

GHENT UNIVERSITY AS PARTNER FOR HORIZON EUROPE CALL

HORIZON-HLTH-2022-STAYHLTH-01-01-two-stage:
“**Boosting mental health in Europe in times of change**”

Ghent University (UGent), Belgium, is targeting new collaborations within the aforementioned upcoming call for Horizon Europe as a work packages or task leader. Below we give an overview of the domains in which UGent Principal Investigators offer their services. The researchers mentioned below are affiliated to the interdisciplinary research consortium UGent @ Work. This consortium unites UGent-researchers from different fields of study who all conduct research on work and the labour market. That way, UGent @ Work wants to (i) increase interdisciplinary collaboration and (ii) increase evidence-based policy on topics related to work and the labour market, such as (but not limited to) wellbeing at work, burnout, and labour market discrimination.

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Domain: labour economics with a focus on (i) the transition from school to work, (ii) labour market discrimination and (iii) work and health
Expertise for the call: identifying barriers to and stigma against ex-burnout patients in the labour market & to offer solutions



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Relevant expertise

Stijn Baert's (he/him) research is mainly situated in the broad field of **labour economics with a focus on (i) the transition from school to work, (ii) labour market discrimination and (iii) work and health**. In the context of the latter research theme, he has coordinated research on labour market integration after burn-out (e.g., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2021.101050>) and published in (interdisciplinary) journals such as Health Economics and Social Science & Medicine.

IDEAS again ranks him among the 20 economists worldwide with the highest scientific impact in the world in his age group (top 0.001%).

Interest in the call

Currently, we are conducting experiments aimed at **identifying barriers to and stigma against ex-burnout patients in the labour market**. These are mainly vignette experiments. We innovate by designing the vignettes in such a way that underlying mechanisms can be uncovered. For example, we found that ex-burnout patients are more likely to experience serious disadvantage in promotion than in hiring. The perception of lower (i) leadership capacity, (ii) role model, (iii) stress tolerance and (iv) outside options together explain about half (49.2%) of the disadvantage (<https://ideas.repec.org/p/iza/izadps/dp14502.html>).

I would be very interested to move on to solutions, i.e. **the effectiveness of things that ex-burnout patients can do to counter the aforementioned stigma** (and which we could test via vignettes). For example, adding signals of sufficient stress tolerance.

In addition, I would find it very interesting to study the mechanisms underlying other mental thresholds in similar experiments. In previous research, I found that previous depression causes stigma on the labour market (<https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/socmed/v130y2015icp91-98.html>) but what exactly the underlying mechanisms are (and whether they are similar to those of burnout) is much less clear.

In other earlier research I focused on the problem of underemployment, i.e. **working below one's educational level**. Something that really appeals to me is studying whether (and when) this is a **predictor of burnout**.

Domain: Mental health (inequalities), (de)stigmatization and medicalization
Expertise for the call: Quantitative analyses using secondary cross-national comparative data



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Relevant expertise

Prof. Piet Bracke (he/him), Dr. Katrijn Delaruelle (she/her) and Dr. Melissa Ceuterick (she/her) are part of the Hedera research group (Department of Sociology, Ghent University). Hedera has a rich tradition in (cross-national comparative) research on mental health (inequalities), (de)stigmatization and medicalization. More specifically, their research has concentrated on (i) assessing the impact of **social changes** (e.g., the expansion of education and the rising incidence of over-education, second demographic transition, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic) on **population mental health and mental health inequalities**, (ii) **causal attributions and stigmatizing attitudes** towards persons with mental health problems among adolescents, the general population and healthcare providers, (iii) need-based and non-need based **use of mental health services and benzodiazepines**. Hedera has vast expertise in collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data.

Hedera is currently involved in the H2020 funded [VAX-TRUST](#) project.

Interest in the call

We see ourselves in the role of **project partner**, taking the lead in one of the work packages. This work package (WP) should preferably be focused on conducting quantitative analyses using secondary cross-national comparative data (such as the European Social Survey, SHARE, GGP, ...), as this is one of our primary strengths. Such a WP would align with the following “expected outcome” that is described in the proposal: *“To provide a comprehensive knowledge base of how a transforming Europe can influence mental health in a fast-evolving society, especially in the most vulnerable populations, by consolidating data from relevant sources and/or acquiring new data, and by reviewing existing methodologies”*. We would be open to focus on the mental health repercussions of various social transformations that are described in the proposal (e.g., COVID-19, climate change, socio-demographic changes, migration, ...), with a particular focus on vulnerable populations (e.g., elderly, shorter-educated people, people with disabilities, ...).

Available data, samples or cohorts or relevant papers in the field

- We have vast experience with working on secondary cross-national comparative data that all include measures of mental health (e.g., European Social Survey, Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement, European Health Interview Survey, Gender and Generation Programme, ...)
- In 2020, we collected quantitative data on causal attributions and stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental health problems among 5022 adolescents from the fifth or sixth grade of 38 Flemish secondary schools. We invested substantial efforts in developing a culturally-sensitive survey to explore different cultural, spiritual, and religious health care seeking options and coping mechanism. (The project was funded by the Flemish Research Council)
- In 2018 and 2021, we collected quantitative and qualitative data among Belgian GPs to assess their attitudes and treatment recommendations to depressed patients with various migration backgrounds.

Van de Velde S., Bracke P., & Levecque K. (2010). Gender differences in depression in 23 European countries. Cross-national variation in the gender gap in depression. *Social science & medicine*, 71(2), 305-313.

Bracke P., Pattyn E., & von dem Knesebeck O. (2013). Overeducation and depressive symptoms: diminishing mental health returns to education. *Sociology of health & illness*, 35(8), 1242-1259.

Bracke P., Van De Straat V., & Missinne S. (2014). Education, mental health, and education-labor market misfit. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 55(4), 442-459.

Bracke P., Delaruelle K., & Verhaeghe M. (2019). Dominant cultural and personal stigma beliefs and the utilization of mental health services: A cross-national comparison. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 4, 40.

Ceuterick, M., Bracke, P., Van Canegem, T., & Buffel, V. (2020). Assessing provider bias in general practitioners' assessment and referral of depressive Patients with different migration backgrounds: Methodological insights on the use of a video-vignette study. *Community mental health journal*, 56(8), 1457-1472.

Bracke P., Delaruelle K., Dereuddre R., & Van de Velde, S. (2020). Depression in women and men, cumulative disadvantage and gender inequality in 29 European countries. *Social Science & Medicine*, 267, 113354.

Delaruelle, K., Walsh, S. D., Dierckens, M., Deforche, B., Kern, M. R., Currie, C., ... & Stevens, G. W. (2021). Mental Health in Adolescents with a Migration Background in 29 European Countries: The Buffering Role of Social Capital. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(5), 855-871.

My network of stakeholders, interest groups, expert panels, societies

- Hedera has collaborated with various Flemish stakeholders (e.g., city of Ghent, Sciensano, Flemish Department of Public Health and Family, seniorennet, Domus medica – the umbrella organization of Flemish GPs, ...)
- Prof. Piet Bracke is the former chair of the European Society for Health and Medical Sociology (2010-2014) and of the scientific advisory board of the European Social Survey (2017-2019).
- Prof. Piet Bracke has been a member of the expert group on DSM-V and the organization of mental health care in Belgium from the Belgian Superior Health Council.

Domain: Assessment of psychosocial risks and well-being at work in companies
Expertise for the call: Burnout, work-engagement and well-being of workers



Prof. Dr. Lutgart BRAECKMAN

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Relevant expertise

Lutgart Braeckman (she/her) is a certified specialist in occupational medicine and has developed an expertise in the **assessment of psychosocial risks and well-being at work in companies**. She has coordinated and participated in several projects for different organizations such as the EU lifelong learning programme, Horizon 2020 Twinning project and Belgian Federal Public Services on the mental well-being of workers, and how this can affect work (dis)ability and return to work. She is currently involved in the follow-up of a secondary prevention programme of burn-out and Covid impact at the workplace, a multi-site intervention study to promote worker wellbeing and a study to prevent psychosocial risks in medical students and doctors.

Interest in the call

Burnout, work-engagement and well-being of workers (encompassing prevalence, prevention, influences, interventions, causes, consequences, as well as underlying biological mechanisms) are my fields of expertise and interest. Since I also work as an occupational physician in three companies, acquiring and transfer of knowledge to the society and workplace is essential for me.

Access to data sets

- Longitudinal data of Fedris - Federal Agency for occupational risks - on the Belgian secondary prevention programme of burnout at the workplace

My network of stakeholders, interest groups, expert panels, societies

- Member of the International Commission on Occupational Health, and of three of its Scientific Committees, i.e. the ones on Work Organization and Psychosocial Factors; Ageing workers; and Education and Training in Occupational Health
- Expert member of the Belgian scientific committee Fedris - Federal Agency for occupational risks – chairman of the Flemish Scientific association of Occupational Medicine
- Well established relationships with occupational health services, the national governmental bodies and institutes that are responsible for developing public health recommendations and guidelines.

Domain: Psychosocial work stress

Expertise for the call: exploiting the work place for promotion of mental health



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Relevant expertise

Els Clays (she/her) has a long-standing expertise in work-related health and wellbeing, with a specific specialty in **studying psychosocial work stress, its antecedents, contextual factors and outcomes**. She can build upon experience in leading the recruitment and assessment of occupational risk factors and health outcomes in large-scale studies in the working population. She is currently involved in a multi-site intervention study to promote worker wellbeing and prevent psychosocial risks.

Track record in EU funding:

Els Clays was the lead Promoter for UGent of the Horizon 2020 HeartMan Project (“Personal Decision Support System For Heart Failure Management”), coordinated by the Jozef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in 2016-2019. In this project a personal health (decision-support) system was developed to support heart failure patients in their disease management. UGent was responsible for defining the medical requirements of the system, and participated in developing the medical decision model and designing the decision support methodology. Furthermore, under the supervision of Els Clays, UGent coordinated a randomized-controlled patient trial in 3 hospitals in Flanders.

Interest in the call

Specific interest in exploiting the workplace setting for the overall promotion of mental health, while also connecting to risk factors and resources in the work environment itself. Another key interest is the translation of evidence-based solutions regarding prevention of work-related mental health risks into real-life organizational settings.

Access to available data in the field

- As PI of the BELSTRESS (Belgian Job Stress) studies, Els Clays is member of the IPD-Work (“Individual-participant-data meta-analysis in working populations”) consortium of European cohort studies

My network of stakeholders, interest groups, expert panels, societies

- Member of the International Commission on Occupational Health and of its Scientific Committees on Cardiology in Occupational Health and on Work Organization & Psychosocial Factors
- Expert member of the WHO/ILO Joint Estimates initiative to globally map the work-related burden of disease and injury through a series of systematic reviews (actively involved in 2 working groups, i.e. one review about long working hours and ischemic heart disease, and one about long working hours and alcohol abuse)

Domain: The effects of digital media use on health and well-being



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Relevant expertise

Mariek M. P. Vanden Abeele (she/her) is Associate Professor in Digital Culture. She combines **media psychological and media sociological perspectives** to understand the ramifications of ubiquitous connectivity for individuals and society. Mariek works in imec-mict-UGent, a research group dedicated to **social scientific research at the nexus of the individual, technology and society**.

Mariek is the recipient of a 2020 ERC Starting Grant. Her ERC-project focuses on the topic of digital well-being. It addresses the question how individuals can find an adequate balance between digital connectivity and disconnection. The project looks at various new phenomena, such as technoference, digital stress and cognitive overload, and how they relate to health and well-being. In other projects, Mariek also looks at the effects of self-tracking for health and well-being.

Mariek's work has been published in leading journals in the field of Communication Sciences, such as Communication Theory, Mobile Media & Communication, New Media & Society and Media Psychology. Mariek has received awards for both her teaching and her research output. In 2018, Tilburg University recognized Mariek's accomplishments by appointing her as fellow of the Tilburg University Philip Eijlander Diversity (PED) program, a program dedicated to accelerate the careers of extra-ordinary talented female scholars. Mariek is currently employed as a research professor at Ghent University.

Interest in the call

Digital connectivity brings tremendous benefits for individual health and wellbeing: People can access information, social networks and services independent of time and place constraints. Technology also enables them to track and monitor their own health and well-being in new ways. These benefits aid individuals in leading an autonomous, pleasurable and meaningful life.

At the same time, however, **digital connectivity brings new challenges**. Individuals struggle with being online 24/7. Recent communication scientific literature describes various mechanisms through which digital media use may affect health and well-being negatively. Separating these mechanisms is essential to differentiate how, when, why, and for whom digital media use may be detrimental. I can bring this expertise.

Individuals also increasingly use **digital technologies to support their health & well-being**. For instance, fitness and mindfulness apps have shown to be extremely successful. While their use may bring substantial benefits, there are also concerns about their potential side effects, for instance whether they may contribute to the internalization of undesirable health ideals.

As a media psychologist and sociologist, I am well versed in the effects of digital media use on health & well-being. Moreover, my background in media studies research can help in bringing out critical perspectives on technology use in the support of health and well-being. Finally, our research group holds substantial expertise in the broader area of user experience research.