

The Wellbeing of Distance Learning Students: The Importance of Work and Family Responsibilities

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Work-family-study balance

Established literature on **work and family roles and wellbeing** – with important findings from empirical studies.

Research on **work-family-study interface** – relatively limited & focused on campus-based courses.



Drawing upon the existing work-family literature:

Role conflict = circumstances when roles in different domains are incompatible in some respect; and,

Role facilitation = participation in one role increases the performance or quality of a second role.

1. To quantitatively examine students' mental wellbeing using an established and tested measure (i.e. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales/DASS-21).
2. To consider the associations between wellbeing, and students' work and family commitments, and perceptions of work/family-study conflict and facilitation.
3. To explore students' perceptions of institutional support, and to elucidate the strategies used for coping.

Who?

- Sample of Level 3 students in Schools of HWSC and ECYS (n=1,436).

How?

- A JISC Online Survey (May 2019).
- Demographic information provided.

What?

- Work and family characteristics.
- DASS-21

1. Work-study conflict
2. Work-study facilitation
3. Family-study conflict
4. Family-study facilitation

- Conflict measures adapted from Netemeyer et al. (1996).
- Facilitation measures adapted from Grzywacz and Marks (2000).
- 5 questions per scale.
- 5 point Likert scale responses (plus 'not applicable'), e.g.
1 = 'strongly disagree' →
5 = 'strongly agree'.

Examples

Conflict

5.1 *"My job causes me stress which makes it difficult to concentrate when studying"*

8.2 *"Due to family-related duties, I have to make changes to when I plan to study"*

Facilitation

6.2 *"The skills that I use in my job are useful for my university studies"*

9.3 *"Spending time with my family puts me in a good mood and this helps me study"*

Open-ended questions

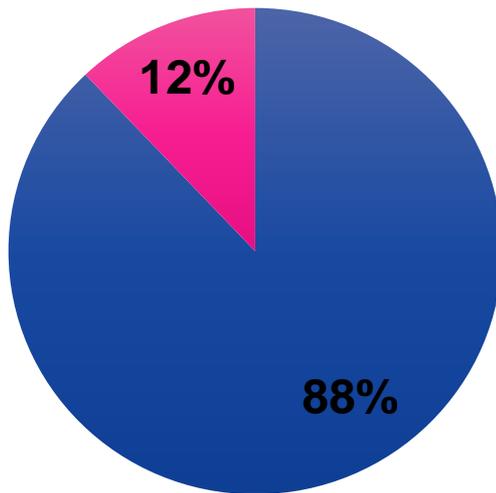
Open-ended items included asking students about...

- Coping strategies;
- Sources and perceived effectiveness of support and university resources used
- Improvements to existing OU support in combining roles.

Demographic characteristics

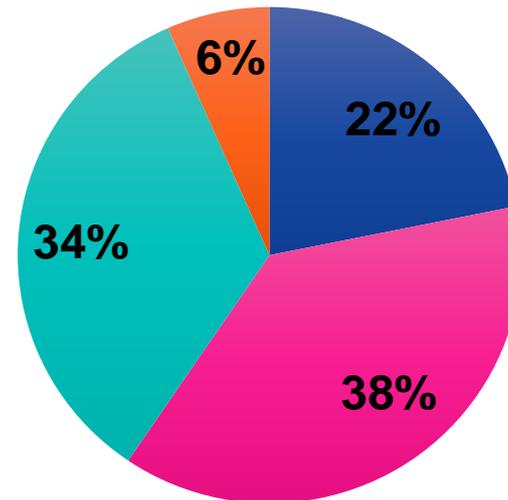
$n = 348$ (a response rate of 24%)

Sex



■ Female
■ Male

Education at Registration



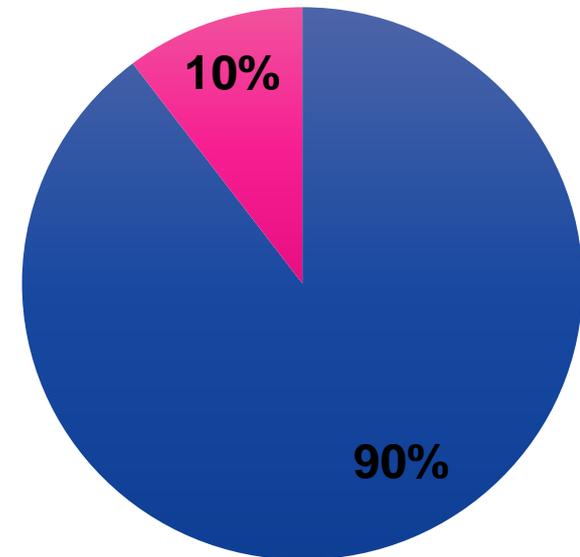
■ Less than A Levels
■ A levels or equivalent
■ Undergraduate or higher
■ Refused or missing

Family characteristics

	%
<i>Married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting</i>	
Yes	67.3
No	32.7
<i>Children aged 18yrs and younger in household</i>	
Yes	52.5
No	47.5
Unpaid carer	
No	67.6
Yes, 1-19hrs a week	19.8
Yes, 20-49hrs a week	5.0
Yes, 50hrs+ a week	7.6

Working defined as = Over the past month, were you (tick all that apply and include any paid work, including casual or temporary work if only for one hour):

- Working as an employee;
- On a government-sponsored training scheme;
- Self-employed or freelance;
- Working for your own or your family's business;
- Away from work ill, on holiday or temporarily laid off; and,
- Doing any other kind of paid work.



- Working
- Not working

Student wellbeing – DASS-21

	Current study	UK general population ^a	Level 3 DL Law students ^b
	Mean	Mean	Mean
Depression subscale ^c	9.74	5.66	9.50
Anxiety subscale ^d	7.45	3.76	6.88
Stress subscale ^e	14.26	9.46	14.04

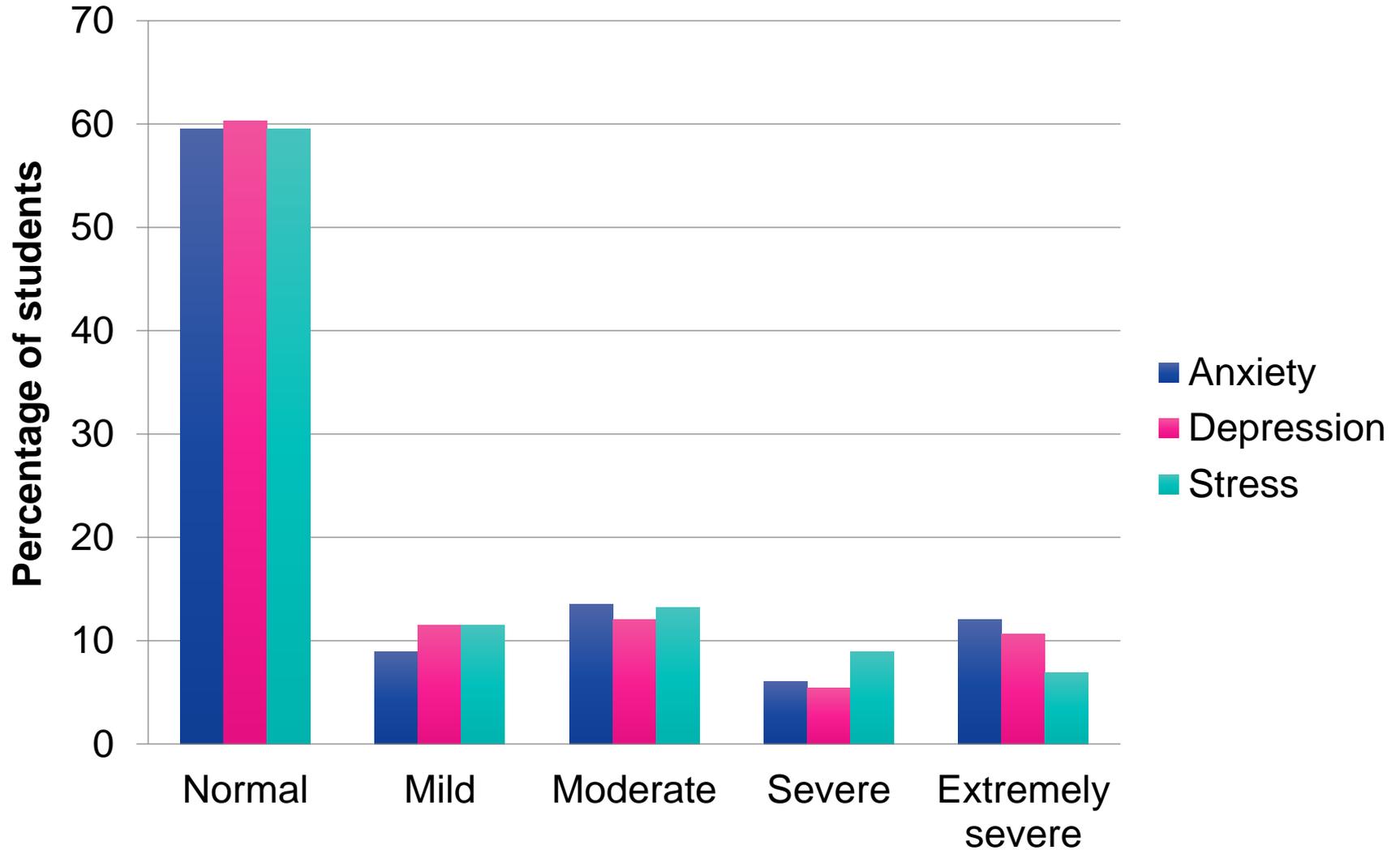
^a As reported by Henry and Crawford (2005) ^b Jones et al. (2018)

^c 0-4 indicates normal range, 5-6 mild, 7-10 moderate, 11-13 severe, >14 extremely severe.

^d 0-3 indicates normal range, 4-5 mild, 6-7 moderate, 8-9 severe, >10 extremely severe.

^e 0-7 indicates normal range, 8-9 mild, 10-12 moderate, 13-16 severe, > 17 extremely severe.

Student wellbeing based on DASS-21



Wellbeing & work/family roles

	Anxiety	Depression	Stress
Unpaid carer	++	++	++
Partnership	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Children	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Working	--	n.s.	n.s.

++ higher probability of falling into high stress/depression/anxiety category

-- lower probability of falling into high stress/depression/anxiety category

n.s. no significant differences detected

Wellbeing & conflict/facilitation

	Anxiety	Depression	Stress
work-study conflict	++	n.s	++
work-study facilitation	n.s	--	--
family-study conflict	++	++	++
family-study facilitation	n.s	--	--

++ more likely to report difficulties on DASS-21 sub-scales

-- less likely to report difficulties on DASS-21 sub-scales

n.s. results not statistically significant (i.e. no significant findings detected)

“Universities need to support life-long learners, but how can they best support those who have additional responsibilities?”



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