

POSTER ABSTRACT

Non-visible disabilities and the adult social care workforce in England: encouraging untapped talent and supporting sustainable careers

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Background: Adult social care (ASC) in England struggles to attract and keep staff: encouraging and empowering people from less represented groups would help but this is more challenging if someone has a disability, which may not be obvious. Research is needed to explore new ways for organisations to inspire and help these people to consider social care as a possible career, and to support them to develop and stay in the sector.

Approach: My research focuses on the potential interface between non-visible disabilities and barriers to entering, progressing and remaining in the ASC workforce in England. I am asking:

- how ASC organisations can support staff with non-visible disabilities to develop and sustain long-term careers in the sector
- what can be done to encourage individuals with non-visible disabilities to consider ASC as a realistic and sustainable career option.

To do this, I am:

- undertaking a narrative review to answer these research questions
- planning to set up and coordinate a 'Non-visible Disabilities and the Social Care Workforce Public, Practitioner and Organisation (PPO) Team' to discuss, co-design, co-produce and share research and outputs to support ASC organisations to attract and retain staff with non-visible disabilities. (This activity is subject to funding confirmation.) The team will consist of experts with diverse backgrounds, non-visible disabilities and/or relevant employment experience. Five such individuals have already been helping me to consider parameters, limitations, issues, risks and mitigations relating to the team, its activities, project outputs and dissemination. This invaluable stakeholder involvement includes conversations with two social care practitioners and a group discussion with three public advisors with varied social care employment and lived experience, all of whom have non-visible disabilities occurring from birth, in menopause and/or later life.

Results: This research is at an early stage but searches and discussions with social care researchers and practitioners indicate an absence of relevant literature. (Only a few references have been identified relating to the impact of cognitive disorders, especially Acquired Brain Injury,

and some psychological conditions, especially neurodivergence, on individual employment, careers and education, and/or recruitment and retention to the health and care workforce.) The impact of other non-visible conditions appears not to have been investigated but needs confirming.

Implications: More inclusive workforce strategies and initiatives are needed to broaden the social care workforce in England and make it more representative of, and flexible and attractive to individuals with a wide range of lived and employment experience and skills. This includes people with non-visible disabilities, for whom entering, progressing and remaining in the social care workforce presents additional, potentially insurmountable barriers. Yet little research has been published on this.

Subject to funding, results and outputs from this co-produced research could assist ASC organisations to encourage and support people with non-visible disabilities to consider ASC as a realistic career and to progress and remain in the sector. This has the potential to increase the capacity, capability and sustainability of the social care workforce in and beyond England, as well as wider national care (and health) sectors.