-help

**Big White Wall** is an online mental health and wellbeing service offering self-help programmes, creative outlets and a community that cares. When you're dealing with everyday stressors or major life events, we'll help you get through it.
Depression

1. **Introduction**
2. **Symptoms**
3. **Causes**
4. **Diagnosis**
5. **Treatment**
6. **Living with clinical depression**
7. **Psychotic depression**

**Introduction**

Depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days.

We all go through spells of feeling down, but when you're depressed you feel...
Social media; anti-stigma campaigns

Mental Health on The Mighty
@MentalHealthOnTheMighty

Our needs matter. And denying them doesn’t make them go away. That’s why for #MentalHealthMonth and for May’s #MyMightyMonth, we’re challenging our community to embrace their needs. Get the conversation started by filling out and sharing these customizable templates.
Social media; anti-stigma campaigns

We're supporting time to change end mental health discrimination

MentalHealth Matters
@TimeToChangeJP
Raising awareness of MentalHealth & reducing stigma. It's just as important as physical health!
ChildhoodDomesticViolence surviv...

MentalHealthMatters
@ShefUniMHM
Mental Health Matters is an affiliated society that aims to improve support systems, promote awareness and alleviate the stigma of mentalhealth.

ARTvocacy @ARTvocacyPH · May 15
MentalHealthMatters
Artvocacy features Mental Health Issues such as depression for this week's advocacy.
Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Living Life

Living Life To The Full for older adults

Overcoming low mood and stress
Results of research (mine and others) in online mental health
Young people’s needs from mental health mobile technologies

1. Safety: confidentiality, cyberbullying, stigma
2. Engagement
3. Functionality
4. Social interaction
5. Promoting awareness
6. Accessibility
7. Gender
8. Young people in control

University students’ e-mental health use

- Women use more than men
- 78% did not trust what they found
- 13% had used e-mental health (forums, chat)

- Advantages:
  - Easy to get
  - Lots of info
  - Private

- Disadvantages:
  - Unreliable info
  - Don’t know who wrote info
  - Medical advice more reliable

Figure 1: Number of higher education student suicides by year, deaths registered in England and Wales,
between the 12 months ending July 2001 and the 12 months ending July 2017

Start with Google

Google

my life sucks
my life sucks
my life sucks meme

About 19,900,000 results (0.54 seconds)

Rate My Life - How Are You Doing? Find Out If You Suck at Life.
www.ratemylife.net
At Rate My Life, we rate your life using factors derived from what people want to accomplish in life after aggregating data from the entire Internet!

Images for my life sucks

you want to kill me? go ahead, my life sucks anyway.

More images for my life sucks

5 Helpful Things to Do When You Think Life Sucks - Tiny Buddha
tinybuddha.com/blog/5-helpful-things-to-do-when-you-think-life-sucks/
1 Oct 2014 - 5 Helpful Things to Do When You Think Life Sucks ... For the better part of my life, I've felt flustered and incapable of handling these moments.

FML: Your everyday life stories
www.fmylife.com/
6I agree. your life sucks415That could've happened to me34 ... He was curious as to how my mom had a better ass than mine when she was twice my age. FML.
Not too much text

http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/depression.aspx
Videos!

**When I am Sad**
Aglia Mortcheva
7 years ago · 450,130 views

**L CD VOL 01 - I'm Sad - Senmie (Official Lyric Video) / Original song**
L PRODUCTION OFFICIAL
1 month ago · 26,179 views
Official Lyric Video I'm Sad - Senmie (Original song) MV Coming soon ...! L Album CD VOL 01 Smart Tune : 415639 SMS TO 855.

**I AM A SAD PERSON**
JellyandDay2
1 year ago · 114,063 views
Today I talk about my depression. #VentingWithJelly
--------- Want more of us?

**What To Do When You're Sad**
MusicandartsaveLives
3 years ago · 14,478 views
A lot of people ask what I do when I'm sad; so these are some things that I do and you could try too. Let me know if any of these ...
Interactive, not static

• Discussion forums
• Respect confidentiality
• Quizzes, but not if topic is “too serious”
• Chatting/texting with a trusted counsellor
• Chatting/texting is better than phone
• Games must hold their interest
Other results

• People do not know what is available
• Poor health literacy
• Disagreements on judging credibility
• Trust issues are prominent
Finding solutions to advance digital health for addressing unmet needs in relation to self-harming behaviours
...through socially-oriented, equal inclusion of stakeholders

- Social Innovation Labs/co-production approach to the incubation of creative ideas and solutions
- Young people with “lived experience”, parents, families will all contribute equally
- Hackathons
- Interviews, surveys
- Project Steering Group
I asked some PhD students what helps them deal with stress and take care of themselves…

• Yoga
• Deep breathing: 5/5/5/5
• Meditation
• Tea/coffee/water break, alone/with others
• Take time off – no working 24/7!
• Do things you enjoy!
• Find things to remind you you’re not alone
• Set auto reminders: stand, walk, take breaks
• Consider your supervisor relationship
Other things to do

- Nutrition and exercise
  - Watch your coffee, alcohol, sugar...
  - 10,000 steps per day
- Get sunlight (yes, this is Scotland, but…)
- Take medications if prescribed
- Deal with the causes of stress if possible
- Prioritise and learn to say “no”
- Where, when, and how do you work best?
- Make lists and tick things off – feels good!
- Keep a diary for appointments
- Write down your thoughts… “brain dump”
- Maintain perspective on your work, your life…
People are amazing resources

- Friends and family
- Departmental academic PhD advisor or other staff who is not your supervisor
- See your GP
- Find a private counsellor at [https://www.bacp.co.uk/](https://www.bacp.co.uk/) (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)
- Student disability services
- Student counselling services
Strathclyde’s Student Counselling

Student Counselling

- Offers one to one counselling sessions, workshops and self help resources.
- Provides a confidential service for undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Strathclyde, available at any time during your university career.
- Is available for any personal issue affecting general well-being, health, relationships or study.
- Respects your values choices and lifestyle.
- Assists you to talk through your concerns and when appropriate, helps you to make the changes and decisions that are right for you.

If you wish to see a counsellor for the first time this academic session, please contact Reception on 0141 548 3510 or email: student-counselling@strath.ac.uk. We will make arrangements for you to have an initial meeting where you needs can be assessed.

Please contact our Student Nurse if would like advice and corroboration of Personal Circumstances. She is also available to offer support with health concerns and

https://www.strath.ac.uk/studentcounselling/
Strathclyde’s Student Counselling: Self-help resources

Wellbeing collection
Research shows that evidence based self-help materials, particularly in combination with a small input from specialist support services, can be very effective in improving Mental Health and wellbeing. Student Counselling has worked together with the Library to bring a range of ebooks and books to students and staff of the University. The titles have been chosen to cover a range of topics and also to support the Universities very popular Mindfulness courses. Student Counselling offers individual counselling and the counsellors will also be happy to support you with choosing titles or working through the materials. Self-help books can help you understand yourself and others better. With motivation and support they can even help you address major life difficulties.

Counselling online resources
View a selected range of online resources at Student Counselling Self-Help

Programmes available within the University
Hypnotherapy
For more information on hypnotherapy available in the University http://www.strath.ac.uk/studentcounselling/hypnotherapy/

Mindfulness
Mindfulness programme available to students of the University http://www.strath.ac.uk/disabilityservice/mental/insospurpose/
The best advice I received during my PhD (from Prof Tefko Saracevic, a very senior academic):

“The best dissertation is a done dissertation. The purpose of writing a dissertation is to graduate, not to save the world.”
Free handouts!

help with ADJUSTMENT

• GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO ADJUST. The way you are feeling is a natural response to a major life event or change that you have experienced and will not last forever.

• THINK POSITIVELY. Remind yourself of your strengths, skills, and abilities. What difficulties have you overcome in the past? How can you apply the coping skills you used then to your current situation?

• CHALLENGE THE WAY YOU TALK TO YOURSELF. Question whether the situation you feel negative about is as bad as it seems. Ask: “Is there another way to look at this?” “Am I focusing on the negative details and forgetting the positive details?”

• KEEP ACTIVE. Participate in activities you enjoy doing. Exercising can also make you feel good. Try a brisk 30 minute walk each day.

• GET SUPPORT. Talk to friends and loved ones about how you are feeling. Understanding and support from others can help you get through this difficult time and speed up the recovery process.

For more self-help material & service info:

wellbeing
services south glasgow

better@wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk
WWW.WELLBEING-GLASGOW.ORG.UK

NHS
Greater Glasgow
and Clyde
Your PhD timeline

Just how you made Amber’s timeline at the beginning of the workshop, make your own PhD timeline. What sources of stress do you think you might face at different points in your process? What if something unexpected happens in your life? What will you do to manage this stress? How will you take care of yourself? What are your goals for your PhD, and how can you help yourself meet them? You and your partner can share your timeline and strategies with each other if you feel comfortable doing so.
Discussion and Q&A