



KI Postdoc Association Postdoctoral Stipend Results Overview

On the 16th November 2018, a survey was sent to the postdoctoral and doctoral community at the Karolinska Institutet (KI). KIPA sought to define the opinion of these interest groups regarding the postdoctoral stipend. The survey was anonymous, requesting solely the gender of the respondent along with their respective appointment at KI (i.e., employed on a salary, external stipend/fellowship, internal KI stipend); followed by a YES, NO, or NO STRONG OPINION to the question: “Do you agree that postdoctoral researchers should be working/ appointed on a stipend?”.

We received a total of 415 responses over an approximate period of 6 weeks. After removing those which were out-with our target groups of interest (N=9; i.e., assistant professor, senior lab manager), as well as those which had an undefined employment (N=15), we were able to continue with our analysis with a total number of 391 entries. Postdoctoral researchers accounted for 251 of the entries (approx. 30% of postdoc community at KI), whereas the doctoral candidates accounted for 140.

Q1. Do you agree that postdoctoral researchers should be working/ appointed on a stipend?

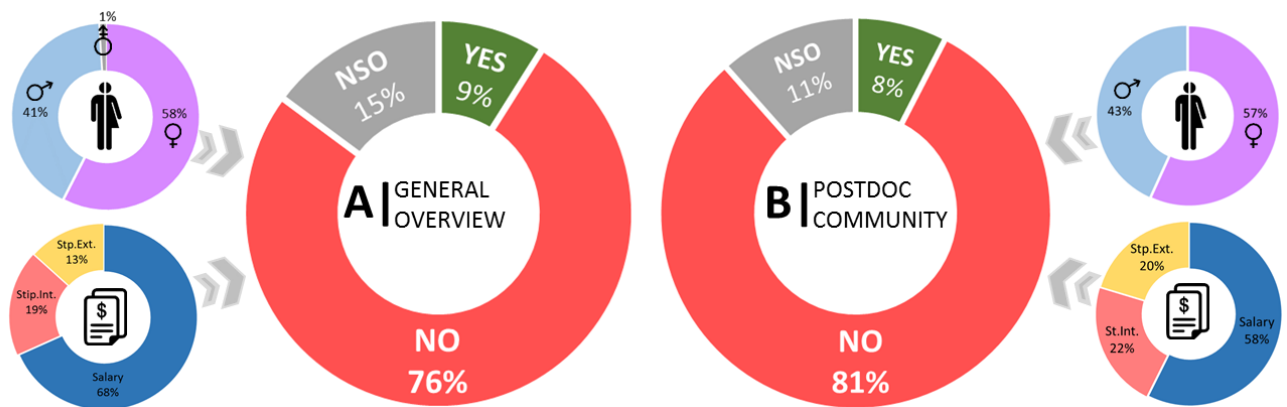


Fig 1. Overview of survey results incorporating the views from the postdoctoral and doctoral communities (A; N=391), as well as the postdoctoral group alone (N=251). Results indicate that both interest groups do not agree that postdoctoral researchers should be working/appointed on a stipend (76%). There was 1 respondent from the postdoc community that selected “other” in the gender category which accounts for 0.4%.

KEY: NSO = No Strong Opinion; Stp.Ext. = External Stipend/Fellowship; Stp.Int. = Internal Stipend

YES

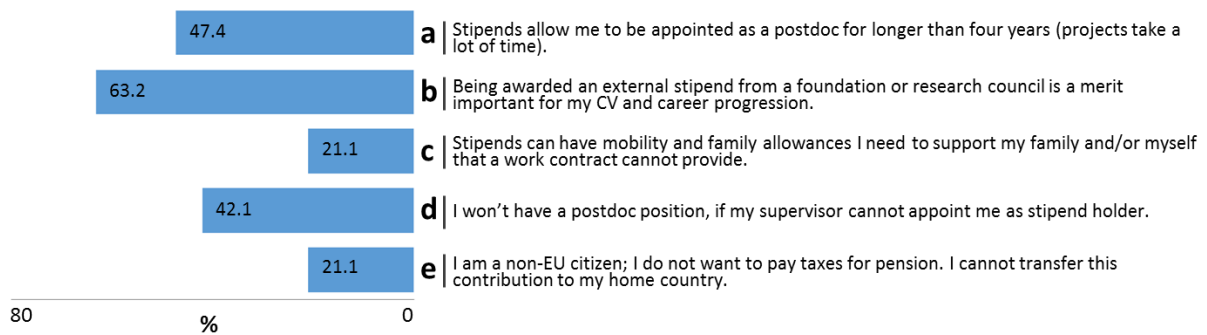


Fig 2. Bar chart representing the reported reasons for answering “yes” from the postdoc community. Respondents were allowed to select as many options that represented their answer.

Summary from the comments section of respondents who answered “yes” (T= 5; 3 Female, 2 Male; 3 Salary, 1 Stip. Ext., and 1 Stip. Int.)

The income of a postdoc can be higher on a stipend versus a salary. This can also be beneficial in order to cover the costs of a family, as well as prolong the duration of a given postdoc within a lab. There is a preference for PIs to employ postdocs on a stipend due to the lack of obligation to pay tax, which is compounded by the lack of funds available within research groups to employ postdocs on a salary.

The stipend creates inequality towards non-Swedish employees, as well as those who wish to go on parental leave. One example was given of an individual taking parental leave for only 6 weeks after giving birth before having to return to the lab. It was perceived that this would be deemed unacceptable for a Swedish employee to endure.

Suggestions from the respondents of the survey: The stipend could be time-limited, as there are often differences between internal and external stipend durations. It was suggested to have better conditions (i.e. social benefits) to eradicate the “unfairness” of the stipend. Also, decrease the percentage of INDI that KI charges on external fellowships (e.g., VR postdoc fellowship to go abroad) to allow a better allowance for the postdoc.

NO

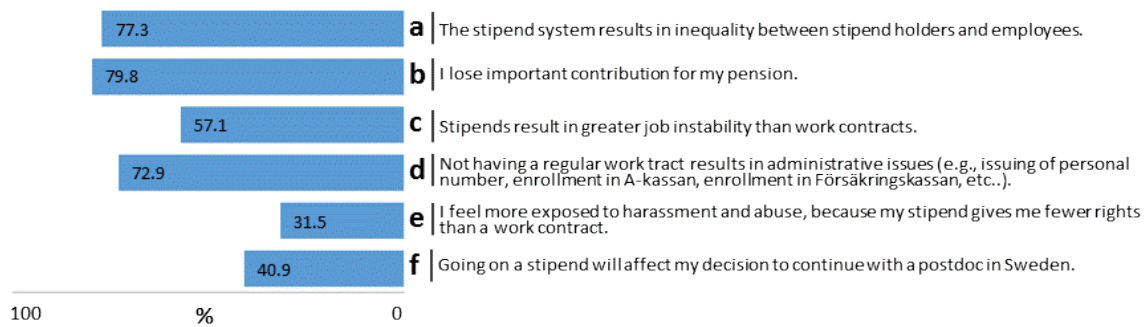


Fig 3. Bar chart representing the reported reasons for answering “no” from the postdoc community. Respondents were allowed to select as many options that represented their answer.

Summary from the comments section of respondents who answered “no” (T= 33; 22 Female, 11 Male; 17 Salary, 8 Stip. Int., and 8 Stip. Ext.)

The KI stipend was described as discriminatory, a shame to KI and the academic system in Sweden, an embarrassment, and overall ridiculous. Furthermore, the stipends in general, “expose postdocs to financial, administrative and emotional instability”. They result in a loss of talent from Sweden, and a high staff turnover rate.

Stipends do not permit postdocs to have Föräldrapenning (or have it at a very low rate) or to have parental leave (or have very limited parental leave). They leave postdocs unable to purchase an apartment and sometimes even find an apartment, whilst they are not eligible for a bank loan. Stipend postdocs also do not have the right to gym reimbursement or eye care. Health care is limited or sometimes no medical coverage is offered. The time spent on a stipend does not count when applying for permanent residency in Sweden. Some postdocs on a stipend cannot cover their living expenses. After completion of the stipend time, there is no support for career transition or coaching. The stipend also leads to difficulty when dealing with the Arbetsförmedlingen and provides no A-kassa.

- Postdocs are being hired on a chain of short-term stipend contracts exceeding 2 years.
- Postdoc salaries at SciLifeLab and KTH are higher than those offered by KI.
- PIs are not aware of the eligibility criteria for stipends and are therefore misinforming incoming postdocs about their eventual position and career at KI. This has placed postdocs in limiting positions (e.g., promised 2 years and then placed on shorter contracts once postdoc arrived in Sweden).
- Postdocs are having their employment terminated with only 2 weeks notice.
- PhD candidates can take up to 7 years to complete their studies, however a postdoc has less time with a higher workload. There is income, and treatment inequality between PhD holders and non-PhD holders.

Suggestions from the respondents of the survey: KI has the responsibility to reduce the differences between employed staff and those on a stipend/fellowship. KI is responsible for ensuring a postdoc is employed on a salary. External fellowships are prestigious and beneficial; however, they should be transformed into salaries paid to the postdoc. The HFSP and Marie Curie fellowships were highlighted as positive stipend examples.

No Strong Opinion

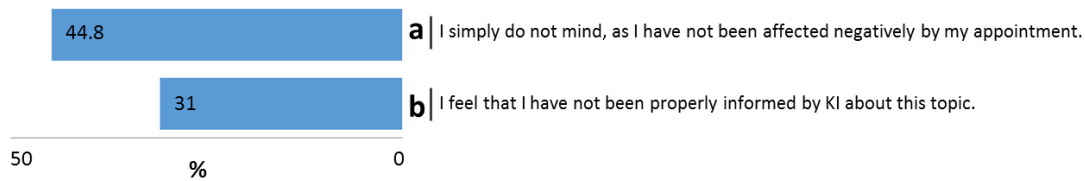


Fig 4. Bar chart representing the reported reasons for answering “no strong opinion” from the postdoc community. Respondents were allowed to select as many options that represented their answer.

Summary from the comments section of respondents who answered “no strong opinion” (T= 8; 3 Female, 5 Male; 4 Salary, and 4 Stip. Ext.)

The opinion of postdocs here suggests a difficulty to decide in absolute terms which is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or what a system without the stipend would look like in Sweden. The stipend allows for more postdocs to be employed in Sweden, something that may not be possible should there not be any stipends. A fellowship/stipend from an appropriate funder can have a positive outlook on a postdocs’ CV, as well as allow for more independence. In contrast, the use of the stipend results in the loss of talent and overall attractiveness of KI to researchers that are unable to accept the terms of a fellowship/stipend.

If the postdoctoral researcher is single (i.e. without a partner), with no children, isn’t planning to have children during their postdoc and is planning to stay in Sweden for a short period of time only, then perhaps the stipend is a suitable option. Additionally, a reduction in the total number of postdocs could help to concentrate funding towards select research groups. If there were no stipends, then the only viable option would be to seek funding from VR (Vetenskapsrådet), which only funds postdocs to work outside of Sweden. Non-European individuals may not request or desire a pension from their employer; however, not having pension contributions was seen as a negative overall.

Suggestions from the respondents of the survey: The Swedish government and/or KI should compensate by providing postdocs with the social benefits that are currently being denied to them. KI stipends were denounced for the uncertainty they provide, which is not reflected or balanced by the actual take-home salary. Hence, extra insurance needs to be added to the stipend. Also, more information needs to be provided by the employer regarding the stipend and what this entails prior to arrival/contract start and even whilst job offer is being made.

Q1. Do you agree that postdoctoral researchers should be working/ appointed on a stipend?

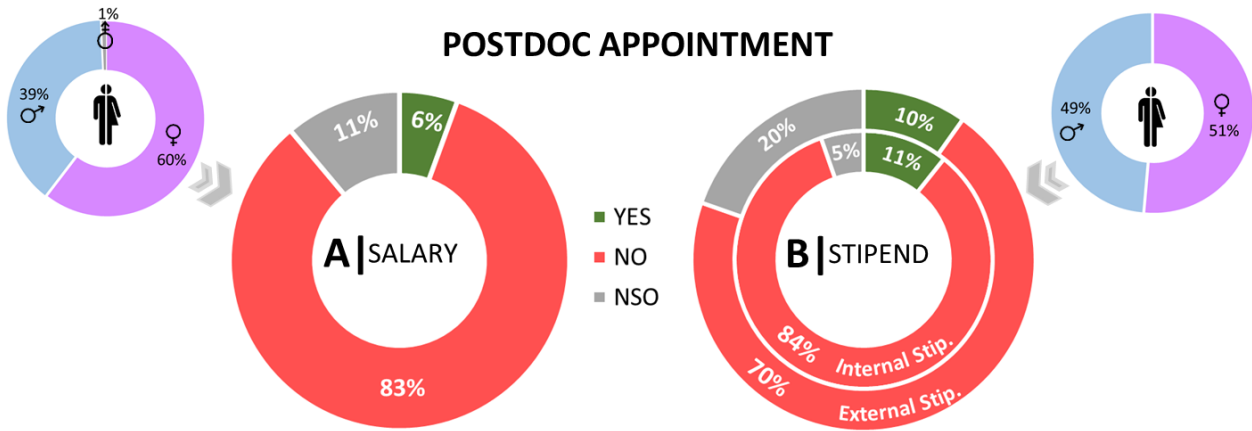


Fig 2. Overview of survey results classified based on postdoc appointment (A | Salary (N=144); B | Internal and External Stipends/Fellowships (N=107)). 14% more postdocs on an internal stipend responded “no” to the question compared to those which are currently on an external stipend/fellowship. The negative consequences of the internal KI stipend have been reflected in the comments section of our survey (*available on Page 3 and 4 of this document*).

KEY: NSO = No Strong Opinion