Wellbeing of Level 3 students from HWSC & ECYS: The importance of their work and family

Aims of the project

a) To quantitatively examine student wellbeing using an established measure (i.e. the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale/DASS-21);
b) To consider the association of student (i) wellbeing in relation to students' work and family roles,   as well as their experience of role conflict and role facilitation; &,
c) To explore students' perceptions of institutional support, as well as to elucidate students' strategies used for coping.

Concepts
Role conflict: circumstances were roles in different domains are incompatible in some respect.
Role facilitation: participation in one role increases the performance or quality of a second role.

Methods

Students in the sample were invited to complete the online survey in April 2019. The survey included a validated scale of mental distress (i.e. the DASS-21), closed questions related to work and family roles, and measures of work/family study conflict and work/family-study facilitation. It also included open-ended questions which asked students about the: (a) *strategies they use to help combine work and family responsibilities with studying*; (b) *sources and perceived effectiveness of university support and resources used*; and (c) *suggestions for how the OU could improve support for students*. The response rate for the survey was 24% (n=348).

Results

The quantitative results indicate students who are also carers are at risk of experiencing poorer mental wellbeing, in terms of depression, stress and anxiety, whilst students who are also working experience decreased anxiety. Increases in work/family-study conflict scores were associated with poorer mental wellbeing. Work/family-study facilitation were associated with decreased risk of poor wellbeing. Themes from the qualitative data included: (1) *building rituals and habits for learning (to help combine work/family with studies)*; (2) *navigating online environments and contexts for learning in terms of how learning resources and options can hinder or facilitate learning*; and, (3) *responding to the pressures and problems that hinder learning.*

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