



REPORT ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

IN THE THIRD-CYCLE PROGRAMME

HUV HT20/VT21

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Summary of the main results of the study:

Problem areas:

- Varying degrees of loneliness, uncertainty and vulnerability are not uncommon feelings. These are linked to being in a subordinate position (in several ways = supervisor, fixed-term employment, being part of the faculty) and being excluded from certain contexts.
 - This presents a risk of ill health for doctoral students in general.
 - Women and external doctoral students suffer more than men and internal doctoral students.
- Some environments are more closed off than others.
 - Doctoral students are discouraged from contacting others.
 - Doctoral students become reliant on individual supervisors.
 - Perceive a risk of reprisals which means they avoid giving feedback.
 - People stay silent; many silent individuals create a culture of silence.
 - Problems become individualised when they cannot or are not permitted to be spoken about.
- Unclear frameworks regarding teaching.
 - Different requirements, expectations and support within different subjects.
 - They are often thrown into teaching at the deep end, with no introduction.
 - Expected to teach oneself; the course evaluation is often the only feedback on how well they perform.
 - It is a big responsibility and takes a lot of time.
 - Creates a feeling of uncertainty, which means more time is put into teaching rather than research studies.
- Unclear and informal power structures vis-à-vis research and doctoral studentship.
 - Workplace attendance.
 - Doctoral student's right to educational support.
 - Decision-making processes.
 - Allocation of resources and thesis credits.
 - Division of duties - organisation of the working day.
 - Extension of contracts for licentiate and doctoral projects.
- Norms about the 'good' researcher have an impact, both because they shape the expectations doctoral students put on themselves and the expectations they perceive others have of them. These are perhaps not possible to achieve given the individual's background or circumstances.
 - Full-time norm.
 - The 'good' researcher.
 - Individualism.
 - Gender norms.
 - Functional norms.
 - Ethnicity norms.

Suggested actions:

- Improve existing and create new supportive structures for doctoral students.
 - Common information, clear rules and transparent decision-making processes.
 - Enable the faculty's doctoral students to talk to each other and compare their situations.
 - Have the same or similar structures in all subjects.
 - Make the faculties aware of norms and normative expectations.
- Establish a doctoral student representative.
 - A person who is independent of power structures in the organisation.
 - A safe forum to raise problems and improper behaviour.
 - Protect doctoral students' work situation and rights.
- Review how the individual study plan (ISP) is used.
 - Check-list or forward-looking tool for planning and self-control?
 - Facilitate the annual follow-up process.
 - Practical discussion document for doctoral students and supervisors.
 - Allow for reflection, out of sight of the supervisor .
 - How are credits allocated, how much power does each supervisor have?
- Formalised support for the teaching part of the third-cycle programme.
 - Gain consensus when unequal opportunities exist in different departments.
 - An introduction to teaching for all doctoral students.
 - Formalised mentorship during the teaching part.
 - Open educational seminars to ventilate teaching challenges.
- Open and non-hierarchical supervisor relationships and research environments.
 - Encourage contact with other environments, participation in researcher networks and conferences.
 - Efforts to incorporate external doctoral students.
 - Clarify doctoral students' rights regarding educational support.
 - Consensus regarding what supervisor support includes.
 - Clear and fair guidelines regarding workplace attendance.
 - Make decision-making visible regarding matters such as:
 - allocation of resources and thesis credits
 - teaching-related decisions
 - extension of contracts for licentiate and doctoral projects
- Make unhealthy norms and power hierarchies visible and take a long-term approach to changing them.
 - Conscious recruitment for diversity and strategic work for broader recruitment/broader participation: Heterogeneous environments create a better understanding of individuals' circumstances and requirements than homogeneous environments.
 - Provide transdisciplinary meetings and networking for doctoral students.
 - The actions that help the most vulnerable provide support to everybody.

Introduction

It has been noted that Mid Sweden University's previous *Action plan for the Integration of Equality 2017-2019* as well as student-centric equal opportunities initiatives primarily focus on first-cycle and second-cycle students. This was the context in which the faculty board (HUV) decided to carry out an analysis of doctoral students' experiences of their studies from the perspective of equal opportunities, and implement appropriate actions based on the results.

The survey was carried out during autumn 2020 (HT20) and spring 2021 (VT21) by the equal opportunities representatives of the HUV and NMT faculties. These were deemed suitable researchers as neither of them has any kind of power relationship with the doctoral students. Both of them are doctoral students and are familiar with research and knowledgeable about equal opportunities matters. Each representative was allocated 60 hours for planning, carrying out interviews, analysis of the interview materials and report writing.

The purpose of the analysis was to investigate the different forms of discrimination encountered by doctoral students and the power structures that exist within the third-cycle education. Additionally the aim was to gain knowledge about the strategies used to avoid exposure and the type of experiences that lead to a good or not-so-good research environment from the perspective of equal opportunities.

Method

The assignment involved conducting a qualitative interview study. There are 120 enrolled doctoral students at the Faculty of Human Sciences. Of these, 28 are external doctoral students located in other places in Sweden or in other countries. It was estimated that 80 of the total doctoral students were active, while others were on parental leave, on sick leave or inactive for other reasons. Due to the topic and the amount of time allocated to perform the study, focus group interviews with up to six participants per group were selected as the method for data gathering. Individual interviews were also offered to those who so desired. Three people specifically requested doing individual interviews and another three interviews became individual as nobody else signed up for that group occasion. The interviews were carried out over Zoom. They were recorded and saved on a local hard-drive.

On three different occasions, all doctoral students received an email including an information letter (Appendix 1) with clear information about the study, its purpose and the method to be used. Information about the study was also sent to heads of department and heads of subject so they could remind and encourage the doctoral students to participate. Moodle was the platform used for registration and to ensure that only persons connected to Mid Sweden University could participate or see who else participated.

Ten interviews with a total of 18 people were carried out between November 2020 and January 2021.

Interviews	Women	Men
Individually	4	2
In groups	9 (3 groups)	3 (1 group)
Total	13	5

In accordance with the information letter (Appendix 1), approximately a time of one and a half hours was allocated for each interview. However, several of the interviews took longer than that. The majority stated that they wanted to share their experiences to help others. Others expressed that they wanted to participate to give their opinion on the matter, even though they did not feel exposed themselves.

An interview guide was used during the interviews (Appendix 2) that started with a recap of the purpose of the study and a description of its central themes. The interviewees often started talking directly after that without any need to ask the specific questions fully. Only in a few cases did the specific questions act as guidance to direct the interviews. Notes were taken during and after each interview, and during the subsequent listening to the recordings. Analysis was performed both jointly and individually by the equal opportunities representatives. The notes were collated, sorted and thematised, and were then put into a Mindmap tool (Appendix 3) to categorise and clarify the themes and patterns.

The analysis of the interview material led to the introductory summary of the problem areas and suggested actions. These are the themes or the “focus areas” that, based on the analysis, should be prioritised in efforts to improve and develop the study environment of the doctoral students and the equal opportunities-related conditions at the HUV faculty. While not all doctoral students participated, the material demonstrates that there are aspects that should be addressed and worked with. By working with these areas that perhaps today do not affect too many people, which is of course too many anyway, we can create environments that both help those individuals who do suffer today and minimise the risk of exposure for future doctoral students.

In-depth discussion about the suggested actions

Supportive structures

One theme that is present throughout the material is the need for clarity and transparency to enable conversations and comparisons between different groups of doctoral students. One example relates to making the decision-making processes around giving credits for thesis work more visible. Another example is the requirements, expectations and support regarding teaching and a further example relates to employment or continuation of the doctoral studentship. Many doctoral students perceive that there are unclear rules, informal structures and grey zones. These can favour improper use of power, for example for allocation of resources, thesis credits, decisions about teaching and extension of contracts for licentiate and doctoral projects. Confidence in the leadership's handling of equal opportunities and related processes is low in some areas. Who gets to proceed from licentiate to doctor? Who gets the 'more popular' courses that look better on a CV? What are these decisions based on? In this regard there are areas that are not spoken about openly in several subjects within several departments.

To enable them to discuss and compare their situations, it is therefore important to share common information to all doctoral students regardless of which subject or department they belong to. Having the same or at least similar structures in all subjects reduces the risk of siloed or closed environments.

Those doctoral students who have been or are in the most vulnerable situations, have been or are part of closed environments where contact with other subjects or higher education institutions is not encouraged, on the contrary it is advised against. In these circumstances doctoral students become reliant on their individual supervisors, which risks leading to strong dependency relationships. It also becomes difficult to give feedback for fear of reprisals, for example in the form of reduced support from the supervisor or worse conditions regarding teaching. When it is difficult to give feedback a culture of silence emerges, which reinforces the already closed environment.

In this context, one recurring theme is the feeling that the problems raised get individualised. The majority of the most serious and urgent problems encountered by doctoral students are usually linked to the fact that the doctoral students themselves get pointed out as the problem, despite the fact that the underlying issue stems from the organisation of work, or is the fault of the organisation's (subject's) leaders. When an environment does not admit to organisational or personal failings of supervisors or the leadership, and instead blames the individual doctoral student, the consequences for the doctoral student are often feelings of loneliness, isolation and vulnerability, which in turn lead to ill health and sometimes even sick leave.

One solution to this issue is to create or push for open environments. By encouraging networking between subjects and higher education institutions, individualisation of problems can be prevented. There are different ways to make doctoral student gatherings, networking and contact between subjects and higher education institutions the *norm*, so that no environment can refrain from contact with other environments. In this way, open environments and shared expectations of the doctoral students can be created, which means that more of them dare to speak up or request such if they are lacking. This can for instance take place via *mandatory* doctoral student meetings, collaboration on seminars/workshops within and between subjects, and through cooperation with other higher education institutions and external assessors. However, such efforts require resources so that they can be planned, implemented and maintained.

Doctoral student representative

Against the background of the described experiences of vulnerability, loneliness, culture of silence, informal power structures and, in quite a few cases, low confidence in fairness and equal opportunities, the need for a doctoral student representative is raised several times as one of the possible, concrete measures within a structured process to generate open and healthy doctoral student environments, without exception. Given the awareness of the risk of reprisals, a doctoral student representative under the duty of confidentiality could act as a safe forum for doctoral students to air their experiences of equal opportunity-related and similar misconduct. Many of them know that the Director of studies of the third-cycle education fulfils that type of function, but knowing that s/he (regardless of who is in the role) may have personal relationships with colleagues in the faculty in question means that they sometimes refrain from contacting that person.

The essential point here is that a forum is needed that allows reflections and criticism of the work methods and structures, without the risk that this will backfire on the doctoral students. As a person independent of the organisation's power structures, a doctoral student representative could give individual support and if needed refer issues on to other bodies and support functions, and continuously bring attention to the work situation and rights of doctoral students.

Individual study plan (ISP)

Partly connected to the need for a doctoral student representative, the analysis highlights the desire for a review of the processes related to the individual study plan used in the third-cycle programme. One point of view that emerged was that consensus should be built (where it does not exist) about how the individual study plan is to be used, and this should be complied with in practice.

For some doctoral students the individual study plan acts as a check-list of things to tick off when done, often together with the supervisor, who then has overarching control of the doctoral student's position in the process. For others, though, the ISP is more of a living document, a tool for their own forward planning (in accordance with the Higher Education Ordinance, Ch 6, Sec. 29). This helps them gain perspective on their own doctoral study situation and thereby enables them to form a critical view of different aspects of the third-cycle programme. There is space for such reflection in the individual study plan, but it is nevertheless ultimately approved by their supervisor. In a subordinate, and sometimes vulnerable position as a doctoral student, critiquing one's own supervisor or subject faculty is difficult.

One example of the difficulties in getting heard relates to the experience expressed by several doctoral students that there are divergent conditions for credit allocation for similar pieces of work. In this they emphasise how the half-time and final review seminars are assessed: while some are awarded credits after completion of the seminar, others do not get credits until they have processed the opponent's (and the supervisor's) comments. The process of re-working the text until it has been approved by the supervisor can take several months. Some doctoral students are fully aware that there are guidelines for allocation of credits, but they perceive that these are not followed. As it stands, the subject to which doctoral student belongs and the specific supervisor they have make a big difference. These varying conditions can generate unfair salary differences between doctoral students. As far as possible, it should therefore be ensured that credits for each piece of work within the third-cycle programme are allocated on the same basis, regardless of subject and department.

The above example illustrates that it is important for the individual study plan to be shaped so that it enables doctoral students to document critical reflections without the supervisor having sight of these. The creation of such a space in combination with the establishment of a doctoral student representative with a duty of confidentiality would be two steps towards healthier working conditions in areas where these do not currently exist, as evidenced by the interview material.

Teaching

When they commence their third-cycle programmes, many doctoral students are novices at teaching. Similar to the divergent conditions described above related to credit allocation, the analysis makes it clear that there are also varying circumstances when it comes to the teaching part of the third-cycle programme. This involves unclear frameworks, which lead to different requirements, expectations and support within different subjects and in different departments. Some doctoral students receive robust support for teaching materials, course structure etc, while others do not receive any support at all. Being thrown into teaching without any introduction is a problem that occurs. It places a lot of responsibility on the individual when they are expected to learn most things by themselves. Sometimes, the course evaluation is the only feedback they receive on how well they have performed. This can lead to them putting a lot more time into the teaching-related work than the amount of time actually allocated. If they do not know whether they have done a sufficiently good job, they try even harder to ensure the students are satisfied. The unclear frameworks described risk creating uncertainty and, in some areas, result in large differences in the amount of time and commitment put into teaching.

Where clear frameworks and structures regarding the doctoral students' teaching are lacking, they should be created and introduced as a matter of urgency. One initial suggested action could be to build and offer all doctoral students a formal introduction to teaching at the beginning of their third-cycle studies. Suggestion number two is to offer mentor support across the board prior to and during the teaching periods (especially early in the third-cycle studies). Third, the interview material demonstrates a need for educational seminar discussions (where such are not already offered) with the possibility to air and discuss the perceived challenges of teaching. The fourth and final point is that it might be constructive to show how the teaching is allocated across the work plans of the doctoral students so as to reduce the risk of unequal opportunities.

Research and doctoral studentship

Doctoral students have a subordinate relationship with their supervisors, making them subordinate to power in different ways. Some of the interviews demonstrate improper use of power by some supervisors, such as using master suppression techniques. During the course of the interview work, a picture emerges of a small number of environments that have major problems related to unhealthy power hierarchies, with supervisors who are not held accountable for things such as withholding information and isolating doctoral students from other doctoral students or environments. Some doctoral students experience exclusion from research projects, conferences and/or researcher networks within or outside the university, while others are given plenty of access and feel included. Reasons that are given for exclusion and experiences of unequal opportunities are ethnicity, sex and which supervisor they have. Unhealthy environments and dependence on any one supervisor can be avoided if, as standard practice, all doctoral students are instead encouraged to participate in networks inside and outside of the university.

All doctoral students and supervisors should also be made aware of the right to change supervisors, and that projection of guilt, deterioration of career opportunities and other reprisals targeted at any doctoral student who changes supervisor, are in no way acceptable.

As the interviews were conducted, it became evident that there are major differences in supervisors' availability, feedback and support in the research process. Of course, differences can be explained and relevant to some extent, but too large a variance risks leading to unequal opportunities. While some environments and supervisors provide comprehensive support to doctoral students, other supervisors only receive texts on which they provide feedback, with very little interaction in between.

Another dissimilarity that was illustrated in a couple of the interviews is the degree to which the supervisor steers the doctoral student's theoretical specialisation or choice of methodology. Interviewees emphasised the importance of being able to conduct research based on perspectives they are 'passionate' about, even if the individual supervisor does not have in-depth knowledge of the specific perspective. On the one hand there are supervisors who grant their doctoral student/s great freedom to decide for themselves and open the door to external expertise for help, and on the other hand are supervisors who are significantly more controlling in decisions about how the research subject is to be tackled, and do not allow doctoral students to seek knowledge or competence from other higher education institutions, or from other subjects within the same university. To some extent there may also be reasons for dissimilarities here, nevertheless, one suggested action is to enable discussions about theory and choices of methods in an environment where more views than those of the supervisors can be raised. Strengthening entire environments so that they gain consensus on guidelines, structures and what supervision should actually entail, as well as creating networks with other subjects, may be one tool for avoiding the problems described above. In this way, new norms can be created, particularly in subjects/departments that are not very open.

Furthermore, it was expressed that there are unequal opportunities and treatment for internal versus external doctoral students. Internal doctoral students are those that have already held a position at the university prior to the doctoral studentship, for instance as a lecturer or a research assistant. The experience is that there is more loyalty to, and greater inclusion of, internal doctoral students compared to externals. Internal doctoral students often receive better support because they are known in the organisation, and they have a job regardless of what happens with their doctoral studies. They often know more about existing projects, and it is thus easier for them to get involved in them. Research assistants are often already part of ongoing or planned projects.

Access to the supervisor's network and the chance to travel to conferences (mentioned above) are further aspects where unequal opportunities are perceived to exist between internal and external doctoral students. It is important to be aware and open about the confidence internal doctoral students have compared to external doctoral students, so that different groupings do not emerge. There is a double issue in this regard as external doctoral students can feel excluded from the entire environment while internal doctoral students can feel excluded from the doctoral student environment. Both transparency and consensus are essential here, so that the doctoral student faculties become stronger regardless of the doctoral student's position. Additionally, conscious and continuous work is required to include externally recruited doctoral students.

When it comes to doctoral students' right to educational support if they have a functional impairment, the interview material brings to the fore that far from all the supervisors and others working with the third-cycle programme have the requisite knowledge about doctoral

students' rights to educational support for neuropsychiatric, psychological or functional impairment. There are some who view that doctoral students with functional impairments have no place on a third-cycle programme. A lack of knowledge and those types of normative perceptions obviously generate problems for doctoral students who need educational support. To address this, efforts are first required to raise the awareness of doctoral students' rights to apply for educational support if they have a functional impairment. Second, long-term work is needed to make visible and change the norms and perceptions that risk impeding students with functional impairments from applying for or completing third-cycle studies. Third, initiatives to increase knowledge about adapting teaching and examinations for students that receive educational support would also be relevant.

Finally, we also want to raise the differences in requirements for workplace presence, both presence on location and continuous presence during the weeks. In some of the interviews, it emerged that requirements for presence can differ for doctoral students and other employees within the same subject. This gives rise to a risk of unequal opportunities in terms of organisation of the working day, for example allocation of so-called academic housekeeping. Uneven division of duties generates and perpetuates unequal opportunities – and different career opportunities. One proposed action would be to make the existing guidelines for attendance clear (taking into account commuting and other relevant variables) so as to create equal opportunities for everybody.

Norms, inclusion and diversity

Varying degrees of loneliness, uncertainty and vulnerability are not uncommon feelings. This is linked to the fact of being in a subordinate position in various ways. Doctoral students are subordinate to their supervisors and new in the faculty, which means that they do not know what they can demand or expect of their supervisors. Awareness of the fixed-term nature of their employment and the fact that they are new in the environment can mean they push themselves harder and thus become prone to following the norms and values that are perceived as important. This applies less to internal doctoral students who already have insight into the environment and the existing conditions.

One clear norm was the 'good' researcher who could put all their time and interest into the domain. The 'good' researcher is a man (who is single/independent and can put all his time into work without giving a second thought to family and other's needs), is functionally able (i.e. has no functional impairments such as dyslexia or other physical disabilities), who works full-time (i.e. has no diseases or responsibility for others which require part-time work), and who can easily gain a view of, orientate himself in and handle the 'normal' environment (i.e. understands academia and the Swedish culture). The 'good' researcher thus contains several different norms and cultural expectations; norms related to gender, ethnicity and work capacity, both in terms of time and function. These kinds of norms need to be made visible and dealt with by supervisors and smaller and larger faculties.

According to the interviews, there are unequal terms and opportunities for female vis-à-vis male doctoral students in terms of things like access to research networks and teaching. Several examples of strong gender norms were emphasised, including descriptions of men as being ambitious and women being needy. These generate different understandings of the individual's drive. The women who highlighted this saw it from an outside-in perspective, in that the surrounding context created or maintained perceptions that men are accepted into research networks because they are ambitious and dare to step forward, whereas this was not expected of women. Men who recounted the same thing instead saw the situation from an

inside-out perspective; they described themselves as ambitious and therefore managed to gain access to networks.

These gender-based norms and expectations are not uncommon and demonstrate the privilege that male doctoral students can have, in other words that their gender does not cause them problems. When things go well it is because “I put my best foot forward”. As such, they are not always attentive to when other doctoral students have a problem and thus cannot/do not need to get involved in others’ situations. For female doctoral students it can be the opposite, which emerged from the interviews: due to their own experience of subordination they also see when others are subordinate. This takes energy as they also engage with others, and that can also force a culture of silence. If you see and get involved in problems, you can easily become part of the problem. To avoid this, one can instead choose to remain silent which also takes (emotional) energy, but then you know that you are perpetuating the culture of silence and hierarchies of power. Participation in this study could be interpreted in light of the above: in part because we see that there were substantially more women than men who showed an interest in participating, and also as more women than men described that they wanted to participate to be able to talk about matters that they could not speak about in other settings.

Apart from gender norms, the full-time norm was also raised several times. Many requested greater acceptance for part-time work and described that as part-time staff they were questioned in different ways, as though they had to prove themselves more than those who worked the ‘normal’ full time. There are many varied reasons for part-time work, such as illness, functional impairment, family situation and parenting. These reasons can give rise to discrimination in diverse ways, which makes it even more important to develop a good workplace environment and understanding for those doctoral students that are in this position. Another reason may involve shared roles, in other words having another job at the university or elsewhere simultaneously. Regardless of the reason, these doctoral students struggle with expectations and a structure that is created for full-time work.

The full-time norm was also discussed in relation to the individualism and culture of competition and performance that exists within academia. Even though a great deal of collaboration and networking takes place, it is one’s own performance that is measured and assessed, which can create unequal opportunities for those who do not conform to the norm of the ‘good’ researcher. Norms can also be expressed through language and inappropriate comments that can lead to exclusion and subordination. Interviewees described that racist comments would sometimes be made by people in superior positions and nobody in the faculty pointed it out or tried to stop it. In such situations, the feeling of subordination can be particularly strong for immigrants or people with a foreign background. There is a greater risk of this type of conduct happening in homogeneous environments compared to heterogeneous settings. If the staff or doctoral student group has a good gender and ethnic balance, it is harder to use racist or sexual comments as more people are affected by such language.

Many doctoral students had witnessed sexual comments, sometimes in the workplace but more often in the grey zone between work and leisure time (e.g. at evening activities during conferences), which nonetheless affects workplace relations. If such language becomes normalised there is a risk that boundaries get pushed, such as comments related to (in)appropriate clothing for women, to such a degree that people have to weigh up every day whether their clothes are going to be seen as appropriate or not. If environments allow or enable such shifting of norms, in the end it can lead to sexual harassment. While it is not

commonplace, there are environments where this is perceived as a risk (or even a constant threat in the background), usually in environments where sexual comments are already allowed.

One way to deal with racist and sexual comments is to work consciously with recruitment for diversity so as to break down homogeneous environments. Heterogeneous environments can create greater understanding of individuals' circumstances and requirements compared to homogeneous environments. This does not only apply to gender and ethnicity, it is also relevant to functional variations and working hours.

Heterogeneity can present challenges. On the one hand, different experiences, needs and desires can create conflicts, but on the other, in the long term it can create new forms of normality. The result depends on how the department or subject manages it. This connects back to our overarching recommendation to have common information and similar structures, in the form of clear rules and visible decision-making processes, in all subjects. Furthermore, efforts must be given to making norms visible and building awareness within the faculties of the consequences of normative expectations.

The interviews also emphasised that the issue was not only about norms and expectations at an individual or group level. Rather, several people see it as an issue that permeates the whole of academia; that they found themselves in a masculine-coded environment even though some of them were in environments that were predominantly female.

Conclusion

In accordance with the purpose of the analysis, based on the interview material we have brought to light patterns such as exclusion, vulnerability, loneliness, isolation and informal power structures that doctoral students in the HUV faculty experience or have experienced. Furthermore, we have tried to make practical suggestions for faculty-wide actions that could help to improve the faculty's doctoral student environment as a whole towards more open, healthy, transparent and inclusive study and workplace environments for our doctoral students. One of our points of departure, based on the interviews and our experience as equal opportunities representatives, is that what helps the most vulnerable also becomes a support for everybody.

In terms of the equal opportunities work within the different subject environments of the HUV faculty, it is evident from the similar experiences in the interview materials that awareness of these issues in the subject environments is good and sometimes excellent, but that not much activity is noticed in the area. In many environments equal opportunities issues are raised in different meetings, while more practical efforts are requested based on existing documents, theories and discussions. The perspective of equal opportunities work that emerges from the interviews is not in any way unique - there is often a risk that it ends at being partially or completely a paper exercise. One overarching aspiration should therefore of course be that equal opportunities work should bring about more real change towards greater equality and fairness. Further, our hope is naturally that the above proposed actions provide the foundation for constructive dialogue about implementation of actual changes where these are requested in the doctoral student environments in our faculty.

Appendix 1: Information letter

To all doctoral students within the Faculty of Human Sciences (HUV) at Mid Sweden University

The HUV faculty board has decided to conduct an analysis of doctoral students' experiences of their studies from the perspective of equal opportunities, and implement appropriate measures and activities based on the results. The interview part of the study will take place during HT20, and the subsequent analysis will be done in VT21.

Universities are hierarchical organisations, and the academic culture and structure differs from many other organisations. We are approaching you as doctoral students to help us learn about your experiences at Mid Sweden University, with a focus on equal opportunities.

The specific purpose of this analysis is to gain knowledge of different forms of discrimination that doctoral students are exposed to, the power structures you encounter as doctoral students, strategies for avoiding exposure and your experiences of what has led to a good or not-so-good research environment from the perspective of equal opportunities.

The analysis will not reveal names or personal data, it will be an analysis upon which to base work regarding (un)equal opportunities as a structural problem. We would like to contact all active doctoral students at HUV, regardless of whether you have experienced discrimination or not. It is just as important to understand which aspects of the organisation may have caused vulnerability as it is to understand which factors can foster a good environment for doctoral students.

The interviews will be carried out by Lasse Reinikainen and Ulrika Lif. Both of us are equal opportunities representatives at the university and like you, we are also doctoral students. The interviews will be done via Zoom in focus groups consisting of 5-6 participants per group. They will take place until week 51, and should take around one and a half hours of your time. The interviews will be recorded. Lasse and Ulrika are the only people who will have access to the material, and once it has been processed and analysed all the files will be deleted.

All material will be treated confidentially and anonymised in the reporting of the results. The anonymised material may be used in a scientific article in the future. As the questions can touch upon difficult experiences/situations, you will have the possibility to contact Student health services or Occupational health services (Previa). For this reason, the groups will be split by gender. Individual interviews are also possible as are other group constellations. If you would prefer one of these approaches, please contact us directly.

Participation is voluntary, but if you are prepared to be interviewed by us, we request that you join one of the interview groups on our platform in Moodle. You will find a number of groups for different dates and times. Once a group/time is fully booked it will be closed, so the earlier you sign up the more certain you are to get a time that suits you. We can also set up more times if needed so that everybody gets the chance to participate. You can log in and book your time here until **30 October**: [https://elearn20.miun.se/moodle/user/\(XXX\)](https://elearn20.miun.se/moodle/user/(XXX))

When you log in, use this course code to access the room: **likavill2020**

Feel free to contact one of us if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Lasse Reinikainen and Ulrika Lif

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Appendix 2: Interview guide

Introduction: recap the purpose of the study:

The specific purpose of this analysis is to gain knowledge of **different forms of discrimination** that doctoral students are exposed to, the **power structures you encounter** as doctoral students, **strategies for avoiding exposure** and your experiences of what has **led to a good or not-so-good research environment** from the perspective of equal opportunities.

Background questions:

- Subject, length of time as a doctoral student, previous work within academia
- Equal opportunities work in their department
 - (How active, who participates in it, general and/or problems noticed)
- Own knowledge of power hierarchies and discrimination, interest in these matters

Core questions:

- Experience of vulnerability, power arrangements, discrimination or perceived unfairness (own or others)
 - Formal or informal situations
- Strategies for dealing with or solving problems
- Explanation models: why does it happen?

Specific interview questions

- Have you been discriminated against/harassed any time, or felt that there was a risk it might happen, or that a risk may arise?
 - Based on what?
 - Gender, ethnicity, religion or other belief, functional variation, age, sexual orientation or gender identity). (Other power structures?)
- In what way?
 - Sexual harassment, allusions, functional variations, master-suppression techniques, etc.
 - Where has it taken place (at or external to the university)?
- Have you ever felt *vulnerable* or in a *subordinate position* due to your own position/characteristics, in relation to your supervisor, manager, colleagues or students?
 - Same sub-questions as above (basis, manner, where).
 - Specific questions about the supervisor/doctoral student relationship (also come further down)
- Do you know anybody else who has been, or is at risk of being, discriminated against or harassed?
 - Have you seen/witnessed anything that you think is probably vulnerability/discrimination (but those involved did not seem to think so)?
 - Same sub-questions as above (basis, manner, where).

- *Did it involve one-off occasions or longer processes/courses of events?*
- How do you deal with any risks/situations regarding vulnerability/subordination?
 - For example, the supervisor/doctoral student relationship?
 - Are there things that limit your or others' ability to act?
- *Who was involved, who knew that it happened?*
- Do you know where you can turn for support or help?
 - (alone or together)
 - What was your experience of the support and processes regarding the matter?
- Do you feel that the university takes these matters seriously, that they are addressed?
 - At a local level, centrally?
 - Are colleagues/employees aware of equal opportunities issues?
- How, in your view, have you (your experiences) helped to create a good or not-so-good research environment from an equal opportunities perspective?
 - How have events affected you/colleagues/the faculty or the research/education (opportunities/limitations)?

Extra questions/follow up

- Do you see any risks of vulnerability/exclusion in your university surroundings or in other university-related contexts?
- Other power structures/power arrangements?

Appendix 3: Mindmap

