Report - COVID19 IOFGSS Wellbeing Survey

Objectives

The objective of the survey was to check-in on how students and other research staff (RS) are doing and gauge what factors are impacting their well-being and productivity. We hope these results will help to identify any additional needs and what could be done to support students’ RS’s well-being as we shift to remote work.

Results

41 individuals responded to the survey (8 MSc, 21 PhD, and 10 RS). No significant difference in wellbeing or productivity were observed among the respondent’s position (i.e., MSc, PhD, or RS), therefore the presented results merge all 41 individuals.

Most (n = 19; 46%) respondents reported “somewhat worse” mental health (Figure 1; Q2; mean 3.5 ± 0.8, where 3 is “about the same” and 4 is “somewhat worse”). The most common factors identified to impact mental health (Q3) were general anxiety about COVID-19 (76% of responses), decreased productivity (68%), disruption of routine (57%), impacts on degree timeline (35%), loneliness and social isolation including from family (30%; Figure 2). These were also the top 6 factors when looking at just respondents reporting “slightly worse” or “much worse” wellbeing (n = 22). Four out of six responding with “other” reported worry about the health and wellbeing of their families.

Figure 1. Q2 - Compared to before 'social distancing', how has your mental health and wellbeing been during the last week? Q4 - Compared to before 'social distancing', how has your average productivity been during the last week?
Figure 2. Q3 - What are the main factors impacting your mental health and wellbeing?

- General anxiety about COVID-19: 28 (76%)
- Decreased productivity: 25 (68%)
- Disrupting of routine: 24 (67%)
- Potential impacts to your degree timeline: 13 (35%)
- Social isolation and loneliness: 11 (30%)
- Isolation from family: 11 (30%)
- Disruption of network or research: 11 (30%)
- Inability to meet supervisor’s expectations: 8 (22%)
- Other (please explain): 10 (28%)
- Living alone: 2 (3%)

Figure 3. Q5 - What are the main factors affecting your productivity?

- Anxiety/worrying (e.g., about COVID-19, degree timeline): 25 (70%)
- Disruption of routine: 24 (67%)
- Insufficient workplace space (e.g., no office desk, chair, or designated space): 13 (36%)
- Poor environment (e.g., too hot, too loud/noisy): 13 (36%)
- Other (please explain): 10 (28%)
- Social isolation and loneliness: 9 (25%)
- Parental distraction/obligations (e.g., children): 4 (11%)
- Lack of in-person science communication (e.g., weekly seminars): 4 (11%)
Most respondents (n = 14; 34%) reported “much worse” productivity (Figure 1 - Q4; mean 3.8 ± 1.5, where 3 is “about the same” and 4 is “somewhat worse”). Among respondents reporting “slightly worse” or “much worse” (n = 27) productivity, the most common factors identified (Figure 3 - Q5) were disruption of routine (74%), anxiety about COVID-19 (67%), inadequate workspace and environment (33%), social isolation/loneliness (33%). Five out of ten responding with “other” reported some form of distraction (e.g., children, pets, partner, TV, skype, chores, etc.).

Notably, some individuals did report improved mental health (n = 4; 10%) or improved productivity (n = 6; 15%; Figure 1). There was a significant relationship between wellbeing and productivity (Figure 1; Q2 & Q4). Five respondents noted issues stemming from children, either through decreased mental health, productivity, or as a source of uncertainty regarding expectations, especially as they do not have access to childcare.

The most common factor identified to improve mental health and productivity was going outside for a walk/run/bike. If full quarantine is mandated by the government, this could become a significant risk factor for student and RS wellbeing.

![Chart](image)

**Figure 4.** Q6 - What coping strategies have you employed to maintain your mental health/productivity?

There were 11 written responses to “Is there anything else you would like to share about how COVID-19 is impacting your mental health and/or your productivity?” (Q7). Four were related to
various anxieties. Three mentioned anxieties or worry for others (including family, friends, students, or coworkers/partners in other countries). Three mentioned poor working conditions (including dark basements, home not being a ‘workspace’, and being easily distracted). Two had mentions of unknown expectations or feeling like they are falling short of the expectations. The other key ideas were inability to establish a routine, uncertainties around returning to Canada (including unknown cost), and whether we’d be informed of positive cases in AERL for our own safety.

There were eight written responses to “Is there anything the IOF Graduate Student Society, Faculty, or peers could do to improve your wellbeing and/or productivity?” (Q8). Five discussed setting appropriate expectations or extending deadlines. Three discussed having a social space just for students/RS (i.e., without faculty to reduce pressure for being productive). Two requested additional resources for mental health. Other key ideas were having a workshop on working from home, ensuring people have access to all necessary tools to work from home (e.g., academic journals, VPN, adequate internet, Photoshop/illustrator). Other suggestions for activities included trivia, science talks over zoom (e.g., Friday seminar or fish & chips), or a establishing an IOF portal/forum for general discussions (e.g., research, social, COVID struggles).