

Article

Veterinarian—Chasing a Dream Job? A Comparative Survey on Wellbeing and Stress Levels among European Veterinarians between 2018 and 2023

Wiebke Jansen ^{1,*} , Lizzie Lockett ², Tricia Colville ³, Mette Uldahl ⁴  and Nancy De Briyne ^{1,*} ¹ Federation of Veterinarians of Europe, Rue Victor Oudart 7, 1030 Brussels, Belgium² Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, The Cursitor, 38 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1EN, UK; l.lockett@rcvs.org.uk³ Vets Now Emergency Limited, Penguin House, Castle Riggs, Dunfermline KY11 8SG, UK; tricia.colville@btinternet.com⁴ Vejle Hestepraktis, Fasanvej 12, 7120 Vejle, Denmark; mette@uldahl.eu

* Correspondence: wiebke@fve.org (W.J.); nancy@fve.org (N.D.B.)

Simple Summary: Whilst recognizing the abundantly positive aspects within the different domains of the veterinary profession, the challenging socio-economic and cultural working climate has been recognized as a source of veterinary mental wellbeing issues. Comparing the results of two large-scale European surveys, stress levels and the need for medical leave due to reduced mental wellbeing remained at comparatively high levels, and mental wellbeing scores remained low. While important differences between countries were noticed, early-career veterinarians and female veterinarians were most at risk of decreased mental wellbeing all over Europe for all three indicators. Notwithstanding the increased attention that is given to veterinary wellbeing in the last decade, our results underline that major efforts remain necessary by creating more supportive and attractive workplaces that prioritize wellbeing, a good work/life balance and provide job satisfaction.

Abstract: Whilst recognizing the abundantly positive aspects within the different domains of the veterinary profession, the challenging socio-economic and cultural working climate has been identified as a source of veterinary mental wellbeing issues. This mixed methods study provides an overview of the mental state of veterinarians across Europe via two cross-sectional surveys in 2018/2019 ($n = 14,559$ veterinarians) and in 2022/2023 ($n = 12,393$ veterinarians). Mental wellbeing was assessed using 3 indicators: self-reported stress levels, the need for medical leave due to reduced mental wellbeing (22% and 23%, resp., in 2018/2019 and 2022/2023) and the seven-question Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (2018/2019: 25, 2022/2023: 24.8). In both surveys, important differences were spotlighted between countries, but early-career veterinarians and female veterinarians were most at risk of decreased mental wellbeing all over Europe for all indicators. In conclusion, stress levels and need for medical leave due to reduced mental wellbeing remained at comparatively high levels across the two surveys and standardized mental wellbeing scores remained equally low. Notwithstanding the increased attention given to veterinary wellbeing in the last decade, our results underline that major efforts remain necessary, by creating more supportive and attractive workplaces that prioritize wellbeing, a good work/life balance, and providing job satisfaction.

Keywords: veterinary; mental health; wellbeing; burnout; stress; WEMWBS; stress



Citation: Jansen, W.; Lockett, L.; Colville, T.; Uldahl, M.; De Briyne, N. Veterinarian—Chasing a Dream Job? A Comparative Survey on Wellbeing and Stress Levels among European Veterinarians between 2018 and 2023. *Vet. Sci.* **2024**, *11*, 48. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vetsci11010048>

Received: 28 November 2023

Revised: 22 December 2023

Accepted: 18 January 2024

Published: 22 January 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Veterinary medicine is regarded as a rewarding profession by many students and veterinarians, offering many diverse career paths for adaptable professionals. Working with animals, job satisfaction in terms of challenges, and stimulus were mentioned consistently by UK veterinarians as the best parts of their job [1]. However, despite the hugely positive

aspects of working in the various sectors of the veterinary profession, veterinary mental wellbeing (MWB) concerns have been linked to the challenging socio-economic and cultural working environment. Over the past decade, numerous reports have identified important stressors for veterinary professionals, such as long working hours [2–5], a lower income compared to other medical professionals [6], insufficient development opportunities, a lack of mentorship [7], challenging client communications [3,6,8–11], a demanding work–life balance [1,6], and high student debt [12,13], resulting in compassion fatigue [14,15], burnout [14–17], veterinarians feeling that they have a life not worth living [18], moral dilemmas, and other forms of stress [19]. In particular, early-career female practitioners generally seem to experience more negative stressors compared to more experienced male colleagues [2,12,20]. Publications from Europe [8,21], Australia [22,23], and the U.S. [5] have reported high stress levels, high rates of burnout, depression, and other mental illnesses, and even physical musculoskeletal disorders that are correlated with psychosocial risk factors in the veterinary profession [24]. Even though the studies suggest that the poor MWB of veterinarians differs depending on the age, gender, area of work [19,25], working hours, and relationship with clients [26], they also indicate that veterinarians have significantly poorer MWB compared to the general population [8,27]. Veterinary professionals have also been found to have one of the highest proportional mortality ratios (PMRs) for suicide of any occupation [28], around twice as high a PMR than other healthcare professions [29,30], and an overall higher PMR than the general population [29,31]. While numerous studies are available in the U.S. and some European countries, no study has been conducted so far comparing the different European countries. More recently, several studies reported that veterinary MWB has been under increasing pressure due to the global COVID-19 pandemic [32–37].

Especially in the early years of the career, emotional factors, working conditions, and business challenges might lead to disillusion, compromised enthusiasm, and burnout, and might even cause severe mental and physical health issues: In 2021, over 40% of U.S.-based practitioners, who graduated during the last 10 years, were thinking of leaving the profession, citing mental health (33%) and work–life balance (27%) as their top reasons [38]. A recent Dutch study showed that 16.8% of recently graduated practitioners left veterinary practice within five years due to excessive job demands or insufficient job resources as the most frequently cited reasons [7]. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines work-related stress as a response that people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and that challenge their ability to cope [39]. This type of stress can lead to job burnout, which is a prolonged psychological response to ongoing emotional and interpersonal occupational stressors and is associated with exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of despair [17].

While targeted surveys indicated concerns over veterinary MWB, this mixed method cross-sectional study investigated for the first time in a comparable and semi-standardized questionnaire (i) the self-reported stress levels, (ii) the need for medical leave due to reduced mental health, and (iii) the standardized MWB scores of veterinarians on a European level in 2018/2019 and 2022/2023.

2. Materials and Methods

This mixed methods study consisted of two cross-sectional online surveys. The STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology) guideline for cross-sectional studies [40] and the Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys (CHERRIES) [41] were used for reporting (Tables S1 and S2).

2.1. Surveys

Both the 2018 and 2022 survey protocol were developed by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE). Informal beta testing of the questionnaire was carried out within FVE. Targeted social media posts, newsletters, and e-mails with an open link to the questionnaire were sent to all 38 FVE national veterinary member associations and several international

organizations and corporations with a request to forward to their respective members. Participants were given extensive project information, including content, funding, contractor, and purpose. Participation was voluntary and not remunerated, and no question was compulsory, except for some of the demographic questions (e.g., gender, age) in 2018/2019. The questionnaire was online, anonymous, and issued for European veterinarians to complete between November 2018 and March 2019, and again between November 2022 and March 2023. The item-fixed questionnaire with one question per screen (59 in total) was offered in all official languages of the participating countries on veterinary demography, the demand for veterinary services, veterinary practices, working patterns of veterinarians, the future of the profession, and questions on wellbeing and stress. Some participants did not answer all questions, which led to different subtotals for each analyzed question. Questions remained editable until the submission of the questionnaire. All analyzed countries were able to recruit enough respondents in both surveys to produce country-level estimates (adjusted margin of error is ± 0.80 at the 95% confidence level). The analyzed questions in this study covered assessed demographics in relation to (i) self-reported stress levels on a scale from 0 (not stressed) to 10 (very stressed) in 2018/2019 and 1 (not stressed) to 4 (very stressed) in 2022/2023, (ii) whether respondents had to take time off for medical leave due to burnout, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, or depression, and (iii) measured wellbeing scores (Table S3). For the latter, the standardized short seven-question Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS—© NHS Health Scotland, The University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2006, all rights reserved) was used. This scale was developed to provide a measure of MWB that is suitable for use in an adult population based on seven individual items scored on a five-point Lickert-type scale from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time). The higher the values in the score are, the higher the MWB of the individual is. Key attributes of the WEMWBS scale were its focus on the positive; its face validity among the general population, public health practitioners, and policy makers; its normal distribution in the general population, with no floor or ceiling effects; and it being validated previously with veterinary professionals [42–44].

2.2. Data Handling and Statistical Analysis

Incomplete or duplicate responses based on time stamps were removed. After this validation step, data were tabulated, processed in Microsoft® Excel, and organized. An ordinal logistic regression model was used in 2022/2023 to evaluate differences between the impact of the independent variables ‘role in the veterinary profession’ (Employed full-time veterinarian (e.g., Public services, veterinary administration, practice, clinic), Employed part-time veterinarian (e.g., Public services, veterinary administration, practice, clinic), Owner/partner veterinarian/practice manager, Non-practicing veterinarian (industry), Non-practicing veterinarian (academia), and Interim/locum/freelance) on the ‘stress level’ (1, 2, 3, 4). Calculations were performed in RStudio (package stats, MASS, and dbplyr), and a p -value of ≤ 0.05 was considered significant. The comparison of cumulative WEMWB scale results was performed with an unpaired t -Test. A p -value of ≤ 0.05 was considered significant. Data were analyzed and plotted using MS Excel and GraphPad Prism.

3. Results

3.1. Demographics

The estimated number of active veterinarians in Europe was 309,144 in 2020 [2]. In 2018/2019, a total of 14,559 veterinary professionals coming from 30 countries completed the survey, while in 2022/2023, 12,397 veterinarians from 37 European countries did. The 2018/2019 survey mandatorily asked for age and gender (only options were female/male). The 2022/2023 survey allowed participants to select ‘other gender’ (selected 11 times) or ‘prefer not to say’ (selected 74 times). In both surveys, most respondents were female (58% and 65%, resp.) and under 44 years of age (59% and 56%). To allow for comparison, the same 27 European countries were selected based on the criterion of more than 30 respondents in both surveys (Table S4).

3.2. Self-Reported Stress Levels of Veterinary Professionals

The average stress level for European veterinarians was 6.9 in 2018/2019 (scale of 0 lowest–10 highest) and 2.7 in 2022/2023 (scale of 1 lowest–4 highest). The self-reported levels of stress varied significantly between countries, namely, between 5.7 and 7.6 in 2018/2019 (scale of 0–10) and between 2 and 3.3 in 2022/2023 (scale of 1–4). In 2018/2019, veterinarians from North Macedonia, Italy, and Slovenia reported the highest stress levels country-wise. Those from Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands reported the lowest levels of stress. In 2022/2023, veterinarians from Latvia and Cyprus reported the highest levels of stress, while those from The Netherlands and Denmark reported the lowest stress levels (Figure 1).

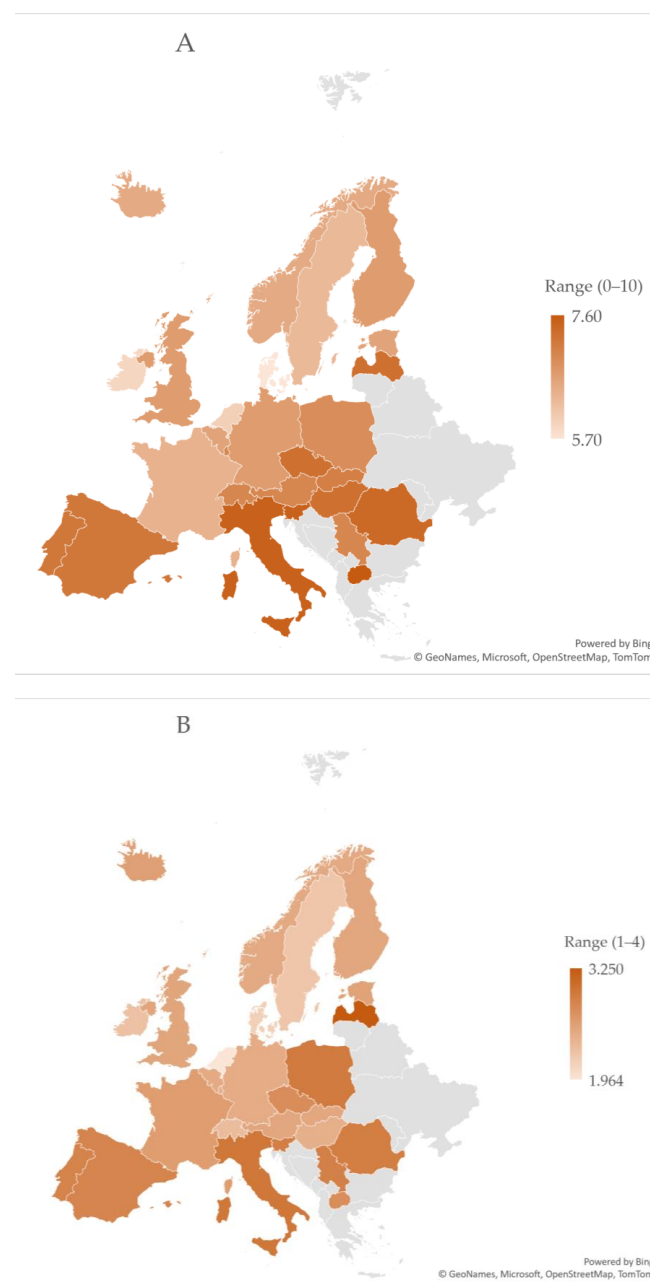


Figure 1. Heatmap showing veterinary self-reported stress levels at work by country. The darker the orange color is, the higher the stress level in the country is. (Panel A): years 2018/2019 (range: min. 0 to max. 10), (Panel B): years 2022/2023 (range: min. 1 to max. 4).

The stress levels of female and male veterinarians differed across Europe, with a few countries noting higher stress levels in male veterinarians, but with most reporting higher levels in female veterinarians. The average stress level for European female veterinarians was 7 in 2018/2019 and 2.7 in 2022/2023, and for male veterinarians, they were 6.8 and 2.5, resp. Stress levels decreased consistently in both surveys with age (Figure 2). The ordinal logistic regression showed that in 2022/2023, full-time employees ($p < 0.001$, OR 1.62, 95% CI:1.31–2.01) and practice owners and managers ($p < 0.001$, OR 1.43, 95% CI: 1.15–1.78) scored significantly higher in self-reported stress levels.

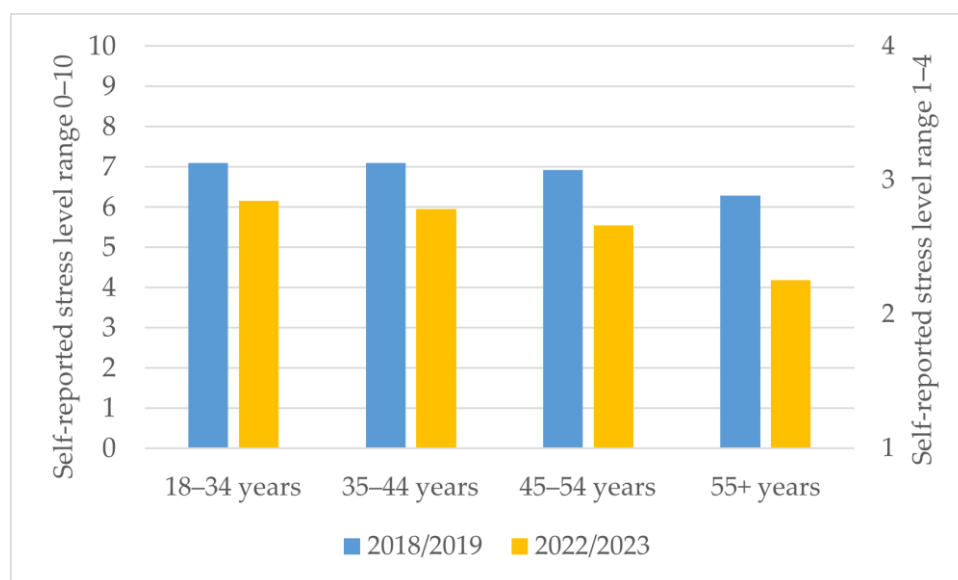


Figure 2. Average veterinary self-reported stress levels at work by age categories on the y -axis, first x -axis: years 2018/2019 (range: min. 0 to max. 10), secondary x -axis: years 2022/2023 (range: min. 1 to max. 4).

3.3. Medical Leave Due to Reduced Mental Health

In total, 22% and 23%, resp., of all veterinarians answering the survey in 2018/2019 and 2022/2023 needed to take more than two weeks off work due to burnout, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, or depression in the last three years. This number varied very much between countries in both surveys, with the lowest numbers reported in Germany and Switzerland (12%, resp.) versus the highest number in North Macedonia (63%) in 2018/2019, and 9% being reported in Luxembourg and Hungary versus Latvia (58%) and North Macedonia (42%) in 2022/2023. It remained consistent over the two surveys that more female veterinarians reported taking medical leave (25% and 26%, resp.) than male veterinarians (17.3% and 18%, resp.), and early-career veterinarians taking more than senior veterinarians (Figure 3). Variations can also be noted within the veterinary profession, with veterinarians working in NGOs (66%) and in food hygiene (31%) reporting the highest proportions in 2018/2019 and in the group ‘telemedicine, consultancy and emergency care’ with 27% in 2022/2023. Consistently, veterinarians from the group ‘education and research’ reported the lowest proportions of medical leave for mental health reasons in both surveys (13% in 2018/2019, 18% in 2022/2023). Veterinarians working in independent practices (23%, $n = 4743$) and corporate practices (24%, $n = 1385$) took equal amounts of medical leave for mental health reasons in 2022/2023, and the frequency of medical leave was lowest in 2022/2023, with 20% in practices with more than 26 veterinarians (full-time equivalents) (data for 2018/2019 not available).

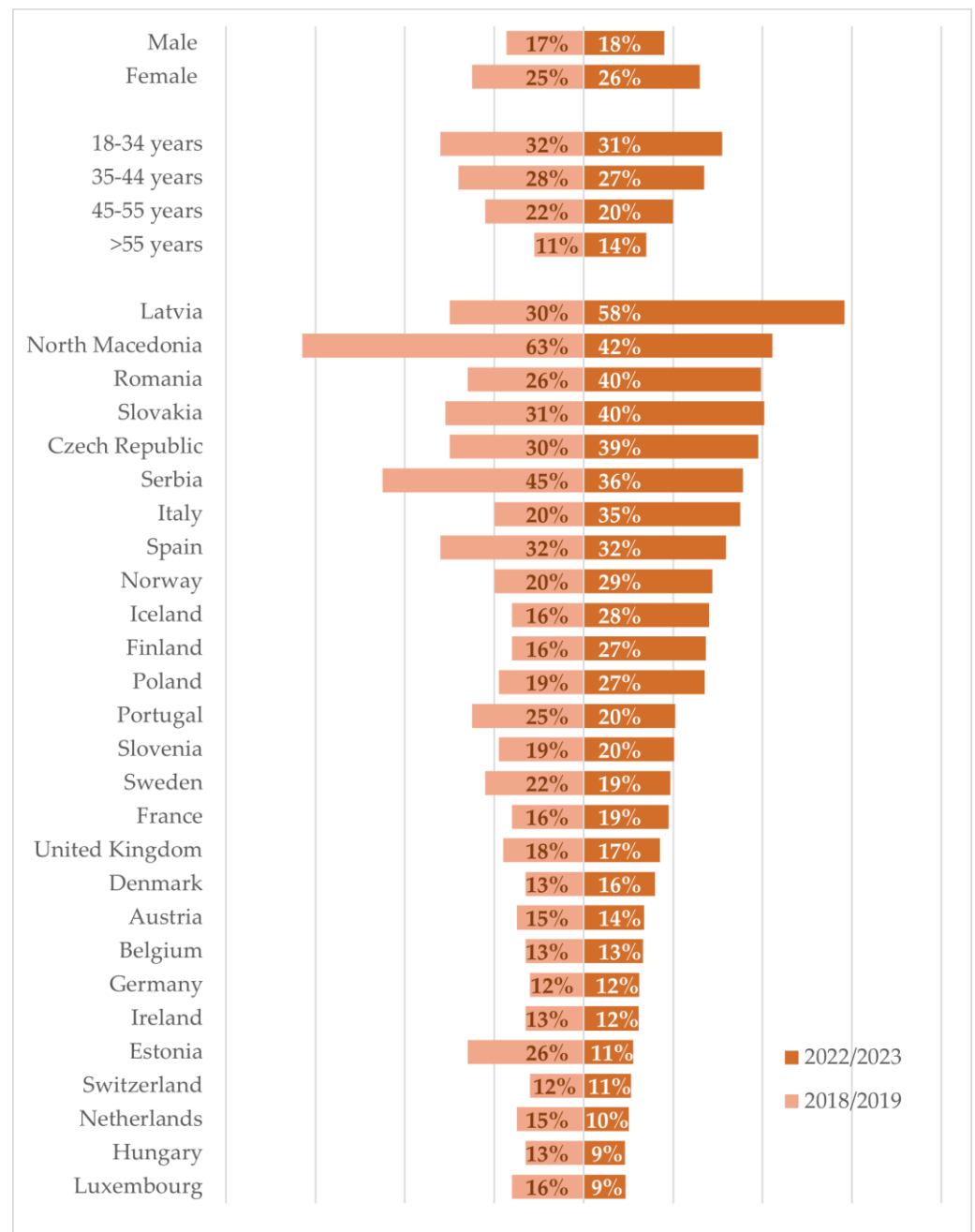


Figure 3. Percentages of veterinarians who took medical leave due to burnout, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, or depression of more than 14 days in the last three years by gender, age, and country.

3.4. Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

Respondents were asked to fill in the seven-question Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). WEMWBS asks about experiences, thoughts, and feelings over the past two weeks. Individual items are scored on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time), and a total scale score is calculated by summing the seven item scores. These questions asked how often they felt optimistic, relaxed, useful, that they were dealing well with problems, thinking clearly, feeling close to people, and able to make up their mind. The minimum score is 7 and the maximum is 35. After removal of all replies with missing answers, 14, 185 responses (2018/2019) and min. 9704 to max. 9690 responses (2022/2023) were valid. The cumulative score in 2018/2019 was 25, compared

to an almost equal cumulative score in 2022/2023 of 24.8. The order of the best-ranked questions remained consistent over the two surveys (Figure 4). In both surveys, wellbeing scores generally increased with age, and females scored lower than males. In 2022/2023, $n = 6$ participants were able to choose 'other gender' and scored particularly low, with a sum of 20.8. Hardly any differences were seen between the two surveys for veterinarians working full-time (sum of 25.1 and 24.5, resp.) or veterinarians working part-time (sum of 25.0 and 24.5, resp.). In 2022/2023, a distinction was made between veterinarians working in an independent practice (sum of 24.9, $n = 4695$) and veterinarians working in a corporate practice (sum of 24.3, $n = 1376$), but no significant difference was observed. Consistently over all countries, 'I've been feeling relaxed' had the highest proportion of 'none of the time' and 'rarely', with 40% (2018/2019) and 38% (2022/2023) (Figure 5).

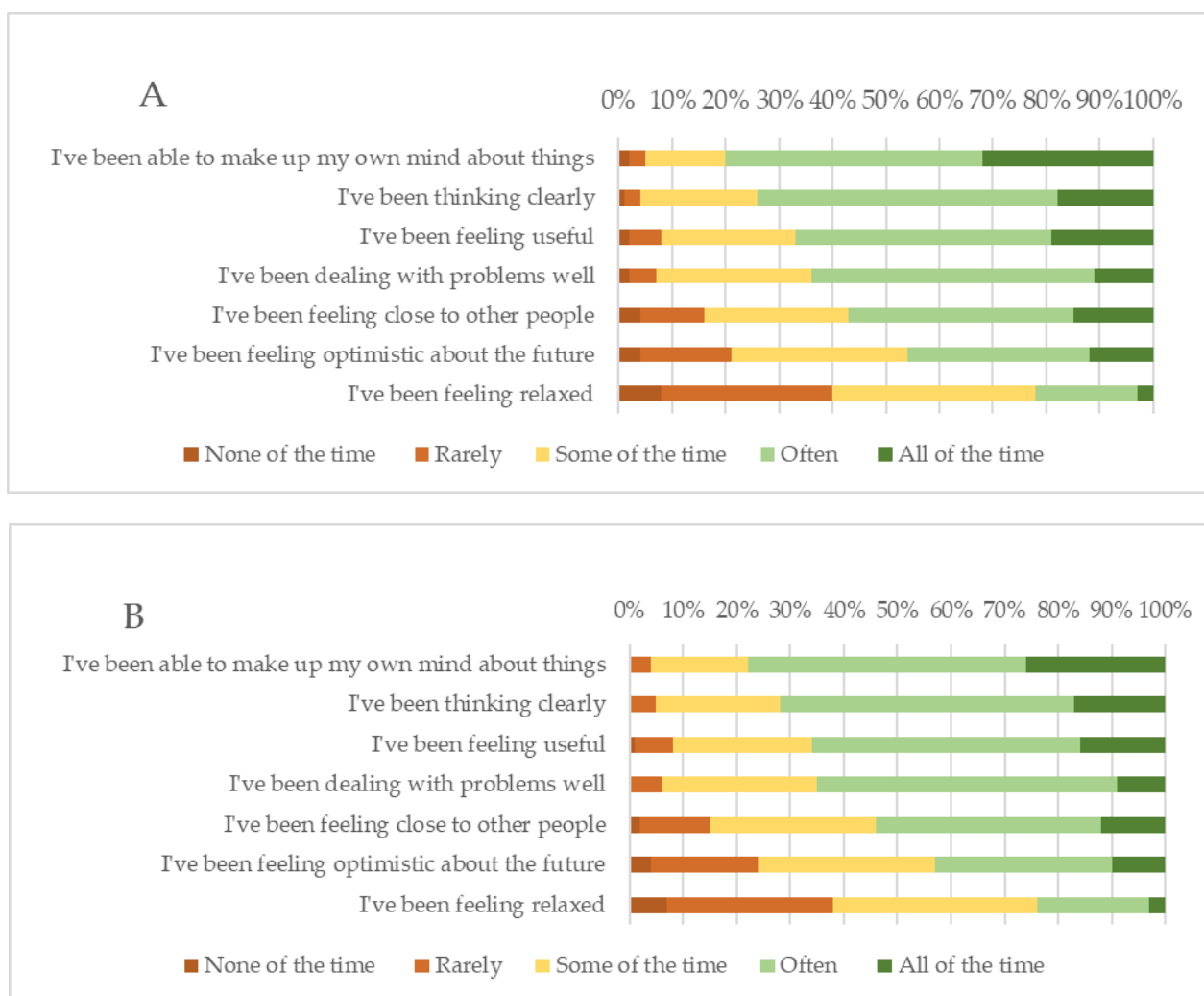


Figure 4. Sum of response frequencies ('none of the time', 'rarely', 'some of the time', 'often', 'all of the time') (bars) and percentages (x-axis) of the seven WEMWBS items in descending order of best scored questions. (Panel A): years 2018/2019, (Panel B): years 2022/2023.

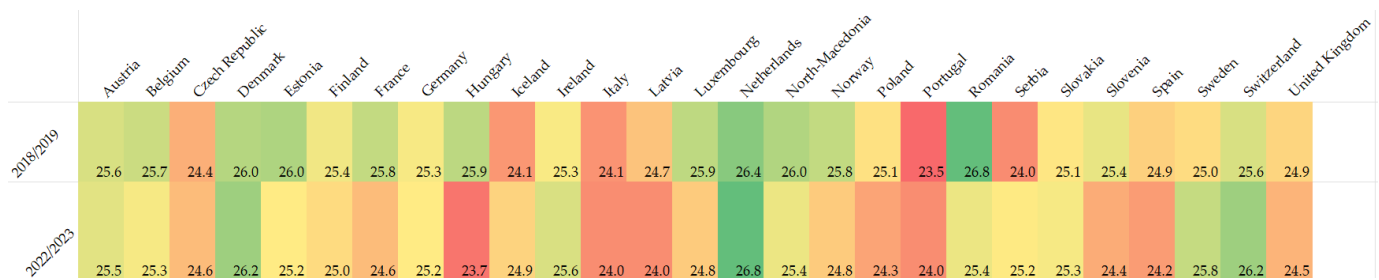


Figure 5. Heatmap of the sum of WEMWB scores per country showing visually the countries with a higher overall WEMWBS score (more positive experiences, thoughts, and feelings) in shades of green and those with lower WEMWB scores in shades of red. (2018/2019: max. 26.80 (green), min. 23.54 (red). 2022/2023: max. 26.80 (green), min. 23.70 (red).

4. Discussion

Attention to veterinary MWB has increased substantially in the last decade, followed by the development of support programs by many veterinary organizations, companies, and faculties [45]. In our study, we analyzed veterinary MWB based on the results of two representative, consecutive surveys in 2018/2019 and 2022/2023 of the veterinary profession on three indicators: (i) self-reported stress levels, (ii) the need for medical leave due to MWB issues, and (iii) the seven-question Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. Despite multidimensional crises (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and the war in Ukraine), the overall MWB indicators have remained worryingly high but relatively stable since 2018. While this might sound surprising, other similar studies confirmed that the European average happiness in the COVID-19 years of 2020–2022 was just as high as in the pre-pandemic years of 2017–2019 [46,47]. There was a globe-spanning surge of benevolence in 2020 and especially in 2021, supported by a stronger sense of common purpose, which might have stabilized the perceived situation and been reflected in our results [48]. In both surveys, important differences were spotlighted between countries, with some countries consistently scoring better (e.g., Denmark, The Netherlands) and other countries consistently lower (e.g., Lithuania, Hungary). However, it is acknowledged that the individual MWB of the population in Europe during the pandemic years declined significantly, with higher levels of anxiety and depression and increased demands for mental health services [49]. In addition, various countries and sectors saw a period called the ‘Great Resignation’ during the pandemic years, where many employees who were dissatisfied in their current job position (mostly related to low remuneration, no opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected at work) resigned and moved on [50–52]. While no precise data are available on the turnover in veterinary workplaces, there are indications that this also happened in the veterinary field, with those who were most unhappy leaving their position within the profession or even leaving the profession completely, and as such, also no longer answering the 2022/2023 survey. Overall, early-career and female veterinarians were identified as being most at risk of an impaired MWB. There are several potential factors to consider that influence these findings. The veterinary profession has evolved, and recent graduates may face different challenges in a changed professional landscape than their more experienced counterparts [53]. Shifts in client expectations, technological advancements, and associated changes in the profession may contribute to additional stress [54]. Recent graduates, regardless of gender, often experience career development pressure to establish themselves in their careers [55]. This pressure can contribute to stress and anxiety, particularly if they perceive that their career progression is slower than expected [56]. Different generations and genders may employ different coping mechanisms. More experienced colleagues may have developed coping strategies over time, while recent graduates may still be learning effective ways to manage stress and challenges [57–59]. Societal expectations and gender roles can influence the experiences of female professionals. Women may feel additional pressure to prove themselves in male-dominated fields like veterinary leadership positions, potentially contributing to

stress [60]. In addition, gender-based discrimination or bias may affect the experiences of female veterinarians from their undergraduate studies onwards, potentially impacting their mental health [61,62]. Stereotypes and biases can create additional stress and undermine professional confidence [63]. Moreover, young female veterinarians may face challenges in balancing their career and personal life, especially if they are also managing family responsibilities [4,64,65]. This balance can be particularly demanding during early career stages [66]. Furthermore, some countries account for higher proportions of early-career and/or female veterinarians, which might have influenced further the individual country results.

4.1. Self-Reported Stress Level

The very nature of veterinary medicine inevitably causes strain due to inherent stressors due to the cumulative responsibility for animal health and welfare, public health, decision making over life and death, economic restrictions on care, and client and societal expectations [67–69]. However, avoidable workplace stressors in veterinary medicine, such as an overly high workload, a lack of control over working hours, and high demands, have a serious and direct toll on productivity and the efficiency of work, work quality, and human resources [17]. The culture of veterinary medicine commonly labels veterinarians with adjectives such as passionate, hard-working, altruistic, and patient-driven, with expectations for veterinarians to be impervious to stress and fatigue, or beliefs that personal health is subservient to work [70]. These unhealthy norms, blind spots, and tacit assumptions can cause mental and physical stress and unsustainable working conditions [70].

To improve the assessment of stress [71], self-reported stress level ratings on a 4-point Lickert-type scale was applied in 2022/2023, as opposed to a 11-point Lickert-type scale in 2018/2019; however, this impeded direct comparison across the two surveys. Nevertheless, the plotted data do not indicate a drastic change between the two surveys, and compared to other publications, the stress level of veterinarians (6.9 on a 0 (no stress)–10 (highest stress) scale in 2018/2019, and with 57% indicating that they are quite stressed (38%) or very stressed (19%) in 2022/2023) seems consistently higher than in the general population. A global survey from 2020 focusing on veterinarians dealing with companion animals used the same 4-point Lickert-type scale and reported that the least stressed groups are part-time employees, male veterinarians, and professionals with 30+ years of experience. A notable finding regarding the stress levels of European veterinarians showed a sharp increase compared to pre-COVID-19, with an average of 60% of professionals being ‘quite’ or ‘very stressed’, and with the highest stress levels reported from the UK (70% ‘quite’ or ‘very stressed’) and Portugal (87% ‘quite’ or ‘very stressed’) [72]. A study from the American Psychological Association (APA) measured stress levels on a 10-point scale in 2020, with an average of 5.6 based on 2076 adult participants. In the 2022 Gallup report on ‘State of the Global Workplace 2023’, 44% of participants on a global level and 39% on a European level said that they experienced a lot of stress, and full-time employees scored significantly more often at the highest stress level. The Gallup analysis found that work engagement (work involvement, enthusiasm for work) has 3.8 times more influence on employee stress than work location (in the practice, hybrid, or remote work). However, this was for all employees, and no studies are available on whether the same applies for the veterinary profession [73]. Denmark, The Netherlands, and Switzerland remained in the top positions in both surveys, as they do in ours. The same result is shown in other publications, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s Better Life Index [74] and the *Journal of Happiness Studies* publication in 2020 on happiness and life satisfaction comparing 21 countries [75,76].

Similarly to our study, the APA data found that different generations experience different levels of stress, with younger adults reporting higher average stress levels (6.1) and stress levels going down with age (ages 56–74; 4.7) [77]. In addition, general mental health was shown to improve with age in the general population too, and was related to improved emotional regulation, communication, and coping skills developing over

time [78]. Several other European studies showed identical risk profiles, with stress levels in general being higher in the younger population and females [79,80]. Our results clearly show that early-career and female veterinarians are more likely to have decreased MWB. As identified earlier, female veterinarians have a higher risk of psychological distress and burnout compared to male colleagues, as do early-career veterinarians compared to more senior colleagues [37,38,81–83]. Factors that may play a role were identified as a high workload, long working hours, moral distress, ethical dilemmas, difficulty in achieving a good work/life balance, and a lack of support or recognition [35]. In particular, early-career professionals are more likely to face different challenges due to the changed veterinary professional landscape, career development pressure, and still developing coping strategies. Female veterinarians may be more likely to face difficulties due to gender roles and expectations, stereotypes and bias, and managing multiple roles and responsibilities without appropriate support, which can be particularly demanding during early career stages. This can lead to role conflicts, a work–life imbalance, and burnout, which can negatively affect self-esteem, life satisfaction, stress levels, and happiness. It is to be hoped that the next generation of veterinarians will grow up in a society with certain expectations about values, team spirit, a work schedule that also allows for time spent with family and friends, fair remuneration, and possibilities to change to other veterinary work fields or professions [45]. This will demand a culture change within veterinary medicine and veterinary practice, also earlier stated by [15,81], in which a compensation model that incentivizes long hours and promotes heroism is abandoned. This situation is not unique to the veterinary profession, as other healthcare professions face similar challenges. It is therefore essential for all healthcare professions to create supportive and inclusive work environments that are adapted to the needs of the different stages of life and that prioritize the wellbeing of all their employees, regardless of age, gender, or other diversity factors. However, the interpretation of these statistics should also consider survival bias, as burned out professionals are more likely to change careers and be excluded from the sampled population [9].

To address these challenges, many national and regional veterinary organizations worldwide have launched awareness campaigns and begun to implement MWB support programs. Organizations such as Mind Matters International ((MMI), founded by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)), Vetlife, and Not One More Vet have been established to raise awareness and improve MWB on an (inter)national level for individuals in need. Despite these programs, it is recognized that not all veterinarians receive the support that they need due to a local lack of availability and stigmatization of MWB issues [12,46].

4.2. Medical Leave Due to Reduced Mental Wellbeing

Severe work-related stress is associated with increased risks of long-term medical leave, although affected individuals generally do experience improvements during this time [84,85]. The average number of veterinarians who had taken off two weeks in a row due to burnout, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, or depression in the preceding three years went slightly down from 26% to 23%, although some countries, including Latvia (28%), Italy (15%), and Romania (14%), reported a significant increase. There was a slight decrease in females needing breaks in 2022/2023 (26%) compared with 2018/2019 (25%). According to the OECD, mental illness is one of the main causes of sickness absence and disability in the workforce [86]. However, the exact amount of medical leave taken due to mental illness in Europe is difficult to estimate, as different countries have different definitions, methods, and sources of data collection. According to the latest European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) in 2020, 9% of people reported having been absent from work for more than 10 days due to health problems in the preceding 12 months. However, EWCS does not distinguish between mental and physical illness [87]. The European Health Interview Survey reported in 2019 that 4.2% of the general population with tertiary education had at least moderate current depressive symptoms [88]. Compared to the general population,

German veterinarians were approximately three times more likely to have depression (OR = 0.349; 95% CI, 0.309 to 0.940) and approximately twice as likely to express current suicidal ideation as the general population sample used (OR = 0.497; 95% CI, 0.445 to 0.554) [89].

Consistently, early-career and female veterinarians were most in need of a medical mental health break. Large differences can also be observed between countries, ranging from 9% to 58%. Compared to the general EU population, numbers are alarmingly high: 8.7% of women and 5.5% of men aged 15 years and over reported chronic depression in the EU in 2019 [88]. However, these numbers may only be the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, help-seeking behavior may be influenced by stigma, fear of confidentiality issues, and unwanted intervention in healthcare students, practicing veterinarians, and physicians compared to non-healthcare workers, which may prevent appropriate health-related help-seeking behavior [90–92]. In our study, we could not access how many had actually sought help, but it is known that veterinarians and other healthcare professionals are systemically disincentivized to acknowledge MWB issues or to seek help due to mental health stigma [93,94] and self-stigma [95]. The difference between veterinarians in need of taking medical leave and the actual rate of taken medical leave remains to be elucidated. For clinical physicians, it was shown that speaking up or seeking help to deal with work-related stress continues to be perceived, especially within the culture of healthcare, as a sign of weakness, despite awareness raising and the known prevalence of burnout [96,97]. In a recent study of veterinarians, the majority (97%) expressed that treatment helped individuals with mental illness lead normal lives, but a much lower proportion (53%) agreed that people were caring and sympathetic toward individuals with mental illness [91]. Negative attitudes toward the presence of social support for mental illness were more likely in veterinarians aged 40–59 years (compared to those aged 20–39 years; 46 vs. 37%, OR = 1.18, $p < 0.001$), in women (compared to men; 75 vs. 64%, $p < 0.001$), by solo practitioners (vs. non-solo; 81 vs. 19%, OR = 1.23, $p = 0.08$), in those with evidence of serious psychological distress (vs. without; OR = 1.55, 22 vs. 9%, $p < 0.001$), and by those reporting mental illness after graduating from veterinary school (vs. reporting no mental illness; 42 vs. 58%, OR = 1.66, $p < 0.001$) [91]. This is also seen in other healthcare professions, where, in a study of 516 university hospital physicians who reported recent suicidal thoughts and/or showed other indicators of psychological ill health, a staggering 78% of these distressed physicians had never sought professional help for depression or burnout [98]. While veterinarians working in research and education reported in our survey the lowest frequencies of medical leave due to mental health issues, a previous study from 2011 of occupational health across various veterinary sectors, those in education and research reported the highest levels of stress, and in another study from 2003, those in research, teaching, industry, and government positions experienced the highest levels of depression [16,25]. Although the situation seems to improve, these numbers are alarming because of the implications for patient care, clinical research, the education of future veterinarians, and for the individual affected veterinarian alike.

4.3. The Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

The cumulative WEMBWS score went slightly down from 25 in 2018/2019 to 24.8 in 2022/2023. Compared to a cross-country study in Denmark, the veterinarians in our surveys seem to score similarly compared to the general population, with a Danish general population WEMBWS score in 2016 of 26.4, in Iceland of 25.4 in 2017, and in the UK in 2016 of 22.9 [99]. WEMBWS scoring was undertaken in the UK in 2019, with similar scores (a sum of 47.7/70 for 14-point WEMBWS), yet there were lower levels of MWB among equine veterinary surgeons and equine veterinary nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the situation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic [36].

Similarly, respondents in our surveys were consistently positive over both surveys about how often they had been able to make up their own mind and think clearly, but less positive about the future and feeling relaxed [100]. Demographic analysis of the veterinary

profession in both surveys showed that early-career professionals and female veterinarians scored lowest. It was shown that a lack of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness in the veterinary profession is frequently reported as a stressor in the UK and USA [101–105]. Timmenga et al. recommended that implementation strategies to increase awareness of MWB and DEI must reach all veterinarians at all levels of their professional careers, e.g., through positive reward programs, campaigns, and webinars, which were universally stated as being very effective in creating awareness and having a large impact [45]. Globally, the number of female veterinarians is increasing and has outpaced the number of male veterinarians in many countries and regions [106–113]. This is also the case in Europe, where the number of female veterinarians is growing rapidly (from 58% in 2018 to 65% in 2023) [2]. Despite this, a gender pay gap is still observed in veterinary practice [2,4], as are client sexism [114], a lack of respect for female practitioners following childbirth and/or taking part-time work [115,116], and gender mismanagement and leadership visibility issues, with females rarely climbing to the upper end of the veterinary hierarchy [109,116,117]. In addition, members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) community experience more mental health problems and suicidal ideation in veterinary school and as veterinary professionals [1,118]. A global survey by the International Veterinary Student Association (IVSA) concluded that student discrimination was a serious issue due to their sexual orientation or ethnicity at most veterinary universities [119]. This was underlined by Snyder et al., who were able to show that the veterinary profession in the USA was the least racially diverse (consisting of 93.8% White non-Hispanics), with one of the lowest proportions of people of color compared to other health occupations [120]. While the sample size in our survey of those choosing ‘other gender’ was too small to analyze, the cumulative WEMWBS was strikingly low, and further research is needed to explore the MWB of and specific support for non-cisgender veterinarians. Although DEI support programs were less available, Timmenga et al. recommended that, at the beginning of veterinary training, all students need positive and inclusive role models as well as diverse examples from the veterinary profession [45].

4.4. Limitations of the Study

The non-probability snowball sampling of the survey made it difficult to determine the sampling error or generalize inferences about the studied entities based solely on the obtained questionnaire responses. There was a subjective measurement bias in the results, since respondents were asked to rate the stress level on a non-standardized scale and via self-reporting. Medical leave due to burnout, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, or depression may underestimate the true effect of the exposure and the outcome, as other mental health conditions such as anxiety were not adequately reflected, leading to an underreporting of medical leave for mental health conditions. In addition, other factors may be at play than the individual need for medical leave, leading to an inability to actually take the medical leave due to, i.e., stigma or workforce shortages. While the short seven-item WEMWBS is widely used to measure MWB and psychological functioning in individuals, it has limitations in that it is based on self-reporting, there are cultural considerations, and the interpretation is challenging, with no defined threshold for defining good or poor MWB. The accessibility and geographical coverage of the survey were enhanced by providing the questionnaires in different languages. However, even well-translated surveys can be biased by cultural issues. The main considerations were the acceptability of extreme positive or negative opinions of the assessment scales in various cultures, cross-cultural equivalence, and whether respondents could be biased toward answering questions in ways that were socially acceptable.

5. Conclusions

Veterinarian MWB is complex and multifaceted, and impaired MWB can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or professional background. Our findings showed that despite multidimensional crises, the need for medical leave due to reduced mental health

and MWB scores remained stable, with overall stress levels being consistently high. In particular, our results showed that early-career and female professionals are at higher risk, potentially due to the changed veterinary professional landscape, career development pressure, and professionals still developing coping strategies. Moreover, gender roles and expectations, stereotypes, and bias may play a role, as well as the need to manage multiple roles and responsibilities without appropriate support. All these aspects can be particularly demanding during early career stages. However, our results indicate that part-time work seems beneficial for veterinary MWB. Therefore, improving veterinarian wellbeing will be most successful by creating supportive veterinary workplaces that prioritize wellbeing, staff retention, and pay attention to the work/life balance. Despite many psychometric tools reported in the (veterinary) literature to measure MWB, there is a crucial need to define, in the near future, comparable and consistent standards for MWB assessments in healthcare professions.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/vetsci11010048/s1>: Table S1: STROBE Statement—checklist of items that should be included in reports of cross-sectional studies, adapted from [40]; Table S2: Checklist for reporting results of internet E-surveys (CHERRIES), adapted from [41]; Table S3: Question and answer formats from of the 3rd VetSurvey; Table S4: Analyzed countries, their total respondents for 2018/2019, registered active veterinarians in 2022, participation rate, population, and veterinarians per 1000 population in 2022.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, visualization, supervision, project administration, writing—original draft preparation, and writing—review and editing: N.D.B.; validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, visualization, writing—original draft preparation, and writing—review and editing: W.J.; writing—review and editing: T.C., L.L., and M.U. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethics Committee of the Cliniques Universitaires Saint-Luc (Brussels, Belgium) and the CHU UCL Namur (Yvoir, Belgium) confirmed that this non-interventional study was legally exempt from ethical review, as laid down in Art. 10 of the Belgian law relating to experiments on the human person from 7 May 2004.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed written consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, N.D.B. The data are not publicly available due to containing information that could compromise the privacy of survey participants.

Acknowledgments: The authors are grateful for the numerous contributions from the survey participants.

Conflicts of Interest: Authors W.J. and N.D.B. were employed by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe. All authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

References

1. Robinson, D.; Edwards, M.; Mason, B.; Cockett, J.; Arnill Graham, K.; Martin, A. *RCVS 2019 Survey of the Veterinary Profession*; Institute for Employment Studies: Brighton, UK, 2019. Available online: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/the-2019-survey-of-the-veterinary-profession/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
2. FVE. *FVE VETSURVEY 2018*; European Veterinary Survey 2018—Future Veterinarians: Younger and Female; Federation of Veterinarians of Europe: Brussels, Belgium, 2019; Available online: <https://fve.org/publications/european-veterinary-survey-2018-future-veterinarians-younger-and-female-2/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
3. Gardner, D.H.; Hini, D. Work-Related Stress in the Veterinary Profession in New Zealand. *N. Z. Vet. J.* **2006**, *54*, 119–124. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
4. Kersebohm, J.C.; Lorenz, T.; Becher, A.; Doherr, M.G. Factors Related to Work and Life Satisfaction of Veterinary Practitioners in Germany. *Vet. Rec. Open* **2017**, *4*, e000229. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]

5. Nett, R.J.; Witte, T.K.; Holzbauer, S.M.; Elchos, B.L.; Campagnolo, E.R.; Musgrave, K.J.; Carter, K.K.; Kurkjian, K.M.; Vanicek, C.F.; O'Leary, D.R.; et al. Risk Factors for Suicide, Attitudes toward Mental Illness, and Practice-Related Stressors among US Veterinarians. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2015**, *247*, 945–955. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
6. Vande Griek, O.H.; Clark, M.A.; Witte, T.K.; Nett, R.J.; Moeller, A.N.; Stabler, M.E. Development of a Taxonomy of Practice-Related Stressors Experienced by Veterinarians in the United States. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2018**, *252*, 227–233. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
7. Sonneveld, D.; Goverts, Y.; Duijn, C.C.M.A.; Camps, G.; Bougie, R.; Mastenbroek, N.J.J.M. Dutch Veterinary Graduates Leaving Practice: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Frequency and Underlying Reasons. *Vet. Rec.* **2023**, *192*, e2178. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
8. Bartram, D.J.; Yadegarfar, G.; Baldwin, D.S. Psychosocial Working Conditions and Work-Related Stressors among UK Veterinary Surgeons. *Occup. Med. Oxf. Engl.* **2009**, *59*, 334–341. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
9. Emmett, L.; Aden, J.; Bunina, A.; Klaps, A.; Stetina, B.U. Feminization and Stress in the Veterinary Profession: A Systematic Diagnostic Approach and Associated Management. *Behav. Sci.* **2019**, *9*, E114. [CrossRef]
10. Moses, L.; Malowney, M.J.; Wesley Boyd, J. Ethical Conflict and Moral Distress in Veterinary Practice: A Survey of North American Veterinarians. *J. Vet. Intern. Med.* **2018**, *32*, 2115–2122. [CrossRef]
11. Perret, J.L.; Best, C.O.; Coe, J.B.; Greer, A.L.; Khosa, D.K.; Jones-Bitton, A. The Complex Relationship Between Veterinarian Mental Health and Client Satisfaction. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2020**, *7*, 92. [CrossRef]
12. Volk, J.O.; Schimmack, U.; Strand, E.B.; Lord, L.K.; Siren, C.W. Executive Summary of the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2018**, *252*, 1231–1238. [CrossRef]
13. Volk, J.O.; Schimmack, U.; Strand, E.B.; Vasconcelos, J.; Siren, C.W. Executive Summary of the Merck Animal Health Veterinarian Wellbeing Study II. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2020**, *256*, 1237–1244. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
14. Best, C.O.; Perret, J.L.; Hewson, J.; Khosa, D.K.; Conlon, P.D.; Jones-Bitton, A. A Survey of Veterinarian Mental Health and Resilience in Ontario, Canada. *Can. Vet. J. Rev. Veterinaire Can.* **2020**, *61*, 166–172.
15. Perret, J.L.; Best, C.O.; Coe, J.B.; Greer, A.L.; Khosa, D.K.; Jones-Bitton, A. Prevalence of Mental Health Outcomes among Canadian Veterinarians. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2020**, *256*, 365–375. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
16. Hatch, P.H.; Winefield, H.R.; Christie, B.A.; Lievaart, J.J. Workplace Stress, Mental Health, and Burnout of Veterinarians in Australia. *Aust. Vet. J.* **2011**, *89*, 460–468. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
17. Steffey, M.A.; Griffon, D.J.; Risselada, M.; Scharf, V.F.; Buote, N.J.; Zamprogno, H.; Winter, A.L. Veterinarian Burnout Demographics and Organizational Impacts: A Narrative Review. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2023**, *10*, 1184526. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
18. Dalum, H.S.; Tyssen, R.; Hem, E. Prevalence and Individual and Work-Related Factors Associated with Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours among Veterinarians in Norway: A Cross-Sectional, Nationwide Survey-Based Study (the NORVET Study). *BMJ Open* **2022**, *12*, e055827. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
19. Cevizci, S.; Babaoğlu, Ü.T.; Serpen, A.; Yilmaz, O.; Boyar, H.; Çelikel, S. Occupational Stress and Risk Factors in Veterinary Surgeons. *Kafkas Univ. Vet. Fak. Derg.* **2014**, *20*, 41–48. [CrossRef]
20. Begeny, C.; Ryan, M.; Bongiorno, R. Motivation, Satisfaction, and Retention: Understanding the Importance of Vets' Day-to-Day Work Experiences. 2018. Available online: <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/2990/motivation-satisfaction-and-retention-bva-workforce-report-nov-2018-1.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
21. Armitage-Chan, E. 'I Wish I Was Someone Else': Complexities in Identity Formation and Professional Wellbeing in Veterinary Surgeons. *Vet. Rec.* **2020**, *187*, 113. [CrossRef]
22. Fritsch, L.; Morrison, D.; Shirangi, A.; Day, L. Psychological Well-Being of Australian Veterinarians. *Aust. Vet. J.* **2009**, *87*, 76–81. [CrossRef]
23. Meehan, M.; Bradley, L. Identifying and Evaluating Job Stress within the Australian Small Animal Veterinary Profession. *Aust. Vet. Pract.* **2007**, *37*, 70–83.
24. Smith, D.; Leggat, P.; Speare, R. Musculoskeletal Disorders and Psychosocial Risk Factors among Veterinarians in Queensland, Australia. *Aust. Vet. J.* **2009**, *87*, 260–265. [CrossRef]
25. Reijula, K.; Räsänen, K.; Hämäläinen, M.; Juntunen, K.; Lindbohm, M.-L.; Taskinen, H.; Bergbom, B.; Rinta-Jouppi, M. Work Environment and Occupational Health of Finnish Veterinarians. *Am. J. Ind. Med.* **2003**, *44*, 46–57. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
26. Hansez, I.; Schins, F.; Rollin, F. Occupational Stress, Work-Home Interference and Burnout among Belgian Veterinary Practitioners. *Ir. Vet. J.* **2008**, *61*, 233. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
27. Cardwell, J.M.; Lewis, E.G.; Smith, K.C.; Holt, E.R.; Baillie, S.; Allister, R.; Adams, V.J. A Cross-Sectional Study of Mental Health in UK Veterinary Undergraduates. *Vet. Rec.* **2013**, *173*, 266. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
28. Mellanby, R.J.; Platt, B.; Simkin, S.; Hawton, K. Incidence of Alcohol-Related Deaths in the Veterinary Profession in England and Wales, 1993–2005. *Vet. J.* **2009**, *181*, 332–335. [CrossRef]
29. Bartram, D.J.; Baldwin, D.S. Veterinary Surgeons and Suicide: A Structured Review of Possible Influences on Increased Risk. *Vet. Rec.* **2010**, *166*, 388–397. [CrossRef]
30. Witte, T.K.; Spitzer, E.G.; Edwards, N.; Fowler, K.A.; Nett, R.J. Suicides and Deaths of Undetermined Intent among Veterinary Professionals from 2003 through 2014. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2019**, *255*, 595–608. [CrossRef]
31. Tomasi, S.E.; Fechter-Leggett, E.D.; Edwards, N.T.; Reddish, A.D.; Crosby, A.E.; Nett, R.J. Suicide among Veterinarians in the United States from 1979 through 2015. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2019**, *254*, 104–112. [CrossRef]
32. Mair, T.S.; Lockett, E. The Impact of COVID-19 on Equine Veterinary Practice and Mental Wellbeing. *Equine Vet. Educ.* **2021**, *33*, 6–9. [CrossRef]

33. Mureşan, A.N.; Morariu, S.; Baisan, R.A.; Costea, R.; Mureşan, C. The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic During Lockdown on the Veterinary Profession in Romania: A Questionnaire-Based Survey. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2021**, *8*, 737914. [CrossRef]
34. Quain, A.; Mullan, S.; McGreevy, P.D.; Ward, M.P. Frequency, Stressfulness and Type of Ethically Challenging Situations Encountered by Veterinary Team Members During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2021**, *8*, 647108. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
35. Quain, A.; Mullan, S.; Ward, M.P. Risk Factors Associated With Increased Ethically Challenging Situations Encountered by Veterinary Team Members During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2021**, *8*, 752388. [CrossRef]
36. Mair, T.S.; Mountford, D.R.; Radley, R.; Lockett, E.; Parkin, T.D. Mental Wellbeing of Equine Veterinary Surgeons, Veterinary Nurses and Veterinary Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Equine Vet. Educ.* **2021**, *33*, 15–23. [CrossRef]
37. Scoresby, K.; Journey, C.; Fackler, A.; Tran, C.V.; Nugent, W.; Strand, E. Relationships between Diversity Demographics, Psychological Distress, and Suicidal Thinking in the Veterinary Profession: A Nationwide Cross-Sectional Study during COVID-19. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2023**, *10*, 1130826. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
38. Ouedraogo, F.B.; Lefebvre, S.L.; Hansen, C.R.; Brorsen, B.W. Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, and Secondary Traumatic Stress among Full-Time Veterinarians in the United States (2016–2018). *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2021**, *258*, 1259–1270. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
39. Leka, S.; Griffiths, A.; Cox, T. *Work Organisation & Stress: Systematic Problem Approaches for Employers, Managers and Trade Union Representatives*; Protecting Workers' Health Series: No. 3; World Health Organization: Geneva, Switzerland, 2003. Available online: https://kohahq.searo.who.int/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=26419&shelfbrowse_itemnumber=46783 (accessed on 22 December 2023).
40. von Elm, E.; Altman, D.G.; Egger, M.; Pocock, S.J.; Gøtzsche, P.C.; Vandenbroucke, J.P. The Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) Statement: Guidelines for Reporting Observational Studies. *J. Clin. Epidemiol.* **2008**, *61*, 344–349. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
41. Eysenbach, G. Improving the Quality of Web Surveys: The Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys (CHERRIES). *J. Med. Internet Res.* **2004**, *6*, e34. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
42. Tennant, R.; Hiller, L.; Fishwick, R.; Platt, S.; Joseph, S.; Weich, S.; Parkinson, J.; Secker, J.; Stewart-Brown, S. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS): Development and UK Validation. *Health Qual. Life Outcomes* **2007**, *5*, 63. [CrossRef]
43. Bartram, D.J.; Yadegarfar, G.; Sinclair, J.M.; Baldwin, D.S. Validation of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) as an Overall Indicator of Population Mental Health and Well-Being in the UK Veterinary Profession. *Vet. J.* **2011**, *187*, 397–398. [CrossRef]
44. Bartram, D.J.; Sinclair, J.M.; Baldwin, D.S. Further Validation of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) in the UK Veterinary Profession: Rasch Analysis. *Qual. Life Res.* **2013**, *22*, 379–391. [CrossRef]
45. Timmenga, F.S.L.; Jansen, W.; Turner, P.V.; De Briyne, N. Mental Well-Being and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness in the Veterinary Profession: Pathways to a More Resilient Profession. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2022**, *9*, 888189. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
46. Ahrendt, D.; Anderson, R.; Dubois, H.; Jungblut, J.-M.; Leoncik, T.; Sandor, E.; Poetinen, L. *European Quality of Life Survey 2016*; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: Brussels, Belgium, 2018; Available online: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2017/european-quality-life-survey-2016> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
47. Helliwell, J.F.; Layard, R.; Sachs, J.D.; De Neve, J.-E. World Happiness Report 2021. 2021. Available online: <https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2021/WHR+21.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
48. Helliwell, J.F.; Layard, R.; Sachs, J.D.; De Neve, J.-E.; Aknin, L.B.; Wang, S. World Happiness Report 2023. 2023. Available online: <https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2023/WHR+23.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
49. OECD. *Health at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2019. [CrossRef]
50. Parker, K.; Horowitz, J.M. Majority of Workers Who Quit a Job in 2021 Cite Low Pay, No Opportunities for Advancement, Feeling Disrespected. *Pew Res. Cent.* **2022**. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
51. Platt, S.R. *It's Time for a Change: A Call to Make Your Life Count in a World of Urgent Need 2019*; U.S., Colorado Springs: Multnomah, OR, USA, 2019; ISBN 9780735291416.
52. Theodoridou, A.A. Brain Drain, A Modern Issue for the EU. *HAPSc Policy Briefs Ser.* **2023**, *4*, 142–148. [CrossRef]
53. Viner, B. Veterinary Career Pathways in a Rapidly Changing World. *Practice* **2021**, *43*, 397–400. [CrossRef]
54. Bonnaud, L.; Fortané, N. Being a Vet: The Veterinary Profession in Social Science Research. *Rev. Agric. Food Environ. Stud.* **2021**, *102*, 125–149. [CrossRef]
55. O'Connor, E. Sources of Work Stress in Veterinary Practice in the UK. *Vet. Rec.* **2019**, *184*, 588. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
56. Pritt, S.L.; Case, H.C. The Importance of Veterinary Career Awareness. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2018**, *252*, 1200–1204. [CrossRef]
57. Oldenborgh, E. Veterinary Students Worldwide: Mental Health, Causes of Stress and Coping Mechanisms. Master's Thesis, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2022. Available online: <https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/452> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
58. Williams, S.M.; Arnold, P.K.; Mills, J.N. Coping with Stress: A Survey of Murdoch University Veterinary Students. *J. Vet. Med. Educ.* **2005**, *32*, 201–212. [CrossRef]

59. Whitnall, V.M.; Simmonds, J.G. Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies in Experienced Australian Veterinarians. *Vet. Rec.* **2021**, *189*, e202. [CrossRef]
60. Treanor, L.; Marlow, S.; Swail, J. Rationalizing the Postfeminist Paradox: The Case of UK Women Veterinary Professionals. *Gend. Work Organ.* **2021**, *28*, 337–360. [CrossRef]
61. Summers, O.S.; Medcalf, R.; Hubbard, K.A.; McCarroll, C.S. A Cross-Sectional Study Examining Perceptions of Discriminatory Behaviors Experienced and Witnessed by Veterinary Students Undertaking Clinical Extra-Mural Studies. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2023**, *10*, 940836. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
62. Kimble, N. The Influence of Gender Inequities Experienced on the Intended Career Pathways of Women Veterinary Students. Master's Thesis, University of Arizona, Tucson, AR, USA, 2022. Available online: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/536f5522d80d14f48b822b638ab2fb57/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
63. Girvan, P. Clearing up the Bullshit: Deconstructing 'feminisation', Gender Stereotypes and Gender Biases within UK Veterinary Surgery. Master's Thesis, Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden, 2019. Available online: <https://studyvent.com/search/8908/clearing-up-the-bullshit> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
64. Mastenbroek, N.J.J.M.; Jaarsma, A.D.C.; Demerouti, E.; Muijtjens, A.M.M.; Scherpbier, A.J.J.A.; van Beukelen, P. Burnout and Engagement, and Its Predictors in Young Veterinary Professionals: The Influence of Gender. *Vet. Rec.* **2014**, *174*, 144. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
65. British Veterinary Association (BVA) CONGRESS Gender Issues and the Veterinary Profession—Striking a Healthy Balance. *Vet. Rec.* **2006**, *159*, 505–506. [CrossRef]
66. Sirajunisa, K.; Panchanatham, N. Influence of Occupational Stress on Work Life Balance among Women Professionals. *J. Commer.* **2010**, *2*, 44. Available online: <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:6722876> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
67. Arbe Montoya, A.I.; Hazel, S.; Matthew, S.M.; McArthur, M.L. Moral Distress in Veterinarians. *Vet. Rec.* **2019**, *185*, 631. [CrossRef]
68. Crane, M.F.; Phillips, J.K.; Karin, E. Trait Perfectionism Strengthens the Negative Effects of Moral Stressors Occurring in Veterinary Practice. *Aust. Vet. J.* **2015**, *93*, 354–360. [CrossRef]
69. Dow, M.Q.; Chur-Hansen, A.; Hamood, W.; Edwards, S. Impact of Dealing with Bereaved Clients on the Psychological Wellbeing of Veterinarians. *Aust. Vet. J.* **2019**, *97*, 382–389. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
70. Steffey, M.A.; Griffon, D.J.; Risselada, M.; Buote, N.J.; Scharf, V.F.; Zamprogno, H.; Winter, A.L. A Narrative Review of the Physiology and Health Effects of Burnout Associated with Veterinarian-Pertinent Occupational Stressors. *Front. Vet. Sci.* **2023**, *10*, 1184525. [CrossRef]
71. Cohen, S.; Kamarck, T.; Mermelstein, R. A Global Measure of Perceived Stress. *J. Health Soc. Behav.* **1983**, *24*, 385–396. [CrossRef]
72. Moorcock, A.; Potter, N.; Kunduz-Kara, D. *VetsSurvey 2021: Understanding the Veterinary Profession*; CM Research and VetsPanel: London, UK, 2021; Available online: <https://cm-research.com/vetssurvey-2021-understanding-the-veterinary-profession-report/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
73. *Gallup State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report*; Gallup, Inc.: Washington, DC, USA, 2023; p. 99. Available online: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx#ite-506924> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
74. Greco, S.; Ishizaka, A.; Resce, G.; Torrisi, G. Measuring Well-Being by a Multidimensional Spatial Model in OECD Better Life Index Framework. *Socio-Econ. Plan. Sci.* **2020**, *70*, 100684. [CrossRef]
75. Ruggeri, K.; Garcia-Garzon, E.; Maguire, Á.; Matz, S.; Huppert, F.A. Well-Being Is More than Happiness and Life Satisfaction: A Multidimensional Analysis of 21 Countries. *Health Qual. Life Outcomes* **2020**, *18*, 192. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
76. Lataster, J.; Reijnders, J.; Janssens, M.; Simons, M.; Peeters, S.; Jacobs, N. Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Well-Being across Age: A Cross-Sectional General Population Study among 1709 Dutch Speaking Adults. *J. Happiness Stud.* **2022**, *23*, 2259–2290. [CrossRef]
77. American Psychological Association. *Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis*; American Psychological Association: Washington, DC, USA, 2020. Available online: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/sia-mental-health-crisis.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
78. Thomas, M.L.; Kaufmann, C.N.; Palmer, B.W.; Depp, C.A.; Martin, A.S.; Glorioso, D.K.; Thompson, W.K.; Og Jeste, D.V. Paradoxical Trend for Improvement in Mental Health with Aging: A Community-Based Study of 1,546 Adults Aged 21–100 Years. *J. Clin. Psychiatry* **2016**, *77*, 1019. [CrossRef]
79. Odriozola-González, P.; Planchuelo-Gómez, Á.; Irturia, M.J.; de Luis-García, R. Psychological Symptoms of the Outbreak of the COVID-19 Confinement in Spain. *J. Health Psychol.* **2022**, *27*, 825–835. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
80. WEF. *5 Facts about Global Mental Health*; World Economic Forum: Geneva, Switzerland, 2018. Available online: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/global-mental-health-five-key-insights-which-emerge-from-the-data/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
81. Perret, J.L.; Best, C.O.; Coe, J.B.; Greer, A.L.; Khosa, D.K.; Jones-Bitton, A. Association of Demographic, Career, and Lifestyle Factors with Resilience and Association of Resilience with Mental Health Outcomes in Veterinarians in Canada. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2020**, *257*, 1057–1068. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
82. Kahler, S.C. Moral Stress the Top Trigger in Veterinarians' Compassion Fatigue: Veterinary Social Worker Suggests Redefining Veterinarians' Ethical Responsibility. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2015**, *246*, 16–18. Available online: <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2015-01-01/moral-stress-top-trigger-veterinarians-compassion-fatigue> (accessed on 22 December 2023).

83. Scotney, R.L.; McLaughlin, D.; Keates, H.L. An Investigation of the Prevalence of Compassion Fatigue, Compassion Satisfaction and Burnout in Those Working in Animal-Related Occupations Using the Professional Quality of Life (ProQoL) Scale. *Vet. Nurse* **2019**, *10*, 276–284. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
84. Hultén, A.-M.; Bjerkeli, P.; Holmgren, K. Work-Related Stress and Future Sick Leave in a Working Population Seeking Care at Primary Health Care Centres: A Prospective Longitudinal Study Using the WSQ. *BMC Public Health* **2022**, *22*, 851. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
85. Glasscock, D.J.; Carstensen, O.; Dalgard, V.L. Recovery from Work-Related Stress: A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Stress Management Intervention in a Clinical Sample. *Int. Arch. Occup. Environ. Health* **2018**, *91*, 675–687. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
86. OECD. *Sick on the Job? Myths and Realities about Mental Health and Work, Mental Health and Work*; OECD Publishing: Paris, France, 2012. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
87. Sostero, M.; Milasi, S.; Hurley, J.; Fernandez-Macías, E.; Bisello, M. *Teleworkability and the COVID-19 Crisis: A New Digital Divide?* JRC Working Papers Series on Labour, Education and Technology; European Commission: Seville, Spain, 2020; JRC121193. Available online: <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-07/jrc121193.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
88. Eurostat. *European Health Interview Survey (EHIS): Mental Well-Being and Social Support Statistics*; Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union: Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2018. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/hlth_det_esms.htm (accessed on 22 December 2023).
89. Schunter, N.; Glaesmer, H.; Lucht, L.; Bahramsoltani, M. Depression, Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Risk in German Veterinarians Compared with the General German Population. *PLoS ONE* **2022**, *17*, e0270912. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
90. Mcfarland, D.C.; Hlubocky, F.; Riba, M. Update on Addressing Mental Health and Burnout in Physicians: What Is the Role for Psychiatry? *Curr. Psychiatry Rep.* **2019**, *21*, 108. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
91. Kassem, A.M.; Witte, T.K.; Nett, R.J.; Carter, K.K. Characteristics Associated with Negative Attitudes toward Mental Illness among US Veterinarians. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2019**, *254*, 979–985. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
92. Aranha, P.R.L.; Roshini, M.; Seema, P. Assessment of Health-Seeking Behavior among Undergraduate Students at a University. *J. Health Allied Sci. NU* **2022**, *12*, 385–391. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
93. Cardwell, J.M.; Lewis, E.G. Stigma, Coping, Stress and Distress in the Veterinary Profession—the Importance of Evidence-Based Discourse. *Vet. Rec.* **2019**, *184*, 706–708. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
94. Wallace, J.E. Mental Health and Stigma in the Medical Profession. *Health* **2012**, *16*, 3–18. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
95. McArthur, M.L.; Matthew, S.M.; Brand, C.P.; Andrews, J.; Fawcett, A.; Hazel, S. Cross-sectional Analysis of Veterinary Student Coping Strategies and Stigma in Seeking Psychological Help. *Vet. Rec.* **2019**, *184*, 709. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
96. Koinis, A.; Giannou, V.; Drantaki, V.; Angelaina, S.; Stratou, E.; Saridi, M. The Impact of Healthcare Workers Job Environment on Their Mental-Emotional Health. Coping Strategies: The Case of a Local General Hospital. *Health Psychol. Res.* **2015**, *3*, 1984. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
97. Hill, A.B. Breaking the Stigma—A Physician’s Perspective on Self-Care and Recovery. *N. Engl. J. Med.* **2017**, *376*, 1103–1105. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
98. Fridner, A.; Belkic, K.; Marini, M.; Sendén, M.G.; Schenck-Gustafsson, K. Why Don’t Academic Physicians Seek Needed Professional Help for Psychological Distress? *Swiss Med. Wkly.* **2012**, *142*, w13626. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
99. Koushede, V.; Lasgaard, M.; Hinrichsen, C.; Meilstrup, C.; Nielsen, L.; Rayce, S.B.; Torres-Sahli, M.; Gudmundsdottir, D.G.; Stewart-Brown, S.; Santini, Z.I. Measuring Mental Well-Being in Denmark: Validation of the Original and Short Version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS and SWEMWBS) and Cross-Cultural Comparison across Four European Settings. *Psychiatry Res.* **2019**, *271*, 502–509. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
100. RCVS. Preliminary Report for the RCVS Workforce Summit 2021—Recruitment, Retention and Return in the Veterinary Profession 2021. Available online: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/recruitment-retention-and-return-in-the-veterinary-profession/retention-recruitment-and-return-in-the-veterinary-profession-preliminary-study-updated-2022.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
101. British Veterinary Association. *BVA Report on Discrimination in the Veterinary Profession 2019*; British Veterinary Association: London, UK, 2019; p. 10. Available online: <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/2991/bva-report-on-discrimination-in-the-veterinary-profession.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
102. Elmore, R.G. The Lack of Racial Diversity in Veterinary Medicine. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2003**, *222*, 24–26. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
103. Elmore, R.G. Reasons for the Lack of Racial Diversity in Veterinary Medicine. *J. Vet. Med. Educ.* **2004**, *31*, 414–416. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
104. Greenhill, L.M. DiVersity Matters: A Review of the Diversity Initiative of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. *J. Vet. Med. Educ.* **2009**, *36*, 359–362. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
105. Greenhill, L.M.; Davis, K.C.; Lowrie, P.M.; Amass, S.F. *Navigating Diversity and Inclusion in Veterinary Medicine*; Navigating Diversity and Inclusion in Veterinary Medicine; Purdue University Press: Indianapolis, IN, USA, 2013. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
106. German State Veterinary Association BbT U40-Workshop. 2020, pp. 558–568. Available online: <https://www.amtstierarzt.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Bericht-U40-Workshop.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
107. Gül, R.T.B.; Ozkul, T.; Akçay, A.; Ozen, A. Historical Profile of Gender in Turkish Veterinary Education. *J. Vet. Med. Educ.* **2008**, *35*, 305–309. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
108. Heath, T.J. Longitudinal Study of Veterinary Students and Veterinarians: Family and Gender Issues after 20 Years. *Aust. Vet. J.* **2007**, *85*, 290–295. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

109. Irvine, L.; Vermilya, J.R. Gender Work in a Feminized Profession: The Case of Veterinary Medicine. *Gend. Soc.* **2010**, *24*, 56–82. [CrossRef]
110. Lofstedt, J. Gender and Veterinary Medicine. *Can. Vet. J. Rev. Veterinaire Can.* **2003**, *44*, 533–535. Available online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC340187/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
111. Mastenbroek, N.J.J.M. The Art of Staying Engaged: The Role of Personal Resources in the Mental Well-Being of Young Veterinary Professionals. *J. Vet. Med. Educ.* **2017**, *44*, 84–94. [CrossRef]
112. Robinson, D.; Buzzeo, J. *RCVS 2013 Survey of Recent Graduates*; Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons: London, UK, 2013. Available online: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/rcvs-survey-of-recent-graduates-ies-2013/> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
113. Veterinärmedizinischen Universität Wien. *Vetmeduni Vienna Jahresbericht 2020*; University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna: Vienna, Austria, 2020; p. 36. Available online: https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/fileadmin/v/oeuk/Jahresbericht/Deutsch/Vetmeduni_Vienna_Jahresbericht_2020_WEB_low.pdf (accessed on 22 December 2023).
114. Williams, A. Sexism Straight from the Horse's Mouth: Life as a Female Vet. *The Conversation* 2014. Available online: <https://theconversation.com/sexism-straight-from-the-horses-mouth-life-as-a-female-vet-33962> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
115. Gatrell, C. *Embodying Women's Work*; Open University Press: Maidenhead, UK, 2008; ISBN 978-0-335-21990-2.
116. Knights, D.; Clarke, C. Gendered Practices in Veterinary Organisations. *Vet. Rec.* **2019**, *185*, 407. [CrossRef]
117. Castro, S.M.; Armitage-Chan, E. Career Aspiration in UK Veterinary Students: The Influences of Gender, Self-Esteem and Year of Study. *Vet. Rec.* **2016**, *179*, 408. [CrossRef]
118. Witte, T.K.; Gorczyca, K.; Chaddock, M.; Greenhill, L.M.; Carmichael, P. Health and Well-Being Among LGBTQ Veterinary Professionals: What It Is and Why It Is Different. In Proceedings of the AVMA Annual Conference, Denver, CO, USA, 13 July 2018; p. 4. Available online: https://docs.google.com/document/d/14yzdX3lGCru_LvB-PJtgyY7fbuuetYjZmAYKyFrVRaU/edit (accessed on 22 December 2023).
119. Shergill Kaur, N.; Buren, L.; Martina, M.; Sekinat Oluboyede, I.; Saidi, H. *Report of the International Veterinary Students' Association's (IVSA) Taskforce on Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI)—Discrimination In The Veterinary Community*; International Veterinary Students' Association: Brussels, Belgium, 2019; p. 33. Available online: <https://www.ivsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IVSA-Discrimination-In-The-Veterinary-Community-f-1.pdf> (accessed on 22 December 2023).
120. Snyder, C.R.; Frogner, B.K.; Skillman, S.M. Facilitating Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Health Workforce. *J. Allied Health* **2018**, *47*, 58–65. Available online: https://depts.washington.edu/uwrhrc/uploads/FINALREPORT_Facilitating%20Diversity%20in%20the%20Health%20Workforce_7.8.2015.pdf (accessed on 22 December 2023). [PubMed]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.