



8:30am – 10:00am

Where the rubber meets the road: The real life impact of policy on Canadian postdocs

*Panel Organizer: Joseph S. Sparling
Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars*

Where the Rubber Meets the Road: The Real-Life Impact of Policy on Canadian Postdoctoral Scholars

Friday, November 9th, 2018



Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars
Association Canadienne des Stagiaires Post-doctoraux



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Session Overview

Time	Event
13 min	Presentation #1 The Canadian Postdoctoral Training System (JS Sparling)
12 min	Presentation #2 Stories from the Front Line: The Challenges Facing Canadian Postdocs (K Hegde)
45 min	Presentation #3 Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Panel Discussion on Solutions to Improve the Canadian Postdoctoral Experience Presenter/Moderator: J Haverfield Panelists: R Fernandez, D Bérubé, JS Sparling
20 min	Question Period



THE 2016 CANADIAN NATIONAL POSTDOCTORAL
SURVEY REPORT



Jadavji NM, Adi MN, Corkery TC, Inoue J, Van Benthem, K. (2016). *The 2016 Canadian National Postdoctoral Survey Report*. CAPS/ACSP.

www.caps-acsp.ca



The Canadian Postdoctoral Training System

Joseph S. Sparling



Presentation #1



What's a Postdoc?



A postdoc is an individual with a doctoral degree (or medical professional equivalent) holding a temporary position that is primarily designed to provide mentorship and advanced training for a career as an independent researcher and/or a faculty member in academia.

Postdoc Training: Intention vs. Reality

The postdoc position was originally intended to be a brief period of training after a PhD to prepare people for tenure-track research faculty positions.

Over time...

- Increased reliance on postdocs and PhDs as low-cost labour to drive academic research

"...there are not enough faculty positions for the number of postdocs either...it is a serious problem and is directly related to me leaving Canada for an academic position in the United States." –Survey Respondent

positions relative to number of trainees
ing p

"Limited opportunity for tenure track positions- competition is too fierce, and you need to have multiple postdocs to even be considered." –Survey Respondent

CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey

Postdoc Training: The Reality Today

Lengthening of postdoc training times

- More 'training time' required to become competitive for faculty positions
- Up to 8 years of training and 20+ publications is the norm in some fields

<20% of current postdocs are likely to attain tenure-track faculty positions

(Edge & Munro, 2015)



Presentation #1



The Aging of the Postdoc Population

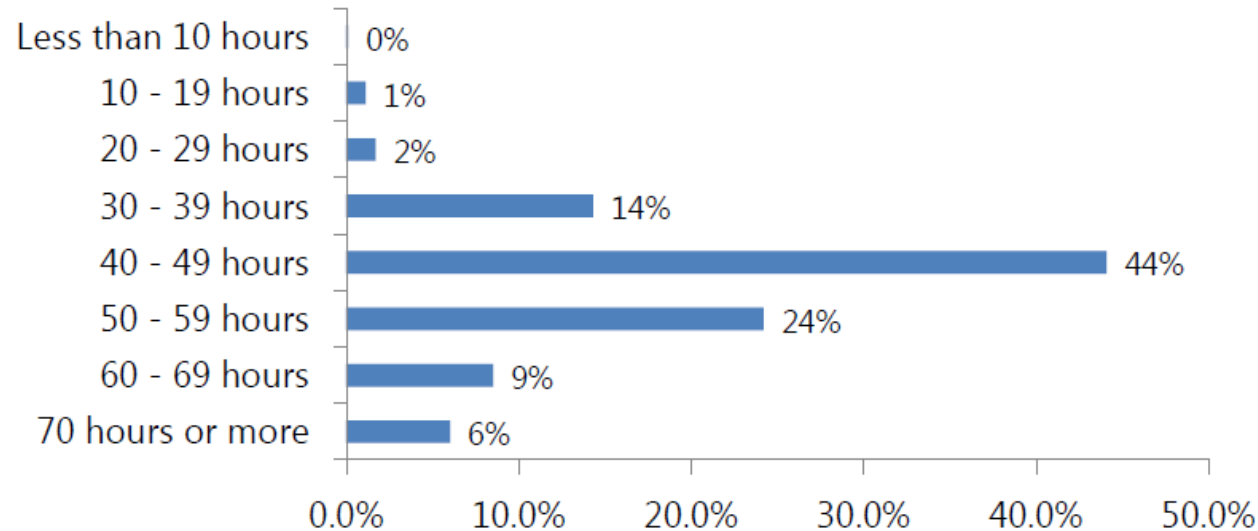


- Average age = 34 years old
- 2/3 married
- 1/3 have children (50% ≥ 2 kids)
- Adult / family oriented life stage:
 - Settling down
 - Buying houses
 - Starting/planning families
 - Saving for retirement

CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey

Hours Worked and Compensation

Hours worked per week (2016)



Canadian Postdocs:

>40 hrs/week 83%

>50 hrs/week 39%

>60 hrs/week 15%

**Average FT employee
(25 yrs+) in Canada:**

39.3 hrs/week*

Compensation	Canadian-funded postdocs in Canada	Foreign-funded postdocs in Canada	Canadian postdocs working abroad
Est. average annual income (CAD\$)	\$46,600 (47% <\$45,000)	\$55,500	\$54,000

CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey

*Jan-Aug 2016 Labour Force data (StatsCan)



Presentation #1



Foregone Wages for Canadian-trained Postdocs

Ferguson & Wang, 2014 – Labour market outcomes for Canadian PhDs

Est. gross annual earnings of 2009-2010 grads working FT in 2013

	Master	Doctorate	Doctorate-working in post-doctorate position	Doctorate-working in a non post-doctorate position	
	dollars				
Percentile 25 th	54,000	57,000	45,000	65,000	
Median	70,000	75,000	50,000	82,000	\$32,000 / year
Percentile 75 th	88,000	96,000	63,000	100,000	
CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey			Median \$47,500	\$75,000	\$27,500 / year
			Current postdoc in Canada	Former Canadian postdoc	



Labour Market Outcome for Canadian-trained Postdocs

	PhD holder (No Postdoc Training)	Former Postdocs (n=479; CAPS' 2016 Survey)
Unemployment rate	4% (Edge & Munro, 2015)	9%
Annual income	\$82,000 (Ferguson & Wang, 2014)	\$75,000

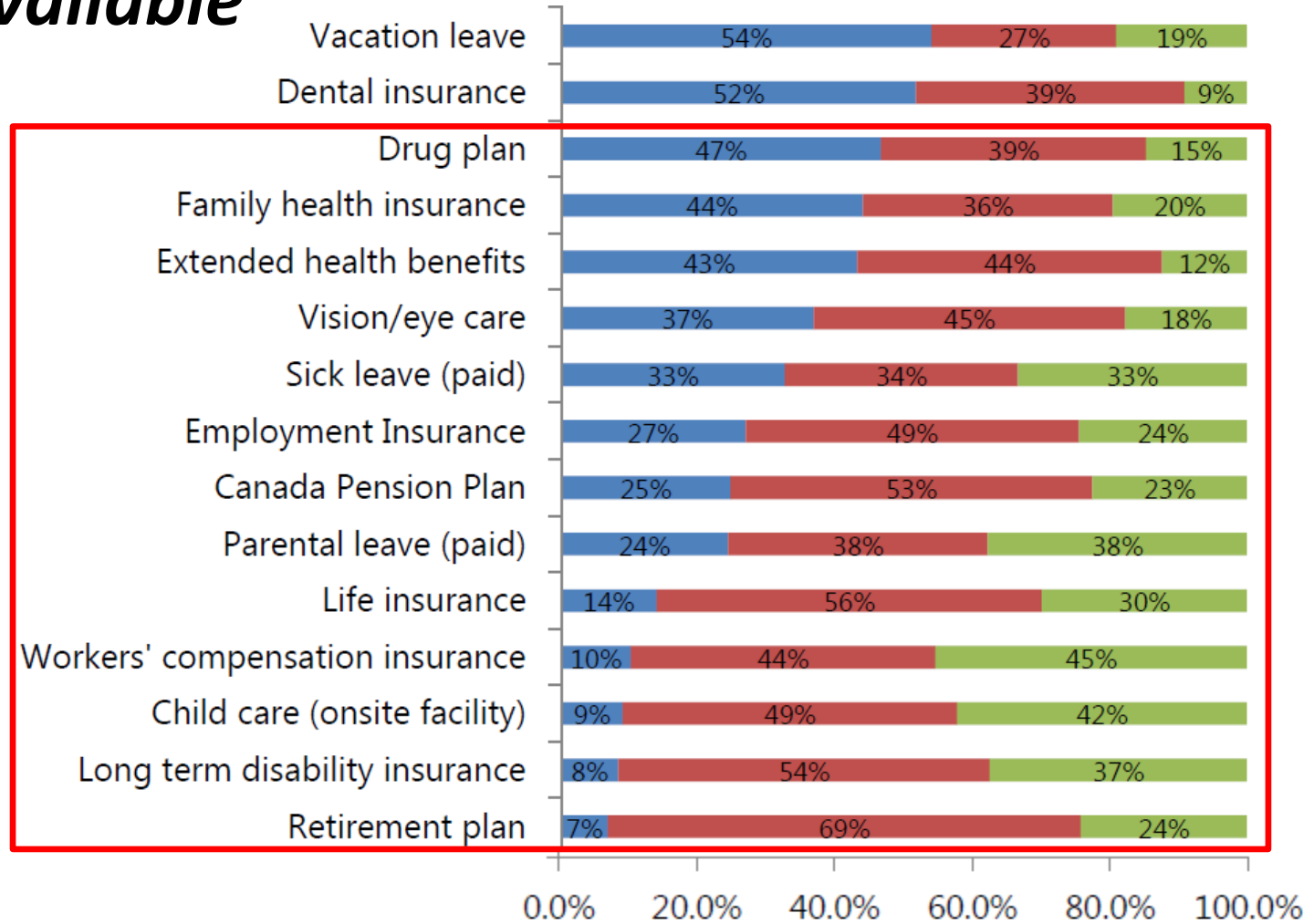
Cumulative earnings:

No evidence that former postdocs trained in Canada ever surpass (or even catch up to) the average Canadian PhD graduate who goes straight into the workforce

TAKEHOME:

No evidence of a labour market advantage for postdoc training

Benefits Available



CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey

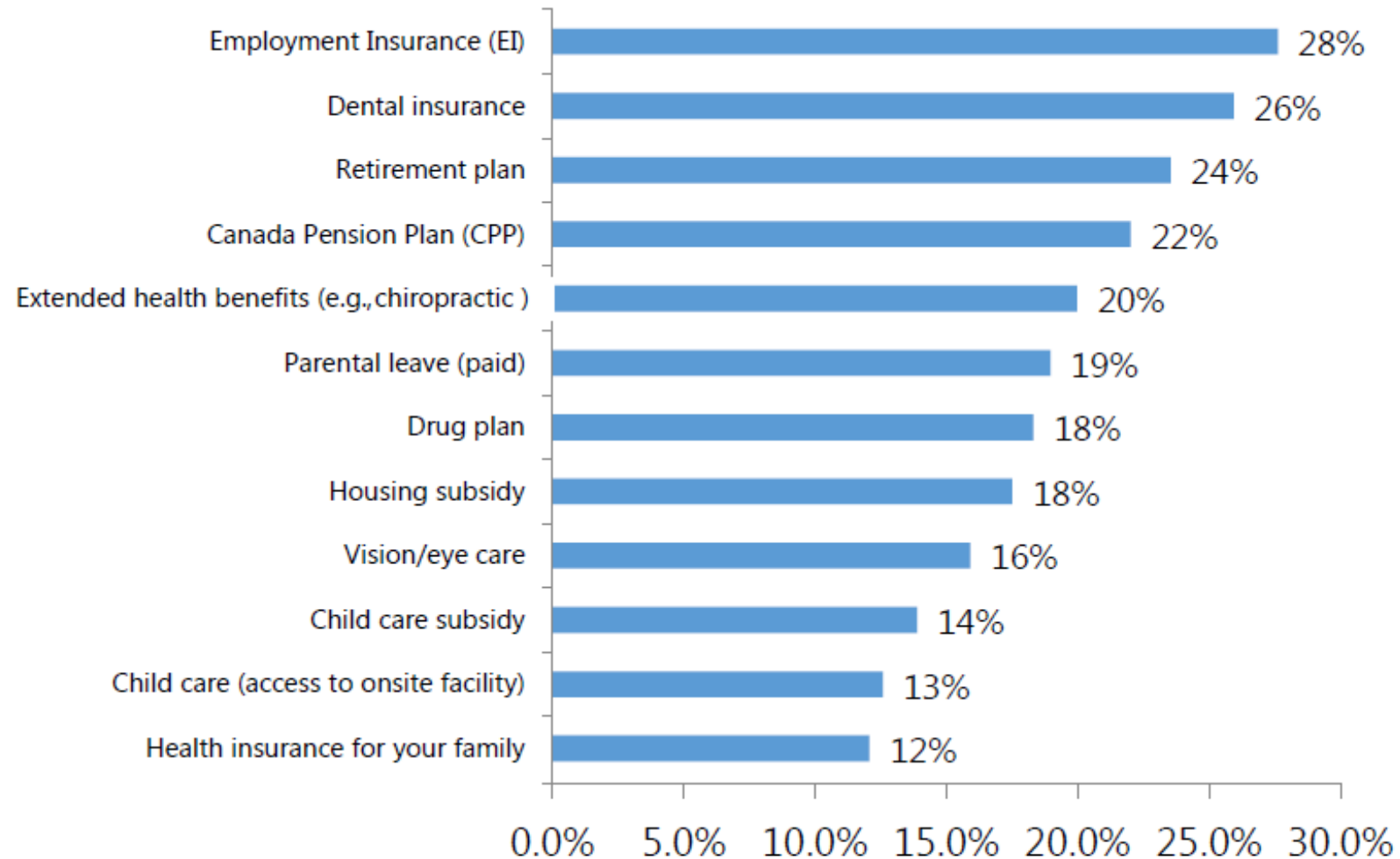
■ Available ■ Not Available ■ Don't know



Presentation #1



“Top 3” benefits desired among postdocs



CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey



Presentation #1



The True Cost of Training for Postdocs in Canada

Foregone Wages

Lost Retirement Income

Duration of postdoc	Foregone wages	Duration of postdoc	Lost CPP retirement income/yr	Lost CPP income from 65-85 years
1 year	\$30,000	1 year	\$300	\$6,000
2 years	\$60,000	2 years	\$600	\$12,000
3 years (median)	\$90,000	3 years (median)	\$900	\$18,000
4 years	\$120,000	4 years	\$1,200	\$24,000
5 years ("max")	\$150,000	5 years ("max")	\$1,500	\$30,000

Estimated Cost Due to Lack of Health/Dental Benefits: \$2,000/year per household*

(*estimate based on Sanmartin et al., 2014 assuming household income at or below median in Canada)



Presentation #1



The True Cost of Training for Postdocs in Canada

Assuming 3 years of postdoc training without employee status

Lost wages (~\$30k/year)	\$90,000
Lost retirement income	\$18,000
Health/dental expenses	\$6,000
Total	\$114,000

Employment Status of Postdocs in Canada

The 'Average' Postdoc

- **2016 Survey data:** ~30% of postdocs estimated to be employees
- **2018 Update: 'Average' postdoc in Canada now an employee?**
 - Unionization → internally-funded postdocs now employees at most universities
 - Majority of postdocs in Canada are “internally-funded”(range 50-85%)

Externally-funded postdocs (fellowship-holders)

- **Largely denied employee status**
- Few exceptions – employer expenses often deducted from postdoc \$

Government Labs also continue to deny postdocs employee status

- Government labs hire postdocs ('visiting fellows') to conduct research
- 2012 – CRA ruled a visiting fellow with federal funding was an employee
- Not yet implemented by all government labs

*Stories from the Front Line:
The Challenges Canadian Postdocs
Facing*

Krishnamoorthy Hegde



Presentation #2



Postdoc Salaries / Stipends

The Impact of Taxation

- All postdocs pay full federal income tax
 - Most postdocs pay 1 full year provincially income tax (except externally-funded/international postdocs in QC) studying after high school, and
 - Most postdoc take home is less than \$45,000/year. Sometimes less than a graduate student with Vanier scholarship (\$35,000 tax-free)
- average income in Canada

- Survey Respondent

Lack of Recognition of Years of Training/Experience

- Failure to acknowledge the value of the training and experience
- No set minimum pay in grant funds
- No guidelines for increasing pay with years of training
- Such schemes are supported by agencies in other countries (e.g., NIH)

Wage disparity is rampant in the Canadian Postdoc Training System

- Gross annual income for full time postdocs in Canada varies by >50%
- Minimum income standards \leq \$40,000/year are common
- Maximum income standards generally lacking – (some exceptional external awards)
- Pay of two postdocs who largely do the same work in the same lab may vary by >50%
- Fellowship holders are commonly forced to take a cut in pay once their fellowship expires

Trainee vs. Employee – Academia’s Dilemma

Included as insurable employment under current EI Regulations (SOR-96-332):

6 Employment in any of the following employments, unless it is excluded from insurable employment by any provision of these Regulations, is included in insurable employment:

(a) employment of a union member by the member's union in conducting union business, other than picketing in a labour dispute;

(b) employment of a person as an apprentice or trainee, notwithstanding that the person does not perform any services for their employer;

(c) employment of a person as a member of the clergy or as a member of a religious order;

(d) employment of a person in a barbering or hair-dressing establishment, where the person

(i) provides any of the services that are normally provided in such an establishment, and

(ii) is not the owner or operator of the establishment;

EI Regulations literally state the

opposite
“An apprentice or trainee is an employee”

at risk of being denied access to

and/or funding for training?

status are not mutually exclusive

state the opposite...

This is common knowledge today in most sectors of the workforce – academia is behind the times

Current to March 18, 2018

5

Last amended on December 3, 2017

External Award Holders vs. The Average Postdoc

What's wrong with this picture?

Average Canadian Postdoc

- The average postdoc has access to benefits but external award holders (arguably the 'best and the brightest') do not.
- **Internally-funded**
 - **Full federal & provincial income tax**
 - **Employee status**
 - Access to EI benefits & CPP
 - **Union member**
 - Access to health/dental
 - Access to other employee-style benefits & pensions
 - Bargaining rights

External Award Holders

- Situation making some postdocs reluctant to even apply for external funding opportunities??
- **Award from funding agencies**
 - **Full federal & provincial income tax** (except in QC)
 - **Trainee status**
 - No access to EI/ CPP
 - Maternity / parental leave – only if provided by funding body
 - **Excluded from unions**
 - Mostly, no such 'employee' benefits
 - No bargaining rights

Maternity & Parental Leave

Access to paid parental leave depends on source of funding

"I am very grateful for the four

- **Internally funded postdocs** from the Employer, Year covered has been raised to 6 months and hoping NSERC will see the value in raising it even further to the one year that **Trainees only** – typically no, unless provided by funding body
- **Externally funded postdocs** my non-academic friends got
- No recourse – EI/CPP Ruling precedence not in favour

- Survey Respondent

"Your words made tears stream down my face. Thank you for listening to our stories."

- Personal letter RE: CAPS' EI/CPP Rulings post

Why coverage provided by institutions/funding agencies in lieu of EI is not ideal

- Postdoc contract ends just before birth of child – unlikely to get a renewed contract so no paid leave
- 6 months at full pay – people need longer to adjust and get comfortable with their child

Family Planning

- Very difficult for someone on a short-term contract
- Postdocs who want children forced to take other jobs

Health/Dental Benefits

E.g., A university in western Canada recently stripped guaranteed health/dental benefits from some external award-holders

who were previously provided those benefits
Access to health/dental benefits is highly variable

- Employee status
- Source of funding
- External-funding delivery mechanisms
- Supervisors' whims or available funding
- Collective bargaining
 - Current contracts that guarantee benefits – negotiation situation in future
 - No consultation or even proper notification made to postdocs
 - Decision made to guard against potential employee status rulings by the CRA

Health/Dental Benefits

Access to health/dental benefits is highly variable

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- Source of funding
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Impact

- Many postdocs and supervisors unaware until contract renewal
- Future postdocs are unlikely to know that they can negotiate benefits
- Postdoc parents will have to negotiate health/dental coverage for their families
- Postdocs with existing medical conditions – difficult situation to cover regular medical expenses

Vacation Time

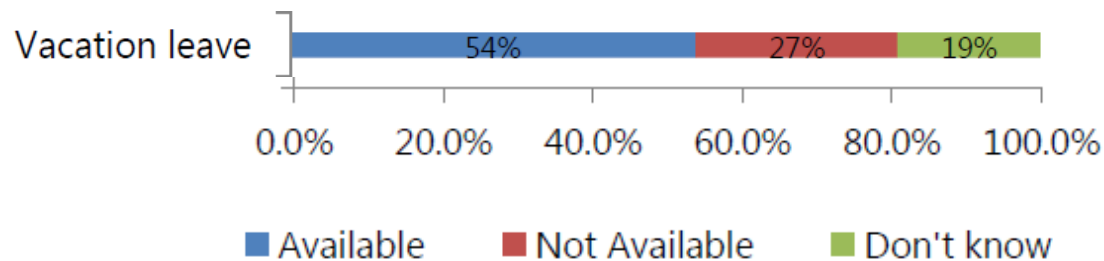
Work more than the average Canadian

- >1/4 do not have access to paid vacation leave
- Increased mental and emotional stress
- Increased burnout and dissatisfaction
- **Example**
- Institutions / funding agencies with no clear policy around paid vacation time
- Some agency's fellowship policies prohibit paid leave entirely



Impact on real life

- Expected to request permission for any time physically away
- Any time away from workplace that is not work related is added to the end of the fellowship
- Failure to disclose – funding may be cancelled and/or recalled



Mental Health

Issues

- Lack of benefits to cover counselling/wellness support
- Lack of access to on-campus support
- Lack of attention to root issues

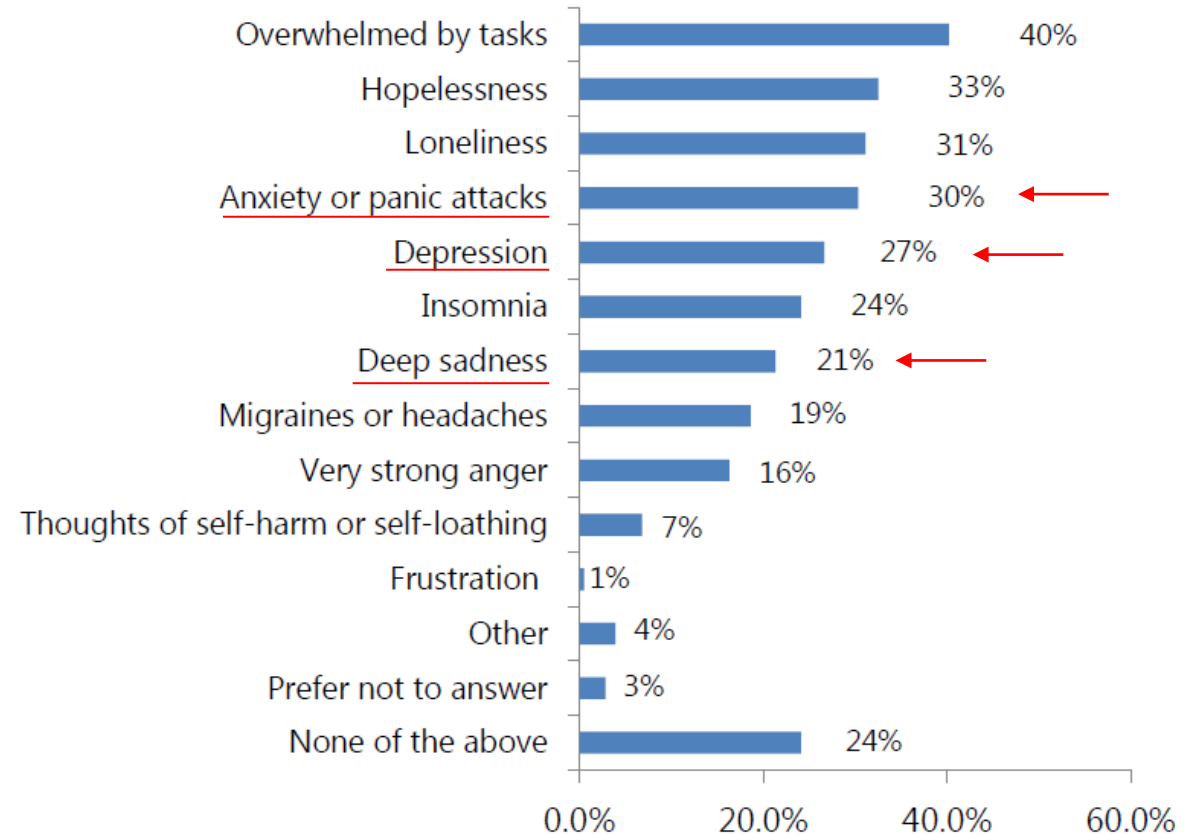


Figure 4.3.1. Mental health experience of all respondents during their postdoctoral training. Symptoms experienced for more than a month at a time.

CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey

Peripheral Support

“Caitlin” – support in conflict

An externally-funded postdoc

Ended with her being fired / cancelling her award / barring her from teaching during their ‘dispute’

No process in place to defend

When she tried – closed door meetings with admin and the university

Ombudsperson refused to accompany/offer any advice or help

Her only options – seek an EI/ CPP Ruling from the CRA/hire a lawyer

“Jim” – transitioning out of academia

An internally-funded postdoc

PI ran out of \$ –fired with minimal notice

Little support available for career development

Could not find a job – ended working at a local retail store

Moved up to manager quite quickly

Happy with his job - making more than he did as a postdoc

Career Development

- “Professional development, particularly for non-academic career is REALLY lacking”
-Survey Respondent
- Less than 20% tenure-track faculty positions
 - Vast majority must find alternative careers
 - Only 16% of postdocs have access to professional career counselling

“[I am] incredibly discouraged at the state of career development and skill development for postdocs with my PI/mentor and institution”
-Survey Respondent

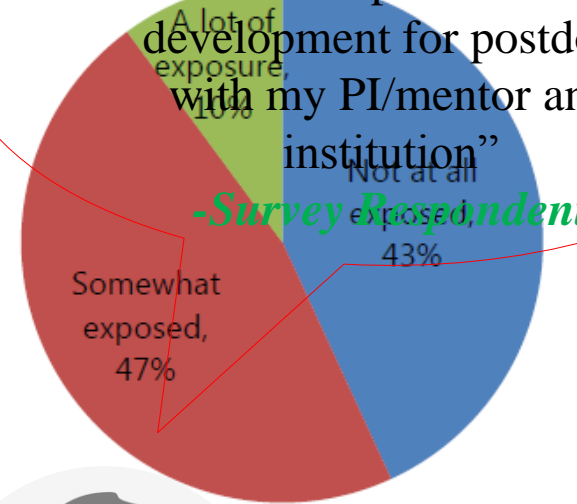
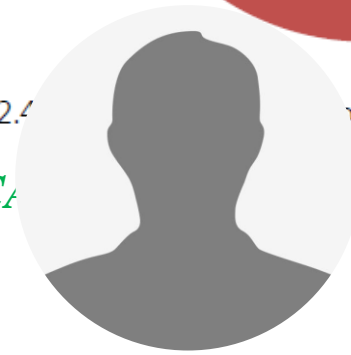


Figure 3.2.4

CA



to non-academic career opportunities.

National Postdoc Survey

*Edge & Munro, 2015

***Where the Rubber Meets the Road:
Panel Discussion on Solutions to Improve the
Canadian Postdoctoral Experience***

Jenna Haverfield



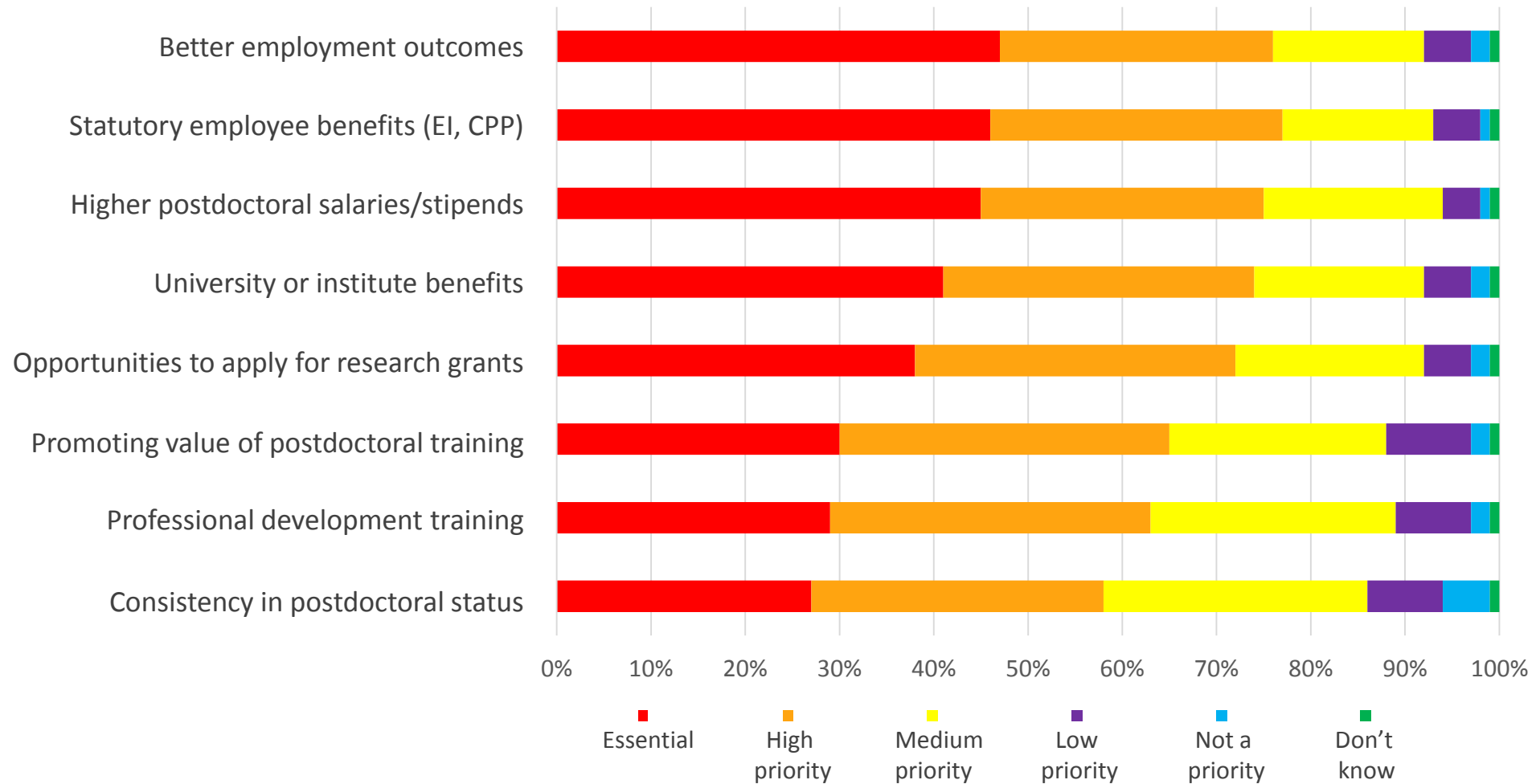
Presentation #3



Common Barriers to Postdoctoral Recruitment & Retention in Canada



What Canadian Postdocs Want to Change



CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey



Presentation #3



What Postdocs Want to Change

"During my postdoctoral fellowship, I found there was a significant difference in the experiences of externally funded postdocs (like myself) and those who were formally university employees and had access to benefits and so on... "
–Survey Respondent

"Postdocs should be eligible for EI benefits and make contributions to EI and CPP. This is the issue that I find most disconcerting among those listed." –Survey Respondent

"I hope the government can really help to make the working status of postdoctoral fellows clear - so that we could have employment insurance --something very important for female researchers."
–Survey respondent

CAPS/ACSP 2016 National Postdoc Survey

Identifying the Underlying Policy Issues

- ✘ Lack of tracking of postdoc labour conditions or labour market outcomes.
- ✘ Lack of minimum standards & uniform national/provincial policies pertaining to all postdocs.
- ✘ Lack of oversight regarding postdoc employment status – at institutions and government laboratories.
- ✘ Lack of funding or other incentives for institutions to adopt more supportive policies.

Panel Discussion

Dr. Dominique Bérubé



Dr. Rachel Fernandez



Dr. Joe Sparling



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Presentation #3



Recommendation #1:
**Monitor the Postdoctoral Training System
& Track Outcomes**

Recommendation #2:
**Establish Minimum Standards of
Postdoctoral Support**

Recommendation #3:
**Classify All Postdoctoral Scholars
Working in Canada as Employees**

Recommendation #4:
**Establish a Uniform National Policy on
Postdoctoral Training**

Questions?



Closing Comments

