

Developing good support for student carers: a cross university study

Kubiak C., Larkin M., Deepak-Gopinath M., Gill T., Messenger J., and Vseteckova J.

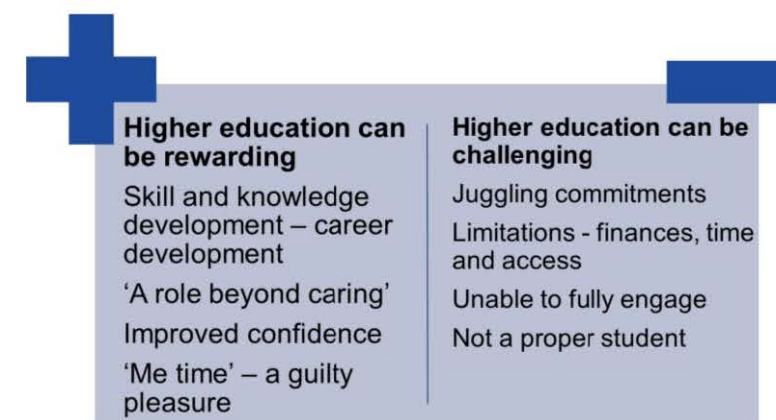
School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care



Who are student carers?

Students providing unpaid and essential care to a friend or a family member.

3-6% of OU students are carers



Widening participation is a priority

Research questions

- What are student carers' study management strategies?
- What constitutes 'good support'?

Method

Phase one: 20 Health and social care student carers
Phase two: 40 student-carers, undergraduate and postgraduate, across all four faculties

Interviewed by phone.

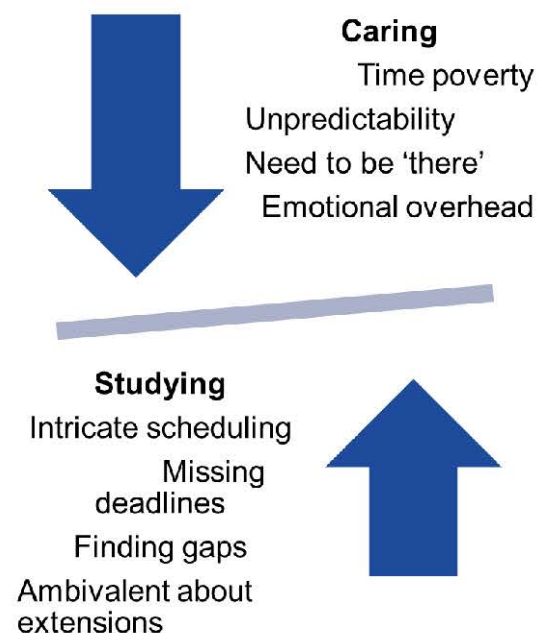
Thematic analysis conducted to identify themes

Findings

Like carers in general, responsibilities impact on

- health and wellbeing
- educational attainment
- finances, employment
- social life

Studying is challenging



Motivations

- Replacing frustration with career ambition
- Developing passions, other selves
- Caring affords distance learning (and vice versa)

Social engagement

75% are solo studiers

'I have very good friends that I've had for 50-odd years in some cases. And I would go there for support as it were. I think that what helps me about the OU is it's got nothing to do with the caring side of my life.' (F02)

25% are connected studiers (25%)

'... by being in the WhatsApp group, because it's just easier to bounce stuff off of each other, and gain quick answers to questions that other people have asked before you.' (F24)

Recommendations

- Module design for flexibility
- Dedicated carer support line and proactive support
- A carers' support group
- A carers' website
- one-to-one student-run mentoring
- An online discussion forum
- Improve carer declaration rates

To learn more, Chris.Kubiak@open.ac or Mary.Larkin@open.ac.uk

