Mind your mind?

Mental resilience of Probation officers

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17 April 2024

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Working in probation / forensic field

What is the reason for you to work in this sector?

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Working in probation / forensic field

What is the reason for you to work in this sector?

- Challenging, complexity of cases
- Fascination with how someone comes to delinquent behavior
- Contributing to a safe society

"The unimaginability and unpredictability"

"Calls for mental muscle pain"

"Mix of idealism and realism"

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Working in probation / forensic field

Most professionals deliberately chose to do this work and see it as fulfilling, however, it can be demanding

- Incidents of aggression / self-harm
- Tension in contact with clients
- Secondary traumatization
- High expectations from society

"Tens of thousands leave go allright but the one that goes wrong gets big headline in newspaper"

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Potential consequences

- Fear, self-blame, shame, anger
- Sick leave
- Long-term symptoms:
  - Burnout
  - PTSD
  - Secondary traumatization

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Working in probation / forensic field

What are the risk factors for negative consequences?

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Risk factors

Professionals

- Low emotional intelligence
- Neuroticism
- Experienced work stress
- Personal circumstances

Organisations

- Bureaucracy
- High workload
- Limited impact on decision-making
- Lack of autonomy
- Lack of responsibility / recognition in case of incident

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Working in probation / forensic field

What are protective factors to prevent negative consequences?

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Protective factors

Professionals

- Optimism
- Empathic
- Belief in own ability
- Emotionally stable
- Detached coping / compassion

Organisations

- Open culture
- Aftercare opportunities
- Sincere commitment
- Transparent communication

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II Dutch mixed-method study

To gain insight into factors that influence the mental resilience of forensic social professionals and what is needed to be able to keep doing their job satisfactorily

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Definition mental resilience

Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences (APA)

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Dutch study – online survey

Online survey

315 people completed the survey: 19 statements and 16 open-ended questions. Average time spent by each person: over 27 minutes

Topics:

- Safety in contact clients/colleagues
- Daring to show vulnerability to clients/colleagues
- Work-life balance
- Support from managers/organization
- Effect of social perception on work

Interviews: 11 in-depth interviews

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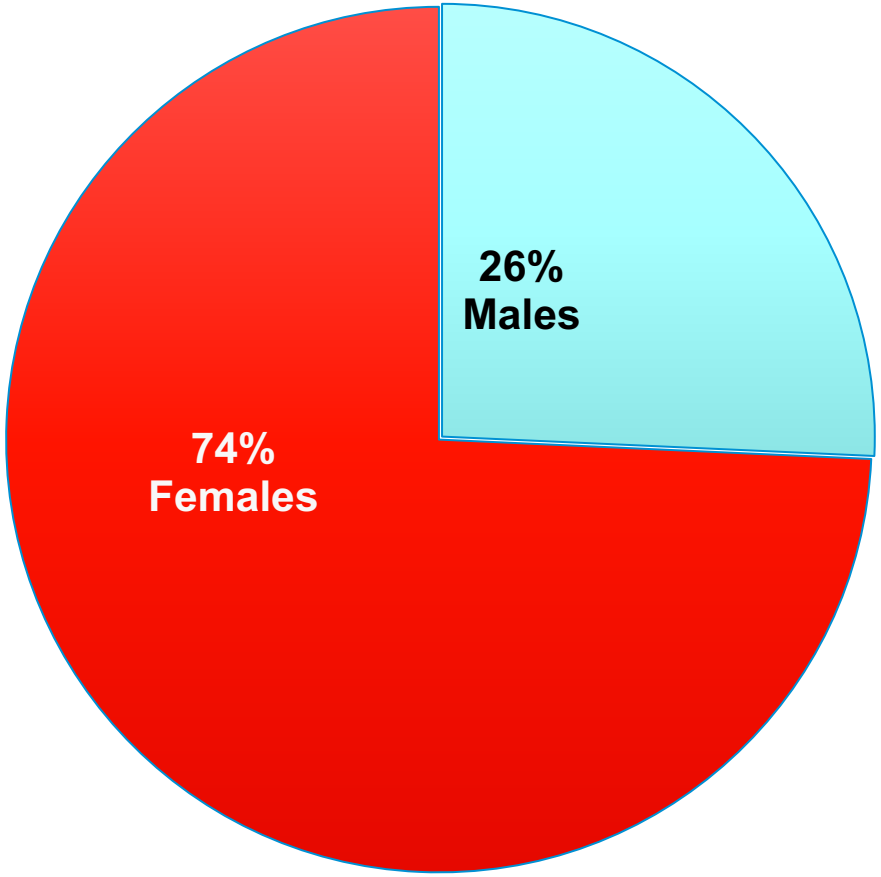
Participants online survey

Gender



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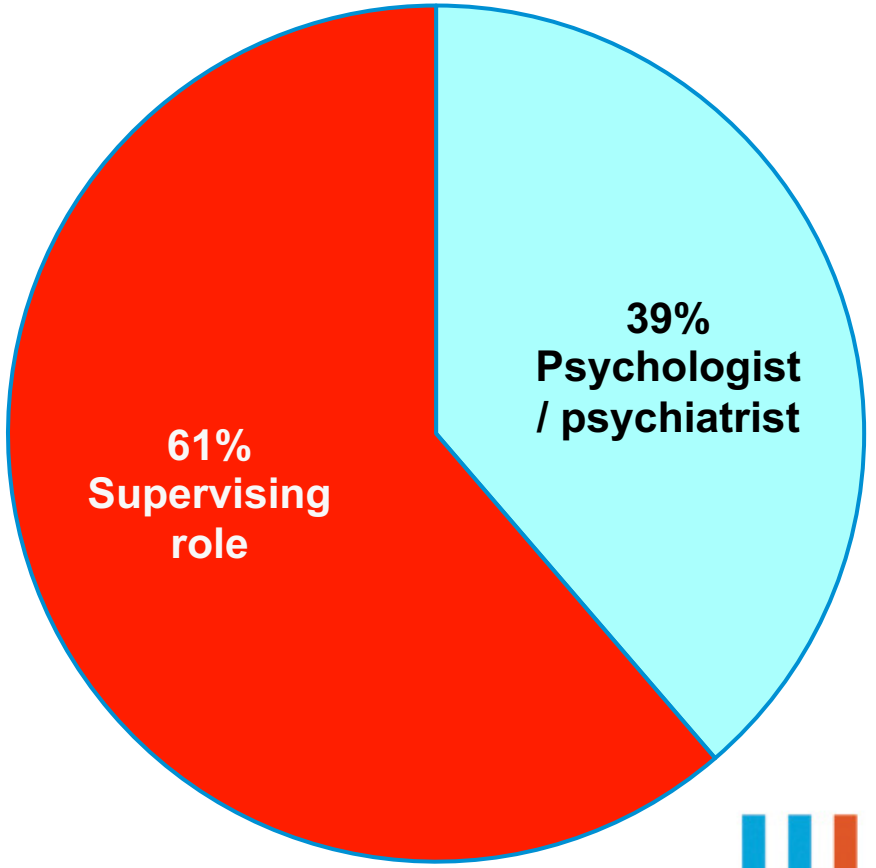

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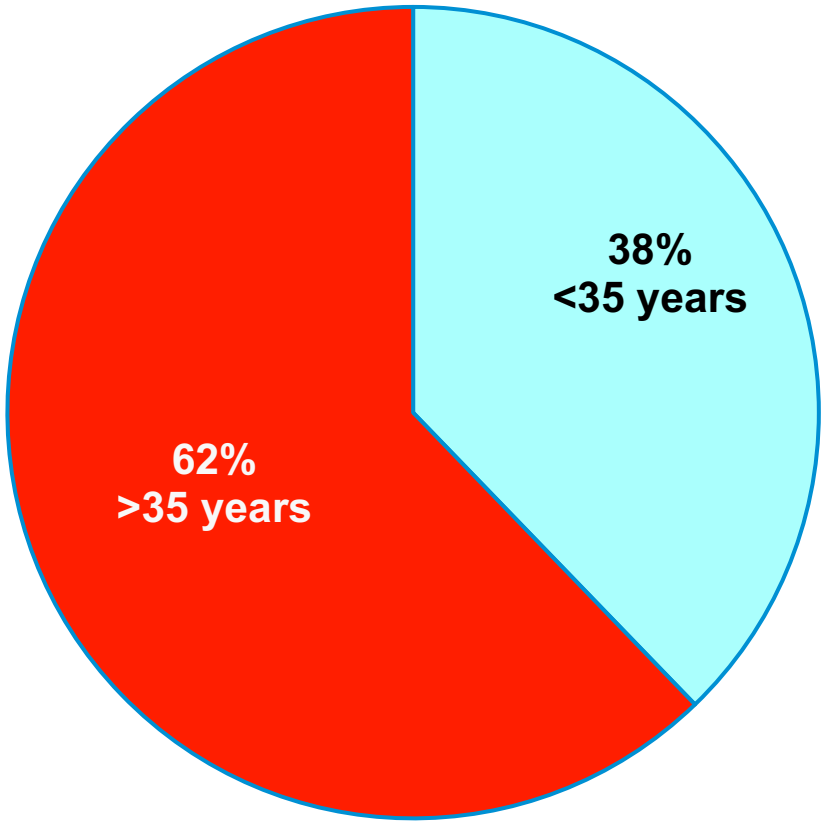
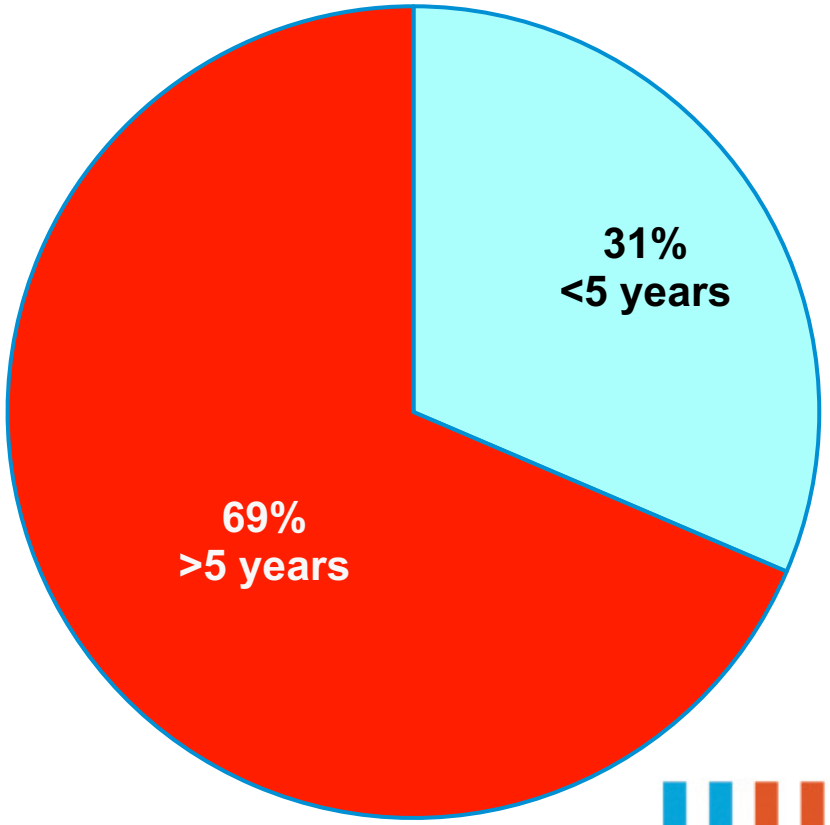
Participants online survey

Age



Experience



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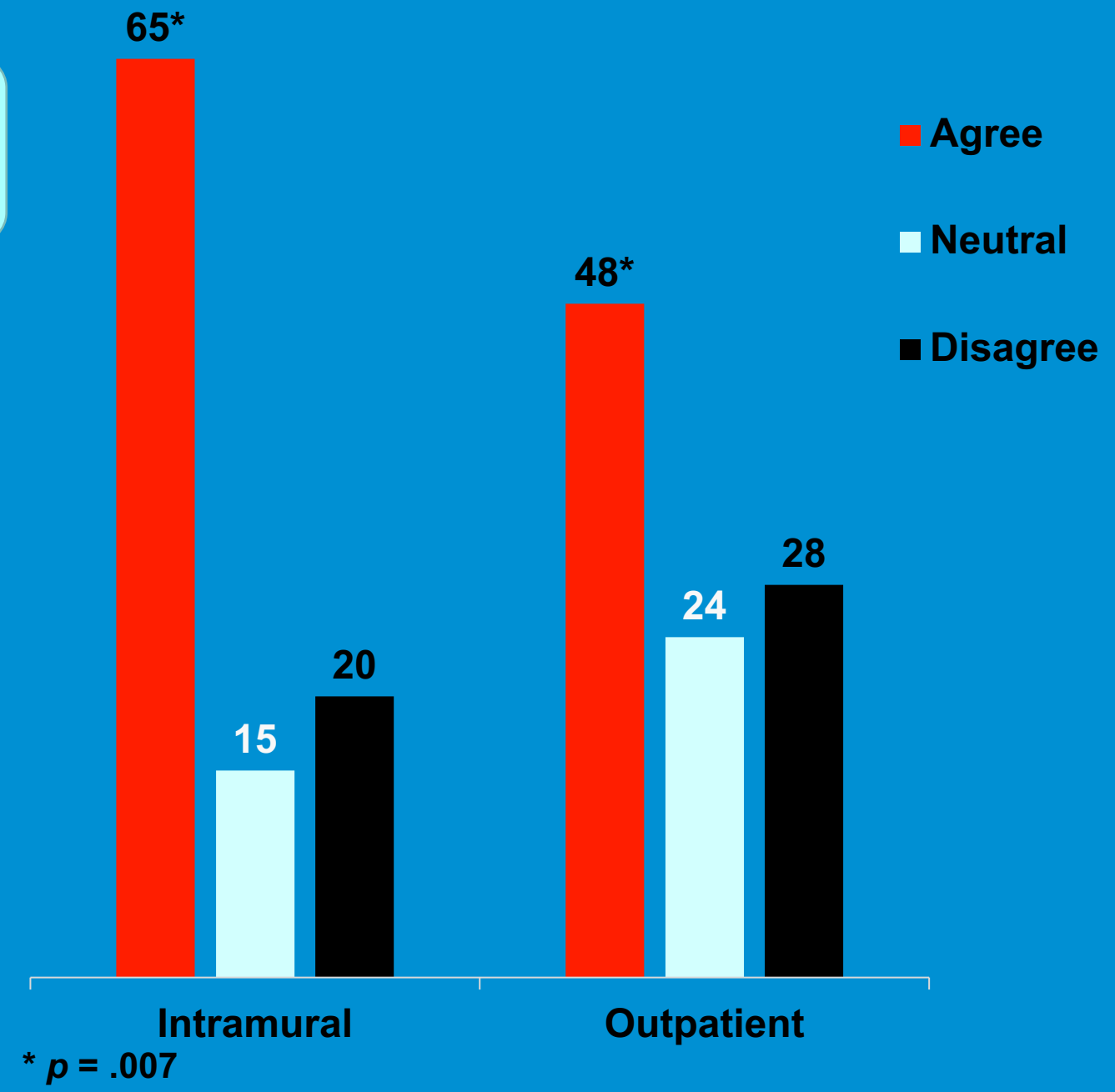
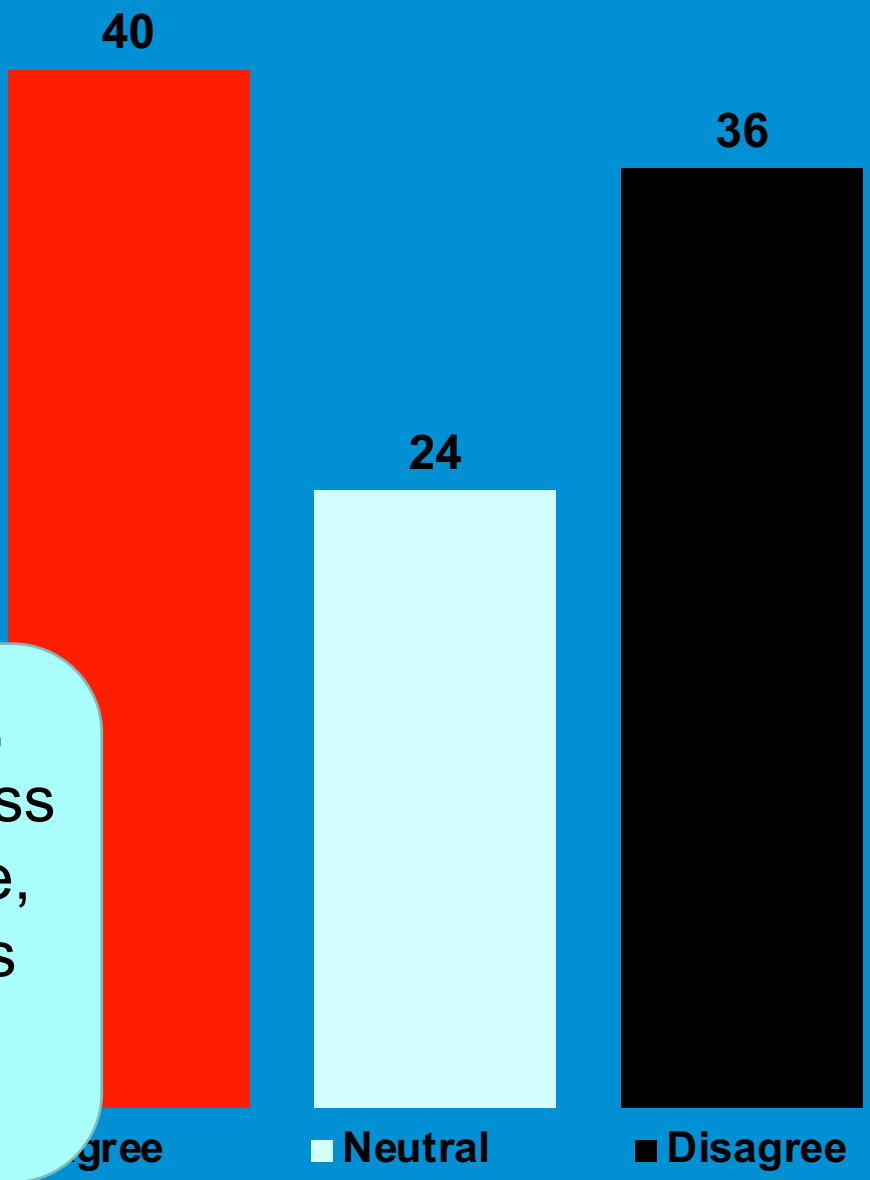
Safety in relation to clients / colleagues

“You are the client's washing machine”

It is part of my job that I am confronted with aggression



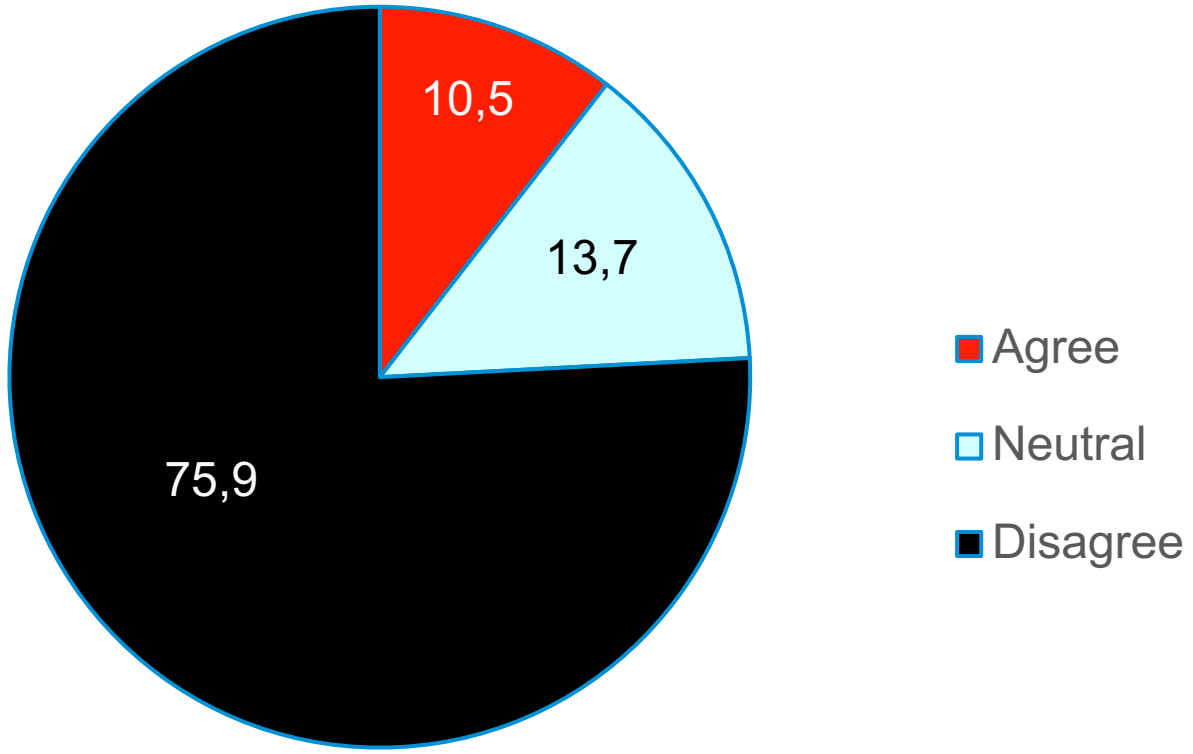
I sometimes feel scared at work and it's because of clients' behavior



"Sometimes not at all, but the moment I am less resilient in personal life, comments from clients also come through harder.."

I prefer not to present myself in a vulnerable way to colleagues

"In the beginning you don't want to come across as 'too light': my contract will not be renewed if I really tell you how I feel".



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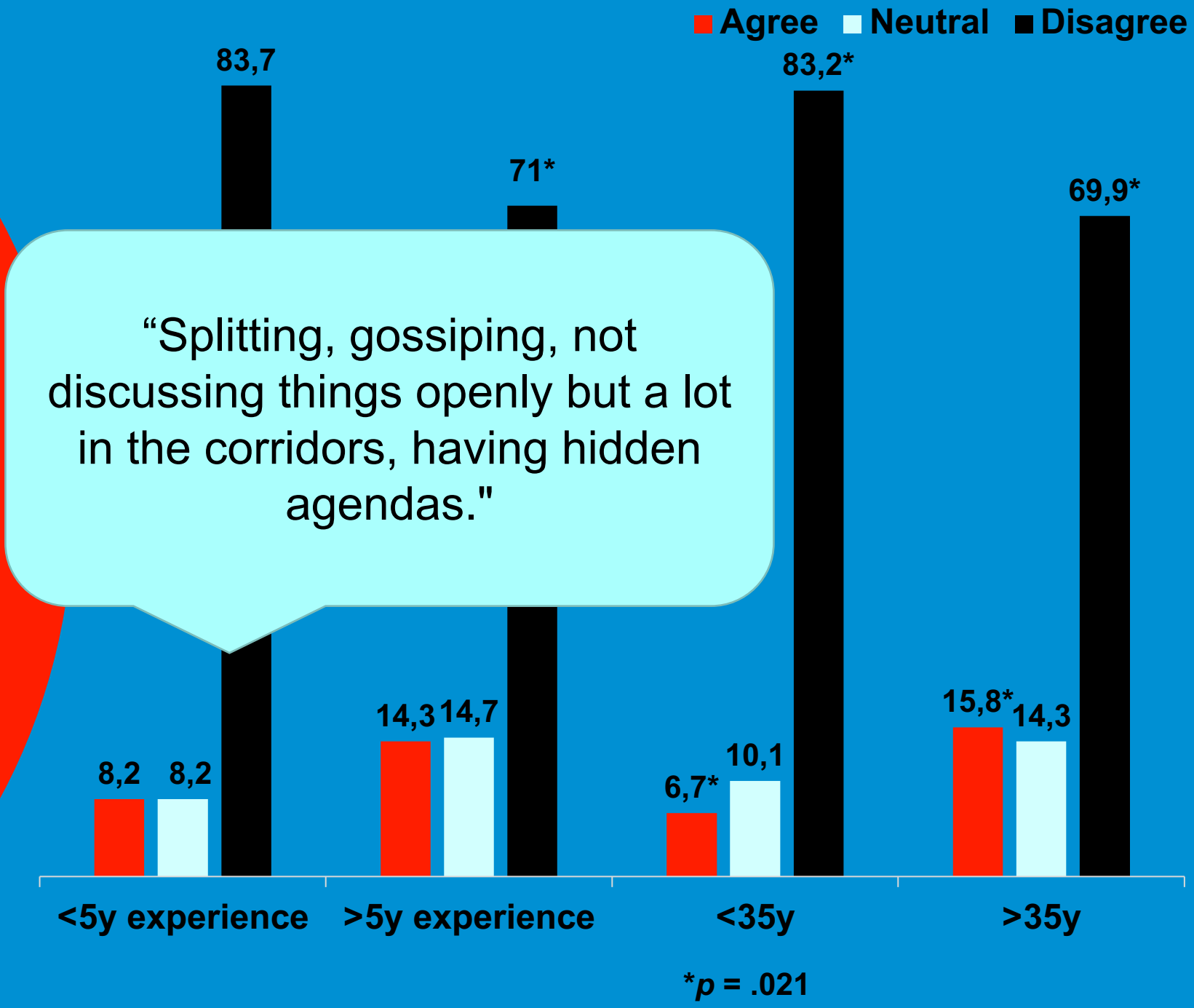
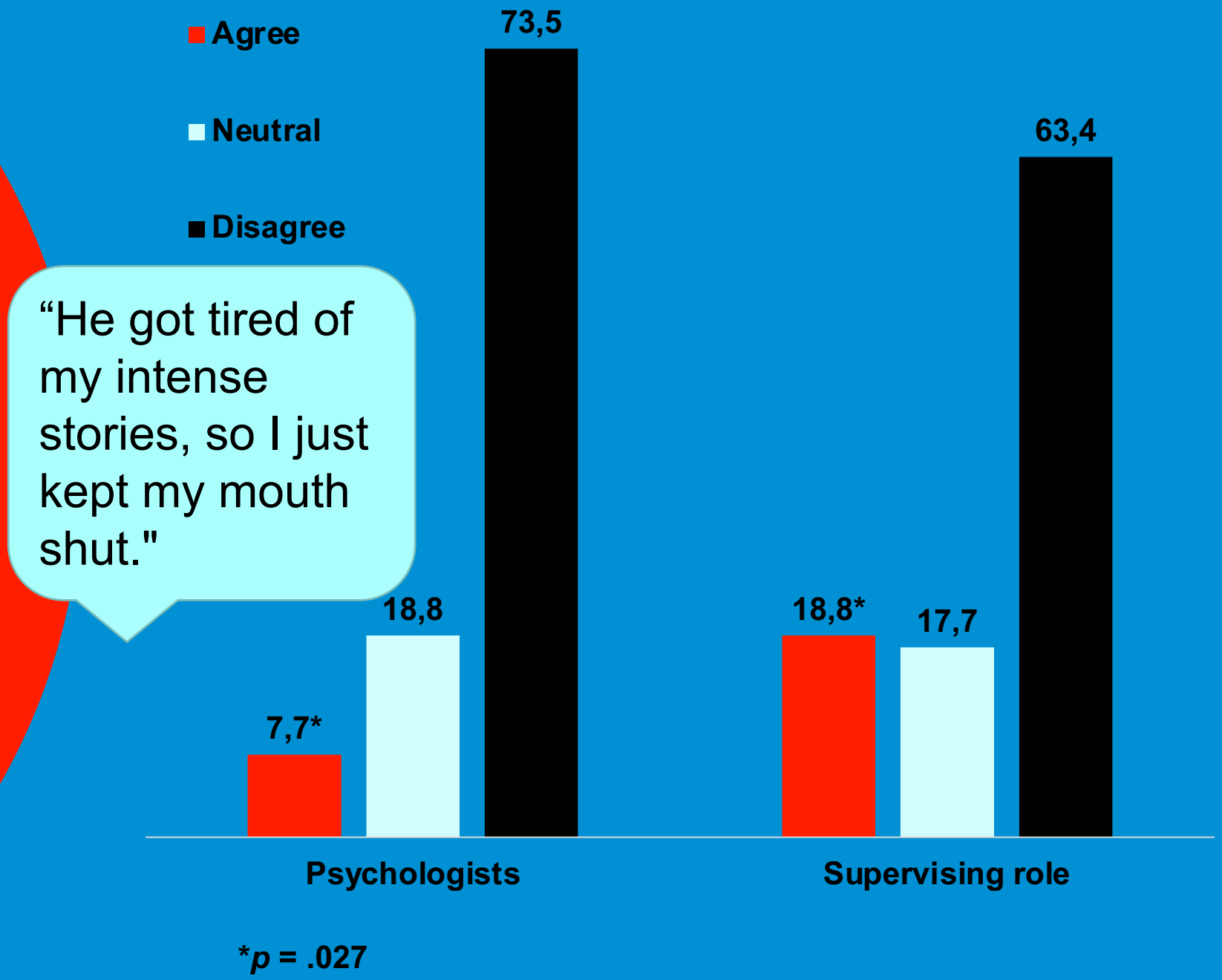
I sometimes feel scared at work and it's because of behavior of colleagues



"Splitting, gossiping, not discussing things openly but a lot in the corridors, having hidden agendas."

Work / life balance

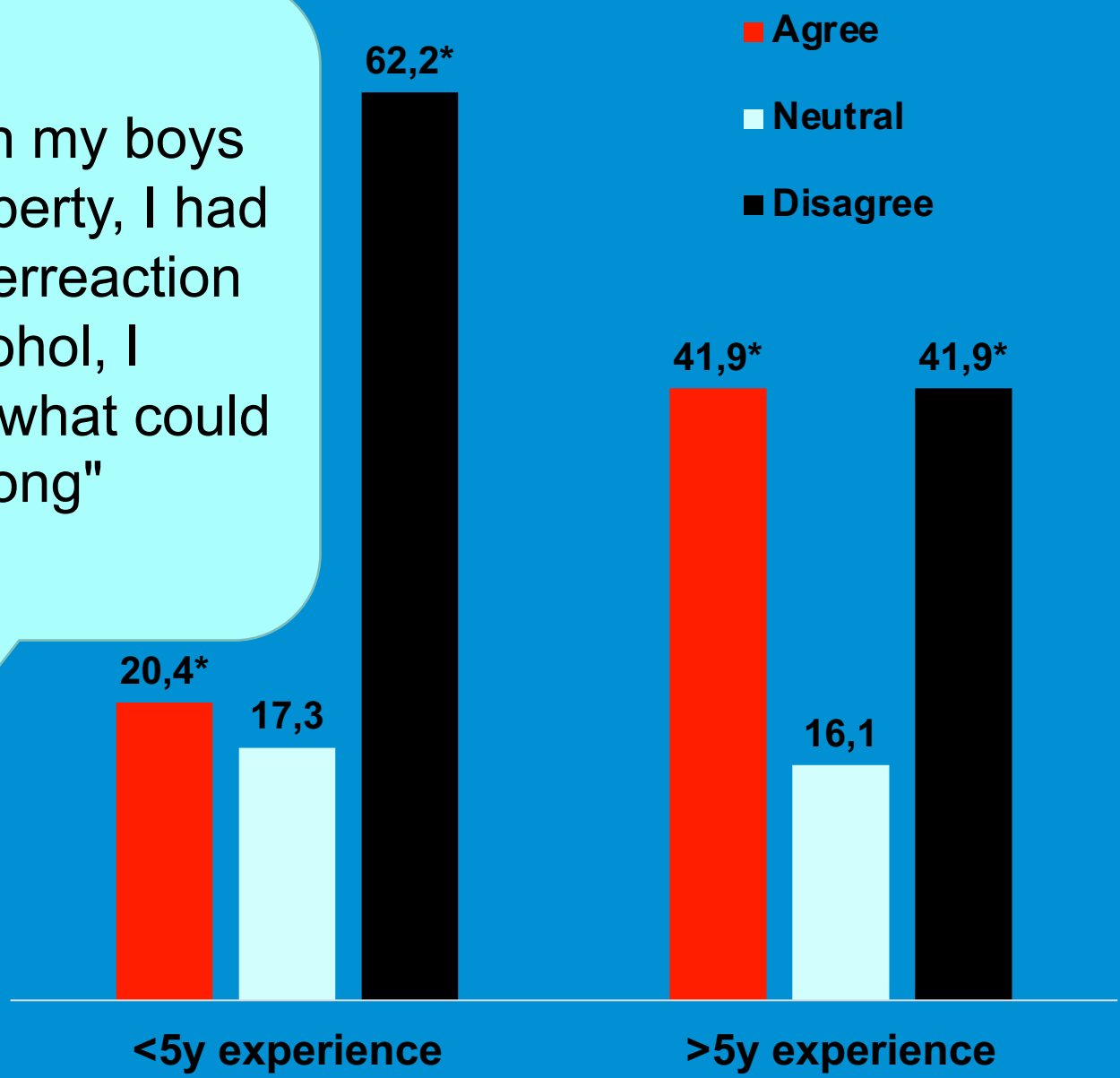
Alertness at my work affects my personal life with respect to sharing vulnerabilities



"He got tired of my intense stories, so I just kept my mouth shut."

Alertness at work affects my personal life with regard to (over)protective behavior towards children/ animals/ friends

"When my boys hit puberty, I had an overreaction to alcohol, I knew what could go wrong"



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Management / organization

How do managers affect your mental resilience?

"when a manager is friends with some colleagues in his / her private life"

Supportive

- Create optimal conditions
- Encourage & stimulate
- Giving confidence /appreciation
- Paying attention to the human aspects, not just the production figures

Not supportive

- Dual role: more difficult to show vulnerability
- Too much attention for organizational part, too far from the work floor
- Only visible when things go wrong

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Are you satisfied with support in organisation?

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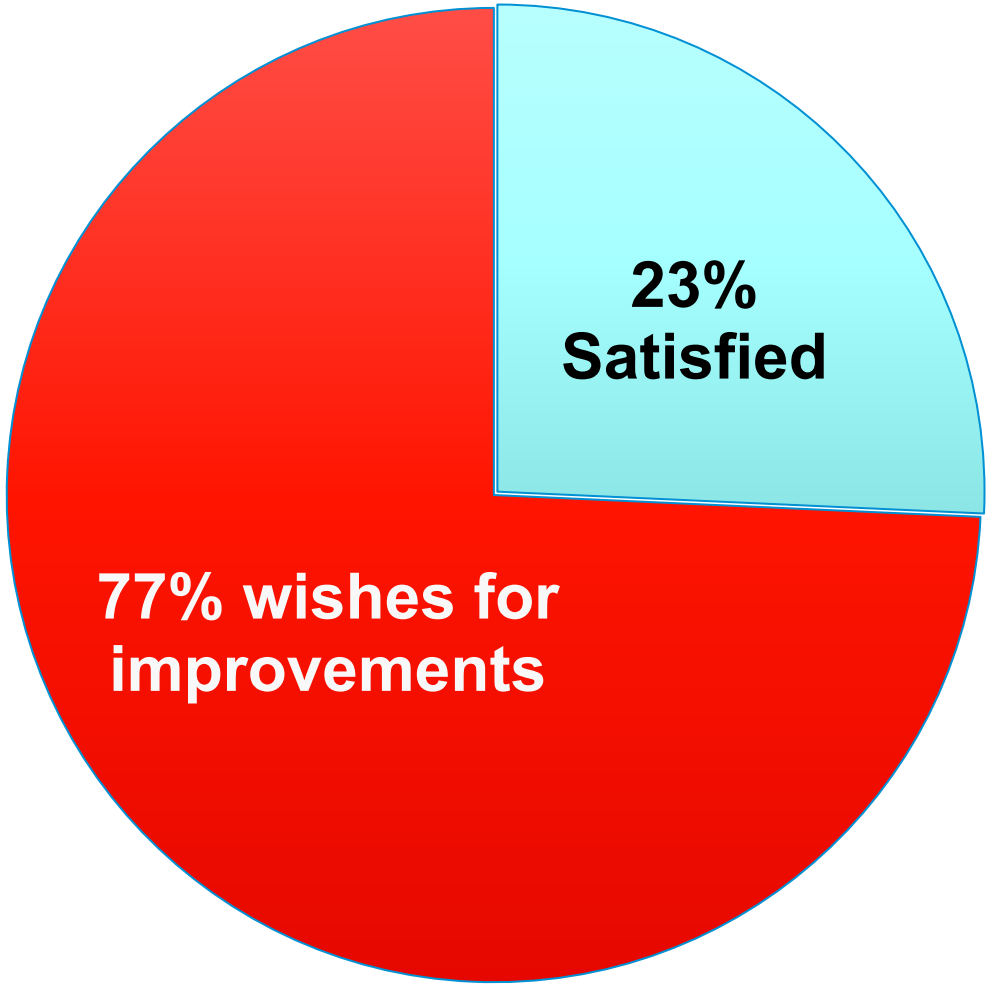
Satisfied with support in organisation?



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What would you like the organization to offer to give your mental resilience attention?

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What would you like the organization to offer to give your mental resilience attention?

"Time/space to recover after contact complicated clients"

"Courses on mental resilience and then also space to participate in them"

"More contemplation"

"I would like to see more evaluation on an individual level, not just on a case level. Not just on the content and what was done in terms of actions but also what happens mentally. Not just 'how is it now?'"

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Conclusions individual characteristics

- **Introspection.** Recognizing own needs and uncertainties and daring to share them
- **Personal issues matter.** Problems often have an impact on mental resilience at work, when confronted with the problems of clients
- **(Over)protective behavior** towards loved ones for more experienced professionals
- **Protective factors** (e.g., emotional stability, detached coping) important

Conclusions team characteristics

- **Open culture.** Sharing vulnerabilities, insecurities and frustrations reduces the likelihood of burnout symptoms and secondary traumatization
- **Important role of manager**. Also pay attention to personal issues
- **Coaching & supervision.** Experienced as helpful + can strengthen the cohesion within the team

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Conclusions organization characteristics

- **Balanced distribution of case-load and severity of cases**: young professionals in particular feel they are overloaded. Not all organizations have the culture that tensions and vulnerabilities can be shared openly.
- **Handling incidents**. Help and encourage (official) reporting of serious incidents.
- **Clear policy and implementation of prevention** (primary), aftercare (secondary) and guidance after persistent complaints (tertiary) following incidents is still too often lacking.

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Recommendations

- **Acknowledge your needs and take good care of yourself**

- **Organizations:**
  - Transparency, open culture (reflection, peer review)
  - Organizational tasks (autonomy, balanced distribution)
  - Recruitment and selection
  - Clear policy on incidents (e.g. when to report them?)
  - Prevention: primary, secondary, tertiary
  - Aftercare / support teams

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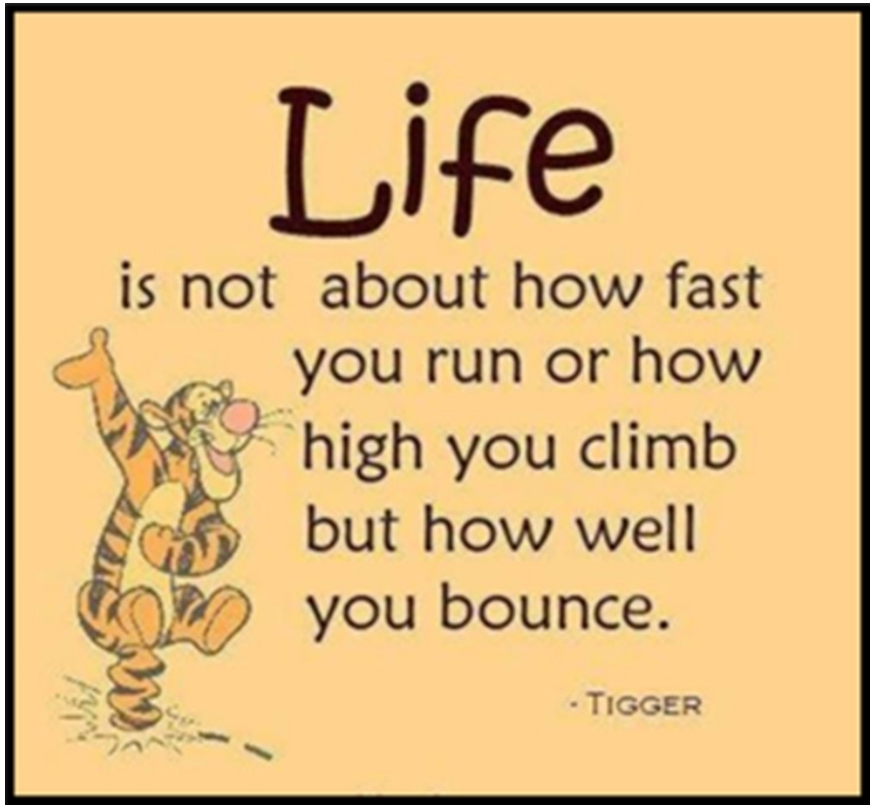
Future plans

- More research is needed!
- PhD project Resilience: development of resilience & risk / protective factors
- Phd project Working climate



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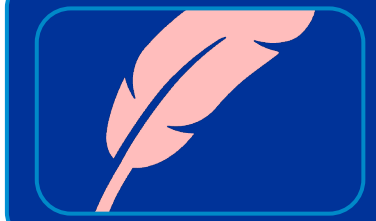
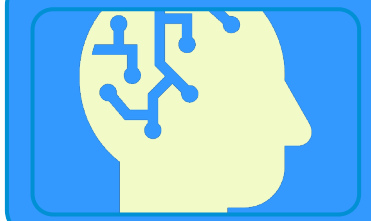
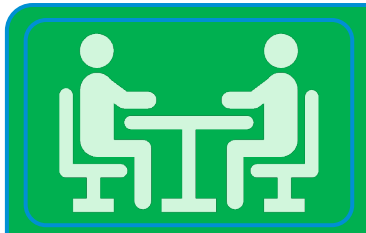
Key messages mental resilience



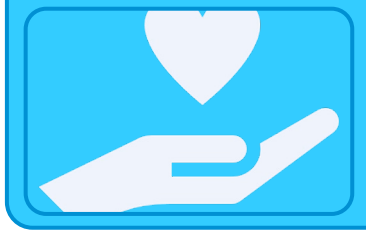
More attention to and research into mental resilience



Individual characteristics and personal situation of importance



Organizational characteristics and team characteristics of importance



Clear policies needed (including prevention, aftercare) + open culture

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Werken aan inclusie, veiligheid en rechtvaardigheid

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