Does caring experience shapes vocational choices in higher education?

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Being a carer

Carers

Regular, nonprofessional assistance with daily activities or emotional support to a relative who has an illness, disability, or loss of autonomy

(Blanc, 2010)

Emerging adult carers

- People aged 18-25 who provide or intend to provide care, assistance or support
- Person receiving care = Parent, sibling, grandparent, partner, own child or other relative
- Type of illness = Disability, chronic illness, mental health problem, substance misuse or other condition

(Becker & Becker, 2008; Levine et al., 2005)

- Unstudied population
- Specifically target as a distinct cohort
- Time to recognize and support

(Day, 2015; Kent, 2020; Levine et al., 2005)
Vocational choices

• Facing the illness/disability of a relative = Daily life of many students
  (Belghith et al., 2020)

• Major life event = Psychosocial transition
  • Redefine emerging adults’ world representations
  • May be integrated as part of identity
  (Guichard, 2005 ; Parkes, 1971)

• Caring experience directly influence vocational choices
  • Consciously or unconsciously choosing a care-related career or not
  • Career plans could be directly related to the relative’s illness/disability
    • Becoming a nutritionist when a parent has a diabetes
  (Becker & Becker, 2008 ; Thompson, 2017)
How is caring experience associated to vocational choices in higher education?
Method

Participants

- 6767 students
- 79.84% of undergraduates
- 77.28% of women
- 20.14 years (SD = 1.87)

Caring experience

- 20.39% never facing relatives’ illness
- 16.43% facing relatives’ illness in the past
- 2.70% facing relatives’ illness in the past and currently
- 60.47% facing relatives’ illness currently

Participants

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Method

Measures

• **Vocational choices**
  • “What profession are you considering?”
  • *Health/care-related vocation* vs. *Not*
    • 47.05% of health-care related

• **Major life events**
  • “Do you think that some life events have influenced your choice of study?”
    • Yes or *No*
      • 47.66% of Yes
  • “If Yes, which ones?”

• **Self-recognition as carer**
  • About Me and My Family questionnaire
    (Joseph et al., 2009; Leu et al., 2019 for French adaptation)
  • “Who was the relative?”
  • “Why he/she needed support?”
    • Analysis of the reason
      • Acceptable intrarater agreement: $\kappa = 0.77, p < .001$
        (Landis & Koch, 1977)
  • 29.14% self-recognized as helping and supporting a relative with an illness/disability
Results

Does having a caring experience shape vocational choice?

- \( \chi^2 (3) = 210.78, p < .001 \)

<p>| Table 1. Distribution in percent of caring experience and health-related vocation. |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently ((n = 4092))</th>
<th>Past and currently ((n = 183))</th>
<th>Past ((n = 1112))</th>
<th>Never ((n = 1380))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No health-related vocation ((n = 3719))</td>
<td>53.60 (-3.45)</td>
<td>53.67 (-1.62)</td>
<td>58.72 (2.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health-related vocation ((n = 2959))</td>
<td>46.40 (3.45)</td>
<td>46.33 (1.62)</td>
<td>41.28 (-2.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adjusted standardized residuals in parentheses. Bold adjusted standardized residuals reflect significant over- or underrepresentation.
Results

What kinds of major life events?

Interrater agreement: $\kappa = 0.77, p < .001$ 

(i.e., Landis & Koch, 1977)

• Theme 1: macro-contextual events, 3.49%
  • “I was supposed to go to Spain to study physical therapy but with the consequences of the Covid-19 I gave up this project.”
  • “The environmental challenges pushed me in the scientific direction.”

• Theme 2: micro-contextual events – schools and jobs, 28.63%
  • “Internship after my grade repetition in medical school.”
  • “I wanted to be a veterinarian, but my academic abilities made me change my mind. I preferred to go to something where I would have less difficulty.”
  • “After being bullying, I totally gave up on the idea of working with humans and it reinforced my desire to work with animals.”
Results

What kinds of major life events?

• Theme 3: micro-contextual events – family and relatives, 50.32%
  • “I think my parents idealized the fact that I would study science ("it opens more doors") and since I never really had a specific course of study to follow I followed this one, which suits me very well.”
  • “When I was younger, my father worked at the Bordeaux airport. I used to spend days with him and I was fascinated when I observed the planes. This fascination became a passion that guided me in my orientation.”

• Subtheme: illness/disability of a relative, 14.9%
  • “I wanted to work in a care-related job. Then my father got cancer and I got tired of taking care of others and decided to go back to management to work in the world of high jewelry.”
  • “Many psychological problems and cancers in my family made me want to go into a health profession.”
  • “I want to be a pharmacist to have more knowledge and help my mother who couldn’t go to health professionals because of money.”
What kinds of major life events?

• Theme 4: **onto-contextual events**, 31.70%
  
  • “My trip to Mayotte confirmed that I wanted to do research in botany.”
  
  • “I am a volunteer at the French Red Cross, I have done many missions with the SAMU. This gave me the desire to continue in medicine.”
  
  • “I started watching Japanese cartoons in middle school and wanted to work in them.”
  
  • “My struggle with anorexia makes me want to help others.”
Results

Which determined vocational choices?

Table 2. *Generalized linear model for predicting health-related vocational choices.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.57</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-3.33</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current and past</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-0.98</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major life events – Illness/disability of a relative</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>9.72</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-recognition</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The reference category for caring experience is current.
Which determined vocational choices?

Table 3. *Generalized linear model for predicting health-related vocational choices with interaction effect.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-3.25</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current and past</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major life events – Illness/disability of a relative</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-recognition</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major life events x Self-recognition</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The reference category for caring experience is current.

- Same results after controlling for mother and father jobs
- Same results after changing the reference category for caring experience
Discussion

• Currently facing the illness/disability of a relative = Choosing health or care-related vocation
  • Not the fact to face the illness/disability of a relative but the moment in which it occurred
  • No time to make vocational decision = Reducing cognitive effort and adopt a simpler strategy
    • Referred to current situation = Caring experience

• Major life events = From macro- to onto-events
  • 60.47% currently facing the illness/disability of a relative: only 14.9% as a major life event
    • Only few emerging adult students integrated their caring experience as part of identity

• Only the illness/disability of a relative as a major life event predict vocation to health/care-related jobs
  • McLean and Pratt (2006) = Narrative identity
  • Narrative identity as better predictor of vocational choice
  • Observations made by Becker and Becker (2008) = Depend on the integration into identity

(Sauermann, 2005)
Limitations and perspectives

- Self-recognition only current caring activities
  - Endorsing caring activities in the past?
- All participants with the illness/disability of a relative as a major life event
  - More than one major life event?
  - Illness/disability of a relative = The only event?
- Importance of time in caring experience = Longitudinal study
- Using a qualitative method in a narrative identity perspective = Better capture emerging adult student carers vocational process
“Depression of one of my parents, so I made the choice to study close to the family home.”

“My grandmother has many health issues, so I want to be able to take care of her in a professional way soon.”

“Having taken care, during my childhood, of an ill relative. The satisfaction that it gives us to bring something beneficial to the life of a person, to his health.”
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Thank you for your attention

With the financial support of

Questions or suggestions?