Navigating Caregiving obligations Understanding the Experiences of Student-Carers at Trinity College Dublin

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inclusive Trinity

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STUDY AIM

The study aims to examine the experiences, challenges, and support mechanisms for student-carers in higher education, focusing on well-being, academic and financial difficulties, and policy awareness at Trinity College Dublin. It also aims to identify how student-carers balance their dual roles as students and carers, and explore potential improvements in support systems to help them effectively manage their responsibilities.

METHODS

Survey (n = 232 students)
Questions were asked about the demographics, well-being, academic performance, and financial situations of students, comparing students with caregiving responsibilities to students without, along with gathering insights into the number of students who take on additional caregiving duties and to understand more about these responsibilities.

Interview (n = 2 students; 7 staff members)
To obtain in-depth information about students with caring responsibilities and the ways they can be supported, we conducted interviews with students and college staff who come into contact with and can support them.

Focus Groups (n = 14 student-carers)
To gather insights into the experiences and challenges of student-parents and informal carers and pinpoint opportunities for enhancing institutional support to effectively address their needs.

> "The guilt that I have in coming here, because it's always a trade-off, and for the most part, that's me, and the house, and everything. Though I have to balance the caring responsibilities with college, and nothing else matters"

> "I don't care about policies, I care about human understanding and feeling like you're a person, not just a number in the university"

How can the Curriculum be more Inclusive for Student-Carers?

- Streaming/Recording of Lectures
- Carer Support Groups/Services
- Timetables Shared in Advance
- Staff Training
- Increased Inclusivity in College Community
- Alternative Education Routes
- Carer-Friendly Timetables
- Empathy and Understanding

RESULTS

Academic Burden
The majority of student-carers (78.69%) felt that their additional responsibilities sometimes impacted their academic performance. 52.46% missed lectures occasionally or more. Additionally, 75.41% of student-carers reported being better able to manage their responsibilities when lectures were streamed and/or recorded.

Impact of Caring Responsibilities on Academic Performance
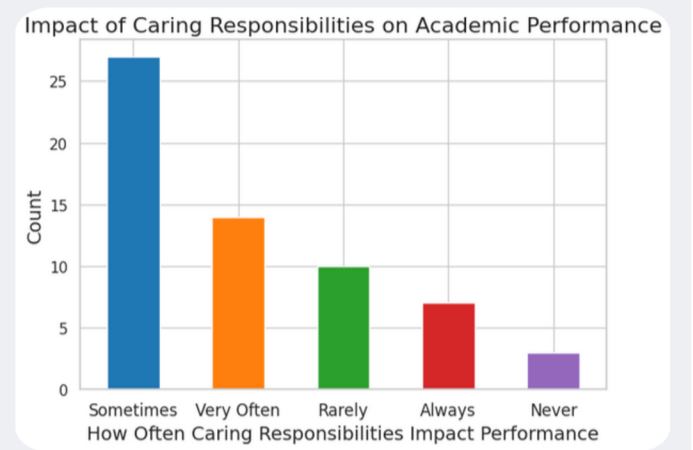
Well-Being
The findings reveal a significant emotional burden on student-carers, with stress and emotional turmoil linked to caregiving duties. Student-carers reported lower quality of life, increased depressive symptoms, and higher levels of stress and anxiety. They also faced greater physical health challenges, lower life satisfaction, and a stronger sense of loneliness. Our qualitative research highlighted the emotional toll of caregiving, including feelings of guilt, burnout, stress, anxiety, and imposter syndrome.

Financial Challenges
Survey results show that student-carers are 2.35 times more likely to face financial difficulties than non-carers. Focus group discussions further highlighted the financial strain of balancing caregiving with academic commitments, with participants pointing to childcare costs, unpaid work placements, and insufficient financial support as key challenges.

Student-Carer Policy
84.69% of students were unaware of TCD's policy for informal carers and student-parents, suggesting that the policy is poorly disseminated and implemented.
To view the policy please scan the QR Code:

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant challenges faced by student-carers at Trinity College Dublin. By identifying key areas of difficulty, it sheds light on gaps in existing support policies and emphasises the need for more inclusive support systems to help student-carers thrive academically and personally. Suggestions for improving student-carers' experiences are also presented in the report, providing a foundation for enhancing support systems and fostering a more inclusive academic environment at TCD.