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Pandemic, Doctoral Students and the Role of Supervision

The Ph.D. research and supervision process passes through different momentums of ups and downs, demotivation, and stress situations. Unexpected situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and its considerable influence on the individual's daily life as well as their working situation and research process, put new pressures on the Ph.D. students. This study aims to investigate the supervisor's roles in handling unforeseen challenges such as the recent pandemic. Therefore, the research focuses on the pandemic's influence on Ph.D. students, their research process and motivation, and their supervisors' strategies in helping them tackle the demotivation and stress situations. In this research, we conducted an online survey, including open-ended and Likert scale questions, distributed among the doctoral students at Malmö University. According to the survey result, with 36 respondents, the pandemic has affected the doctoral student's research methods, communication frequency and efficiency with their supervisors, access to the office and laboratory, and motivation to write and finish their doctoral education. Stress, new life and family priorities, the uncertainty of fieldwork and research methods, isolation, skepticism about the importance of their research, and less connection with supervisors and peers have been mentioned as their reasons for demotivation. In addition, the data analysis shows that the majority of respondents emphasized the importance of the supervisors' role in their motivation. According to the results, clarity of feedback, setting realistic goals, time management, mutual understanding, caring and support, flexibility and availability, regular meetings and informal meetings, and having positive attitudes are essential factors in doctoral supervision under stressful situations. The findings pinpoint the most efficient supervision strategies during the pandemic. However, the results also address the students' different needs and the importance of awareness and attention to the students' differences under supervision and mentoring.