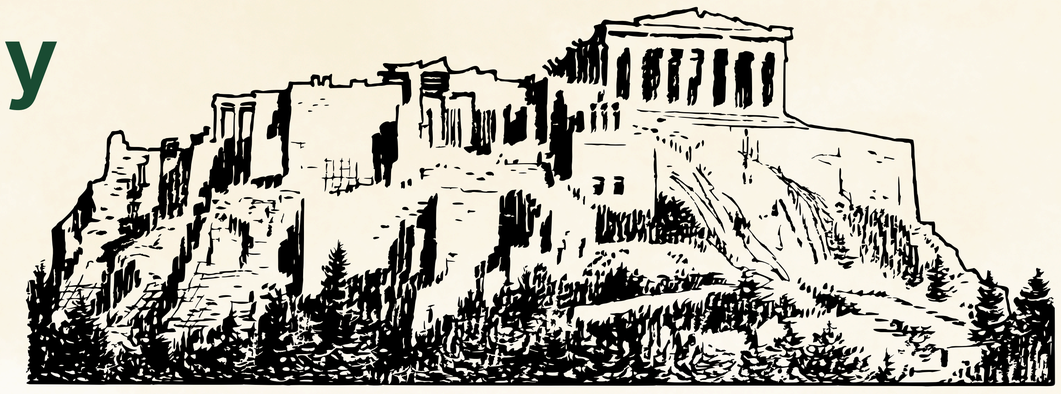
Exploring career concerns and opportunities for UK based early career researchers (ECRs) working in the field of eating disorders: A Delphi Study



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1. INTRODUCTION

- Across disciplines, job security and professional identity are increasing challenges for ECRs [1]
- Relative to research on other mental health conditions, the field of eating disorders (EDs) faces significant disparities in both research visibility [2] and available funding [3]
- Training and retention of ED ECRs should be a priority to ensure continued good quality research in this field [4]

2. OBJECTIVE

To explore the **consensus and disagreement** on key areas relevant to the ECR experience, providing **insight into concerns and opportunities** and allowing for the translation of such insights into **supporting ED ECRs in their career progression**

4. DATA ANALYSIS

- Content analysis for open-text comments
- Median responses and interquartile ranges were calculated for round 2 and 3
- In the final round, percentage agreements of those indicating somewhat agree/agree/strongly agree were calculated for each statement
- **Consensus > 85% agreement**

3. RESEARCH METHDODOLOGY - DELPHI STAGES

1 → **2** → **3**

1: Evaluation of initial items and open-text option to suggest further concerns and opportunities relevant to ED ECRs

2: (Dis)agreement rating of modified career concerns and opportunities

3: (Dis)agreement rating in response to controlled feedback on participants' responses

5. RESULTS - CONCERNS

ED ECRs generally experience a mismatch between **research timelines** (e.g., publication/project timelines) and length of contracts.

"In my experience, and the experiences of those I know who work at other unis etc... contracts will be ending quite significantly before the end of the projects."

ED ECRs generally have to make **personal sacrifices** (e.g., relocation, less time for family/friends, pay cuts).

"[...] a huge part of why I think a lot of talent is lost in the ED field/ academia. I also think you need immense privilege to be able to make these sacrifices. Many people from marginalized groups do not have access to this kind of privilege which perpetuates a lack of diversity in the field. [...]"

ED ECRs generally struggle with **job insecurity** (e.g., lack of job opportunities or reliance on short/ fixed-term contracts).

"To continue in research in a specific field and location is incredibly difficult"

ED ECRs generally struggle with a **lack of funding** in research roles and projects.

"I have been tempted to focus more on depression or anxiety research to have more funding options"

ED ECRs generally struggle with **feeling pushed out of ED research** (due to lack of funding, opportunities, etc.).

"I think it can be hard to find high impact journals that will be interested in ED research"

ED ECRs generally struggle with the **pressure to publish research**.

ED ECRs generally struggle with **unclear career trajectories** (e.g., it is not clear how to progress as an ECR and which opportunities are available)

"I have no idea what roles I can secure in the future in my field of research"

6. RESULTS – OPPORTUNITIES

- 8/9 career opportunities reached consensus
- Supportive networks, mentoring, and engagement with lived experience experts, policy, 3rd sector, and clinical practice were seen as particularly important

6. DISCUSSION

Open comments indicated that a lack of consensus was either **not perceived as specific to ED ECRs,** taken as a **job requirement**, or associated with **individual situations, predispositions, or choices** due to the flexibility of research work. Some of these concerns were seen as particularly relevant to **clinician-academics**, as dependent on the **academic environment** of specific universities, or difficult to assess **without representation of voices** that might be particularly affected by inequalities.

Read the full study here

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[1] https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12348 [2] https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30423-5 [3] https://beat.contentfiles.net/media/documents/APPG_Research_Funding_inquiry_report.pdf [4] https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(16)00081-X