



Generation Z's Views of Care and Care Careers

SUMMARY OF PROJECT FINDINGS



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RESEARCH TEAM

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PROJECT SUMMARY

People are living longer and while many experience good health and well-being into their later years, many others require care and treatment in response to ill-health and disability. A skilled workforce is required to respond effectively and ethically to the health and social care needs of people across the lifespan. However, due to demographic changes, there will be a shortage of people available and willing to respond to care needs.

Generation Z is the generation of young people, born between mid-1990's and mid-2000s. Those aged 13 to 14-years-old, now receiving full-time education in England, are currently considering career options. The increasing need for care provides many interesting and worthwhile work opportunities for people of all ages, as formal care-givers and as volunteers. Engaging young people in conversations about care is crucial as they will be the main care workforce of the future, However, little is known of their views regarding what is meant by care and by care careers.

This project aimed to learn about the views of Generation Z regarding care and care careers. In England, this generation of young people was born into a period of financial and economic austerity and have grown up with a familiarity with technology. Hence these young people are also known as the i-generation. As Generation Z is at the age of making choices regarding subjects for future study which will shape their future career choices, it is interesting and Important to explore their views of care and care careers.

Following ethical review by the University of Surrey Ethics Committee and receipt of a favourable ethical opinion, the research team approached and gained permission to access 4 schools in the south east of England. All are mixed sex schools, two are urban and two are in more rural areas. Three of the schools are non-selective schools and one is a grammar school (the latter school requiring an entrance exam).

Focus groups were conducted in each school to collect the perspectives of students regarding their views of care and care careers. In all, there were 13 focus groups with 86 student participants (32 boys and 54 girls). Data were analysed and four themes arrived at: (1) Negotiating self-regarding and other-regarding care priorities; (2) Conceptualising care work; (3) Recognising care challenges; and (4) Incentivising care work decisions.

Theme 1 - In 'negotiating self-regarding and other-regarding care priorities', Generation Z participants talked of care as central to relationships with family, friends and the environment. 'Love' was a central idea in the discussions of care, particularly in relation to family and friends. Participants talked of caring about their education (*that can set me up for life*) and also of recognising the importance of self-care, particularly when there is pressure to compare *'yourself to other people [...] caring about what other people think of you is not good.'* Participants were sensitive to the need to care for others *'if you care for each other, then together we'll get further ahead [...] makes life a bit easier for everyone.'* There were examples of caring in their local communities, however, some felt there had been *'a loss of (a) sense of community'*. There was a strong view that caring for the environment has to be a priority.

Theme 2 - Generation Z participants shared a wide range of views in 'conceptualising care work'. Views as to what counts as 'care work' ranged from more traditional care roles in nursing, medicine and '*any 999 service*' to more extended views of care work as, for example, as a builder. The rationale for the latter is that the work is directed towards '*building something for someone who needs it*'. A distinction was made between 'care work' and 'a care career'. Whereas, care work '*could be even a small act of kindness*' or voluntary work, a care career is something more sustained where people get paid. There appeared to be gender differences regarding the impact of a career with, mostly boys, questioning whether roles in care could have the same impact as a CEO of a company or as a lawyer or politician. That said, some participants were drawing on family experience regarding the value and status of care work. Family carer role models and encouragement from parents enabled some students to consider and plan for a care career.

Theme 3 - Across all of the focus groups, there was an appreciation of the challenges of care work. Generation Z participants referred to low wages, as compared with other career options ('*at the end of the day, you need to make enough money to live*'). There was also acknowledgement that this suggests a lack of fairness and need for political action ('*the care industry is really under-funded*'). Other perceived challenges of care work were identified as the psychological and emotional costs of care. Working with people who are suffering, for example, when '*you can't do anything about it*' or when care offered is rejected. There was recognition that some areas of care, such as the care of older adults, may be stigmatised and care may also be thought of '*women's job to do it*.' Stress and other negative consequences of caring were also highlighted as was the importance of being 'a strong person' and not bringing your work home.

Theme 4 - Participants had no difficulty in sharing the value of care and of care work. The positive impact of helping people, of meeting people '*from all walks of life*', of receiving gratitude from care-giving and from feeling proud and happy that you have helped someone were highlighted. Generation Z focus group participants were also sensitive to the need for incentives, such as higher salaries, to attract and retain people in care. Participants identified a need for more information about care careers which could include visits to care homes and using social media to promote positive aspects of care work. Participants suggested that social media also had a role in drawing attention to environmental concerns, for example, '*there is an Instagram page that has all this stuff about stopping using plastic waste, forestation, animal cruelty and the more that people spread that around the more the people are going to realise its actually an issue that needs to be stopped.*'

Responses from Generation Z suggest they are conscientious and thoughtful regarding the local and global need for care. There is an awareness that a balance is to be struck between caring for others and self-care. A distinction is made between care work involving, for example, voluntary work and acts of kindness and a care career as paid work. Technology has a key role in reaching Generation Z and innovative education and care practice need to engage hearts and minds. It is recommended that recruitment and retention of Generation Z to health and social care will be enhanced by employers' prioritising workforce wellbeing, respectful work environments and financial and other rewards, comparable with other careers. To engage and retain young people who choose care careers, project findings suggest that technology will have a key role in professional education and practice.

Thank You from the Research Team

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