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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

# Stressful Learning: examining the reciprocal dynamic nature of stress amongst educators and students in higher Education

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# Preamble....if I may...

Nature of education has changed in recent decades.

Increased pressure for performance, metrics, outcomes etc....has changed what is prioritised in education but also (and not so subtly!!) has changed the nature of our work as educators..

Impact upon the culture and dynamics of the education workplace.

Increased individualism in the midst of a deluge of collaboration rhetoric...  
institutional values almost a schizophrenic fragmentation....

Leaves one wondering in 'commonsenseasaurus' style  
about purpose....





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# Academic Experience

Stress is an inherent feature of work life and is a growing concern in higher education [1].

The available evidence suggests that academics are experiencing increased stress levels [2, 3]. “Work-related stress has significant costs for the wellbeing of academics, their families, their colleagues, and their university and more broadly for the quality of higher education.” [2, p.231]

Responsibilities of teaching; research; community service; work overload [4].  
emotion work; [5] email related stress; [6] work-life conflict; [2, 7-8] job insecurity;  
lack of tenure; bullying cultures; increased student numbers; student diversity;  
decreased student staff ratios; [9] increased student expectations; increasing care  
needs students e.g. social/mental health issues [10] fear of poor teaching  
evaluations....



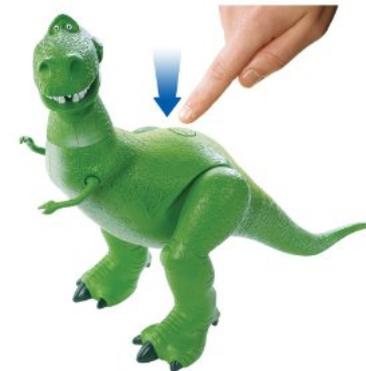


# Academic Experience

This constellation of conflicting pressures and demands on academics has translated into longer working hours. [1, 11]

Academics tend to work longer hours than most other professional groups. [11] In the UK, a national study of academics found that 36% regularly work in excess of the 48 hour weekly limit set by the European Union's Working Time Directive, with almost one respondent in three working more than 50 hours. [1].

High levels of workaholism are evident in the Irish academic population also [12].





# Academic Experience

Sustained exposure to pressures can (at worst) result in burnout,<sup>[13]</sup> or (at least) negatively impact upon the wellbeing of academics.<sup>[2]</sup>

Evidence of high levels of psychological distress (as measured by the GHQ12) among academics. For example, Kinman et al reported caseness (significant levels of psychological distress cut off 5) rates of 50% in a U.K sample<sup>[14]</sup> and Winefield et al<sup>[15]</sup> reported similarly high levels of caseness (43%) among Australian academics.

We need more research in Irish HE context...



# Student Experience

- 39% of higher education students identified as ‘cases’ (scores > 5 on the GHQ) i.e. having distress levels indicative of poor mental health [16, 17].
- Acceptance of distress as a normal part of student life [18, 19].
- Significant numbers of students are experiencing psychological distress at a level that can adversely impact their mental and physical health<sup>[20]</sup>, lifestyle behaviours<sup>[21]</sup>, academic performance,<sup>[22]</sup> retention<sup>[23]</sup>...
- Cognitive deficits linked with high stress levels including difficulty concentrating, & paying attention in class, impeding learning and performance, <sup>[24]</sup> negative impact on student judgement, & ability to think, to learn, to make decisions and to concentrate <sup>[25]</sup>.



# Student Experience

Lecturers/ tutors/placement inspections *had a Lecturer there last year, he really stressed me out big time.....I thought he was just acting up getting on a power trip..."*

Workload (amount)

Assessment (amount)

Assessment (type (GROUPS!! Presentations; Timing and Differentiated Weighting)...



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## So what is going on?

- Students think lecturers don't care and that they are piling on the work.
- Lecturers think students are perhaps not engaging enough
- Both are frequently overwhelmed and stressed...even distressed
- Why are we not talking together and negotiating curriculum and assessment...
- Health Promoting College wherefore are thou?
- Imbed health promotion in the psyche of teaching. Teaching and learning as healthful endeavours...? Pastoral care?





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- Improving Organizational Relationships and Behaviours (an inter-institutional research group focused on the continuum of bullying and of well being...) [www.iorb.ie](http://www.iorb.ie)...in its infancy
- Publication of this input: = "<https://www.intechopen.com/books/global-voices-in-higher-education/challenging-performativity-in-higher-education-promoting-a-healthier-learning-culture>" title="Challenging Performativity in Higher Education: Promoting a Healthier Learning Culture">Challenging Performativity in Higher Education: Promoting a Healthier Learning Culture</a>



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