SENSE OF COMMUNITY, POWER, AND SCHOLARLY OUTPUTS: INSIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCHER MENTAL HEALTH OBSERVATORY STAIRCASE SURVEY

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Sustainable Working Conditions in Academia Survey (STAIRCASE)

- Cross-sectional non-probability online survey (data collection from September 2023 to August 2024)
- 4,296 participants from different scientific disciplines and countries (see Figure 1).
- Variables related to academic working conditions, including feelings of belonging (Burr et al. 2019) and interdisciplinary conflict (Færgestad et al. 2017), research and publication practices, disciplinary background and many others.
- Data available through the Research Centre for Higher Education and Science Studies (DZHW) (Lasser et al. 2025)

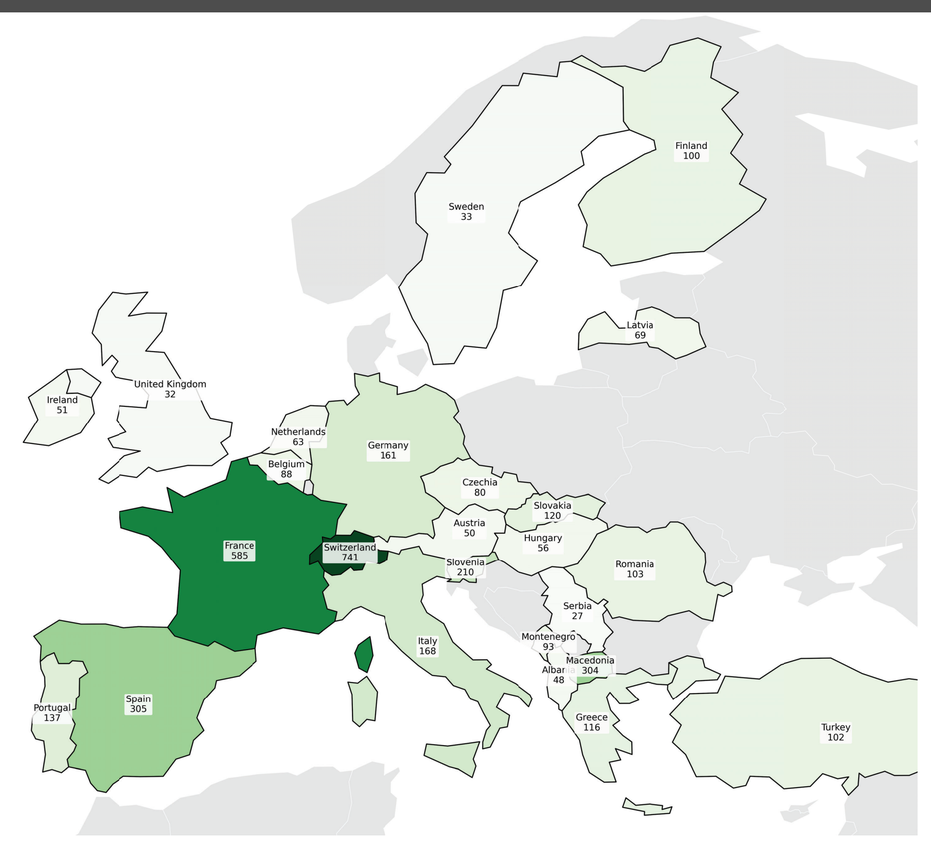


Figure 1: Number of responses per country with at least 24 respondents (Image generated with MS Copilot based on Table 1 in Lasser et al. 2026)

Selected demographic variables and indicators

- Mean age was 38.1 years with standard deviation of 10.7.
- 63.7% of all who disclosed gender reported to be female.
- 35.9% of respondents' current field is social sciences or humanities.
- 33.1% reported no academic outputs in the previous 5 years.
- Two indicators were computed as mean values of selected items, interpersonal conflict (Figure 2) and sense of community (Figure 3).

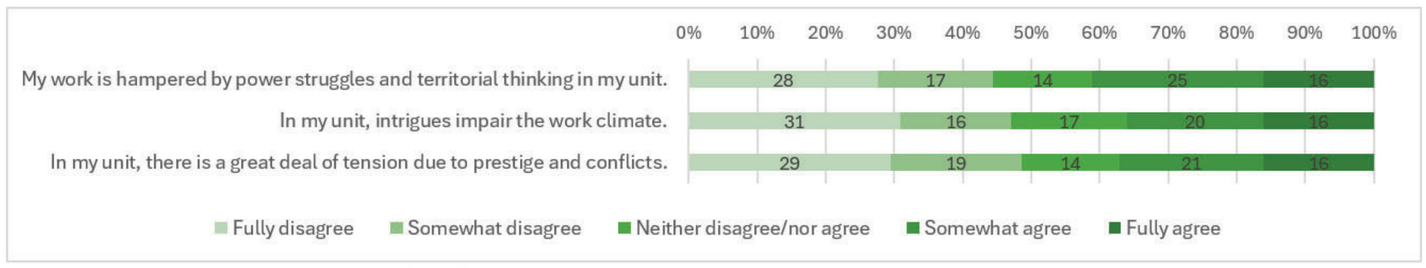


Figure 2: Items measuring interpersonal conflict

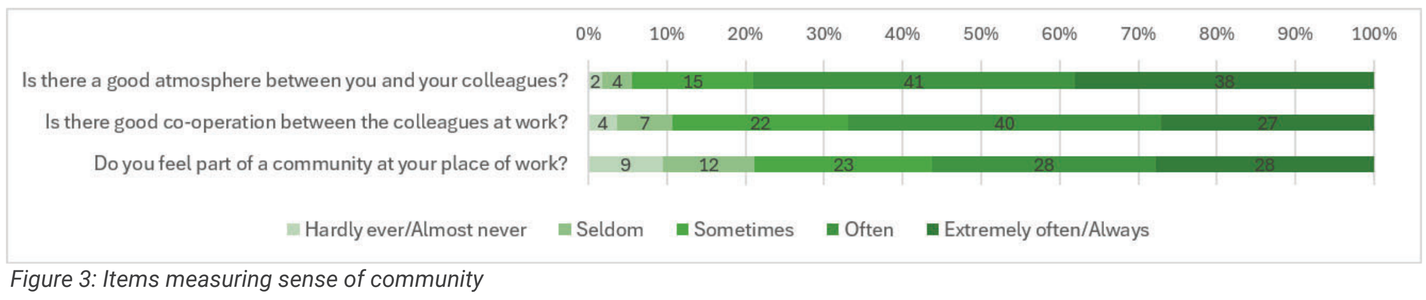


Figure 3: Items measuring sense of community

Spearman correlation analysis

- Academic output increases with age ($\rho = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$) and decreases with female gender, although the correlation is negligible ($\rho = -0.040$, $p = 0.011$).
- No correlation between being in the social sciences and academic output.
- Interpersonal conflict is negatively correlated with sense of community ($\rho = -0.513$, $p < 0.001$).
- Interpersonal conflict shows positive but very weak correlations with age ($\rho = 0.168$, $p < 0.001$), female gender ($\rho = 0.097$, $p < 0.001$), social sciences ($\rho = 0.106$, $p < 0.001$), and academic output ($\rho = 0.100$, $p < 0.001$).
- Sense of community has very weak negative correlations with age ($\rho = -0.084$, $p < 0.001$) and social sciences ($\rho = -0.096$, $p < 0.001$), but no significant correlation with female gender or academic output.

Conclusions

- Interpersonal conflict is associated with a lower sense of community.
- Demographic and disciplinary differences have only very weak associations with conflict and sense of community.
- Improving collegial environments may be more important than demographic characteristics for strengthening sense of belonging.

Limitations

- Most effects are small despite being statistically significant.
- The cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and low response rates in many countries may limit generalisability.

Future directions

- Conduct multivariate analyses of the observed associations.
- Compare findings across countries and include additional explanatory variables.

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