

Listening to Early Career Researchers in Latin America: Report from the careers and experience survey by the ISTAART PIA to Elevate Early Career Researchers and University College London.

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It is only through the undertaking of vital dementia research that we can understand Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia and neurodegenerative diseases - research to understand what is happening in the brain and how to prevent, better diagnose, treat, and care for people living with these diseases.

Behind every discovery are researchers, with the majority falling into the category of being at the early career stage. Early Career Researchers (ECRs) significantly contribute to the field, but from within, there are concerns about how supported individuals feel to thrive and remain within research. There are also questions around what actions research institutions, funders and policy makers are taking to address research careers issues.

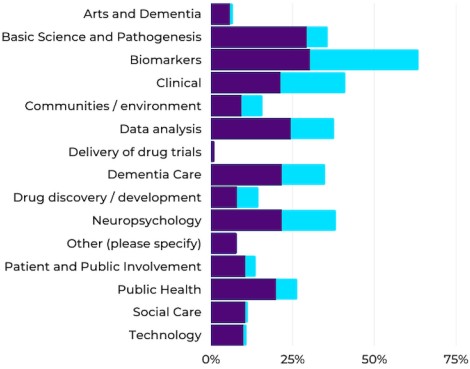
To investigate researchers' experiences of their workplaces, fields, careers and support, University College London and The Alzheimer's Association International Society to Advance Alzheimer's Research and Treatment (ISTAART) Professional Interest Area to Elevate Early Career Researchers (PEERS) surveyed ECRs working in the field of dementia or those who had recently left the field.

This poster highlights a small sample of the results of the survey conducted between 1st September & 31st October 2021. - focusing on those respondents located in Latin America.

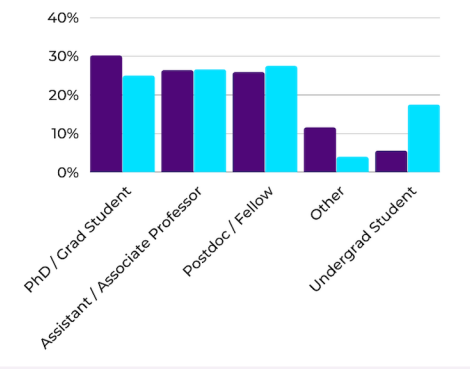
Who took the survey



Research field

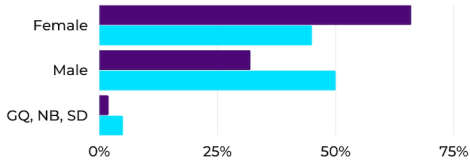


Research field



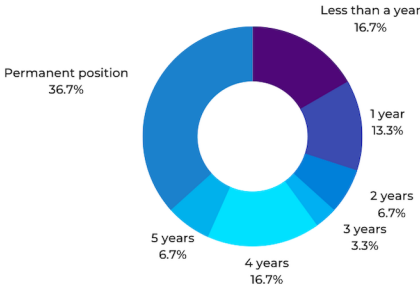
17% of respondents considered themselves to hold an identity that is underrepresented at their institution and amongst peers (compared to 29% internationally), increasing to 32% when considering those who hold the position they hope to reach in the future (36% internationally).

Gender

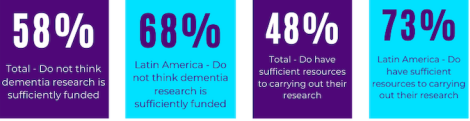
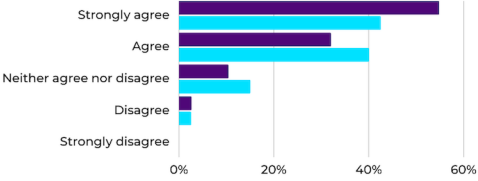


95% of respondents agree or strongly agree that funding and job opportunities are the biggest barrier to early career researchers, and 87% agree or strongly agree that job security is a significant issue.

How long is your current contract?

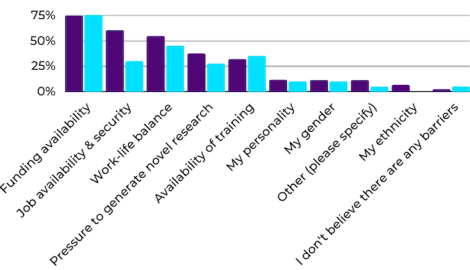


How do you feel about the following statement "The short-term nature of research contracts and funding is a barrier to making advancements and discoveries in dementia research"



We asked respondents if they were thinking of leaving dementia research; 375 people replied, 25% replied Maybe, 15% replied Yes, 60% responded No (compared to 48% internationally).

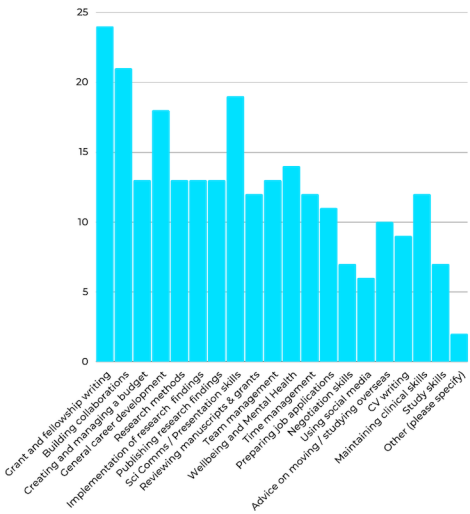
What do you believe to be the most significant barriers to career progression?



As an Early Career Researcher in Latin America have you ever personally experienced any of the following forms of discrimination or prejudice?

Source of Interest	Rather not answer	No	Yes
Sexism	0% (2.6% All)	72.5% (60.5% All)	27.5% (37.0% All)
Ageism	2.5% (2.6% All)	97.5% (73.1% All)	0% (24.4% All)
Racism	0% (3.2% All)	82.5% (85.4% All)	17.5% (11.5% All)
Religion / faith	0% (3.7% All)	92.5% (90.3% All)	7.5% (6.0% All)
Homophobia	0% (2.3% All)	87.5% (92.6% All)	12.5% (5.2% All)
Ableism	0% (4% All)	100% (91.1% All)	0% (4.9% All)

In which areas would you like further support?



Conclusion

The findings of this survey will not come as a surprise to anyone working within the dementia research space. Internationally it paints a picture of a workforce who enjoy their jobs, are motivated, driven and care about the work that they do and the people that will benefit from their discoveries. However, it also highlights the challenges they face personally, professionally, and culturally within the world of academia. They also demonstrate that whilst individuals in different countries may experience slightly different challenges, there are many common themes.

Whilst the survey responses from Latin America were small, making it hard to be certain in our conclusions. We understand that academics in Latin America face a multitude of challenges that can significantly hinder their work and professional growth. These challenges encompass various aspects, including limited funding, often issues with inadequate infrastructure, political instability, and language barriers. However, unlike other places in the world there are fewer concerns over the nature of short-term contracts and a lack of research positions, but instead a lack of training.

One of the primary challenges faced by academics in Latin America is the scarcity of funding for research and academic projects. Limited financial resources restrict the ability of researchers to conduct comprehensive studies, purchase necessary equipment, and attend conferences or workshops that foster intellectual exchange.

The free-text element of our survey also highlighted that inadequate infrastructure is another significant hurdle faced by academics in the region. Insufficient laboratory facilities, outdated equipment, and limited access to innovative technologies hinder research progress and innovation. This is also supported by a publication by Hidalgo and Radicella (2020) highlighted the need for improved research infrastructure in Latin America, emphasizing the correlation between research infrastructure and scientific productivity. However, as the majority of our Latin American respondents work in fundamental science / clinical research, we cannot be certain around questions on infrastructure in other areas e.g., care research, arts etc. We also cannot be certain if that is due to these areas being less researched in this region or due to our lack of diversity in respondents.

The free-text areas also highlighted that political instability and frequent changes in government policies pose further challenges for academics in Latin America. Shifts in political power can disrupt research agendas, funding priorities, and institutional stability.

Despite the challenges, we discovered that researchers working in Latin America appear to be less likely to leave the professional, and more have permanent contracts. This could be related to the issue that many highlighted that they were undertaking an MD / PhD, which could result in remaining in clinical research, and the issue being funding to undertake research and collaborate internationally, not to fund their positions. Additionally, the number of number of people reporting experiencing sexism and ableism is lower than other countries, however reports of racism, homophobia and discrimination of faith / religion are higher.

In conclusion, academics in Latin America confront various challenges that hinder their professional growth and research productivity. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and political instability. Efforts to address these challenges and create an enabling environment for academic development are crucial for fostering innovation, knowledge generation, and international collaboration within the region. However, whilst the career structures may differ the same challenges affect most researchers in Latin America.

These results suggest that any support provided for ECRs elsewhere in the world, in places with greater levels of funding could be translatable and usable in Latin America, and widening access could improve ECR career opportunities.

