

# UNDERSTANDING HOW UNDERGRADUATE YOUNG ADULT CARERS ARE SUPPORTED IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY COMPARING RUSSELL GROUP AND NON-RUSSELL GROUP UNIVERSITIES:

## 01. INTRODUCTION

- **Day (2021)**– Young adult carers can be defined as individuals between the age of 18 and 25 who provide unpaid or paid care and assistance to family members experiencing a disability, addiction, chronic illness or mental health condition.
- **Main Objective**– Determine the differences and/or similarities between the experiences of young adult carers at Non-Russell Group and Russell Group universities.
- **Main Aim**– Understand how universities can enhance the support they offer to students who are young adults carers and provide these individuals with a safe platform to voice their experiences.

## 02. LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Larkin and Kubiak (2021)**– Young adult carers experience a number of challenges balancing academic, employment, caring and social responsibilities at university.
- **Kettell (2020: 102)**– Found limited qualitative scholarly research exploring how undergraduate young adult carers balance higher education demands with their caring responsibilities.
- **Carpentier (2021: 217)**– Funding gap between Russell Group and non-Russell Group universities in the distribution of monetary support.
- **Yiengprugsawan et al. (2012)**– Caring responsibilities could have a negative impact on young adult carers physical and mental health wellbeing at university.
- **Runacres et al. (2024: 9)**– Young adult carers at a higher risk of experiencing stress, anxiety, increased fatigue and low mood compared to students with no caring responsibilities.

## 03. METHODOLOGY

- **Ethical Considerations:**
  1. Prior to the interview, it was required to sign the informed consent form and read the participant information leaflet.
  2. Participants were briefed before and after the interview was conducted to decrease deception.
  3. Free to withdraw at any time.
  4. Resources were signposted to the young adult carer participants facing financial or wellbeing difficulties to avoid harm.
- **Research Design**– Qualitative research design to produce subjective and unique insights on the experiences of young adult carers.
- **Sampling Frame**– Purposive sampling by selecting a targeted group of participants who are recruited in a way that are relevant to the report as suggested by Charmaz (2006).
- **Research Methods**– Semi structured interviews conducted either online and face-to-face for a duration of 30 minutes.
- **Interview**– Began with a briefing of the interview structure and an icebreaker question.
  - **Participant Recruitment:**
    1. Recruited from young adult carer charities part of the Carers Trust UK.
    2. Two participants recruited with Participant A from a Russell Group university and Participant B from a Non-Russell Group university.
  - **Face-to-Face Interview**– Location negotiated with Participant A to schedule meeting and audio was recorded on a Dictaphone to create a transcript.
  - **Online Interview**– Participant B recorded audio and visual data via Microsoft Teams.
  - **Interview Guide**– 15 questions covering a breadth of topics related to accessibility of support services, financial and wellbeing support received.
  - **Challenges:**
    1. Difficulties accessing participant's which decreased the response rate.
    2. Participant B asked for the interview to be stopped after expressing discomfort.
  - **Mitigating Discomfort**– Interview paused and later resumed after validating their experiences by listening attentively as suggested by Darling (2014)

## 04. DATA ANALYSIS

- **Weston et al. (2001)**– NVivo coding can be defined as using the exact language of the participants to label the data.
- **NVivo Coding**– Achieved by identifying categories or patterns in the participant's actual lived experiences as young adult carers.
- **Developing the Key Codes**– Reflective approach by selecting the most common themes that the participants discussed in the semi-structured interviews as suggested by Stevens *et al.* (2024: 6).
- **Key Codes:**
  1. Experience balancing higher education and caring responsibilities
  2. Ease of accessing financial support for caring responsibilities
  3. Ease of accessing wellbeing support for caring responsibilities

### PARTICIPANT A:

1. Felt "like having like two full-time jobs" and often needed "extensions" to complete work.
2. Expressed difficulties accessing financial support as "no services are in place to target young adult carers."
3. Has been on a "waiting list for 3 years to receive wellbeing support for widening participation students."

### PARTICIPANT B:

1. Has "never experienced anything different and is (their) normal."
2. Expressed difficulties accessing financial support as "never knew there was support available so never tried to access them."
3. Conveyed that "there is nothing in place for me as a young carer."

## 06. CONCLUSION

- **Concluding Statement**– Russell Group and Non-Russell Group universities in the UK do not have an effective approach when distributing financial and wellbeing support to undergraduate young adult carers.
- **Current Universities' Approaches:**
  1. Provide broad financial and wellbeing resources that predominantly target widening participation students which are ineffective in supporting the specific needs of young adult carer as supported by Stevens and Brimblecombe (2022) findings.
  2. Limited advertising of resources available on university websites which can prohibit young adult carers aiming to access financial or wellbeing services.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
  - **Collaborative Approach**– These recommendations were suggested by the participants.
    1. Information and advice services advertised on university websites and social media platforms can help young adult carers understand the support available.
    2. Statistical recognition of young adult carers to identify students which can enable personal tutors and wellbeing support staff to signpost relevant wellbeing resources.
    3. Access to financial support through bursaries or grants.

## 05. FINDINGS

### SIMILARITIES:

- **Young adult carers do not receive specific financial or wellbeing resources designed to cater to their unique needs at Russell Group and Non-Russell Group universities.**
  1. **Participant A**– "I think that's what's really, really, lacking. There are very general resources that are available to all Widening Participation students. I think it definitely needs to be a lot more specific to the carer."
  2. **Participant B**– "There is nothing in place for me as a young carer and something needs to be done about this because it is not easy or sustainable for me long term."
- **Young adult carers at university are often unaware of the advertised services they can access at university.**
  3. **Participant A**– "I am in my third-year now. I think it's taken so long for me to find support because it's not on the same website as widening participation."
  4. **Participant B**– "There is no structure in place for carers. You have to personally search for support yourself."

### DIFFERENCES:

- **Completing caring responsibilities can often feel like a full time job and is very difficult to balance alongside higher education.**
  1. **Participant A**– "I guess being a young carer really does have lots of demands on my time... also emotionally. It can be very difficult to balance the two."
  2. **Participant B**– "I have never met any other young adult carers so I have never experienced anything different. This is my normal so I'm used to it."

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