Academic stress triggers – Results from a global survey on mental health among researchers

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CACTUS FOUNDATION | Mental Health Survey

Joy and Stress Triggers

A global survey on mental health among researchers

https://www.cactusglobal.com/mental-health-survey

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What is the CACTUS Mental Health Survey

The CACTUS Mental Health Survey mainly focused on **mental health, fulfilment, and wellbeing in academia.**

13,000+ participants globally
Largest global survey on researcher mental health and wellbeing

Diverse sampling
Covers all academic career stages with strong representation of minorities

Responses from 160+ countries
Strong representation from around the world, including the top 10 research producing countries

5,000+ Researcher insights
Powerful suggestions reflecting changes the global researcher community would like to see

Themes I'd like to focus on today

- Work environments in research

- Work-related pressures

- Work-life balance and personal wellbeing

- Feeling valued, safe, and included in academia

- Seeking support and normalizing conversations about mental health

- What kind of changes researchers would like to see

Who participated in the CACTUS Mental Health Survey?

- A total of **13,000 researchers** globally participated in this survey.

- Respondents from Asia made up over half **(53%)** of the total survey sample.

- **China, Japan, South Korea, and India** were among the Top 10 countries represented in the sample.

- **Female respondents** made up more than half (57%) the sample.

**Number of respondents working in each region at the time of taking the survey**

North America
1,445 (11%)

Europe
2,599 (20%)

Asia
6,892 (53%)

Central America
76 (1%)

Australasia/ Oceania
301 (2%)

Africa
792 (6%)

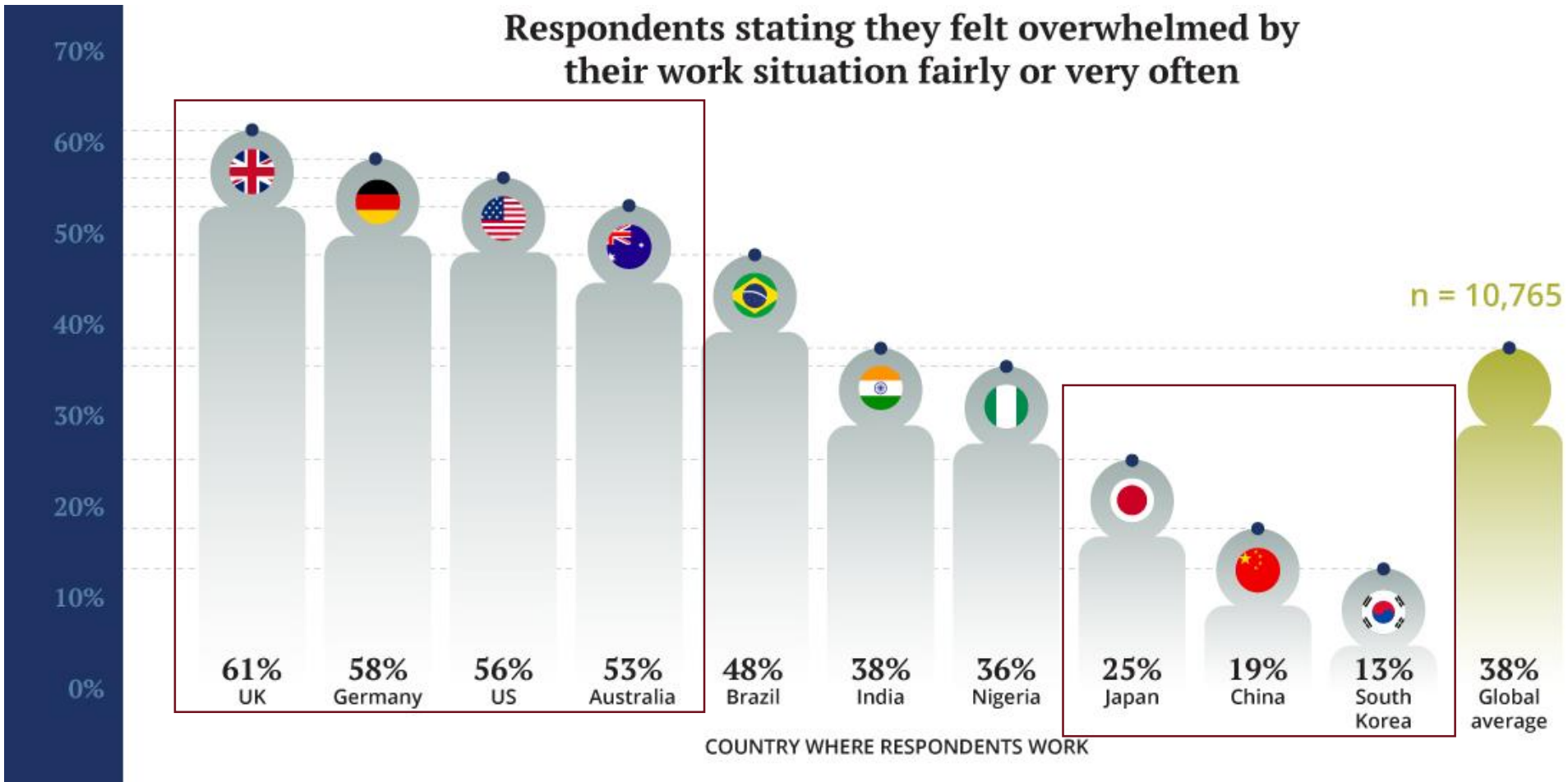South America
893 (7%)

Antarctica
2 (0%)

- **38%** of the global survey sample indicated that they **felt overwhelmed by their work situation fairly or very often**.

- **31%** reported typically working more than 50 hours a week; **13%** reported working over 60 hours per week.

- **Female respondents** were more likely to indicate that they felt overwhelmed frequently as compared to male respondents (46% vs. 27%).

- **PhD students** were consistently more likely to report that they felt overwhelmed frequently.

In the last month, how often have you felt overwhelmed by your situation at work?

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

7% • 17% • 38% • 23% • 15%
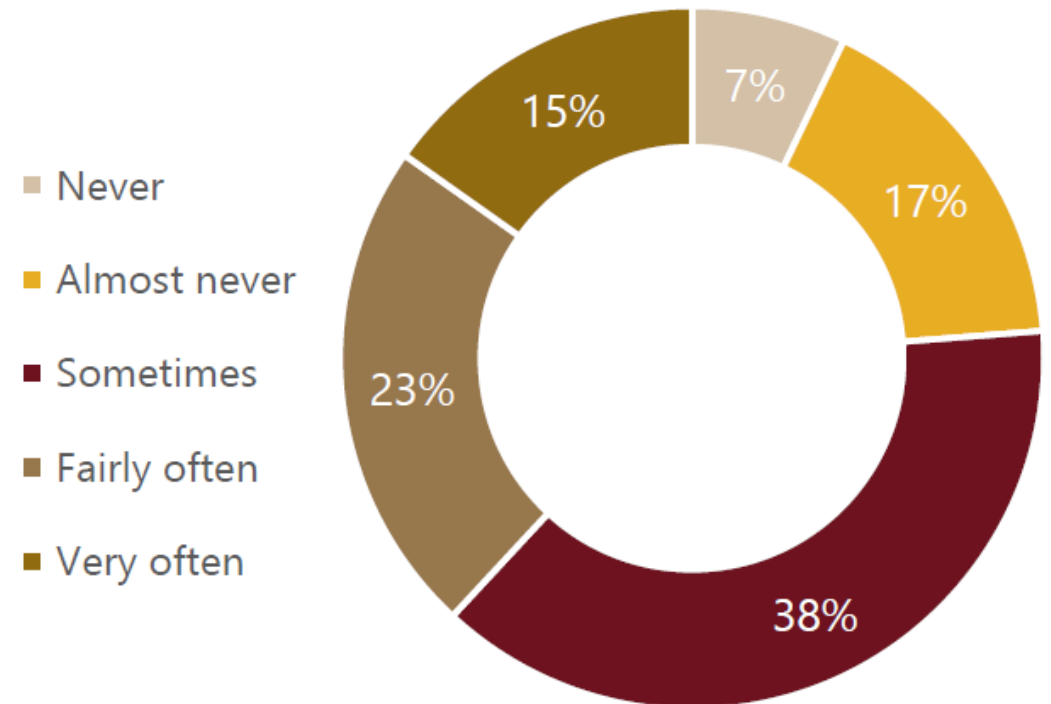
Among other countries, **respondents working in the UK, Germany, the US, and Australia** were more likely to state that they felt overwhelmed by their work situation fairly or very often.

Respondents stating they felt overwhelmed by their work situation fairly or very often

n = 10,765

| 61% UK | 58% Germany | 56% US | 53% Australia | 48% Brazil | 38% India | 36% Nigeria | 25% Japan | 19% China | 13% South Korea | 38% Global average |

COUNTRY WHERE RESPONDENTS WORK

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Work environments in research (3/3)

- Researchers based in Asian countries (specifically China, Japan, South Korea, and India) appeared to be working considerably longer hours.

- **40%** of researchers working in Asian countries indicated that they typically work **more than 50 hours per week**, compared to those in English-speaking countries (specifically the US, the UK, Australia, and Canada).

Typically, how many hours in a week do you work?

40%

	Up to 40	41–50	51–60	More than 60
Asian countries	25%	35%	21%	19%
English-speaking countries	35%	41%	16%	8%

Base n = 8,148
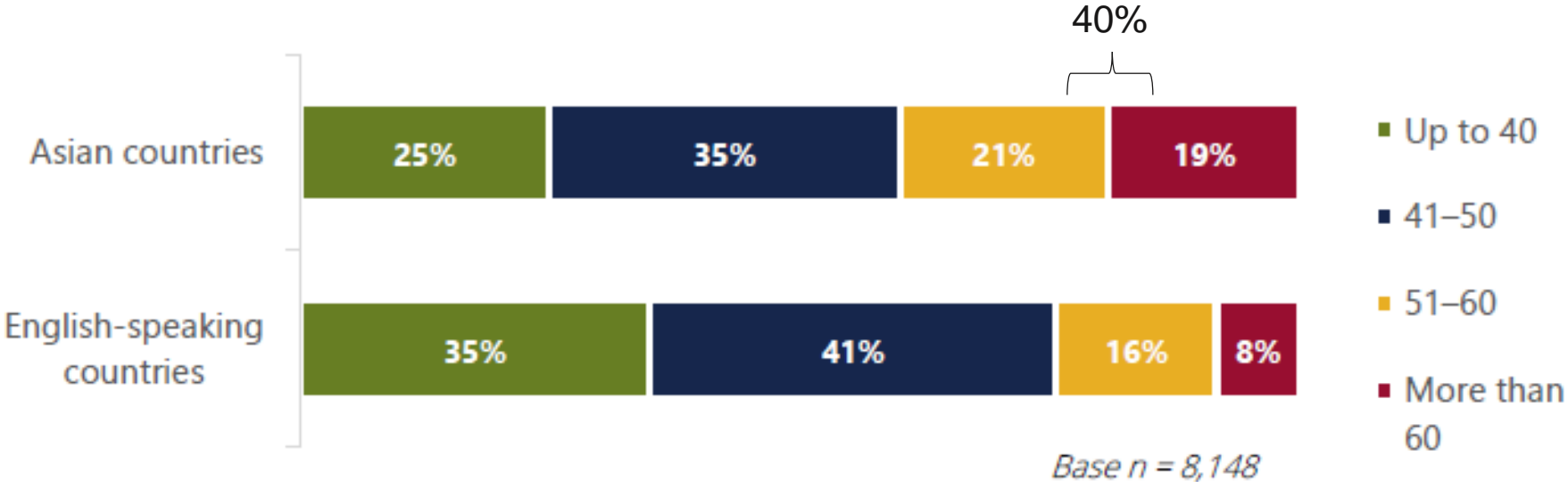
Work-related pressures (1/2)

- **65%** of the global sample indicated that they were **under tremendous pressure to publish papers, secure grants, and complete projects.**

- Respondents working in Germany, Australia, China, and Nigeria were most likely to agree that they were under such pressure.

"I am under tremendous pressure to publish papers, secure grants, and complete projects"
(% Agree)

n = 11,318

| 75% Germany | 74% Australia | 69% China | 69% Nigeria | 67% UK | 66% Japan | 66% Brazil | 63% US | 62% India | 48% South Korea | 65% Global average |

COUNTRY WHERE RESPONDENTS WORK

Work-related pressures (2/2)
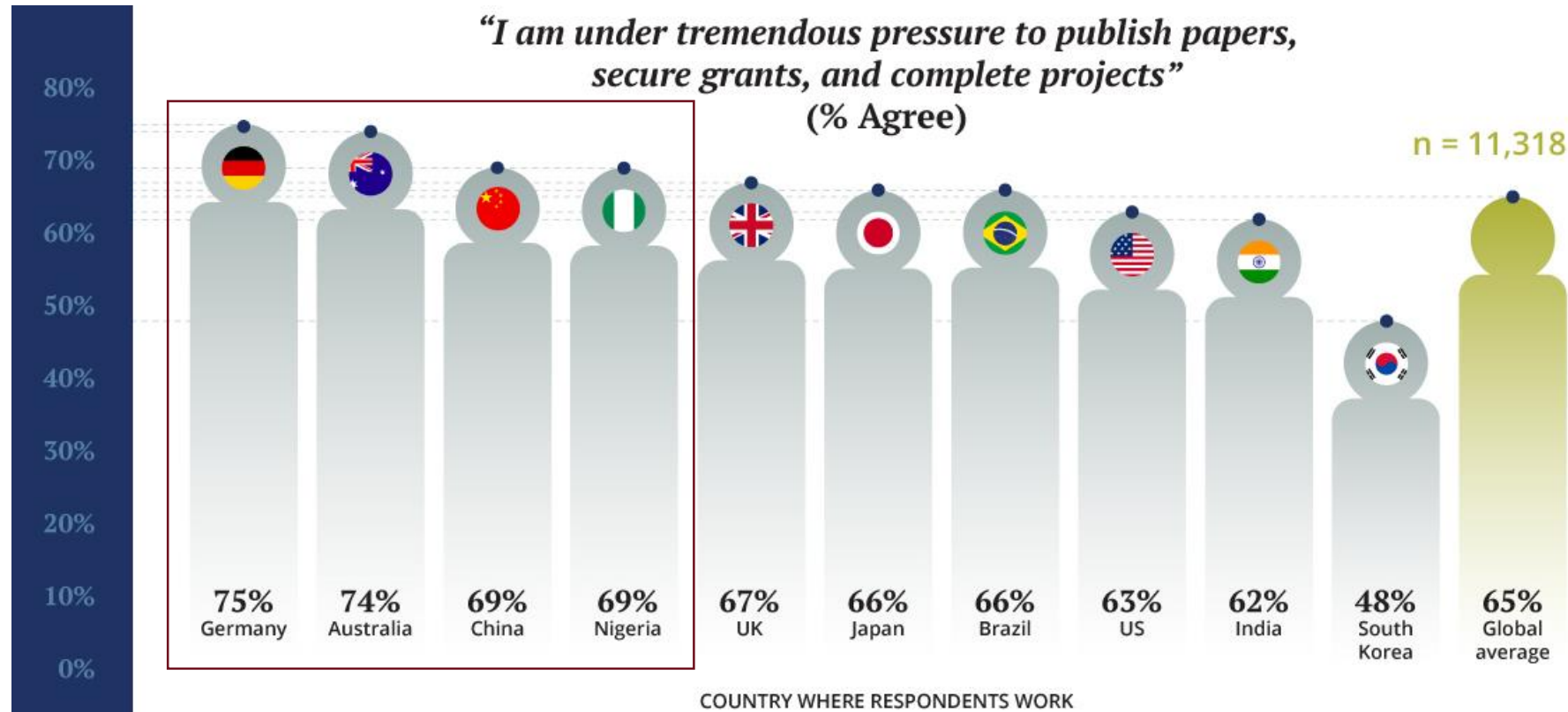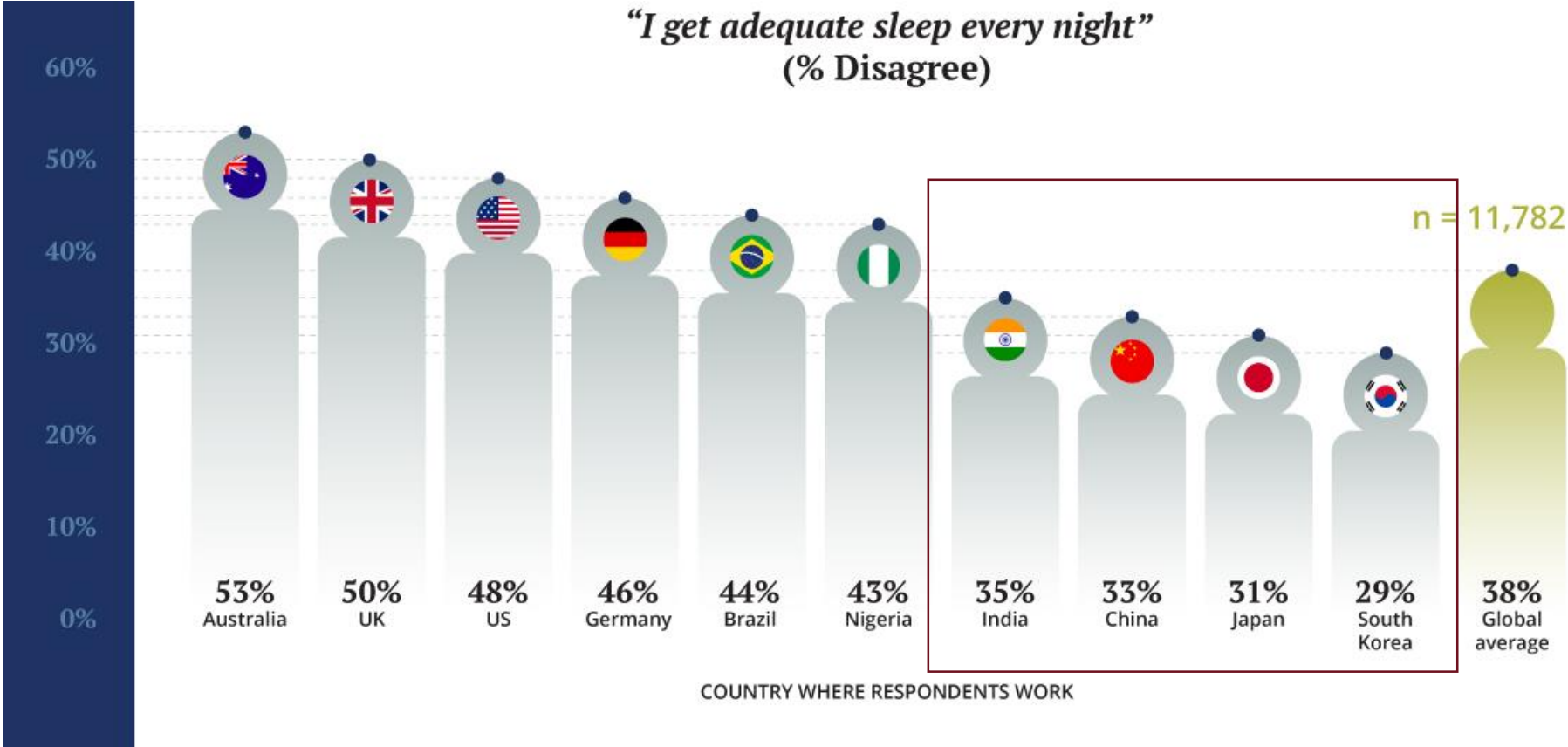
Of the global sample,

- **56%** indicated that they were **under continuous pressure to maintain their current reputation** in the research community.

- **57%** agreed they were unsure about their job prospects and their chances of having a stable career.

- **46%** agreed to the statement – *"I think it's unfair how research performance is evaluated in my organization."*

- **44%** felt that they did not have sufficient and high-quality resources to do their work effectively.

"I feel unsure about my job prospects and chances of having a stable career"

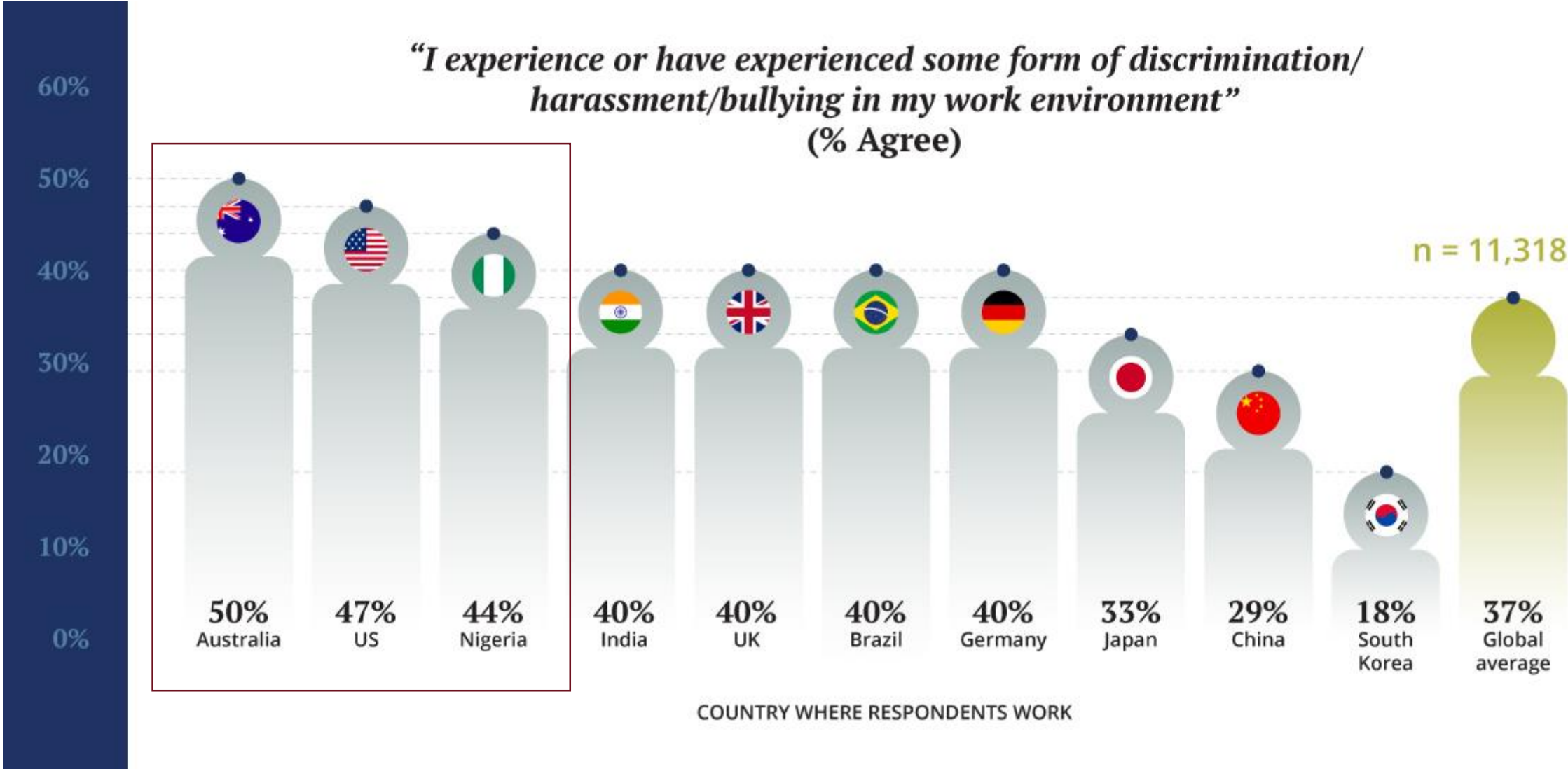|	India	China	Japan	South Korea	Global sample
% Agree	63%	55%	55%	34%	57%
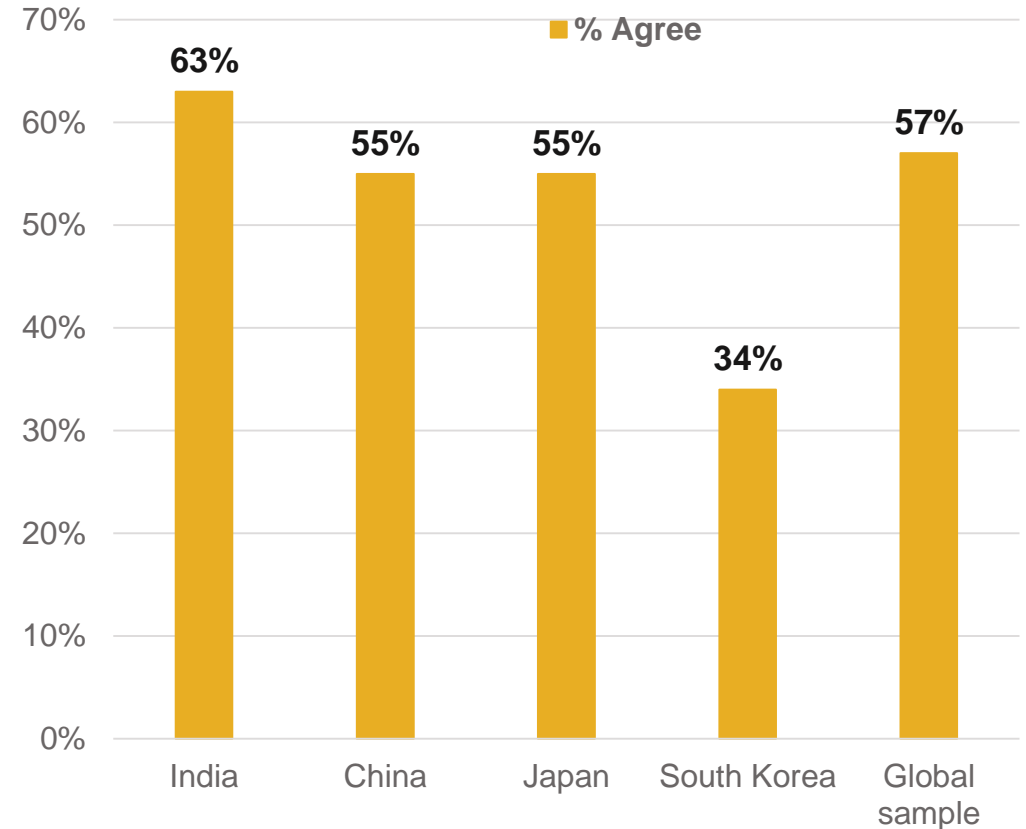
Work-life balance and personal wellbeing

- **43%** of the global sample indicated that they **didn't have sufficient time to spend on hobbies/recreation, or other family/social activities.**

- **38%** disagreed they get adequate sleep every night or are satisfied with their financial situation.

"I get adequate sleep every night"
(% Disagree)

n = 11,782

| 53% Australia | 50% UK | 48% US | 46% Germany | 44% Brazil | 43% Nigeria | 35% India | 33% China | 31% Japan | 29% South Korea | 38% Global average |

COUNTRY WHERE RESPONDENTS WORK

Feeling valued, safe, and included in academia

"I experience or have experienced some form of discrimination/
harassment/bullying in my work environment"
(% Agree)

n = 11,318

| 50% | 47% | 44% | 40% | 40% | 40% | 40% | 33% | 29% | 18% | 37% |
| Australia | US | Nigeria | India | UK | Brazil | Germany | Japan | China | South Korea | Global average |

COUNTRY WHERE RESPONDENTS WORK

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Seeking support and normalizing conversations about mental health (1/2)

- **49%** of the global sample **said they would NOT discuss work-based feelings of severe stress or anxiety** with relevant people or authorities in their workplace.

- **Researchers based in Asian countries** were more likely to indicate that they would discuss their feelings of stress or anxiety with relevant people at their workplace, in order to receive help for these issues.

If you ever experience feelings of severe stress or anxiety because of your situation at work, would you discuss them with relevant people in your workplace so that they can help you by taking appropriate action?
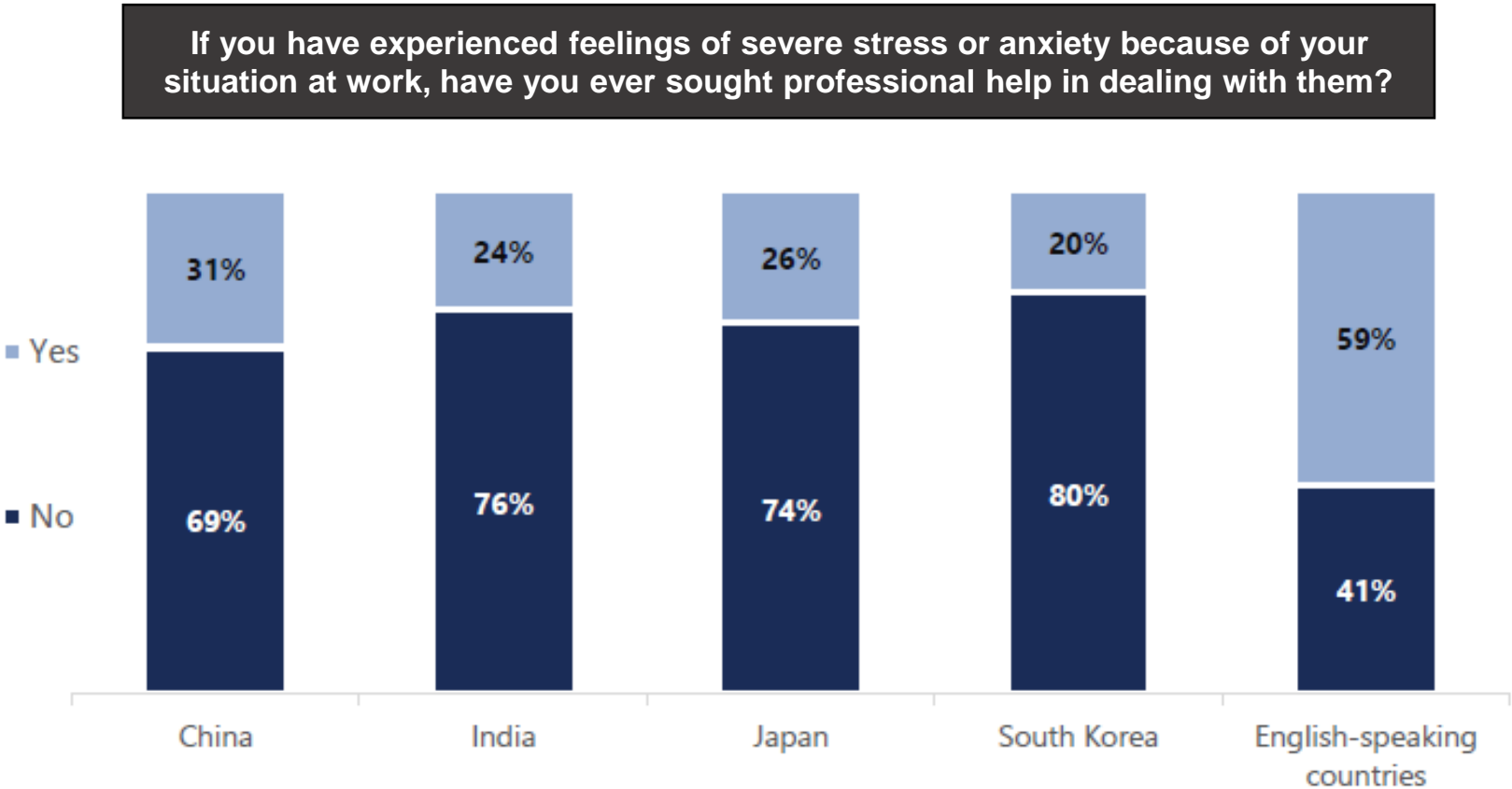
	China	India	Japan	South Korea	English-speaking countries
Yes	59%	48%	53%	58%	47%
No	41%	52%	47%	42%	53%
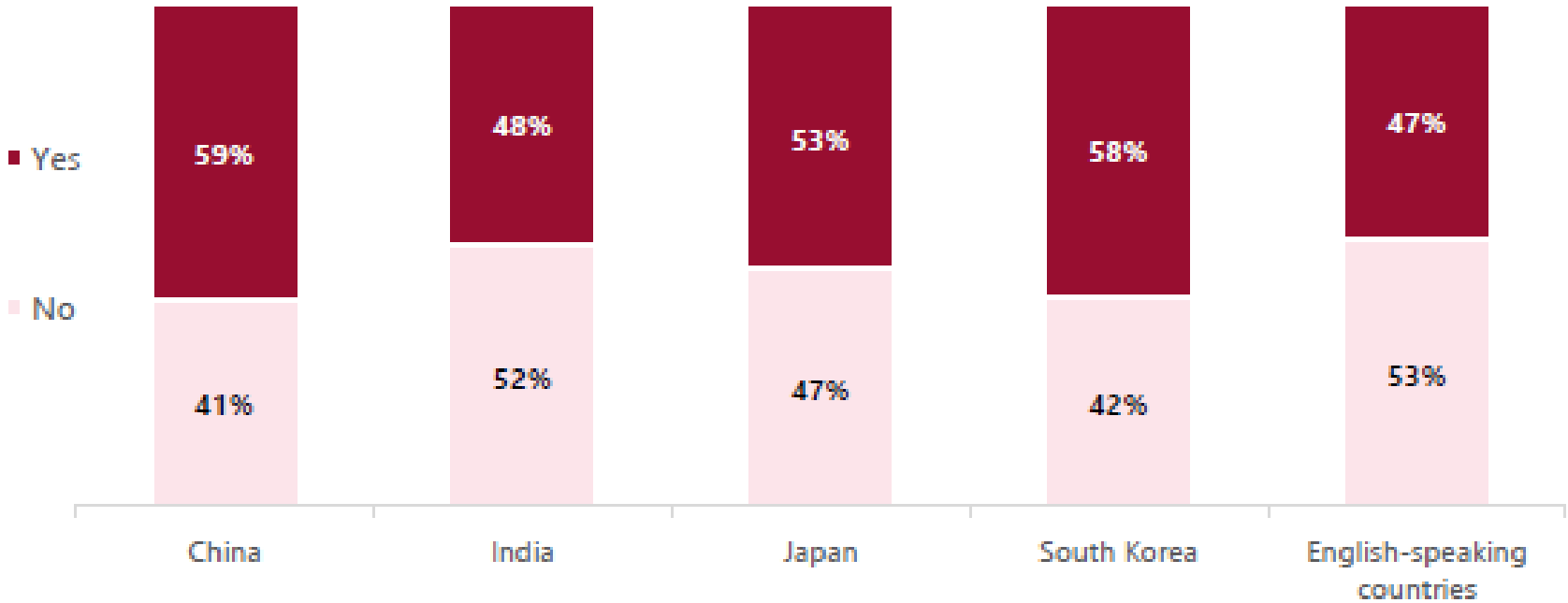
Base n = 6,923

Seeking support and normalizing conversations about mental health (2/2)

- **63%** of the respondents experiencing stress or anxiety because of work said they had NOT sought professional help.

- **74% of respondents in Asian countries** said they had not sought professional help to deal with these issues, as compared to 59% of those in English-speaking countries.

If you have experienced feelings of severe stress or anxiety because of your situation at work, have you ever sought professional help in dealing with them?

	China	India	Japan	South Korea	English-speaking countries
Yes	31%	24%	26%	20%	59%
No	69%	76%	74%	80%	41%

Base n = 6,884

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What can stakeholders do to ensure a great work environment for researchers?

5,434 responses received

1,000 responses analyzed

We asked participants a critical open question. Their comments indicated several issues that need to be urgently addressed –

- A need for measures to promote equality and prevent harassment, discrimination, and bullying

- More flexibility in work approach, improved work-life balance

- Job security and better pay for researchers

- Provision for psychological support and counselling services; normalizing discussions around mental health

- A need for fair, unbiased research evaluation and performance measures

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What our survey participants had to say

Realise the extent to which academic staff are suffering in silence from depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. I often feel like I can only cope with the demands of my job if I am taking antidepressants; I shouldn't need to self-medicate to cope. Prioritize educating all staff about how common these issues are.

Take people seriously! I experienced harassment and bullying and I was brushed off and not listened to until it got severe. Then the department said "why didn't you say anything" when I had been the entire time. What seems inconsequential to some may be harmful to others.

Mean what you say! If you encourage people to take work-life (balance) seriously and mental health seriously, but then in practice become hostile towards those who do, you're not ACTUALLY promoting work-life balance.

Create job security by reducing fixed term contracts, don't use hourly paid workers whenever possible, do not require staff to work vastly more hours than they are contracted to do and get paid for.

Make it clear that it's common to feel overwhelmed and encourage folks to talk to each other and their supervisors. Many of the negative things people feel are very common, but they don't realize that. Realizing others were feeling the same things I was, always helped me. Maybe host department social events that are designed for this.

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Thank you!

To download the full version of both survey reports, visit:
https://www.cactusglobal.com/mental-health-survey

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