

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY SPECIAL: RESEARCH REPORT ON PSYCHOSOCIAL WORKLOAD AT DUTCH UNIVERSITIES

Research into the current state of affairs regarding work pressure and undesirable behavior and how the 14 Dutch public universities deal with these psychosocial risks.

Netherlands Labour Authority, April 2024

Executive summary

Work pressure and undesirable behavior have been a problem for university staff for some time. To reduce this, in 2020 the Labour Authority asked the 14 public universities to draw up action plans. After reviewing these action plans in 2021, and based on other studies, the Labour Authority found that there was still not enough being done about work pressure and undesirable behavior at universities. This report addresses the current status of work pressure and undesirable behavior at universities as well as its causes.

The aim of the study is to uncover:

1. how universities meet the obligations under the Dutch Working Conditions Act (Arbeidsomstandighedenwet) when it comes to identifying the risks of work pressure and undesirable behavior, as well as their policy cycle.
2. the experiences of employees concerning work pressure and undesirable behavior.
3. the possible causes of work pressure and undesirable behavior.
4. the measures universities have implemented to prevent and reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior, and which measures are considered effective.
5. the actions universities have taken following the points of concern regarding work pressure and undesirable behavior raised by the Labour Authority during the intervention in 2020/2021.

The Labour Authority visited 14 public universities in the Netherlands between June and August 2023, examined documentation related to health and safety policies and conducted interviews. The Labour Authority also conducted an online survey among all academic and teaching staff working at these universities between September and November 2023. This survey was completed by more than 9,200 employees.

Key findings

1. Universities shape their health and safety policy on psychosocial workload in various ways, but there is little insight into its underlying causes; an integrated approach is lacking and it is difficult to guarantee successful implementation within the organisation
2. Work pressure is experienced by many. There is no insight into working hours while employees report overtime and perform additional tasks outside and above the job profile. Of all respondents, 54% indicated they themselves had experienced undesirable behavior in the past two years.
3. The main causes of work pressure are education and research funding, too many tasks, performance pressure, and ambition. The hierarchical structure and managers play a central role in undesirable behavior .
4. Universities take many measures, but employees are aware of and use them only to a limited extent. Measures with a source approach are seen as the most efficient in tackling work pressure. Little is reported to confidential advisers, and official complaints are hardly ever submitted.
6. The points of concern communicated by the Labour Authority in 2021 have been followed up only to a marginal extent.

Introduction

High work pressure and undesirable behavior have been a problem within Dutch universities for years. Previous studies by the Labour Authority found that while universities pay a lot of attention to work pressure, they do not focus sufficiently on eliminating the underlying causes.¹ Universities pay less attention to undesirable behavior (including bullying, aggression and violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination).

Excessive work pressure and/or undesirable behavior can lead to physical and psychological complaints, including fatigue, depression and burn-out symptoms, as well as post-traumatic stress, heart disease and musculoskeletal disorders. Psychosocial workload (psychosociale arbeidsbelasting, PSA) accounts for almost 20% of the work-related disease burden in the Netherlands². It is one of the three main culprits concerning damage to health caused by working conditions.³ PSA consists of work pressure and undesirable behavior. In this study, the Labour Authority looks at both objective work pressure, including hours worked and how leave is taken, as well as subjective work pressure, including psychological job demands and employee exhaustion. The Labour Authority distinguishes four forms of undesirable behavior: bullying, aggression and violence, sexual harassment and discrimination.⁴ Current health and safety legislation states that the employer must have policies and measures in place to prevent or reduce PSA as much as possible.⁵

In this study, the Labour Authority focuses on charting the policy on PSA at the 14 public Dutch universities⁶, as well as the resulting measures and actions in the workplace. In doing so, the Labour Authority also investigates the experiences of academic and teaching staff on work pressure and undesirable behavior. Following previous signals, reports, inspections and action plans drawn up by universities, the Labour Authority wants to better understand the extent to which universities have actually implemented improvements in the approach to PSA.

This study aims to take stock of where Dutch universities currently stand in tackling PSA and the experiences of work pressure and undesirable behavior among employees. The primary responsibility for tackling PSA and ensuring a healthy and safe working environment lies with the employer, i.e. the universities.

Background

The following is an account of the various studies and signals that gave rise to the current study into work pressure and undesirable behavior at the 14 Dutch public universities.

¹ Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report](#).

² RIVM (2021). [High-impact determinants: Psychosocial work pressure](#).

³ Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [The status of healthy work](#).

⁴ Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. [Psychosocial work pressure \(PSA\) | Health and safety portal](#).

⁵ Inspectie SZW (2021). [Occupational diseases in Focus](#).

⁶ These are, in alphabetical order, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Open University, Radboud University Nijmegen, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Technische Universiteit Delft, Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, Tilburg University, Universiteit Leiden, Universiteit Maastricht, University of Twente, Universiteit Utrecht, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit, and Wageningen University, see also <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/wie-we-zijn>

In 2017 and 2018, the Labour Authority visited six public universities and assessed the extent to which they had identified, further investigated, planned and evaluated the risks of work pressure and undesirable behavior. The following conclusions (among others) were drawn based on this non-representative selection among universities.

1. At all universities inspected, there was structural work pressure; half of the universities were not yet taking sufficient measures to address the causes of work pressure.
2. Aggression was established at five of the six universities, and at some of the universities, the anti-aggression policy still paid too little attention to employee safety.
3. Undesirable behavior was established at five of the six universities. Despite the policies against undesirable behavior, undesirable behavior could still occur.

Following published reports and the outcomes of the above mentioned inspections, the Dutch Labour Authority asked 14 public Dutch universities in late 2020 for an action plan on overtime pressure, undesirable behavior (including discrimination) and working hours. The published reports were:

- The report *Inventory of extent and consequences of structural overtime at Dutch universities*. A large number of reports (n = 719) on structural overtime and work pressure were made to the action group WOinActie. WOinActie worked with the Scientific Education and Research sector of the General Education Union (AOB) and FNV Overheid. These reports were analysed in the report, which was presented to the Labour Authority.⁷ Summary: 36% of respondents reported working overtime structurally. Previous collective bargaining agreements to reduce work pressure did not seem to have any effect, and work pressures seemed to have increased. A large proportion of respondents also reported suffering from physical and psychological complaints due to structural overtime and work pressure
- The 2019 report titled *Harassment in Dutch Academia into misconduct and harassment*.⁸ This study showed that female academics experienced various forms of structural misconduct and harassment in the workplace, compounded by structural and cultural factors within universities. These had a significant impact on health, personal life and careers.
- The 2018 National Working Conditions Survey (NEA), which figures showed that universities scored high in a benchmark for discrimination and internal sexual undesirable behavior.⁹

In the action plans, universities indicated what measures and actions they took (or planned to take) against work pressure and undesirable behavior, including discrimination, and how they evaluated (or planned to evaluate) these measures. The Labour Authority reviewed these action plans and reported the findings to each university. The overall findings of this project were also reported in a publicly published report.¹⁰ The overall conclusions were that universities paid a lot of attention to work pressure, but many of the measures focused on the individual (e.g. time management training) rather than on a source approach (e.g. structurally reducing work pressure by increasing staff). It was

⁷ Jongsma, M., Sanders, W., & Weeda, C./ WOinActie (2020). [Inventory of the extent and consequences of structural overtime at Dutch universities](#).

⁸ Naezer, van den Brink, & Benschop, Y. (2019). [Harassment in Dutch academia. Exploring manifestations, facilitating factors, effects and solutions](#).

⁹ Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report](#). p. 3

¹⁰ Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report](#).

also unclear how universities evaluated the effectiveness of various measures. Furthermore, much less attention was paid to policies and measures targeting undesirable behavior and discrimination. There appeared to be little insight into the actual hours worked by university staff.

Based on the action plans, the Labour Authority concluded that universities do not explicitly address underlying causes of work pressure and undesirable behavior. The risk of PSA problems persisting arises when universities' PSA policies focus more on symptom management. The Labour Authority has therefore called on universities to work on the problems, while taking into account the causes. When the underlying causes are outside the universities' sphere of influence, a dialogue should be sought with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This report follows up on the 2021 action plans and broadly explores the current status of work pressure and undesirable behavior within universities.

There are several other studies encouraging further research on work pressure and undesirable behavior within universities, namely:

- ICTU study commissioned by Universities of the Netherlands in which both 2019 and 2022 work pressures at universities were studied. The work pressure was high: more than 70% of academic staff said they were (very) much affected by work pressure. Work pressure also remained high over time; there was no decrease in perceived work pressure among academic staff between 2019 and 2022, but even a small increase in work pressure among managerial staff.¹¹
- Rathenau Institute study in 2022 on use of time and overtime among researchers and lecturers. This study on more than 2,200 respondents, revealed that a total of 66% of university staff work overtime, and over 25% work weekly overtime for over a quarter of contracted hours.¹²
- KNAW's advisory report Social Safety in Dutch Science, which argues that current Dutch science is a breeding ground for socially unsafe and transgressive behavior inside and outside university walls.¹³
- Research conducted by FNV and VAWO in 2019 among more than 1,100 university employees shows that 4 in 10 had experienced socially unsafe situations, including bullying, abuse of power, humiliation, sexual harassment and exclusion.¹⁴
- Research by Promovendi Netwerk Nederland in 2020 among 1,600 PhD students, showing that 18.6% of all respondents had experienced some form of undesirable behavior.¹⁵

In summary, the studies, the inspections in the period 2017-2020 and the assessment of the 2020 action plans expose several problems concerning PSA within Dutch universities. While legal obligations, such as the risk assessment, with an action plan, are often met, as is the fact that the written policy is usually present in outline form (except for working time registration), the risks are insufficiently controlled in practice. Moreover, the assessment of action plans shows that

¹¹ Vrieling & De Groot / ICTU (2022). [work pressure and exhaustion among university employees](#).

¹² Rathenau Institute (2022). [Time expenditure and overtime among researchers and lecturers](#).

¹³ KNAW (2022). [Social safety in Dutch science. From paper to practice](#).

¹⁴ FNV & VAWO (2019). [Social safety of employees at universities](#).

¹⁵ Promovendi Netwerk Nederland (2020). [PNN PhD Survey. Asking the relevant questions. Workplace malpractices: Discrimination, sexual harassment, breaches of the code of conduct](#).

universities do not explicitly address the underlying causes of psychosocial workload. To successfully pursue health and safety policy, it is precisely the underlying causes that must be recognised and addressed.

Research questions

This study focuses on PSA at the 14 public Dutch universities. The aim is to identify health and safety policy and management measures on PSA. In addition, the experiences of academic and teaching staff with work pressure and undesirable behavior were examined to gain insight into the impact of the policy. Here, the following research questions can be distinguished:

1. How do universities meet their obligations under the Dutch Working Conditions Act when it comes to identifying and evaluating the risks of work pressure and undesirable behavior and the policy cycle?
2. What are employees' experiences regarding work pressure and undesirable behavior?
3. What are the possible causes of work pressure and undesirable behavior?
4. What measures have universities taken to prevent and reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior, and which measures are seen as effective?
5. How have universities addressed the points of concern they were given after the Labour Authority's previous intervention in 2020/2021?¹⁶

Research questions 1, 2 and 5 were answered through interviews with various parties within the universities and examination of the submitted health and safety documentation (see 'Qualitative research' section in the Methodology). Research questions 3 and 4 were answered using an online survey of all academic and teaching staff at the 14 universities (see 'Quantitative research' section in the Methods).

Monitoring framework psychosocial workload

The Labour Authority oversees safe, healthy and fair work in the Netherlands. That means that the Authority ensures that employers take measures to prevent or limit psychosocial workload (see Section 3, second paragraph of the Working Conditions Act and Section 2.15, first and second paragraphs of the Working Conditions Decree). Psychosocial workload (PSA) has been included in the Working Conditions Act since 2007 and is defined as: "the factors directly or indirectly distinguished including sexual harassment, aggression and violence, bullying and work pressure, in the work situation that create stress".¹⁷ If employees can be exposed to psychosocial workload, the risks of psychosocial workload shall be assessed as part of the risk assessment, and measures to prevent and otherwise limit psychosocial workload shall be adopted and implemented in the action plan referred to in Section 5 of the Act, taking into account the state of science. Employees who perform work with a risk of exposure to psychosocial stress shall be given information and instruction on the subject and the measures to prevent or reduce such stress.¹⁸

Psychosocial workload concerns task demands, emotional strain, cognitive strain (difficulty) and lack of autonomy (control options), which can underlie work pressure. PSA also relates to undesirable behavior (aggression and violence, sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination) - which can include both internal undesirable behavior (by colleagues or supervisors) and external undesirable behavior (by customers, patients, students and the like). The Authority-wide Risk Assessment (IRA) and the State of Healthy Work show that PSA

¹⁶ Based on working conditions legislation and the work instructions of the Netherlands Labour Authority: Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Work instruction: prevent and reduce work stress due to work pressure](#) and Inspectie SZW (2020). [Basic inspection module on internal undesirable behavior](#).

¹⁷ [Art 1\(3\)\(e\) Health and Safety Act](#).

¹⁸ [Art 3, second paragraph, Occupational Health and Safety Act](#).

has been one of the biggest causes of illness at work for many years. PSA risks lead to mental and physical health problems, sick leave and long-term absence and even occupational disability.¹⁹⁻²⁰

The results of this study are input for enforcement inspections by the Labour Authority in 2025 targeting shortcomings in universities' health and safety policies.²¹ The Labour Authority works from the perspective that most employers are willing and able to comply with the law. Therefore, the Authority is trying to prompt employers to comply with the Working Conditions Act by providing action perspectives. For example, by passing along points of concern²² and providing knowledge²³ so that employers can take (preventive) measures more easily. However, this intervention strategy by the Labour Authority is not free of obligation. If employers ultimately fail to show improvements, a demand compliance will be issued, possibly followed by a fine²⁴.

To better address PSA problems, the Labour Authority can investigate underlying causes in a sector. The Labour Authority needs to know why a sector scores high on PSA problems. Knowledge about the underlying causes gives the Labour Authority leads for substantiated interventions and demands for compliance. The results of this study provide these leads for a follow-up project.²⁵ The results of this study will not result in a warning, demand or fine at this stage. However, the Labour Authority does expect employers to work with the findings and the action perspective offered.

Method

Approach

The Labour Authority answered the various research questions by visiting all 14 universities in the Netherlands and talking to various parties involved in drafting, implementing and/or monitoring the health and safety policy on PSA. In addition, the Labour Authority conducted an online survey of all academic and teaching staff working at the 14 universities. The data from the interviews and surveys was analysed and is discussed by topic in the results section.

Target group and demarcation

This study specifically focuses on PSA among academic and teaching staff at universities. Universities were deliberately chosen to the exclusion of institutes for higher professional education because of:

- the field of tension between research and teaching at universities;²⁶
- the distribution of finances for university research (including grants);²⁷
- the hierarchical structure at universities;²⁸
- follow-up to the earlier intervention by the Labour Authority in 2020/2021.

It has been decided to focus on academic and teaching staff (student assistants, PhD students, postdocs/researchers, lecturers, university lecturers, senior lecturers, professors) to the exclusion of

¹⁹ Inspectie SZW (2018). [Final report Authority-wide Risk Analysis 4.0.](#)

²⁰ Inspectie SZW (2022). [Authority-wide Risk Analysis 5.0.](#)

²¹ Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Annual plan 2024.](#)

²² Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report.](#)

²³ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures against internal undesirable behavior.](#)

²⁴ Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Annual plan 2024.](#)

²⁵ Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Annual plan 2024.](#)

²⁶ KNAW (2018). [Split or duet? Intertwining teaching and research at Dutch universities.](#)

²⁷ Higher Education and Research Funding Advisory Committee (2019). [Changes to: Towards transparent and balanced funding, and greater collaboration in higher education and research.](#)

²⁸ KNAW (2022) [Social safety in Dutch science. From paper to practice.](#)

support and management staff (employees at facility services, IT, administration, HR, library or secretariat), for various reasons.

- Previous research has shown that academic staff experience more work pressure than support and management staff.²⁹
- Previous research has shown that the causes of work pressure between academic staff and support and management staff are different³⁰ and would broaden the scope of the research even further.
- The field of tension between research and teaching referred to above is only relevant for academic staff.³¹
- The hierarchical academic structure is less relevant for support and management staff.³²

Qualitative research - study documentation and interviews with universities

Each university was visited by two people from the Labour Authority, consisting of an inspector and a researcher.³³ The visits took place in June and July 2023. During their visits, the pairs spoke to various parties involved in developing, implementing and/or monitoring health and safety policies. More specifically, the following four parties were spoken to at each university:

- HR central representatives (those responsible for health and safety policy)
- representatives of HR decentralised (the implementers of health and safety policy)
- Confidential advisers (key figures in policy on undesirable behavior and discrimination)
- employee participation representatives (in the form of members of university or faculty councils).³⁴

These parties were spoken to separately employing semi-structured interviews. At all universities and in all interviews, an a priori defined set of topics and questions were discussed. Topics of discussion included the legal health and safety obligations (the inventory and evaluation of PSA in particular), the creation of measures to reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior, the testing of the effectiveness of measures taken, the perceived causes of (risk of) PSA, visibility of working hours and leave.

See Appendix I for an overview of all topics covered and questions asked.

In the written announcement of the visit, all universities were asked to provide their risk inventories and evaluations, including the action plan, the basic contract with the health and safety service provider, a recent employee satisfaction survey and the 2020 implementation action plans drawn up by the universities. The inspector and the researcher reviewed these documents before the visit. Their findings were included in the interviews. The interviews were reported on by the researcher and submitted to the inspector for approval and completion.

²⁹ Vrieliink & De Groot / ICTU (2020) [University employees experience \(very\) much work pressure.](#)

³⁰ Jongsma, Sanders, & Weeda / WOinActie (2020) [Inventory of extent and consequences of structural overtime at Dutch universities.](#)

³¹ KNAW (2018). [Split or duet? Intertwining teaching and research at Dutch universities.](#)

³² Of course, this may vary by department

³³ These were two senior Labour Authority researchers with experience as scientific researchers and lecturers at Dutch universities. The researchers did not visit universities where they have ever been employed. The five inspectors involved are employed by the Labour Authority's Psychosocial Work Pressure Programme and have experience conducting inspections in the field of PSA on that basis.

³⁴ It was decided not to interview administrators because the study focuses on the implementation of the policy in practice. Of course, the administration of each university was informed about the study, and several administrators made contact with the investigators and inspectors on their own initiative during the visits.

Quantitative research - employee survey

The Labour Authority conducted an online survey among all academic and teaching staff at the 14 universities to identify the state of affairs around psychosocial workload and working hours and the knowledge about and use of measures against PSA.

Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Labour Authority could not access employees' contact details and email addresses at the 14 universities. Therefore, the survey was shared through the employer. All universities were asked to send an invitation containing the link to the online survey, including an accompanying mail prepared by the Labour Authority, to all academic and teaching staff (i.e. professors, lecturers, senior lecturers, researchers, PhD students, lecturers and student assistants) in the period between 18 September and 8 October 2023. The universities sent a reminder invitation from the Labour Authority two weeks after this. The survey was preceded by a comprehensive privacy statement on the purpose of the study, the survey content, storage and protection of personal data and rights. The survey was available in Dutch and English. A total of 50,651 employees were sent invitations. The survey could be completed until 14 November 2023.

The survey was compiled with care, using existing and validated scales according to the latest science where possible. The following is a brief overview of the tools, measurements and data collected. The psychometric qualities of the measurements listed below can be found in Appendix II. The full survey, including the privacy statement, can be found in Appendix III.

Demographics and job characteristics

Demographic data was obtained to the limited extent possible to gain insight into (differences between) specific groups of employees in terms of PSA and working hours. For example, it is known in the literature that employees on fixed-term contracts face worse working conditions and health than employees on permanent contracts.³⁵⁻³⁶ It is also known that women working at Dutch universities are relatively frequently affected by undesirable behavior.³⁷ Finally, WOinActie's report shows that lecturers, assistant professors and full professors work structurally more than their contract hours. Respondents were not required to complete all questions. It was possible to skip questions.³⁸ The following demographic variables and job characteristics were asked about:

- gender (m/f/other/prefer not to say)
- Age
- nationality (Dutch/non-Dutch, within the EU/non-Dutch, outside the EU)
- first (preferred) language (Dutch/English/other)
- home situation (including, living at home, living alone, living with partner, living with children living at home)
- working at which university/faculty (in case working at several universities, they indicated which university they worked most hours at)
- position according to the university job classification system (UFO)

³⁵ Howard (2017). [Nonstandard work arrangements and worker health and safety.](#)

³⁶ Pirani & Salvini (2015). [Is temporary employment damaging to health? A longitudinal study on Italian workers.](#)

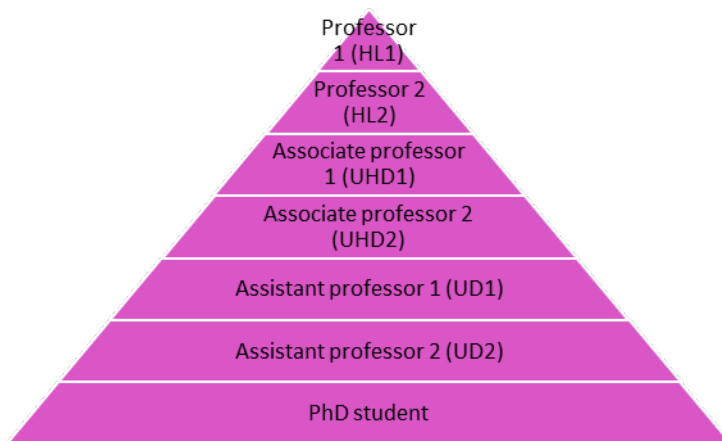
³⁷ Naezer, van den Brink & Benschop (2019). [Harassment in Dutch academia. Exploring manifestations, facilitating factors, effects and solutions.](#)

³⁸ Jongsma, Sanders & Weeda / WOinActie (2020). [Inventory of the extent and consequences of structural overtime at Dutch universities.](#)

- salary scale
- type of contract (temporary appointment/temporary with the potential for permanent/permanent appointment/other)
- managerial position (yes/no)
- years of service active in science
- number of ancillary functions

One of the demographic variables widely used in this research is job according to the university job classification system (*universitair functieordeningsysteem*), also known as the UFO profile. All universities in the Netherlands work with this system. Based on this system, every employee of a Dutch university receives a compact description of their tasks and responsibilities.³⁹ These UFO profiles also determine in which salary scale an employee is placed in the job level matrix.⁴⁰ The university system is hierarchically ordered (see Figure 1). However, this figure is not complete because of a number of profiles that can be placed at different levels of the pyramid via the job matrix, such as the position researcher 1-4 or lecturer 1-4.

Figure 1. Academic positions within universities



Work pressure

Work pressure has been operationalised in various ways to gain the fullest possible insight into this occupational risk. Stress caused by work pressure was measured as in the Labour Authority's Occupational Health and Safety Monitor⁴¹ where workers indicate whether they experienced more stress caused by work pressure than incidentally in the past year. Also measured were perceived psychological job demands⁴² and perceived exhaustion as the most important dimension of burnout⁴³.

To make more specific statements on work pressure, consideration was also given to the number of additional tasks performed by employees belonging to higher job profiles (UFO profiles) than the profile in which they are classified and remunerated.

³⁹ [Job classification system \(UFO\) | Universities of the Netherlands.](#)

⁴⁰ [Job level matrix | Universities of the Netherlands.](#)

⁴¹ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Occupational Health and Safety 2019-2021.](#)

⁴² Items from [Choi et al. \(2012\)](#), based on the theoretical framework of [Karasek, Choi, Ostergren, Ferrario & Smet \(2007\)](#).

⁴³ Schaufeli, De Witte & Desart (2020). [Manual Burnout Assessment Tool \(BAT\).](#)

In addition, the number of overtime hours was reported, and the substantiation of leave and working hours in the evenings and weekends was examined for more insight into compliance with the Working Hours Act. The Working Hours Act (ATW in Dutch) aims to prevent overburdening of employees, and to create the possibility of combining work and private life. After all, if one can take sufficient rest, stress due to work pressure is less likely to arise. Therefore, questions were also asked about working hours (e.g., more than 60 hours per week) and leave.

As well as taking stock of the current state of (perceived) work pressure, a list of 11 causes of work pressure, based on previous publications⁴⁴, was presented to the respondents. These include, amongst others, too many tasks, unrealistic norm hours for tasks⁴⁵, performance pressure and competition. For each of these causes, respondents could indicate whether they considered it a cause of work pressure. It was also possible for respondents to add their own causes of work pressure.

Undesirable behavior

The Labour Authority distinguishes undesirable behavior into bullying, aggression and violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Respondents were asked which forms of undesirable behavior they had personally experienced in the past two years or which they had seen happen to colleagues.

First, 14 concrete behaviors were presented, including: social isolation, physical aggression, verbal aggression, and sexual comments, and jokes. These 14 concrete behaviors are based on forms of bullying, aggression and violence, sexual harassment, and supplemented by concrete behaviors that emerged from reports of undesirable behavior in academia. These include harassment in the form of scientific sabotage such as wrongfully claiming authorship or thwarting promotions by not sticking to agreements.⁴⁶ Undesirable behavior is not always recognised as such or people find it difficult to attach the label of undesirable behavior to it (especially in the case of sexually undesirable behavior). Pointing out concrete behavior can increase the identification of undesirable behavior and thus the quality of responses to this question.⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸

Discrimination, as a component of undesirable behavior, was asked about separately from the above 14 undesirable behaviors. The main reason for this separate questioning on discrimination is to due to clarity in terms of presentation for the respondents. Indeed, as well as the aforementioned undesirable conduct, 12 legal grounds for discrimination can also be identified. These 12 legal grounds for discrimination (including age, gender and race) were presented and supplemented by discrimination based on parental status (having or not having children). Again, respondents were asked which forms of discrimination they had personally experienced in the past two years, and/or

⁴⁴ Among others, the report of [WOinActie \(2020\)](#).

⁴⁵ Standard hours concern the standardisation of task load around teaching tasks, taking into account both teaching itself and preparation and subject development. Standard hours are thus the hours allocated to certain teaching-related tasks.

⁴⁶ These forms of harassment are characterised by both task-related behavior such as unfairly claiming authorship, as well as person-related behavior such as social isolation. See, [Naezer, van den Brink & Benschop \(2019\). *Harassment in Dutch academia. Exploring manifestations, facilitating factors, effects and solutions.*](#)

⁴⁷ Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau & Stibal (2003). [Reported incidence rates of work-related sexual harassment in the United States: Using meta-analysis to explain reported rate disparities.](#)

⁴⁸ Johnson, Widnall & Frazier (2018). [Sexual Harassment of Women. Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.](#)

which they had seen happen to colleagues. They were also asked who the perpetrator of the undesirable behavior was.

A list of causes of undesirable behavior was presented to the respondents who assessed which causes they felt caused undesirable behavior. In the creation of the list of causes underlying undesirable behavior, use was made of the findings of the KNAW report on social safety in Dutch academia, in which organisational structure, workplace culture and the academic system are all indicated as breeding grounds for undesirable behavior.⁴⁹

Finally, a psychologically safe working environment can contribute to openly discussing and raising undesirable behavior. Managers play a crucial role here, as they can act as role models in creating and maintaining a psychologically safe working environment. Therefore, respondents were asked to complete scales measuring the extent to which they feel psychologically safe in the department where they work⁵⁰ and the extent to which they experience passive-aggressive behavior from their manager⁵¹.

Reporting work pressure and undesirable behavior

Respondents were asked whether they had been educated about work pressure and undesirable behavior, informed about where to report problems related to it, and how to reach a confidential adviser or ombudsperson. Employees who reported work pressure or undesirable behavior were asked whether they reported it or why not, to which party/parties they reported it and how they assessed the handling (procedure, reception, aftercare) of this report. In addition, respondents could indicate any remaining issues they wanted to bring up concerning work pressure or undesirable behavior in an open text box.

Measures to prevent or reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior

Based on the interviews and the documentation sent by the universities, the Labour Authority compiled a list of measures taken by each university against work pressure or undesirable behavior. This list of measures was then submitted to the universities and adjusted where necessary. Criteria for inclusion in the list were:

- (i) The measure directly affects an employee (e.g. hiring more staff or adjusting working hours standards) or
- (ii) An employee could take advantage of the measure (e.g. social safety training).

Thus, measures that have not yet resulted in concrete actions or only in very general welfare programmes have been excluded from this study. That includes committees considering (talking about) measures to combat work pressure. The same applies to mandatory elements of the basic contract, such as a free consultation hour with the company doctor.

Among the measures included, a distinction was made between those aimed at all employees (e.g. a time management course) and those intended explicitly for managers (e.g. a leadership programme on social safety).

⁴⁹ [KNAW \(2022\). Social safety in Dutch science. From paper to practice.](#)

⁵⁰ Edmondson (1999). [Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams.](#)

⁵¹ Passive aggressive leadership behavior according to [Mitchell & Ambrose \(2007\)](#) as part of destructive leadership ([Tepper, 2000](#)).

In the online survey, respondents were shown only the measures applicable to the university where they work. Respondents were then asked to indicate whether they were aware of each of the different measures. Respondents in managerial positions were shown the measures for managers in addition to the general measures.⁵² If the employee had knowledge of a measure, they were also asked whether the respondent used it, and if so, to what extent the respondent felt that the measure in question effectively prevented or reduced work pressure or undesirable behavior.

Statistical tests and interpretation

In addition to the average scores of all respondents on variables, for each variable we tested for (significant) differences based on demographic characteristics (such as age, gender, nationality) and job characteristics (such as university and position). In each case, the results section discusses the average score for all respondents, as well as significant differences between groups of respondents with at least a medium effect size ($\eta^2 \geq .06$ or ϕ (Phi) $\geq .10$ ⁵³ or Cramer's V ⁵⁴). Significant differences with small effect sizes ($\eta^2 \geq .01$ - $\eta^2 < .06$ or $\phi \geq .05$ - $\phi < .10$) are mentioned in footnotes. Non-significant differences based on group characteristics or significant differences with negligible effect size are not described.

Characteristics of survey respondents

A total of 9,281 employees completed the online survey. 29 respondents indicated in the open response field that they held a non-scientific or teaching position (e.g., secretary or support and management staff). With 9,252 respondents, the response rate is 18%. This study's large academic and teaching staff population makes it plausible that this is an acceptable response rate. Similar surveys among academics show lower response rates.⁵⁵ Also considered was whether respondents with different background characteristics (such as gender, age, and position) were represented in the survey, and the background characteristics of participants in this study were compared with data on the entire target population to see if they differed from each other.

Among these 9,252 respondents were 112 student assistants. This group was analysed separately (see p. 48). The dataset that is the subject of the overall analyses in this report consists of 9,140 respondents. 51% of respondents said they identified as female, 46% as male, 1% said they identified as neither and 2% preferred not to answer. National figures show that about 43% of academic staff are women.⁵⁶ Women are thus slightly overrepresented in this sample. The average age of the respondents was 40 years ($SD = 11.53$).

Of all respondents, 66% said they were from the Netherlands, 22% from another EU country and 13% from outside of the EU. These figures largely corresponded to the respondents' preferred

⁵² Measures that specifically targeted a specific part of the university (e.g. 1 faculty, or only lecturers) were not included in the overall results section.

⁵³ Akoglu (2018). [User's guide to correlation coefficients](#) and Tabachnik & Fidell (2007). [Using multivariate statistics](#).

⁵⁴ The interpretation of Cramer's V depends on the number of degrees of freedom, for interpretation up to and including $df = 5$ see [chi squared test - Small/Medium/Large Cramer's V effect size tables available for degrees of freedom > 5? - Cross Validated \(stackexchange.com\)](#). For $df > 5$, the conversion to Cohen's ω is used.

⁵⁵ Kolsaker (2008). [Academic professionalism in the managerialist era: a study of English universities](#). Mudrak et al. (2017). [Occupational Well-being Among University Faculty: A Job Demands-Resources Model](#). Szromek & Wolniak (2020). [Job Satisfaction and Problems among Academic Staff in Higher Education](#).

⁵⁶ Rathenau Institute (2023). [Scientific and support staff by university and subject area](#).

language (67% Dutch, 21% English and 12% other). Compared to recent national figures on academic staff, which show that by 2022, 46% of academic staff will be of non-Dutch origin, non-Dutch workers seem to be slightly underrepresented in this survey (with 34% of respondents not from the Netherlands).⁵⁷ The majority of respondents were cohabiting with a partner (37%), cohabiting with a partner and children living at home (32%) or living alone (20%).

Respondents from all universities participated. The overall distribution of the various universities as employers in this sample largely matches the national distribution. Two universities are slightly overrepresented compared to the national distribution, and four universities have slightly lower response rates than the national distribution. Respondents additionally indicated the position they held within the university (where they were employed the most number of hours per week; see Table 1).⁵⁸

Table 1. Distribution in job positions of both respondents and population at the 14 universities.

Job position	% Job distribution respondents	% Job distribution population
PhD student external	1%	14%
PhD student internal	24%	25%
(Postdoctoral) researcher	7%	12%
Lecturer	10%	15%
Assistant professor 2	13%	10%
Assistant professor 1	15%	8%
Associate professor 2	7%	4%
Associate professor 1	6%	3%
Professors 1 and 2	13%	9%

There are some anomalies compared to the job distribution of all academic staff in the Netherlands. Relative to the population, few external PhD students, lecturers and (postdoctoral) researchers completed the survey. Moreover, compared to the distribution in the population, relatively more Assistant Professors 1 (UD1) and full professors completed the survey. In addition to the existing positions in Table 1, just under 5% of survey respondents said they had a position within the university other than the positions mentioned above. When this option was ticked, the open response field analysis showed that the vast majority belonged to academic or teaching staff. For example, a large proportion indicated that they were lecturers/researchers or lecturers/PhD students or, for example, junior/senior researchers. Since these are scientific positions, it was decided not to remove this group from the analyses.⁵⁹

Of all employees, 38% reported having a managerial position within the university. In addition to their work within the university, they were also asked to what extent they had other jobs as well. The majority (67%) reported holding no ancillary position, 20% one ancillary position, 8% two ancillary positions and 5% three or more ancillary positions.

Looking at the type of employment of employees, just over half had a permanent contract (58%), 5% a temporary contract with the prospect of a permanent contract and 35% a temporary contract. This

⁵⁷ Rathenau Institute (2023). [Scientific and support staff by university and subject area](#).

⁵⁸ The data in the last column of Table 1 (% job distribution population) was obtained from sent data from the 14 universities on current job numbers.

⁵⁹ These individuals did not fall into the job categories used either, so analyses using the variable job did not include them.

is also in line with national figures, which showed that 39% of all academic staff work on temporary contracts. On average, respondents were employed for 36 hours per week ($SD = 6.84$) and had been active in science for 13 years ($SD = 10.55$).

In terms of demographic characteristics, the sample in the current study does not seem to differ significantly from the population of scientific and teaching staff in the Netherlands. There is no information on whether employees who did complete the survey differ from those who did not ('non-response bias').⁶⁰ Related to that, there may be a self-selection bias here, and respondents may have participated because they had strong opinions on the topics in this survey. It could also be that employees did not complete the survey because they did not have the time. At present, it is difficult to make statements about how these biases affect the results of this study.

Results

Occupational health and safety policies on psychosocial workload

A number of general health and safety obligations ('system provisions') apply to all companies with at least one employee regardless of their economic activity and the specific risks involved. Two of these obligations are having a risk assessment and an action plan. This means that an employer must have written descriptions of all occupational risks in the company (the risk assessment), including an action plan describing the measures the company will take to eliminate occupational risks or reduce their impact (the action plan).

If psychosocial workload poses a risk when carrying out the work, this risk should be included in the risk assessment through a further inventory. This further identification of PSA risks may be evidenced by other current documents, such as an in-depth study on work pressure/work stress or an employee satisfaction survey with additional questions on work pressure/work stress or undesirable behavior. The risk assessment should refer to these in-depth studies. This is also referred to as the in-depth risk assessment for psychosocial workload.⁶¹ "In this assessment, the employer identifies the work pressure sources that may lead to work stress and assesses the balance between work pressure sources and energy sources, as well as whether employees experience work stress." This in-depth study at universities in the form of a questionnaire survey requires, among other things, that "the causes of excessive work pressure can be deduced from the results." There must therefore be a clear relationship between the cause (the sources of work pressure) and the consequence of excessive work pressure."⁶²

The prevention and management of psychosocial workload should also have a cyclical character, the PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Check & Act), in which an inventory is made, and measures are drawn up and implemented on an ongoing basis. Policies and individual measures must also be evaluated continuously, and risk assessments are started again based on this evaluation.⁶³ Through the documentation provided and the findings from the interviews, the Labour Authority looked at the extent to which universities comply with these obligations.

⁶⁰ Within the scope of this study, it was not possible to apply common techniques for studying response-bias, see, e.g. [Lindner, Murphy, & Briers \(2001\)](#).

⁶¹ [Article 2.15, Working Conditions Decree](#).

⁶² Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Work instruction on preventing and mitigating work stress caused by work pressure](#).

⁶³ Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Work instruction on preventing and mitigating work stress caused by work pressure](#).

(In-depth) risk assessment and action plan

All universities have a risk assessment in place. Some universities have an overall risk assessment for the entire university, but the majority have separate risk assessments for the different organisational units (faculties or buildings). Thus, most universities have multiple risk assessments. Often, for illustrative purposes, risk assessments of a number of faculties have been shared with the Labour Authority. That means no inspection of all risk assessments or testing of whether there is a risk assessment for every organisational unit, every faculty. The risk assessments received were of highly variable quality and/or completeness and of very different periods (there can be risk assessments at the same university that are a year old, but also risk assessments that are 6 or 7 years old). In terms of both content and lead time, the various risk assessments within a university were often not uniform either. It is therefore not possible to make statements about the completeness and quality of coverage across the university or universities as a whole. The attention paid to the risk assessment process at each university also varies widely. For instance, some universities go through the risk assessment process every year, while there was little evidence of an ongoing process at others. The findings below are based on the information provided by the universities. In each case, the assessment assumed the best-case scenario: as soon as there were indications of the presence of obligations at one organisational unit within the university, it was assumed that this also applies to all other organisational units.

12 of the 14 universities have a risk assessment with at least one action plan containing measures to counteract or prevent work pressure or undesirable behavior. Two of these 12 action plans lack deadlines for implementing measures.

The documents show that at 11 of the 14 universities, psychosocial workload (PSA) was recognised as a risk in the risk assessment. The three universities that have not identified PSA as a risk in the risk assessment thus fail to meet the legal requirements. In addition, 5 of the 14 universities list work pressure or undesirable behavior in a more in-depth risk assessment on PSA. However, universities do refer to causes of work pressure in separate policy plans, but these often lack the link between cause and effect required by the work instruction. All universities do conduct in-depth research in the form of an employee satisfaction survey.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the results of these employee satisfaction surveys are not always linked to the analyses in the (in-depth) risk assessment. Half of the universities mention the outcomes of work pressure or undesirable behavior from the employee satisfaction survey in the risk assessment.

The depth of the employee satisfaction survey, the in-depth survey on PSA, varies widely. In all employee satisfaction surveys, work pressure is asked about, sometimes through multiple measurable variables (e.g. stress and overtime or components of burnout). Respondents are also often asked about the causes of work pressure (at 11 out of 14 universities). However, these questions are often selective, as they present a very limited set of possible causes or only one presented possible cause. At one university, employees could answer for themselves what causes their work pressure in an open-ended question.

⁶⁴ 11 of the 14 universities outsource the employee satisfaction survey to an external party (8 of them to the same party; however, these questionnaires are all different in composition), 3 universities conduct the employee satisfaction survey themselves by academics with substantive knowledge and/or by HR.

Almost all universities (13/14) ask questions in the employee satisfaction survey about undesirable behavior. None of the employee satisfaction surveys ask about underlying causes of undesirable behavior. Two out of 13 universities ask about who displayed the undesirable behavior (e.g. the supervisor, a colleague or a student). In 10 of 13 universities, questions about reporting undesirable behavior were also included. 3 Universities ask on what ground discrimination takes place (at one other university, this is not asked directly but instead looks at how discrimination differs across different groups of employees). What is further noticeable is that the classification of undesirable behavior into specific categories varies across universities (e.g. harassment and sexual harassment separately or together in one category).

The PDCA cycle

At two universities, there is evidence that the full PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle is completed. For example, at one university, a project group with a manager had been set up to analyse where the problem was with the standard hours system; an action plan with concrete measures, including a SMART analysis, had been drawn up, implemented and evaluated in a report.⁶⁵ At most universities, the interviews stated that the entire PDCA cycle was followed, but a check of the documents showed that this was often not the case. Most universities have not taken action based on a problem analysis. Nor was there was a clear evaluation of the measures taken or feedback in the risk assessment of this evaluation. Some universities had only conducted an employee satisfaction survey once, which has not yet resulted in an evaluation of the measures.⁶⁶ In short, there is little evidence that universities complete a full PDCA cycle. As stated above, there is often an (initial) inventory of PSA risks (e.g. through the employee satisfaction survey), feedback on the inventory to managers and employees, and policy plans and risk assessments with proposals for measures. Measures are also drawn up and implemented. However, measures are evaluated occasionally. Often, these processes run independently of each other. For example, documents show that 12 universities have a policy plan on work pressure, and eight have a policy plan on undesirable behavior. However, with only one exception, these policy plans are not directly linked to a risk assessment, and in-depth research is rare. In other words, there seems to be little integration of all these policies nor embedding of these processes in the organisation. Table 2 shows which of the above requirements regarding health and safety policy are met by each university.

⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the measure proved unsuccessful.

⁶⁶ However, it is questionable whether an employee satisfaction survey is the right method to test the effectiveness of a single measure.

Table 2. Overview of health and safety policy requirements compliance

	Psychosocial workload recognised as a risk in RI&E	In-depth research/ in-depth RI&E on psychosocial workload	Written action plan	PDCA cycle completed
University A	X	X	X	X
University B	√	X	√	X
University C	√	X	√	X
University D	√	X	√	X
University E	√	√	√	X
University F	√	X	√	X
University G	√	√	√	X
University H	√	X	√	X
University I	X	X	X	X
University J	X	X	√	X
University K	√	√	√	X
University L	√	√	√	√
University M	√	√	√	√
University N	√	X	√	X

Note. The universities are presented in random order

Implementation of policies and action plans

A lot is happening at universities when it comes to measures against work pressure and undesirable behavior. The interviews show that university HR departments have worked hard and undertaken many initiatives to reduce PSA risks. In addition, many measures have been taken in recent years in various forms, such as financial incentives for additional staff, setting up a (better) structure of social safety within the university (e.g. through confidential advisers and ombudspersons), education, training, and leadership programmes. Sometimes, HR staff report that there is so much happening in this area that they lose track of it.

Despite the many actions and initiatives, this still do not seem to result in a noticeable reduction in work pressure or undesirable behavior. This could be explained by some patterns that the Labour Authority encountered in most universities: (1) policy does not always lead to concrete action, (2) central control but decentralised responsibility for policy implementation, (3) power relations that can get in the way of policy implementation, and (4) the role of managers.

At each university, there were many initiatives on work pressure and undesirable behavior, including dialogue forums, action groups, learning tables, task forces, working groups, expert groups, steering groups, committees and reflection groups. Some interviewees branded the various policy processes and action groups as giving a false sense of security because they made it seem as if they were actually taking action. Looking at the returns, those processes rarely led to concrete actions. The policy processes were therefore sometimes described as extremely soft.

Most universities have an organisational structure with a central control but decentralised responsibility for implementing policies and measures.⁶⁷ First of all, there is a knowledge and skills gap that needs to be bridged so that, on the one hand, centrally one knows what decentralised needs and practices are, and how decentralised departments work to make appropriate policies, and that, on the other hand, decentralised has the skills and resources to implement these policies. This finding emerged from the interviews since faculties indicated that they do not see how university-wide measures fit their needs, that central policy was perceived as interference, and that there is a pressing need for customisation from faculties/departments/programmes. Decentralised implementation also complicates the evaluation of the measures implemented because, for example, the measures were not deployed everywhere or in the same way. Sometimes, there are also very interesting and successful initiatives within departments or faculties which do not extend beyond that department (e.g. an extra research budget or maternity leave support as a buffer against backlogs). It was noticed during the interviews that HR on the central level is sometimes unaware of what is happening at the decentralised level (in terms of implementation of measures) and vice versa. Thus, the alignment between central and decentralised leaves much to be desired in implementing and monitoring health and safety policies.

Second, this dichotomy creates complications regarding responsibility. "There is no ownership" is often stated. Some universities are currently working on getting deans to work better together and reduce the fragmentation of responsibility to create more ownership over policy and its implementation.

What is striking from the interviews is that HR central (university-wide) often has little grip on how central policies are implemented at the decentralised level (the faculties), and sometimes measures are not implemented at all because a dean⁶⁸ of a faculty does not want to prioritise them, for example. Faculties are often described as little islands or kingdoms deciding what to do or prioritise for themselves. Thus, it is not self-evident that assignments from the college board or HR at the central level are embraced or implemented at the decentral level.

Furthermore, direct managers (often also professors) play a key role in employee work processes as well as policy processes. This applies to both work pressure and undesirable behavior. The interviews show that managers are seen as the cause of many problems (from setting unachievable standards to intimidating employees), but at the same time as the solution to those problems (creating and monitoring an open and safe working environment). A certain leadership style and role of managers is seen as one of the risk factors that increase undesirable behavior.⁶⁹ Much, then, depends on managers tackling work pressure and promoting a safe and healthy organisational culture. Some managers have a good nose for this; others less so. It was often noted in the interviews that managers are not selected based on their leadership qualities but based on their substantive academic qualities. However, most universities are in the process of adjusting this selection policy and executive development programmes. Moreover, because of the way universities are structured, managerial positions are regularly rotated. This may mean that the person who was

⁶⁷ However, there are 2 universities that operate only at the central level in terms of HR. In this case, discussions were held with central HR employees who perform their duties at or with 'decentralised' level (e.g. account managers/business partners for faculties).

⁶⁸ A dean heads a faculty and is responsible for its administration and management. Also, a dean is a professor at the same faculty. The Executive Board usually appoints the dean for a period of 3-5 years.

⁶⁹ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures against internal undesirable behavior.](#)

initially a manager is 'just' an employee within the same department or faculty a few years later, and vice versa. It was indicated that this could lead to an interweaving of dependencies, lack of ownership, less specialisation as a manager, and possibly less quality.⁷⁰

To upgrade the quality of their leaders, at least 10 universities⁷¹ have leadership courses addressing work pressure and undesirable behavior. Such courses are usually not mandatory for all managers (this is the case at one university, and there is one university that wants to make it compulsory in the near future). Moreover, the interviews revealed that there is often self-selection bias regarding participants. Participating executives are often new or versed in the issues. There is also a perception that managers are not always given enough time for their roles, which may affect their leadership quality.

An additional risk of the key role of managers emerged from the interviews. When the manager is the source of undesirable behavior, employees see few opportunities to do anything about it. After all, reporting can directly affect their career progression and position within the department. In addition, the interviews revealed that employees feel that HR is mainly there for the organisation and managers and not for them as employees. Employees indicated in the survey that there is a lot of emphasis on 'having the right conversation' and informal resolution of incidents and issues of undesirable behavior and social safety within universities. Essential conditions for resolving anything informally are that both the manager and the HR department are safe and reliable interlocutors for employees. When employees are dealing with a manager who is the source of the undesirable behavior or does not want to cooperate in a solution, such an informal solution is out of reach.

In short, universities are doing a lot in the area of work pressure and undesirable behavior, but there seem to be several barriers to the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Work pressure

The section below discusses both the findings of the visits and interviews, and the results of the employee survey on the work pressure experienced by academic and teaching staff. It also looks at the causes of work pressure. Interviews with the various university stakeholders involved in health and safety policy revealed that all universities recognise work pressure as a problem. The employee satisfaction surveys also revealed that work pressure is too high and that employees work overtime on a structural basis. Moreover, when multiple employee satisfaction surveys had been taken, there was little to no decrease in perceived work pressure, and some universities showed an increase in work pressure compared to the previous employee satisfaction survey.

Perceived work pressure

Psychological job demands are the first variable to identify employees' perceived work pressure. Having high psychological job demands means that employees have to work fast and hard, an extreme amount of work is demanded of them, and there is too little time to do it.⁷² When job demands are too high, this can lead to stress, burn-out (complaints) and reduced well-being. High

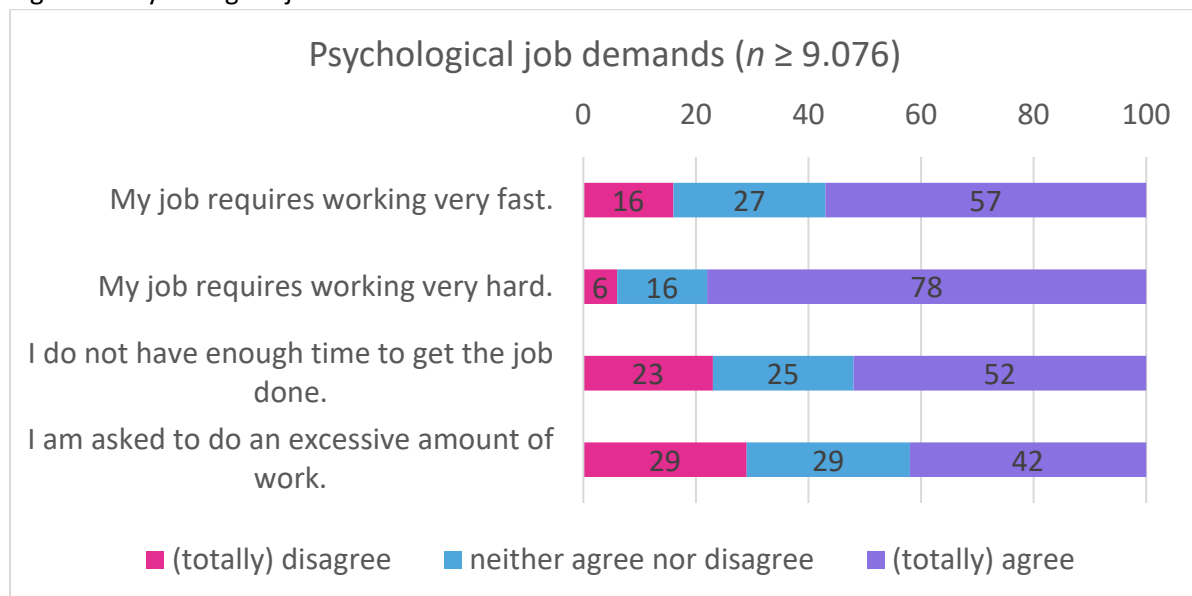
⁷⁰ The disadvantages of rotational leadership have also been highlighted in previous research and advisory reports in Defence. See, for example: Defence Socially Safe Working Environment Committee (2018). [Research into a socially safe working environment at Defence](#).

⁷¹ There was no set question about leadership pathways in the interview but this information came up at 10 universities.

⁷² Items from [Choi et al. \(2012\)](#), based on the theoretical framework of [Karasek, Choi, Ostergren, Ferrario, & Smet \(2007\)](#).

psychological job demands need not be a problem in themselves and do not necessarily lead to work pressure. However, it is important that employees have sufficient resources and capacity to cope with the high job demands and compensate for the negative consequences.⁷³ In the survey, employees could indicate to what extent they identified with the statements measuring psychological job demands (e.g. 'My job requires working very fast'; 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). Averaged across the four statements measuring psychological job demands, employees scored 3.55 ($SD = 0.85$). The data and Figure 2 show that the majority of respondents reported having to work very fast (57%) and very hard (78%), and having too little time to complete the work (52%).

Figure 2. Psychological job demands

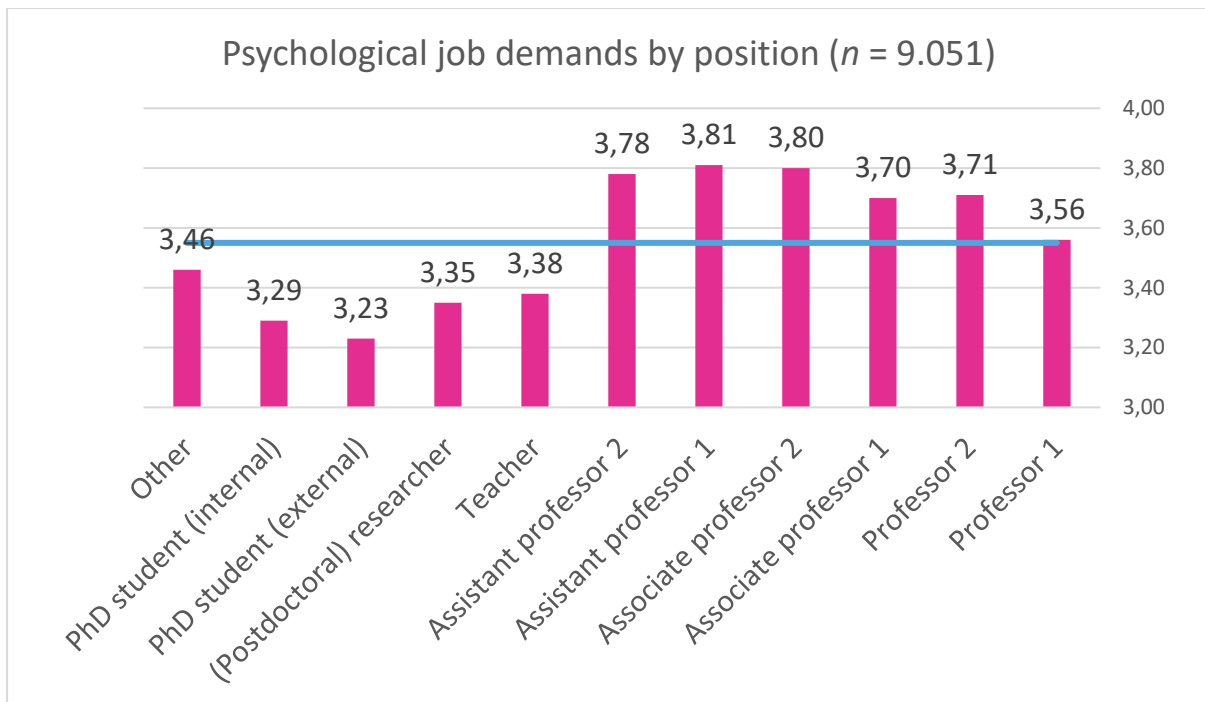


Furthermore, psychological job demands are significantly higher for some job functions than for others ($F(9,8,606) = 73.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$). The results show that assistant professors (both UD1 and UD2) and associate professors (UHD 2) score significantly higher than professors 1, who score around the average. Teachers, (postdoctoral) researchers and PhD students report significantly lower psychological task demands than professors 1 (see Figure 3).⁷⁴

⁷³ Bakker & Demerouti (2017). [Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward.](#)

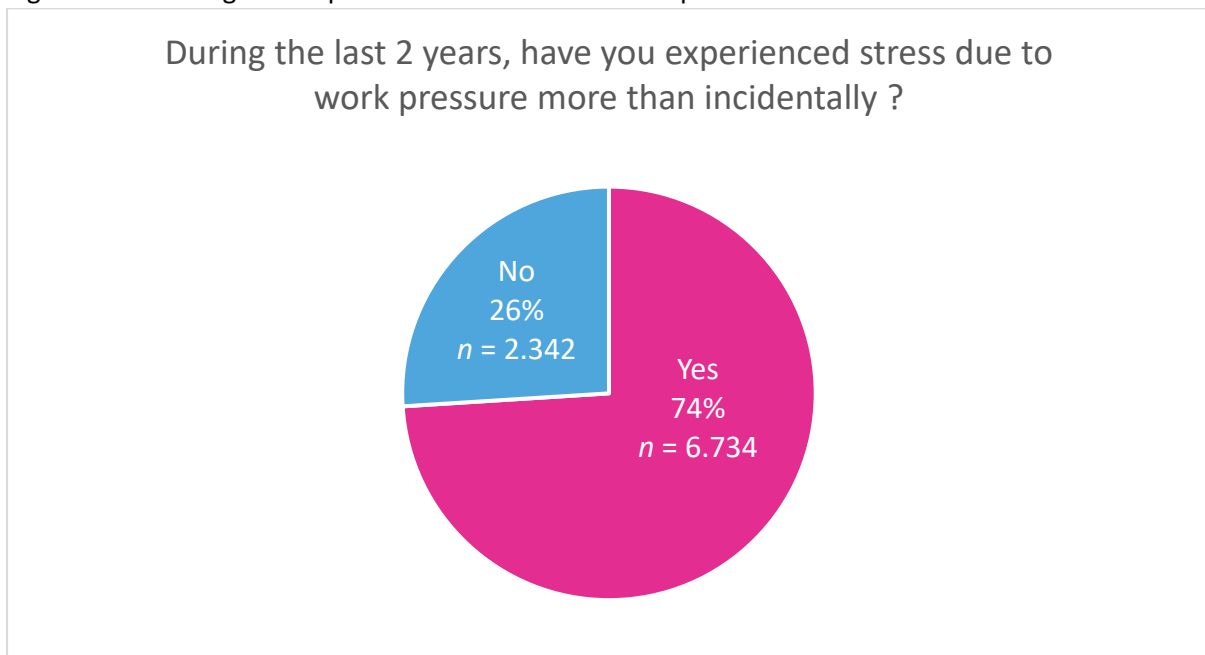
⁷⁴ Managers and respondents on permanent contracts reported higher psychological task demands than non-managers and respondents on temporary contracts ($\eta^2 = .04$ and $\eta^2 = .05$, respectively). In addition, there are minor effects of nationality and having children, with non-Dutch and respondents with children living at home reporting higher psychological task demands than Dutch and respondents without children living at home ($\eta^2 = .02$ and $\eta^2 = .01$, respectively). No or negligible differences in psychological task demands were found for other variables, such as university.

Figure 3. Psychological task demands broken down by function



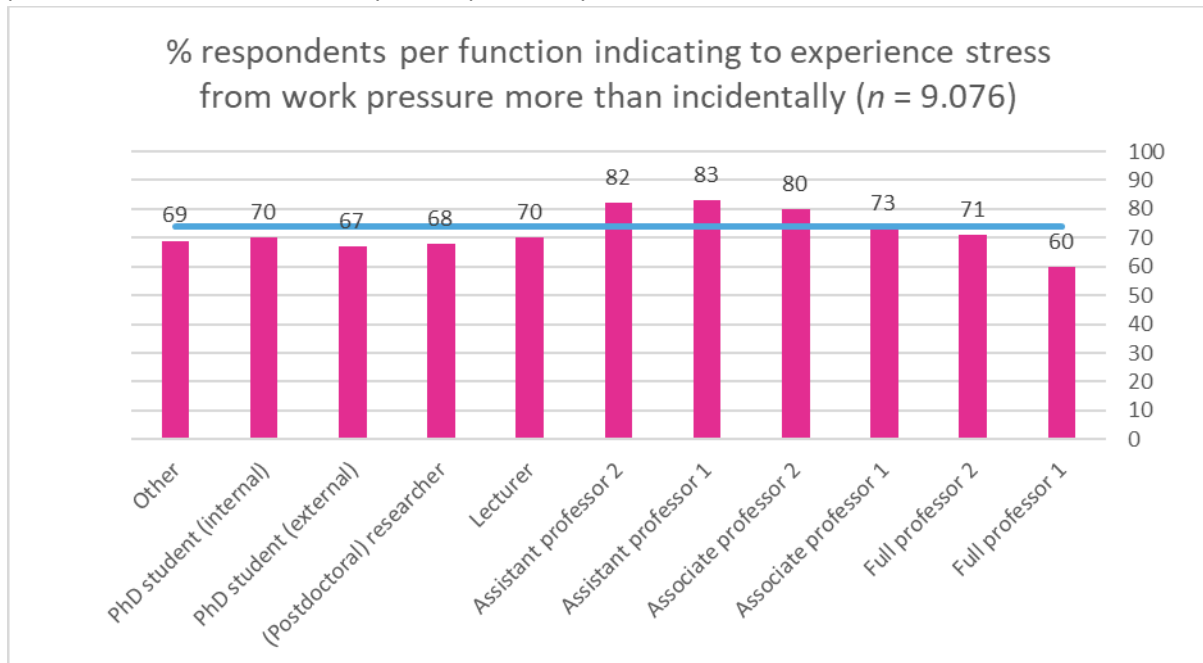
Since psychological task demands alone are not enough to make statements about the perceived work pressure of academic and teaching staff, respondents were also asked to indicate whether they experienced stress due to work pressure more than incidentally (more than a few times a year) in the past two years. Almost three-quarters of all respondents said they experienced more than incidental stress due to work pressure in the past two years (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentages of experienced stress due to work pressure



Here, there is a significant relationship between job position and perceived stress due to work pressure ($X^2(9) = 200.42$, $p < .001$, Cramers $V = .15$). Thus, the percentages of respondents who indicated experiencing stress due to work pressure more than occasionally differ significantly across job functions, as shown in Figure 5. Notably, all assistant professors, followed by associate professors, most often experience stress due to work pressure. Full professors (H1) are least likely to report stress due to work pressure.⁷⁵

Figure 5. Percentage of respondents by job function indicating they experienced stress due to work pressure more than incidentally in the past two years



The final indicator of perceived work pressure was exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is one of the main dimensions of burnout and involves a severe and prolonged loss of energy accompanied by feelings of significant physical and mental fatigue.⁷⁶ The average score on perceived exhaustion of all respondents working at the 14 universities was 2.68 ($SD = 0.81$). This average score on exhaustion can be compared with national norms for these measures of burnout symptoms and exhaustion. The norms for working people in the Netherlands are 1.00-1.75 for low exhaustion, a score between 1.76-2.99 for medium exhaustion, 3.00-3.99 for high exhaustion, and a score between 4.00-5.00 for very high exhaustion.⁷⁷ Respondents thus scored at the high end of average levels of exhaustion. Figure 6 shows the scores of all respondents on exhaustion broken down by different standards (relative to working people in the Netherlands). It can be seen that 13% and 51% of respondents reported low or medium levels of exhaustion, respectively. Of all respondents, 29% scored a high level of exhaustion and 7% a very high level of exhaustion. This means that of all respondents in this

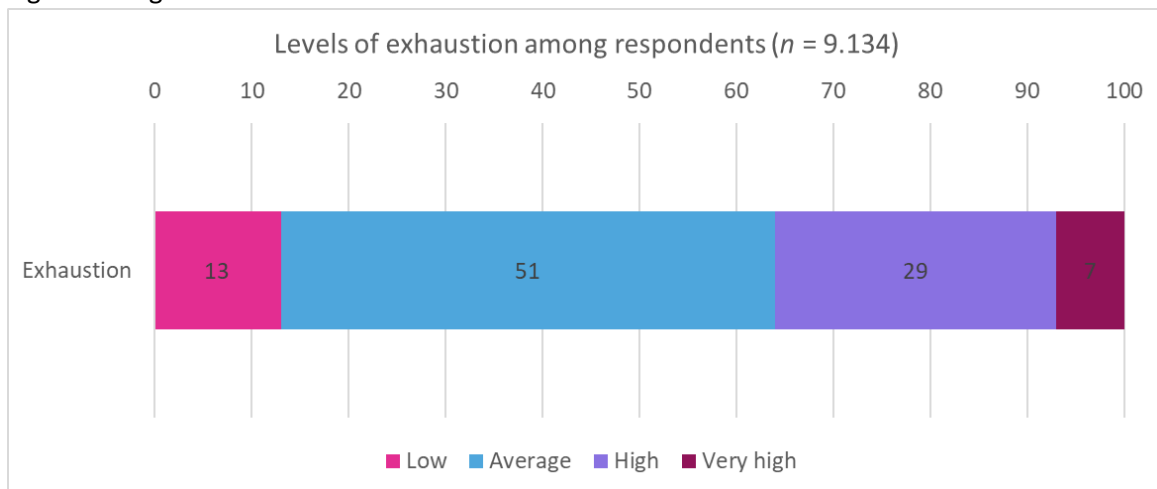
⁷⁵ Stress due to work pressure also differed significantly across universities (Cramer's $V = .07$, $df = 13$). Significant differences were also observed for contract type (Cramer's $V = .07$, $df = 3$), nationality (Cramer's $V = .10$, $df = 2$) and gender ($\phi = .09$ and $df = 1$), with respondents with a permanent contract or the prospect of a permanent contract reporting stress due to work pressure more often than respondents with a temporary contract, non-Dutch people reporting more often than Dutch people and women more often than men. However, the effect sizes for these relationships with perceived stress due to work pressure were small.

⁷⁶ Schaufeli, De Witte & Desart (2020). [Manual Burnout Assessment Tool \(BAT\)](#).

⁷⁷ Schaufeli, De Witte & Desart (2020). [Manual Burnout Assessment Tool \(BAT\)](#). In this manual, see Table 64.

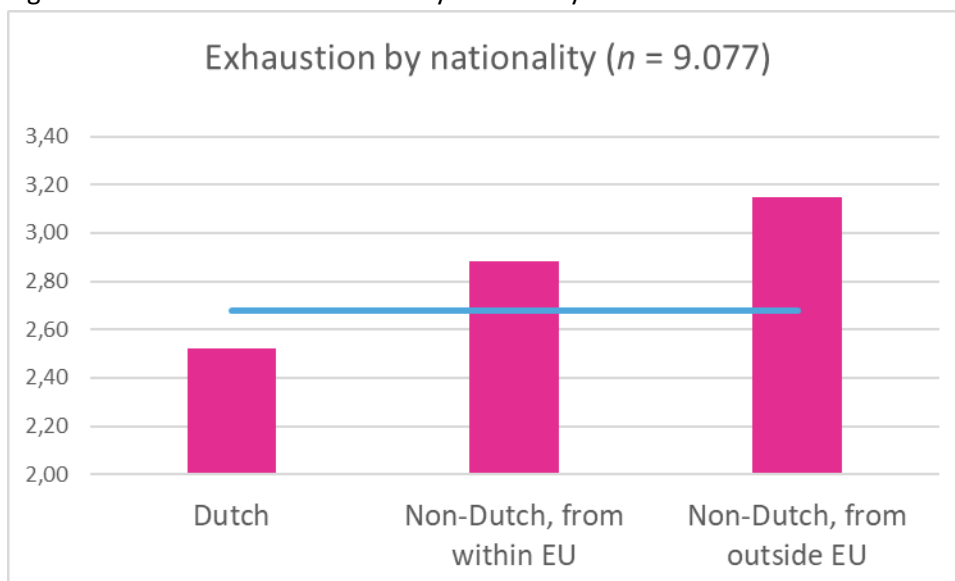
study, 36% report high to very high levels of exhaustion compared to the Dutch working population and this group is likely at (high) risk of burnout.⁷⁸

Figure 6. Degree of exhaustion



Non-Dutch workers reported significantly more exhaustion than Dutch workers ($F(2, 9070) = 402.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$). In particular, workers of non-Dutch origin from outside the EU show high scores, which also increases their risk of burnout (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Exhaustion broken down by nationality



Tasks outside and above the job profile

The task load of academic and teaching staff was also investigated to better understand the perceived work pressure. This was done by looking at the actual job profile of staff on their

⁷⁸ According to the [Handbook Burnout Assessment Tool \(BAT\)](#), no limit values are yet available for working people in the Netherlands. The statement on the risk of burnout is based on the limit values for working people in Flanders, with scores on exhaustion from 3.06 - 3.30 falling under orange (= risk of burnout) and scores from 3.31 - 5 under red (= very high risk of burnout).

contract⁷⁹ and comparing it with the actual responsibilities of those respondents in their day-to-day work as defined by the different job profiles. In this study, task load is thus understood as the extent to which employees' duties and responsibilities relate to the tasks agreed on the assigned job profile as specified in their contract. Specifically, this examines the number of additional tasks employees perform above their agreed job level.

For example, a university lecturer 1 (UD1) has the responsibility to 'ensure periodic maintenance of the assigned teaching units', the lower graded university lecturer 2 (UD2) does not yet have that responsibility. Or, an associate professor 1 (UHD1) has the task of 'acting as co-supervisor for PhD students', an associate professor 2 (UHD2) and assistant professors (UD1 and UD2) do not have this task. These UFO profiles also determine the salary scale in the job level matrix.⁸⁰ In this survey, employees were asked what their UFO profile is according to their contract, and they were presented with all tasks and responsibilities from all UFO profiles. They were then asked which tasks/responsibilities they perform/have in their daily work.

This analysis⁸¹ reveals that many of the respondents perform additional tasks outside their UFO profile (see table 3). Strikingly, the lower the UFO profile, the higher the number of additional tasks. Assistant professors 2 (UD2) have on average more than eight additional tasks associated with higher UFO profiles, while associate professors 1 (UHD1) perform at most two additional tasks on average. There are assistant professors 2 (UD2) who report performing tasks at full professor 2 (HL2) level, such as "leading or participating in committees or working groups, aimed at governance of the faculty or institution" (31% of UD2s report doing so). Also notable is the number of respondents in assistant professor profiles (UD1 and UD2) and associate professor 2 profiles (UHD2) who act as co-supervisors for PhD students (63%, 77% and 93% respectively), while that responsibility belongs to the profiles of associate professors 1 (UHD1) or above.⁸²

⁷⁹ All universities in the Netherlands operate a university job classification system. Based on that system, every employee of a Dutch university receives a description of their job, also called a job or UFO profile, with a corresponding job level. See [Job classification system \(UFO\) | Universities of the Netherlands](#).

⁸⁰ [Job level matrix | Universities of the Netherlands](#).

⁸¹ This analysis only took into account tasks of employees at UD2, UD1, UHD2 and UHD1 levels. Full professors have to be able to perform almost all tasks. The range of tasks of lecturers and researchers (postdocs) is highly varied, also, alternative teaching arrangements are often made with PhD students that are contractually defined.

⁸² Per UFO profile, no significant differences were found between male and female employees in the number of additional recorded responsibilities and tasks.

Table 3: Job profiles and responsibilities and tasks above the agreed upon job profile

UFO profile as per contract	% respondents who took up at least 1 additional task	Average number of extra tasks per respondent (SD)	Most common extra task	Next most common extra task
UD2 (n = 1,161)	98%	8.44 (3.88)	Independently conduct research in a broad or specialised area of research (91%, from UD1)	Ensure periodic maintenance of assigned teaching units (75%, from UD1)
UD1 (n = 1,323)	98%	6.00 (3.14)	Acting as co-supervisor for PhD students (77%, from UHD1)	Drawing up and implementing improvement proposals in response to teaching evaluations for teaching units (68%, from UHD1)
UHD2 (n = 625)	99%	5.39 (2.44)	Acting as co-supervisor for PhD students (93%, from UHD1)	Drawing up and implementing improvement proposals in response to teaching evaluations for teaching units (74%, from UHD1)
UHD1 (n = 503)	83%	1.87 (1.36)	Chairing or participating in committees or working groups aimed at the governance of the faculty or institution (56%, from HL2)	Making strategic proposals and implements faculty teaching policies (39%, from HL2)

These results show that respondents, especially in lower job profiles, are structurally burdened with more responsibilities and tasks than they are appointed for.

It does not seem to be the case that respondents are structurally paid more than what they are classified for in the UFO profile. Table 4 shows that some of the respondents may be underpaid. Particularly at the level of assistant professor 1 (UD1), 17% of respondents indicated that they are paid below scale 12, while that is the least they are entitled to under the collective agreement.⁸³ This data could indicate non-compliance with the collective agreement.⁸⁴ These findings obviously rely on respondents' self-reporting and need verification with actual contracts and applied pay scales.

⁸³ [Job level matrix | Universities of the Netherlands.](#)

⁸⁴ These results could also be explained by the use of start-up scales (see article 3.7 in the [CAO Dutch Universities](#)), but it is unknown whether and how often start-up scales are used by universities. See: <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/cao-concept/bezoldiging/algemeen>.

Table 4: Job profiles and salary scale

UFO profile as per contract	Paid according to scale 10 or below	Paid according to scale 11	Paid according to scale 12	Paid according to scale 13	Paid according to scale 14 or higher	Other/prefer not to say
UD2 (scale 11)	3%	80%	11%	1%	1%	4%
UD1 (scale 12)	1%	16%	72%	3%	1%	7%
UHD2 (scale 13)	1%	2%	5%	79%	4%	10%
UHD1 (scale 14)	0%	1%	2%	11%	77%	8%

Some universities have rules for objections to classification in a particular job profile. It is unclear how often employees use this and to what extent they are aware of it.⁸⁵

Further analyses reveal that the number of additional tasks is positively correlated with both psychological task demands ($r [3611] = .18, p < .001$), and perceived exhaustion ($r [3611] = .10, p < .001$), albeit to a weak extent. That means that the more additional tasks employees have to perform above the rated UFO profile, the higher the degree of perceived psychological task demands and exhaustion.

Working hours and leave

Overtime

Academic and teaching staff were on average employed for 35.86 hours a week ($SD = 6.84$), where they reported working an average of 41.77 hours a week over the past six months ($SD = 11.07$). That means working an average of 5.91 hours per week ($SD = 8.29$) more than contractually agreed. In comparison, the National Survey of Working Conditions (NEA) 2022 shows that of the employees who reported that they sometimes had to work overtime, the average number of overtime hours was 2.8 hours per week.⁸⁶ Therefore, the academic and teaching staff in this study work more overtime than the national average. The figures in this survey on the number of overtime hours per week are reasonably in keeping with the findings from recent university employee satisfaction survey. Not all employee satisfaction surveys asked about the absolute number of (overtime) hours worked per week, but for the five universities where this was measured, it was on average 8 hours per week more than agreed in the contract.

It is also found that the average number of overtime hours per week differs between jobs ($F(10,8924) = 84.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$). The results show that no job group within the university works less than 3 hours of overtime per week on average (see Figure 8). Notably, professors work the most hours of overtime per week. Professors reported working overtime more than the average of all respondents combined and also more than assistant and associate professors.⁸⁷ Lecturers, PhD

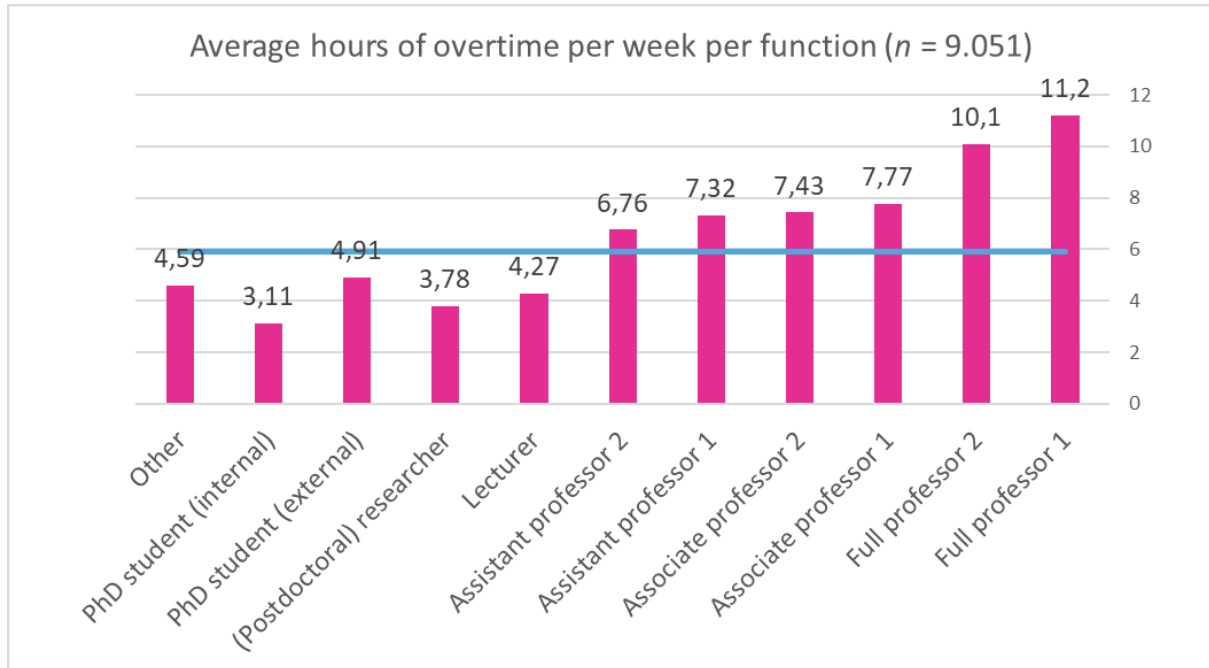
⁸⁵ See, for example: [Remuneration \(caouniversities.nl\)](https://www.caouniversities.nl) or [Rules for reflection times and objections UFO | Radboud University \(ru.nl\)](https://www.ru.nl).

⁸⁶ [National Working Conditions Survey TNO/CBS \(2022\)](https://www.tno.nl), with 72% of the sample in the NEA indicating that they sometimes work overtime.

⁸⁷ It should be noted that while full professors on average report the most overtime, they do not score the highest on perceived work pressure. This could be because they have become accustomed to the work

students (especially interns) and (postdoctoral) researchers reported the least number of hours of overtime per week and also worked significantly less overtime than assistant professors. Still, it can be seen that even the group reporting the fewest average hours of overtime per week (internal PhD students) scores higher than the national average overtime hours based on the NEA.

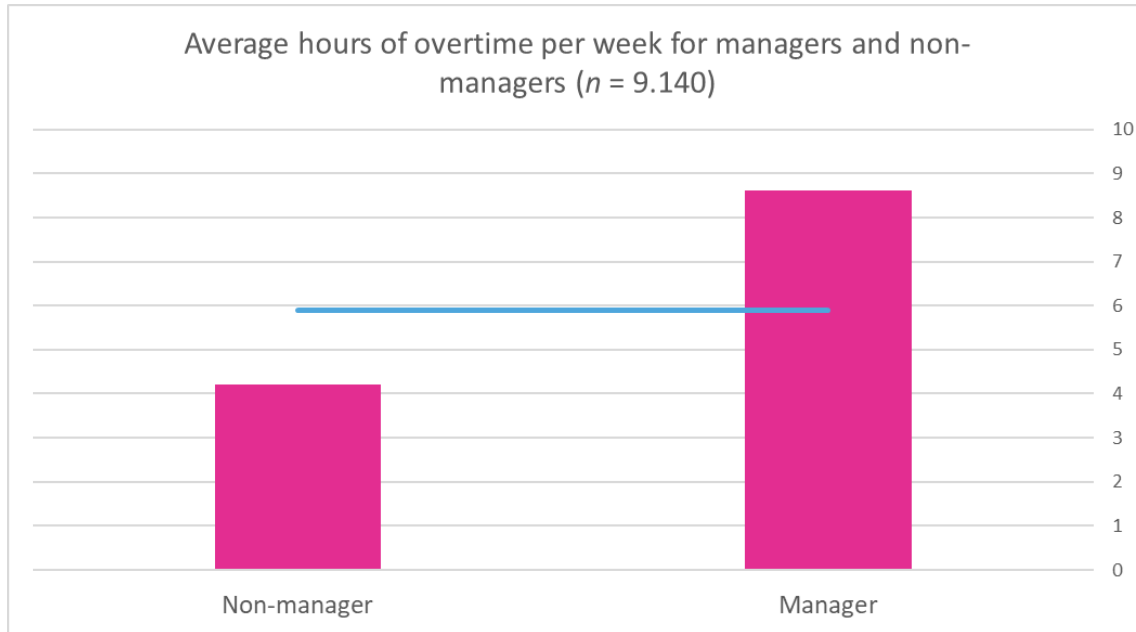
Figure 8. Overtime broken down by job position



Significant differences were also observed in overtime hours between respondents with and without managerial positions. Managers work an average of 8.62 working hours per week more than agreed in the appointment, which is 4.38 hours per week more overtime than non-managers ($F(1,9,018) = 644.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$; (see Figure 9).

pressure and overtime. Professors may also not have considered the hours spent in ancillary positions that are not officially part of the contract with the university when filling in their actual hours worked. Professors report the most ancillary positions among all job groups, averaging between two and three ancillary positions.

Figure 9. Number of overtime hours for managers and non-managers



Overtime was positively correlated both with psychological task demands ($r [9.013] = .39, p < .001$) and with perceived exhaustion ($r [9.014] = .16, p < .001$). This implies that the more overtime worked, the higher the psychological work load. Here it is plausible that when a large amount of work has to be done in limited time and therefore there are high psychological task demands, people will work longer than contractually agreed. Moreover, these results suggest that the more overtime employees work, the greater the perceived exhaustion and ultimately the likelihood of burnout symptoms.

Following this, 56% of respondents said they *often* or *always* work more hours than stated in the contract. 19% of respondents said they *rarely* or *never* work more than the number of hours contractually agreed (see figure 10).

Working more than allowed under the Working Hours Act

As also shown in Figure 10, 11% of respondents said they *often* to *always* work more than 60 hours per week and 18% said they *often* to *always* have less than 11 hours of rest time between 2 working days. These two provisions in the Working Hours Act may be violated based on these results.⁸⁸ In addition, 40% of respondents said they *often* or *always* work in the evenings and 36% said they *often* or *always* work at weekends because they did not finish their work during the working week. A quarter of all respondents said they *rarely* or *never* work outside normal working hours (25% for evenings and 29% for working weekends, respectively).

Besides overtime, this survey also collected information on the use of leave and holidays. Almost half of respondents (48%) said they *never* or *rarely* get to take their annual statutory leave and 35% said they are *often* or *always* at work during statutory leave. These figures show that a significant proportion of respondents work during periods meant for rest and psychological distance from work.

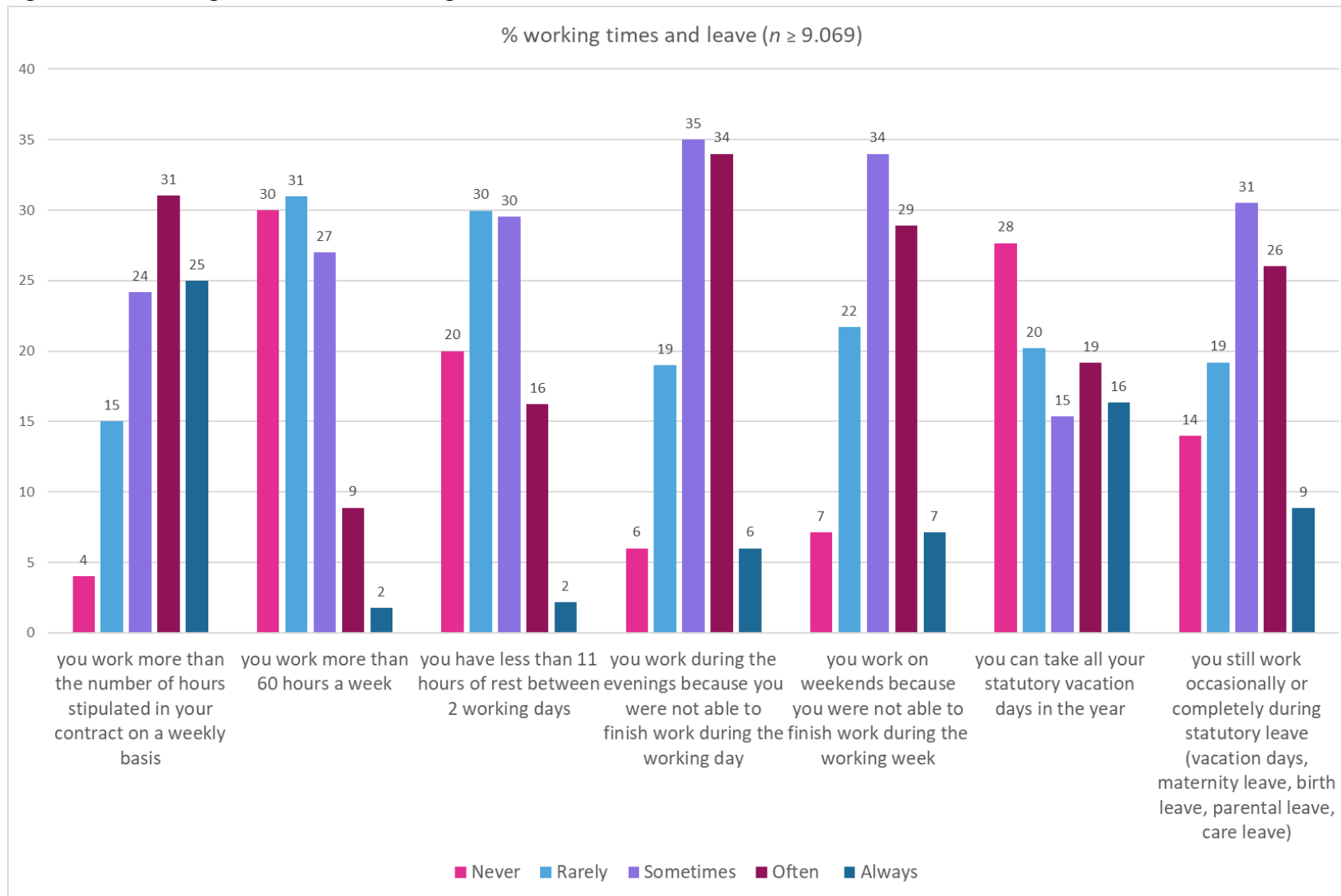
⁸⁸ Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (2010). [The Working Hours Act. Information for employers and employees.](#)

With a full-time appointment of 38 hours, employees at Dutch universities are entitled to about 29 vacation days.⁸⁹ This survey asked approximately how many vacation days respondents took and actually enjoyed in 2022. This analysis included only respondents working 38 or more hours according to their contract, as leave hours are more difficult to determine among part-time workers. On average, respondents reported having enjoyed 23.63 vacation days ($SD = 9.21$). This is over five days less per year than their minimum legal entitlement.

Finally, of the 1,825 respondents who had used maternity, birth, adoption, foster/parenthood, care leave, or special leave in the past two years, 26% reported that their duties were actually aligned with available working hours. 29% said this was partly the case, and 45% said their duties were not aligned with the available working hours during the leave.

⁸⁹ This leave consists of 152 statutory leave hours and 80 non-statutory leave hours. However, there is also leave other than vacation leave, which can add up to 9 extra days of leave. In addition, some employees work 40 hours instead of 38 hours a week, saving an additional 2 hours of leave per week. Thus, the frame of reference is a conservative estimate of the number of holidays. See: [Working hours, holidays and leave | Universities of the Netherlands.](#)

Figure 10. Percentages on answers working hours and leave



Applicability of the Working Hours Act

During the interviews, it was found that HR staff were sometimes surprised that the researchers asked for information on compliance with the Working Hours Act (ATW). Some of them argued that the ATW did not apply to scientific staff, claiming that science as a sector was exempted from the ATW or that scientists earn too much. However, this is incorrect. It is true that workers aged 18 and above with an annual salary above than three times the minimum wage are exempt from the standards of the Working Hours Act. In January 2023, people earning €75,150 gross or above were exempt from those standards. This means in line with the job profiles at a university, employees who are paid in scale 12 step 9 and above will be above this standard amount.⁹⁰ While scientific research can indeed be a ground for exception, this applies under certain conditions and not in a general sense.

Under Section 2:1 of the Working Hours Act, it is possible to (partially) exclude the application of the Working Hours Act. Such an exception has been created for conducting scientific research. This is included in Section 2.1:2, third paragraph (b) of the Working Hours Decree. This stipulates that much of the Working Hours Act does not apply to employees aged 18 or over who conduct scientific research. One condition is that "the nature of this research or the processes to be used in the research make it necessary". The explanation of the then Working Hours Decree⁹¹ included the following about this: "The restriction on the applicability of the Working Hours Act is linked to the fact that scientific research is governed, among other things, by physical laws. Such laws do not always relate to the working and rest time pattern prescribed by law, but they are the subject of (scientific) research. Hence, the nature of the study must necessitate a derogation in the area of working and rest times."

Similar reasoning applies to certain research methods commonly used in scientific research and the processes it entails. Again, this requires a derogation from Section 5 of the Working Hours Act. An exception has thus been created for conducting scientific research. However, this exception only applies if it involves scientific research into specific physical laws or if certain research methods and processes commonly used in scientific research are applied. Thus, the nature of the study must necessitate a derogation from working and rest periods.

The exception therefore does not cover *all* forms of scientific research, but only a subset of research that otherwise (if the Working Hours Act applied) could hardly be carried out, if at all. Thus, a university (or other institution where scientific research is conducted) may only use this exception if necessary to conduct the research. This further implies that these exceptions require individual assessment and apply only to the employees in charge of such studies. Either way, this exception does not cover employees who exclusively teach and/or carry out regular research at a university that can take place at usual working hours.

⁹¹ This explanation can be read here: [Official Gazette \(1995\). Working Hours Decree](#). This concerns the explanation of the 1995 Working Hours Decree, which included the exception for scientific research in Section 2.1:11. As part of the simplification of the Working Hours Act, the Working Hours Decree was rearranged in 2007, changing, among other things, the section number. However, nothing substantively changed, so the 1995 explanatory note remains applicable.

The above indicates that for a large proportion of university employees, the ATW applies (1) because they do not conduct research that cannot take place within regular working hours and/or (2) because they do not earn more than three times the minimum wage.

Under the ATW, an employer must also have proper records of working hours. Such a record makes it possible to keep track of exactly how many hours an employee works and, in particular, how much overtime. All this is important to limit working hours and ensure the right to break and rest periods. However, all the universities visited indicated during the interviews that they have little or no insight into how many hours and when their employees work. They do not have a working time record that includes employees' start and end times and breaks or a set schedule and a record of deviations from that schedule. Most HR staff agree that employees work more than agreed according to their contracts and also that less than planned leave is taken.

In summary, the results from this survey show that respondents work an average of almost six hours of overtime per week every week, do not take their full leave time, continue working during leave or holidays, and universities may be violating the ATW. Given the overtime of academic and teaching staff, it appears advisable for universities to start working with registering working hours. This gives management and employees a better understanding of overtime. In addition, bottlenecks in work pressure and understaffing can be identified. By recording working hours, more attention can be paid to rest and work-life balance.

Almost all universities report having 'leave backlogs'. In many ways, HR tries to encourage managers to have employees take leave. However, they also indicate being little successful at this. At several universities, HR notes that employees take leave to work on research, for example. Absenteeism rates are often low and there is mention of presenteeism, meaning that sick employees continue to work (even though they are significantly less productive).⁹²

Function contracts

The current collective agreement for Dutch universities (from April 2023 to June 2024) stipulates that the employer can conclude a 'function contract' (in Dutch functiecontract) with academic staff. A function contract is based on achieving certain results rather than on working hours, allowing employees to organise their work flexibly. After entering into such a contract, the employee is personally responsible for arranging working, rest and vacation times. From January 1st 2024, function contracts can only be concluded with employees from scale 11 and onwards.⁹³

The survey revealed that 18% ($n = 1,625$) of respondents said they use a function contract, 25% said they do not work with a function contract, and 57% said they did not know what a function contract entails. Interestingly, the largest group of users of the function contract are PhD students (26% of the 1,625 respondents). This is a group of junior researchers who are mostly at the beginning of their careers, have temporary appointments, and have relatively little work experience but are pressured to perform. The question is whether it is advisable to have junior researchers bear this responsibility. Consequently, this will no longer be possible from 1 January 2024, as PhD students are classified below scale 11. Other users of the function contract are assistant professors (26%), full professors (16%), and associate professors (13%).

⁹² Schultz & Edington (2007). [Employee health and presenteeism: a systematic review.](#)

⁹³ [CLA | Universities of the Netherlands.](#)

Causes of work pressure

In the interviews, all parties were asked what they see as the causes of work pressure. Interviewees see the main cause in how the education system is funded and the increasing or fluctuating student numbers (mentioned at 10/14 universities). After funding, regulatory pressure, accountability pressure or administrative burden are most often mentioned (8/14). This pressure or burden is mostly about external stressors, such as financial accountability for research funding received or all the processes and administrative steps to get/keep a programme accredited. This is followed by competitive research funding with a low success rate (7/14).

Also mentioned are too much work or excessively stringent task demands (6/14), lack of staff or inability to fill vacancies (5/14), and a different way of dealing with students that is more service-oriented, as well as the high demands students have regarding their courses and the psychological complaints students suffer from (5/14). Previous research also suggests that universities in particular indicate external causes for work pressure, such as funding for teaching and research. In 2021, the Labour Authority asked universities to (a) enter into dialogue with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for causes outside the universities' sphere of influence and (b) gain insight into internal causes of work pressure that universities can influence themselves.⁹⁴ In 2023, through the umbrella organisation *Universiteiten van Nederland* (UNL, universities of the Netherlands), universities put forward proposals to make the universities more future-proof. However, these proposals lack focus on work pressure.⁹⁵ Based on the current survey, it does not appear that universities have gained a better understanding into the underlying internal causes of work pressure. As mentioned above, the available policy documents often lack an in-depth problem analysis, and causes of work pressure are not systematically covered in depth in employee satisfaction surveys. It is true that education funding is partly based on student numbers that can fluctuate, but it also consists of a lump sum that reaches the various organisational units according to an internal distribution model. No analyses of how internal distribution models could accommodate fluctuating student numbers are known.

As more internal causes of work pressure, the interviews reveal performance pressure or performance culture (7/14) and the high ambition of individuals, faculties, and universities (7/14).

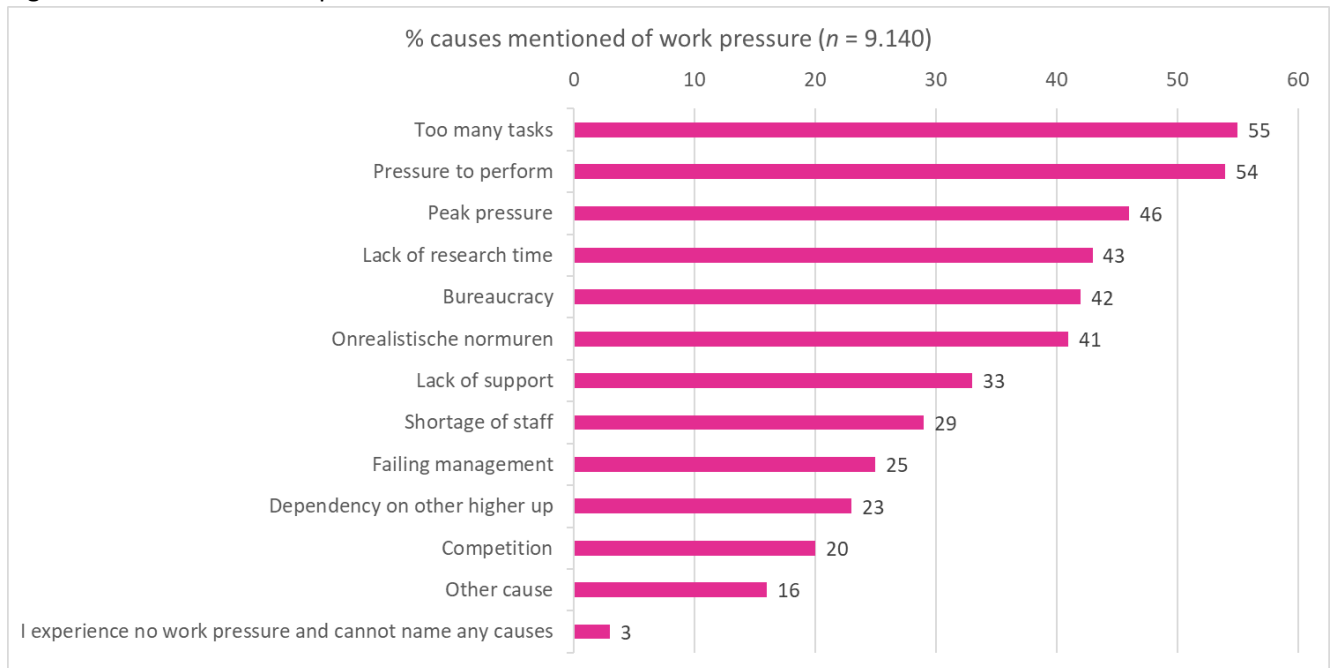
In addition to the causes discussed during the various interviews, the survey also allowed respondents to indicate what they see as the main causes of work pressure. Respondents could indicate from a total of 11 specific causes of work pressure whether they saw it as a cause. This list of 11 causes is based on the causes of overtime from WOinActie's 2020 report and the most frequently mentioned causes in universities' employee satisfaction surveys. On top of this, respondents could enter an off-list cause in an open-ended response field. As shown in Figure 11, more than half of respondents (55%) cited too many tasks as the main underlying cause, followed by

⁹⁴ Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report](#).

⁹⁵ The Minister of Education, Culture and Science initiated the 2022 *Toekomstverkenning Onderwijs en Wetenschap* (Education and Science Future Outlook), to which universities want to actively contribute through UNL. [A Future Vision for University Education](#) (2023) has therefore been offered through the UNL Werkgroep Sterken (Strengths Working Group). Among other things, this vision argues that the funding system should change from competitive funding to funding that promotes collaboration and profiling. Making transition funds available to enable systemic changes is also advocated. However, it is also indicated that previous committees have proposed changes to the funding system (such as the 2019 [Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation \(AWTI\)](#) and in 2010 the [Veerman](#)) Committee. None of these plans addresses work pressure.

performance pressure (54%) and peak work pressure (46%). 3% of all respondents said they themselves did not experience work pressure and could not name any causes.

Figure 11. Causes of work pressure

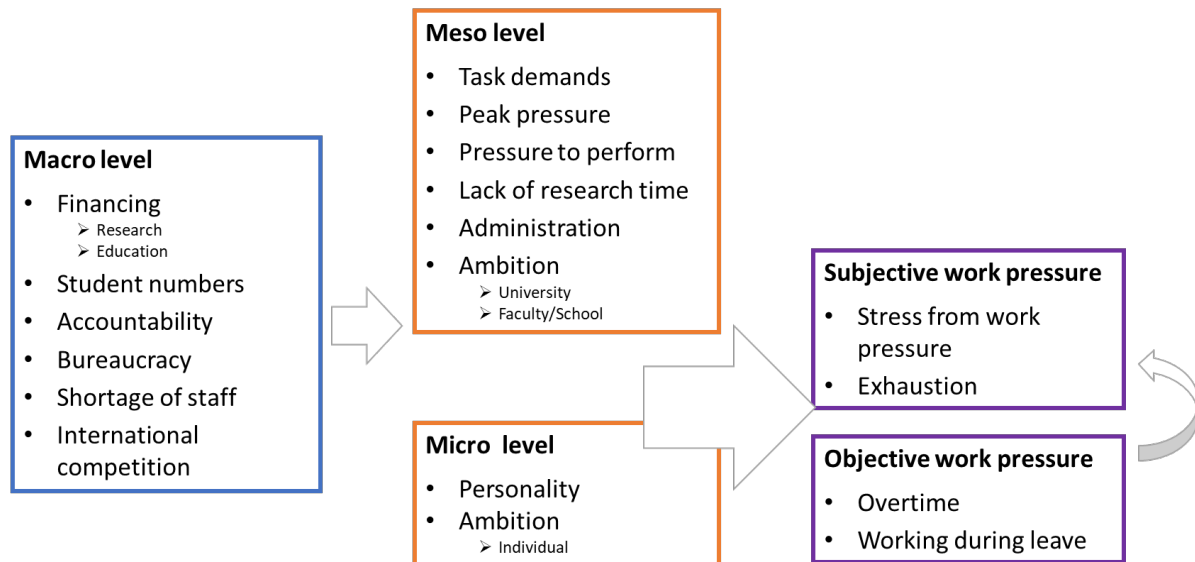


Of all respondents, 15% reported another cause of work pressure. Analysis of this open-ended response field revealed that the most frequently mentioned other cause of work pressure is one's own ambition and that one finds it difficult to say 'no' in order not to miss out on career opportunities (*"too many nice things you are offered and which you don't say no to because they are relevant/provide easy funding/strategically relevant/the dean wants it etc."*, *"ambition"*, *"perfectionism"*). The second cause mentioned was not just too many tasks but the combination of all kinds of different (and sometimes unexpected) tasks for which there is no 'time' and the continuous switching between these tasks (*"fragmentation of work/responsibilities"*, *"too many 'optional' (but crucial) tasks for which there are no hours"*, *"In academia, it is often unclear how many hours there are for the work, my supervisor or I often take on opportunities or work without knowing how much time it will take and whether it fits."* *You have very many small tasks, such as editorship, reviewing, teaching, conferences, students, and internal and external meetings. Grant writing also always comes unexpectedly and is expected of you"*). This category was often mentioned in a managerial context. The third commonly cited cause is temporary contracts that create work pressure. Fourth is the lack of realistic and clear/transparent expectations (*"unclear objectives and promotion criteria"*, *"Unrealistic expectations (all research must be excellent and the expectation that novice researchers can work completely independently)"*).

All causes of work pressure identified by respondents were significantly positively related to their perceived psychological task demands ($r_{pb} = .10 < .39$, all p 's $< .001$) and exhaustion ($r_{pb} = .07 < .28$, all p 's $< .001$). The strongest relationships exist between too many tasks, lack of research time, unrealistic norm hours and psychological task demands ($r_{pb} = .39$, $r_{pb} = .35$ and $r_{pb} = .32$, respectively) and performance pressure, management deficiency, dependence on others in higher positions and exhaustion ($r_{pb} = .28$, $r_{pb} = .27$ and $r_{pb} = .24$, respectively).

Figure 12 presents a conceptual model of the relationships between different causes of work pressure that emerged from this study. The model distinguishes between causes at the macro (contextual factors such as funding for education and research), meso (organisational factors such as increased task demands and administrative burden) and micro (such as personal drive of employees) levels. These causes are schematically related to different outcomes of work pressure, including perceived work pressure and hours worked, and it can be seen how the different explanatory factors are related to work pressure.

Figure 12. Conceptual model of work pressure at universities



Support and management staff

Although no information was obtained regarding support and management staff⁹⁶ in the survey, this group frequently emerged as a topic during the interviews with various parties within the universities. It became clear from the interviews that support and management staff also experience high work pressure. Support and management staff feel disrespected in that experience because the Labour Authority's study focused only on scientific and teaching staff. They indicate that they are, after all, 'communicating vessels'. If the support and management staff have too much work, then the academic and teaching staff will be burdened with additional tasks, for example, with a self-service HR system used at one of the universities, which entails additional tasks and responsibilities for the academic and teaching staff. Conversely, if the scientific and teaching staff have too much work, more support is required from the support and management staff. The support and management staff indicate that a lot of work pressure is caused by, among other things, the financial accountability of teaching and research and the constant need to tender for Learning Management Systems, for example, but also the ever-accelerating developments in IT (accelerated by the corona pandemic). The support and management staff members urged the Labour Authority to pay attention to them as well.

⁹⁶ A term some universities are moving away from as part of a culture shift towards recognising and valuing. By not distinguishing between 2 categories of employees, they aim to create an open mind and attitude so that more cooperation and a team spirit can emerge. See <https://www.uu.nl/nieuws/van-wp-en-obp-naar-collegas>.

Undesirable behavior

During the interviews, all universities acknowledged that undesirable behavior sometimes occurs in the organisation. Information on undesirable behavior usually relies on two sources, namely the employee satisfaction survey and the reports of the confidential adviser. According to the employee satisfaction surveys, an average of 12% of respondents experienced undesirable behavior (if an overall figure was available for undesirable behavior, regardless of form).

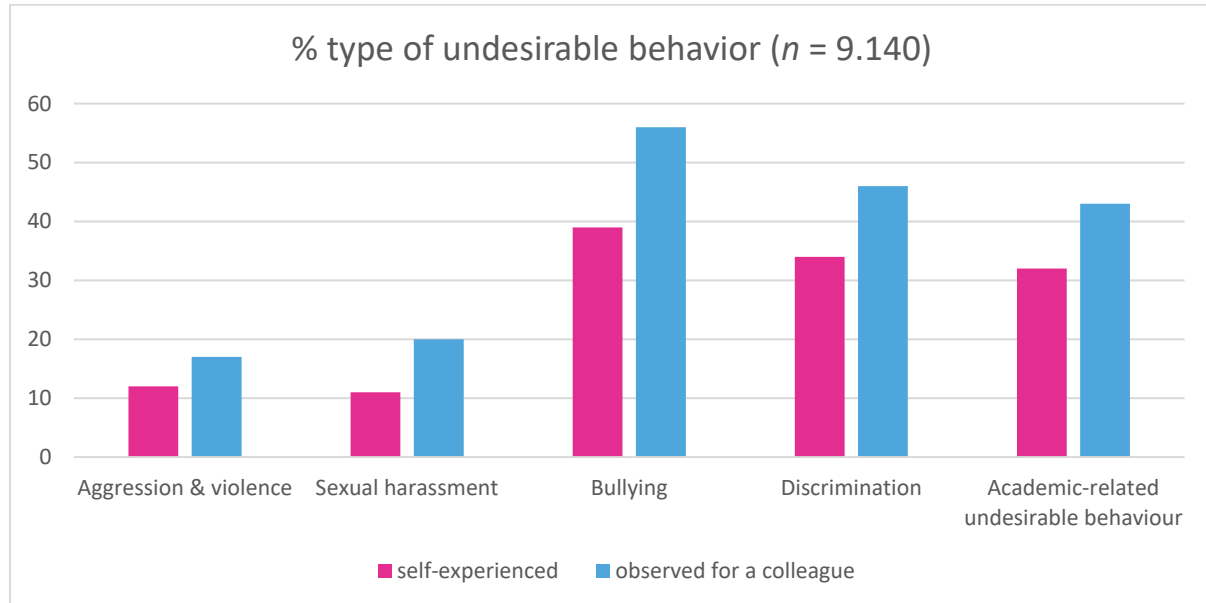
During several interviews, researchers and the inspectors were informed by interviewees about cases of undesirable behavior that were going on at the time. The nature of those cases varied widely, from PhD students who had decided to leave because of high work pressure, to stories about questionable acts of university board members. The inspector referred the interviewees to ways of reporting this to the Labour Authority.

Experienced undesirable behavior

The Labour Authority distinguishes four categories of undesirable behavior: aggression and violence, sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Respondents were found to be most affected by bullying. 39% indicated they experienced some form of bullying themselves in the past two years, and 56% had seen it happen to a colleague. Discrimination is also commonplace. A third of respondents said they had experienced some form of discrimination, while as many as 46% had seen it happen to a colleague. Sexual harassment, as well as aggression and violence, are reported less frequently. Yet 11% still report that they have experienced some form of sexual harassment in the past two years, and 20% have seen it happen to a colleague. When it comes to aggression and violence, 12% of respondents had experienced this themselves, with 17% seen it happen to a colleague.

In addition to undesirable behavior falling into one of the above categories, respondents in this survey were asked about undesirable behavior specific to working within a university. This academic-related undesirable behavior can be seen as an expression of harassment. Specifically, these include falsely claiming authorship, failing to honour agreements (e.g. adjusting standards for promotion without consent or being given more tasks than agreed), and scientific fraud (e.g. data fabrication or p-hacking). As can also be seen in Figure 13, these forms of academic-related undesirable behavior are relatively common, with 32% of respondents saying they have personally experienced this in the past two years and 43% had seen it happen to a colleague.

Figure 13. Type of undesirable behavior, self-experienced and observed happening to a colleague



Across all 14 individual specific undesirable behaviors, it is notable that gossiping is the most frequently mentioned form of undesirable behavior, followed by non-compliance with agreements made, social isolation, wrongfully claiming authorship, organisational bullying and verbal aggression (see Figure 14). On average, respondents themselves had experienced 1.48 different forms of undesirable behavior (SD = 2.03, min = 0, max = 15).⁹⁷

Of all respondents, 55% said they had personally experienced at least one specific undesirable behavior in the past two years and 70% said they had occasionally observed some form of specific undesirable behavior in a colleague. 7% of respondents said they had neither experienced undesirable behavior (excluding discrimination) themselves nor seen it happen to colleagues (these are mainly Dutch respondents or PhD students).

Among the various forms of discrimination that respondents experienced themselves or witnessed with a colleague in the past two years, discrimination based on gender (16% experienced themselves and 22% seen from others)⁹⁸, nationality (10% experienced themselves and 20% seen from others)⁹⁹, type of contract (8% experienced themselves and 14% witnessed from others) and age (8% experienced themselves and 10% seen from others) were most frequent. Figure 15 shows the results regarding the different forms of discrimination. On average, all respondents experienced 0.73 different forms of discrimination themselves (SD = 1.35, min = 0, max = 13).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Women, non-Dutch employees, UD1s, UHD2s and UHD1s, executives and employees with permanent appointments experienced more different forms of undesirable behavior than men, Dutch employees, other job groups, non-executives and employees with other appointments (all η^2 s between .01 and .02).

⁹⁸ Of the respondents who reported experiencing gender-based discrimination, 80% were women.

⁹⁹ Of the respondents who reported experiencing discrimination based on nationality, 43% were non-Dutch but European, 41% from outside the EU and 16% Dutch.

¹⁰⁰ Women, non-Dutch workers from outside the EU, UD1s, UD2s and teachers experienced more different forms of discrimination than men, non-Dutch workers from within the EU and Dutch workers, and other job groups (all η^2 s between .02 and .04).

Figure 14. Specific undesirable conduct (excluding discrimination)

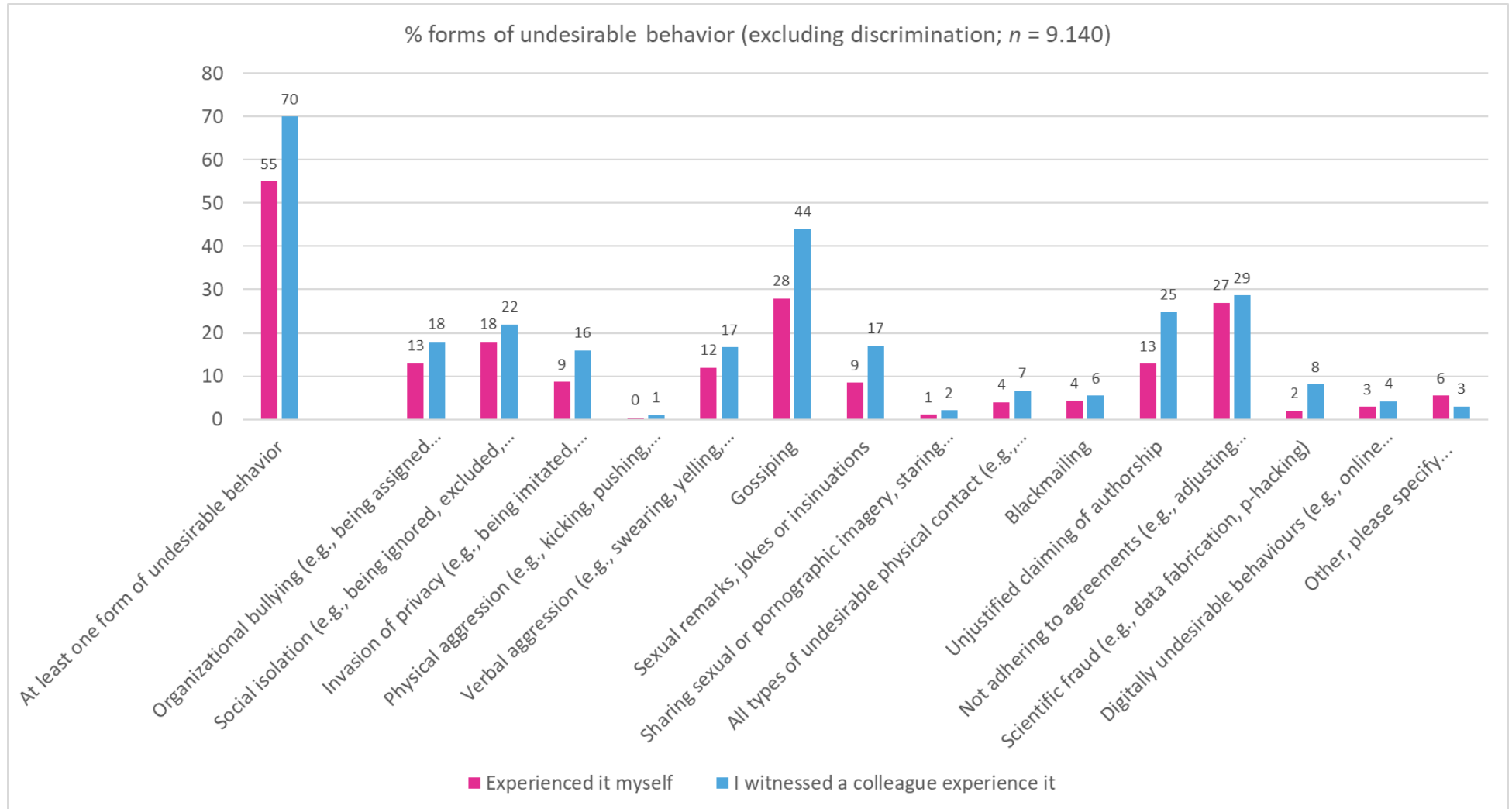
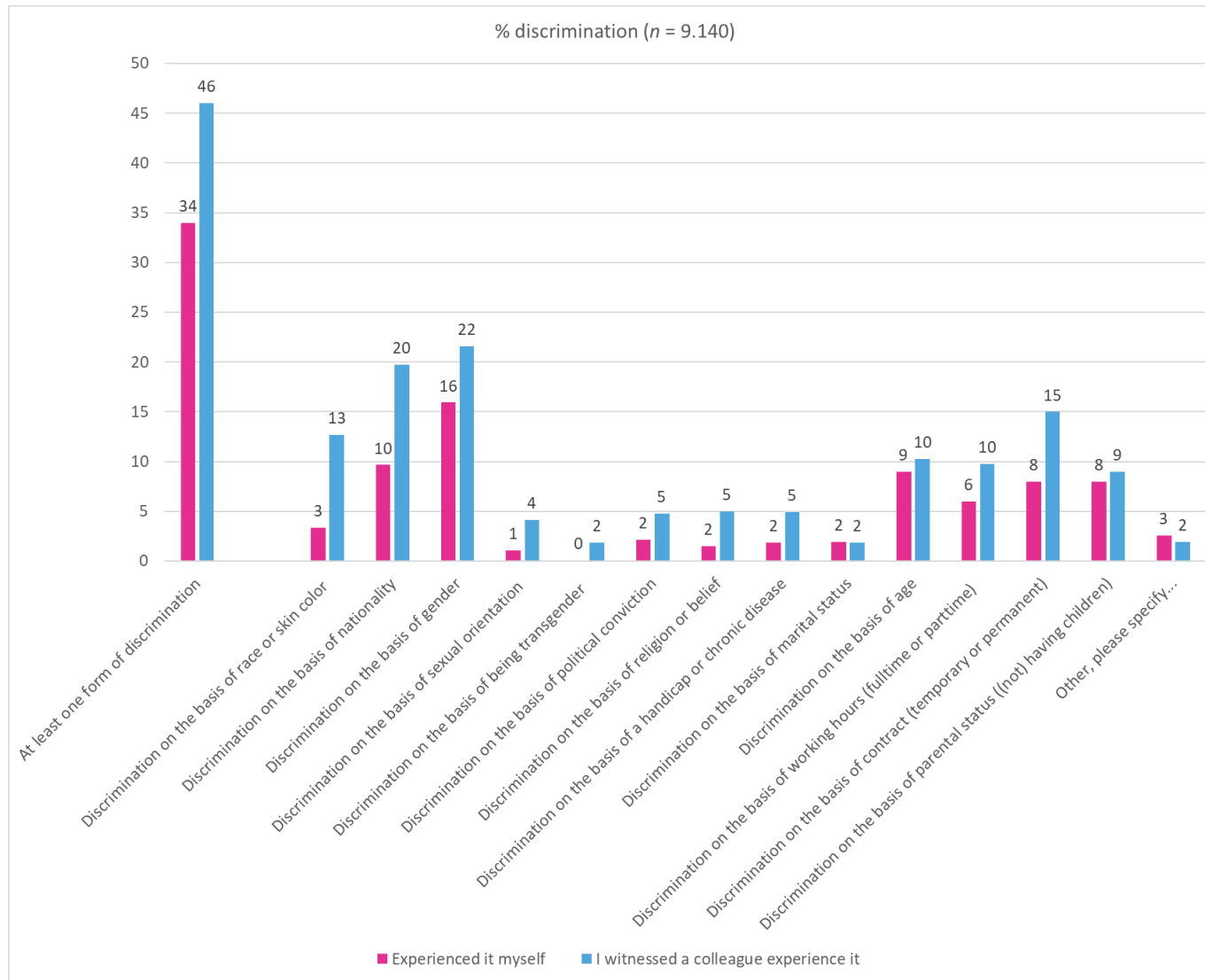
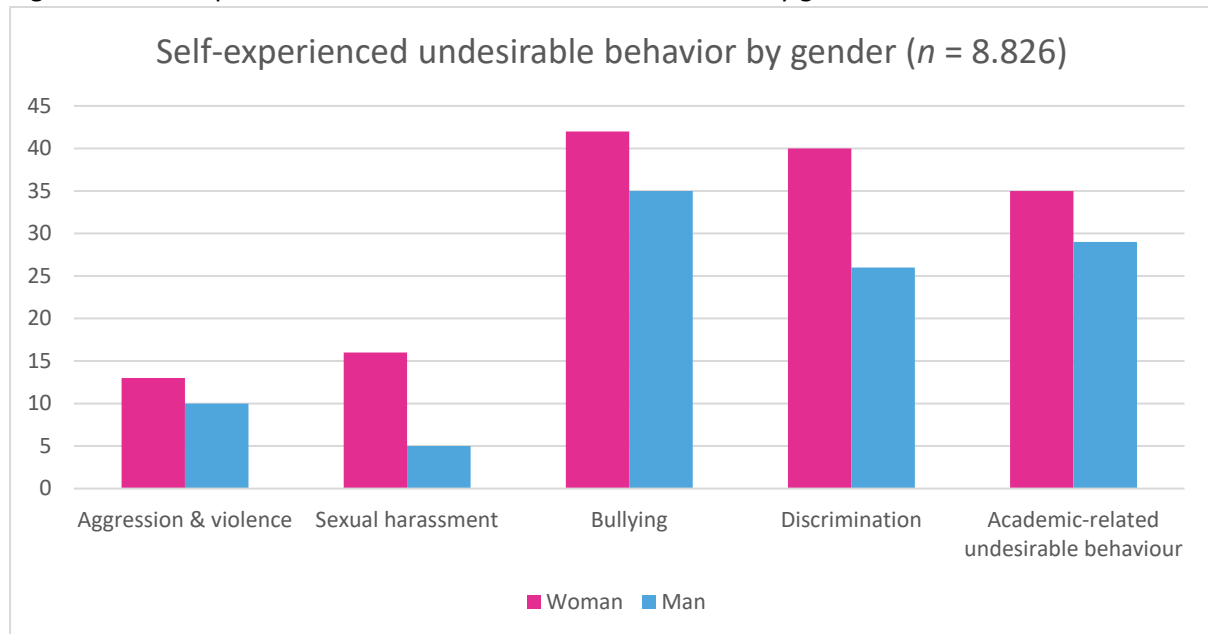


Figure 15. Forms of discrimination experienced by respondents themselves or seen among colleagues in the past two years



Broken down into the five specific categories of undesirable behavior, it is notable that for all forms of undesirable behavior, women indicate that they encounter it more often than men (see figure 16).¹⁰¹ The differences between men and women in perceived sexual harassment and discrimination were medium to large in nature ($\phi = .17$ and $\phi = .14$, respectively).

Figure 16. Self-experienced undesirable behavior broken down by gender

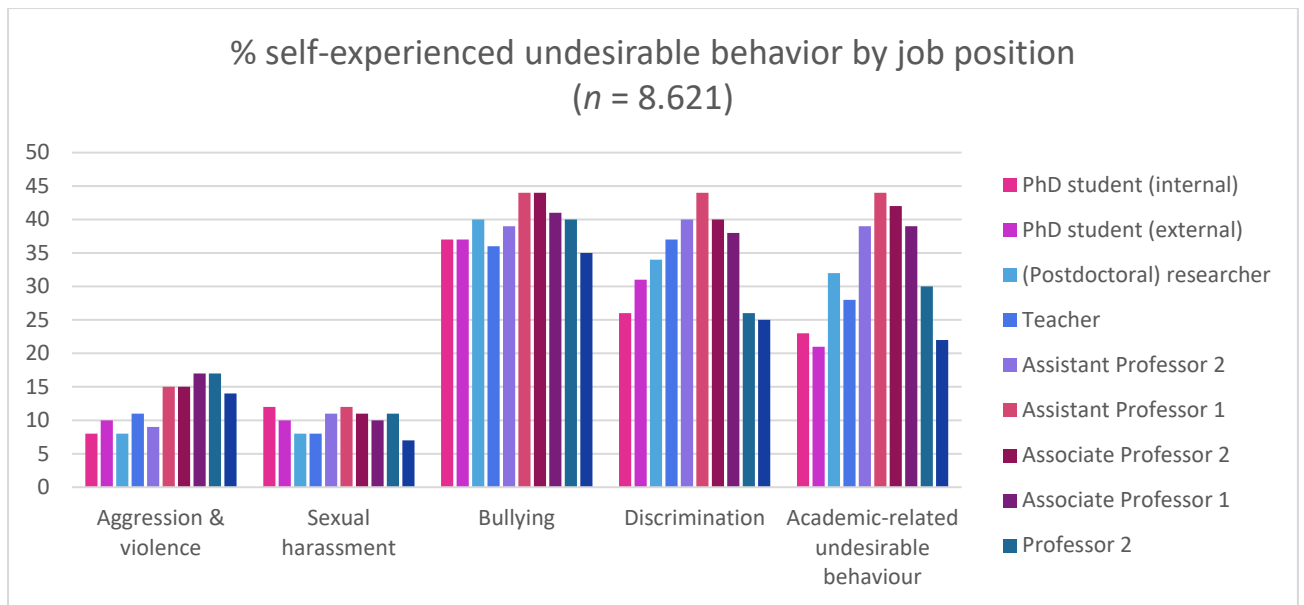


It can also be seen that assistant professors (especially UD1) and associate professors (especially UHD2) are more likely to experience undesirable behavior (see Figure 17). The differences between the job positions for aggression and violence, discrimination and scientific undesirable behavior were medium in nature (Cramer's $V = .11$, $.15$ and $.17$, respectively, $df = 9$).¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ All differences between men and women are significant ($p < .001$). For bullying ($\phi = .06$), aggression and violence ($\phi = .04$) and science-related undesirable behavior ($\phi = .07$), the effects are minor.

¹⁰² The effects of position on bullying (Cramer's $V = .06$, $df = 9$) and sexual harassment (Cramer's $V = .06$, $df = 9$) are of a minor nature.

Figure 17. Self-experienced undesirable behavior broken down by job position



Causes of undesirable behavior

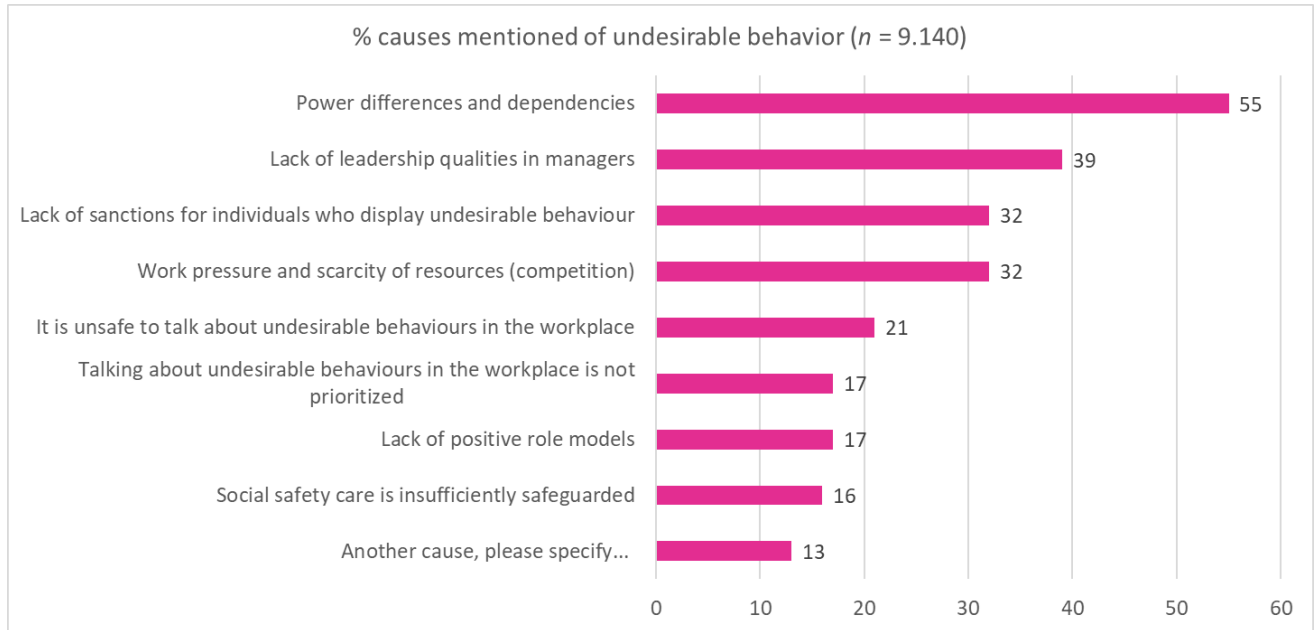
In the interviews, each interviewed party at each university was asked to indicate what they thought the causes of undesirable behavior were. Power differences (hierarchy) and associated dependencies were cited as the main cause at every university (cited at 14/14 universities). Dependencies mean that if undesirable behavior happens to you, you cannot easily discuss this because your own position may be at stake, which is accompanied by fear. In addition, work pressure or performance pressure was often mentioned as a cause (9/14). The pressure to perform can cause people to put their own interests before those of others and be less respectful towards each other. It was also often mentioned that it is due to 'culture' (8/14). Interviewees said that this is just the way things work at a university, that there is a culture of fear, or that there is no culture of openness where people can raise undesirable behavior with others. They indicated that, in practice, this sometimes means that perpetrators of undesirable behavior are tolerated, shielded, and allowed to carry on as usual and that there are no consequences attached to undesirable behavior. It was also mentioned that communication can be a problem (6/14). These comments often concern intercultural contexts in cases where situations are 'misinterpreted' from a different cultural perspective, which can lead to conflict, but it is also argued that scientists are simply not that good at communicating. Lastly, it was also noted that managers lack leadership qualities, soft skills or time to properly handle situations of undesirable behavior (4/14). Previous research indicates that all the above mentioned factors are related to likely increases in the risk of internal undesirable behavior.¹⁰³

It was frequently noted during the interviews that deans, as well as members of the Executive Board, are so high up in the hierarchical structure that they no longer have a realistic view of what happens on the work floor. Moreover, the interviews indicate that the top echelons of the university (deans, CvB, HR managers) often have many different ideas about what a safe working environment should mean and sometimes struggle with a certain cultural shift. For instance, interviewees regularly indicated that people at the top complain that they are "not allowed to say anything anymore".

A similar picture emerges from the survey. As shown in Figure 18, more than half of the respondents indicated that, in their view, undesirable behavior is caused by power differences and dependencies, and about a third of the respondents mentioned the lack of leadership qualities among managers. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient sanctions for perpetrators of undesirable behavior, and the role of work pressure and scarcity of resources are cited as causes.

¹⁰³ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures against internal undesirable behavior.](#)

Figure 18. Causes of undesirable behavior



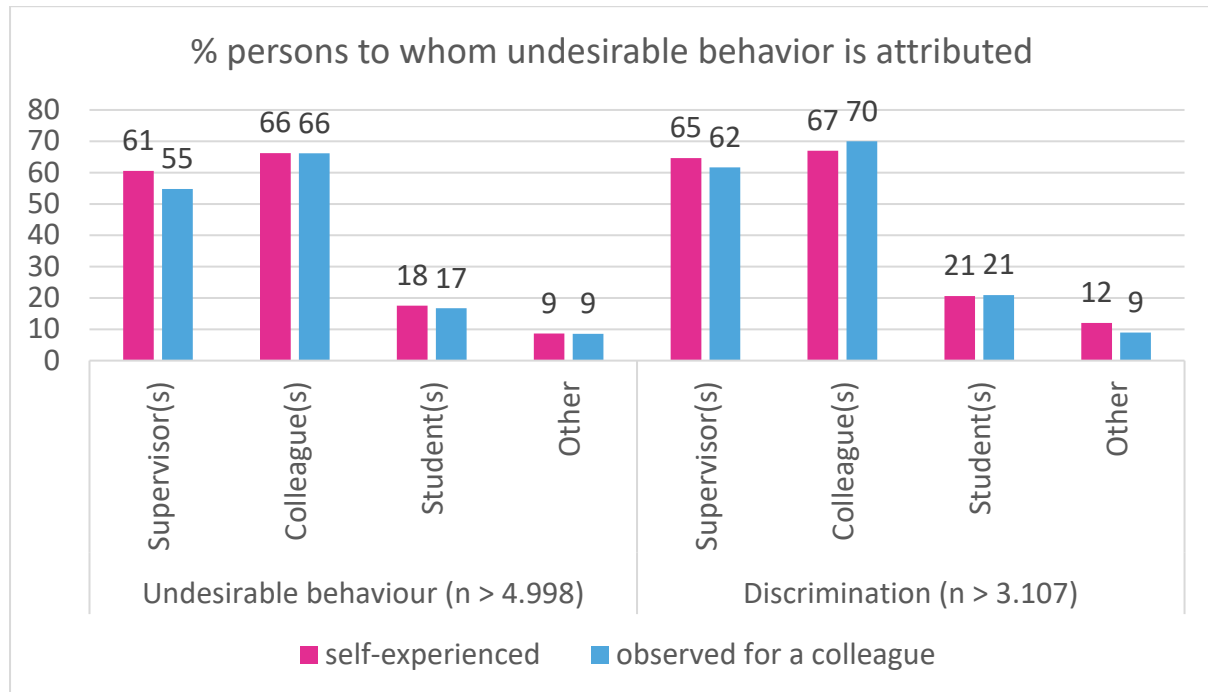
Of all respondents, 13% reported another cause of undesirable behavior. After analysing this open-ended response field, it was found that the most frequently mentioned 'other' cause was ignorance or unawareness (*"People don't understand that some jokes are not funny/are unwelcome", "ignorance", "those who display undesirable behavior are often unaware of it themselves.", "implicit bias"*). The second cause mentioned was that there are no consequences for those displaying undesirable behavior; they are shielded, protected, things are covered up (*"Malpractices are downplayed by managers. Undesirable behavior is covered up.", "Cases' are often corrected with training and counselling programmes (or mediators) who benefit from saying their role has worked well - and then you have to start all over again.", "Moreover, the top-down hierarchy at the university creates an environment where managers at different levels cover up each other's mistakes and protect each other.", "There are managers who do not address ethical issues because people who behave unethically may pull in a lot of money for the organisation.", "Lack of accountability and proper social safety and accountability mechanisms. Confidential advisers are closely intertwined with the management team."*).¹⁰⁴ The third most frequently mentioned 'other' cause relates to positive discrimination and wokism, which prevents certain groups from feeling able to speak up (*"Dutch, white males are currently heavily disadvantaged in the university circuit, both at the universities themselves and through research funders. This discrimination has drifted over from the US and will only get worse in the coming years.", "Policies that focus on inclusion of a few specific and often small groups and lead, sometimes unnoticed, to the exclusion of other, often much larger groups"*).

Respondents who had personally experienced undesirable behavior or had witnessed it for a colleague were asked who they thought the behavior could be attributed to. Here, discrimination

¹⁰⁴ This cause is also mentioned in the opinion of the government commissioner on sexual transgression and sexual violence: "There is also a pattern in science that staff who provide a lot of funding and/or have high-profile publications to their name (and are therefore highly regarded) can sometimes afford to engage in more sexually transgressive behavior than others." Government commissioner on sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence (2024). [Opinion on Tackling sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence in higher education and science.](#)

was questioned separately. All other forms of undesirable behavior are displayed in the left part of figure 19. The results reveal that the majority of perceived and seen undesirable behavior (including discrimination) is attributed to supervisor(s) and/or colleague(s).

Figure 19. Persons to whom undesirable behavior is attributed



Psychological safety and manager's passive-aggressive behavior

On statements that relate to the existence of a psychologically safe working environment in the department - an environment in which you can bring up problems and difficult topics, for example – responses were neutral to agreeing (average score 3.58 on a scale of 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree, and 3 = disagree/disagree).¹⁰⁵ Perceived psychological safety was negatively related to the number of types of undesirable behavior a person experienced oneself ($r [9089] = -.58, p < .001$) and that one has seen happen to colleagues ($r [9089] = -.35, p < .001$). A similar relationship existed between perceived psychological safety and discrimination (self-experienced: $r [9089] = -.45, p < .001$; seen happen to a colleague: $r [9089] = -.34, p < .001$). Although no causal conclusions can be drawn from this data, the most logical explanation seems to be that undesirable behavior contributes to experiencing an unsafe working environment.¹⁰⁶ However, an unsafe environment could also encourage undesirable behavior.

The extent to which employees experience passive-aggressive behavior from their managers was measured as a final form of undesirable behavior. Employees reported to (almost) never experience

¹⁰⁵ Women, non-Dutch respondents and university (senior) lecturers feel less safe than men, Dutch and other job groups (η^2 between .01 and .04). Minor differences between universities were also evident, with scores ranging between 3.40($SD = 0.79$) and 3.67($SD = 0.79; \eta^2 = .01$).

¹⁰⁶ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures against internal undesirable behavior.](#)

this ($M = 1.23, SD = 0.54$; on a scale of 1 = never, 5 = always).¹⁰⁷ Experienced passive-aggressive behavior was positively related to the number of types of undesirable behavior a person has personally experienced ($r[9071] = -.55, p < .001$) and that one has seen happen to colleagues ($r[9071] = .27, p < .001$). A similar relationship was observed between perceived passive-aggressive behavior by the supervisor and discrimination (experienced by themselves: $r[9071] = .33, p < .001$; seen with a colleague: $r[9071] = .23, p < .001$). These results indicate that when managers behave in a passive-aggressive manner this is accompanied by several undesirable behaviors.

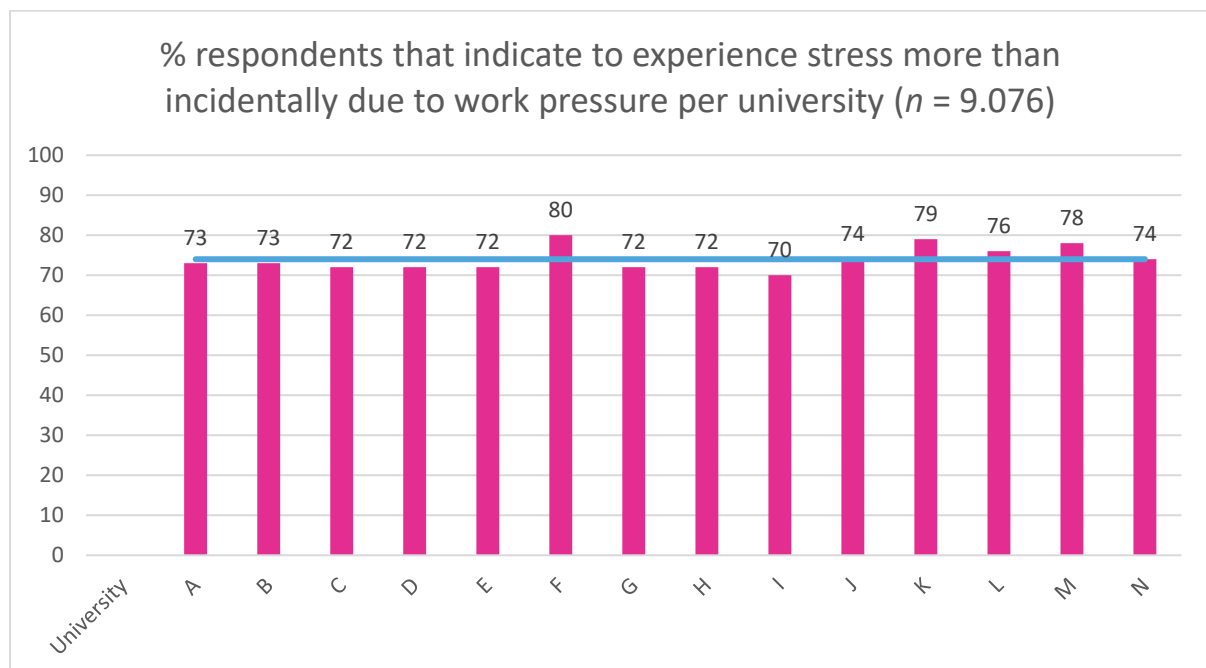
Comparison of universities

Below, we focus on the differences between Dutch universities in terms of work pressure and undesirable behavior. Universities with less prevalent work pressure and undesirable behavior may have a more effective approach. Thus, charting the differences between universities could help identify successful policies and measures.

First, we looked at the average scores per university on the different operationalisations of work pressure. The differences between universities were negligible for both psychological task demands and exhaustion ($\eta^2 > .01$). Respondents from different universities thus reported similar scores on both psychological task demands and exhaustion. The number of overtime hours worked per week did not differ significantly across universities.

One operationalisation of work pressure did differ significantly across universities; perceived stress due to work pressure. However, the effect size of this difference was small (Cramer's $V = .07, df = 13$). There are not one or more universities that clearly stand out in a positive light (see Figure 20). The universities are presented in random order.

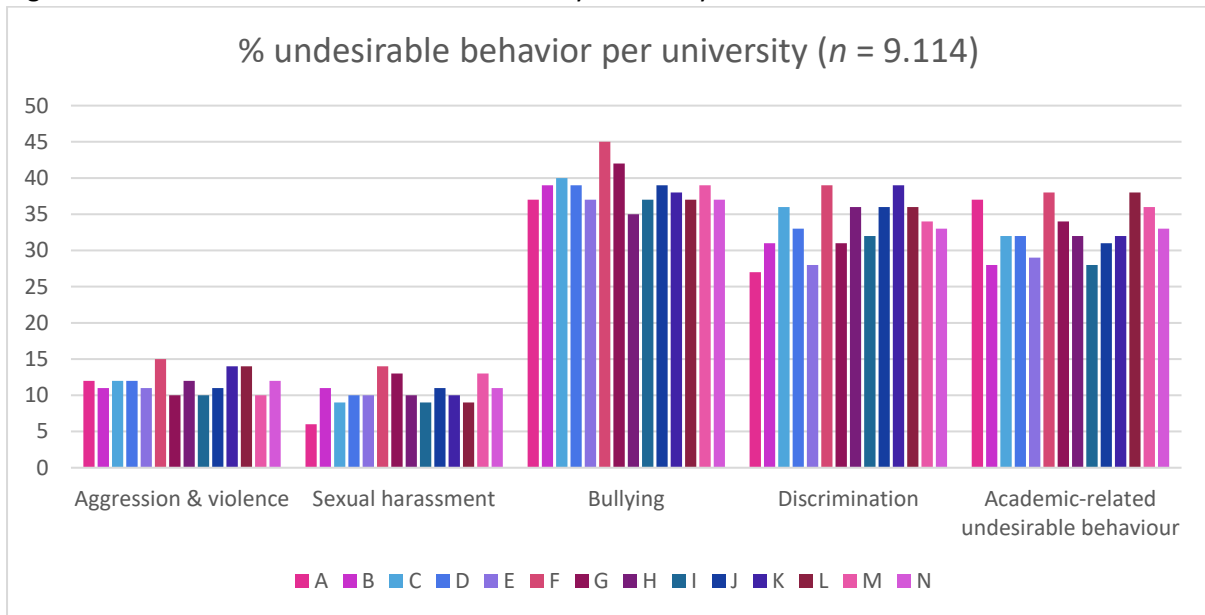
Figure 20. Stress experienced due to work pressure broken down by university



¹⁰⁷ Non-Dutch respondents from outside the EU experience more destructive leadership than other non-Dutch and Dutch, and external PhD students experience more destructive leadership than other job groups (both $\eta^2 = .01$).

Second, scores for different types of undesirable behavior are similar across universities (see Figure 21).¹⁰⁸

Figure 21. Undesirable behavior broken down by university



If we relate these results to the earlier findings on PSA policy compliance (see also Table 2), it is striking that compliance on these points (e.g. recognising PSA as a risk in the risk assessment) does not seem to be directly related to perceived work pressure and undesirable behavior by respondents. Universities L and M meet all four requirements of PSA policy, but score relatively high compared to the average on perceived stress due to work pressure and certain forms of undesirable behavior. Universities A and I did not meet any of the requirements, scoring around the average on perceived stress due to work pressure and relatively high on certain forms of undesirable behavior. University H stands out in that the respondents here recorded the highest scores on perceived stress due to work pressure and various undesirable behaviors. Linked to the four requirements for the PSA policy, this university meets two of the four points.

In short, no universities can be identified where respondents stand out in terms of exposure to the PSA risks of work pressure and undesirable behavior. This implies that, in general, employees from different universities report being exposed to work pressure and the various forms of undesirable behavior to a similar extent. Thus, based on these outcomes, it is not possible to link successful policies and measures to reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior to a specific university.

¹⁰⁸ The levels of self-reported sexual harassment, discrimination and scientific undesirable behavior differed significantly, however, these effects were small in nature, all Cramer's $V = .06$, $df = 13$.

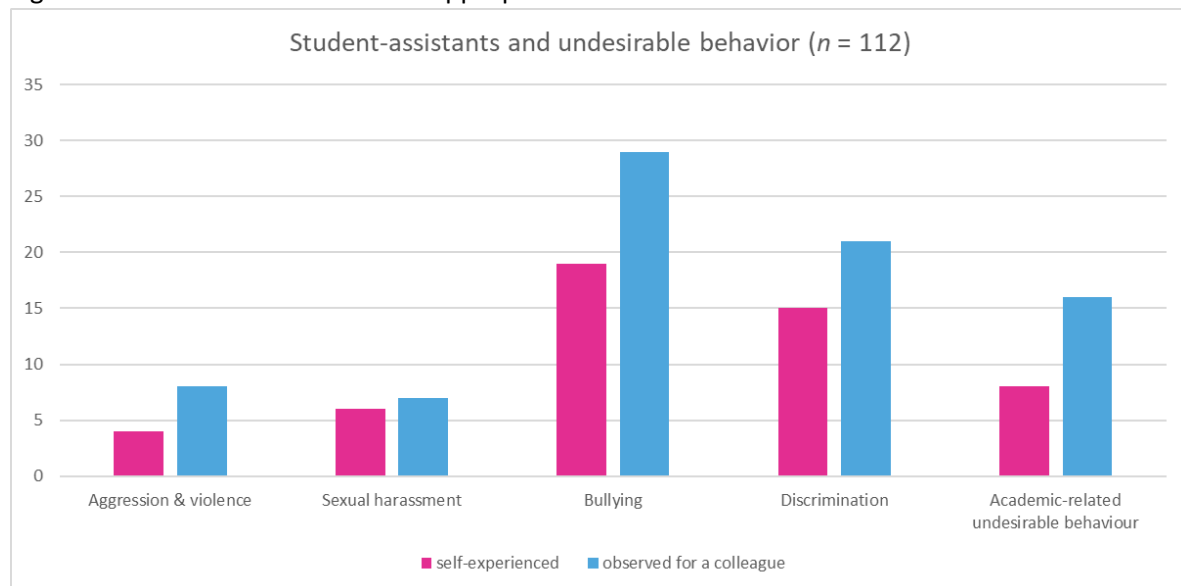
Student assistants

The analyses on student assistants were carried out separately because student assistants are classified as support and management staff, not as academic and teaching staff. Student assistants are included in this study because they often work directly with academics and teaching staff, contributing to academic teaching or research.¹⁰⁹ The student assistantship can also be a stepping stone to a career in science.¹¹⁰

A total of 112 student assistants completed the survey. On average, these respondents are 23.51 years old ($SD = 5.00$) and are employed for 10 hours a week. Looking at the different indicators of work pressure, the results show that on psychological task demands, student assistants score an average of 2.38 ($SD = 0.74$), which is significantly lower than academic and teaching staff ($M = 3.55$). The percentage of student assistants experiencing stress due to work pressure is about the same as the other respondents, with 74% of student assistants answering this question in the affirmative. At a mean of 1.94 ($SD = 0.68$), perceived exhaustion is significantly lower than for the other respondents and falls below the norm of the average level of exhaustion. Finally, the average overtime for students is 2.27 hours per week. Overall, the results show that student assistants score lower than academic and teaching staff on almost all indicators of work pressure.

The various forms of undesirable behavior are also experienced less and seen less by student assistants than academic staff (see Figure 22). Similar to academic staff, bullying is the most frequently mentioned undesirable behavior, followed by discrimination and academic-related undesirable behavior.

Figure 22. Student assistants and inappropriate behavior



Based on these results, it can be concluded that undesirable behavior and especially work pressure are less prevalent among student assistants than among academic and teaching staff. It can be noted that the number of overtime hours and the perceived undesirable behavior is considerable given the small number of hours in the contract.

¹⁰⁹ [Student assistant | Universities of the Netherlands.](#)

¹¹⁰ ASWA Research Agency (2009). Student assistant. [Students and teachers about student assistantships.](#)

Measures to reduce work pressure and undesirable behaviors

Based on the documentation received and interviews with the various parties within the universities, it can be said that many measures are being taken to reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior. What is striking about some of these measures is their individual, reactive or non-obligatory nature. Examples include time management courses, individual coaching and optional leadership courses and social safety training. Two more frequently mentioned measures from the interviews are implementing a Recognition and Rewards program and improving the system to decide on norms for hours of teaching.

Recognition and rewards programs aim at a cultural change that steers away from merely valuing research achievements and bringing in cash flows while the academic profession also covers many other performance domains.¹¹¹ Alongside this, Recognition and reward programs can also play a role in reducing undesirable behavior by, for example, placing more emphasis on (leadership) qualities that promote social safety. Many universities see Recognition and rewards programs as a solution to some of the current work pressure. However, universities are at notably different stages in implementing this. Despite much already being set in motion¹¹², Recognition and reward programs do not generally take much concrete form in the workplace. A few universities have already created career paths based on different career profiles, but for most universities, Recognition and rewards is mainly a topic of conversation during the annual performance review. The impact and effectiveness of Recognition and rewards on work pressure and undesirable behavior has not yet been gauged anywhere. The Recognition and rewards program also does not yet seem to succeed in making authority less dependent on bringing in cash flows as, for example, the government's commissioner on sexual transgression and sexual violence expected.¹¹³

Many universities are also trying to take stock of or produce a system for norm hours for teaching. Unfortunately, no best practices seem to be emerging from this yet because (1) barely any objective standards seem possible for a diversity of content and forms of education, (2) employees are reluctant to indicate how long they take to complete certain tasks, and (3) departments do not share their systematics with others for fear of having to use a different system later.

To understand the extent to which employees are aware of/informed about of measures taken, to which measures are used and considered effective, respondents first indicated whether they were aware of the measures. If the employee knew about a measure, they were also asked whether they had used it, and if so, how the respondent rated the measure in question in terms of effectively reducing work pressure or undesirable behavior, where rating 1 = *not at all effective* and 5 = *very effective*. The analyses distinguished between measures to reduce work pressure, measures to prevent undesirable behavior, and measures specifically intended for managers.

First, it is striking that universities take far fewer measures against undesirable behavior than against work pressure. For example, across all universities, there were 31 measures against undesirable behavior and as many as 113 measures to reduce work pressure.

¹¹¹ VNSU, NFU, KNAW, NWO, & ZonMw. (2019). [Room for everyone's talent. Towards a new balance in recognising and valuing scientists.](#)

¹¹² For an overview of initiatives taken, see VNSU, NFU, KNAW, NWO, & ZonMw. (2019). [Room for everyone's talent. Towards a new balance in recognising and valuing scientists](#) and [Recognition and appreciation | NWO.](#)

¹¹³ Government commissioner on sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence (2024). [Opinion on Tackling sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence in higher education and science.](#)

Awareness and use of measures

Overall, the results reveal that, regardless of the type of measures, on average, about one-third of all respondents are aware of the measures, and also about one-third of respondents who are aware of these measures have used them (see table 5).¹¹⁴

Of 9,114 respondents, 11% said they were completely unaware of measures to prevent or reduce stress due to work pressure and/or undesirable behavior. Of the 7,957 respondents who said they were familiar with at least one measure, 8% said they had not used any.

Table 5. Awareness, use and effectiveness of measures

Measures	Aware of measures	Use of measures	Effectiveness of measures
Work pressure	24% (range 2-85% n = 18.949)	30% (range 0-74% n = 6.076)	3.52 (range 2.00-4.72)
Undesirable behavior	32% (range 9-67% n = 6.871)	28% (range 8-60% n = 1.217)	3.31 (range 2.71-4.13)
Managers	37% (range 8-79% n = 2.691)	29% (range 3-48% n = 876)	3.32 (range 2.68-4.30)

NOTES: Respondents could tick multiple measures. Therefore, the numbers in these tables do not refer to unique respondents but to the number of measures ticked. The range presented is at the measure level.

Assessment of the effectiveness of measures used

On average, the measures used by respondents are rated between 'neutral' (score 3) and 'somewhat effective' (score 4). The lowest-scoring measures against work pressure are stress checks and work pressure guides that provide insight into work pressure, *work-life balance coaches*, and programmes to digitise/automate/unify work/processes (all scored below 2.50, i.e. between 'not really effective' and 'neutral').

The best-scoring (seen as most effective) measures all relate to reducing work pressure and concern obtaining additional staff or support. This could include less teaching, less committee work, task reduction for new tasks, re-use of course material or broadening of norm hours for teaching, expansion of formation, support by research/teaching assistants or administrative support. All measures aimed at reducing work pressure and increasing staff score on average higher than a 4.00 (between 'somewhat effective' and 'very effective').

Specific measures against undesirable behavior

Several universities use two measures against undesirable behavior. First, half of the universities have used a theatre performance (e.g. Mindlab) to address and raise undesirable behavior.¹¹⁵ Secondly, there is training that gives employees tools to raise and combat undesirable behavior, known as active bystander training. Since the majority of universities use these measures, they are listed separately below. Table 6 shows that on average, the effectiveness of both the theatre performance and the training is rated between 'neutral' and 'somewhat effective'.

¹¹⁴ These analyses only included measures against work pressure and undesirable behavior where it was clear to the researchers that everyone could be aware of or make use of them. For example, these analyses did not include specific measures for PhD students or pregnant employees.

¹¹⁵ [Mindlab theatre performance by Theatre Makers Radio Kootwijk](#)

Table 6. Awareness, use and effectiveness of specific measures of undesirable behavior

Measures	Aware of measures	Use of measures	Effectiveness of measures
Theatre performance Mindlab ¹¹⁶	41% (range 21-58%)	34% (range 20-47%)	3.36 (range 3.13-3.57)
Active bystander training	39% (range 11-67%)	31% (range 13-44%)	3.50 (range 3.11-4.13)

Online platforms for personal development and vitality

Half of the universities offer employees the opportunity to attend (mostly) online training courses and workshops on personal development, health and vitality. Universities offer such workshops to reduce work pressure (e.g. dealing with stress, time management or mindfulness), among other things. Respondents at most universities are not familiar with these platforms (an average of 22% are familiar with such online platforms, with a range of 1-69%). The respondents who do know about it make little use of it (17% use the online platform's offer, range 9-32%). Respondents who used this measure indicated that they did not see it as effective (mean score of 2.81¹¹⁷, which is below the neutral point).

Confidential adviser

It is not yet a legal requirement for employers to appoint a confidential adviser, although there is a bill proposing an obligation to appoint a confidential adviser for employers with 10 or more employees.¹¹⁸ According to the collective agreement of the Universities of the Netherlands, the employer does have to "appoint or designate a confidential adviser whose task is to provide initial reception of persons who have been confronted with undesirable behavior and initial reception of complaints about acts which violate the Equal Treatment Act".¹¹⁹ A confidential adviser is integral to the policy against psychosocial workload and is there for employees who encounter undesirable behavior. The duties of a confidential adviser include¹²⁰:

- receive, guide and advise employees dealing with undesirable behavior
- referring employees to appropriate assistance
- advising and supporting the employer in preventing undesirable behavior
- annual report of findings to employer, works council or employee representation
- recording instances of undesirable behavior
- providing education on undesirable behavior

Confidential advisers should also always treat employees' information confidentially; a duty of confidentiality also applies. In consultation with the Works Council or employee representatives, employers may choose to appoint one or more internal or external confidential advisers. An important consideration when appointing a confidential adviser is knowing the organisation well and being accessible to employees. The confidential adviser must be able to operate independently and

¹¹⁶ These averages include 6 universities because at 1 university the measures were offered to a select group of employees, which may distort the percentages.

¹¹⁷ This average excludes 1 university because only 1 employee there had used the measure. The average is 2.98 when the rating for this university is added.

¹¹⁸ [Bill by member Maatoug to amend the Working Conditions Act in connection with making a confidential adviser compulsory | Lower House of the States General.](#)

¹¹⁹ Article 1.12(2), cf [Collective Labour Agreement of Dutch Universities.](#)

¹²⁰ [Confidential adviser | Health and Safety Portal.](#)

not experience conflicts in another role. Finally, the confidential adviser must have the right knowledge, experience and relevant training.

The interviews and documents revealed that all 14 universities have one or more confidential advisers. The number of confidential advisers varies widely across universities: from 1.5FTE for all students and staff combined (about 40,000 people) to two central and 26 decentralised confidential advisers only for employees (about 5,500 employees).

At a large proportion of universities, moreover, it was found that there are plans to expand or professionalize policies against undesirable behavior. The infrastructure in the field of undesirable behavior relates both to the established policies and procedures around undesirable behavior, diversity and inclusion and to the various facilities and structures, such as confidential advisers, ombudsperson and hotline(s). All universities have appointed an ombudsperson in addition to confidential advisers.¹²¹ An ombudsperson complements the internal care structure when it comes to undesirable behavior. The tasks of an ombudsperson include promoting the handling of reports and complaints of undesirable behavior, mediating in conflicts and advising (solicited and unsolicited) on improvement of processes and policies. The main differences between a confidential adviser and an ombudsperson is that the latter focuses on the organisation (and not on the individual reporter), is impartial, and can investigate potential structural problems of undesirable behavior on their own initiative.¹²²

Some universities have an extensive organisation and infrastructure around social safety, with confidential advisers and ombudsperson also linking up with, for example, company social workers, psychologists, hotlines, coordinators, and scientific integrity officers. Sometimes, these collaborations were well organised, while at other universities, these roles and responsibilities were less clear. The confidential advisers who functioned within a team to promote social safety expressed positive to very positive views on such partnerships. For instance, it was stated that forming and positioning a clear team on social safety led to better education and increased awareness among employees. This outcome is in line with the findings in the opinion of the government commissioner on sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence, which recommends the mandatory establishment of a single professional social safety team.¹²³ Also, having one social safety team makes it easier to promptly pick up signals of undesirable behavior within the organisation and investigate and issue joint advice. Moreover, it has been found that when confidential advisers have a coordinator and central hotline, for example, there is often an overview of issues and peer review in these cases. Proper registration of reports helps to identify signals and trends.

Several confidential advisers mentioned the tension between the responsibility to register reports properly on the one hand and the privacy of the reporters on the other. They indicated that many reporters want to remain anonymous, making it difficult for them to share cases with other confidential advisers. Moreover, it was found that clear reporting records were not always present, especially when there was a weaker partnership between confidential advisers and other social safety partners. In some cases, cases are not recorded centrally at all, except in the personal notes of the confidential adviser him/herself, and no or less information is shared between the confidential

¹²¹ <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/onderwerpen/personeel/universitaire-ombudsfunctie>.

¹²² https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/files/publications/Landelijk_kader_voor_invulling_universitaire_ombudsfunctie.pdf.

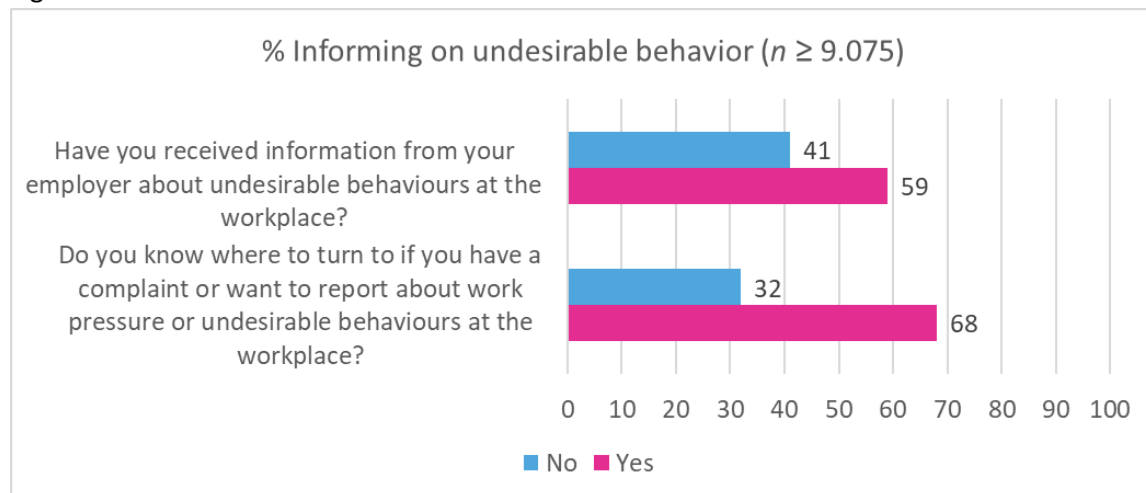
¹²³ Government commissioner on sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence (2024). [*Opinion on Tackling sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence in higher education and science*](#).

advisers and with, for example, the ombudsperson. For example, signs and problematic patterns about perpetrators of undesirable behavior with multiple aggrieved parties (who have reported to different confidential advisers) may be missed.

In addition, confidential advisers at some universities spoke of "problematic cases" or "long-running casework". They indicate that these cases are difficult to resolve because, for example, building a case with evidence against the suspected perpetrator proves difficult, or there are no incentives for deans to intervene.

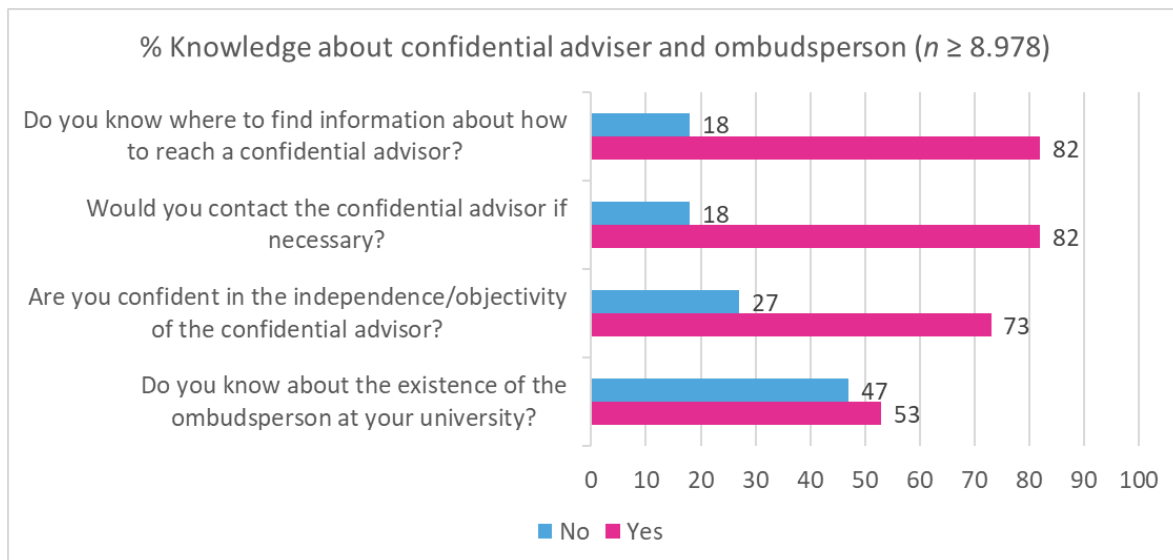
Besides receiving and supporting reporters and identifying and advising the employer, one of the core tasks of the confidential adviser is to provide information on how to deal with undesirable behavior. Here, the confidential adviser must be given sufficient time. At five of the 14 universities, confidential advisers indicated that they have sufficient time and resources to provide education on their role and create awareness of undesirable behavior. The survey reveals that the majority of respondents received education and information about the confidential adviser (59%) and know where to go for a complaint or report about undesirable behavior (68%; see Figure 23).

Figure 23. Education and information on undesirable behavior



Furthermore, the survey reveals that a large proportion of respondents (82%) know where they can find information is about the confidential adviser and that they would also approach them when needed (82%). Employees are less familiar with the existence of the ombudsperson (see Figure 24).

Figure 24. Knowledge about the confidential adviser and ombudsperson



Reporting undesirable behavior

According to confidential advisers/ombudsperson annual reports, excessive work pressure and/or undesirable behavior is reported at all universities. The number of reports ranged from 13 to 123 per university over the last year for which this information was available (based on the most recent reports from the confidential advisers¹²⁴; an average of 72 reports per year per university; a total of 1002 reports). Reports are most often about harassment (sometimes in the form of bullying, sexual harassment, or verbal aggression). At three of the 14 universities the annual reports also contained information about whom the reports had been about (of course anonymously).

The survey revealed that not everyone who has experienced PSA reports it. All respondents who reported experiencing stress due to work pressure and/or undesirable behavior in the past two years were asked whether they had reported it. 31% indicated to have reported on work pressure and 17% on undesirable behavior.¹²⁵ Figure 25 shows the percentage of respondents who made a report about work pressure and/or undesirable behavior or their reasons for not making a report.

¹²⁴ That data was used at the universities where confidential advisers reported separately from the ombudsperson. Those figures were used where no distinction could be made between reports made to confidential advisers or the ombudsperson.

¹²⁵ These need not be unique employees; individuals may have reported both work pressure and undesirable behavior. Hence, the percentages here also add up to above 100%.

Figure 25. Reports of work pressure and/or undesirable behavior

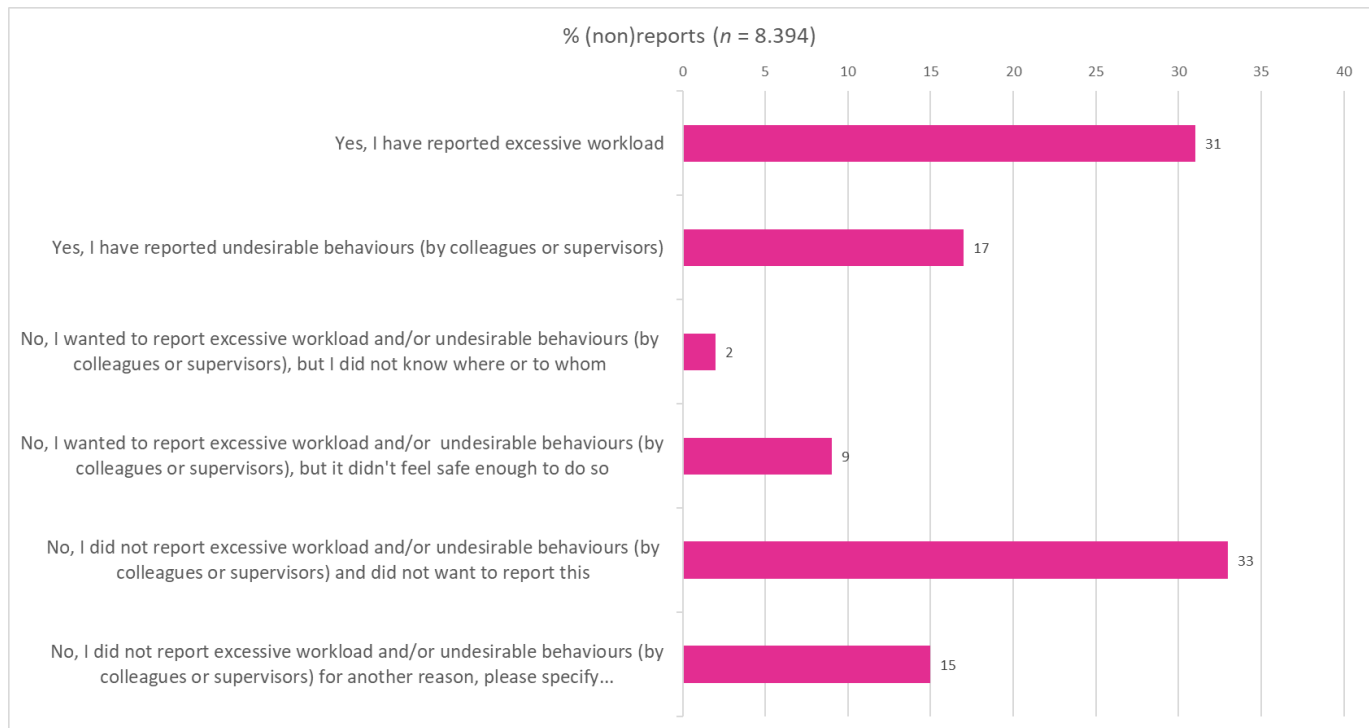


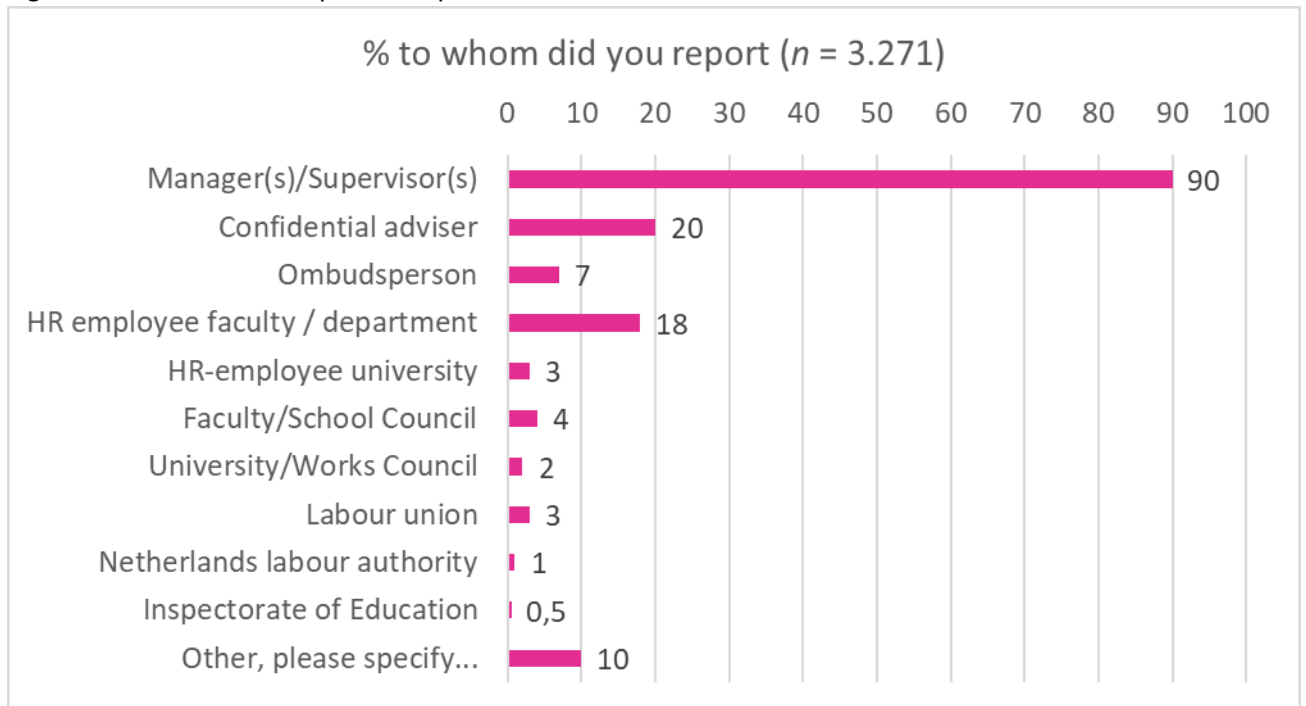
Figure 25 also reveals that some of the respondents (33%) who experienced work pressure and/or undesirable behavior did not want to file a report. 9% indicated that they did not report because it did not feel safe enough for them to do so. 15% said they had another reason for not reporting. After analysing the open-ended response field, the most frequently mentioned other reason for not reporting was that people perceive reporting as pointless and have no confidence that reporting is going to change anything about the situation ("*It is pretty pointless to do that; [there] are never or rarely any consequences.*"). *Individuals who display such behavior almost always get away with it*"; "*There has been no accountability whatsoever for managers - higher bodies have supported them even in obvious cases of mismanagement. So, no point in wasting time*"). The second frequently cited reason was that work pressure, in particular, is inherent to the type of work scientists do and reporting on it is pointless or unnecessary. Here, respondents indicate that work pressure and undesirable behavior are normalised and that they therefore either do not see it as a problem, have contributed to that norm, or do not feel they would be taken seriously if they were to bring it up ("*too much work pressure is all part of the game*", "*this is something that is part of the job as far as I am concerned*". *I don't know other than that the work pressure within the university is high*"). Finally, there is also mention of dependencies in a person's career on which reporting would have a negative effect and therefore it is better not to report ("*Fear of retaliation*"; "*You know it's not going to be responded to properly and it's going to affect your career*").

The interviews revealed that employees are reluctant to make a report and that when they do, they often do so at a late stage, much to HR's frustration. Indeed, they would like to see reporters seek informal help from HR or their immediate manager early so that timely intervention or de-escalation can occur. Nevertheless, HR is sometimes seen as helpful only to the faculty/school and manager, not the employee. Further, based on the interviews, a significant reason for not reporting emerged as employees fear the potential impact on their work and career, for example, missing out on promotions, not having contracts extended, or being otherwise "gotten rid of" or excluded. It was

argued that due to interdependencies, reporters are in a vulnerable position which increases fear of speaking up about undesirable behavior and work pressure.

The total of 4.896 respondents in the survey indicated to have reported to others. They reported most often to their manager, followed by the confidential adviser and a local HR employee (e.g. at the faculty/school, or connected to the department; see Figure 26).

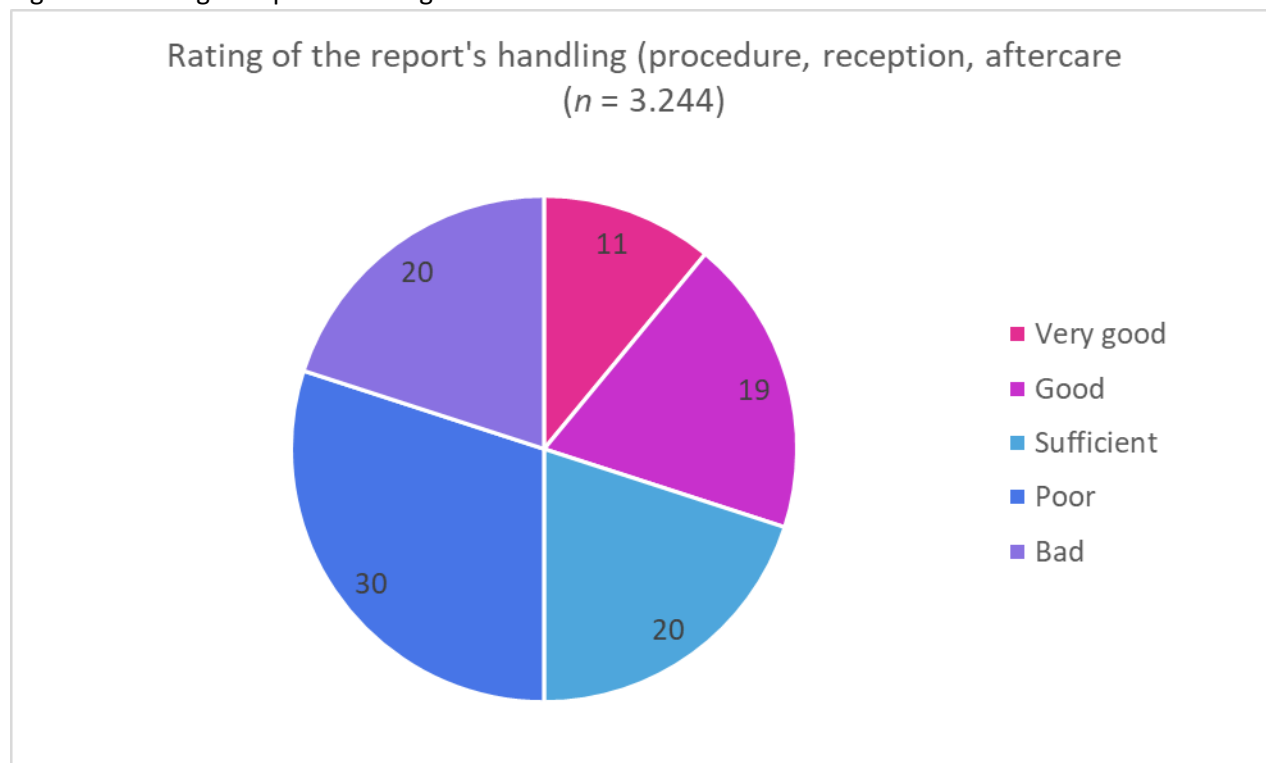
Figure 26. To whom did reporters report?



All respondents who reported having made a report were also asked how they rated the report's handling (procedure, reception, aftercare). As shown in Figure 27, half of the reporters are dissatisfied (rated as moderate or poor), and the other half are satisfied (rated as adequate to very good).¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Opinions on the handling of reports differed significantly between universities. However, this effect was small in magnitude ($\eta^2 = .02$) and was driven by the fact that the lowest-scoring university ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.31$) was significantly different from some better-scoring universities ($M = 3.32 - 3.49$).

Figure 27. Rating of report handling



Filing an official complaint

Confidential advisers indicate that filing an official complaint is a difficult process that can have negative consequences for both the complainant and the accused.

According to the reports on complaints filed, five universities had no complaints filed in the previous year, and four universities had a combined total of 11 complaints.¹²⁷ These 11 complaints contrast with the numbers of employees who reported experiencing excessive work pressure and/or undesirable behavior. A low percentage of official complaints could indicate a well-functioning informal reporting or complaint system, where problems and abuses are resolved before they result in an official reporting procedure. However, this seems to be invalidated by this study's results, which show that handling reports made to managers and confidential advisers, among others, is rated as inadequate by half of the respondents. In addition, almost 10 per cent of respondents said they did not feel safe enough to make a report. Combined with the high proportion of respondents who indicated that they were dealing with work pressure and/or undesirable behavior, the explanation for the low number of official complaints seems to lie in the poor functioning of the complaints procedure.

A complaint procedure usually involves adversarial hearings, and it can be very confrontational for both complainant and defendant to read in black and white what the other party says about them. According to the works/university council and confidential advisers, the complaints system is mainly procedural, which often results in complainants not believing their feelings are being recognised. Works/university council members also indicate that the complaints procedure does not lead to solutions or improvements, and after-care for reporters is insufficient. This finding is also confirmed

¹²⁷ Of the remaining 5 universities, there is no or not clear specifiable information on complaints.

by the opinion of the government commissioner on sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence.¹²⁸

Based on the documents provided, there seem to be large differences between universities in terms of how a complaints committee is composed, how substantively informed it is, and how independent it is. For example, complaints committees are comprised of university employees, but the health and safety provider can also appoint an external complaints committee. Some confidential advisers indicate a need for an independent complaints committee with substantive knowledge of academia. They indicated that a single national complaints committee for all universities would be a solution.

Such a national complaints committee would ensure independence, sufficient knowledge, and lower the threshold because it could handle complaints outside university procedures. According to various studies, there is a tendency to dismiss complaints as labour disputes or individual cases, which prevents causes from being addressed structurally.¹²⁹ A national complaints commission could counter this trend.








¹²⁸ Government commissioner on sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence (2024). [Opinion on Tackling sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence in higher education and science.](#)

¹²⁹ See Essanhaji commissioned by Sophocles (2022). [De \(on\)mogelijkheid van klachten](#) and Loyens, Claringbould, & Täuber (2023). [What does scientific research say about nature, breeding ground and approach?](#)

Follow-up of identified areas of concern based on previous intervention Labour Authority 2020/2021

During a previous intervention in 2020, the Labour Authority asked all universities to draw up action plans - university plans on how to prevent/reduce work pressure, undesirable behavior/discrimination and working hours. These plans were then studied and analysed by the Labour Authority. The resulting report and individual feedback letters in 2021 identified several areas of concern regarding these action plans.¹³⁰ Table 2 shows these previously identified areas of concern, along with the findings based on the documents, interviews and survey results studied in 2023.

Table 7: Issues of concern as formulated by the Labour Authority in 2021 and the findings of the current investigation in 2023. NOTES: Alongside the findings, a traffic light model is presented in the last column to indicate the status of the stated concern. Green means a clear improvement in 2023 compared to 2021 based on the documentation, interviews and online survey. Orange indicates that there is partial improvement, but it remains an area of concern. Red indicates no or insufficient improvement observed compared to 2021.

Areas of concern identified in 2021 based on the Action Plans by universities	Findings in 2023 based on documentation, interviews and online survey results	
<i>Work pressure</i>		
1. Many of the universities' (proposed) measures are targeted at the individual rather than having a source approach.	There has been an increase in measures that address issues more structurally, such as an investment in additional staff and more support. The majority of measures still focus on the individual employee. These include, in particular, measures to make individuals more resilient to work pressure and undesirable behavior.	
2. There is no systematic examination of whether measures align with the underlying causes of problems. The PDCA cycle is not completed optimally.	Most universities have not taken action/measures based on a problem analysis. There was no clear evaluation of measures taken or any discussion of evaluations in the risk assessment and evaluation. In short, there is little evidence that universities complete a PDCA cycle. The plans and processes that do exist seem to be implemented independently.	
3. The effect of training aimed at reducing work pressure is not measured and is not clear.	The impact of individual measures is tested little to not at all. Effects of individual measures cannot be tested through an employee satisfaction survey because a change over time in outcomes cannot be attributed to a specific individual measure.	
4. It is not clear how much employees make use of available training programs.	Universities have little to no insight into whether employees use measures to reduce work pressure. The survey shows that, on average, about 30% of employees are aware of available measures, and of those who are aware, an average of 30% make use of them.	
5. Universities cite underfunding, particularly insufficient grants to conduct proper research, as an underlying cause. The action plans have not led to further insight into causes within the universities' sphere of influence.	The employer cites underfunding as a cause of work pressure. The extent to which universities themselves have adjusted their internal allocation models has not been examined. Within the influencing possibilities of the universities themselves, there is no problem analysis in the available policy documents, nor are causes of work pressure and undesirable behavior systematically questioned in employee satisfaction surveys. The current study also shows other underlying causes, such as structurally additional tasks above the employee job profile.	
<i>Working hours</i>		
6. Universities have little insight in and pay little attention to actual hours worked by employees.	Universities still have little or no insight into how many hours their employees work and when they work. They also sometimes mistakenly think that the Dutch Working Hours Act (ATW) does not apply to them (in full).	
7. The imbalance between valuing performance in the domain of lecturing versus	All universities are engaged in the Recognition and Rewards programme, an initiative of several umbrella	

¹³⁰ Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report](#).

research is a potential source of work pressure.	organisations. ¹³¹ Universities are at various stages of thinking about and implementing this programme. It is not clear how different interpretations of the programme will impact reducing work pressure.	
8. In employee satisfaction surveys of universities, there is little or no focus on working hours in relation to work pressure.	9 out of 14 universities ask for information on overtime in their employee satisfaction survey. The relationship between overtime and the experience of work pressure is barely made, if at all. The information on overtime in the employee satisfaction surveys did not lead to concrete actions.	●
<i>Discrimination in the workplace</i>		
9. There is insufficient assessment of the 12 legal grounds for discrimination and subsequently, grounds that should form part of an approach to counter discrimination.	In the employee satisfaction survey, 13 of 14 universities asked whether employees experienced discrimination. Three Universities asked about the specific grounds of discrimination. In other words, universities usually have information on whether discrimination is occurring, but only three universities have insight into the 12 legal grounds of discrimination.	●
10. There is insufficient focus on adequately identifying occupational risks due to discrimination. Thus, underlying risk-increasing (organisational and/or personnel) factors are not adequately identified.	As mentioned above, problem analyses of underlying causes are lacking in the available policy documents, and causes of discrimination are not systematically covered in employee satisfaction surveys. There is no insight into risk-increasing factors as for instance identified in the Delphi study by the Labour Authority. ¹³²	●
11. In contrast to work pressure, employee surveys (including employee satisfaction surveys) focus much less on discrimination. Also, the follow-up of employee surveys is not always clear. Nor is it always clear what specific measures will be taken.	All universities now ask questions about undesirable behavior in the employee satisfaction survey. None of the employee satisfaction surveys ask about the causes of undesirable behavior. At three universities, questions about who caused the undesirable behavior (e.g., the supervisor, a colleague or a student) are asked. As mentioned above, all universities ask about perceived discrimination, but only three universities also have insight into the 12 legal grounds of discrimination.	●
12. Regarding discrimination, the PDCA cycle is not or is insufficiently completed; 'the cycle is not fully completed' and is not recognised as such at most universities. As a result, the effects of measures concerning discrimination, for example, are unclear.	There was evidence of full completion of the PDCA cycle at two universities. However, these PDCA cycles related to work pressure, not undesirable behavior or discrimination.	●
13. The responsibilities and competencies for addressing discrimination are not always clearly defined. For example, who is responsible for coordinating and processing reports and signals following complaints and interpreting and refining the reports and signals with background information?	All universities now have a confidential advisor, an ombudsperson, and sometimes an additional infrastructure where employees can report discrimination. The majority of respondents indicated they had received education and information about the confidential adviser and knew where to go for a complaint or to report undesirable behavior.	●
14. The organisation of aftercare for victims of discrimination and sexual harassment does not seem to be sufficiently well organised. There is no visible focus on this in most universities' documentation.	There is still little to no documentation on aftercare for victims of undesirable behavior. The current study reveals that about a quarter of respondents indicate they do not want to report because they consider it unsafe or do not believe in its effectiveness. Half of the employees who did report are dissatisfied with the handling of the report and aftercare.	●
15. The involvement of employee representation in the issue of	No research has been conducted into this.	

¹³¹ [Recognition & Rewards programme - Recognition & Rewards \(recognitionrewards.nl\)](https://www.recognitionrewards.nl/).

¹³² Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures against internal undesirable behavior.](#)

discrimination is not demonstrably structured.		
16. Information and education are mostly voluntary, and continuous attention to this issue remains necessary.	Participation in programs against undesirable behavior is still almost always voluntary.	●
17. Sometimes, there are many (policy) documents on discrimination, but the status and coherence between documents and actions are unclear.	Many documents state something about undesirable behavior, and many different parties are involved in policy and implementation. The status and consistency between documents and actions are not clear.	●

It can be concluded that universities have not adequately followed up on the 2021 action plans and identified areas of concern, as most of them still apply in 2023. That includes not following the PDCA cycle optimally, not adequately identifying causes of psychosocial workload and not having an insight into working hours. The Labour Authority expects university Executive Boards to take action on all the above orange and red areas of concern.

In addition, some areas of concern from 2021 have been made more insightful through the current study, such as the specific grounds of discrimination faced by scientific and teaching staff. In addition to the above addressed areas of concern on psychosocial workload policies in table 2, several additional areas of concern were identified based on the current study:

- Ensure an integrated and uniform approach to policy processes (risk assessment and evaluation, employee satisfaction surveys, policy documents) in all organisational units.
- For each action taken to prevent or reduce psychosocial workload, go through the full PDCA cycle, in which the evaluation of measures play an important role.
- Ensure that underlying causes of work pressure and undesirable behavior are systematically identified, especially those within the university's sphere of influence, and translate this into concrete measures that address these causes.
- The Working Hours Act applies to a large proportion of university employees. Therefore, ensure that there is insight into working hours, provide adequate rest and recuperation opportunities for employees, and actively monitor this.
- Continue to proactively draw employees' attention to available measures against work pressure and undesirable behavior.
- Evaluate why the formal (and informal) reporting and complaint system is not used and/or not effective for reporting undesirable behavior.
- Focus on measures aimed primarily at improving working conditions rather than lifestyle.

It is now up to the universities to move forward with these outcomes and comply with the law. The Labour Authority works from the perspective that most employers are willing and able to comply with the law. The Labour Authority offers a perspective for action to promote employers' compliance with the Working Conditions Act. For example, by stating points of concern¹³³ and providing knowledge¹³⁴ so that employers can take (preventive) measures more easily. However, this intervention strategy by the Labour Authority is not free of obligation. If employers ultimately fail to show improvements, a demand compliance will be issued, possibly followed by a fine.¹³⁵ The

¹³³ Inspectie SZW (2021). [WOinActie report](#)

¹³⁴ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures against internal undesirable behavior.](#)

¹³⁵ Netherlands Labour Authority (2023). [Annual plan 2024.](#)

latter is not applicable in the context of this study, but the current study will be followed up by an inspection project in 2025.

Perspective for action

Based on the Labour Authority's current research results, it can be concluded that work pressure and undesirable behavior are persistent problems among teaching and scientific staff at the 14 Dutch public universities. This calls for measures that require various actors to take action. The responsibility for a healthy working environment lies primarily with employers. In the case of universities, the Executive Boards bear the ultimate responsibility for a well functioning health and safety policy.¹³⁶ Based on this responsibility and the findings of this study, the university Boards should take the lead in initiating improvements, directing them accordingly and actively seeking accountability from faculties/professors.

The current study offers insight into possible causes of the observed work pressure and undesirable behavior. In addition to the areas of concern already mentioned above, the Labour Authority provides additional perspective for university administrations based on the current research findings and observed patterns:

- There is often central management and decentralised implementation of policies and measures on work pressure and undesirable behavior. Central HR policies are not always implemented within faculties, and the ownership of psychosocial workload policy development and implementation is unclear. Measures do not always align well with policy, and HR at the central level is not always aware of what is happening at the decentralised level. Ensure that central HR policies are implemented and evaluated at the decentralised level, and create alignment and ownership on formulating and implementing psychosocial workload policies.
- Universities experience the method of funding combined with fluctuating student numbers as problematic. In anticipation of changes in funding, explore options for coping with fluctuating student numbers within your own institution.
- Many employees perform additional tasks that are not part of their job profiles. This creates additional work pressure. Ensure that job/remuneration and task load align with the job profiles laid down in the collective agreement. Also, look into whether requirements for selection procedures and/or internal promotions align with job classification system profiles (UFO profiles).
- Many employees experience undesirable behavior. Undesirable behavior emerges as a structural problem that cannot be treated as an individual or stand-alone case or incident.¹³⁷ Actively propagate this and work towards an adequate approach to prevent and reduce undesirable behavior that is transparent, clear and structural.¹³⁸⁻¹³⁹
- Complaints about work pressure and undesirable behavior are rarely submitted, while psychosocial workload problems are considerable. Half of the respondents rated the handling of their report as inadequate, and some of the respondents indicated they did not feel safe enough to report. Review how informal reporting procedures can better meet employees' needs with complaints about work pressure and undesirable behavior. Consider

¹³⁶ Employees of medical faculties are not always included in the university's workforce, but in the university medical centre. In these cases, the university medical centre and not the university is the employer.

¹³⁷ Essanhaji, commissioned by the Social Fund for the Knowledge Sector (2022). [The possibility \(and impossibility\) of submitting complaints.](#)

¹³⁸ Netherlands Labour Authority (2022). [Delphi study on risk factors and measures of internal undesirable behavior.](#)

¹³⁹ [KNAW \(2022\). Social safety in Dutch science. From paper to practice.](#)

whether other, more approachable yet independent and safe, ways would be more effective in making the reporting system function better.

- Managers play a key role in both the problem as well as the solution of/for work pressure and undesirable behavior. Continue to develop high-quality leadership and make sure it is not free of obligation.

Besides Executive Boards, other actors also have a role to play. This includes policymakers, sector associations, works councils and individual employees. The following are areas for improvement that the Labour Authority intends to actively bring to the attention to those parties.

- Ongoing initiatives on (a) education and research funding and (b) social safety still pay little attention to work pressure and undesirable behavior and their underlying causes. Consider how these themes can be integrated into current and future plans and initiatives in this area.¹⁴⁰
- Dependencies play an important role in the problem of undesirable behavior. Consider possible adjustments to the existing dependencies so that these negative impacts are mitigated and use proposals made for this purpose.^{141_142}

¹⁴⁰ Examples include the Future Outlook on Education and Science (2022) and UNL Working Group-Sterken [A Future Vision for University Education](#) (2023), or the [Advisory Council on Science, Technology and Innovation](#) (2019) and the Committee [Veerman](#) (2010).

¹⁴¹ Advisory Committee on Diverse and Inclusive Higher Education and Research (2022). [Advice and Recommendations following the advisory report Social Safety in Dutch Science - From paper to practice](#).

¹⁴² First steps to this end are described, for example, by The Young Academy (2023). [Everyone's a professor!](#)

Appendix I

Themes and questions from semi-structured interview

Central HR

Work pressure	Overtime, duties and leave	Undesirable behavior	General
Does the university have an up-to-date, sound and complete risk assessment on the risk of stress due to work pressure?	What have universities done to gain (better) visibility into the number of hours employees work?	Is an up-to-date, sound and complete risk assessment in place regarding the risk of undesirable behavior?	What is the number of employees per academic and teaching position at the university?
Does this make it clear per department/function which sources of work pressure are too high and/or which sources of energy are too low, creating an imbalance that puts you at risk of work stress?	Which employees are covered by the Working Hours Act (ATW) (do not earn more than three times the minimum wage/do not work with natural phenomena, which do not require a derogation on working and rest times)?	Based on the findings in the risk assessment, has a Plan of Action been drawn up with measures to adequately control this risk?	According to policymakers/implementers, what are the main causes of work stress due to work pressure?
Has the university included sufficient measures in the Action Plan to reduce identified sources of work pressure that are too high or increase sources of energy that are too low?	Do employees take their leave?	Have effective rules of conduct for mutual communication and interaction between staff members been established to which all staff should adhere, and are they actively promoted?	According to policymakers/implementers, what are the main causes of undesirable behavior?
Have deadlines been set to implement and evaluate these measures?	What are the standard hours for teaching, research, and additional duties (committee/council member)?	Does the university have an informal complaint structure, where the manager can resolve incidents informally?	Do universities apply the occupational hygiene strategy? If so, what bottlenecks do decision-makers experience when applying the occupational hygiene strategy to PSA?

<p>Are the measures being implemented?</p>		<p>Has an independent confidential adviser or a person with a similar confidential position been appointed to whom staff members can turn if they encounter undesirable behavior in their work?</p> <p>And if a confidential adviser is appointed, are they sufficiently independent, accessible, competent, empowered, equipped, known and accepted by staff?</p>	
<p>Has there been a thorough evaluation of measures to reduce identified work pressure sources that are too high or increase energy sources that are too low?</p>		<p>Has the university provided a formal structure for employees to file a complaint about inappropriate behavior, and has it been investigated and ruled on?</p>	
<p>Has the overall approach to risks that can lead to job stress also been evaluated?</p>		<p>Are managers trained or instructed in/on the subject of undesirable behavior?</p>	
<p>Is the PDCA (improvement) cycle (re)run if it shows that there are still risks that can lead to work-related stress?</p>		<p>Is sufficient information provided periodically to permanent and temporary employees on the risks of undesirable behavior and the measures and provisions taken in this regard?</p>	

<p>Do employees and managers who may face work-related stress receive adequate information and education on the associated risks and the measures taken to prevent or reduce the risks?</p> <p>Does it also teach them what work stress means and how to recognise it?</p>		<p>Is the effectiveness of addressing the risk of undesirable behavior, with the associated package of management measures, periodically evaluated?</p>	
<p>Do managers monitor compliance with instructions?</p>		<p>If undesirable behavior is identified, what is done with employees/managers about whom complaints/signals come in?</p>	

Local HR

Work pressure	Overtime, duties and leave	Undesirable behavior	General
Is local HR clear per department/function which sources of work pressure are too high and/or which energy sources are too low, creating an imbalance at risk of work stress?	Does HR locally think there is a lot of overwork among academic staff?	How are the rules of conduct for mutual communication and interaction between staff members designed locally and how are they promulgated?	According to local HR, what are the main causes of job stress due to work pressure?
What measures are being taken at the local level to reduce identified sources of work pressure that are too high or increase sources of energy that are too low?	What are the local standard hours for teaching, research, and additional duties (member committee/council)?	How is the local informal complaint structure, where incidents can be resolved informally by managers, shaped?	According to local HR, what are the main causes of undesirable behavior?
How are information and education on work stress risks and measures shaped locally?		How is the formal complaint structure around undesirable behavior designed locally?	Does the local HR feel they have enough time and resources to engage in prevention?
How do managers monitor compliance with instructions and how does local HR know?		How is the training/education of managers on undesirable behavior designed locally?	How much local HR to how many employees?
What is done with complaints about work pressure?		How is periodic employee education on undesirable behavior designed locally?	Which topics does HR locally deal with/not deal with? (work pressure/undesirable behavior/prevention)
		What is done about multiple complaints/signals of undesirable behavior around certain individuals?	Does local HR feel effective?

Works/University council

Work pressure	Overtime, duties and leave	Undesirable behavior	General
According to the Works Council, do employees and managers who may face work-related stress receive adequate information and training on the associated risks and the measures taken to prevent or reduce the risks of work-related stress? Does it also teach them what work stress means and how to recognise it?	Does the Works Council have the impression that there is a lot of overtime among academic staff?	In the opinion of the Works Council, have effective rules of conduct for mutual communication and interaction between staff members been established, which all staff members should adhere to, and are they actively promoted?	According to the Works Council/UR/FR, what are the main causes of job stress due to work pressure?
In the opinion of the Works Council, has the university taken sufficient measures to reduce work pressure sources that are too high or increase energy sources that are too low?	Does the Works Council have the impression that there are problems with taking leave or that employees enter into improper constructions with special leave?	According to the Works Council, does the university have an informal complaint structure, where the manager can resolve incidents informally?	According to the Works Council/UR/FR, what are the main causes of undesirable behavior?
According to the Works Council, do managers monitor compliance with instructions?	According to the Works Council, are standard hours for teaching, research, and additional duties (committee/council member) balanced?	According to the Works Council, has the university provided a formal structure for employees to file a complaint about undesirable internal behavior, and has it been investigated and ruled on?	Do works councils feel they are taken seriously, i.e. are they really acting on what they identify?
		According to the Works Council, are managers trained or instructed in/on the subject of Internal undesirable behavior?	
		According to the Works Council, is sufficient information provided periodically to both permanent and temporary employees about the risks of internal undesirable behavior and	

		the measures and provisions taken in this regard?	
		According to Works Council, what is done with complaints of undesirable behavior around certain individuals?	

Confidential advisers

Undesirable behavior	Notifications	General
<p>Has an independent confidential adviser or a person with a similar confidential position been appointed to whom staff members can turn if they encounter undesirable behavior in their work?</p> <p>And if a confidential adviser is appointed, are they sufficiently independent, accessible, competent, empowered, equipped, known and accepted by staff?</p>	<p>In practical terms, what happens when an employee reports to the confidential advisor?</p>	<p>How do employees know where to find the confidential adviser?</p>
<p>Has the university provided a formal structure for employees to file a complaint about undesirable internal behavior, and has it been investigated and ruled on?</p>	<p>How many reports per year are received?</p>	<p>Do employees trust the confidential adviser?</p>
<p>What is done with managers about whom complaints/signals are received?</p>	<p>What are these reports about (and can this be broken down by percentage)?</p>	<p>Does the confidential adviser see themselves as effective?</p>
	<p>What does the confidential adviser do with these reports?</p>	<p>How many confidential advisers are there for how many employees?</p>
	<p>How is the handling of reports monitored?</p>	<p>Where are the confidential advisers located (at university level, by faculty, or another structure)?</p>

	What kind of guidance do reporters receive? How will they be protected?	According to the confidential advisers, what are the main causes of work stress due to work pressure?
	How many of the reports become a 'real' case/complaint?	According to the confidential advisers, what are the main causes of undesirable behavior?
		Can employees choose which confidential adviser they go to?

Appendix II

Psychometric qualities

Table 8. Psychometric qualities of the scales used

	Example item	Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's α	total/M (SD)
Psychological task demands ¹⁴³	My job requires me to work very quickly.	1 = Completely disagree, 5 = Completely agree	4	.84	3.55 (0.85)
Exhaustion ¹⁴⁴	At work, I feel mentally exhausted.	1 = Never, 5 = Always	8	.92	2.68 (0.81)
Psychological safety ¹⁴⁵	In my department, my skills and talents are valued and utilised.	1 = Completely disagree, 5 = Completely agree	7	.85	3.56 (0.77)
Manager's passive-aggressive behavior ¹⁴⁶	My manager makes negative comments about me to others.	1 = Never, 5 = Always	5	.90	1.24 (0.55)

¹⁴³ Items from [Choi et al. \(2012\)](#), based on the theoretical framework of [Karasek, R., Choi, B., Ostergren, P.O., Ferrario, M., & Smet, P. D. \(2007\)](#).

¹⁴⁴ Schaufeli, W.B., De Witte, H. & Desart, S. (2020). [Manual Burnout Assessment Tool \(BAT\)](#).

¹⁴⁵ Team Psychological Safety scale from Edmondson, A. (1999). [Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams](#).

¹⁴⁶ Passive aggressive abusive supervision subscale of [Mitchell & Ambrose \(2007\)](#), based on the Abusive supervision scale of [Tepper \(2000\)](#).

Appendix III

Online survey

Section 1 - Introduction

Goal of the investigation

The Netherlands Labour Authority oversees safe, healthy and fair employment for everyone. In 2023 the Dutch Labour Authority investigates psychosocial workload (work pressure, undesirable behavior and discrimination) at the 14 public universities in the Netherlands to tackle unhealthy and unsafe working conditions. To gain better insight into the working conditions at your university, your experiences as an employee are of great importance. That is why we invite you to answer a number of questions on these topics. By participating in this investigation you will not only help us, but also contribute to better working conditions for you and your colleagues.

This research will result in several important outcomes:

- Each university receives an overview with concrete points for improvement aimed at its own organisation.
- We publish insights on causes and *best practices*, based on data from all universities, in a general report that will be provided to all universities, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and other interested organisations (e.g. UvNL, KNAW, NWO, labour unions).
- The results of the study serve as input for potential follow-up actions by the Labour Authority or other (government) bodies.

This survey focuses on the following topics: (experienced) workload; undesirable behavior at work and discrimination; causes and measures taken to reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior at work; experiences with reporting work pressure or undesirable behavior within the university. Filling in this questionnaire should take approximately 10-15 minutes and consists of a maximum of 41 questions. Participation is completely voluntary, therefore you can decide to stop at any time.

Use of personal information

The list of information below is collected to run analyses at the group level and will never be used at the individual level:

- Gender
- Age
- Nationality
- Native / preferred language
- Function / UFO Function Profile
- University and Faculty / School
- Type of contract
- Number of years active in science
- Household composition

Identifying markers, such as IP-address and location are blocked. All analyses are run at the group level, never at the individual level. Your answers will be taken together with all other respondents at your university and all other respondents at universities in the Netherlands. As stated above, all universities will be given individual feedback (at university level). Before this feedback is given, a check on traceability will take place.

Provision to third parties

The Labour Authority uses Survalyzer software to carry out the survey. By means of a data processing agreement with Survalyzer, the Labour Authority ensures that the data is processed and stored securely and that it is not used for other purposes. Your data will be deleted from the Survalyzer environment as soon as they are no longer needed there. Furthermore, we will not provide your data to other parties. ***Your answers will under no circumstances be shared with your employer.***

Security and Storage

We take appropriate safety measures to prevent misuse and unauthorized access to the collected data. We take measures to ensure that only those that need to have access to the data (main researchers of the Netherlands Labour Authority) and that access to the data is shielded. The data will be stored for a period of 1 year after the research has been completed.

Questions or complaints

We are of course willing to help you if you have any further questions about the processing of your personal information (via NLAPostbusMonitorAiB@NLArbeidsinspectie.nl). In the case we cannot find common ground, you can also contact the [Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens](#).

Voluntary participation

The Netherlands Labour Authority bases this survey on Article 6.1(e), GDPR. This means that participation in this survey is voluntary and informed consent is not required. The Netherlands Labour Authority and your employer ask you to participate only of your own free will. The Labour Authority does not register who does or does not participate. Therefore, individuals cannot be held accountable for this.

In case you wish to participate in this survey, we ask you to indicate below that you are aware of the processing of your personal data. At the end of the survey, we will ask you this question again. Only when you press 'Submit answers', your data will be stored and included in the research.

I participate in the study and understand that my personal data will be processed for this purpose.

- Yes
- No¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ If participants answered with 'No' they were directed out of the survey and saw the message: "Thank you for your answer. Unfortunately you cannot participate in this survey."

Section 2 – personal situation

These first questions are about your personal situation.

1. What is your gender

- Female
- Male
- I identify as...: _____
- I prefer not to say

2. What is your age (in years)?

3. What is your nationality?

- Dutch
- Non-Dutch, from within the European Union
- Non-Dutch, from outside the European Union

4. What is your native/preferred language?

- Dutch
- English
- Other

5. What is your home situation like?

- Living with parents/ guardian
- Living alone
- Living with children at home
- Living together with partner
- Living together with partner and children at home
- Living together with others (not a partner or children)
- Other, please specify...: _____

Section 3 – questions university

The next questions pertain to the university you work at.

6. For which Dutch university do you work?

If you work for multiple Dutch universities, please fill in the university where, according to your contracts, you work most hours per week.

- Erasmus University Rotterdam
- Open University
- Radboud University Nijmegen
- University of Groningen
- Delft University of Technology
- Eindhoven University of Technology
- Tilburg University
- Leiden University
- Maastricht University
- University of Twente
- Utrecht University
- University of Amsterdam
- VU Amsterdam
- Wageningen University
- Other, please specify...: _____

7. For which faculty/institute/part within the University do you work?¹⁴⁸

- Erasmus School of Economics¹⁾
- Erasmus School of Law²⁾
- Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication³⁾
- Erasmus School of Social and Behavioral Sciences⁴⁾
- Erasmus School of Philosophy⁵⁾
- Erasmus MC⁶⁾
- Rotterdam School of Management⁷⁾
- International Institute of Social Studies⁸⁾
- Erasmus School of Health Policy & Management⁹⁾

¹⁴⁸ Participants only saw the faculties/institutes/parts they indicated to work for.

- Erasmus University College ¹⁰⁾
- Bèta sciences ¹¹⁾
- Cultural science ¹²⁾
- Management ¹³⁾
- Educational science ¹⁴⁾
- Psychology ¹⁵⁾
- Law ¹⁶⁾
- Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies ¹⁷⁾
- Faculty of Arts ¹⁸⁾
- Nijmegen School of Management ¹⁹⁾
- Radboud University Medical Centre ²⁰⁾
- Faculty of Science ²¹⁾
- Faculty of Law ²²⁾
- Faculty of Social Sciences ²³⁾
- Economics and Business ²⁴⁾
- Behavioral and Social Sciences ²⁵⁾
- Religion, Culture and Society ²⁶⁾
- Arts ²⁷⁾
- Medical Sciences ²⁸⁾
- Law ²⁹⁾
- Spatial Sciences ³⁰⁾
- Science and Engineering ³¹⁾
- Philosophy ³²⁾
- University College Groningen ³³⁾
- Campus Fryslân ³⁴⁾
- Architecture and the Built Environment ³⁵⁾
- Civil engineering and Geosciences ³⁶⁾
- Electrical Engineering, Mathematics & Computer Science ³⁷⁾
- Industrial Design Engineering ³⁸⁾
- Aerospace Engineering ³⁹⁾
- Technology, Policy, and Management ⁴⁰⁾

- Applied Sciences ⁴¹⁾
- Mechanical, Maritime and Materials Engineering ⁴²⁾
- Mathematics and Computer Science ⁴³⁾
- Industrial Engineering and Innovation Sciences ⁴⁴⁾
- Industrial Design ⁴⁵⁾
- Electrical Engineering ⁴⁶⁾
- Biomedical Engineering ⁴⁷⁾
- Chemical Engineering and Chemistry ⁴⁸⁾
- Built Environment ⁴⁹⁾
- Mechanical Engineering ⁵⁰⁾
- Applied Physics and Science Education ⁵¹⁾
- Tilburg School of Economics and Management ⁵²⁾
- Tilburg Law School ⁵³⁾
- Tilburg School of Social and behavioral Sciences ⁵⁴⁾
- Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences ⁵⁵⁾
- Tilburg School of Catholic Theology ⁵⁶⁾
- Archeology ⁵⁷⁾
- Humanities ⁵⁸⁾
- Medicine / Leiden University Medical Center ⁵⁹⁾
- Governance and Global Affairs ⁶⁰⁾
- Law ⁶¹⁾
- Social and Behavioral Sciences ⁶²⁾
- Science ⁶³⁾
- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences ⁶⁴⁾
- Faculty of Law ⁶⁵⁾
- Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences ⁶⁶⁾
- Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience ⁶⁷⁾
- Faculty of Science and Engineering ⁶⁸⁾
- School of Business and Economics ⁶⁹⁾
- Behavioral, Management and Social Sciences ⁷⁰⁾
- Engineering Technology ⁷¹⁾

- Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science ⁷²⁾
- Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation ⁷³⁾
- Science and Technology ⁷⁴⁾
- MESA+ - Institute for nanotechnology ⁷⁵⁾
- Techmed Centre ⁷⁶⁾
- Digital Society Institute ⁷⁷⁾
- Faculty of Science ⁷⁸⁾
- Faculty of Veterinary Medicine ⁷⁹⁾
- Faculty of Humanities ⁸⁰⁾
- Faculty of Medicine ⁸¹⁾
- Faculty of Geosciences ⁸²⁾
- Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance ⁸³⁾
- Faculty of Social and Behavioral Science ⁸⁴⁾
- University College Utrecht ⁸⁵⁾
- University College Roosevelt ⁸⁶⁾
- Economics and Business ⁸⁷⁾
- Faculty of Humanities ⁸⁸⁾
- Faculty of Medicine ⁸⁹⁾
- Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences ⁹⁰⁾
- Faculty of Science ⁹¹⁾
- Amsterdam Law School ⁹²⁾
- Faculty of Dentistry ⁹³⁾
- Academisch Centrum Tandheelkunde Amsterdam (ACTA) ⁹⁴⁾
- Faculty of Science ⁹⁵⁾
- Faculty of Behavioral and Movement Sciences ⁹⁶⁾
- Faculty of Humanities ⁹⁷⁾
- Faculty of Medicine ⁹⁸⁾
- Faculty of Law ⁹⁹⁾
- Faculty of Social Sciences ¹⁰⁰⁾
- Faculty of Religion and Theology ¹⁰¹⁾
- School of Business and Economics ¹⁰²⁾

- Agrotechnology and Food Sciences Group¹⁰³⁾
- Animal Sciences Group¹⁰⁴⁾
- Environmental Sciences Group¹⁰⁵⁾
- Plant Sciences Group¹⁰⁶⁾
- Social Sciences Group¹⁰⁷⁾
- Wageningen Food Safety Research¹⁰⁸⁾
- Other, please specify...: _____¹⁰⁹⁾

8. Which function do you have within the university?

- Student Assistant
- Teacher (without research-related tasks)
- PhD student (internal)
- PhD student (external)
- (Postdoctoral) researcher
- Assistant Professor 2
- Assistant Professor 1
- Associate Professor 2
- Associate Professor 1
- Full Professor 2
- Full Professor 1
- Other, please specify...: _____

9. Do you have a managing/supervisory role?

- Yes
- No

10. Do you also have ancillary functions, and if so, how many?

- No ancillary functions
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- More than 5

11. In the past 12 months, did you also work in another country than the Netherlands (for the university for which you work most hours; this excludes conferences and short term visits)?

- Yes, more than two weeks
- Yes, more than a month
- Yes, more than 6 months
- No

12. In which salary scale does your salary fall (you can find this information on your salary slip)?

- 18
- 17
- 16
- 15
- 14
- 13
- 12
- 11
- 10
- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5
- 4
- 3
- Other, please specify...: _____
- I prefer not to say

13. Which tasks/responsibilities do you have in your current function? Below, please check the tasks/responsibilities that apply to your position, if not please leave open (multiple options possible). We refer to the core unit you work in as 'the department'.

Conducting research

- Independently conducting research in a broad or specialist research area.
- Conducting research based on a research proposal already defined and approved (by a colleague).
- Conducting research under supervision, based on a research proposal already defined and approved (by a colleague).

Coordination of research

- Acting as co-supervisor/co-promotor for PhD students.
- Supervising scientific staff in conducting research.
- Translating developments in the research area into national or international research program(s).
- Coordinating and establishing the realization of a research program.
- Coordinating and establishing the realization of related research projects that form an important part of a research program.
- Establishing the scope of and structuring of own research.

Contract Research

- Initiating, acquiring and being accountable for 2nd and 3rd party funding for both own and other people's research.
- Contributing to the acquisition of 2nd and 3rd party funding for both own and other people's research.

Development of Education

- Make improvement proposals based on educational evaluations for educational programs and implementing them.
- Initiating and developing the design, content and didactics for a substantial part of the educational program.
- Initiating and developing the design, content and didactics for related educational parts of a program.
- Development of assigned educational parts of a program based on established design, content and didactics.
- Take care of periodic maintenance of the assigned teaching parts.

Teaching

- Teaching self-developed educational parts of a program for various target groups.
- Teaching already developed regular educational parts of a program.

Teaching Evaluation

- Make strategic proposals and implementing faculty education policy.
- Responsible for the quality of education within a chair / research group.
- Make improvement proposals based on educational evaluations for educational parts of a program and implementing them.
- Make improvement proposals based on educational evaluations for assigned educational parts of a program.
- Identifying opportunities for improvement for assigned educational parts of a program.

Organization

- Managing a chair, department, or institute.
- Leading a part of a department or performing mandated management tasks of the Professor, for example, conducting appraisal interviews, supervising the implementation of education or drafting of the budget.
- Performing board and/or management tasks that go beyond the department, for example leading a program committee or coordinating a program, etc.
- Supervising or participating in committees or working groups, aimed at the board of the faculty or institution.
- Supervising a form of cooperation in the field of education with external parties from society, government or business.
- Supervising working groups, committees or project teams within the department. Contribute to board and coordinating tasks, as well as mentoring staff within the department.
- Participate in workgroups, committees, or project teams within the department. Contribute to administrative and coordinating tasks within the department. Contribute to an open, safe and inclusive working environment.

14. What kind of contract do you have?

- Temporary position
- Temporary position with the intention to turn into a permanent position (e.g., tenure track)
- Permanent position
- Other, please specify... : _____

15. According to your contract, how many hours do you work per week?

16. On average, how many hours did you actually work per week during the past 6 months?
Excluding ancillary functions; if you started this position less than 6 months ago, please answer with the period since you started in mind.

17. How many years have you been active in science (both with your current employer and in the past for other universities; for academics since the start of your PhD project or teaching or research position, excluding breaks, such as a sabbatical)?

Section 4 – questions work experience I

The next questions concern your experiences at work and situations or events you have encountered during your work.

18. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
My job requires working very fast.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My job requires working very hard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am asked to do an excessive amount of work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have enough time to get the job done.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. During the last 2 years, have you experienced stress due to work pressure more than incidentally (more than a few times a year)?

If you started this position less than 2 years ago, please answer with the period since you started in mind.

- Yes
- No

20. According to you, what are the most important causes of work pressure in your job?

Multiple options possible

This list with causes is, among others, based on the results of the report of WOinActie, 2020.

- Too many tasks
- Unrealistic norms for teaching (=hours assigned for teaching tasks)
- Pressure to perform
- Competition with colleagues
- Bureaucracy
- Peaks in work pressure
- Shortage of staff
- Management falling short
- Lack of research time
- Lack of practical support
- Dependency on others in higher positions
- Another cause, please specify... : _____
- I do not experience work pressure and cannot name any causes

Section 5 – questions work experience II

The following statements are related to your work situation and how you experience this situation.

21. Please state how often each statement applies to you.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
At work, I feel mentally exhausted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Everything I do at work requires a great deal of effort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At work, I feel physically exhausted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I get up in the morning, I lack the energy to start a new day at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to be active at work, but somehow I am unable to manage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I exert myself at work, I quickly get tired.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At the end of my working day, I feel mentally exhausted and drained.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 6 – questions about the behavior of co-workers

The next questions concern the behaviors of your colleagues and/or managers at work.

22. Please check with which behaviors you yourself as a scientist have had to deal, or you have witnessed your colleagues deal with in the past 2 years?

If you started this position less than 2 years ago, please answer with the period since you started in mind. You can check multiple behaviors.

	Experienced it myself	I witnessed a colleague experience it	Neither experienced nor witnessed it
Organizational bullying (e.g., being assigned pointless tasks, getting an intentionally wrong performance review from management)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social isolation (e.g., being ignored, excluded, not being greeted or not being invited)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invasion of privacy (e.g., being imitated, ridiculed, making jokes about ones private life)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical aggression (e.g., kicking, pushing, hitting/punching)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Verbal aggression (e.g., swearing, yelling, threatening, insulting)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gossiping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual remarks, jokes or insinuations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sharing sexual or pornographic imagery, staring or sexual gestures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All types of undesirable physical contact (e.g., arm around your shoulder, grabbing, pinching, kissing, assault or even rape)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blackmailing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unjustified claiming of authorship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not adhering to agreements (e.g., adjusting norms for promotion without mutual approval, getting more tasks than agreed)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scientific fraud (e.g., data fabrication, p-hacking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digitally undesirable behaviors (e.g., online bullying)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. Please check with which types of discrimination you yourself as a scientist have had to deal, or you have witnessed your colleagues deal with in the past 2 years.

If you started this position less than 2 years ago, please answer with the period since you started in mind. You can check multiple types.

	Experienced it myself	I witnessed a colleague experience it	Neither experienced nor witnessed it
Discrimination on the basis of race or skin color	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of nationality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of being transgender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of political conviction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of a handicap or chronic disease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of marital status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of working hours (fulltime or parttime)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of contract (temporary or permanent)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination on the basis of parental status ((not) having children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

24. Who was the offender of this undesirable behavior (including discrimination) you yourself experienced or witnessed other colleagues experience?¹⁴⁹

You can check multiple options.

- Manager(s)/supervisor(s)
- Colleague(s)
- Student(s)
- Other, please specify... : _____

25. According to you, what are the most important causes of undesirable behaviors (including discrimination) by your colleagues/manager(s) in your job?

You can tick multiple options.

- Work pressure and scarcity of resources (competition)
- Power differences and dependencies
- Talking about undesirable behaviors in the workplace is not prioritized
- It is unsafe to talk about undesirable behaviors in the workplace
- Social safety care is insufficiently safeguarded
- Lack of sanctions for individuals who display undesirable behavior
- Lack of leadership qualities in managers
- Lack of positive role models
- Another cause, please specify... : _____
- I do not experience any undesirable behaviors by colleagues or supervisors (including discrimination) myself nor have I observed this with colleagues and cannot name any causes

26. The next questions concern information being shared within the organization.

	Yes	No
Do you know where to find information about how to reach a confidential advisor?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you confident in the independence/objectivity of the confidential advisor?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Would you contact the confidential advisor if necessary?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

¹⁴⁹ Question 24 was only shown if the participant had ticked at least one of the types of undesirable behaviors or discrimination in questions 22 and 23.

Have you received information from your employer about work pressure?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you received information from your employer about undesirable behaviors at the workplace?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you know where to turn to if you have a complaint or want to report about work pressure or undesirable behaviors at the workplace?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you know about the existence of the ombudsperson at your university?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. You have indicated that you have had to deal with stress due to work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors at work in the past two years.
 Have you reported excessive workload and/or undesirable behaviors within the university?¹⁵⁰
multiple answers possible

- Yes, I have reported excessive workload
- Yes, I have reported undesirable behaviors (by colleagues or supervisors)
- No, I wanted to report excessive workload and/or undesirable behaviors (by colleagues or supervisors), but I did not know where or to whom
- No, I wanted to report excessive workload and/or undesirable behaviors (by colleagues or supervisors), but it didn't feel safe enough to do so
- No, I did not report excessive workload and/or undesirable behaviors (by colleagues or supervisors) and did not want to report this
- No, I did not report excessive workload and/or undesirable behaviors (by colleagues or supervisors) for another reason, please specify...: _____

28. Who did you report to about excessive work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors (by colleagues or supervisors)?¹⁵¹
multiple answers possible

- Manager(s)/Supervisor(s)

¹⁵⁰ Question 27 was only shown if the participant had answered question 19 with 'yes' and had ticked at least one of the types of undesirable behaviors or discrimination in questions 22 and 23.

¹⁵¹ Question 28 was only shown to respondents who had indicated to have reported in question 27.

- Confidential advisor
- Ombudsperson
- HR employee faculty / department
- HR-employee university
- Faculty/School Council
- University/Works Council
- Labour union
- Netherlands labour authority
- Inspectorate of Education
- Other, please specify...: _____

29. How do you assess the handling (procedure, aftercare) of your complaint/reporting?¹⁵²

- Very good, because...: _____
- Good, because...: _____
- Sufficient, because...: _____
- Poor, because...: _____
- Bad, because...: _____

30. Do you have any comments or remarks regarding the reporting you did about excessive work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors at work?

No comments/remarks

¹⁵² Question 29 was only shown to respondents who had indicated to have reported in question 27.

Section 7 – questions about work times

31. How often does it happen that ... ?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
you work more than 60 hours a week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you have less than 11 hours of rest between 2 working days	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you work during the evenings because you were not able to finish work during the working day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you work on weekends because you were not able to finish work during the working week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you can take all your statutory vacation days in the year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you still work occasionally or completely during statutory leave (vacation days, maternity leave, birth leave, parental leave, care leave)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you work more than the number of hours stipulated in your contract on a weekly basis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32. How many vacation days (of 8 hours) did you take and also enjoy in 2022 (i.e. did not work)?

_____ (validation: number)

I was not yet employed at my current employer on 01-01-2022

33. In case you have been on maternity, birth, adoption, foster/parental, care, or special leave in the past 2 years, were your work tasks actually aligned with the available working hours?

- Yes
- Partly
- No
- Not applicable to my situation

34. Have you concluded a function-based contract with your university, which stipulates that you yourself are responsible for managing your own working hours, break times and holidays?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Your employer has indicated that it offers the following measures in the workplace regarding work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors. Can you indicate which measure(s) you are aware of, whether you use them, and whether you think they help to reduce work pressure and undesirable behaviors at work?

35. Tick the box(es) below, if you **are aware of** (= you know that these measures are in place) measure(s) offered by the university with regard to preventing or limiting stress due to work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors at work.

multiple answers possible

- Measure 1¹⁵³
- Measure 2
- ...
- I am aware of another measure, please specify... : _____
- I am not aware of any measure(s) to prevent or reduce stress caused by work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors at work

36. Tick the box(es) below, if you **have made use of** a measure with regard to preventing or reducing work pressure and / or undesirable behaviors at work?¹⁵⁴

multiple answers possible

- Measure 1
- Measure 2
- ...
- [text from 'another measure' question 35]

¹⁵³ On the basis of interviews per university a list with measures was constructed to reduce work pressure and undesirable behavior. This list with measures was presented to each university to check and if necessary was adjusted. Participants were only presented with measures from the university where they worked (most hours).

¹⁵⁴ Question 36 was only shown if a participant had indicated to be aware of at least one measure in question 35. Only the measures the participant had ticked in question 35 were shown.

- I have not made use of any measure to prevent or limit stress due to work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors this past year

37. To what extent do you consider the following measures effective when it comes to preventing or limiting work pressure and/or undesirable behaviors at work?¹⁵⁵

	Not at all effective	Not effective	Neutral	Effective	Very effective
Measure 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Measure 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[text from 'another measure' question 35]	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

38. Do you have any comments or remarks regarding the measures to prevent or reduce work pressure or undesirable behaviors at work?

No comments/remarks

¹⁵⁵ Question 37 was only shown if a participant had indicated to have used at least one measure in question 36. Only the measures the participant had ticked in question 36 were shown.

Section 8 – questions department

The following statements concern the department where you work.

39. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
If you make a mistake in this department, it is often held against you.					
Members of this department are able to bring up problems and tough issues.					
People within this department sometimes reject others for being different.					
Within my department it is safe to take risks.					
It is difficult to ask other members within this department for help.					
No one within my department would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.					
Working with members within this department, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.					

Section 9 – final questions

You have arrived at the last questions of this survey. The following statements are about your supervisor.

40. Please indicate how often you have to deal with the following statements.

My supervisor ...

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

ridicules me

tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid

puts me down in front of others

makes negative comments about me to others

tells me I'm incompetent

41. Do you have any remarks concerning work pressure or undesirable behavior at your university? For example, are there issues you would like to share about this topic, that have not been addressed in this survey, you can let us know in the text box below.

No comments/remarks

Thank you for completing this survey. By clicking on 'Send answers' you agree to participate in this research and the processing of the personal data you have submitted.

Thank you very much for your participation. Your answers have been sent.

Appendix IV

Literature list

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