



26 May 2021 // Nikhef staff meeting

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The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on LHCb scientists



INTRODUCTION

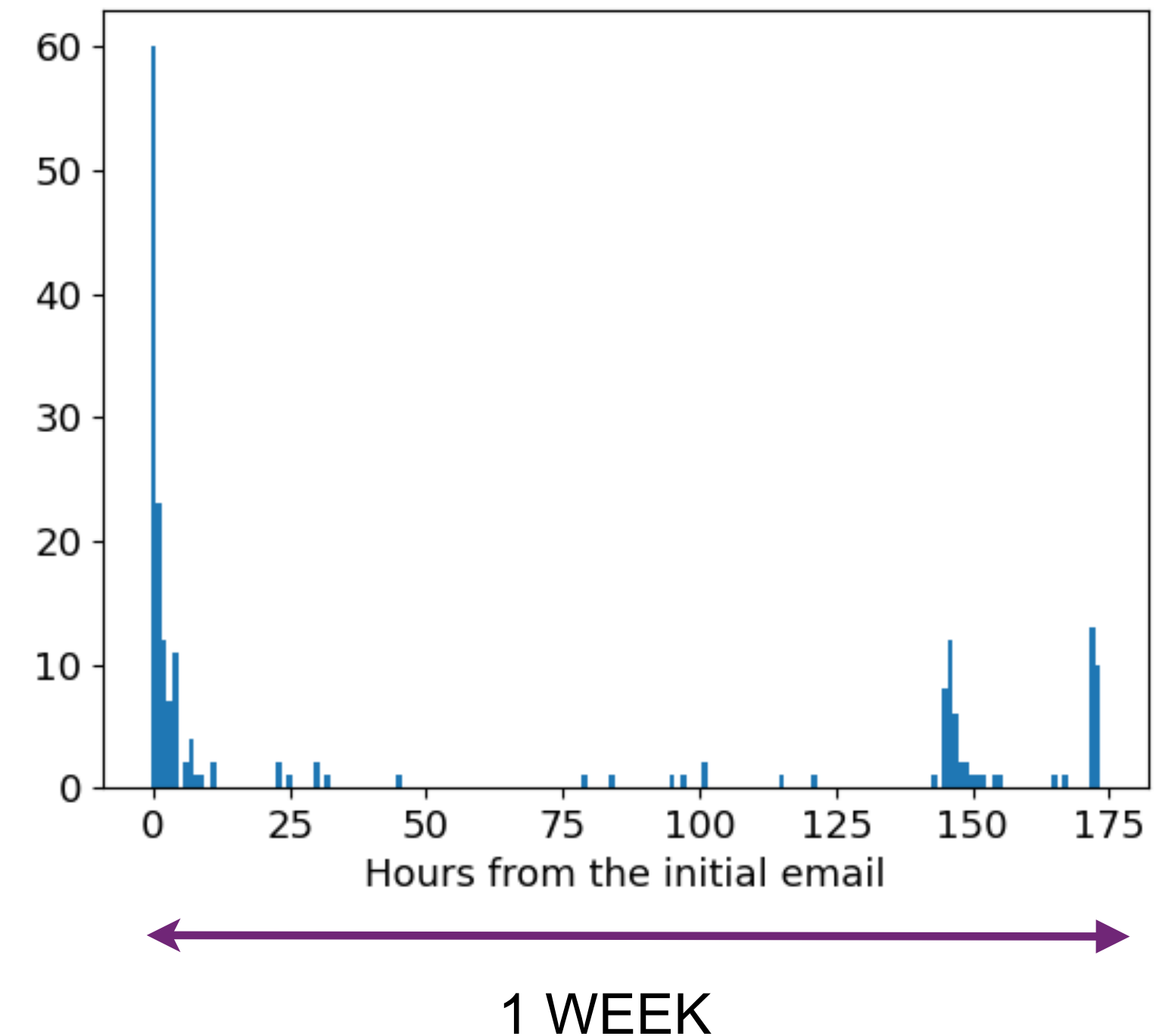


- LHCb's Early Career and Gender Diversity Office (ECGD)
+ volunteers
- December 2020 session during LHCb collaboration week:
“Being a (EC) scientist during a pandemic”

METHODOLOGY

- Anonymous
- 45 non-mandatory multiple choice questions + 2 open questions
 - phrased as neutral as possible
- Splits made by:
 - resident in home country or not (defined by respondent)
 - career stage: PhD students / postdocs / permanent staff

Response submission



DISCLAIMER

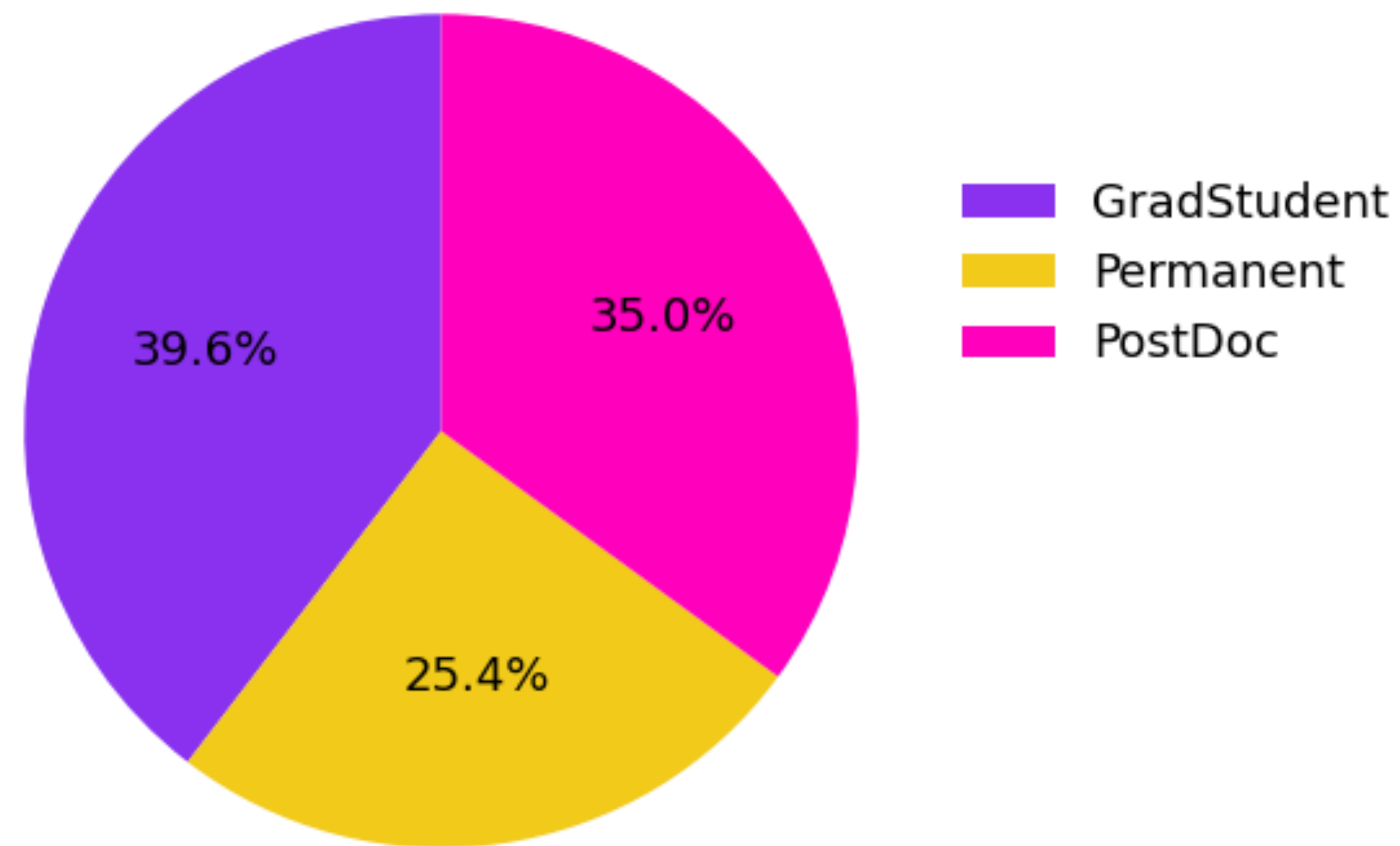
Finally, we would like to underline that none of the authors involved in this study is a social scientist, nor trained to properly develop and evaluate the outcome of such a survey. However, we hope that this study can help to increase the awareness about the effects of the social response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular on our younger colleagues, such that appropriate mitigating actions can be planned. Moreover, we hope that this note will trigger reflection on the importance that such studies be carried on a wider scale, using appropriate methods and techniques.

With this presentation, we want to:

- make you (more) **aware** of your colleagues' well-being
- encourage you to **carry out similar surveys**
- **not** accuse you of anything, everyone is trying their best

SURVEY RESPONSE

What is your career stage?



- Conducted in December 2020
- 199 responses: 14% of LHCb
- 9 master students + 69 PhDs (combined into GradStudent/PhD)
- 69 postdocs
- 50 permanent staff members
- [Link to the full paper](#)

WORRISOME RESULTS

- Younger colleagues well-being has deteriorated.
- Indicated by their lack of productivity, motivation, and focus.
- 20-30% of PhD / postdocs reported feeling anxious and frustrated most of the time
- Around 50% of PhD students, 45% of post-docs and 20% of permanent staff experienced a big decline in their mental health
 - worse for those living abroad



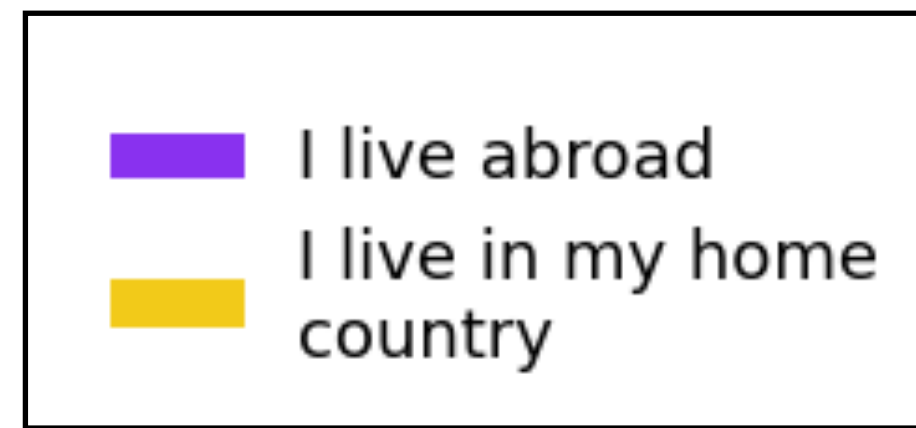
CAVEATS

- These numbers are from December 2020
 - Things may have changed for better or for worse
- Suggestion for improvements intertwined with our findings
- Despite results showing permanent staff is doing better, we know some were overwhelmed by teaching and child-care/home-schooling

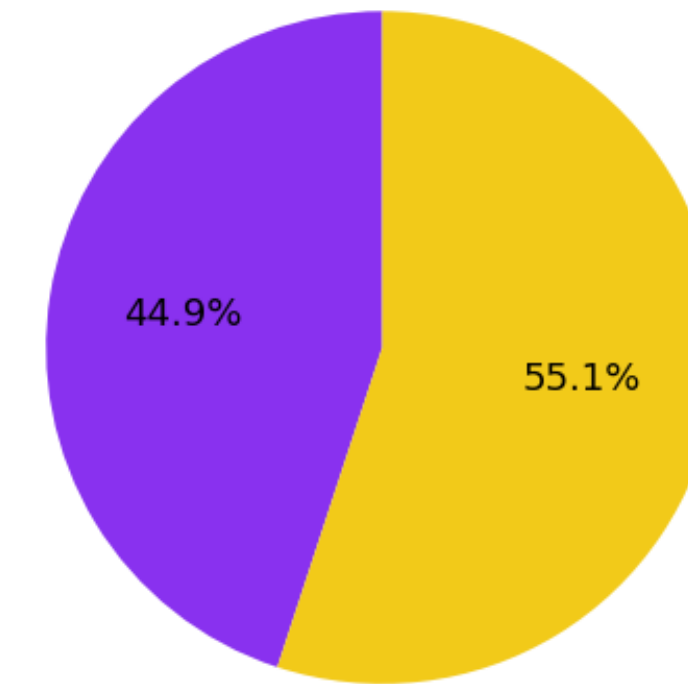
HOME COUNTRY

Interpretation of
“home country”
deliberately left free

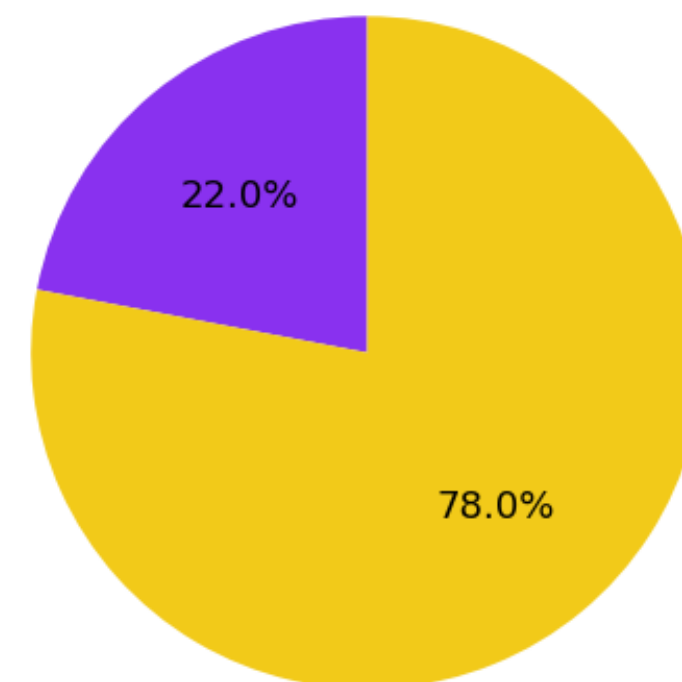
Do you live in your home country?



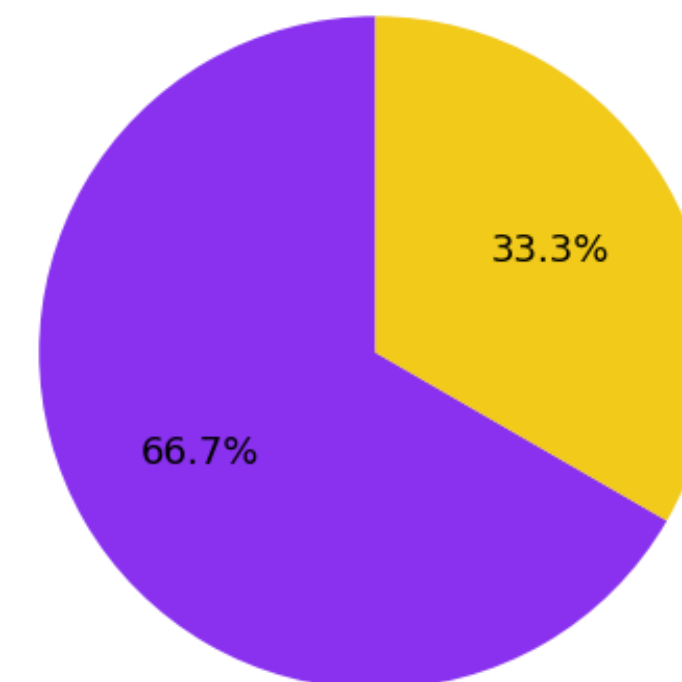
all



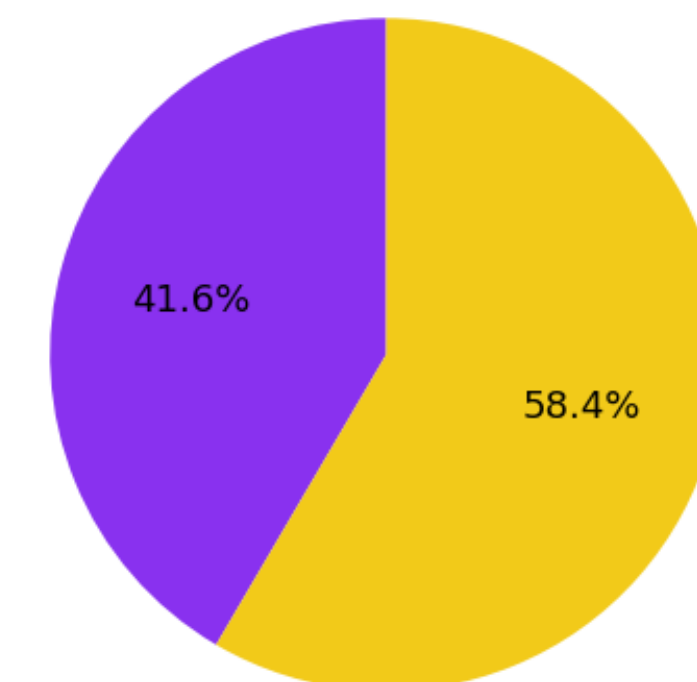
permanent



postdoc



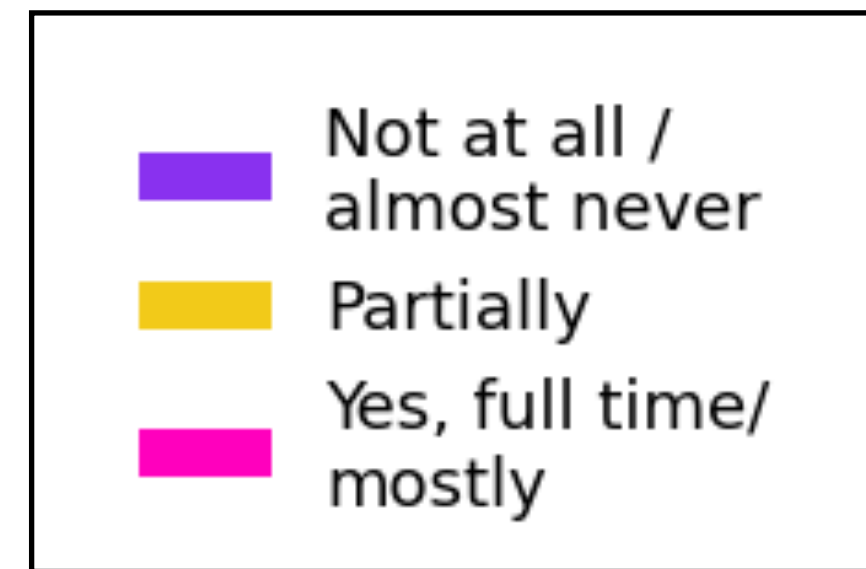
PhD



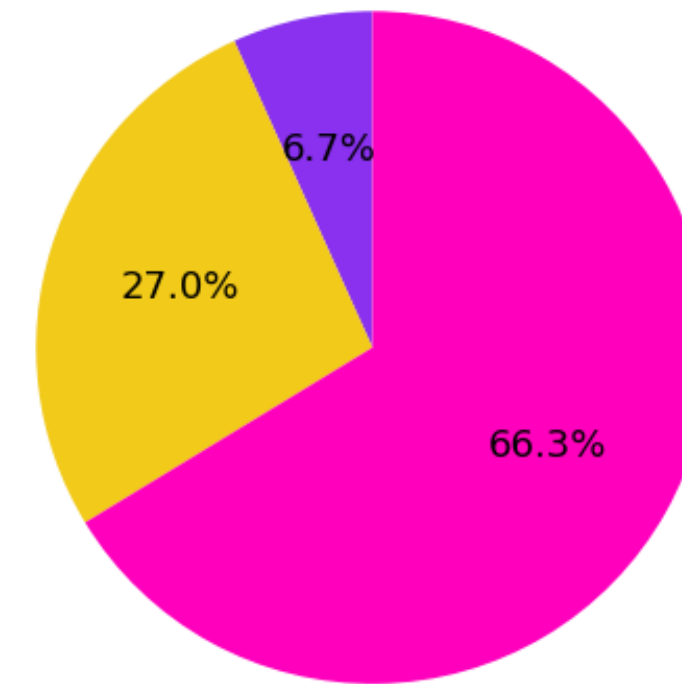
WORK @ HOME

Do you work from home?

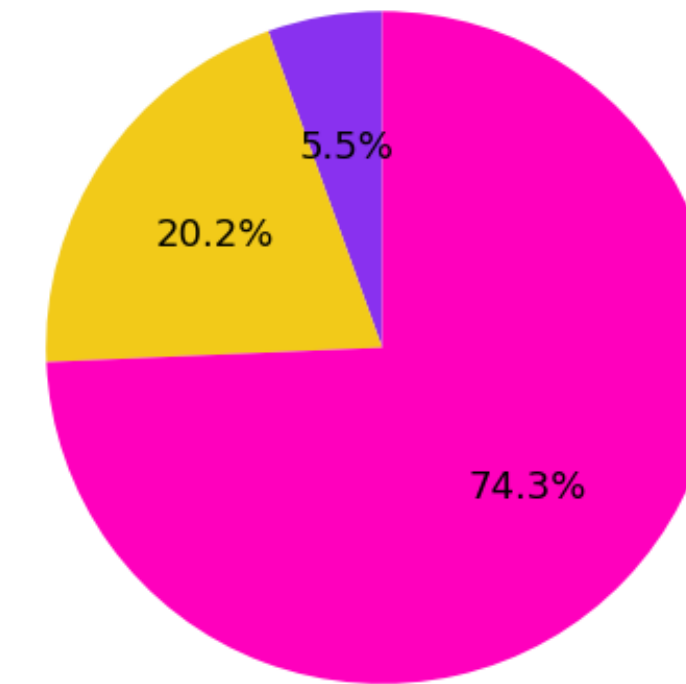
majority worked from home



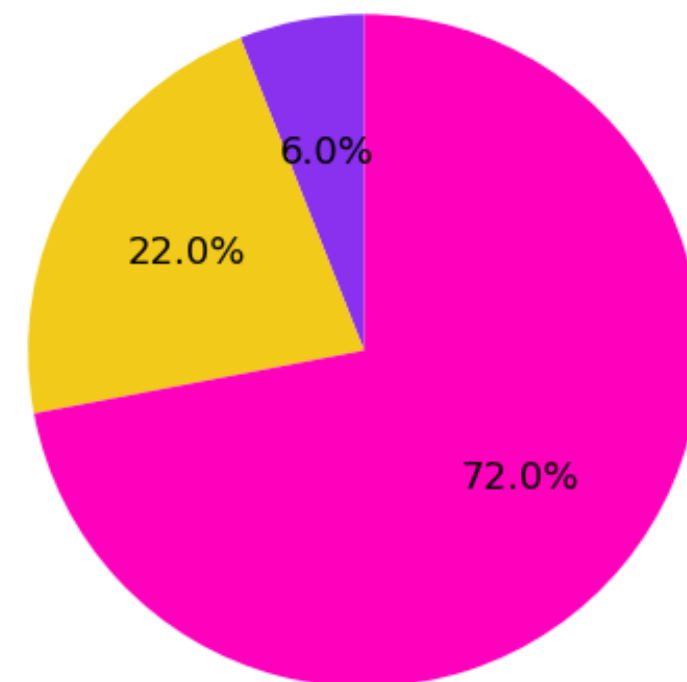
home-country



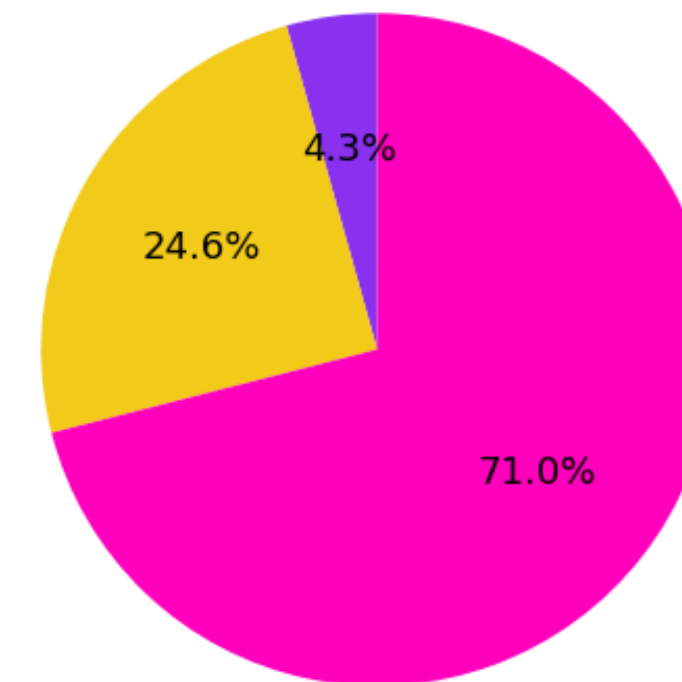
abroad



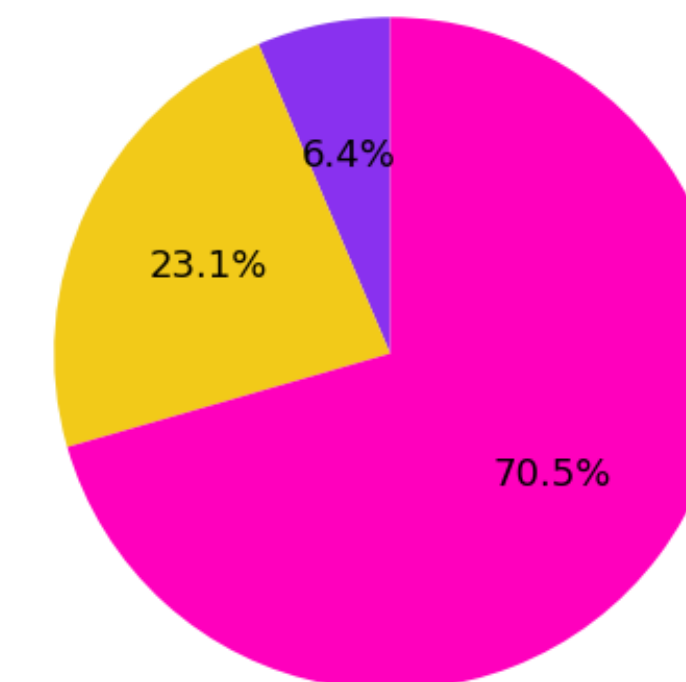
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postdoc



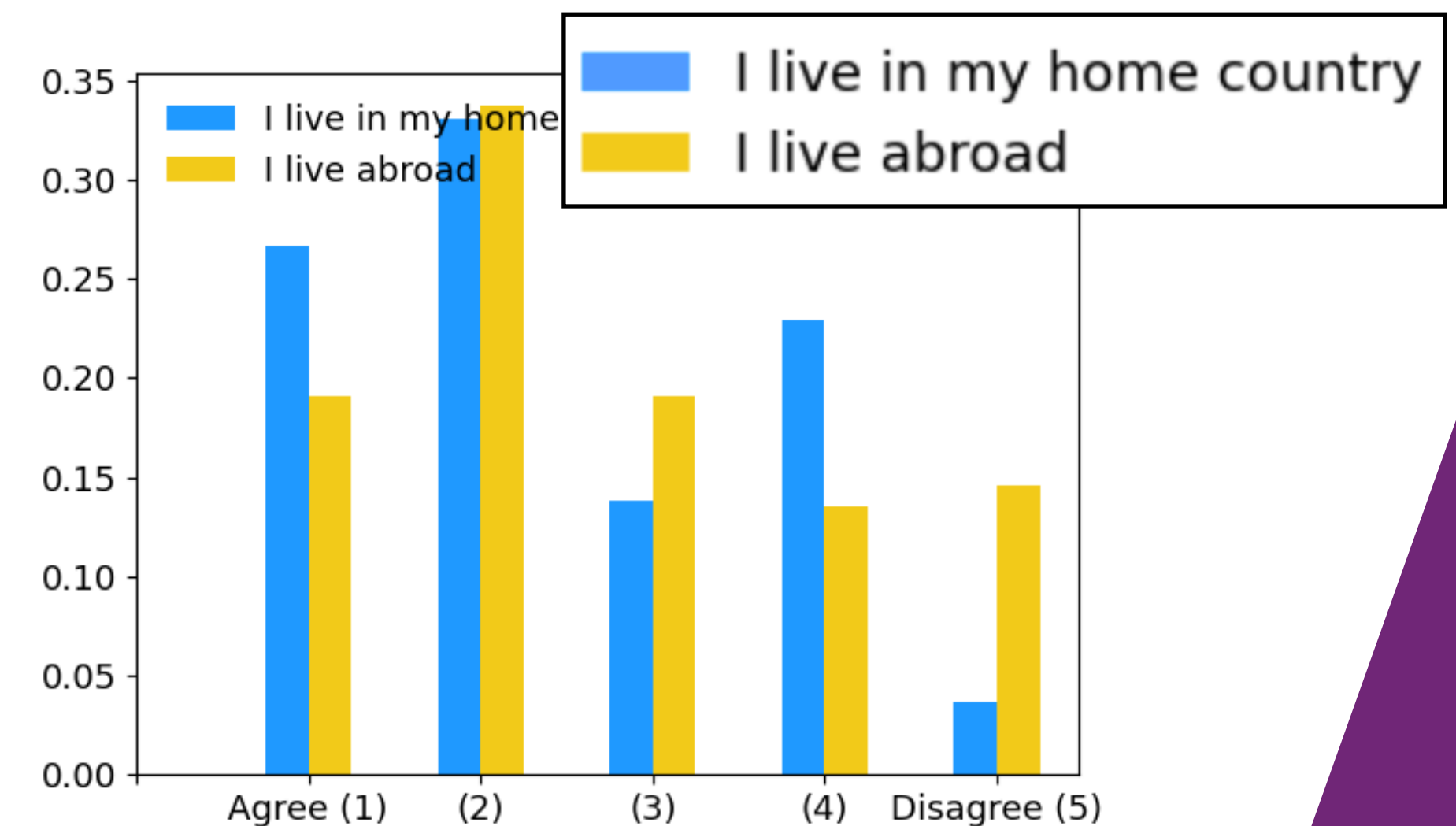
PhD



EQUIPMENT WORKING @ HOME

- 1/3 of all respondents felt uncomfortable with the home ergonomics
- Relatively easy to solve, enough resources at Nikhef. Does everyone have access to this?

I feel comfortable with my current remote work ergonomics

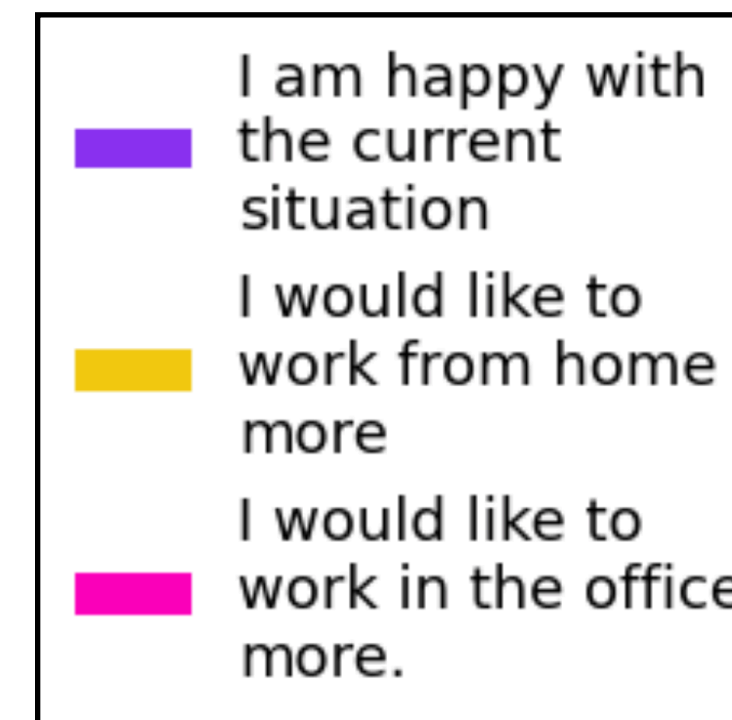
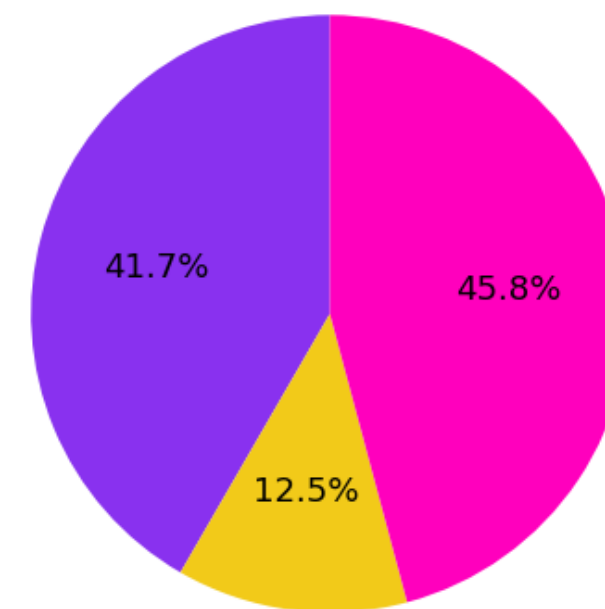


HAPPY TO WORK @ HOME?

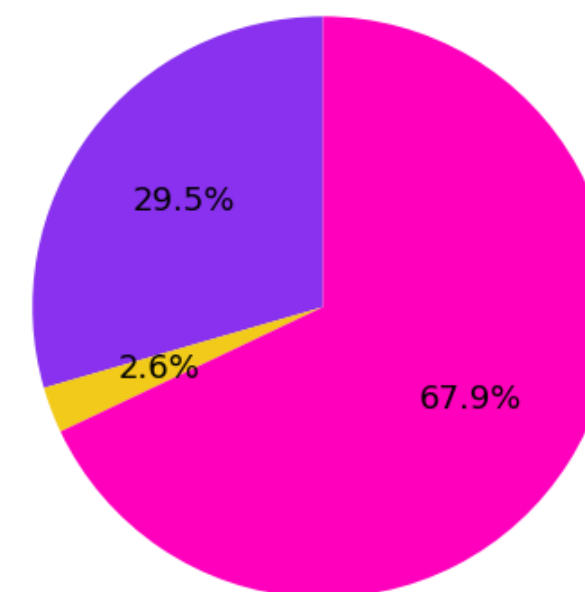
- Permanent staff is more happy about working at home than any other group
- No clear separation between people living abroad

How happy are you with your working from home/office situation?

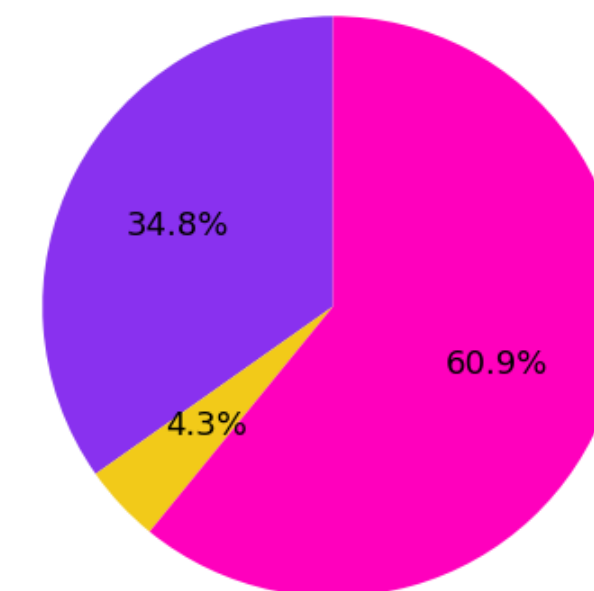
permanent



PhD



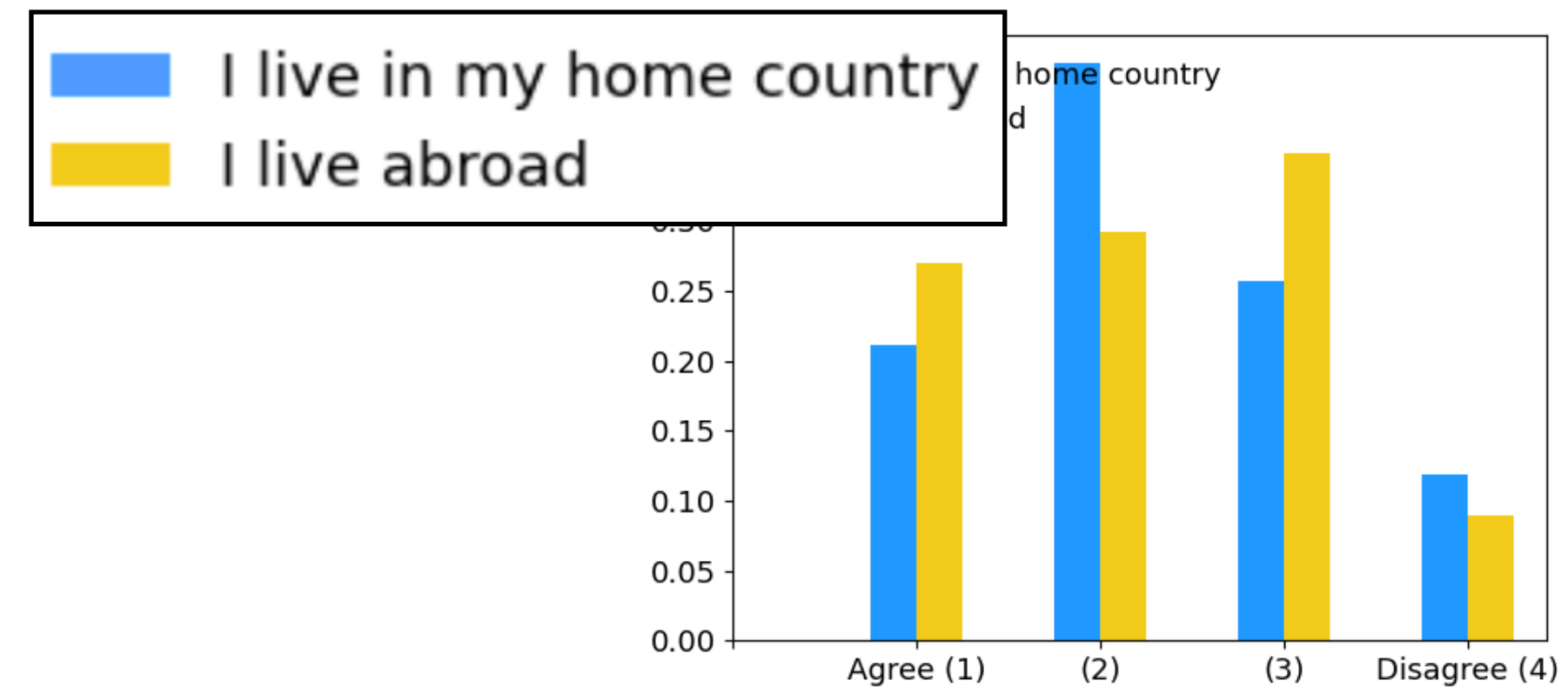
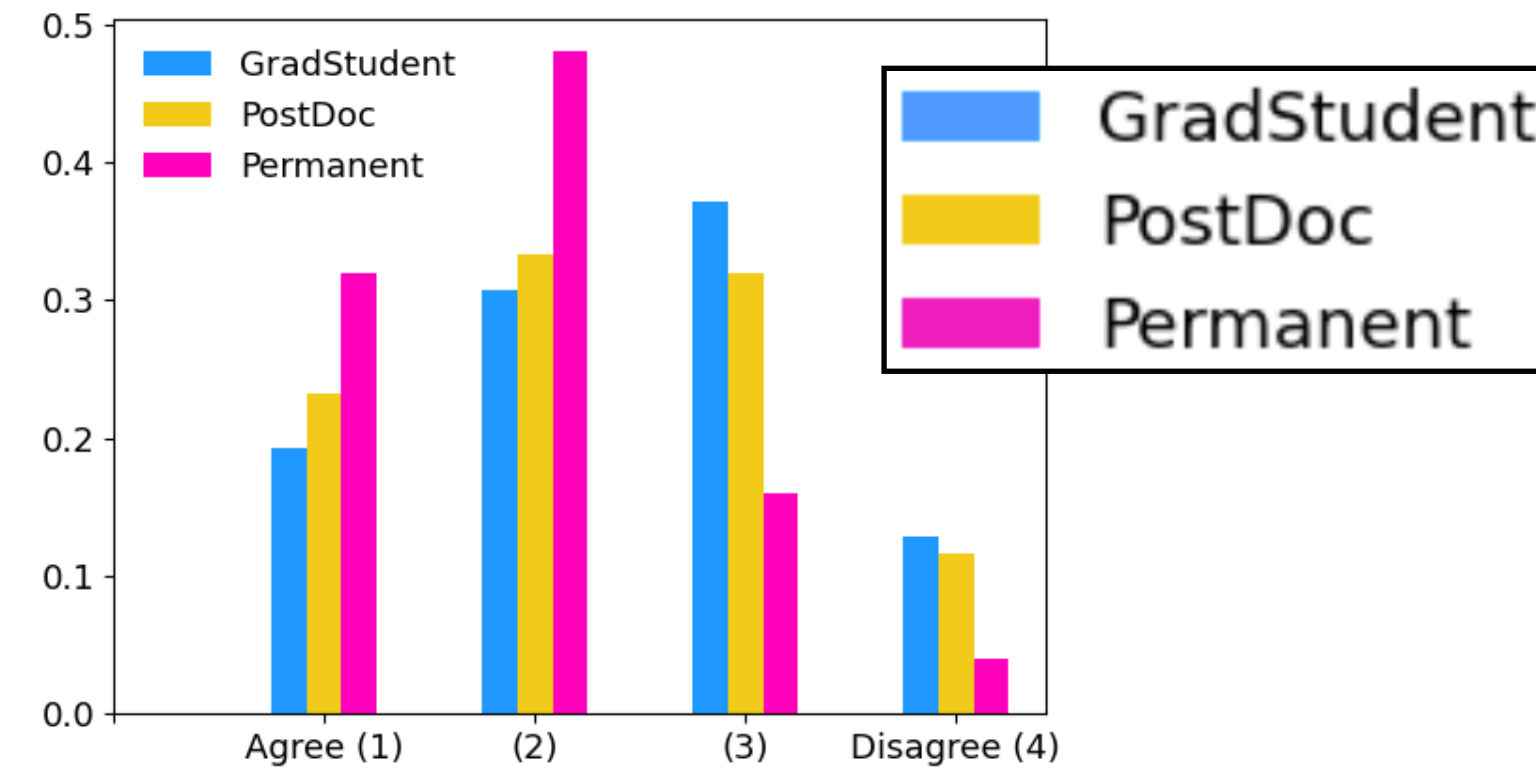
postdoc



COMMUNICATION COLLEAGUES

- 40% of postdocs and PhDs, 20% of permanent staff are unhappy about the frequency of the communication with colleagues

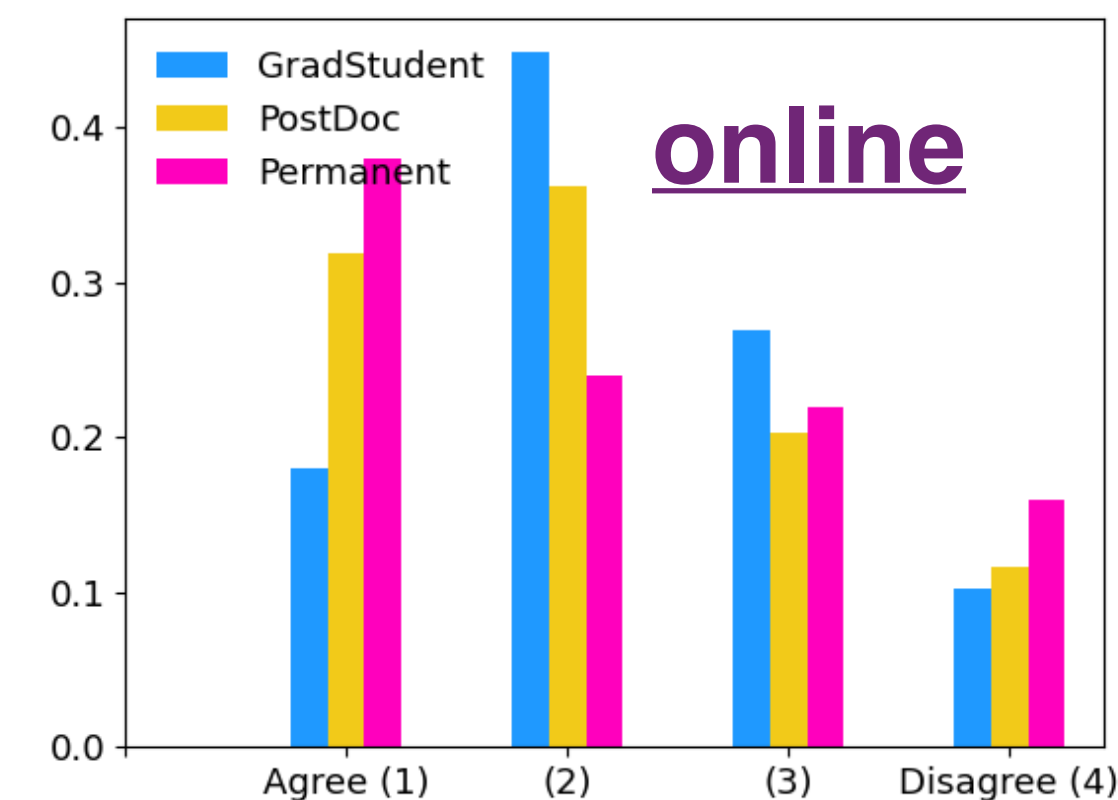
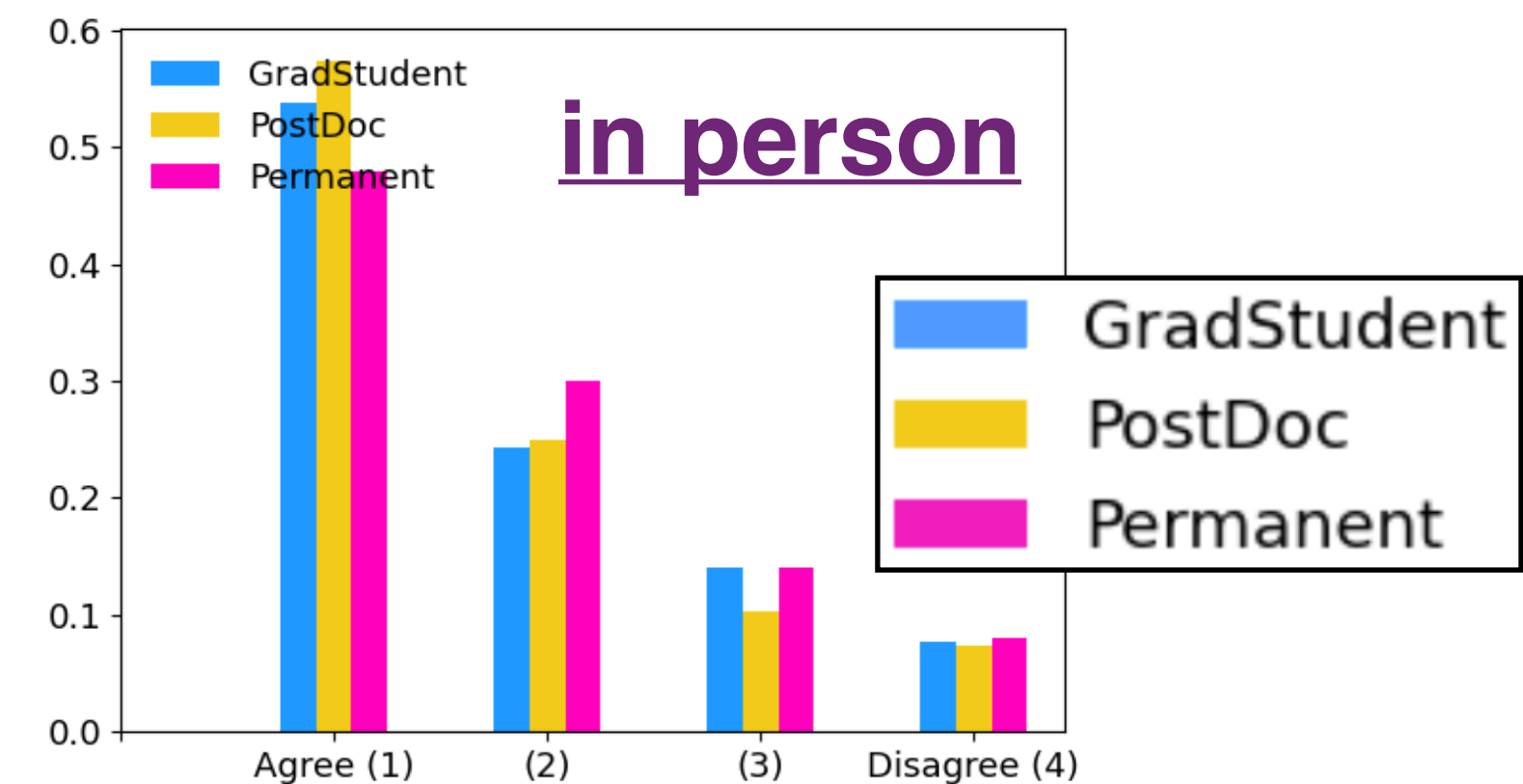
I am happy with how often I communicate with colleagues



COMMUNICATION WITH COLLEAGUES II

- Situation now different from December
- Arrange meetups in person
 - Nice initiative: peer-of-the-week by Mara Senghi Soares to check in on colleagues
- Online possibilities:
 - work-related: Mattermost/Slack
 - informal: online games and coffee chats
 - big differences between people's interest

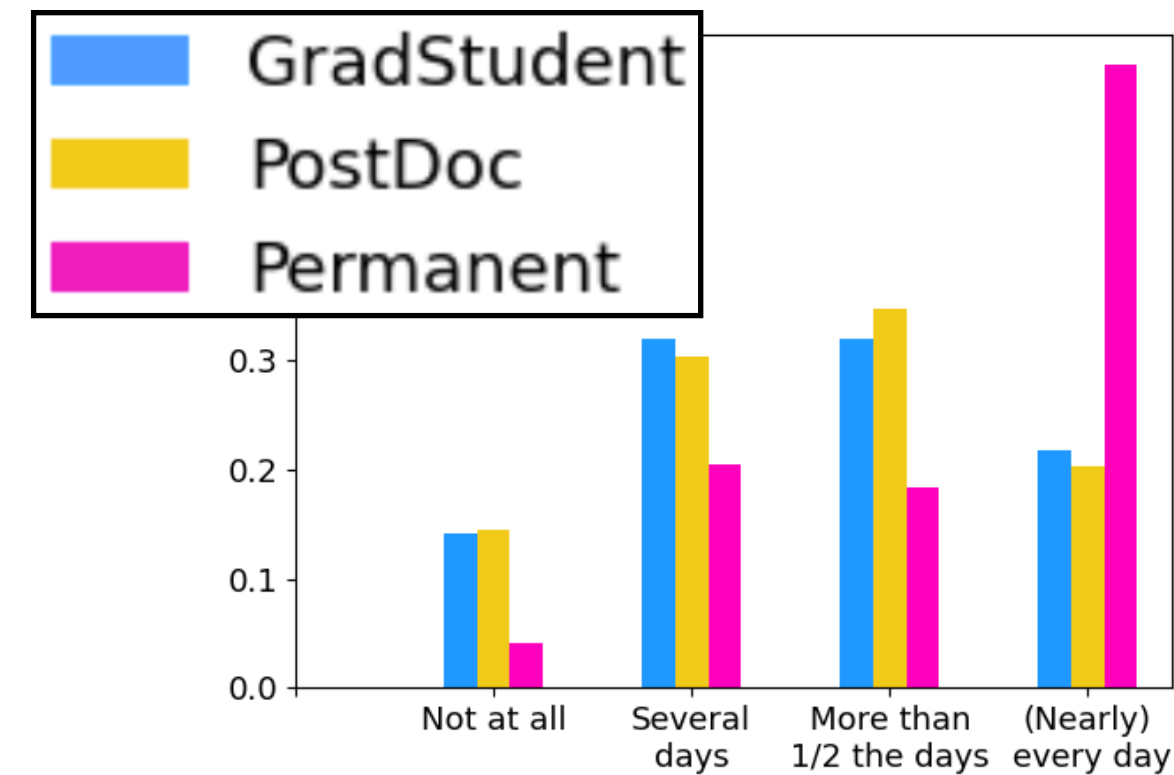
I am interested in regular meetup with my coworkers



MOTIVATION TO WORK

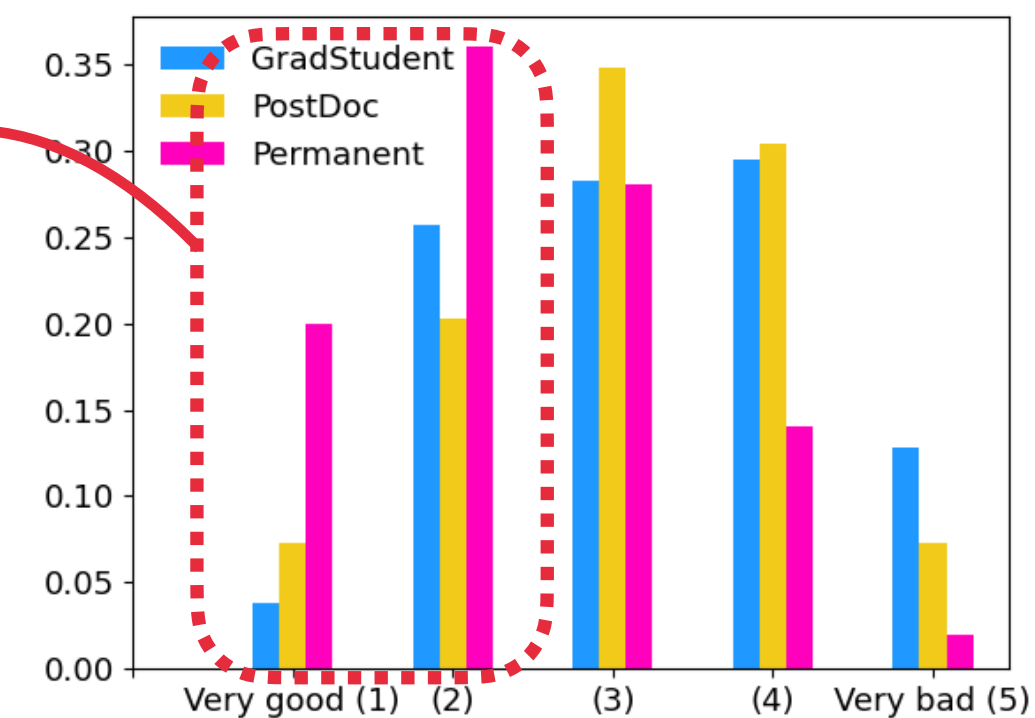
- Self-assessment of the productivity is low for postdocs and PhDs.
- Correlation(self-productivity assessment, motivation) = 0.5
- Motivation and productivity slightly worse when living abroad

Do you feel motivated to work?



How would you rate your productivity compared to pre-corona?

Q to those that are extra productive:
Are you aware what happened to the people that used to knock on your door?



SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE MOTIVATION

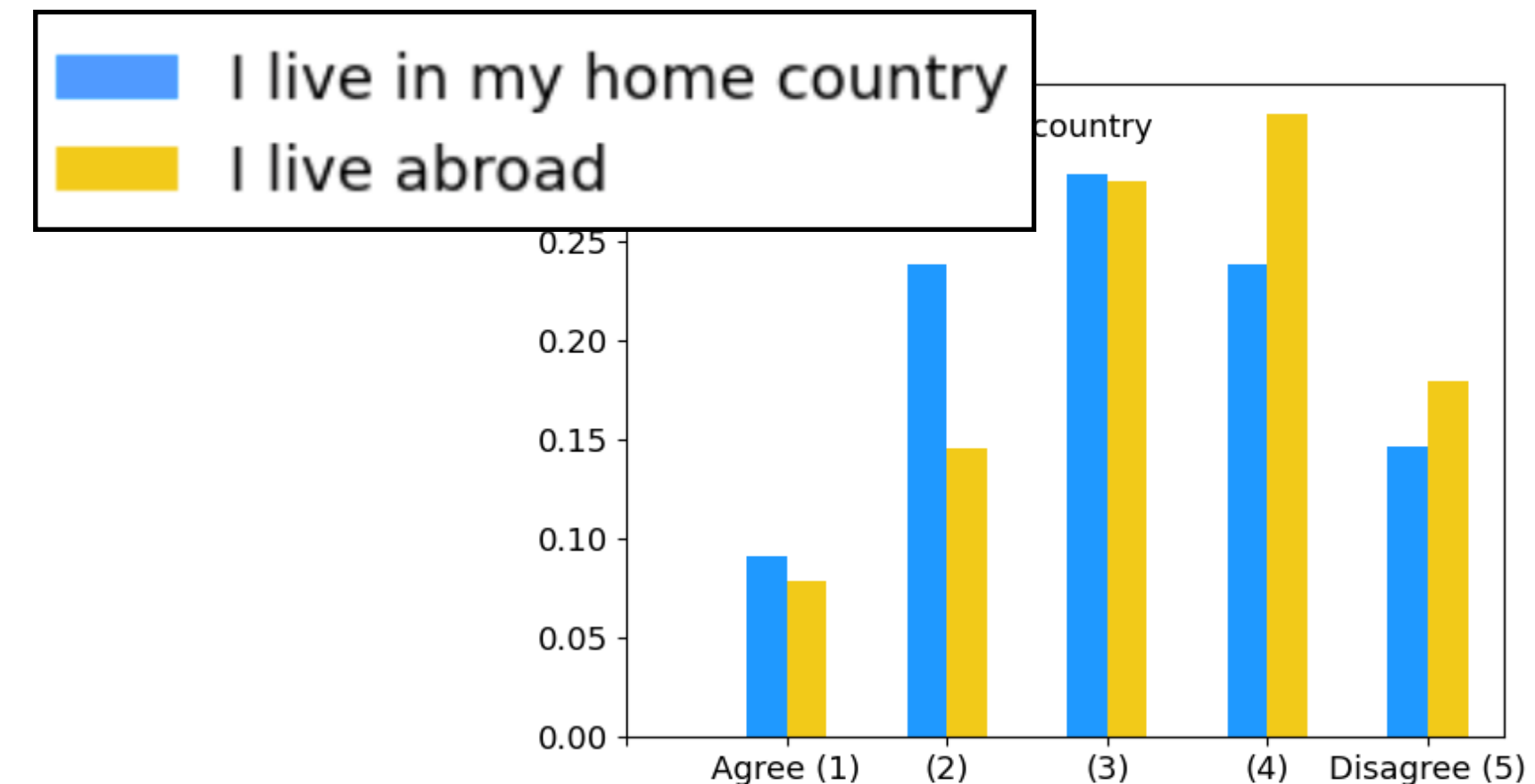
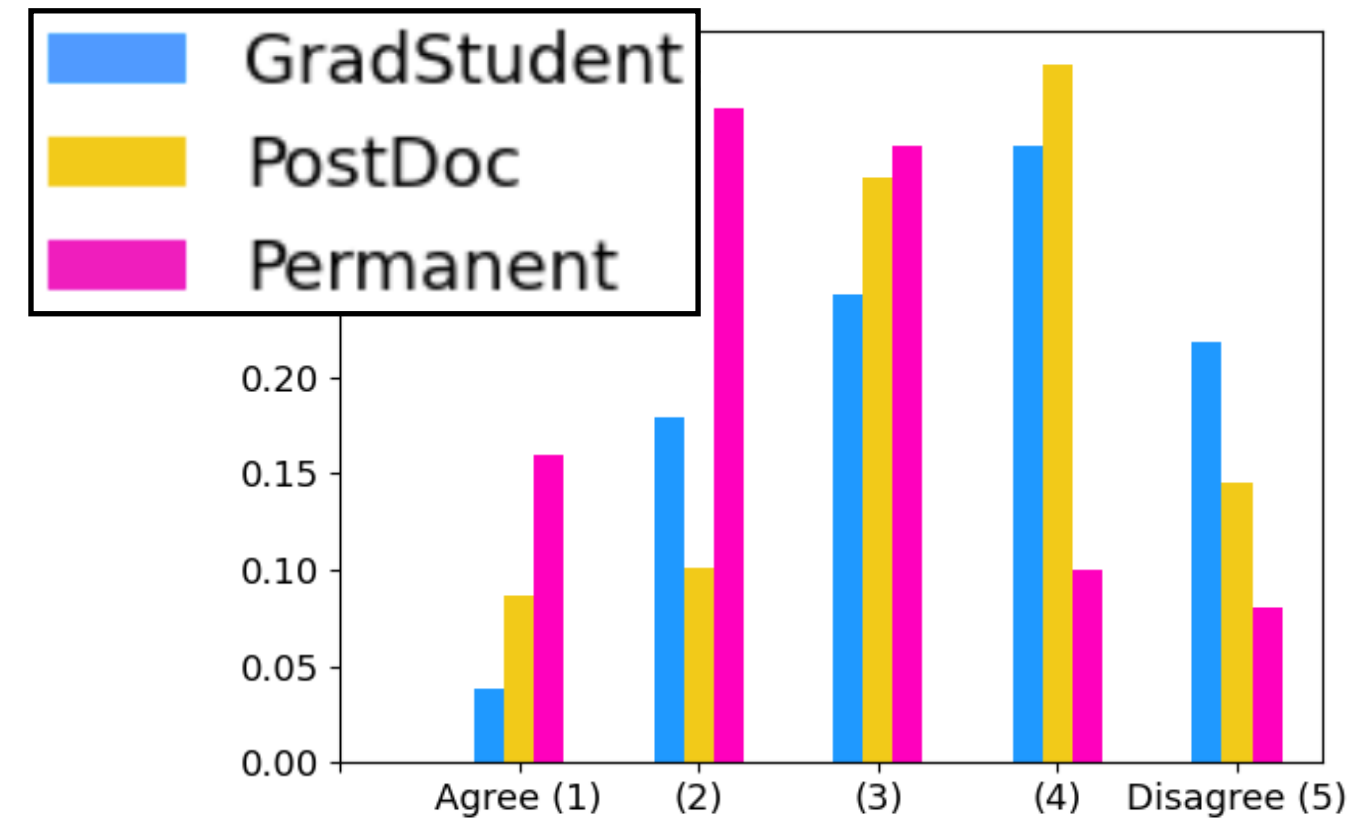
- Can help to reassure people it's OK to be less effective.
- Allow people to be flexible, focus on bits of their jobs that they are more motivated to do to get going again.
- Ensure everyone receives regular feedback from *someone*, not necessarily group leader or supervisor

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

About 50% of graduate students and postdocs are not able to maintain a work-life balance.

- Have the similar imbalance existed before pandemic?
- Encourage people to disconnect, take holidays etc.

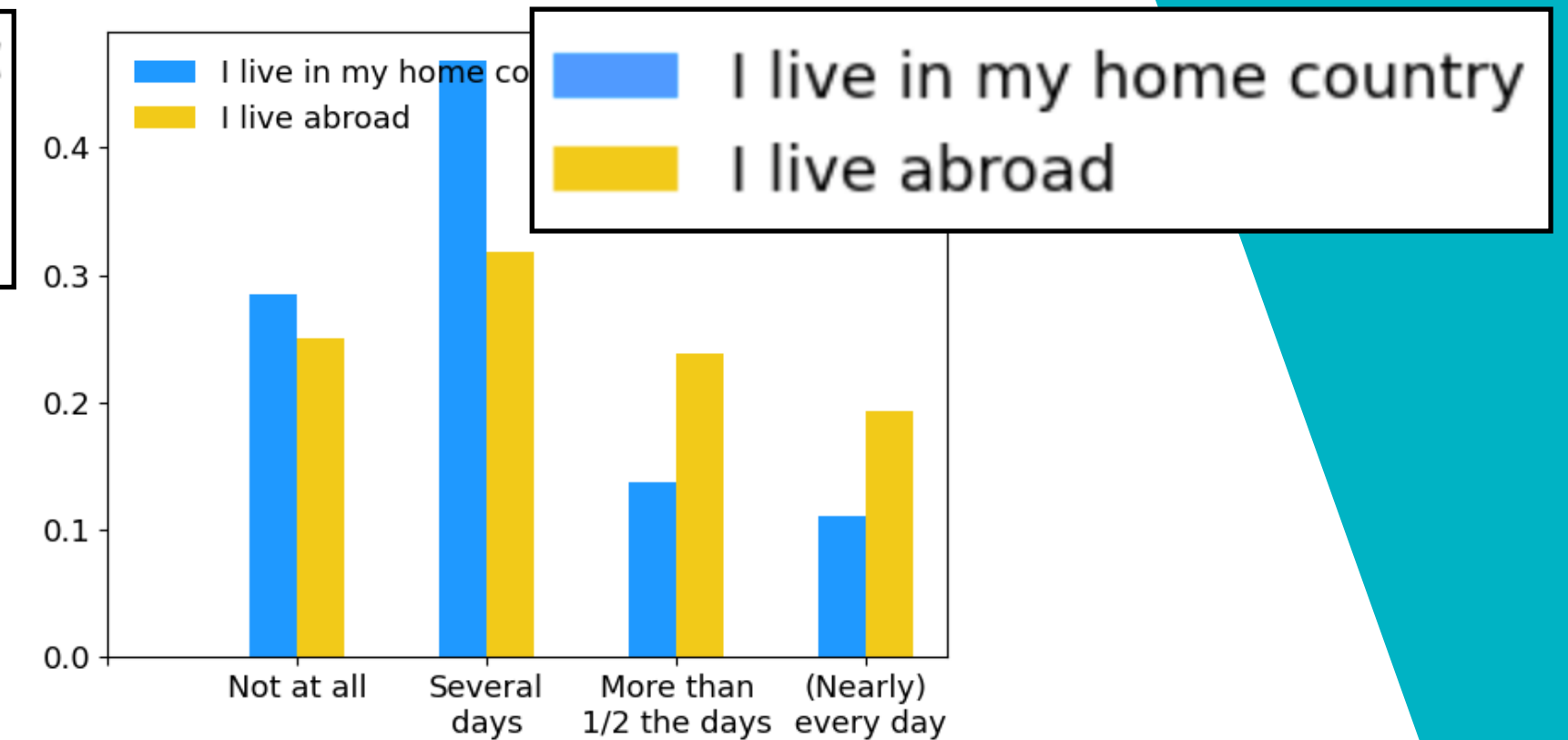
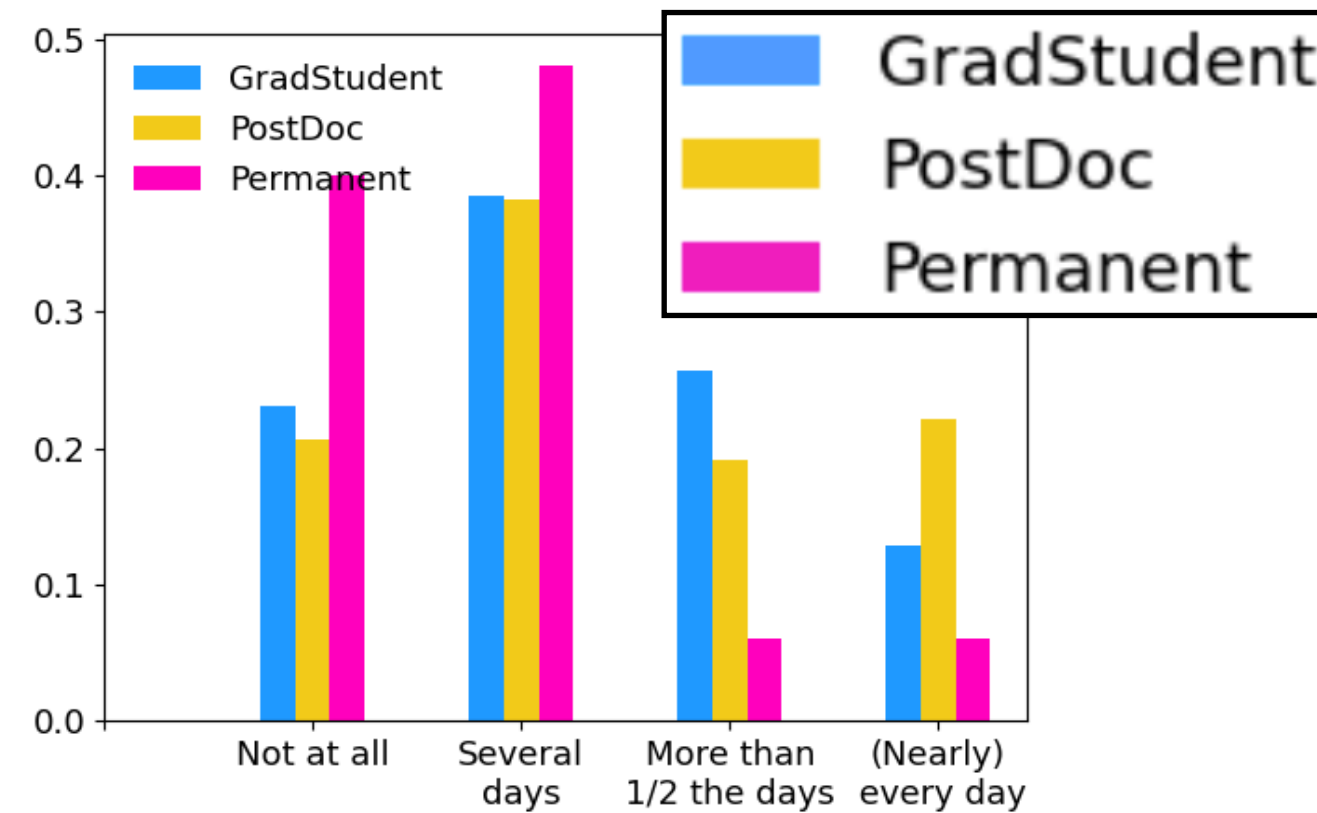
I have been able to maintain a good balance between my work and personal life



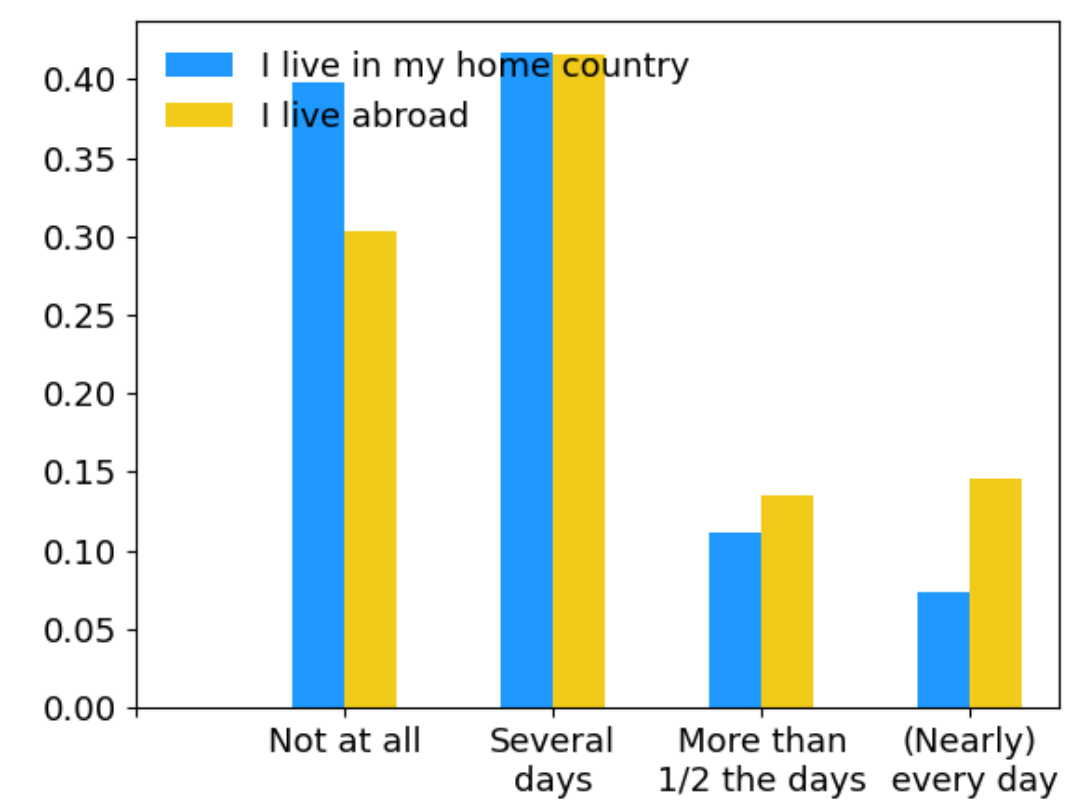
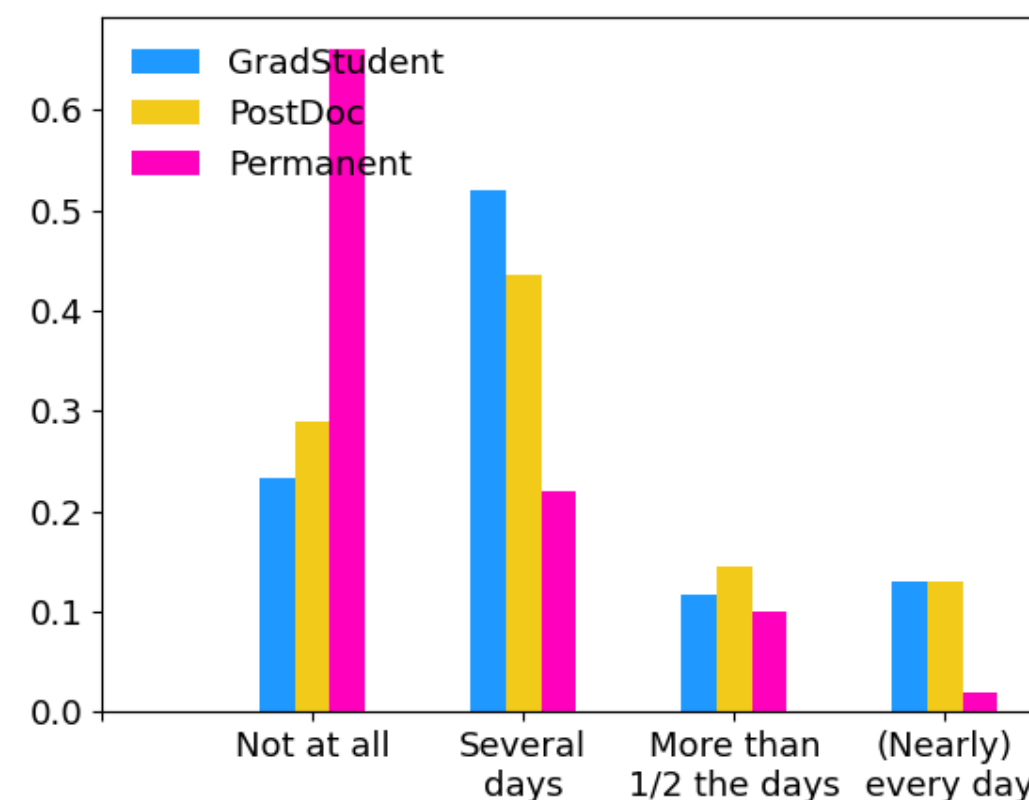
ANXIETY

- 40% of early-career anxious > half days
- Living abroad makes you almost twice more likely to be anxious > half days

Are you feeling more nervous, anxious or on edge?



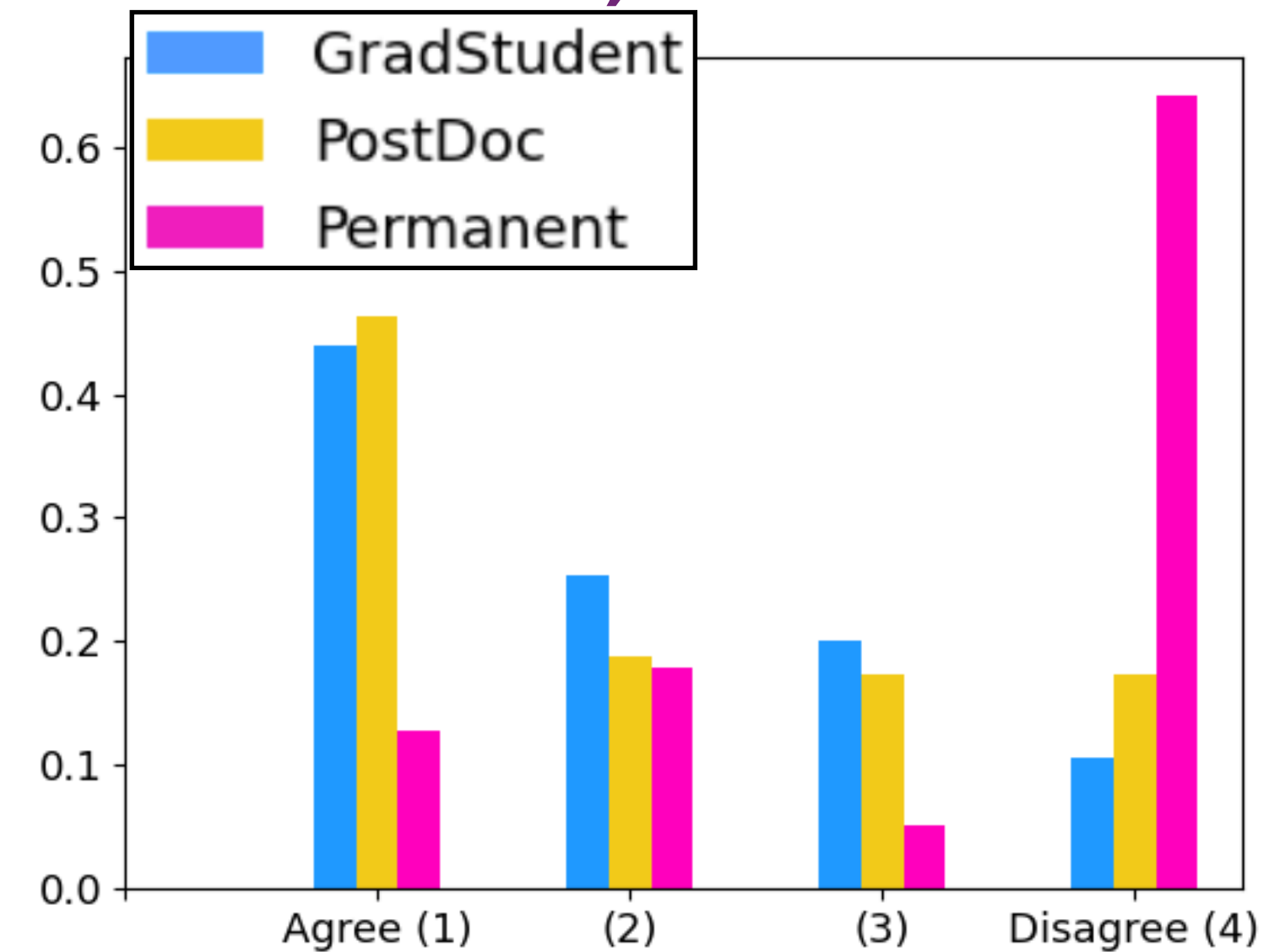
Are you feeling down or helpless?



JOB PROSPECTS

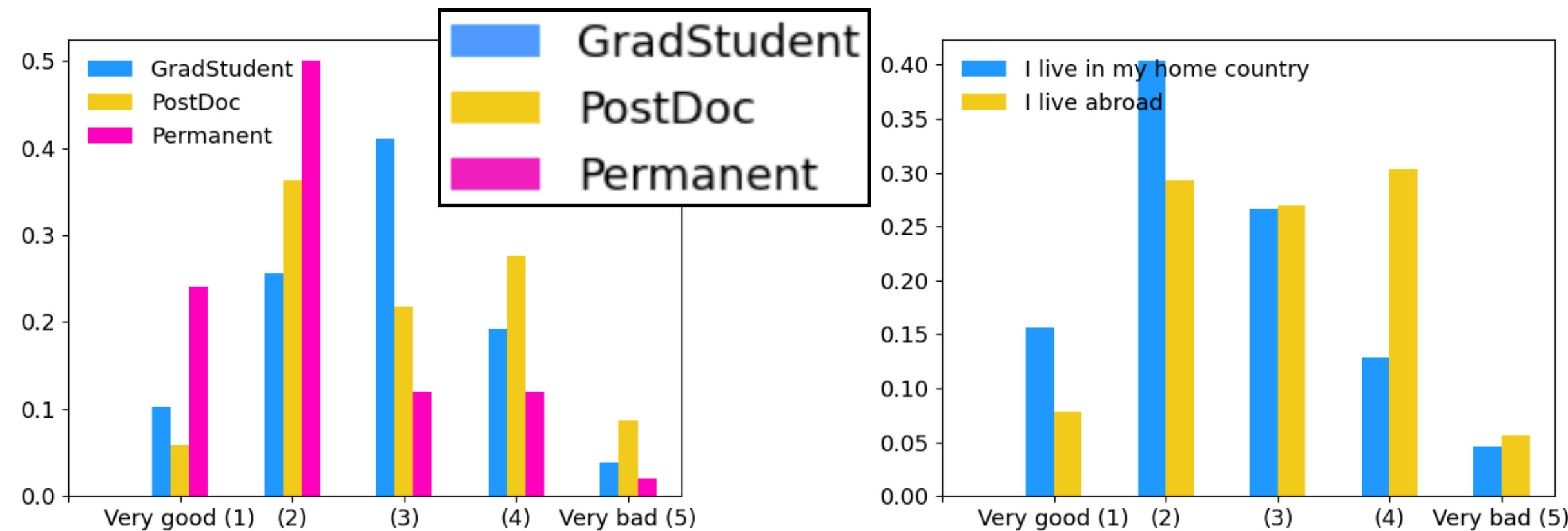
- Worries about job prospects are always there
- Additional fears to not be visible enough within large collaborations
- Good news: little worries about financial situation

I am worried about finding a job in this situation (both inside or outside academia)

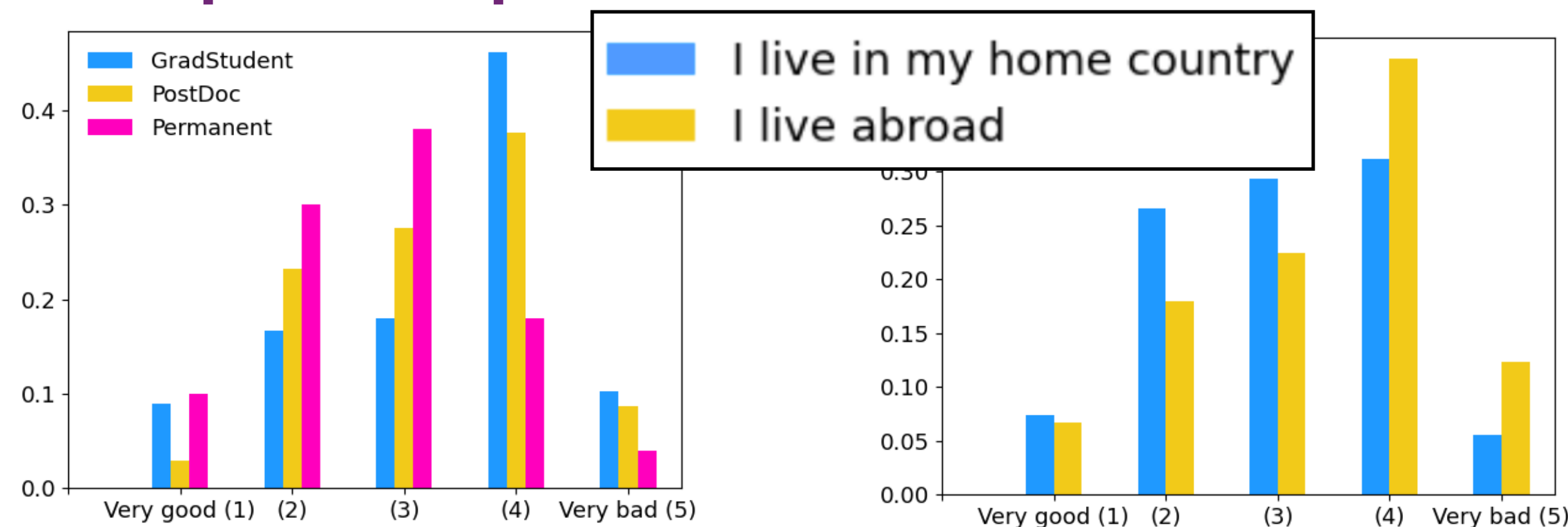


MENTAL HEALTH

How would you rate your mental health?



How would you rate your mental health compared to pre-corona?

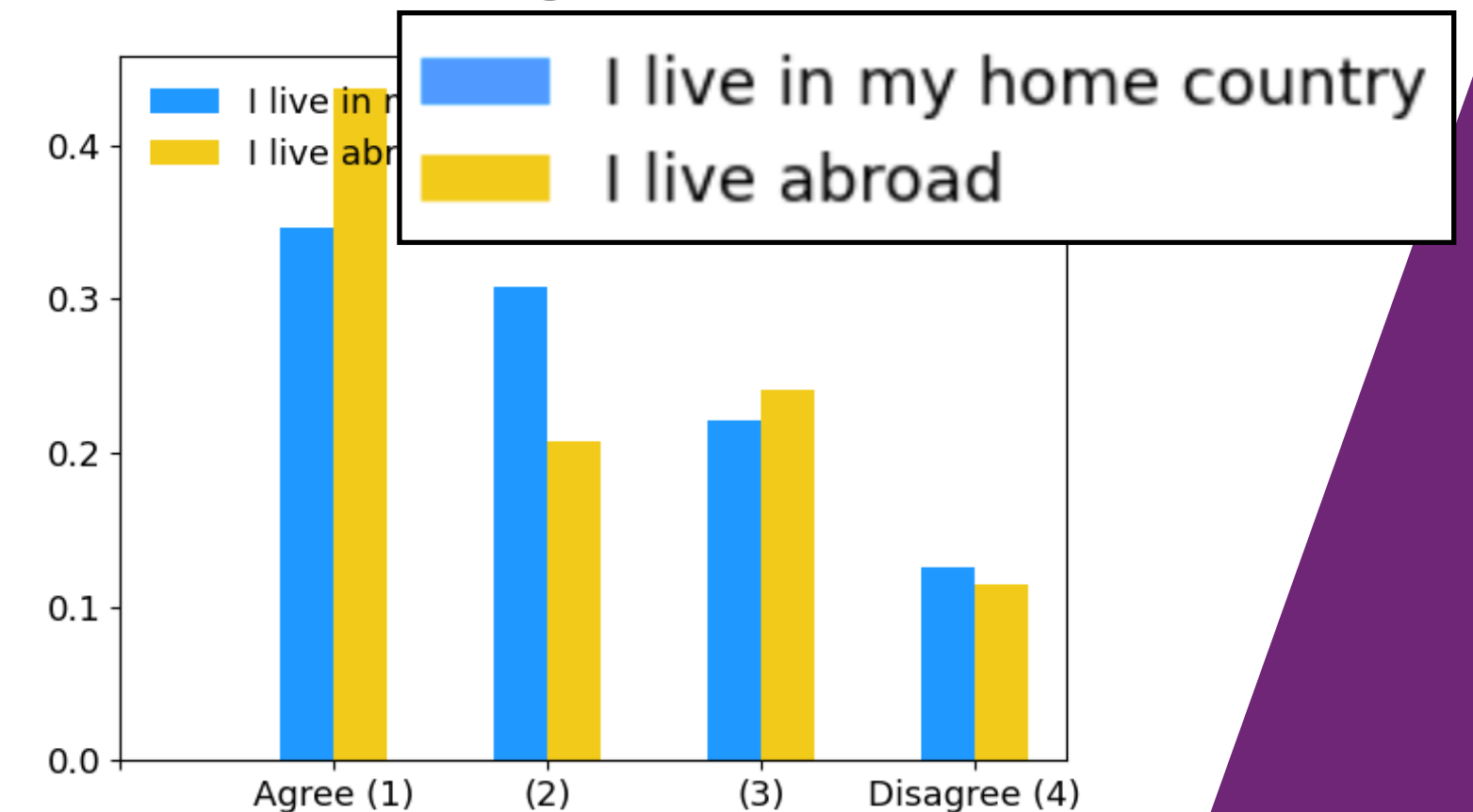
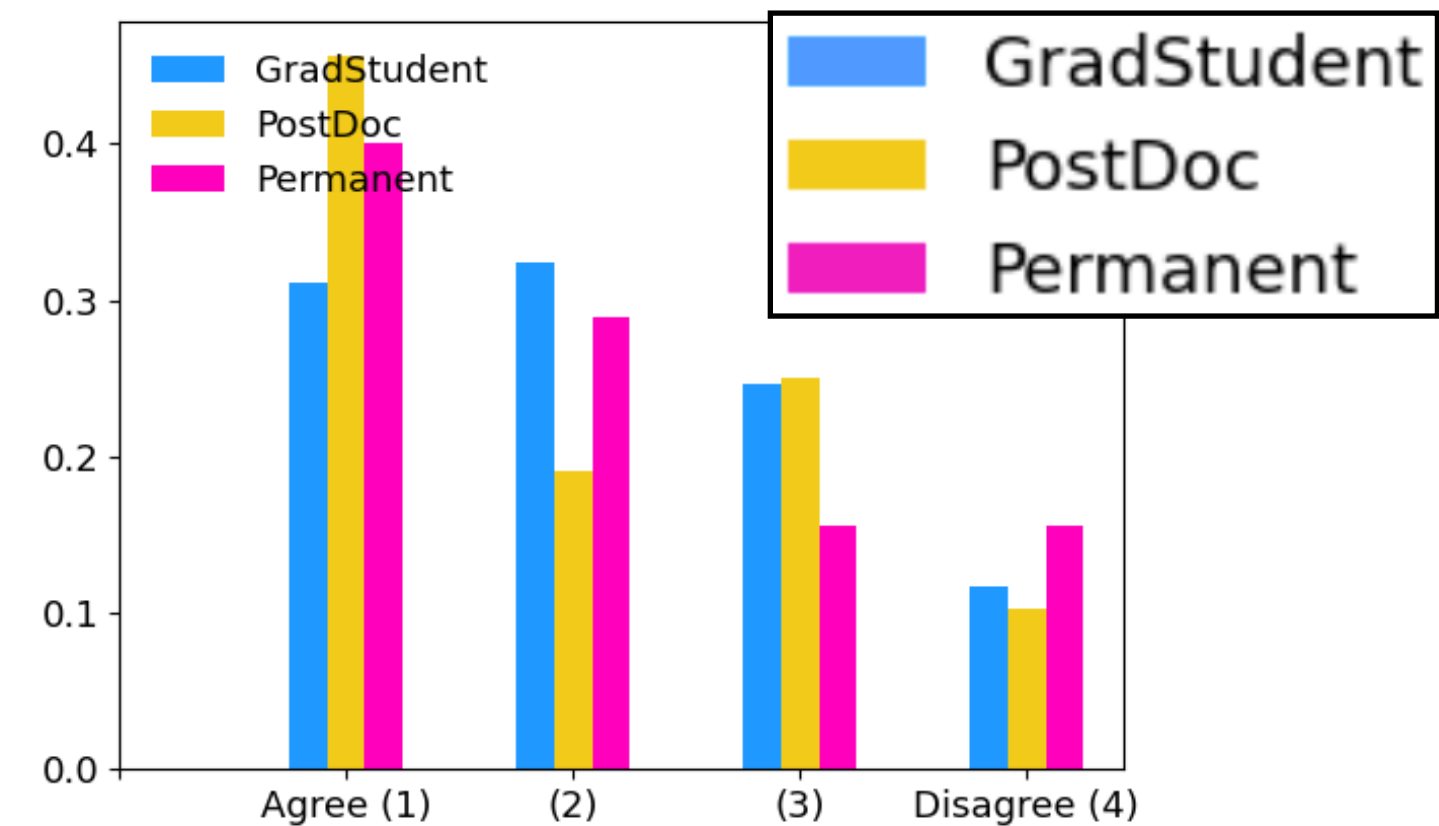


- Self-assessment
- **Mental health has deteriorated compared to pre-corona for 50% of PhDs, 45% of postdocs and 20% of permanent staff**
- General mental health is location dependent

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SUPERVISORS

- 30% of the PhDs and postdocs don't get enough support from their supervisors.
- Do not hesitate to reach out to someone who seems to struggle
- Is professional support available?
 - Accessible in terms of language, finances, waiting time?
 - Nice initiatives for lunchtime mindfulness/relaxation sessions

I have enough support from my supervisor regarding mental health



NICE INITIATIVES

- Using informal tools to seek help from colleagues
- Informal meetings via zoom or in person (in small groups)
- University mental health facilities
- Active lunchtimes
- Changed phrasing in Stan's email: "If you cannot work well at home, for whatever reason, realise there is room to come to Nikhef."



CONCLUSIONS

- Good start to discuss mental health in academia regardless of covid-19
- Uncertain prospects for postdoctoral researchers, *Nature* 588 (2020) 181
- If possible extend current PhD and post-graduate contract, and **provide clarity**

