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► To cite this version:

Basilie Chevrier, Aurélie Untas, Géraldine Dorard. Does caring experience shapes vocational choices in higher education?. European Association of Research on Adolescence conference 2022, European Association of Research on Adolescence, Aug 2022, Dublin, Ireland. hal-03970035

HAL Id: hal-03970035

<https://hal.science/hal-03970035v1>

Submitted on 2 Feb 2023

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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



77.28% of women



79.84% of undergraduates



20.14 years ($SD = 1.87$)

Caring experience



20.39% **never** facing relatives' illness



2.70% facing relatives' illness in the **past** and **currently**



16.43% facing relatives' illness in the **past**



60.47% facing relatives' illness **currently**



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 interrater 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?

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

Table 1.

Distribution in percent of caring experience and health-related vocation.

	Currently (<i>n</i> = 4092)	Past and currently (<i>n</i> = 183)	Past (<i>n</i> = 1112)	Never (<i>n</i> = 1380)
No health-related vocation (<i>n</i> = 3719)	53.60 (- 3.45)	53.67 (-1.62)	58.72 (2.03)	59.73 (3.37)
Health-related vocation (<i>n</i> = 2959)	46.40 (3.45)	46.33 (1.62)	41.28 (- 2.03)	40.27 (- 3.37)

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.”

Results

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.

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

Note. The reference category for caring experience is current.

Results

Which determined vocational choices?

Table 3.

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

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

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

(Sauer mann, 2005)

Discussion

Limitations and perspectives

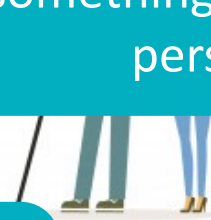
- Self-recognition **only current caring activities**
 - Endorsing **caring activities in the past?**
- All participants with the illness/disability of a relative as a major life event
 - **More than one major life event?**
 - Illness/disability of a relative = The only event?
- Importance of time in 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.”

“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.”

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



Thank you for your attention



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Questions or suggestions?



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With the financial support of

