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Basel

Researcher perspectives on raising concerns: First results from the PRISM project

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PRISM

Perspectives on Research Integrity in Science and
Medicine

A Switzerland-wide study

Lack of empirical research on the topic

Funded by the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences

(PI: Dr. David Shaw)

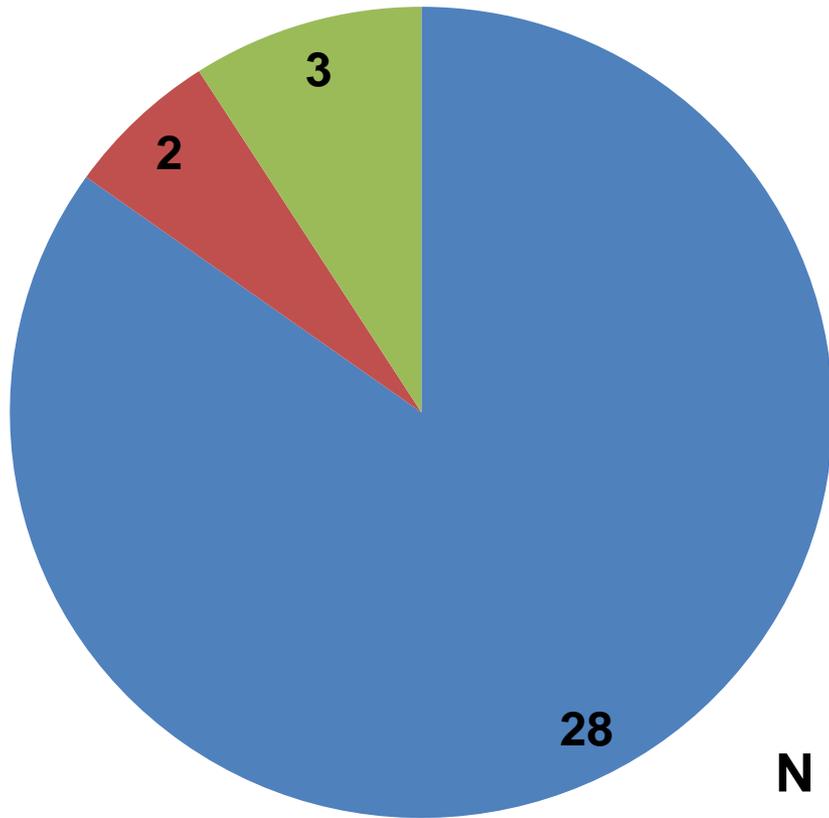
Methodology

- Exploratory qualitative research study
 - All research universities across Switzerland
 - Medicine and life sciences
 - Three levels of seniority
- In-depth qualitative interviews and vignettes
- Recruitment of study participants
 - Newsletters of Life Science Switzerland, university mailing lists

Research questions

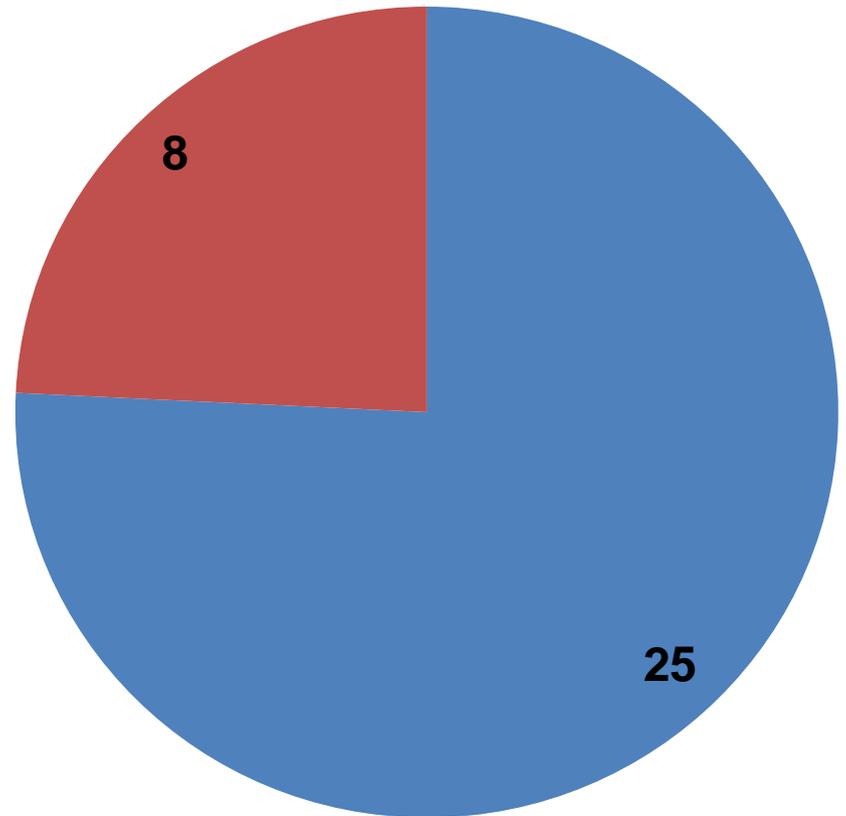
- What reasons or circumstances made it challenging for researchers to raise concerns about scientific misconduct or breaches in research integrity in their research/work environment?
- How can we build a research/lab/university culture which will encourage researchers to raise valid concerns without fearing negative career consequences?

Who participated in our study?



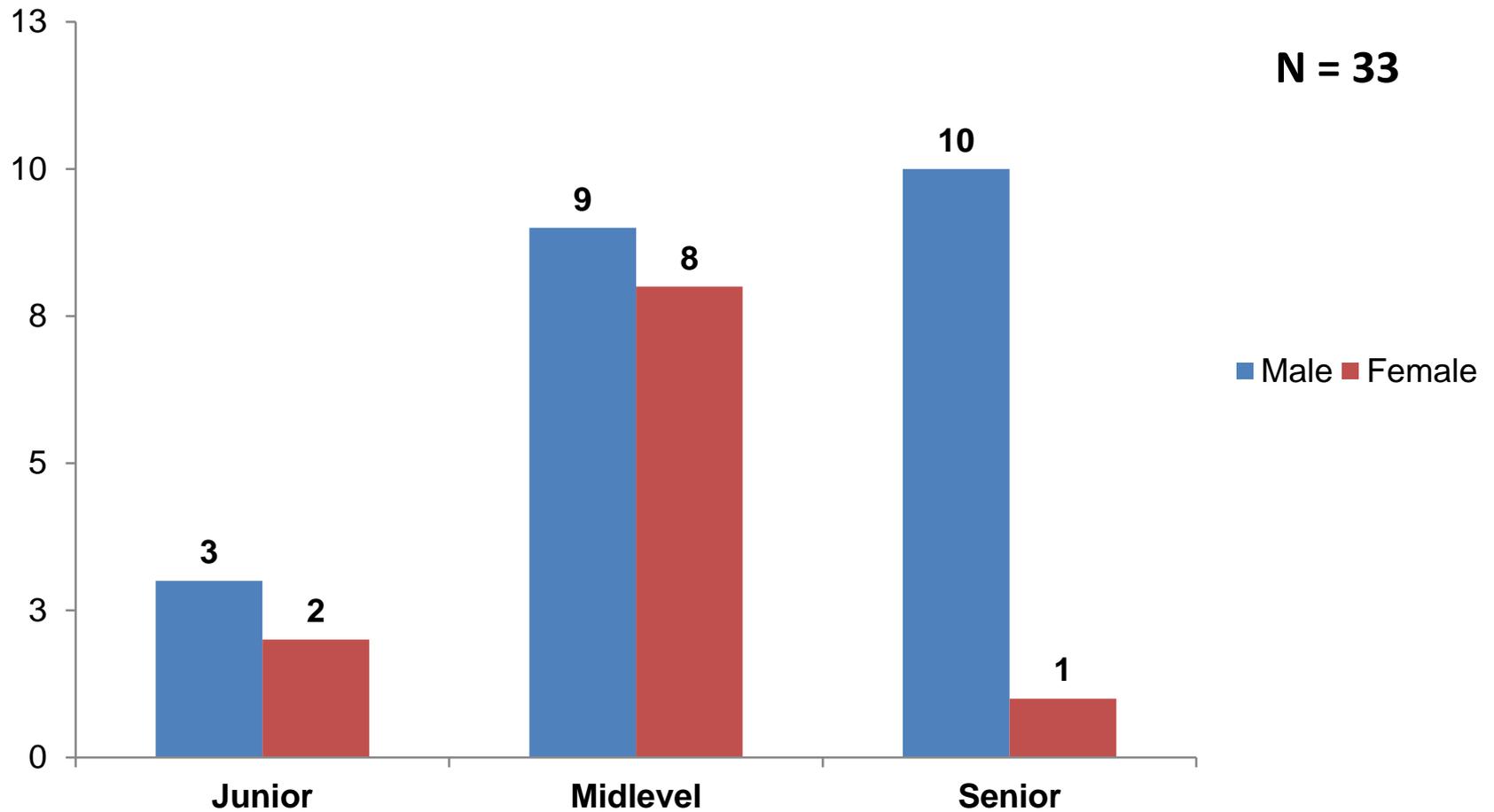
N = 33

■ Medical sciences ■ Life sciences
■ Pharma Industry



■ Clinical research ■ Lab research

Gender and seniority distribution



What reasons/circumstances made it challenging for researchers to raise concerns about scientific misconduct or breaches in research integrity in their research/work environment?

Reasons/Circumstances

- Seniority level
- Gender
- Fear of consequences for career
- Doctoral advisory committees consisting only of the main supervisor
- Extremely competitive research environment focused on output in terms of high impact publications
- Highly secretive & hierarchical research culture

How can we build a research/lab/university culture which will encourage researchers to raise valid concerns without fearing negative career consequences?

At level of research group

- Open and transparent research culture built on trust
- Encourage critique of methodology and analysis
- Difference between raising concerns and accusing someone
- Seniors set strong examples as role models
- PhD advisory committees with members from different research groups or other universities
- Establish procedures to escalate the concerns

At level of university

- Independent and neutral advisory committees where one could seek advice in confidential settings
- Make guidelines and procedures available at the university to address concerns visible, easily accessible and reliable
- Build anonymous online reporting system for breaches in RI similar to the reporting system for medical errors in hospitals
 - Aim is to improve the research environment and prevent future mistakes rather than punishing people
- **Seniors set strong example through personal behaviour**

Ombudsmen / RIOs

- How independent are these people?
- If the confidants for different faculties are mid level researchers, how likely are they to question their senior colleagues in response to concerns raised?
- Potential conflict of interest for the university when a high performing senior researcher is the concern
- How to minimize impact on careers yet ensure honest & transparent investigation of concerns of misconduct?

Limitations

- Self selection bias
- Low participation rates from
 - junior researchers
 - Researchers from life sciences
- Not all universities in Switzerland are equally represented
- Reasons for rather limited participation by researchers are not fully understood

Next steps

- Follow-up survey study with participation from all Swiss universities
- Review of research integrity guidelines and mechanisms and procedures available for raising concerns across all Swiss universities
- Interviews with ombudsmen/members of RI commissions of Swiss universities and national funding agency



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Thanks for listening!