

Addressing Financial Strain, Career Uncertainty, and Mental Health Challenges for Early-Career Fellows

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Introduction

Postdoctoral researchers are essential drivers of innovation and knowledge creation, bridging the gap between doctoral training and established academic or industry careers [1,5]. They occupy an increasingly crucial role by advancing cutting-edge research, mentoring early-career scholars, and cultivating interdisciplinary collaborations [6].

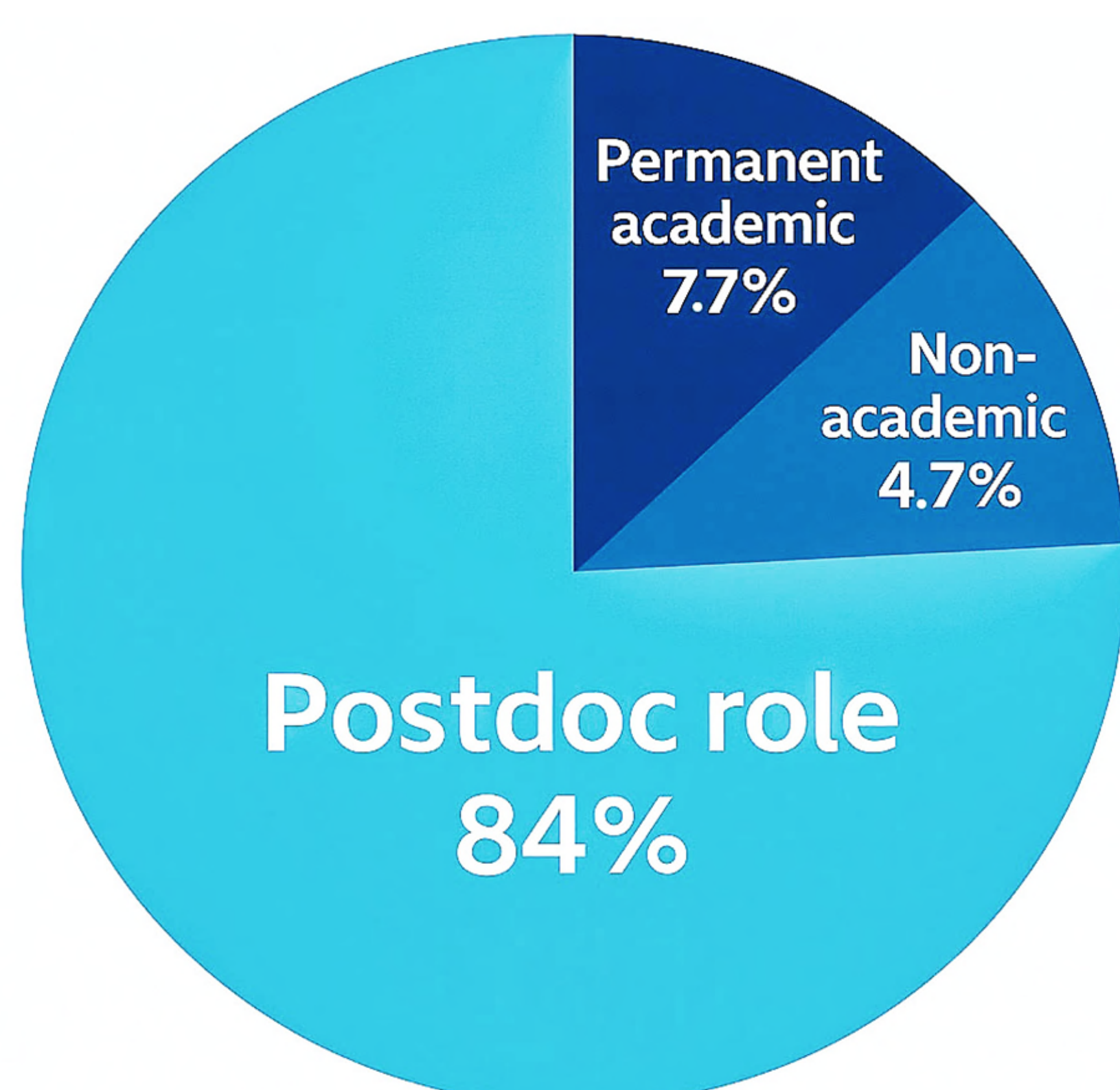


Despite these contributions, postdocs often face complex professional and personal challenges, including financial instability, unclear career trajectories, and limited institutional support, that can adversely affect their mental health and overall well-being [7].

Findings

The UK Employment status

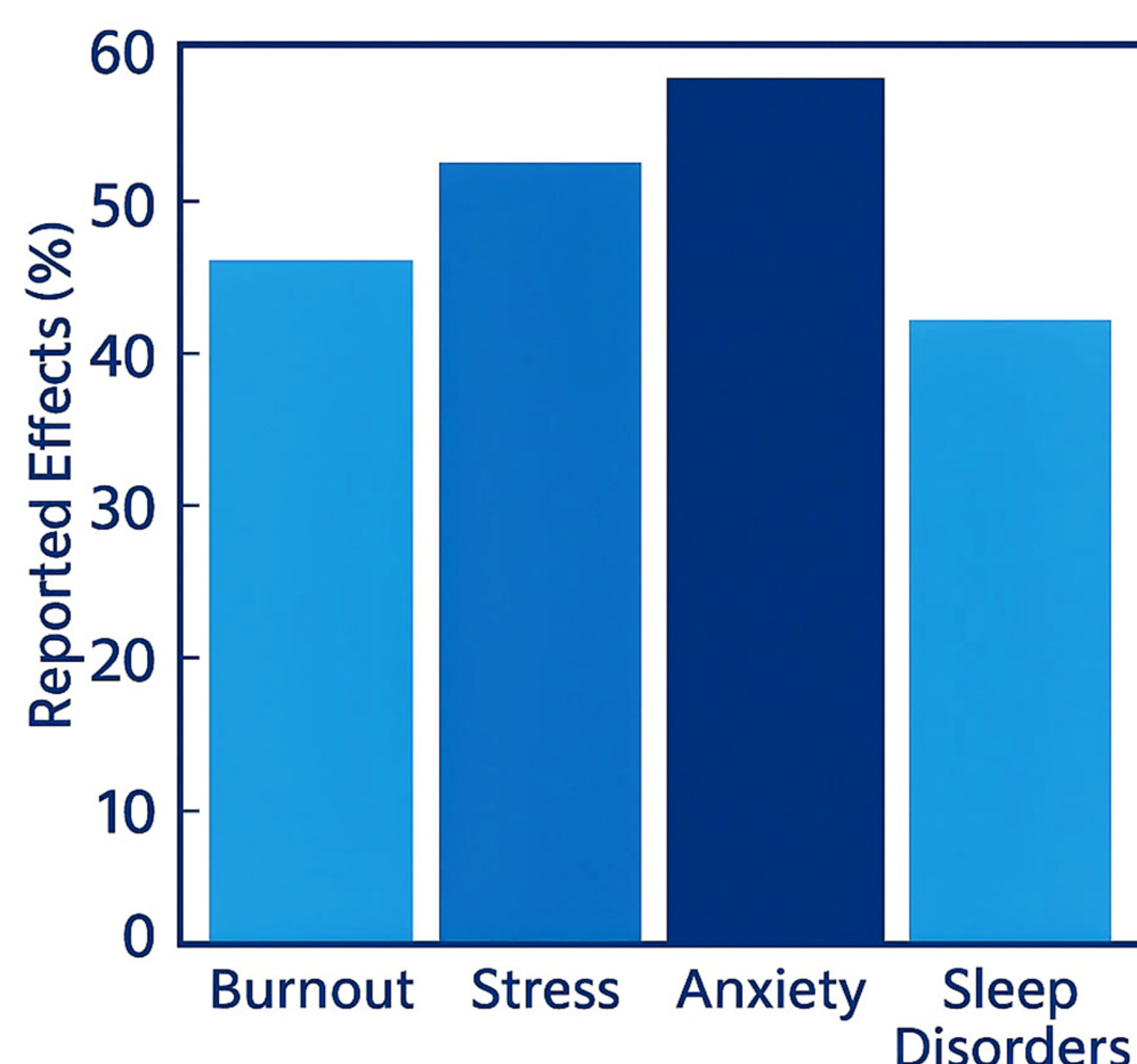
It is a predominance of temporary positions and a limited transition to secure academic or alternative careers [8].



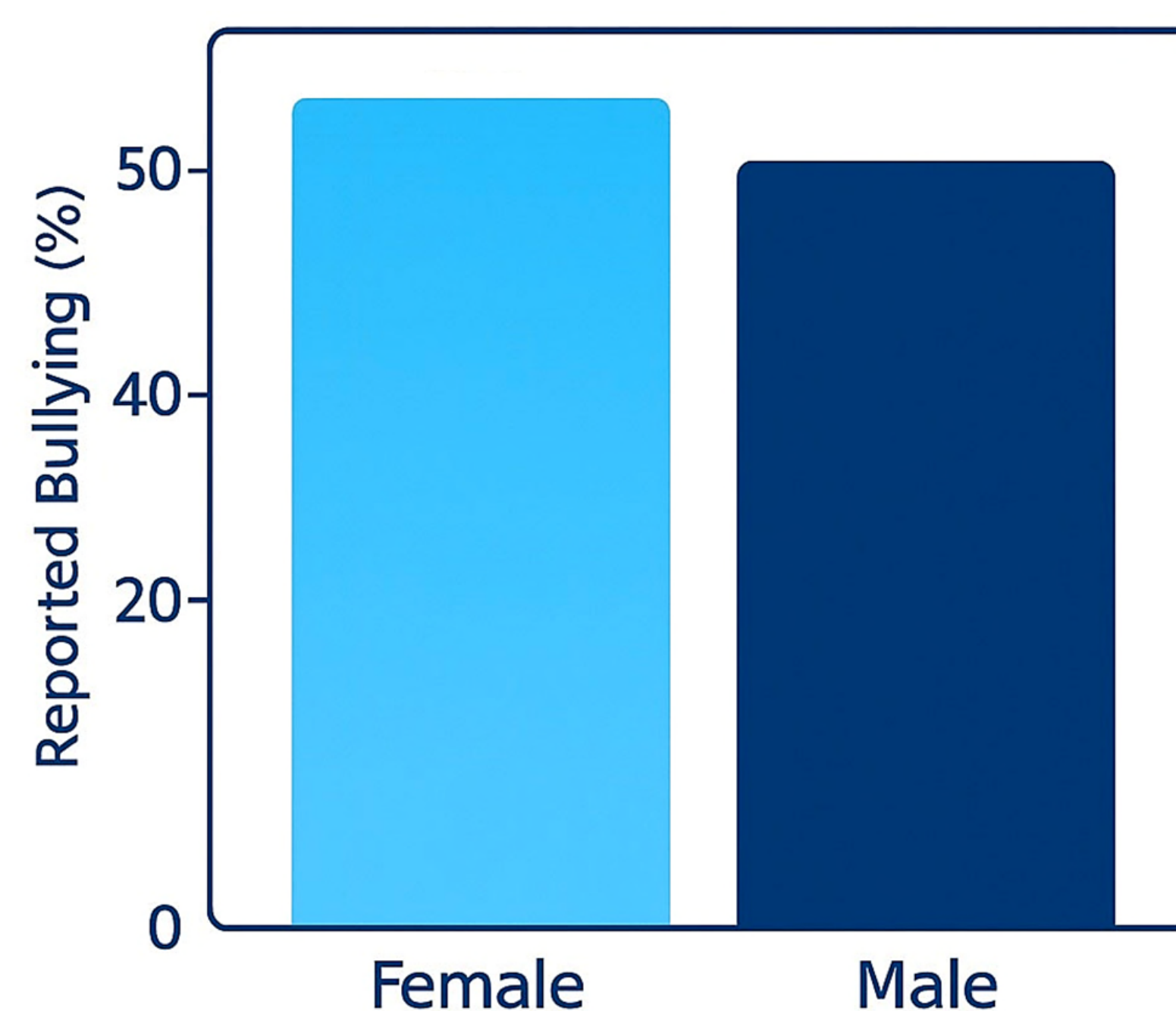
This pattern points to structural bottlenecks in career progression, with few posts converting to permanent roles and many researchers remaining dependent on short-term funding, which undermines stability, long-term planning, and retention in the UK research workforce [7].

Bullying, Harassment, and Mobbing

In UK academia, bullying, harassment, and mobbing are reported at notable levels, with **27.3%** of faculty experiencing bullying and **27%** witnessing it, evidence of entrenched behaviours that often go unaddressed even where policies exist [9].



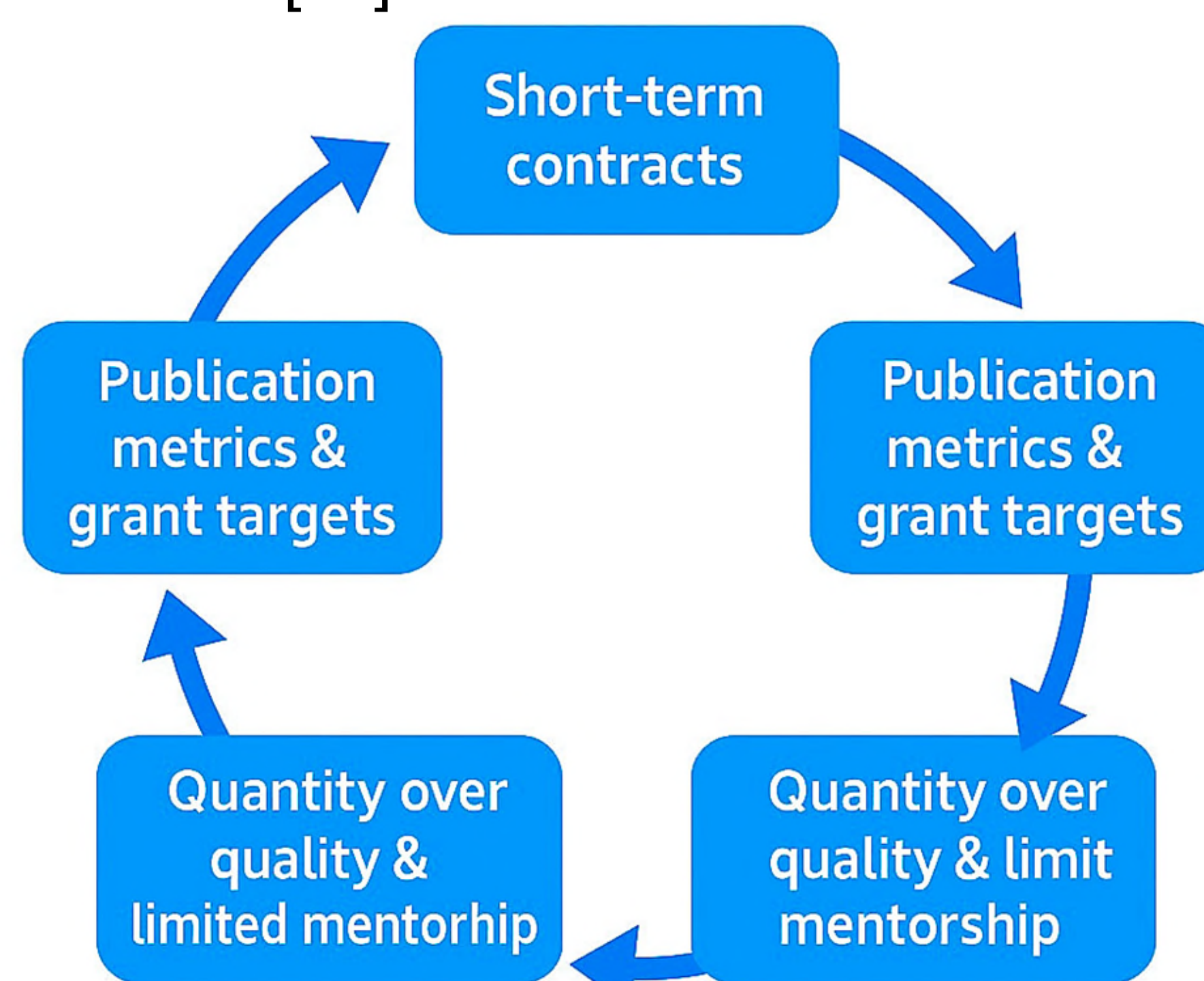
This persistence reflects the limits of formal frameworks without consistent enforcement and cultural change, and it often intersects with power hierarchies and biases that disproportionately affect the EDIs.



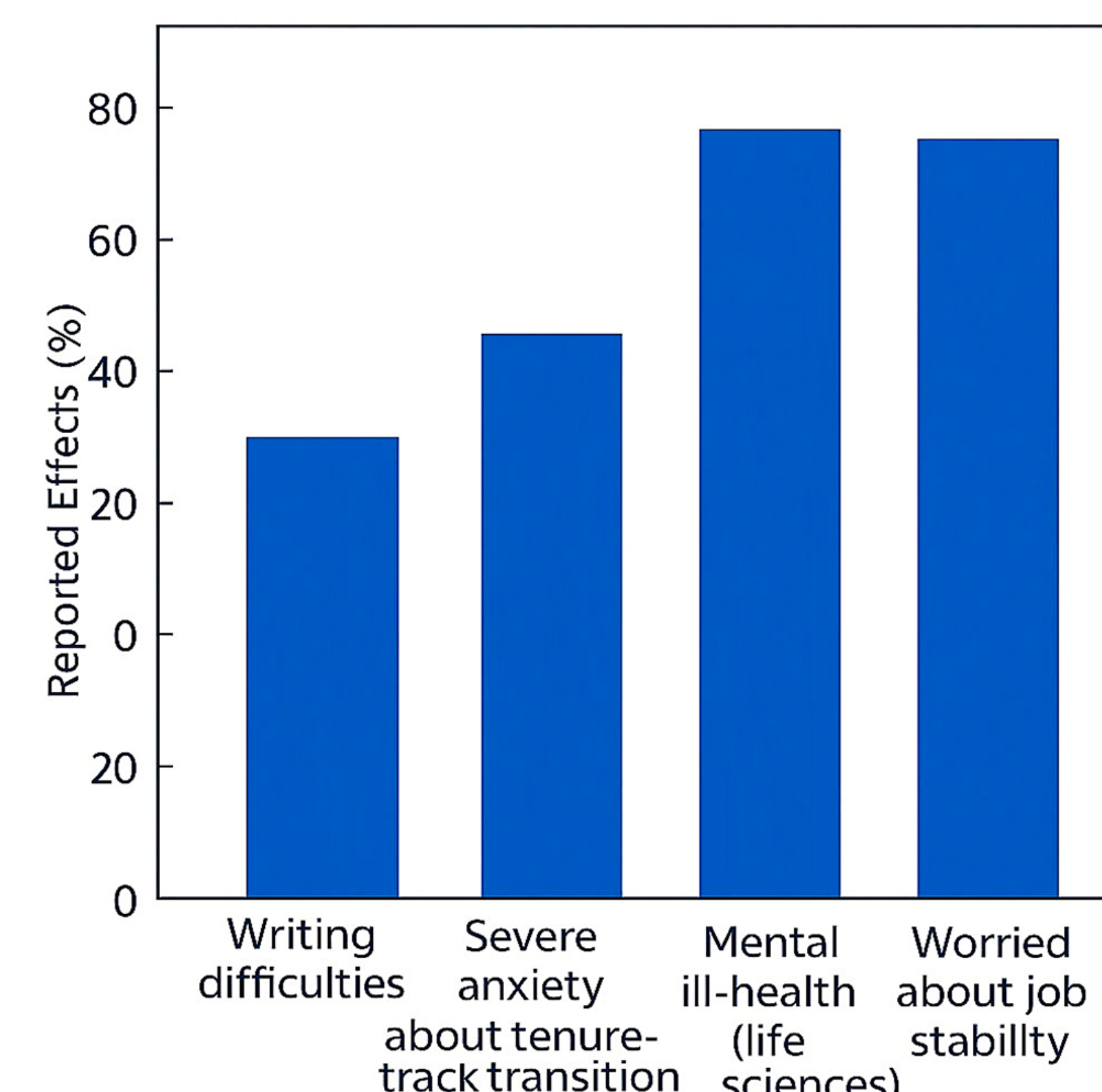
These dynamics are linked to heightened stress, anxiety, burnout, and reduced retention among early-career researchers.

The UK Publish or Perish Culture

The “**publish or perish**” culture is a significant and pressing concern in UK academia [10].



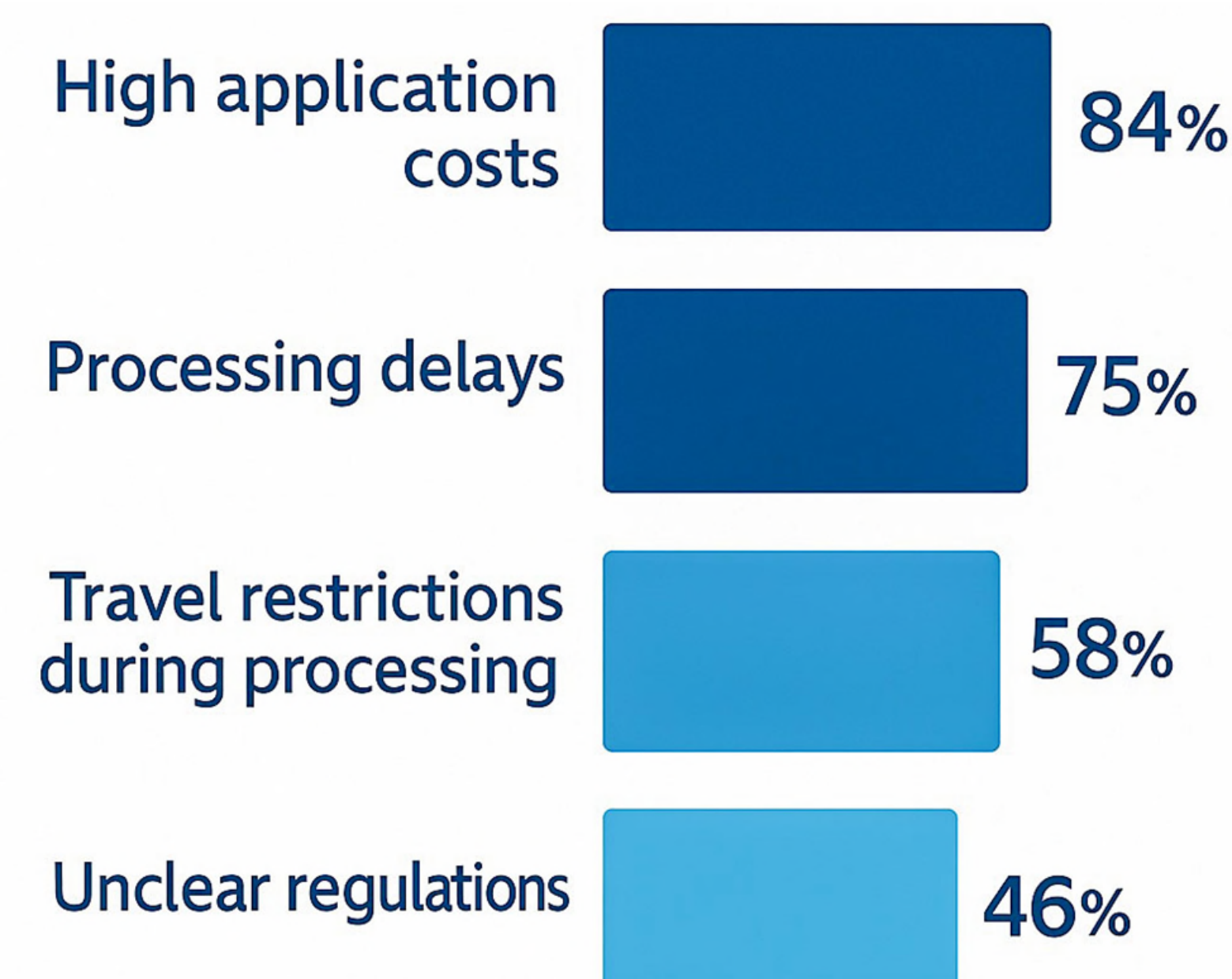
It places substantial pressure on early-career researchers, particularly postdocs on short-term contracts [3].



Many individuals in this field struggle with perfectionism and procrastination, with almost **30.1%** of postdocs experiencing writing difficulties that adversely affect their overall productivity [2].

International Scholar

International ECRs in the UK typically hold university or employer-sponsored temporary visas, often via Skilled Worker-type routes with significant bureaucracy [4].



Top barriers are high application costs, travel restrictions and unclear regulations. These hurdles delay project start-up, add financial strain, and reduce productivity and well-being among non-UK researchers.

Future Work

Pilot postdoc-specific interventions:

- targeted mental-health support,
- transparent progression/mentoring,
- and modular training strengthening peer networks;

The aim is to evaluate effects on well-being, career outcomes, and retention.

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