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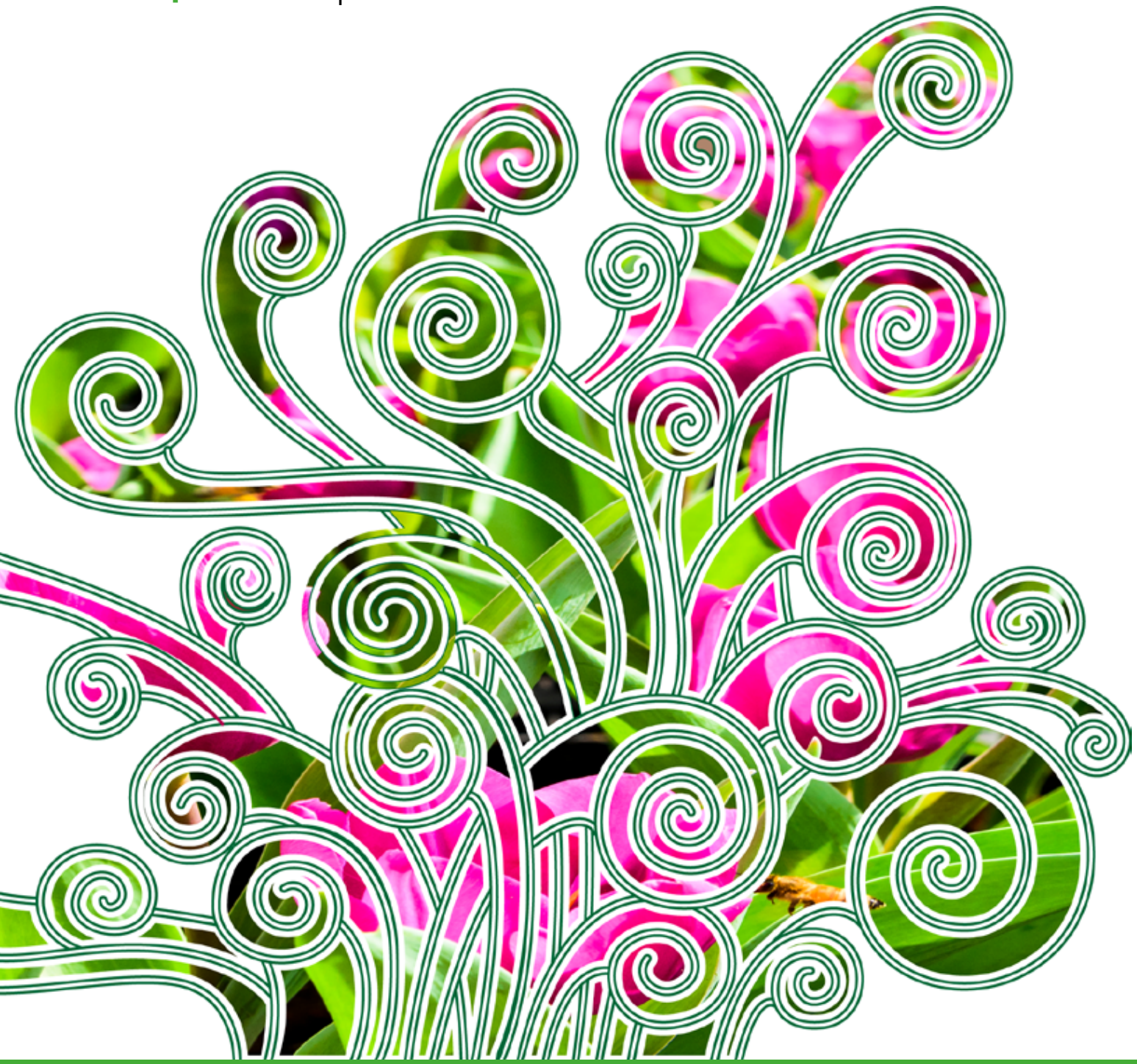

Promoting research and reflective practice in career development

NICEC

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

NICEC STATEMENT

The Fellows of NICEC agreed the following statement in 2010.

'The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) was originally founded as a research institute in 1975. It now plays the role of a learned society for reflective practitioners in the broad field of career education, career guidance/counselling and career development. This includes individuals whose primary role relates to research, policy, consultancy, scholarship, service delivery or management. NICEC seeks to foster dialogue and innovation between these areas through events, networking, publications and projects.

NICEC is distinctive as a boundary-crossing network devoted to career education and counselling in education, in the workplace, and in the wider community. It seeks to integrate theory and practice in career development, stimulate intellectual diversity and encourage transdisciplinary dialogue. Through these activities, NICEC aims to develop research, inform policy and enhance service delivery.

Membership and fellowship are committed to serious thinking and innovation in career development work. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations connected with career education and counselling. Fellowship is an honour conferred by peer election and signals distinctive contribution to the field and commitment to the development of NICEC's work. Members and Fellows receive the NICEC journal and are invited to participate in all NICEC events.

NICEC does not operate as a professional association or commercial research institute, nor is it organisationally aligned with any specific institution. Although based in the UK, there is a strong international dimension to the work of NICEC and it seeks to support reflective practice in career education and counselling globally.'

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TITLE

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AIMS AND SCOPE

The NICEC journal publishes articles on the broad theme of career development in any context including:

- Career development in the workplace: private and public sector, small, medium and large organisations, private practitioners.
- Career development in education: schools, colleges, universities, adult education, public career services.
- Career development in the community: third age, voluntary, charity, social organisations, independent contexts, public career services.

It is designed to be read by individuals who are involved in career development-related work in a wide range of settings including information, advice, counselling, guidance, advocacy, coaching, mentoring, psychotherapy, education, teaching, training, scholarship, research, consultancy, human resources, management or policy. The journal has a national and international readership.

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Manuscripts are welcomed focusing on any form of scholarship that can be related to the NICEC Statement. This could include, but is not confined to, papers focused on policy, theory-building, professional ethics, values, reflexivity, innovative practice, management issues and/or empirical research. Articles for the journal should be accessible and stimulating to an interested and wide readership across all areas of career development work. Innovative, analytical and/or evaluative contributions from both experienced contributors and first-time writers are welcomed. Main articles should normally be 3,000 to 3,500 words in length and should be submitted to one of the co-editors by email. Articles longer than 3,500 words can also be accepted by agreement. Please contact the relevant issue co-editor(s) prior to submission to discuss the appropriateness of the proposed article and to receive a copy of the NICEC style guidelines. Final decisions on inclusion are made following full manuscript submission and a process of peer review.

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Overview of this issue

Issue 48 marks a landmark in the evolution of this Journal. We have moved to an open access platform for electronic format. This means the Journal will be freely accessible to all via the internet. The Journal is now hosted by the Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform. Current issues and the full back catalogue will be available and searchable. This includes issues in the period 2000-2010 (Issues 1-25), when this publication went under its previous name of *Career Research and Development: The NICEC Journal*. We hope that open access will bring the work of NICEC Fellows to a wider audience. We will continue to offer opportunities to career development practitioners, research students, and new voices in the field, to publish alongside established academics.

This is an open call issue, attracting submissions on a variety of topics. We have prioritised contributions that address the unavoidable issue of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on careers, together with articles addressing other themes of contemporary change, and current concern.

It is difficult not to understand COVID through the lens of one's own experience. Whilst some experiences may be shared, to a large degree people's socio-economic status determined the impact of the pandemic on their lives. For some, predominantly the professional classes, work continued unabated, shifting to the home environment. For others COVID destroyed livelihoods, or jeopardised income security. Some work cannot be done at home and 'key worker' groups had to expose themselves to risk of infection by continuing in the workplace. And some, notably health workers, had dramatically increased workloads.

The effects of the pandemic are at once subtle and far reaching. The relationship between work, technology, time, and space has been disrupted. To some extent, COVID has accelerated pre-existing social and industrial changes. Its impact has been global, and this is reflecting in our international selection of articles. Crucially the effects of COVID cannot be understood in isolation from other factors and trends that it is entangled with. As result this issue also addresses some other contemporary social and technological issues.

We start with **Hooley** who offers an overview and personal reflections on the impact of COVID on careers, locating it in a socio-political context. This article provides a big picture within which we can frame our conversations on recent global events as a shaper of career development.

Parks-Yancy and Colley take the conversation to the USA, and present evidence of the challenges faced by jobseekers during the pandemic. The way in which jobseekers present themselves to employers in a difficult labour market becomes critical to their success.

Continuing international perspectives, **Albien and Beppo** describe a study into the aspirations of South African students, in a difficult labour market. They demonstrate that COVID has influenced young people's migration intentions.

Returning to the UK, **Olaru and Bolger** explore the career development experiences of single parents, acknowledging that the challenges they face have been intensified by COVID.

Ranavaya explores the experiences of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) career development practitioners. This is an under-researched topic, seen here through the contemporary lens of decolonisation.

Finally, **Wilson, Robertson, Cruickshank and Hall** explore the potential and the pitfalls of artificial intelligence technologies for career development services. They highlight some of the ethical issues that these emerging technologies present to the profession. This article was edited by Lyn Barham.

Pete Robertson, Editor

10.20856/jnicec.4802

The impact of Covid-19 on career

Tristram Hooley

This article explores the experience of careering during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on a wide range of recent research, it proposes a framework for understanding this experience which attends to its multi-scalar nature and to its temporality. The article provides an analysis which addresses the micro, meso and macro levels within which individuals' careers take place. An argument is made that periods of crisis reorder our temporal experiences creating a new periodisation based on:

- the immediate crisis period;
- the subsequent period when restrictions are lifted and we return to the increasingly contested idea of 'normal life'; and
- the long-term as these repeated crises reorder our thinking and our society.

The framework is discussed primarily in reference to the experience of the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, which highlights the cyclical and ongoing nature of such crises.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is not a short-term crisis with a clearly defined end, but an ongoing part of our world. Following the identification of the Omicron variant in December 2021, Jeremy Farrar of the Wellcome Trust pronounced 'that we remain closer to the start of the pandemic than the end' and argued that we need to see it as a long-term challenge which will require concerted global political action (Farrar, 2021).

After two years of COVID, it is a good time to take stock of what has happened and consider what it means for our society and our careers. If COVID is going to be a long-term feature of our world we need to theorise its implications for careering and career guidance.

There was a time when public health was rarely discussed in relation to career. While there is important research that has made the connection between career and health, such research has been at the edges of the field and has typically explored how work and over-work can produce negative health consequences and the impact of health on performance (Grawitch et al., 2017, Smith et al., 2002). Work that explores the role of health as a more structural influence on people's careers has been less common and discussion of its implications for career guidance rarer still (Robertson, 2013, 2014).

The enormous public health crisis of COVID-19 has changed this. We are now in the habit of considering the public health implications of everything. Early in the pandemic, Ronald Sultana, Rie Thomsen and I explored what the pandemic might mean for careers and highlighted the way that it had made many of our assumptions about what our careers might hold increasingly fragile and highlighted their dependence on the wider context (Hooley et al., 2020). We also noted that the pandemic was driving right wing and centrist politicians into unfamiliar political territory in which the state was stepping in to underwrite people's careers and livelihoods. The question that we left unanswered was whether such a shift was just a short-term crisis response or whether these multi-level changes heralded more permanent change.

Since then, scholars of career have been writing about and researching COVID and considering what its implications are for the field. This has included special issues of the *Career Development Quarterly* (Osborn et al., 2021) and the *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* (Fouad,

2020) as well as important articles being published journals such as *Career Development International* (Autin et al., 2020). It has also included a wide range of research, writing and theorisation in related fields. The current issue of the *NICEC Journal* builds on an extends these concerns within the field.

This article will synthesise the emergent literature on COVID and careers to propose a new framework for thinking about the impact of the pandemic on our careers. My framework is multi-scalar and addresses the different levels on which career takes place (what I describe as micro, meso and macro) and recognises the temporal nature of the COVID crisis.

Developing a framework for understanding career in the pandemic

The concept of 'total war' was developed as a way of understanding the experience of warfare in the late nineteenth and twentieth century (Black, 2010). War was no longer something fought by professional armies in remote locations, nor something that the civilian population could ignore. It was a totalising logic around which everything was organised. Total war impacted on small things (the micro level) including individuals' movements and their diets, on organisations and how they operated (the meso level), which in turn had implications for individuals' work and careers and on government policy and the economy (the macro level).

COVID-19 has seen the advent of 'total pandemic' in much the same way. By this I do not mean that COVID-19 is the worst imaginable pandemic or that it has changed every aspect of our lives, but rather that it has seen responsibility for public health move beyond the specialists and has reordered the behaviour of individuals, organisations and governments. Public health is no longer the preserve of doctors and health ministries but is now a part of all our lives and serves as an underpinning logic for all government policies. The presence of COVID has become the new normal and the longer the pandemic goes on the more difficult it is to identify *what is happening because of COVID* from just *what is happening*. Given this it is useful to break it impacts on career down and to think about these impacts in terms of their *micro*, *meso* and *macro* level effects. The recognition that our careers are changing on multiple levels has also been observed by a range of other writers who highlight the way in which personal, organisational and national shifts are often intertwined (Cho, 2020; Kramer & Kramer, 2020).

It is also important to recognise the way that the pandemic impacts on our careers temporally. When the UK entered its first lockdown, its perennially optimistic Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that he believed the UK could 'turn the tide' on COVID and 'send it packing' within 12 weeks (Gallagher, 2020). While it is easy to use hindsight to ridicule the Prime Minister, his temporal perspective was widely shared. The question was not whether we would return to normal, but when. Two years later this seems naïve. Akkermanns et al. (2020) make the important observation that COVID's impact on our careers is likely to change over time, perhaps initially experienced negatively, but ultimately leading to positive change. In this article I will explore this through a new periodisation that the pandemic imposes on people's experience of career. Firstly, the *immediate* crisis period; secondly, the *subsequent* period when restrictions are lifted and we begin to return to the increasingly contested idea of 'normal life'; and finally, the *long-term* as these repeated crises reorder our thinking and our society.

These three temporal perspectives are not neatly defined by public policy decisions such as the beginning and end of periods of lockdown. Rather they are subjective and open to contestation. For a hospitality worker the *immediate* period might be defined as when their restaurant closes, the *subsequent* period when it reopens and the *long-term* when regulations no longer govern the operation of the business. On the other hand, health workers may find that the *immediate* period is associated with a rapid growth in hospital admissions, the *subsequent* period when the peak has been reached and overcome and the *long-term* as when COVID no longer dominates admissions. These two temporal perspectives are clearly intertwined, but they may not run to the same rhythm. Some people may be moving into a subsequent period, whilst others are still caught up in the immediacy of the crisis.

It is not just occupational or positional differences that may lead us to different judgements about whether we are in the middle of a crisis or coming out of it. There are also important political and analytical differences that shape people's perspective. For example, before Christmas 2021, the UK Government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) was lobbying for an increase in regulations and arguing that we were once more in a crisis, while backbench Conservative MPs organised through the COVID Recovery Group (CRG) argued against any regulations that might limit the freedom of individuals and businesses (Woodcock, 2021). This is not to argue that SAGE and SRG's perspectives are equivalent, nor to dismiss the epidemiological realities which the competing strategies needed to address, but merely to note that it is possible for different people and different groups of people to come to different conclusions about the extent, nature and even existence of a public health crisis at the same time.

We have also come to see that the temporal nature of the pandemic is far from linear. It is not a single shock with a steady return to normal, but rather a series of loops bringing us into and out of crises of different severity on a regular basis. The shift from immediate to subsequent and long-term is not a one-way street but rather a constantly shifting set of perspectives which can be applied at a variety of levels.

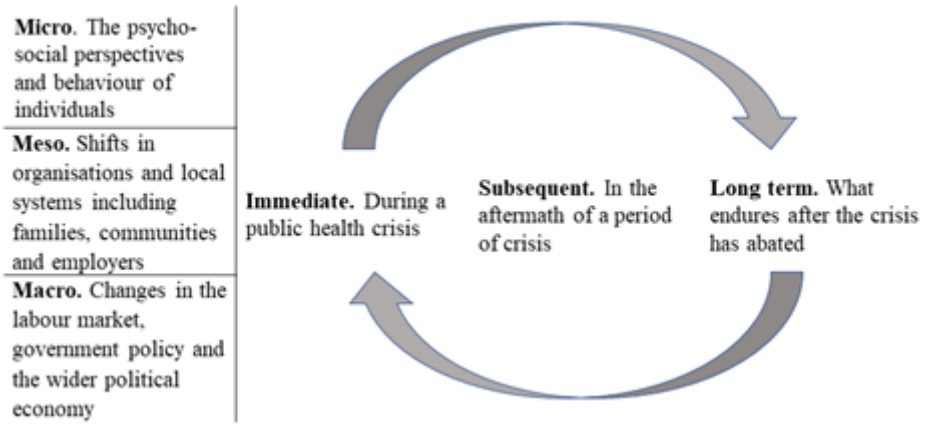
These scalar and temporal concerns offer us a framework (see Figure 1) that we can use to investigate how COVID is impacting on our careers more fully.

Micro level

The pandemic has come as a surprise to most of us, it was not expected nor easily prepared for. It has heightened our sense of vulnerability, disrupted people's daily routines, including their work and study routines, and reorganised and often contracted their social networks (Blustein et al., 2020; Kovacs et al., 2021). These psycho-social changes have resulted in a measurable decrease in mental wellbeing for many people and an increase in stress, anxiety and depression (Saladino et al., 2020) as well as a range of negative behavioural changes including drug and alcohol abuse, suicide and domestic violence (Kumar & Nayar, 2021)

There have also been some positives to the pandemic with people having the opportunity to change their daily routines, spend more time with family and take stock of their lives (Kyoo-Mann, 2021). Although in many cases the challenges of this renegotiation of work and family life have been experienced more keenly by women (Woodbridge et al., 2021). Despite the mental, physical, social and economic challenges posed by COVID, the population has proved to be remarkably

Figure 1. A framework for understanding the impact of COVID on career



resilient with people demonstrating that they are able to manage rapid and unforeseen change. However, the dividing line between those who have experienced the pandemic positively and negatively depends on both pre-existing psychological (Paredes et al., 2021) and social resources (Caballero-Domínguez et al., 2021) as well as the socio-economic position of the individual (Wright et al., 2021).

We have also seen the emergence of contradictory pressures on our social relations. On one hand, COVID has interpolated itself between people, breaking us apart and requiring a physical distancing that is easily transformed into a social distancing. On the other hand, it has also fostered an increased awareness of the nature of social connection, a recognition that people are connected and that our individual wellbeing is based on the air that we breath, on the capacity of our shared health systems, supply chains and other social and economic systems.

De Luca Picione et al. (2021) explore the way in which people have responded to these profound psycho-social disruptions. They identify four different clusters of responses consisting of: firstly, people who put their faith in the state to manage the pandemic; secondly those who are concerned and disorientated by it; thirdly those who focus on looking after themselves; and fourthly those who emphasise responsible behaviour and social solidarity. Despite these differences, all groups agreed that collective action was needed and anticipated a temporary, necessary, but ultimately undesirable reduction in their autonomy because of the measures that would need to be taken. De Luca Picione's work demonstrates the way in which the pandemic has synchronised individuals' psycho-social wellbeing in relation to a global event as well as highlighting the patterning that has emerged in how different people respond to this synchronisation.

The pandemic has compelled governments to play, and be seen to play, a larger role in people's lives and this has shaped people's understanding of what is possible and reasonable to expect from their government. For example, in the UK policies like furlough, increases in Universal Credit, and changes to statutory sick pay successfully protected many people's employment and incomes (Brewer & Tasseva, 2021). Such policies have heightened the entanglement between the personal and the political and individuals' careers and government policy.

During periods of intense crisis many of these psycho-social issues play out in immediate career concerns. For those losing work, particularly those with limited personal resources, the pandemic led to mental health issues and a need to find new forms of support as they adjust and seek work (Wright et al., 2021). Faced with a lockdown and the rapid contraction of employment opportunities (ONS, 2022) some people were anxious to hang on to existing work and safeguard their personal, financial and employment situations. But, as we have moved past the immediate points of crisis there has been interest in whether people have become more active and purposeful in their careers, with some citing the 'great resignation' as evidence of this shift (Brignall, 2021). However, further analysis suggests that most people's job moves in this subsequent period do not represent a fundamental rethinking of their life and career. Rather people are identifying that their power in the labour market has increased and seizing on this moment to increase their security and improve their rewards and conditions of employment after a long period of wage stagnation and relatively low levels of employee leverage (Swindells, 2021).

So, at a micro level people have struggled with pandemic, experiencing both physical and psychological harm from COVID-19 and from social isolation. Simultaneous with these psycho-social challenges, was an immediate and rapid reduction in the number of job opportunities available as employers backed away from hiring during a period of uncertainty (OECD, 2021). But as we have moved into the subsequent period people have started to look for opportunities to progress the careers and lives that have been stalled by COVID. In general, this has not resulted in radical rethinking or starting again, but rather in careful and purposeful careering designed to increase security and quality of life.

Over the long term the very real trauma of the pandemic may have enduring impacts on people's psycho-social worlds. The experience of mental and physical illness, the depletion of social networks, the loss of friends and loved one and ongoing mental health issues or long COVID symptoms may have an impact

on how people engage with life and career. In addition, it is too early to dismiss the idea that the experience of pandemic may serve as a critical disruption, prompting deep career thinking from at least some people. While people seem to be making small career moves following the crisis rather than big ones (Swindells, 2021) it is possible that the repeated cycle of pandemic boom and bust may ultimately foster more fundamental forms of careers thinking and enactment. On the other hand, the pandemic may serve to heighten people's sense of risk and insecurity, ultimately incentivising risk averse career behaviours.

Meso level

The meso level describes the spaces where career happens, including employers, education providers, local and professional communities, and families. In our society such institutions are typically founded on physical proximity and social connectedness. While there are clearly countervailing forces including globalisation, the internet and the growth of the app mediated gig economy, the concepts of place and social connectedness have remained central to most people's experience of reality. For example, in 2019 only around 5% of the UK workforce described themselves as working wholly or mainly at home (ONS, 2020a).

COVID represented a major shock to organisations and networks which relied on proximity to produce goods (factories), organise their operations (offices), sell their products (shops) or create opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and connections (conferences and meetings). During the April 2020 lockdown in the UK and then again in the February 2021 lockdown around 47% were working at home for some of the time, and many of those who were not had to deal with changes and restrictions to the way in which their place of work operated (Partington, 2021). Furthermore, the profile of those working from home was unevenly distributed by sector, occupation and socio-economic status, with older and higher status people far more likely to work at home (ONS, 2020b). This meant that the experience of working in the pandemic differed between organisations (often on a sectoral basis), but also within organisations (often on an occupational basis which intersected with socio-economic status).

During the immediacy of the lockdowns many organisations and networks rapidly re-engineered the way they operated. From community groups delivering 'Zoom Zumba' (Groundwork UK, 2020) to organisations shifting recruitment, induction and learning and development functions online (ISE & AGCAS, 2020), many responses were substantially defined by the rapid adoption of new technologies.

These substantial changes to working life were experienced by workers as neither wholly positive nor negative (ONS, 2021). Many reported improved work-life balance, fewer distractions, an increased ability to focus on and complete work and generally improved wellbeing. But these positives were balanced by concern about it being harder to think of new ideas, there being less opportunities for career advancement and it being harder to work with others.

As the lockdown regulations abated many organisations reflected on the pros and cons of the enforced remote working experiments. Some saw benefits including improved staff wellbeing, reduced overheads, and increased productivity (ONS, 2021). But this change also prompted a number of challenges including some employers investigating how to surveil their remote workforce (Baska, 2020). Others raised concerns about the induction of new, and particularly young workers, the loss of peer-to-peer and happenstance learning and concerns about whether the gains in wellbeing from homeworking would be eroded by loneliness and the loss of workplace support networks (Thomas, 2021).

Employers and other organisations have therefore been wrestling with the definition of a new paradigm. If COVID prompted a period of rapid experimentation, the subsequent period has been defined by questions about how far and how fast to return to the pre-pandemic normal or shift to something else. Some organisations are shedding office space, but it is not clear whether this represents a permanent retreat from the centrality of physical workplaces or what new physical spaces should look like (Mearian, 2021). As we have been cycling in and out of crisis since March 2020, with repeated changes in regulation and the public health situation, many organisations have struggled to establish a new paradigm. The costs of frequent switching from remote to proximate practices is considerable and so it may be difficult for a new

paradigm to emerge until there is a greater sense of permanency to the situation.

In the long run it seems very likely that new paradigms for working, studying, community organising and even social networking with family and friends will emerge. These are likely to intensify the use the of digital technologies but may seek to balance these online connections with face-to-face contact. But such speculation remains idle in a period in which public health crises are regular but remain difficult to predict. What is clear is that COVID has resulted in considerable changes in the way in which the sites and institutions of career operate.

Macro level

The careers of individuals and the development of organisations take place within a social, cultural, political and economic context. This context has a myriad of local variations which exist within a global frame which up until 2008 could be described as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism developed as an ideology and political project from the 1920s and began to influence policy in advanced capitalist countries, starting with Chile, from the 1970s (Srnicek & Williams, 2016). It was defined by a reification of the market and the belief that the power of the state should be mobilised to introduce market logics into all aspects of life. It was designed to advantage capital over labour and implemented through the reduction of labour regulations and the welfare state as well as the deregulation of financial markets.

In many ways the pandemic has showcased the logic of the neoliberal system. While governments and central banks have done everything in their powers to backstop corporate profits and financial markets (Blakely, 2020), the brunt of the impact of the pandemic has been borne by those whose labour drives global profits. Poverty and other forms of inequality are strongly associated with death and other COVID-related risks, with poorer workers both more vulnerable and exposed to infection (Blundell et al., 2020). And it is the very deregulation of labour markets and loosening of workers' rights, including health and safety regulations, that has often been to blame for these differential outcomes (Hendry & Ewing, 2020).

As my colleagues and I have argued previously, the neoliberal project shapes people's careers, for example by reducing the availability of public education, welfare and employment support (including all forms of publicly funded career guidance) and subjecting what is available to a range of quasi-market logics (Hooley et al., 2018). It is also important because neoliberalism is not just an external force which shapes the possibilities available to individuals, it is also an ideology which colonises our thinking, shapes what we consider as 'common sense' within the realm of personal and political possibility.

However, the neoliberal political economy has been experiencing a period of crisis since at least the 2008 banking crisis (Tooze, 2019). The need for regular state intervention to prop up a struggling global financial system accompanied by wage stagnation in many countries has seen the shine come off the neoliberal hegemony. As a result, there has the been the growth of new political formations from both the left and the right that have questioned the orthodoxies of neoliberalism and explored the possibilities of reintroducing tariffs and rolling back various elements of globalisation.

COVID provided a new shock to this already crisis ridden global political economy. In the short term this pushed governments into utilising the power of the state to underpin people's jobs and livelihoods (Blakely, 2020; Fitzroy & Spencer, 2020). Levels of public spending and public borrowing that had previously been dismissed as impossible proved surprisingly easy to implement at speed when it was necessary to do so to keep the population from starvation.

As the world emerged from the initial phase of COVID-19, many celebrated a strong economic recovery. But the speed of the recovery has slowed, bedevilled by the emergence of new variants as well as longer-term structural issues (IMF, 2021). What recovery we have seen has also been characterised by an increase in inequality and poverty (Gopalakrishnan et al., 2021). According to the IMF's Gita Gopinath (2020) we are facing 'a long, uneven and uncertain ascent' which 'will likely leave scars well into the medium term as labour markets take time to heal, investment is held back by uncertainty and balance sheet problems, and lost schooling impairs human capital.'

Whether the trajectory of this long ascent is going to take the world back to pre-2008 conditions is uncertain. For some this assertive deployment of the power of the state points the way towards a new, more progressive political and economic settlement (OECD, 2020), but as Blakely (2020) points out the crisis has seen many corporations and oligarchs enriching themselves in close collaboration with governments who have increased the power of the state and used it to sure up vested interests. Gerbaudo describes this as 'a shift from neoliberalism to neostatism' and suggests that we are 'moving toward a model of capitalism that is far more interventionist than it was during the golden age of neoliberal globalisation' (Venizelos, p.59).

Yet we should be sceptical of any predicted future. One thing that the pandemic has demonstrated is that assumptions about the direction of travel of society or the economy can quickly be rewritten. The pedagogic moment posed by the pandemic for individuals is paralleled with a similar possibility for politics to be transformed in a variety of directions. While in Britain the 2008 crash and the pandemic have resulted in an extended period of right-wing government, which under Boris Johnson has become neostatist in nature, in Latin America there have been decisive swings to the left in Honduras, Peru and perhaps most importantly Chile (Blackburn, 2021). After winning the 2021 Chilean election, Gabriel Boric, pronounced 'if Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave' (The Guardian, 2021). In contrast to the neostatism on offer in the UK, Boric offers another possible version of the post-pandemic future characterised by improved public welfare systems, the forgiveness of student debt, improved wages and living standards and a revitalised democracy.

Conclusions

This article offers a framework for the analysis of the pandemic on career. It reminds us that the pandemic could serve as a pedagogic moment for individuals and for the career development field as a whole, asking us to reflect on what has changed and what has stayed the same, and to scrutinise whether our theories and practices remain sufficient.

I have argued that the pandemic has highlighted the multi-scalar nature of careers. Lockdowns and furlough, simultaneous with organisations divesting of their head offices and the widespread challenges for mental health has shown that our careers take place on multiple levels. Effective theory and interventions must recognise this complexity and address career on all these levels simultaneously.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of social temporality. Career is not just lived to our own biological timeline, nor can it be made to run to a pre-determined plan. The pandemic shows that personal, organisational, and social events and their consequences exert an enormous influence on our careers and that the ability to recognise, analyse and respond to such events is critical in understanding and managing careers.

A period of crisis illuminates truths that exist in the shadows during normal times. Public health is intertwined with our careers and further crises and changes to public health should be expected. These crises unfold over time and are experienced on multiple levels. Career theory needs to recognise the relationship between public health and the opportunity structure and attend to the dialectical interplay between individual careering and social reality. The framework set out in this article provides an approach that can be used to capture these interactions and consider their implications for careering in and after the pandemic.

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'How do I get hired?' Early career individuals' employment strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic

Rochelle Parks-Yancy & Delonia Cooley

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the employment and career expectations of millions of Americans, including individuals in their early career stage. Instead of the robust labour market that was projected prior to the pandemic, this population faced layoffs, job offers rescinded, unemployment, and underemployment in 2020. Their job hunt strategies amidst the pandemic are an important topic of research inquiry. This qualitative study investigates respondents' perspectives of online employment sites, social capital, and personal branding via social media as methods to obtain employment information and to get hired. The authors provide practical suggestions to enhance job seekers' employment searches.

Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the personal and professional lives of millions of people around the world. It destroyed the job market for millions in the U.S.A., including access to career opportunities and employment for early career talent (Auceio et al., 2020; BLS, 2020; Duffin, 2020). Recent college graduates, defined as people ages 22-27 with a Bachelor's degree or more, experienced severe job losses (Duffin, 2020). Companies stopped recruiting at universities (Reidy, 2020), job offers were rescinded (Hess, 2020; Shastri, 2020), and individuals were laid off (Auceio et al., 2020).

The pandemic altered the employment and career expectations of recent college graduates and college students who may have expected a plethora of job opportunities post-graduation (Reidy, 2020). Instead of working in roles commensurate with their education, thousands were rendered unemployed (Beland et al., 2020). They probably experienced substantial challenges with finding a job, given the pandemic's effect on employment.

This paper examines the pandemic's effects on the employment strategies of U.S.A. job seekers who are in their early career stage. The research focuses on three ways in which early career individuals' seek employment: submitting resumés to employers' websites and/or to employment sites; being a referral (social capital); and personal branding, which is promoting one's candidacy to employers via the social media.

This study is important contribution to the labour market and career studies literatures. While there is a plethora of research regarding job hunt methods (e.g. Alexander et al., 2019; Marr & Cable; 2014; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Parks-Yancy, 2010; Roulin, et al., 2014), the pandemic's effect on employment is still ongoing (del Rio-Chanonna, et al., 2020). Researchers are still examining its impact on individuals' current and future careers. The study addresses knowledge gaps regarding the pandemic's effects on the employment strategies of job seekers who are in their early career stage. This is an important line of inquiry, given that this population is the next generation of the labour force. The findings may be used to understand their employment perceptions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

and to inform impending policy decisions among organizations within the U.S.A.

The study is explorative and is structured as follows: The authors review the literature regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on labour markets and the ways in which early career candidates seek employment. Next, the authors address the data, the methods, and the research findings. The study concludes with practical implications.

Literature review

The impact of COVID-19 on employment and perceived career opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the labour market in the U.S.A. (Parker et al., 2020). As of May 2020, 53% of adult Americans were employed, compared with 61% at the beginning of 2020 (Parkinson, 2020). At its first peak, the unemployment rate rose to about 16% in May 2020 and decreased to 6.7% in November 2020 (BLS, 2020), which was still above the February 2020 rate of 3.5%. Evidently, the environment in 2020 was very challenging for employment, even after the pandemic's initial wave.

There are burgeoning studies that address pandemic's effect on the employment of early career individuals. Aucejo et al. (2020) conducted a study of the impact of COVID-19 on college students' perceptions of their career prospects. Of the 1500 students surveyed, 40% lost their job/internship or their job offer was withdrawn by the employer. Thirteen percent (13%) chose to delay graduating, given the high unemployment rate and perceived lack of career opportunities. Twenty-nine percent (29%) believed their future earnings potential was negatively affected. They expected to earn less at age 35 than they had expected to earn prior to the pandemic. Studies have found that resiliency and self-efficacy are significant contributors to individuals' perceptions of likely reemployment, after experiencing job loss (McLaurnon et al., 2020). However, these students expressed a belief that challenging employment conditions would continue for a sustained period.

Company websites/online employment sites

Applying for job opportunities generally includes submitting a resumé (CV) to employers' applicant portal and/or to online job sites, such as Indeed, Monster, Jobvite, etc. (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018). Employers gain insight into applicants' employment objectives, their education, their specific technical and language skills, and their work history (Cole, Field & Giles, 2003). Resumé content affects employer's perceptions of applicants' personality and intelligence (Cole, Field & Giles, 2003; Mader & Mader, 2015). Employers utilize resumé content to determine whether to advance a candidate in the employment screening process (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019).

However, employers are inundated with resumés for job openings, which lessens the likelihood of applicants gaining access to a job interview, let alone to receive an offer (Ingold & Langer, 2021). On average, of 250 resumés submitted per corporate job, up to six candidates will be interviewed and only one person will be hired (Economy, 2015). Hence, there are tempered benefits of job seekers' submitting their resumé to employment sites, as the sole way to promote their candidacy (McCabe, 2017).

Individuals in their early career stage often do not have extensive work experience or professional achievements. They are probably less likely to be actively sought after by employers and may be relegated to submitting resumés to the hypercompetitive online job sites (McDonald et al. 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated employment competition, given the large numbers of people who were abruptly unemployed and actively seeking work during 2020 (BLS, 2020; Beland et al., 2020).

Social capital

Social capital is a well-documented research stream about the effects of social networks on various professional outcomes, including employment, career trajectories, objective career rewards (e.g. compensation, access to training, promotions) and organizational memberships (Granovetter, 1973; Seibert et al., 2017; Strathdee, 2001). Social capital

contributes to individuals' career trajectories via resources that are shared among individuals and groups, who comprise social networks (Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998). These resources include sharing information about employers that are hiring, the willingness of social contacts to influence employment decisions on one's behalf (i.e., refer for employment), and relationships with individuals who directly make hiring decisions (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Access to these resources is embedded among individuals and groups within social networks (Lin, 2001). Thus, social capital resources help people obtain employment (Granovetter, 1973), obtain training (Parks-Yancy, 2010), and receive better-paying and/or more prestigious jobs than they already have (McDonald, 2015).

Referrers are people that are connected to employers. They recommend people within their networks for employment (Lin, 2001). People who are referred to employers are referrals. Their personal connection with the referrer provides access to employers (Portes; 1998; Parks-Yancy, 2012). Referrers leverage their relationships with employers to support the referral's candidacy. In turn, employers view referrals more favorably than candidates with similar skills, but are not a referral (Brown, Setren, & Topa, 2012; Di Stasio & Gerxhani, 2015; Schlachter & Pieper; 2019). This is because, by definition, referrals' qualifications have been validated by the referrer (Dustmann, Christian, & Glitz, 2000). Obviously, this impacts employers' hiring decisions, such that referrals are more likely to be hired than applicants who are not referrals (Seibert et al., 2017). Thus, access to social capital resources provides employment advantages over people without such resources.

Before the pandemic, companies often conducted some or all parts of their screening processes for early career talent on university campuses (Vinson, Reardon, & Bertoch, 2014). University career centre professionals and, sometimes professors, serve as liaisons between the employers and applicants (Vinson, Reardon, & Bertoch, 2014). Accordingly, referred students have an employment advantage over non-referral applicants (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018).

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals in their early career stages may not have been able to obtain referrals for desired roles. First, the job market contraction meant that there were simply fewer jobs available compared to pre-pandemic. This increased employment competition substantially (BLS, 2020; Parker et al., 2020). Second, in 2020, universities furloughed or laid off numerous academic and staff positions (Burke, 2020). So, they were likely not available to help students obtain employment.

Personal branding

Personal branding involves garnering notice by others (Chen, 2013; Zakarda, 2012). Social media branding represents a significant advancement in the ways that applicants promote their qualifications to employers (de Land et al., 2016; Vallas & Christin, 2017). Numerous early career job seekers are competing for employers' attention. The challenge of getting noticed, let alone hired, is substantial (Economy, 2015; Lebowitz & De Luce, 2019) because there are millions of people seeking to create a brand that employers will notice (Shepherd, 2005). This challenge likely grew substantially in 2020, given the extent of pandemic-related job losses and, consequently, the numbers of individuals' seeking employment (BLS, 2020; Duffin 2020).

Social media enables job seekers to show their personal brand publicly and simultaneously (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019; Deckers & Lacy, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Ward & Yates, 2013). Once content is posted on social media, it is immediately available to the entire world, including employers (Bhagdat & Parrish, 2018). In contrast, if an applicant uploads their resumé to a company's employment site, their information is, generally, confined to that specific site. Job seekers' social media activity provides employers with information about their personal brand that is not necessarily evident on resumés. This can enhance applicants' candidacy.

Employers' perceptions of a candidate can be influenced by their social media activity (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Forbes, 2018; Lam, 2016; McCabe, 2017). In one study, 37% of employers stated that their assessment of candidates' social media brand supported their positive view of the candidate (Driver, 2018). In another study, applicants' LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter activity affected hiring decisions (Sameen

& Cornelius, 2015). Thirty-one percent (31%) of the respondents indicated that the candidates' social media brand favorably impacted their receipt of a job offer. Though, candidates' social media brand may not always reflect their true employment qualifications, it is still a method by which employers evaluate candidates (Jeske & Schultz, 2016; Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has possibly both helped and hindered early career job seekers' personal branding. Personal branding enables early career individuals to display their employment suitability beyond just submitting resumés to company websites or online job sites. It can elicit employer interest in candidates (McDonald et al., 2019) who are not referrals. Conversely, given the pandemic's economic effects, it may have been more challenging for job seekers to garner employers' attention (Beland, 2020), despite personal branding.

Early career individuals utilize social media branding to promote their candidacy to employers (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). This is in addition to more traditional methods, such as submitting resumés and being a referral. Therefore, it is important to explore their job hunt methods in the context of the challenging economic environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

Sample

Eighty-three (83) undergraduate business majors and MBA candidates completed the surveys. Fifty-four percent (54%) were juniors and seniors, while 46% percent were MBA students. They were enrolled at a mid-sized, comprehensive university, located in the Southwestern region of the U.S.A. Eighty percent (80%) of the student population receives federal financial assistance to support their education and 45% are commuter students, such that they do not reside on campus. The average age of the sample was 27 and they were approximately 48% male and 52%

Table 1: Survey questions

1. Have you been employed within the past 2 years?
2. If yes, what is the longest time that you've been employed? Please select one.
   - 6 months or less
   - 1 year
   - More than 1 year
   - Other
3. Did you or someone you know lose their job during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What methods are you using now (or have used in the past year) to find out about available jobs? Select all that apply:
   - Applying via Online Job Sites (e.g. Indeed, Monster, etc.)
   - Contacting Personal Relationships (e.g. friends, family, former co-workers/managers, professors, University Officials)
   - Social Media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)
   - Other (please specify)
5. In your opinion, which methods are most likely to help job seekers get hired? Please rank them from 1 (least likely) to 4 (most likely) by typing your answer in the textbox below?
6. Which method helps job seekers get hired the fastest? Select one.
   Why did you select this method?
7. Please provide any other comments that you may have that will help explain how you were able to find a job (or are still looking).

female. Sixty-three percent (63%) worked 25 or more hours per week. This population was appropriate for the study because the respondents were primarily in early career stages and were accustomed to being employed.

Methods

The survey was developed by determining common employment-related personal branding methods (Landers & Schmidt, 2016; SHRM, 2016). The respondents completed the survey online, utilizing Survey Monkey. They were assigned a unique identification code to ensure they could only complete the survey once. They were incentivized to participate by way of receiving extra credit points towards a class assignment. However, if they did not participate in the survey, they received additional extra credit opportunities that were similar in content and duration as the survey.

Table 1 shows the seven survey questions. The authors created a survey comprised of items from employment-related sources and from research about employment methods. SHRM (2016) provides a detailed overview of hiring processes, including employers' evaluation of social media activity. In addition, studies indicate that social capital impacts employment determinations (Brown et al., 2016; Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018; Granovetter, 1973). The study survey was extrapolated from those sources and modified to befit this investigation.

Data analysis

The authors utilized qualitative methods help understand the meaning of phenomena and how or why they occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The research goal was to determine patterns in the participants' responses. The authors categorized common themes contained in the respondents' comments and organized the comments by the numerical proportions. Counting is a tactic in qualitative analysis to determine the content of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is a form of content analysis (Berg, 2001) to find patterns in communications and to understand individuals' beliefs or intentions. It is not meant to provide quantitative analysis nor statistical inferences. Instead, its purpose is to ensure that the patterns reported reflect the data. Where appropriate, we also included quotes from the interviews to highlight the points herein.

Results

Job availability information: Online employment sites matter

Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents were employed within the previous two years. Fifty-four percent (54%) were employed less than one year, but more than six months, while 29% were employed for one year or more. Eighty-two percent (82%) lost their job or knew someone who lost their job during the pandemic. This finding aligns with data regarding the pandemic's significant effect on employment (BLS, 2020).

Online employment sites, such as Indeed, were the participants' most common methods to learn about available jobs (81%). It is not surprising to observe that method ranked first for learning about open positions. Online job sites are advertised quite frequently online, in television advertising, on phone apps, and are, apparently, well-known among this population. A few respondents mentioned employment sites targeted to college students, such as Handshake. Handshake is an app connects universities with employers seeking collegiate talent for available positions. Some of the participants' responses are below:

> 'I created an application to collect [employment information] and they displayed all jobs available. Indeed is a great tool to help with finding a job.'
>
> 'I used Indeed.com and Zip Recruiter.'
>
> 'Employers are very responsive and able to communicate efficiently in response to applicants [on Indeed].'
>
> 'Handshake was my go-to. Sometimes [I] went to [employer's website].'

Social capital (Personal Connections) and personal branding (Social Media) were equally the second most common methods (49%) for participants to obtain employment information.

'Connections are the best way to get a job. I've usually gotten jobs like that.'

'My dad said his friend's company was hiring, so I applied.'

'Since I knew a family member in HR at my old job, I was notified promptly on when positions were available and how soon the hiring process would be. You have a 80% chance scoring a job by utilizing your pre-existing connections.'

Personal contacts: The fastest way to employment

Employment sites were the most utilized methods to gain job information. However, utilizing referrals was perceived as the fastest way for applicants get hired. The majority (58%) ranked personal contacts first, followed by online job sites (48%), then, social media (14%).

'Having a relationship established before a job could be very beneficial as that person can give you tips and help you secure the job.'

'I've noticed that a person is most likely to get a job when they know someone. In my experience I've gotten jobs faster this way.'

'Hiring manager isn't sifting through candidates, rather looking at the one(s) handed to them directly. Every job I have had has come through a personal relationship.'

'Most of the jobs that I have gotten or seen others get were based on relationships they had and were given. Networking is the key.'

The participants did not perceive social media as the first nor second fastest way to get hired. But, a small proportion deemed it to be important because of its speed and accessibility for communicating individuals' talents to employers.

'LinkedIn, although very professional, sometimes has a lot of standards for higher paying positions, companies [that] are looking to fill higher ranked jobs. It's good for those sorts of jobs.'

'People are more adapted to online websites, such as LinkedIn. People can be hired with Facebook and IG [Instagram]. Snapchat has jobs, too.'

'[Social media] is fast and can reach [people] anytime. Anybody can see it, that's why I use it [for employment].'

Advice to the unemployed: Personal contacts and online employment sites

Eighteen percent (18%) of the study participants did not lose their job during the COVID-19 pandemic and did not know anyone who was terminated, either. However, some still provided advice to job seekers. They recommended personal contacts, first, and employment sites, second, as the most effective employment methods.

'Personal contacts and in-person networking events were the fastest and most successful in my [past] search.'

Discussion

The early career respondents utilized online job sites, first, to access information about available jobs. Personal contacts and personal branding were the second most prevalent methods. Though personal contacts was ranked second to utilizing online job sites for employment information, respondents ranked it first as the fastest method to get hired, followed by online job sites and personal branding. The respondents believed that being referred by a trusted source to an employer increased the prospects of getting hired. Finally, some respondents believed that applicants' personal branding and social media were efficient ways to learn about new jobs.

The research results indicate the following:

1. The pandemic wrought extensive job losses among early career individuals (Auceio et al., 2020);
2. Early career individuals utilized online job sites to obtain employment information;

3. Personal branding was a source of employment information and, probably, a method to promote their talents to employers;

4. Personal contacts, that is, social capital, provides an employment advantage over people who do not have such personal connections. Personal connections were substantive contributors to the speed at which the respondents' gained employment.

Implications

There were many employment challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the evidence from this study suggests that leveraging personal relationships can be effective for obtaining employment. There are opportunities for early career applicants to develop personal relationships with individuals who are employers, themselves, or can refer them to employers. Namely, they should get involved with their desired industry's professional organizations. For example, if a job seeker is interested in the accounting roles, they should be active with local chapters of the AICPA (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants). Attending virtual and, when available, in-person professional development events, enables job seekers to evince their employment attributes to professionals and potential hiring authorities (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018).

Job seekers can also engage regularly on employers' social media sites and develop professional relationships via LinkedIn (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018). Hiring managers and other industry professionals on the sites may observe job seekers' engagement and be supportive of their candidacy. Though social media activity does not guarantee hire, it can help individuals display their employment attributes and develop professional relationships with employers, as well as with people who work in their desired field. These actions can cause employers to have a favorable view of the candidate, which can lead to positive employment outcomes.

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Career development during COVID: Increased migration aspirations of South African University students

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The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore COVID-19 effects on South African university students and graduates' experiences of career development and migration aspirations, using Stellenbosch University as a case study. Qualitative interviews (N=30) were conducted with university students and thematic analysis was used. Participants felt that the restrictive COVID measures increased unemployment levels in South Africa and young adults' difficulties in transitioning to the world-of-work. Increased levels of migration aspirations were mentioned by participants to facilitate access to sustainable employment in a global workforce. This study provides useful information and recommendations for international career researchers and practitioners on how to integrate COVID life experiences in career development trajectories.

Introduction

Migration in South Africa (SA) is a multi-layered and a contentious issue, with a flux of migrants and students from other African countries entering SA. However, outgoing movements are far less, with Afrobarometer research (Mataure, 2013) stating that 67% of South African youth (between15 to 34 years of age) wanted to stay in SA (Statistics SA, 2019). Specifically, international student mobility is under-researched, and it is a growing concern of higher education institutions (HEIs) that SA university students are not applying for existing international mobility programmes. Whilst, limited mobility could be linked to unequal socioeconomic backgrounds, there is no research yet that examines what effects COVID-19 had on the mobility and migration aspirations of SA university students and young graduates. In the present research, the unifying theory of *Migration System Theory* (Kritz et al., 1992) was used. The core tenet of this theory is that migration contributes to changes in both the receiving and sending country, at a macro level (economic, political and cultural systems, and institutions) and micro level (individual relations, kinship, and friendship systems) (Kritz at al., 1992).

Research goals

The current research study aimed to answer the overarching research question of what effects COVID-19, and the stringent lock down measures, had on the migration aspirations of SA university students and young graduates. In the light of these COVID effects, the present research has the following specific issues to examine: students career development in the face of the COVID pandemic; and students' perceived costs of migration aspirations.

Migration and mobility definitions

In this research, migration and mobility are time-based and involve crossing borders, based on economic goals of gaining professional opportunities that include training or employment (Cao et al., 2012). In the current research, the term mobility refers to a type of movement that students undertake in pursuing higher education (HE) opportunities. Mobility is often defined as a movement of a shorter time frame, with students returning to their home country or hometown after their education or training is complete (King et al., 2010; Souto-Otero et al., 2013). In contrast, migration is seen as a longer-term movement linked to gaining employment and/or career opportunities (Castelli, 2018; Milusheva et al., 2017). SA youth has been described as

nomadic, with mobility and migration movements being undertaken to attend HEIs and to gain employment in different SA provinces (Hall et al., 2015). The nomadic behaviour of students is evident in the sample.

Students' mobility decisions and destination choices are influenced by the lack of financial resources with South African students choosing countries with lower living and financial costs. Unfavourable exchange rates exacerbate financial strain, resulting in 11.6% of African students being internationally mobile (Beine et al., 2013). In SA, the demand for HE is outpacing offerings, resulting in SA student engagement in online HE, local and international, even before COVID began. Therefore, SA students can be described as 'glocal' students who seek an international education by engaging in new forms of cross-border, hybrid and online HE programmes, whilst staying in their home country (Gesing & Glass, 2018). Many SA students are first-generation students aiming to ensure short-term mobility, which would lead to upward social and economic mobility, regardless of regional conflicts, economic crises, and pandemics.

COVID-19 pandemic developments in SA

The first COVID-19 wave was detected in SA in March, 2020 (Mkhizi, 2020) and the first national lockdown began shortly afterwards. Over three months, essential services (i.e., healthcare workers, financial services, and retail workers with permits) were the only active businesses, transport services were limited, and SA borders were closed (Bullen & Singer, 2020). Restrictions, such as alcohol and cigarette bans, and limited movements in public spaces, were enforced by heavy legal penalties. The economy was severely disrupted by the lockdown. These lockdown restrictions continued as the second wave emerged from the *Beta variant*. At this time, many countries imposed travel bans on SA, which had political and economic impacts (Statistics SA, 2021). Thereafter, the *Delta variant* led to the third wave (NICD, 2021), and again imposed travel restrictions limited international travel. Currently, the emergence of the *Omicron variant* has resulted in the fourth wave (WHO, 2021). As a result, a travel ban was imposed that was comparable to those during Apartheid, and this resulted in further strain on the SA economy (Warah, 2021). The economy was badly affected by the lockdown and travel restrictions, which resulted in 47.9% of businesses trading capacity halted or shut down and 36.4% had retrenched staff (Statistics SA, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, 63% of unemployment rates were found in SA youth (i.e., age range 15-24), but this number of unemployed youth increased by 17% between July 2020 and September 2021 during the pandemic (Statistics SA, 2021).

Methods

Participants

Qualitative data stems from a research project that aims to examine migration aspirations in Stellenbosch University students and alumni (N=30). The demographic characteristics of the sample, and an overview of their orientation to migration is provided in Table 1.

Procedure

Permission to conduct and publish this research was obtained from the relevant ethics committees, as a joint venture between Stellenbosch University and the University of Neuchâtel to promote international student mobility in Sub-Saharan African Students. There were numerous challenges and delays due to COVID-19 and participants were invited by email to take part in the interviews. A research interview was conducted via zoom for 30- 60 minutes. Participants responded to structured questions that asked about their future aspirations of mobility and migration in given time frames. Further semi-structured questions explored reasons for any previous international mobility experiences, and perceived costs and benefits of any future migration aspirations. Thereafter, questioning explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration aspirations.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was conducted to search for dominant qualitative themes, using the migration systems theory to analyse the macro and micro level linkages (Kritz at al., 1992). This provides a cross-sectional examination that can only provide a description at a particular point of time and cultural context. Nonetheless, we believe that these findings will be of wider interest.

Table 1. Sample demographics and migration orientation

	f	%		f	%
Age			**Gender**		
20-29 years	22	74	Female	20	67
30-39 years	7	23	Male	10	33
40-49 years	1	3			
			Hometown		
Race			Western Cape	12	40
White	14	47	Eastern Cape	4	14
Black	9	30	Gauteng	7	23
Coloured	5	17	KwaZulu Natal	1	3
Indian	1	3	Limpopo	2	7
Other	1	3	Northern Cape	1	3
			Other	3	10
Academic level			**Faculties**		
Bachelors	11	37	Agrisciences	2	7
Honours	6	20	Arts & Social Sciences	14	47
Masters	7	23	EMS	5	17
PhD	5	17	Engineering	1	3
Diploma	1	3	Law	1	3
			Sciences	4	13
Current status			Medicine	1	3
Current students & employed	7	23	Education	2	7
Graduated & employed	4	14			
Current student & unemployed	18	60			
Graduated & unemployed	1	3			
COVID increased mobility aspirations			**Continents considered:**		
Yes	20	67	Africa	2	6
No	9	30	Europe	15	50
			Asia	3	10
Perceived COVID restrictions on mobility			Oceania	3	10
Yes	23	77	South America	2	7
No	7	23	North America	5	17
Movement timeframe			**Previous mobility experience**		
Within 2 years	8	27	Mobile	13	43
2-5 years	9	30	Non-mobile	13	43
5+ years	3	10	Online	4	14
Sometime in future	9	30			
Never	1	3			

Results

In the table below, the dominant themes and sub-themes are identified. The results will be presented according to two main overarching themes.

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes identified

Themes	Sub-themes
1. **Increased migration aspirations**	
2. **Perceived costs of migration**	**2.1.** Abandoning SA
	2.2. Current conditions in SA
	2.3. Psychological costs

1. Increased migration aspirations

Participants were seeking financial stability because they had witnessed or were affected by job loss either directly or indirectly. Their increased migration aspirations came from an awareness that the job market had become even more competitive and that they needed to get experience, or a competitive advantage over other job applicants by exploring overseas opportunities to progress in their career trajectories. This is evident in the following excerpts: '…I'm probably not going to be able to do it in SA. So I need to find European or overseas employment' (P.20); and '…if you're from a small town in the Free State, you're not going to get a microbiology post there' (P.12).

International exposure was seen as an 'asset' (P.18 &P.23), or 'invaluable' (P.22) to 'just seize more opportunities' (P.26, P.27 & 28) to develop a skill set attractive to employers in the SA context or overseas because '[international exposure]…seem[s] like a lot of potential if it's on [your CV]'(P.3 & 29), and 'it tells your future employer that you have grit that you want to broaden your horizons, you want to learn constantly, and you can move outside of your comfort zone' (P.10). Interestingly, COVID seemed to reinforce migration aspirations in participants (n = 9, 30%) and to cause a new interest in moving overseas in others (n = 20, 70%). Therefore, the sub-theme of increased migration aspirations explains how participants were considering new avenues for gaining skills to become employable by looking outside of SA. However, the pandemic and travel restrictions caused participants to face increasing difficulties to realise their migration aspirations.

2. Perceived costs of migration aspirations

Sub-theme 2.1 abandoning SA, related to participants' strong connection to SA as seen in the following excerpts: 'patriotic feeling' (P.11); 'love SA'; '…love my town' (P.6); and 'I think that I would sort of be seen as more of a traitor than anything else [for leaving SA]' (P.11). The dominant sentiment that participants shared was the intention to return to SA in following comments: 'Bring it back home' (P.29); 'definitely want come back after that' (P.9); '…So I would want to come back …[to] maintain contact with my family' (P.13), and 'I always want to come back to SA' (P.20).

Sub-theme 2.2 was frustration about the current conditions in SA, which included stringent lock downs that strained the SA economy, high crime rates, electricity black outs, government corruption and looting and rioting incited by political unrest. In the following excerpts we can see these recent events increased future migration aspirations :'…I just want to escape the political landscape that is SA, and I just want to create opportunities for my career on my family' (P.1);'…And I really see that SA is really not in a good place at the moment '(P.20); 'we have things like we are experiencing load shedding, we have so much

corruption in our government' (P.16); and lastly, '…with the rand continuing to fall, and all of this…economic upheaval in the country… it does make international sort of movements, more appealing. And, of course, like raising kids, somewhere very safe… I don't feel safe to live in a free standing home, you know, in our country' (P.11).

Sub-theme 2.3 was psychological costs, and this came from the awareness of leaving social contacts and family behind. It is illustrated by the following excerpts '…it might be bad [going overseas] because I have a family this side' (P.28); '…I've never been without my family, I still have fear of moving' (P.30), 'the social interaction part can be very challenging for mental health for expatriates' (P.13), 'coming from a South African background, [to overcome] an inferiority complex' (P.25), and '…and I am now going somewhere I don't know the culture. Am I going to cope with whatever that world throws at me when I'm all alone?' (P.17).

Discussion

In this discussion we would like to incorporate macro and micro linkages that are involved in the career development and migration aspiration processes of the South African youth in the current sample. The current situation in SA includes looting, increased crime, political unrest, increased unemployment and COVID-related economic strain, and these factors act as macro linkages that influence Stellenbosch University students and graduates to develop increased migration aspirations at the micro linkage level. The increased migration aspirations are viewed as a way to get gainful employment and work experience in order to return to SA in the future. However, there are other micro linkage factors such as social relationships and patriotism that may hinder individuals from undertaking migration processes if these psychological costs are viewed as greater than the benefits of leaving the current detrimental situational factors in SA.

The migration systems theory model is useful because the link is emphasised between migration and development (De Haas, 2010), which allows a broader perspective that views development as not only economic in nature but also social. Therefore, it can be argued that migration has the ability to influence the socio-economic development of the country of origin. It can encourage subsequent migration, enhance the individual's human and social capital, and improve an individual's employability. This research has clearly shown how the COVID pandemic has blurred the micro, cross-domain boundaries, whilst strengthening the macro, transnational boundaries. Changes to the micro and macro boundaries represent important mechanisms in how COVID-19 impacts on individual vocational behaviour and career outcomes (Cho, 2020).

Limitations, recommendations and conclusion

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the case study at a single university in SA means that the results need replication at other HEIs to ensure transferability. Secondly, the COVID-19 restrictions in SA were stringent and research is required in other developing-world countries that had very restrictive measures to assess if similar reactions are visible amongst university students and graduates. Thirdly, qualitative research has limitations based on the individual subjective experiences that are contextually situated in a unique historical period. Nonetheless, we believe this qualitative study provides a valuable perspective on the effects of the pandemic on young people's migration aspirations in the search for sustainable employment opportunities.

Stellenbosch University students and graduates in this sample faced formidable challenges in entering a difficult labour market (Statistics SA, 2021). The most significant findings were that these young people had increased migration aspirations and increased motivation to seek career advancement opportunities, although travel restrictions made the realisation of migration aspirations increasingly difficult. We encourage future research studies to assess the effects of COVID-19 on young people's migration aspirations longitudinally in uncertain job markets and pandemics.

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Meeting the career development needs of single parents

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Social inclusion involves ensuring all individuals and groups are afforded the right to educational, training and employment opportunities. In this article, we highlight how single parents have been disproportionately experiencing inequity within the labour market throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing considerations for career development practice. A study conducted in April 2021 assessed the impact of COVID-19 on childcare commitments and the support single parents require to achieve their career goals, and six themes emerged through qualitative analysis. Recommendations to support the career development needs of single parents are made for employers, policymakers and career practitioners.

Introduction

Single parents in the UK

According to the ONS (2019a), a lone parent family is formed by a single parent with at least one dependent or non-dependent child who lives at the same address. Most single-parent households are headed by women (University of East Anglia, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many single parents found themselves in a challenging situation, dependent on one income to support their family, and unable to rely on help from another adult in the household to manage childcare responsibilities.

There were 2.9 million single-parent families recorded in 2019, representing 14.9% of families in the UK. Single parents with one child (55.3%) were in full-time employment; as the number of dependent children increased, the number of single parents working part-time also increased (ONS, 2019b). Prior to the onset of the pandemic, in the period 1997-2019, there had been a substantial increase in the number of single parents taking up employment (Learning and Work Institute, 2020).

Employment and poverty

Despite being in part-time or full-time employment, poverty has been a constant issue for single parents across the UK. Three main drivers are linked to single parents' poverty: adequate earnings from employment, insufficient income from social security, and high living costs (Public Health Scotland, 2020).

Several studies and official reports find evidence that paid employment has not been an efficient solution to cut poverty, particularly for single-parent families. A report by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2019) notes that around three quarters (73.6%) of single-parent families live below the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for the UK, despite 38.8% being in full-time employment.

Poverty for single parent households is higher than two-parent households because: there is only one income earner in the family, the earner is limited in the hours of work they can commit to due to childcare availability, hourly earnings may be lower because of the gender pay gap. Compared to income earners in couple households, single parents are more likely to be working part-time because they cannot find full-time employment or they work in temporary jobs because they cannot find permanent roles (NHS Health Scotland, 2016), leading to job insecurity.

There is a disproportionate cost to raising a child, regardless of sources of income, within a lone-parent family compared to dual parent families (0-18 years:

£153,000 for dual parent families and £185,000 for single parent families). Fixed household costs relating to childcare, for example, cannot be offset (Hirsch, 2020). During lockdown, parents in employment felt that their work was disrupted because of childcare (ONS, 2020). Unemployed single parents face additional barriers: low or no qualifications, no driving licence, health problems, and living in a household with at least three children (Public Health Scotland, 2020).

To stay in employment, single parents rely on childcare, which can be costly, or reduction in working hours, which lowers their income, increasing the risk of poverty. Government initiatives were introduced to support low-income families: tax credits in the late 1990s that allowed single parents to increase their income when working part-time, the expansion of sparse childcare provision and up to 70-80% of childcare costs through working tax credits, specialist employment support at jobcentres focusing on the needs of single parents, and voluntary employment programmes (Gingerbread, 2018). However, welfare sanctions and conditionality related to benefits, housing, and support services for single parents later increased, such as the Lone Parent Obligations implemented in 2008. This initiative seemed more effective at moving single parents off out-of-work benefits and into work, but less effective with younger parents because they were less experienced and not work-ready (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014).

Welfare has been designed to influence the employment behaviour of single parents. However, their economic situation is negatively impacted by policies that were not designed for their specific needs (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Engagement in paid work was conceptualised as a key parental responsibility, ending maternalism. Parental care was no longer considered to have an economic value. This led to a loss of the status of single parents as a vulnerable group that required financial protection (Davies, 2012). Job Seeker Allowance sanctions and back to work schemes applied to single parents make it difficult for those with lower or no qualifications and no work experience to comply with the restrictions of the welfare system (JRF, 2014).

In conflict with the concurrently emerging 'fair' and 'decent' work agendas, as policies changed single parents became pressured to engage in paid work and they gradually stopped being considered as vulnerable (Millar, 2008). The expectation to be self-sufficient and not dependent on out-of-work benefits pushed single parents into inferior work, but many failed to escape poverty through their earnings, even after receiving tax incentives or child maintenance. Those who have been economically inactive for a long-time struggle to access the labour market, and the type of employment obtained is often low paid, temporary, part-time, has long or unsociable hours, is low skilled and/or labour intensive with high staff turnover. These are characteristics of poor quality and insecure jobs (Centre for Social Justice, 2011), leading to material hardships related to insufficient food, inadequate housing, or bill paying struggles. Too many jobs offer inadequate pay which can lead to insufficient savings or pensions (JRF, 2021).

As single parenthood is more common among individuals with lower qualifications, and as women represent most single parents, they face more barriers accessing employment because of disadvantages in the labour market: gender and motherhood pay gaps, fewer opportunities for career progression, expectations to work part-time, job insecurity, and poor work-life balance. Single parents are found less likely to have adequate jobs that match their preferences compared to coupled parents (European Commission, 2017).

Single mothers who had involuntary job gaps and were unemployed or underemployed were at higher risk of experiencing material hardships than single mothers who were in adequate employment (Eamon and Wu, 2011). Zhan and Pandey (2004) studied the interaction between gender and education and found that degree educated single mothers earned less than their male counterparts and they suggest that this gender pay gap was partly the result of gender discrimination in the labour market.

There are many routes that lead an individual becoming a single parent, but many become so following experience of domestic abuse (Close the Gap, 2019). The Scottish Women's Aid Building Equality (2018) project highlights some of the labour market and paid employment-specific challenges for women who have experienced domestic abuse. These

include: losing access to qualifications, work clothes or equipment; accessing references; disruptive housing status; continuing abuse; costly legal action; social isolation; and loss of childcare. These barriers can affect access to work and broader career planning: goal setting, study options and job-seeking. Only limited research exists with a specific focus on career guidance and development interventions for individuals who have experienced domestic abuse (eg. Chronister & Linville, 2008; Froeschle, 2009; Carthy & Taylor, 2018; and Bornstein, 2011). Existing research tends to be highly specific and has not yet integrated the impact of the pandemic on domestic abuse survivors.

According to Stack and Meredith (2018), the financial hardships experienced by single parents affect their psychological wellbeing, with some parents describing feelings of isolation, anxiety, paranoia, depression and suicidal thoughts. Wu et al. (2014) found that underemployment negatively impacted health particularly for single mothers who were in part-time, low-paid jobs. Age can be a factor determining single parents' ability to find employment as older parents may be in a better position to secure quality employment having gained work experience, compared to younger parents who never worked. For young single parents, the accessibility of options such as apprenticeships, a popular entry route to the labour market for young people, requires critique.

Geographical variation can be a barrier to employment as labour market demand is weaker in some regions. Mosorow and Jalovaara (2019) found evidence that single mothers are less flexible on working hours and travelling distance to work, which decreases their ability to take on certain jobs. There is also a shortage of flexible part-time jobs in the UK that would benefit single parents (Public Health Scotland, 2020).

COVID-19

Women, who comprise the majority of single parents, experienced a greater impact on their income due to COVID-19 mitigations, as the pandemic affected work in female-dominated industries, (eg. administration, education, and health industries). According to the UEA (2020) the pandemic affected women as they were more likely to be furloughed, lose their jobs, or reduce their work hours to look after their children during the lockdown, and received less income, allowing for gender inequality to rise. Iztayeva (2021) found that during the COVID-19 crisis, highly skilled single fathers changed careers or negotiated flexibility with their current employer due to caregiving responsibilities, compared to single fathers in low skilled jobs who had less control over their schedule.

Hertz, Mattes and Shook (2020) researched the impact of COVID-19 on single mothers who lived on their own with their children and those who lived in multi-adult households and found that mothers in single-adult households experienced greater stress associated with managing competing demands, and difficulty balancing remote work and supervising children. Lockdown had a different impact on single parents' ability to work: many started working from home, some experienced changes in the terms and conditions (reduced hours), others were placed on the Job Retention Scheme because of shutdown industry sectors or in response to childcare responsibilities (Gingerbread, 2020).

Single parents felt affected by lockdown and reported feelings of isolation caused by the extra caring responsibilities. Remote work during lockdown has been unevenly distributed, with higher paid employees being able to work from home (Working Families, 2020) to fit new caring responsibilities. Adams et al. (2020) found that a higher percentage of mothers initiated furlough during the crisis than fathers or employees without children, and many furloughed employees had concerns about their long-term job prospects.

Single parents' perspectives of the effects of the pandemic: a research study

The aim of our study was to find out what impact single parents perceive the COVID-19 pandemic had on their childcare commitments and career. We also assessed the support that single parents require to overcome any perceived barriers to employment to enable them to manage childcare responsibilities and achieve their career goals following the pandemic.

Methodology

Participants

The mixed-methods study received approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of the West of Scotland and complied with the Career Development Institute professional guidelines. Before starting the survey, every participant was informed about the purpose of the study, data protection policy, and the institution and researchers responsible for the study. A total of 28 responses were received (six partially completed, and 22 fully completed). The gender variable was not included in the analysis as the aim of the study was not to identify gender differences but to explore the effects of COVID-19 on single parents' career development without making inferences about gender.

Measures

The data was collected in April and May 2021 through an online survey advertised on social media channels (LinkedIn, single parent Facebook groups, Twitter, One Parent Family Scotland and NetMums). The online survey incorporated 21 questions across five sections: two quantitative sections gathered demographic information about the sample, type of household, employment status before and after COVID-19, and information related to income and remote work; three qualitative sections with open-ended questions gathered participants' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours/ intentions related to childcare, employability, and career development.

Results

The quantitative data was used to understand the characteristics of the sample and to find out whether participants' occupation was affected by the pandemic. The qualitative data was analysed with thematic analysis following the six-phase model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The codes and themes were peer reviewed to ensure a higher internal validity of the study.

Research question 1

The first research question assessed the impact that single parents perceived that COVID-19 had on their childcare commitments and three themes emerged: (Table 1):

Table 1.

Themes	Subthemes
Formal and informal childcare	Support network Additional support needs
Work-family role conflict: employee vs parent vs teacher	Balancing 'home working' and 'at home learning' Remote working influences quality of life
Mental health and wellbeing	Burnout Psychological distress

Formal and informal childcare: Single parents spoke about their challenges during lockdown as formal childcare stopped because of nursery and school closures, and the difficulty to get help with childcare from their support network because of lockdown restrictions. Some parents were able to create a childcare or support bubble with other family members. Some respondents described the challenges in managing childcare on their own as their children had additional support needs and 'they could not work independently on schoolwork' or they 'could not be left unsupervised'. Some respondents commented that they had no family nearby and 'no support from other adults' and that they could not return to work because of the lack of childcare.

Work-family role conflict: Many respondents talked about having to deal with various and constant demands as life changed during lockdown and they started to work from home. They got involved in their children's learning and took on the role of 'teacher' as schools also 'moved online' due to lockdown restrictions. Single parents felt overwhelmed trying to play the role of employee, teacher and parent, having very little 'me time' and personal life. Survey participants spoke about the difficulty of managing work and home-schooling during the height of the pandemic, and despite having an understanding employer and a family-friendly work environment, there was no decrease in their work expectations.

Mental health and wellbeing: Lockdown restrictions had a psychological impact on single parents as they

suddenly found themselves isolated without access to formal childcare, and swept away from their support network, feeling lonely and overwhelmed from managing work and parenting, factors contributing to increased psychological stress. One parent expressed their concerns about feeling burnout as they had a child with additional support needs who required constant supervision, which alongside work commitments became difficult to manage, and they feared it would impact their career if not addressed. Another single parent talked about experiencing psychological distress caused by an increase in their work demands.

Research question 2

The second research question assessed the level of support that single parents needed to manage childcare and achieve their career goals following COVID-19 and the following themes emerged (Table 2):

Table 2.

Themes	Subthemes
Studying and training	Financial support Digital connectivity
Fair treatment in the workplace	Flexible working Loss of income
Flexible and affordable childcare	Childcare outside 9-5 Support for all (inclusion)

Studying and training: Single parents talked about studying and training (reskilling) to get back into employment or for career change. Some completed essential training for personal interest as training was more accessible during the lockdown since they were able to do it from home. Other respondents were unable to do any courses as they 'did not have the financial means or childcare support' or because schools closed during the lockdown and they no longer had time to study, or because childcare was too expensive. The thought of studying and retraining came as participants considered a career change; one parent mentioned constantly questioning their career choice, but the age factor seemed to stop them as they wondered, 'what else would you do, given your whole life has been directed to your current job?'

Fair treatment in the workplace: Single parents may have different concerns about work: flexible working, welfare benefits or time-off as balancing working life with home life can be a challenge. Remote working was generally perceived by the respondents as a positive experience. As one participant commented, a health condition impacted their ability to work when they had to commute for long periods, so home working 'greatly improved the chances for long-term employment' and enabled them to 'work at full capacity without experiencing ill health'. The importance of flexible working arrangements, and 'working from home as a standard' were highlighted, also flexibility from employers as remote working shifted to be considered positive and advantageous, and as improving the quality of life. However, according to some participants, too many employers publicly endorse an illusory version of flexible working and part-time workers are discriminated against.

Flexible, affordable childcare: The pandemic made childcare access even more challenging as some parents were furloughed or isolated during the lockdown. The situation was challenging for single parents who have children with disabilities or additional support needs and require increased or constant supervision. Single parents who work shift patterns need childcare support outside the business hours considered to be 'the norm' of 9am to 5pm; childcare needs to be available before 7.30am and 6pm, and to cover weekends and night shifts. Some parents were unable to progress in their career because of childcare commitments, having to choose between keeping 'the children at home and relying on screens to keep them entertained or paying hundreds of pounds a week in childcare-money I don't have'.

Discussion

This study had limitations: the findings are based on data analysis of a small sample because of COVID-19 restrictions, and may be skewed towards participants with digital skills and internet access who completed the survey. There was no control group in this study so further research could assess the impact of COVID-19 on careers by comparing data from single parents and partnered parents.

In the context of career development work, inclusivity defines how we support each client, without bias or prejudice, to achieve their goals and fulfil their potential whilst having an awareness of any barriers that may prevent them from doing so. There are career guidance implications within the findings of the new empirical research conducted and we review them alongside current UK-wide policies on working practices. Employment support for single parents should take into consideration longstanding factors that impact their participation in the labour market: childcare, transportation, work attire, lunch expenses, unpaid work, lack of skills and experience that are common career concerns for this vulnerable group, which need consideration to enable single parents from all socioeconomic levels to progress in their careers (Kossek et al., 1997) however, the pandemic has heightened many vulnerabilities, especially for single mothers.

The findings suggest that self-directed and self-initiated learning inside and outside the workplace is important for individuals to pursue personal learning goals and CPD. Career guidance and counselling could play a key role in facilitating successful transitions into better quality employment for single parents, through signposting of upskilling, reskilling and career change opportunities and enabling individuals to develop a sense of personal agency to help them navigate through a challenging and uncertain labour market (Bimrose and Brown, 2014). This is already emerging as a noted interest, with awareness now that single parents should be offered lifelong learning opportunities to study and reskill which will enable them to access better quality employment to lift them out of poverty and contribute to addressing future skill shortages and skill gaps (UK Parliament, 2021).

Affordable, quality childcare remains a perennial problem. We suggest that policymakers reconsider the level of childcare support that single parents are entitled to and collect evidence of how informal childcare subsidies might work and how parents might respond if such support was state funded. A combination of formal and informal childcare, where gaps in formal childcare provision (particularly for those with additional needs) can be filled to enable parents to participate more in the labour market, however, it is not available to all and perpetuates inequity.

Single parents may not be allowed the opportunity of flexible working that is advertised. There is no guarantee that any flexible working request will be accommodated and appealing a refusal can take up to three months (ACAS, 2022). Employers consulting and collaborating with single parents to create packages of working conditions that will make work-life balance possible (part-time, compressed hours, remote working) could advance this. Flexible working offered as a norm may help unemployed single parents to increase their chances of finding employment and would eliminate the statutory need for employees to wait for 26 weeks to be eligible for consideration for flexible working.

The prevalence of domestic abuse amongst women and single mothers and its interrelationship within career guidance practice warrants further exploration, and while not a focus of the empirical research conducted with single parents on this occasion, should be considered in future work on this topic. Similarly, the accessibility of upskilling and reskilling opportunities, including vocational education and training could be examined, to ensure equitable access to career change opportunities and entry routes to the labour market for single parents.

Single parents remain highly vulnerable in the labour market as their protection within legislation is limited. Without single parent status being considered a protected characteristic within the Equality Act 2010, it is difficult to see how their specific needs will be prioritised. Positive action is required. They are a vulnerable group with specific needs, whose contribution to the economy is hindered by labour market restrictions. In the post-pandemic landscape career development support must accommodate and advocate for single parents' needs, to avoid perpetuating the inequalities this group faces.

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Decolonising career guidance: Experiences of female, BAME career guidance professionals through the lens of intersectionality theory

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This article explores a small-scale study on the experiences of female, BAME career guidance professionals in the workplace through the lens of intersectionality theory. Currently, there is a lack of literature on this highlighting the importance of researching this. The article starts with the introduction, rationale and significance of research into this area and the importance of decolonising methodology. The findings reveal perceptions of unfair treatment, stereotyping, unconscious bias, discrimination and more. They highlight how these experiences are woven together through intersectionality which can result in compounding challenges. This is then followed by recommendations.

Introduction

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women make up 16% of the female working-age population in England and Wales (BITC, 2020). Despite this, their voices are largely absent in workplace equality discourse and research, which tends to focus on the experiences of White women or White men (Opara et al., 2020). In the career guidance sector, the camera rarely pans to the career guidance professional and their experiences (Yates et al., 2017) let alone female, BAME career guidance professionals.

This study was carried out from January to September 2021 as part of my master's degree dissertation and was approved by Nottingham Trent University's ethics committee. It explores female, BAME career guidance professionals' experiences and challenges in the career guidance workplace through the lens of intersectionality theory.

Literature review

Intersectionality theory

Intersectionality is the concept that two or more dimensions of identity, such as gender and ethnicity, result in multiple, complex and intertwined layers of discrimination or disadvantage (Syed and Özbilgin, 2015). Understanding the experiences of female and BAME career guidance professionals through this lens can help reveal how the identity of female and BAME interact in intersecting systems of oppression (Turner, 2011). Research demonstrates that racism and sexism are interconnected and cannot be understood separately (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). Crenshaw (1989, cited in Tariq and Syed, 2017) argues that women have multiple layered facets and there is no one size fits all model. This means that not all ethnic minority women experience the same levels of racism or sexism. It varies between different ethnic groups as well as within. It is also important to note other factors such as socioeconomic status and age which are beyond the scope of this research.

Unfair treatment

Research shows that workplace gender equality has not been achieved (Doldor et al., 2016). The Trades Union Congress (TUC) found that 45% of BAME

women have experienced unfair treatment in the workplace compared to their White counterparts (2020) which is corroborated by the McGregor-Smith Review (2017).

Lack of access to mentors, mentoring support and compounding challenges

Further findings showed the difficulty in accessing a network and mentoring support (Tariq and Syed, 2017). The McGregor-Smith Review (2017) signifies how challenges can compound. The underrepresentation of BAME women in the workplace can cause a lack of role models at higher levels to guide, making it difficult for BAME women to progress. This demonstrates how these complex challenges are woven together. The career guidance sector is female-dominated and so there may be access to female role models however there is still a lack of diversity (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2021).

Unconscious bias and microaggressions

Unconscious bias refers to biases people hold outside of their conscious awareness (Torino et al., 2018). Microaggressions are 'hurtful, demeaning, and dismissive words and actions committed by one individual or group against another whose characteristics and backgrounds are different' (Bellack, 2015, p. S63). For example, someone saying that a Black person is 'well-spoken' implies that they were not expected to have those skills (Pitcan et al., 2018).

Research found that in the workplace, BAME women experienced negative assumptions on how they should behave (Opara et al., 2020). A study by the Guardian (Booth and Mohdin 2018; Booth et al., 2018) found that, because of their ethnicity, 38% of BAME people felt they needed to change their appearance and 37% of BAME people felt they needed to change their voice. Further, 32% of BAME women felt they were treated differently because of appearance, hairstyle and clothing compared to 9% of White respondents.

Impact of the challenges: Mental health and lack of confidence

These compounding challenges can result in negative experiences. The McGregor-Smith Review (2017) highlights that BAME people have lower expectations from their careers because of difficulty in career progression and unequal access to opportunities for career development. The TUC research (2020) emphasizes the compounding effect of racism and sexism which can negatively impact BAME women's confidence in the workplace as well as their physical and mental health. Research (Ali and Inko-Tariah, 2020) found that BAME people suffered from stress, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, perfectionism, fear of vulnerability among other limiting mindsets emphasizing the negative wellbeing and career outcomes.

Decolonisation

Decolonising refers to the undoing of colonial rule over subordinate countries. In the past, there have been predatory, exploitative behaviour towards indigenous communities which, in research, has led to inaccurate stereotypes of indigenous people (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). Western researchers have a history of claiming ownership of indigenous knowledge as well as denying indigenous community's claim to self-determination. Some scholars are therefore paving the path to call for decolonisation, a process which involves examining and being critical of underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practice Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021).

Decolonisation has also now taken a wider meaning of recognising and transforming our minds from colonial ideology. Decolonisation research means 'centering concerns and world views of non-western individuals' (Datta, 2018).

Decolonisation further allows us to examine our biases and challenge and transform dominant ways (Datta, 2018) of thinking. For example, unconscious biases and microaggressions typically relate to the perceptions of individuals. Because of this, these instances are difficult to label as discrimination and could be misjudged as simply perceptions of an individual which may not hold true to reality. This may be true to an extent however writing it off immediately can be damaging. Decolonisation calls for us to understand the experiences of the BAME community without invalidating them based on our biases.

In the career guidance sector, there is a lack of literature on the voices of female, BAME career guidance professionals. Therefore the first step to decolonising career guidance is to allow for underrepresented voices in this community to be represented in literature. The need to decolonise the profession is more important now than ever. The lack of female, BAME professionals' voices in the career guidance literature raises the question of the extent to which these challenges exist in the guidance sector.

Methods

This study is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm. Seven participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Participants had to identify as female and BAME and be qualified to level 6 or 7 whilst working in schools or colleges in the UK. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews through video conferencing which were recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

This study also incorporates elements of decolonising methodology such as critical reflexivity, transparency and respect for self-determination (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). Often in research, there is a power imbalance between researchers and participants. This would be further heightened if White men researched BAME women for example. With myself not being an 'outsider', the power dynamic is reduced. Additionally, there may be a divide in privilege and access to opportunities. This was recognised and efforts were made to minimise this power imbalance through being reflexive, transparent and open to dialogue throughout the research process. Furthermore, consent, ethical considerations and autonomous decision making are crucial. The purpose of this methodology and research is to ensure each participant's experiences and struggles are not minimised (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021).

Decolonising methodology is important as it allows the sharing of experiences of those from minority ethnic backgrounds in the careers profession as a way to start a discourse. It allows us to recognise the lack of literature on BAME women's experiences, to question this and finally to start dialogue through shared solidarity of experiences and struggle against oppression, discrimination and racism.

Findings and discussion

Experiences of being a female career guidance professional

Female dominated environment: Five participants (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) acknowledged that they work in a female-dominated role (and sector) and that people expect a career guidance professional to be a woman (Participants 1 and 4). Because of this, there has been little impact for most.

Discrimination: Participant 7 experienced discrimination and unfair treatment from a male colleague due to being a woman in her role leading her to feel unsafe, isolated and vulnerable. She argues that this was dealt with very well by the school she works at however believes her professional experience as a woman is different from that of male colleagues. She also perceives being treated unfairly on her master's course by peers. Though this is only one individual's experience, this coincides with literature (TUC, 2020; Opara et al., 2020) that found BAME women are more likely to experience unfair treatment and discrimination.

Unconscious bias and microaggressions: In contrast, several participants described instances of subtle microaggressions such as being described as a 'frail woman' (Participant 3), feeling talked down by older white male staff (Participant 6), and feeling that they are treated differently because of being female (Participant 4 and 7).

Participant 4 believes that if she had been male, she would have been respected and listened to by male staff as opposed to being stereotyped as thinking 'emotionally'. This led to anger and decline in mental health. She recognised that this could be due to the intersection of being young, in a junior role as well as being female and BAME.

Participant 5 believes that unconscious bias plays a role in who is promoted and Participant 4 further perceived stereotyping in the recruitment process where she felt that senior male staff wanted someone 'caring, sweet and friendly' as opposed to a more 'forthright' candidate, where both candidates were female and qualified.

These perceptions align with literature that found that BAME women were not taken seriously and experienced sexist remarks (Tariq and Syed, 2017) and that BAME women felt they were treated differently due to appearance, hairstyle and clothing (Booth and Mohdin 2018; Booth et al., 2018).

Progression and gender pay gap: Participant 4 argued that in her experience, when looking upwards to progress, she felt those in higher positions were predominantly male. This is interesting as career guidance is seen as a predominantly female sector (Gatsby Charitable Trust, 2021) indicating that perhaps there needs to be transparency and investigation into roles higher up to see if they are male dominated. She further notes that if she was male, she would be promoted easily. Similarly, Participant 5 argues that when it comes to progression, she feels that male colleagues move up the ladder quicker and that unconscious bias plays a role in who is promoted. The impact of this is making her feel disvalued especially seeing male career guidance professionals with less experience than female professionals being promoted.

Positive experiences: For five participants, being a woman in their role is helpful. Participant 1 emphasized that being in a predominantly female sector, she is not made to feel out of place. Participants 2, 3 and 4 highlighted that students open up more to them than they would if it was a male professional and Participant 7 believes that she is seen as a role model to female students. For Participants 5 and 6, being a woman in their role has not helped as it has had little impact on their role.

When asked about overall experiences of being a woman in their role, only one expressed it being negative while the others were split between positive and neutral.

Experiences and challenges of being a BAME career guidance professional

Racist beliefs can lead to discrimination, even if they are unconscious biases rather than overt prejudices. These prejudices often stem from colonial-era beliefs (Dennis, 1995) where the populations of subjugated countries were classified as inferior based on their physical features such as the colour of their skin. False and damaging world views were promoted as scientific facts such as the human population comprising of different races separated by skin colour rather than one species 'Homo Sapiens' (Dennis, 1995). Over time, this belief has led to the propagation of racist beliefs and unconscious biases. Recognising these discriminatory beliefs, even in oneself, and making an effort to unlearn them is part of the decolonisation process. Without awareness of the existence of discrimination in the workplace, it would be impossible to begin decolonising the career guidance sector. As a result, part of this research involved documenting the experiences faced by female, BAME career guidance professionals, both negative and positive.

Racism and discrimination: Two participants described experiences of racism or discrimination. Participant 5 describes instances where parents did not want to work with her because of her skin colour but noted little impact on her as it was handled well by the organisation. Participant 7 describes several instances of racism including during her master's course by peers and in the workplace by external people. She describes feeling that she was unwanted in her local community yet still had to maintain professionalism. She considered these experiences were due to her being BAME, female, young, educated and in a school serving a predominantly White middle-class community which shows an intersection of factors (Syed and Özbilgin, 2015).

These perceptions of the participants echo the literature which found that BAME women experience unfair treatment, racism and discrimination in the workplace (McGregor-Smith, 2017; TUC, 2020) suggesting that this may exist in the career guidance sector.

Unconscious bias and microaggressions: Participants described instances of unconscious bias and microaggressions as subtle and difficult to label. Participant 1 questions instances and whether it is because she is young, Black or a woman that is causing it indicating the difficulty in labelling and compounding intersections. She further questions if she is in her role as a 'diversity tick' making her feel she may not deserve it. This shows her perceptions of unconscious bias which aligns with literature (Pitcan et al., 2018; Tariq and Syed, 2017).

Participant 5 described her perception of being praised for something in a patronising manner, illustrating an unconscious bias described in literature where she was not expected to do well due to assumptions about how BAME women should behave (Opara et al., 2020).

Participant 6 discussed an instance where she was underpaid whilst a White colleague was paid more despite her feeling that she worked harder. This had a huge impact on her leading her to feel undervalued and hurt. This coincides with literature that highlighted that BAME people are underpaid and undervalued (McGregor-Smith, 2017) suggesting that this could be a barrier for BAME women in the career guidance sector.

Participant 6, a Black woman, experienced comments regarding her hair, both positive and negative. She described an instance, in school, of someone asking to touch her hair and then proceeding to touch it without consent. This demoralising experience illustrates how this form of racism may still exist in the career guidance sector. Participant 4, a Black woman, further described as feeling more comfortable whilst working from home as she could style her natural hair the way she wanted to. She feels extremely anxious that people will perceive her to be unprofessional because of her natural appearance.

Participant 6 expresses herself differently in the way she speaks and Participant 4 feels she has a 'posh' accent and feels she is 'white enough to be accepted'. She identifies her private education and manner of speech as privileges that make it easier for her compared to other people who may be Black.

Both participants are Black indicating that this may be a barrier specifically for Black professionals with regards to appearance and unconscious bias impacting on mental health. These perceptions coincide with literature that showed BAME women's appearance can be seen as unprofessional as they felt they needed to change their appearance or voice (Booth and Mohdin 2018; Booth et al., 2018).

The need to work harder: Three participants felt that they needed to work harder because of being BAME. Participant 5 feels she needs to put her 'best foot forward' and work harder to prove herself in fear of something going wrong and to ensure she is seen as a professional. Participant 6 also feels the need to work harder and 'over qualify' herself to prevent people from thinking less of her. Participant 7 further feels that being BAME means she must work twice as hard. These perceptions coincide with literature in that BAME people are more likely to feel they need to work a lot harder for the same recognition (McGregor-Smith, 2017; Tariq and Syed, 2017).

Confidence: Confidence was perceived as a necessity for a BAME person to have in the workplace (Participant 1, 3, 5, and 6). Participant 3 indicates little impact of racial discrimination or microaggressions as she grew up in Jamaica and notes that the experiences of those growing up in the UK 'under the thumb of racism' may be different and recognises her privilege of being educated and having confidence. However, what about professionals who may not have the same confidence or are deeply impacted by this?

Participant 1 recognised that navigating careers is difficult and that confidence is needed for BAME people. She also feels that confidence is needed tenfold if someone is BAME and a woman which aligns with intersectionality theory. Participant 5 noted that BAME professionals must be confident or they may be judged or misunderstood and that the fear of something going wrong is very apparent.

This coincides with literature (Ali and Inko-Tariah, 2020) and suggests a certain level of confidence may be needed to navigate these situations and if it is not present, it can cause negative career and wellbeing outcomes (McGregor-Smith, 2017).

Progression and lack of role models: Participant 5 identified a barrier for progression as she does not see anyone like her in higher roles, so questions why she would want to go for it. She expressed that if there is more diversity in higher roles and mentors who are 'pulling you up' and not 'slamming the door shut' then it can increase confidence and belief that they can also progress. Though this is the perception of one individual, this aligns with literature discussed in that BAME people face huge barriers in advancing in their career and this can be exacerbated due to a lack of role models or mentors (McGregor-Smith, 2017). The career guidance sector is not diverse (Gatsby Charitable Trust, 2021) and so the implication

is that it may be difficult for BAME women to have access to role models in higher-up positions hindering opportunities to advance in their careers.

Positive experiences: The participants also detailed their positive experiences as BAME professionals. Participants 1 and 7 feel passionate about being role models to other BAME students and Participant 1 recognises that BAME students are likely to be more eager to speak with her. This overpowers the challenges of being BAME and has highlighted a need for more BAME career guidance professionals. This is also recognised by Participant 4 who believes she can tap into a community of BAME people in her role. These findings can be linked to literature that found positive experiences of being BAME can help to have access to cultural knowledge and be able to relate to other cultures (Opara et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Whilst positive experiences of being female and BAME were noted such as being able to support female and BAME students, tap into the BAME community and empower others, negative perceptions were also observed. Unconscious bias, discrimination, racism, difficulty in progression, lack of role models, the need to work harder and impact on mental health indicates the compounding challenges of being female and BAME. The intersection of these means higher levels of disadvantage as many of these challenges snowballed onto one another. There were varying levels of impact and when there was little impact, this was due to privileges of confidence and being educated. What about those who may not have this level of confidence?

These findings illustrated the perceptions of seven participants. In their experiences, instances of unconscious bias, unfair treatment and discrimination were observed. However, it cannot be concluded from this small-scale study whether they may persist in the career guidance sector on a larger scale. What can be concluded is that experiences vary from individual to individual and the complexity and diversity of these experiences, both negative and positive. Other factors such as age, socio-economic class, privilege and confidence may also impact these experiences.

This research aimed to introduce the concept of decolonisation, incorporate elements of decolonisation methodology and share these stories and perceptions. This itself is an act of decolonisation on career guidance as it sheds insight onto the experiences of seven BAME women in the career guidance sector.

The McGregor-Smith Review (2017) indicated that BAME people are discriminated against at every stage in their careers. This holds true to some of the experiences of participants and is worsened due to the intersection of being female and BAME. This highlights a need for further research into this to investigate the presence and prevalence of discrimination and racism in the workplace and in the hiring process. Are there unconscious biases preventing BAME women from progressing? If they do exist, how can we ensure that BAME women are supported and have access to role models? How can we remove barriers to ensure progression, support BAME women's career decision making and improve wellbeing and career outcomes? After all, BAME women are clients in their own journey and make up 16% of the female working-age population in England and Wales (BITC, 2020).

Considering this, recommendations can be made to begin the process of decolonisation. Larger scale research should be undertaken to investigate the experiences of BAME women and determine the prevalence and impact of discrimination, racism and unconscious bias. A support network should be set up for BAME women in the career guidance sector so that they may share ideas and learn from one another in a safe space. Mentoring programmes should be developed for BAME women in the career guidance sector with role models. Training providers should assess their courses on career development to ensure the topic of equality is given adequate attention.

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Opportunities and risks in the use of AI in career development practice

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The Covid-19 pandemic required many aspects of life to move online. This accelerated a broader trend for increasing use of ICT and AI, with implications for both the world of work and career development. This article explores the potential benefits and challenges of including AI in career practice. It provides an overview of the technology, including current uses, to illustrate ways in which it could enhance existing services, and the attendant practical and ethical challenges posed. Finally, recommendations are provided for policy and practice that will support career development professionals in managing these risks and maximising benefits to service users.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the increasing prevalence of digital technologies in the daily lives of people in the Global North. The sophistication of these technologies has also increased, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) being incorporated into a wide variety of digital services. AI is the term used for technology that allows computers to perform tasks autonomously that would otherwise require human intelligence (European Commission, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021). The impact of automation on work and society is potentially far reaching, although, Hooley (2017) has cautioned against alarmist dystopian visions of an automated future, arguing that career guidance has a role in helping manage this transformation. Similarly, there is a growing body of research focused on how to deploy new technologies in a way that maximises the benefits to individuals and reflects the social values of the context in which they are used (Blodgee & O'Connor, 2017; Rahwan, 2018; Willson, 2017). In this article, the focus is specifically on the use of AI by career development services.

Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) has historically been a domain that has shown proficiency in incorporating the benefits offered by new technologies and engaging critically with the risks (Hooley et al., 2010; Moore & Czerwinska, 2019; Watts, 2002). However, research on how AI technologies are currently being incorporated into practice is limited. This article aims to explore the emerging possibilities for the use of AI in CIAG practice, and anticipate the attendant risks, empowering CIAG professionals to bring AI into their practice in a way that realises the benefits, while mitigating the risks.

Background

Work by Hooley et. al.'s (2010) typology identifies three purposes that technology serves in CIAG services to clients: a conduit for communication between CIAG practitioners and their clients, to present information, or as means for allowing clients to independently engage in automated interactions with career related information. AI is considered an example of the latter category in that it customises information based on users' interactions with the system (Hooley & Staunton, 2020). However, this obscures a fundamental difference between 'traditional' technologies and AI. The former are designed as a tool to aid or automate tasks where the processes, inputs and desired outcomes are pre-defined during system design based on concrete rules., whereas AI is intended to handle interactions that it has not been provided with explicit rules to manage. Automated interaction with traditional IT systems means the user is presented with information that has been filtered based on criteria that have been designed by a human and applied to a limited range of

information explicitly provided by the user. Automated interactions with AI systems are more akin to human communication, in that the form and structure used to provide information can be much more varied, and the responses to them are not pre-determined.

The use of AI technology in online interactions has become ubiquitous (Willson, 2017), a trend accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Laberge et al., 2020). Internet users may encounter AI when receiving personalised recommendations whilst using online shopping and entertainment platforms (Fry, 2018). It is also used to facilitate humans' interactions with technology, e.g. voice controlled digital assistants (Følstad & Brandtzæg, 2017). As the technology aims to mimic human interactions, it can be difficult for users to identify when they are engaged with an AI system, or understand how it is designed to execute complex tasks that humans perform intuitively (Gran et al., 2020). Furthermore, the 'uncanny valley' effect of anthropomorphising machines can make users feel uncomfortable using certain types of AI (Ciechanowski et al., 2019).

Broadly speaking, AI operates based on pattern identification. An algorithm analyses data relevant to the intended task to identify elements that are indicative of a particular output. This 'training' is then used by the AI to predict appropriate outputs for previously unseen inputs. Whereas traditional ICT systems would require these relationships to be explicitly provided by a developer, AI is capable of handling complex and novel information without explicit pre-programmed instructions, by detecting complex patterns in enormous datasets. For example, AI shopping recommendations are generated by an algorithm with a large dataset containing information about users' online purchases. The algorithm identifies patterns in user profiles, browsing and purchasing habits that can be used to make recommendations to a future shopper with similar characteristics. This process of determining an output based on similarities between the current situation and previously seen examples is the foundation of AI systems irrespective of whether they are used to generate text, recommend a video clip, or make a medical diagnosis.

System designers can influence which factors are used or prioritised, but ultimately the outputs generated depend on how the system design and training data interact, which can yield unexpected results. The ability to explain/interpret how an output was reached has been identified as a pre-requisite for trustworthy AI systems (OECD, 2021b). This means that the outputs of an AI enabled system may simulate human intelligence, however, the inferences made by AI are not grounded by an understanding of reality that can be compared to human cognition. Human understanding includes implicit personal and societal 'intentions, values and social goals' as intrinsic factors that technology does not have access to (Vallor, 2021). Nonetheless, AI technology can act autonomously to execute complex tasks that historically would have required direct human involvement.

Learning from AI applications in analogous settings

CIAG services can be conceptualised in a variety of ways: for example, as career counselling; career information; career learning; or as matching to suitable occupations. In recent years, AI has been deployed in fields that present similar social challenges. Given the current lack of research specific to CIAG, experience from these analogous settings can shed some light on career-related applications. These fields are therapeutic counselling, library and information services, education, and employee selection.

Counselling services

Automated therapeutic counselling services could offer rapid treatment without waiting lists, and without the potential shame or embarrassment of having to discuss a very personal issue with a human. The promise of wider access to treatment is appealing, and attempts have been made to realise this. One example is Woebot[1], a popular smart phone app that supports users with mental health conditions. It employs a range of approaches including mood management, psycho-education, and cognitive behavioural therapy (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Prochaska et al., 2021). However, quantitative studies of the effects on users

1 https://woebothealth.com/

of this app report mixed results for the impacts on users' mood (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Prochaska et al., 2021; Suharwardy et al., 2020), and qualitative studies have identified user concerns regarding the privacy, efficacy and transparency of chatbots for mental health support (Kretzschmar et al., 2019). This suggests that users' understanding of the technology may be an important factor in ensuring clients benefit from these applications in career counselling.

Information services

Library services are a close 'analogue' to careers services, in that they curate large amounts of information and assist users in their selection. They have also been identified as a domain where AI chatbots have the potential to mitigate known problems, like library users' anxiety and limited availability of professional staff for assistance (Saldeen, 2020). Users would not have to acquire the specialist vocabulary or technical skills required to use traditional methods for database searching, thus lowering the barriers for self-serving their information needs. Research in an academic library highlights the importance of involving library staff in the development of the technology to ensure it can meet the diverse needs of the intended users, and identify when to refer to a human (Mckie & Narayan, 2019).

This applies to AI systems that aim to provide curated access to Labour Market Information (LMI). CIAG practitioners' insights are essential for anticipating the complex and wide-ranging queries a client may initially present with (Bimrose, 2021). However, the purpose of careers related information seeking means that the stakes for automated curation of LMI are higher than with academic literature searches. Search results for users self-serving LMI can have potentially substantial impact on their lives. When a client uses LMI to explore and evaluate the feasibility of their career options, the information that is omitted from search results has an implicit effect in that it removes these from consideration. Using AI to provide personalised LMI introduces a risk that the criteria used by the algorithm for personalisation is inappropriate or too simplistic. For example, using a client's age and gender to identify careers commonly preferred by others who share that age and gender, will serve to replicate existing demographic inequalities in career outcomes.

AI is already being deployed to gather LMI. For example, the OECD have used AI to map 17,000 discrete skills listed in job adverts to a taxonomy of 61 categories, creating a rich source of LMI, that reflects current trends and requires fewer resources to update than traditional approaches (Lassébie et al., 2021). AI tools for increasing the efficiency with which LMI can be accessed by clients are also being developed, for example, the CiCi chatbot, which allows users to access personalised careers information in a conversational format (Hughes, 2021). Both examples involved CIAG experts directly in the design of the technology, which mirrors the emerging trend for co-design as a key requirement for effective and ethical AI (Floridi et al., 2018). They also serve to demonstrate how AI can support efficient dissemination of LMI, whilst reducing expert resources required for its curation.

Education

There has been extensive use of automated systems in educational settings, including applications for vocational education and training (Hai-Jew, 2009). Notwithstanding great hopes for the sophistication of intelligent tutoring systems, in practice those adopted for use have tended to be quite simple (Baker, 2016). Although narrow in scope, research on student outcomes after using AI virtual tutoring systems indicates that they are effective tools that employ a variety of pedagogical approaches effectively to instil understanding of a specific topic (Olney et al., 2012; Paladines & Ramírez, 2020). However, Heffernan (2003) highlights that while AI tutoring systems reduced demands on teacher time, young people have to dedicate more time to covering material delivered this way than they would with standard classroom teaching. AI tutors have the potential to extend the availability of career education, where staff availability is the limiting factor. Although, as this style of intervention requires more from clients than a traditional approach, it is unlikely to be an effective intervention for clients with low levels of motivation, or who would be unable to commit to its use.

Employee selection

Commercial 'off-the-shelf' AI-based recruitment solutions have been adopted by employers (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2019; Gee, 2017; van Esch & Black, 2019). These are most commonly used in the early stages of the selection process to automatically screen application forms or candidates' video interviews (Black & van Esch, 2020; van den Broek et al., 2019). Unilever were early adopters of this technology; reporting increased diversity of recruits and significant cost savings (Gee, 2017). However, the proprietary nature of the software, and the potential competitive advantage offered by new selection methods, means that while they gain media attention (Booth, 2019; Gee, 2017), they are notably absent in published academic research. This severely limits the transparency of both how data is processed, and how outcomes are determined. Nonetheless, the technology is being marketed, including to higher education career services as a tool for developing interview skills among students[2].

The application of AI to the problem of employee selection is analogous to a traditional matching conception of careers work. It is particularly informative because it provides a domain in which to explore some of the ethical challenges that AI presents to career development services, as explored below.

Ethical challenges as illustrated by AI-assisted recruitment

Recruitment has proved to be a contentious domain for AI, (Forum for Ethical AI, 2019; OECD, 2021a) given the impact that recruitment decisions can have for individuals and society. Proponents of AI in recruitment, including software vendors, cite cost savings and the elimination of human error and unconscious bias from the process as key benefits (Hirevue, 2021; Schmidt, 2018). However, historic examples of AI decision-making algorithms have been found to exhibit bias, even in cases where protected characteristics have been intentionally removed from the data, (Birhane, 2021). This is caused by use of attributes that are correlated with the protected characteristics. For example, an experimental attempt to use AI to automate CV evaluation resulted in an algorithm that rejected CVs that included phrases indicative of gender, such as references to women's sport or women's colleges, despite candidates' protected characteristics being consciously excluded from the data (Dastin, 2018). The size of the datasets involved means it is often difficult for humans to foresee these unintentional correlations, and the increasing complexity of the system architecture means that retrospectively identifying the factors that influenced AI decisions requires specialist technical knowledge. This issue is compounded by the fact that humans have been found to trust the output of AI, even when it contradicts their own well-founded knowledge (Suresh et al., 2020). In the context of CIAG, this could mean unknowingly providing users with information and advice that replicates existing imbalances in the labour market. It also highlights the need for on-going monitoring of outcomes to ensure that AI supported interventions are commensurate with the values and ethics of CIAG practice.

Attempts to mitigate this by manipulating the data face both technical and ethical issues. The complexity of the system architecture means that even where attempts are made to 'de-bias' the dataset, prejudiced outcomes can persist due to interactions with the algorithms, or difficulties in identifying which aspects of the data are creating bias in the dataset (Bender et al., 2021). While ensuring effective monitoring of live systems to detect unintended outcomes could potentially mitigate this, complex ethical issues remain. Manipulating the outputs of systems that have a direct impact on individuals and society, means that these systems are no longer just reflecting the world, but changing it in potentially significant ways. Concerns have been raised around the impacts of algorithmic decision-making in perpetuating and exaggerating existing hegemonies, especially given that AI is already being used for tasks in fields like social security, criminal justice, and recruitment (O'Neil, 2017; Tambe et al., 2019). Therefore, determining what the target profile for outputs should be for an AI system to be classified as 'de-biased' or 'fair', and who governs this, is a complex legal, social, and ethical issue; not a technical one.

2 https://www.theaccessgroup.com/en-gb/digital-learning/software/career-development/developing-student-employability/

This is further complicated when the technology is intended for use across national and cultural borders, where consensus may be difficult to achieve. The ability for all stakeholders to understand the design, and to monitor the outputs of AI is a pre-requisite for achieving this, hence the importance placed on explainability and interpretability of AI systems (Linardatos et al., 2020). Thus, the basic threshold for determining if technology that incorporates AI is trustworthy is the explainability and interpretability of the decisions made.

The prominence of third-party vendors in AI recruitment complicates this, as answers to these questions may be considered commercially sensitive by the software developer. This also illustrates issues of accountability when deploying AI. Where the domain or company specific knowledge is provided by the software purchaser and implemented by use of their data, but the outputs are produced by a propriety algorithm owned by the vendor (van den Broek et al., 2019), who is accountable for ensuring compliance with legal and ethical obligations? This is further complicated by the fact that there is the potential for the software purchasers' data to be used to improve the algorithm performance for subsequent customers of the vendor (Wagner, 2020), introducing issues of data privacy. The potential for personal data to be unknowingly included in training data is an acknowledged risk in certain types of AI systems (Bommasani et al., 2021). If personal data is unintentionally disclosed who would be accountable? CIAG practitioners who use, or recommend, AI technologies should ensure that they understand and inform users how their personal data will be collected and used by third-parties. This is particularly true where services are being provided by commercial organisation, who may be motivated primarily by profit when collecting and processing users' information (Zuboff, 2019).

Policy guidance on the use of AI published to date calls for accountability across all stakeholders involved in the development and deployment of AI (European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2021b; Scottish Government, 2021). However, specific legislation for AI is still being developed (Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, 2021; Floridi, 2021), and, as such, does not yet provide detail on how accountability should be allocated when the software used by a service provider is proprietary to a third-party vendor. Nonetheless, given that adequate protection of personal information is a requirement of the Career Development Institute Code of Ethics (CDI, 2019), CIAG professionals should ensure that service users' data will be handled securely by any ICT resource they incorporate into their practice, including more opaque uses of this data for training AI algorithms.

In addition to concerns around the security of personal data, AI-assisted recruitment highlights the difficulty in ensuring that users of AI systems perceive themselves to have been treated fairly (Baldwin, 2006). Introducing AI in this context means that all application forms, CVs, and interviews can be assessed with a consistency that would not be possible for humans (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2019). From the candidate's perspective, the flexibility of access and standardised approach offered by AI-assisted recruitment is a clear benefit (Suen et al., 2019; van Esch et al., 2019). However, this should be caveated by highlighting the limited research focused on candidate experiences, especially those with disability, neurodiversity or who are using their non-native language. Recent research found candidates' experiences of AI recruitment to be negatively impacted by lack of understanding of the technology, and their preoccupation with aligning to an unknown pre-determined criteria during interviews (Jaser et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of CIAG services ensuring their clients are adequately informed about how the AI systems operate and can opt out without adverse impacts.

Managing risks and realising benefits

A European Commission publication on responsible use of AI and algorithmic governance cites recruitment as an example of a high-risk domain for use of AI. The justification for highlighting recruitment is due to its 'significance for individuals…and addressing employment equality' (European Commission, 2020, p. 18). By these criteria, some CIAG activities would also be considered high-risk for the deployment of AI, given its role in improving individuals' lives and supporting equality (Blustein et al., 2019). The role of public policy

in regulating AI is an emerging topic that has attracted national and international attention (Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, 2021; European Commission, 2020; Exec. Order No. 13859, 2019; OECD, 2021b; Scottish Government, 2021). Common themes across these documents are provisions to support the realisation of the potential benefits AI can bring to society, tempered by an acknowledgement of the risks of both deliberate misuse and unintended consequences. Commentary on the emerging policies highlight the difficulty of regulating emerging, highly-specialised, impactful technology that crosses international borders (Floridi, 2021). Using AI within CIAG requires an understanding of the potential impacts for clients, practitioners, and society during system design and deployment in order to successfully achieve an appropriate balance between the risks and benefits.

This requires ensuring CIAG experts and practitioners are involved throughout the process, as exemplified in the CiCi and LMI examples discussed above (Hughes, 2021; Lassébie et al., 2021). The governance standards that AI is held to should not be limited to only policies developed specifically for the technology, but should include the relevant professional standards for the domain it is operating in. Due to the autonomous nature of the technology, AI used in CIAG should be required to demonstrate active compliance with the same code of ethics that a human professional engaging in a comparable activity would. The majority of software vendors developing these systems will not have the knowledge and experience required to evaluate this compliance, and therefore, should actively seek guidance from CIAG professionals during development to ensure ethical considerations are a fundamental component of system design, not something that is considered during sales and marketing, or, at worst, in response to issues that arise post deployment. CIAG services can benefit from the increased scope of the interventions that AI can deliver in a cost-effective way. However, this requires an approach to AI introduction that focuses on increasing value for clients, not reducing staff costs.

Conclusions

The use of AI technology offers practitioners the opportunity to dramatically extend the capacity for delivering curated information. It diminishes limits on when and where clients can access advice and reduces the pre-requisite knowledge they need to self-serve career information. However, the wide-ranging nature of CIAG work means that the introduction of AI should include a careful consideration of the potential benefits and risks that automation could have on both individuals and society. This means exercising reflexivity when commissioning or recommending AI technology to ensure the task is suitable for automation. Where AI is suitable, explainability of the system design, and ongoing monitoring are essential to identify and mitigate unforeseen consequences. Furthermore, the fact that clients can access these tools independently, means that even where a system can be comfortably deployed for a particular use, the technology must be designed with a built-in ability to recognise and refer appropriately when it is not a suitable intervention for a particular client.

When identifying an appropriate AI product, CIAG professionals should use their knowledge and expertise of their own domain to inform the questions they ask about the technology. Although some understanding of the real-world benefits and risks inherent to this kind of technology is necessary to know the questions that should be asked, these should be framed in terms of CIAG, not technology. The key questions should not be limited to efficiency, performance, and cost, but instead must encompass the ability of the technology to effectively and ethically operate on behalf a CIAG service. This should be supported by inter-disciplinary research that identifies best practice in the design and deployment of AI technologies for the maximum benefit of CIAG clients.

The ability to act autonomously when providing automated interactions with clients means that AI is not a tool; it is an agent (Kim, 2020; van Rijmenam et al., 2019). Therefore, the successful introduction of AI into CIAG in practice should not be undertaken as a traditional software development or procurement project, but is more akin to service design.

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Call for papers

Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling: October 2022 Issue

Editor: Michelle Stewart

This issue will have no specific theme. Articles are invited on any topic relating to career development.

This may include:

- career education, career guidance, labour market perspectives
- policy, theory, and practice
- professional issues
- any setting for career development work

Final deadline for complete submissions prior to peer review is 30th June 2022.

For enquiries, and expression of interest, please contact the editor:

Michelle Stewart: michelle.stewart@canterbury.ac.uk

Forthcoming events | NICEC

The NICEC Events are likely to take place via Zoom for the foreseeable future. Please register your interest when the events are promoted to receive the login details. Details for the NICEC events calendar are kept up-to-date on the website http://www.nicec.org/ Please send any queries to Claire.m.nix@gmail.com

Topics	Event & presenter	Date and time
Should Career Development be a Chartered Profession?	Network meeting with *Nicki Moore*	Monday 23 May 2022 2-4.30pm
Bill Law Awards	Award ceremony for student writing	Monday 13 June 2022 5-6.30pm
UN Sustainable Development Goals	Seminar with *Pete Robertson*	Tuesday 5 July 2022 5-6.30pm
Diversity in the profession	Network meeting	Monday 19 September 2022 2-4.30pm
Career education in US higher education	Seminar	Tuesday 29 November 2022 5-6.30pm

Seminars and Network Meetings:

- Included in membership fees for NICEC Fellows and members.
- For non-members: £25 for seminars and £35 for network meetings
- For students: £4 for seminars and £7 for network meetings

The Cutting-Edge events are free to CDI members and NICEC Fellows and members.

Forthcoming events | CDI

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID, we hope to be able to meet everyone from the career development sector again, in-person, for informative and enjoyable events.

For the full training and events programme, including expert training sessions, conferences, webinars, CDI Academy courses and more, please visit thecdi.net/Skills-training-events

If you have any queries, please contact the events team by emailing events@thecdi.net

#100YearsofCareers

18 June 2022, Blists Hill Victorian Town, Telford

This is a fun, family day to mark the career sector's centenary celebration on Saturday 18 June, 4.30pm-10.30pm at Blists Hill Victorian Town, Telford.

You can bring friends and family to the celebration, and explore jobs from the past in the Victorian Town. There will be exhibitions, competitions and interactive areas, and opportunities to learn about the history of the career development sector, growing trends in skills, and occupations of the future.

Tickets include access to all the award-winning attractions in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site over the weekend, so that you can really make a weekend of it.

Tickets are on sale now at: thecdi.net/100years

The winners of the UK Career Development Awards will be announced at the family day at Blists Hill. These prestigious awards showcase the best in career development research and practice.

Find out more about the Awards by visiting thecdi.net/Quality-Assurance/UKCDA

National Career Leaders Conference

30 June 2022, University of Derby, Kedlestone Road Campus

This is the fifth conference of its type, designed to support the learning, information sharing and professional development of Careers Leaders working in secondary schools, FE and SEND schools and colleges, Enterprise Coordinators and Careers Advisers. The theme of the conference will focus on 'Deepening strategic careers leadership' and expert practitioners will invite attendees to join thought-provoking discussions during sessions and workshops throughout the day. There will also be an exhibition, which will provide an opportunity to engage with organisations supporting the careers sector.

To book tickets, please visit thecdi.net/NCLC

ABOUT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for the career development sector. We have a growing membership of 4500 individual members and affiliate organisations and speak with one voice for a lively and diverse sector.

We have a key role to play in influencing UK skills policy as it affects those with whom career development practitioners work and a clear purpose to improve and assure the quality and availability of career development services for all throughout the UK.

All CDI members subscribe to a Code of Ethics, which is supported by a strong disciplinary process, and subscribe to the principles of CPD.

Importantly the CDI is responsible for the UK Register of Career Development Professionals; the National Occupational Standards (NOS: CD); the first Career Progression Pathway for the sector; UK Career Development Awards; QCD and QCG/D qualifications; the CDI Academy; the Careers Framework and a UK-wide CPD programme.

Below are a few of our major achievements:

- A powerful brand supported by an evolving website **www.thecdi.net**; social media (Twitter and LinkedIn) presence; and quarterly magazine *Career Matters*;
- A schedule of CPD, skills training, webinars and conferences based on market analysis and members' training needs;
- A growing media and lobbying presence with the CDI recognised as the *expert voice* in the field; advising politicians, speaking at conferences and commenting on policy;
- The establishment of the UK Career Development Awards – ten sponsored awards including *Careers Adviser/Coach of the Year* and *Careers Leader of the Year and Lifetime Achievement Award*;
- Clear focus on professional identity and increasing the professionalism of the sector through our influence, ownership and development of the QCD and QCG/D and the CDI Academy including the new *CDI Certificate in Careers Leadership*.

ASSURING QUALITY

The CDI has a critical role to play in setting standards and articulating what quality looks like for the sector. Importantly we are an awarding body, managing the Qualification in Career Development (previously the QCG/D) and the UK Register for Career Development Professionals, which is pivotal to our ongoing quality agenda and is fast becoming recognised as the sector's equivalent to chartered status.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with NICEC on the Journal and the NICEC/CDI research-focused events which take place twice a year across the UK.

The Journal is made available to all CDI members via our website.

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