

Laimute Zalimiene¹

ORCID: 0000-0003-0445-4643

Institute of Sociology, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania

Sandra Krutuliene

ORCID: 0000-0001-5442-8932

Institute of Sociology, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania

Laima Okuneviciute Neverauskiene

ORCID: 0000-0002-7969-3254

Institute of Sociology, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania

Boguslavas Gruzevskis

ORCID: 0000-0003-1058-3927

Institute of Sociology, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania

Jolita Juneviciene

ORCID: 0000-0002-8472-5863

Institute of Sociology, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences. Lithuania

***What shapes the pathway of
becoming an elderly care worker?
Young Workers' perspective***

¹ **Corresponding author:** Laimute Zalimiene, Institute of Sociology, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Goštauto 9, 08113, Vilnius, Lithuania; email: laimazali@gmail.com.

Abstract

Elderly care is becoming a much more recognised job in an ageing society. The aim of this article is to reveal how young workers in elderly care describe and interpret the process of entering the field of elderly care and provide insights into how this knowledge could support the development of strategies for youth involvement in the sector. The study, based on a qualitative research strategy, developed the concept of the pathway leading young workers (both men and women) to elderly care work. The concept consisted of three sections in the pathway: points of departure, societal filters that either push or hinder entering elderly care work and preconditions/factors that are important in the process of choosing the work. A gender gap exists in each section of the pathway to this career choice. The results of the study not only reveal the variety of factors influencing job choice in a comprehensive manner but also emphasise the importance of analysing these factors within the context of personal identity and professional fulfilment searches.

Keywords: young workers, carer choice, elderly care work, self-identity, pathway

Introduction

The growth of the older population indicates that the long-term care sector will be one of the major job creators in the future (ILO, OECD, 2019). The sector is already identified as an important source of employment, accounting for 130.2 million workplaces worldwide, which constitutes 3.9% of the global employment (OECD, 2020). However, the extent of the ageing population is higher than the growth of labour in the long-term care sector, which raises the problem of how to provide the sector with sufficient labour resources (OECD, 2020). Social workers and care workers are becoming increasingly recognised and needed professionals in long-term care services. There is a scarcity of research documenting the perspective of social workers who are engaging in work with older adults in long-term care services (Weng & Valenzuela, 2022). Additionally, there are limited studies in the area of understanding the unique experiences of care worker assistants choosing employment in these services.

In addition, the largest portion of the workforce in this sector is comprised of middle-aged and older women. For example, in 2019, more than half of those employed in the sector in Lithuania were aged 50+, which is almost 14% above the EU average (Eurostat, 2020a). The attraction of both the young people in general and young unemployed individuals, in particular, to the sector, has been extensively discussed in different countries for a certain period of time (see: Montgomery et al., 2017). The statistics on youth unemployment show that young people (15–29 years old) who are not in education, employment, or training constituted an average 13.6% in the EU. In Lithuania, this percentage was 13% in 2020 (Eurostat, 2020b). Studies show that the main limiting factors for young people's involvement in elderly care are low wages, insecure employment opportunities offered by the sector, limited training, and development opportunities (Hjelte et al., 2018; Hussein & Manthorpe, 2010;

Montgomery et al., 2017; Cameron et al., 2019). Nowadays, young people are less likely to stay in the elderly care sector compared to older generation (Hodgkin et al., 2017).

The current research aims to increase understanding of young people's perception of elderly care work and contribute to knowledge about the factors influencing their decision to pursue this career. While there is extensive research on why young people are not drawn to work in elderly care, there is limited research on the motivation of those who are already working in the field. Qualitative research examining the circumstances surrounding young people's entry into the elderly care sector within a specific country context is relatively uncommon. This study also holds practical significance as it offers insights into social policy on how to attract young people to this sector.

The aim of this article is to reveal how young workers in elderly care describe and interpret the process entering the field of elderly care, and give insights on how this knowledge could support youth involvement in the sector. In order to reveal this, interviews were conducted with young employees who directly provide long-term care services to the elderly. These services are provided in Lithuania by individuals with higher education, such as social workers, nurses, and physiotherapists, as well as by personal care workers, nursing assistants who do not have higher education requirements (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2014). The research aimed to explore the reasons why young people choose to work in the aged care sector. Therefore, the selection criteria for the research participants were based on their jobs and positions in elderly care facilities, as mandated by national regulations. Although their specific roles in service delivery may vary, all groups are workers in the sector, which is not attractive for young labour force in general.

The main research question addressed in this study were as follows: what are the circumstances and factors that influence the decision of young individuals to pursue a career in the elderly care sector?

1. Theoretical framework

Occupational choice has a significant impact on our entire life. Studies explain why and how people choose one occupation or another by presenting a variety of theories. For example, some studies emphasise the importance of work adjustment, while others focus on vocational personalities in the work environment, social cognitive factors, self or social identity, rational choice, or development of career patterns. Roe (1990) takes the position that an individual's career and work decisions are influenced by a multitude of factors that interact or even reinforce each other, forming a pathway of choice. The current study explains the choice of work in elderly care by relying on the concept of socially-structured pathways in career decision-making, which is emphasised in sociological literature. It embraces a plethora of factors and circumstances determining work choices (Nelson, 2004). Social identity ideas are also important in explaining career decisions, as they are often closely tied to one's sense of self and identity (Berger, 1963). Additionally, there are strong links between career choice and self/identity, as evidenced by studies conducted by Gagne (2014), Kanter Moss (1977), Maree (2019), Ryan and Deci (2018), and Luken (2020). Furthermore, the concept of

public services motivation is relevant in the explanation of career choice, as it emphasises the significance of intrinsic rewards (such as a sense of accomplishment and self-worth in choosing helping professions (Bozeman & Su, 2015; Houston, 2000; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008)).

2. Research methodology and sampling peculiarities

The empirical data for this research was collected by implementing the project “Youth labour force participation in elderly care sector addressing population ageing” (funded by the Research Council of Lithuania, S-GEV-20-35) and analysed using the qualitative research strategy and the qualitative descriptive method. This approach allowed us to examine the research object within a broader context, which is particularly beneficial in practice-related disciplines (Creswell, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). Additionally, advantage of qualitative research in this case is ability to explore experiences of young workers by relying on their own explanation and argumentation, not specific questions suggested by the researcher. The research employed a semi-structured interview approach, following a pre-prepared question guide.

The selection of informants was based on a combination of targeted and convenient sampling methods. This approach was necessary due to the absence of a comprehensive registers in Lithuania which includes social service organisations, social workers, or care workers. The first stage of the selection aimed to represent three different types of elderly care service organisations: home help services, day care centres for elderly, and elderly homes. The second stage of the selection aimed to find young workers in these organisations. The researchers faced a challenge in selecting research participants, especially men. As a result, the initial decision to limit the age range of the selected young workers to 35 years old or younger was changed, and the age range was widened for the male group to 37 years. To reach various social services providers, 40 out of 60 Lithuanian municipalities administration were contacted by phone to inquire about the presence social services providers with young workers. In most cases, it was reported that only young female workers were available, and that young men did not provide services in elderly care organisations directly. Instead, they tended to work as administrators/organisers, take up technical jobs (e.g., drivers providing special transport services), or perform maintenance and other similar tasks. So, they do not meet criteria to be direct care worker. Private elderly care organisations were contacted separately, not through the municipality administration. No research participants matching the criteria were suggested of the contacted private elderly care organisations. To be eligible for the interview, the respondents had to meet three specific selection criteria: 1) be 35 years old or younger; 2) be directly providing services to elderly individuals²; 3) have at least two or more years of work experience in this position.

According to Lithuanian legislation, social workers are employed in care institutions for the elderly to provide services such as counselling and assessment of client needs.

² According to Lithuanian legislation, these employees work in positions such as personal care worker, nursing assistant, social worker, or nurse, directly providing services for elderly individuals. However, administrative staff and support staff (e.g., accountants, drivers, cleaners, etc.) are not included in this category.

Individual care workers also assist with household chores, food preparation and consumption, dressing, and personal hygiene. Employment specialists organise employment opportunities, artistic self-expression, and socio-cultural activities (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2014). Additionally, nursing homes employ assistants who work with the elderly (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2007). Staff positions for social workers, nurses and physiotherapists are only available to individuals with a higher education degree, while individual care workers and nursing assistants only require short-term training programmes in Lithuania. Thus, the situation in Lithuania is very similar to information in other studies (e.g., Rubery et al., 2011), which describe activities performed by staff in aged care facilities. These activities which are typically mentioned include lifting, bathing, feeding, meeting medical needs, and performing functions that require interpersonal or social skills, as well as the preservation and enhancement of social functioning, and administrative and document management functions.

Table 1. Characteristics of the research participants

| Characteristics of research participants | | Number |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Age of respondents: mean 31.1 | | 19 |
| Gender | Female (26–35 years old, mean: 31.6) | 11 |
| | Male (24–37 years old, mean: 30.6) | 8 |
| Institution type | Home help services | 6 |
| | Elderly homes | 10 |
| | Day centres | 3 |
| Position | Social worker | 8 |
| | Personal care worker | 6 |
| | Nursing assistant | 2 |
| | Occupational therapist | 2 |
| | Physiotherapist | 1 |
| Education | Professional education/training | 8 |
| | Higher education in social work/social pedagogy | 11 |
| Place of residence | In three biggest cities | 5 |
| | Outside the biggest cities | 14 |
| Length of employment in the elderly care sector: 2–12 years, mean: 5.5 years | | |

A total of 19 interviews were conducted with young workers who directly provide services for elderly individuals. These interviews took place either by phone or using teleconferencing platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, Messenger between June and September 2021. The sample consisted of 11 respondents with a higher education degree and 8 individuals who had completed short-term training. It is worth mentioning that one respondent with a higher education degree worked in the position of an individual care worker, which is also the case in this sector in Lithuania.

The research utilised a qualitative content analysis as the data analysis method. All interviews with the respondents were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The content analysis of the data was then conducted based on these transcriptions, according to Mayring (2014) basic procedures. The transcriptions were coded using MaxQDA 2020 software for qualitative research, resulting in the creation of a list of emerging categories. In the final stage of the analysis, researchers reviewed the coded segments once again and, in parallel, reformulated initial sub-categories transforming them into a unified system of categories that were further utilised in the analysis. Later, the Code Matrix Browser allowed us to observe the spread of the research categories across separate interviews, as well as track the gender dimension. In other words, to assess the distribution of categories in terms of gender, the categories obtained using the code matrix browser tool were reviewed again, and further divided based on the gender of the interviewee (see Table 2 in the section 3.3 of the article).

3. Results

The qualitative content analysis of the research data focused on respondents' explanations of how/why they entered the workplace in the elderly care sector. Two big themes emerged from the interviews: firstly, the origins of individuals in the elderly care sector, and secondly, the factors that influenced their decision to work in this sector. Under the first theme, the following five categories were identified: entry into the elderly care after participating in the employment services system, choosing to work in elderly care after graduating from university; entry to the elderly care work directly from other fields of practice, entry after completing training courses for individual care worker based upon personal initiative, and entry elderly care through internship.

The second theme consisted of seven categories: parental influence and family values, informal care experiences, self-discovery of identity, random choice, finding a job after a long search for professional identity, seeking a more peaceful job, and public attitude towards work in elderly care.

3.1. Departure points to enter care work with the elderly

Research participants explain how they entered elderly care work in a variety of ways. Some referred to the employment service system, where they applied in search of a job, others reported changing jobs from other fields, or mentioned entering the sector after studying (and graduating in) social work or social pedagogy at universities. It should be noted that the fact of studying social work itself was not an incentive for some graduates to choose a job in the elderly care sector.

Choice to work in elderly care after graduation in social work or social pedagogy at universities

No wonder, that after social work studies, some of the research participants specifically aim to work in elderly care organisations:

When I graduated, I already knew what group I wanted to work with. Although social work is quite a broad field, one can choose working with different groups but I wanted to work with seniors (I3-F)³.

Another respondent who graduated from social work studies, agreed to work as an assistant because there were no vacancies for the position of a social worker then:

[...] since I got on very well with elderly people from as early as I was a young child, I somehow imagined that I'd be working in that field and I was looking for something along those lines, so I even agreed to take a job as an assistant in order to give it a go (I10-F).

Some respondents noted that they were looking for a job, asking around, and just happened to enter the field of elderly care after their social pedagogy studies:

I graduated from social pedagogy studies and was planning to work with children. But after my studies, the situation was that I needed to find a job as soon as possible, and I got an offer to work with the elderly... (I9-F).

Entry to elderly care through internship

The fact of studying social work in general was not an incentive for some participants of our research to choose a job in the elderly care sector (see the quote above). Rather, on the contrary, as other studies suggest (see: Genece, 2021; Wang & Chonod, 2013) social work with elderly people is not among the priorities of social work graduates. Our research revealed that some students were attracted to this sector as a place of work only after having the opportunity to engage in practical experience:

When I started doing practice in the third year, which involved more interaction with elderly individuals, I really enjoyed it. It suited me well and I stuck to it (I12-F).

This experience of engaging in practical work with elderly individuals was important for both female and male respondents. The importance of internships in terms of decisions regarding choosing a job in elderly care sector was indicated and by respondents who participated in employment service programmes. During those internships they discovered that working with the elderly was appealing to them:

There was a youth training course at the Job Centre [...] and we had a three-week internship in elderly homes (I14-M).

³ Throughout the text, each informant is assigned a unique code, where "I" stands for informant, "3" and other numbers represent the informant's number, "F" indicates a female informant, and "M" is a male informant.

Entry to elderly care through employment service system

Through participation in various activities and programmes offered by employment services, the respondents found that they enjoyed communicating with and assisting elderly individuals:

The Job Centre had a programme for young people under 30 called 'Discover yourself'. It was there that I stood out from the whole group in terms of organisation and communication [...] After that programme, I was sent to train as a visiting care worker, I passed the exam, and the next day, I started working as a social worker's assistant. And that's what I've been doing ever since (18-F).

Another respondent indicated that he chose to participate in home helper training courses because that programme seemed to be simpler and more familiar:

[...] at the Job Centre where we had three training options in construction, architecture, and working as social workers' assistants. So my friend and I chose the one we were familiar with [...] (14-M).

Completed training course (personal care worker/assistant social worker) not through employment services

Some research participants indicated that they independently completed courses and obtained certificates that qualify them to work as assistant care workers. This information is significant as it provides additional insight into the motivation of the research participants to engage in elderly care. In other words, the study highlights that some young individuals take the initiative to pursue a career in care work, not solely relying on the more common path through the employment services system. The story of one research participant reveals that her tendency to help the elderly dates back to her early youth. From her interview emerges a memory of a visit to an old people's home during a high school voluntary event, which made a lasting impression on her.

My first encounter with elderly individuals was when I was young. I found myself captivated by these persons who often go unheard. They have so much to share and yet are often overlooked (17-F).

After several years, during which the research participant dedicated herself to her family and raising children, she found herself drawn back to the experience and decided to pursue a course for individual care workers to find a job in an elderly care facility.

Entry to elderly care work from other fields of practices

For some respondents, their entry into the field of elderly care employment is linked to their previous work experience in sectors other than social services. These respondents had worked in industries that eventually closed or went bankrupt. During their job search, they randomly inquired at an elderly care institution that happened to have a vacancy at the time.

Additionally, several respondents had previous jobs in administration and realised they did not enjoy those roles:

[...] I worked with projects in one institution, where I mainly had to do paperwork. So, I thought that it might be more interesting to work with people. And this is how I got into this sector (I18-M).

One research participant was in the past social work managers in the elderly care but he quit his job when a position of personal care worker became available (I18-M). He described his previous position as control work, which he did not like. However, after transferring to work as a personal care worker, he found the job much more satisfying:

And this position is different, and people's attitude towards it is different, they want your help and expect it from you (I17-M).

3.2. What circumstances influenced respondents' choice/decision to entry elderly care work

While recalling their choice to work in elderly care, research participants mentioned a variety of circumstances that either encouraged or were important for their decision.

Parental influence/family values

The respondents noted the influence of their parents and family in their choice of job. One of them reflected, *I think that there is a lot of parental input into my choice of the job (I3-F)*. Another respondent stated that his relatives also worked in the elderly care sector and set a good example for him to choose the same pathway (I14-M). A young woman also attributes her choice of this work to family traditions and values:

My grandmother, my grandmother's father and my great-grandfather always helped people. [...] we always helped those who were in need of food, money or other things. We were always helping others, and I was always there, I was contributing as well [...] So, that's how it started in my childhood. When I finished the 12th grade at school, I already knew where I wanted to go to work. It was either nursing or social work (I11-F).

Informal care experience

The experience of informal caregiving was important factor that encouraged the choice to work in the elderly care sector:

[...] I had to look after my husband's father, which was a good experience [...] I got him back on his feet [...] when I had already gained experience in nursing, it was when I had the idea that maybe I should look at this and dedicate myself to this work and choose it as my job. [...] I chose the nursing assistant's programme at the Job Centre, and then with my own money, I got the certificate of a social worker's assistant so I could work in the service centre (I6-F).

Discovering self-identity

While reflecting on their entry into this sector, research participants highlighted they enjoyed helping people, listening, and communicating with them. They also preferred a quieter environment and a slower pace of life when working with elderly clients. The alignment between the respondents' identity and the nature of care work is typical for this group of informants. Female informants reflected on their work choice:

I found this profession suitable for self-fulfilment because I can express myself and help someone else (I3-F).

[...] you talk to someone and you just see that you can help them in some way [...] and I'm simply happy to be here (I2-F).

I have more fun with others, I like people, I like communicating, I like finding out things, I like listening to stories and learning how things were in the past and how they are now, I like comparing things (I7-F).

However, the male informants expressed a similar view; they perhaps spoke even more emotionally and vividly about how this work helped them find themselves:

So I think that it is the place where you can fulfil yourself. And you don't have to be so stressed, you don't have to pretend, and I don't know, but you can be here in a simple way and you will be accepted. So, this simplicity and lightness are is the biggest rewards (I18-M).

And all this awareness that they are old and the world has become harder and less conceivable for them, and that I, as a young person, can still help them, help them integrate into society and start socialising. I want to help them clarify all their doubts and help them just live the rest of their lives with diligence. For me it's the old people, as we say, who are wounded [...] I myself am so much calmer when I talk to them [...] I just love communicating with them [...] they are so much slower and I do not try to speed them up in any way (I16-M).

Random chance. Fate must have arranged it...

A recurring theme in the respondents' statements was the random entry into this workplace:

[...] now that I think about it, it's probably how fate must have arranged it. Because I was actually thinking about something else all the time [...] (I16-M).

I have actually never planned to work with the elderly because, first of all, I studied social pedagogy and was planning to work with children (I9-F).

So, I have never planned this pathway [...] this job found me not vice versa (I5-F).

Finding a job after diligent searches for a professional identity/vocation

The prominent theme in the informant's explanations was searching for professional identity before they realised that working with older people is the job for them:

I really didn't think about helping old people. I thought it was nonsense. I didn't even like my own grandfather. Old people mumble, they speak nonsense, then they forget it and repeat the same thing all over again [...] After finishing 12 grades at school, I was going to study directing. But then I changed my mind [...] and all 12 years of learning at school were in for nothing [...] I had to take up physically dirty jobs. And then I thought, 'No, I have to do something. I have to change something [...]'. So, I went to the Job Centre [...] This programme referred me to the Visiting Care Workers Programme [...] And that's where I found myself. But it took me a very long time to get it (I8-F).

I was never able to find my place anywhere, I always felt like I was missing something. And now I am doing very well (I1-F).

The respondents who had planned to work with children while studying social work or social pedagogy and then did so for a while realised that they did not like it. It was only when they tried working with the elderly that they discovered their vocation:

[...] I had to work with children with disabilities for a while [...] I became convinced that I can work with children, I can do the job, I really can, but there's no inner joy anymore [...] I don't find this work as exciting as working with seniors [...] And that's how I found myself and my calling, simply by doing this (I9-F).

I never planned to work with the elderly in my life. During my studies and internship, I worked with children at a school [...] but I quit this job [...] When I went to the labour exchange, they offered me a job at a retirement home. I thought that I never planned to work in a retirement home but I accepted the offer [...] when I went there, I realised that this was my field, and I felt like a kid in a candy store [...] here with the elderly [...] (I5-F).

The possibility to try working in elderly care was a very important factor for research participants to find work that met their needs:

You won't know it without trying it [work] out. That's the golden rule [...]. You have to try it because you don't know what you might like. We will only know it by trying. If you don't have any big dreams and don't know where to start, you can start your career by working with the elderly. It can be is a very good place to start (I16-M).

The salary of care workers in the field is low, still having found their place in elderly care, the male respondent tended to justify to the relatively low salary in the sector:

[...] when you want to work, you somehow solve your problems and everything seems to be fine (I17-M).

Different societal support for men's and women's choice to work in elderly care

Male respondents have to withstand certain pressures from their families and society when choosing elderly care as a career pathway. For example, one of them said

that when he decided to work as a personal care worker in a retirement home, his parents discouraged him and did not approve of his choice. However, after a year, they came to terms with it as soon as they saw that he was happy with his work (I4-M).

In the narratives of the informants, we can find signs of dissatisfaction with low salary, especially for male workers:

You cannot afford much for such a salary, especially if you have a family... So, for now, I'm here but only until I find something better (I13-M).

But another male worker enjoys the work and liked being unique in the field:

Most people say I'm good at this job, and I like it myself. I feel I'm contributing to society because women mostly do this work. People are asking why I do this job [...] It is because I like it and I think it is good (I14-M).

Even the female respondents support the stereotype that care work is a job only for women:

I think that it's anyway feminine work because it requires a lot of understanding, a lot of sincerity and lots of other things. Well, not all men have a lot of such qualities, or if they have them, they don't show them. Women are born to take care of others, to sympathise, to help, to wipe tears, and men are very different [...] (I11-F).

Finding a more peaceful working environment

The respondents indicated a calmer and less stressful environment as one of the advantages of working in the elderly care sector. They described the attractiveness of this working environment as a factor that led them to leave their previous job or choose to work with the elderly:

The desire to feel less stress and rush in the workplace (I10-F).

Because I'm a bit of a calmer person myself [...] they [the elderly in care centres] are maybe a bit slower and I do not try to speed them up in any way [...] (I16-M).

Because somehow I always imagined that working with older people was somehow a bit easier [...] There's no rush, the schedule is not very busy, and you can relax a little bit. As I was already emotionally very exhausted, I decided to give it a try (I10-F).

3.3. Does gender gap exist in the pathway to the elderly care work?

When discussing the starting points of entering the field of elderly care, some female research participants mentioned that they personally chose to complete individual care worker courses to pursue this profession. This was particularly true for those who had previous experience in caring for the elderly either within their own families or in institutional settings. Meanwhile, the men did not mention similar

circumstances. They opted for the mentioned courses only when they were registered at the labour exchange, as it was a new field of activity for them which they had not explored previously, including providing care for family members.

Both male and female respondents have mentioned majority of the same preconditions for choosing work, as mentioned above. However, certain differences can also be observed. The importance of informal care experience as a precondition for choosing care work was mentioned only in the accounts of women respondents. Table 2 presents the categories mentioned in women’s (red) and men’s (black) interviews.

Table 2. Visualisation of the categories mentioned in women’s and men’s interviews using MAXQDA’s Code Matrix Browse

| | Categories | Number of interviews (women in red and men in black) | SUM of Interviews |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Departure points to enter care work with the elderly | Entry to the elderly care through employment service system | ●●●● | 4 |
| | Completed training course (assistant social worker) not through PES | ●●● | 3 |
| | Choice to work in the elderly care after graduation in social work/social pedagogy | ●●●●●●●● | 10 |
| | Entry to elderly care through internship | ●●●●● | 6 |
| | Entry to elderly care work from other fields of practices | ●●●● | 4 |
| What circumstances influenced respondents’ choice/ decision to start working in elderly care | Parental influence/family values | ●●● | 3 |
| | Informal care experience | ●● | 2 |
| | Discovering self-identity | ●●●●●●●●●● | 11 |
| | Random chance | ●●●●●●● | 8 |
| | Finding a job after diligent searches for a professional identity/vocation | ●●●●●●●● | 9 |
| | Different societal support for men’s and women’s choice to work in elderly care | ●●●● | 4 |
| | Finding a more peaceful working environment | ●●● | 3 |

* Total number of the interviews conducted: 19

It is not surprising, considering that in Lithuania, the culture of care work as a job for women is still dominant (Mažeikienė & Dorelaitienė, 2011). This finding aligns with research insights obtained by scientists from other countries (see: Scrinzi, 2010; Näre, 2010; Kubiciel-Lodzińska, 2021) which show that women dominate the field of

elderly care. Women make up almost 70% of the global health and social workforce (World Health Organization, 2021).

It should be noted that male and female research participants use different language to describe their personal motivations for becoming care worker. While young women highlight the importance of their empathy and compassion in this line of work, male research participants are more likely to emphasise their communication and listening skills, willingness to assist vulnerable members of society. The latter circumstance is significant while considering which competencies should be publicly emphasised to make the elderly care sector attractive to men as well. It is possible that empathy and compassion, which are often highlighted as major competencies in this field, may not be of interest to or may discourage men from pursuing this line of work.

4. Conceptualisation and discussion

Working further with the categories that originated from the analysis of the interviews and were provided above, the authors developed a concept called *the young workers' pathway to the elderly care work*. The concept included three parts which reflect the circumstances and factors influencing a young person's decision to pursue a career in the elderly care service sector. These three sections of the pathway are: points of departure, societal filters that either encourage or hinder the transition into elderly care work, and preconditions/factors that are important in the process of choosing the profession (see: Figure 1).

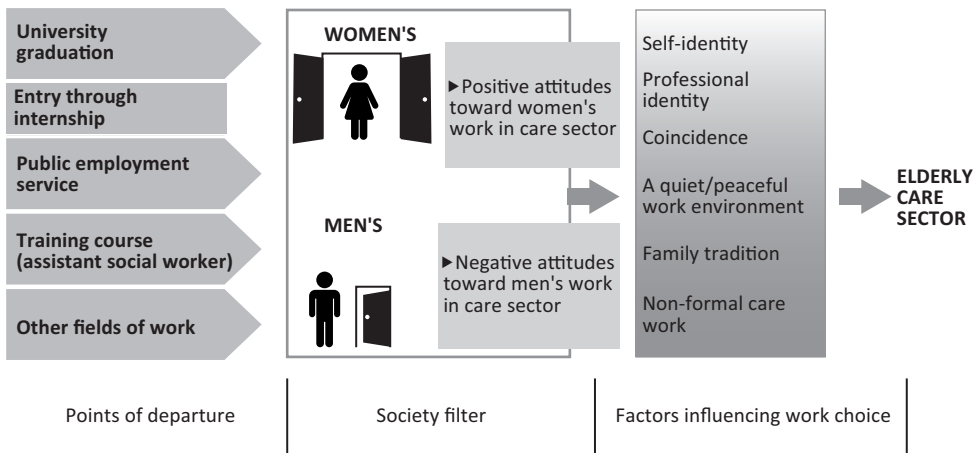


Figure 1. “The young workers’ pathway to the elderly care work” concept

The *starting positions* to the elderly care work was very different: some research participants recalled periods of unemployment, while others mentioned their job search after graduating from studies in higher education; some even referred to dissatisfaction with their previous job, which pushed them to explore the opportunities

in elderly care. Study of Sutcliffe and Dhakal (2018) noted interdependence of working experience in elderly care and choice of similar types of studies. The results of our research indicate that social work studies as such do not directly lead respondents to choose work in elderly care. After graduation, they initially chose to work with other social groups and only later realized their attraction to working with the elderly. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that the starting point for entering the field of elderly care is not limited to institutions such as employment services or social work study programmes in higher education institutions. Practical experience in providing social help to the elderly, outside of institutional settings, also plays a significant role.

The *second part of the pathway* reflects the importance of public attitudes in the decision-making process for selecting a career in elderly care. The results of the survey suggest that both men and women had to navigate societal attitudes that acted as a filter when considering a career in the elderly care sector. This attitude tended to open the door for women, and keep them hardly closed for men. It is also evident in studies of other researchers, e.g., England, Folbre and Leana (2012) argue that women's preference towards care-oriented careers and men's preference towards non-care-oriented careers are reinforced by gender essentialism, i.e., a stereotypical belief that women are better suited for care work. Interestingly, our results also reinforced this stereotype, as even female respondents emphasised that women were more suitable for elderly care work due to perceived qualities that men lacked. Women are still seen as "society's primary caregivers" (Tong, 2009, p. 18). Russell (2007) concludes that, despite the growing proportion of men in the care sector, care work performed by men continues to be viewed as unusual. In our study, male participants who opted for care work often surprised their family members and others, leading to numerous inquiries. However, none of the male respondents mentioned feeling intimidated because of their choice in care work, which does not align with the findings highlighted by England et al. (2012).

Regarding the *third part of the pathway towards elderly care*, young people's accounts indicated a range of preconditions that can be categorised into *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivational factors influencing their job choices. The respondents' statements conveyed a clear message that elderly care work helped them to discover their own identities, pursue their personal inclinations and fulfil their individual needs. Other studies also suggest that intrinsic motivation encourages individuals to choose caregiving based on personal reasons such as finding meaning and fulfilment, rather than being driven solely by external rewards (Clamor, 2020; England et al., 2012; Hu & Hirsh, 2017). The importance of intrinsic values for engagement and work in the elderly care is also noted by England et al. (2012) who argue that intrinsic preferences for care stem from biology, early socialisation, or ongoing involvement in care work. The connection between having an emotionally close relationship with grandparents or other elderly persons and the preference for choosing work in elderly care was also observed by Robert and Mosher-Ashley (2000) in their study of college students' perspectives.

Our findings also point to the conclusion drawn by Vandenberg and Schott (2020) who found that care work is unique and that job satisfaction arises from intrinsic motivations. As a result, employees are willing to accept lower financial rewards for

the job. The concept of *public service motivation*, explored in studies by Hassan, Ansari and Rehman (2021), Kim, Kang and Lee (2021), as well as Perry and Vandenberg (2015), among others, supports the explanation that the meaningfulness of the work compensates for salary disadvantages, and that congruence between the public sector and individuals' prosocial motivation do exist (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013).

The enjoyment derived from helping others, as shown in our study, can also be associated with public service motivation (Breugh et al., 2018).

The importance of relationships and interaction in elderly care is also prominent in our results, as well as in the studies conducted by other researchers (see: Schott et al., 2019). Sutcliffe and Dhakal (2018) reported that participants in their study continue working in the elderly care because it provided opportunities for listening, talking, sharing stories, and engaging in face-to-face interactions. Clamor's (2021) study showed that emotional attachment helps caregivers in attaining self-fulfilment (Carlo & Randall, 2001).

Other researchers also noted the importance of informal care experience in the choice to work in elderly care (Howe et al., 2012; Robinson et al., 2008; Sutcliffe et al., 2018). For instance, Sutcliffe (2018) found that millennials' interest in entering the elderly care industry can be accredited to their past experiences of caring for grandparents or having close relationships with elderly relatives or friends.

Overall, the research not only confirms the presence of various factors and circumstances that influence the choice of care work among young workers, as discussed in caregiver development theories but also highlights the significant role of self-identity exploration in this process. The conducted research supports the notion that there are strong connections between career choice and one's sense of self and identity (see: Luken, 2020). In terms of self-identity, our study participants exhibited a typical motivation towards public service, as they associated their choice of care work with intrinsic rewards such as a sense of accomplishment, self-worth, and satisfaction derived from helping others. The search for a professional identity can be linked to individuals' prosocial motivation, where the capital of prosocial motivation acts as a guiding force that shapes their behaviour accordingly (Kroll & Vogel, 2018).

Conclusions

Despite the unattractive public discourse of elderly care work, especially among young people, the results of the study provide encouraging insights that some young people find this line of work suitable for their needs and personal identity. The decision to enter this sector is influenced by both external factors (such as family values, public attitude, a calmer working environment) and internal factors (such as the search for personal identity and professional fulfilment).

The concept of *the pathway to elderly care work*, developed based on research data, addresses the main question of the study: how and under what circumstances does one enter the elderly care sector and make the choice to pursue this line of work? This concept not only validates the multifaceted nature of factors influencing job choices but also emphasises the importance of analysing these factors within the

context of self-identity exploration. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of having the opportunity to try out this job in advance as a means of self-discovery. In addition, this concept allows for distinguishing the work choice process into two main stages: a) the departure points for entering elderly care work, and b) the circumstances which influenced respondents' choice or decision to enter elderly care work. The research results revealed the importance of public attitudes in the decision-making process for selecting a career in elderly care. While societal attitudes may pose barriers for young men considering this profession, they can overcome these obstacles upon realising that working with the elderly aligns with their identity. In contrast, societal attitudes tend to encourage women to work in this sector, and even female research participants themselves reinforce the perception of care work as inherently feminine. Furthermore, the "departure points" stage in the work choice process provides insights into the origins that lead young people to decide on elderly care work. This, in turn, guides future research that can verify and provide further details on circumstances which guide carer choice. For example, whether the circumstances that determine the choice of care work are the same for young workers who enter elderly care through employment services as for people entering from other fields of practice. The latter aspect is interesting not only because it reflects the respondents' active search for self-identity but also because it underscores the significance of occupational mobility opportunities in the decision to pursue a career in care work.

The new circumstances revealed by this work choice research indicate that it is important to have an opportunity to try this job without any prior motivation or even with negative prejudices, particularly, due to societal attitudes towards this profession.

In terms of further research, the suggested concept of "the pathway to elderly care job" offers a comprehensive examination of the circumstances and factors influencing career choices in caregiving. Additionally, it enables the control of the diversity of these factors and provides a more comprehensive understanding, particularly, when describing and comparing career paths across various professional fields.

Practical implications of the research

To increase the appeal of employment in the elderly care sector, it is necessary to present this job in a comprehensive and engaging way by highlighting its unique features and advantages to both school children and young unemployed individuals.

Given that personal experience (such as trying out this job) and intrinsic factors strongly influence the employability in the elderly care sector, it would be beneficial to create more opportunities for young people to familiarise with this sector in general education schools (e.g., by organising specialised summer schools or volunteer groups).

At the level of education, vocational training, and particular vocational guidance, more attention should be paid to debunking the myth of the feminisation of work in the elderly care sector.

In employment services and career guidance centres, it would be useful to profile the unemployed individuals and offer them jobs in the elderly care sector if they possess sociability, a higher level of empathy, and a preference for a slower pace of lifestyle.

Research limitations

The selection criteria for the research participants were based on the staff positions in elderly care facilities, as mandated by national regulations, but not on their specific roles in service delivery. Therefore, research data allow as to explain, how and why young people decide to work in elderly care in general. However, the scope of this research does not enable us to assert that all the departure points to elderly care identified in the study also determine the significance of the same set of factors for choosing elderly care work.

Research ethics

The permission to conduct interviews with staff members was granted by the administration of each elderly care organisation. Prior to an interview, informed verbal consent was obtained from all workers, who agreed to participate in the study. Each respondent was informed about the anonymity of their personal data in the research publication, using a code to conceal their identity.

Conflict of interests

There are no conflicts of interest.

References

- Berger, P. (1963). *Invitation to sociology*. Doubleday.
- Bhatti, K. & Qureshi, T. (2007). Impact of employee participation on job satisfaction, employee commitment and employee productivity. *International Review of Business Research Papers*, 3(2), 54–68.
- Bozeman, B. & Su, X. (2015). Public service motivation concepts and theory: a critique. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 700–710. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12248>
- Breaugh, J., Ritz, A., & Alfes, K. (2018). Work motivation and public service motivation: disentangling varieties of motivation and job satisfaction. *Public Management Review*, 20(10), 1423–1443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2017.1400580>
- Cameron, A., Johnson, E.K., Evans, S., Lloyd, L., Darton, R., Smith, R., Porteus, J., Atkinson, T. (2019). ‘You have got to stick to your times’: Care workers and managers’ experiences of working in extra care housing. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 28(2), 396–403. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12871>
- Carlo, G. & Randall, B.A. (2001). Are all prosocial behaviors equal? A socioecological developmental conception of prosocial behavior. In F. Columbus (ed.), *Advances in psychology research, Volume II*. (151–170). Nova Science Publishers.
- Clamor, W.L. (2021). Motivation and social support receiving in elderly care: the case of geriatric palliative caregivers. In S. Amornyotin (eds.), *Update in Geriatrics*. (186–425). IntechOpen. DOI: 10.5772/intechopen.87300
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- England, P., Folbre, N., & Leana, C. (2012). Motivating care. In N. Folbre (ed.), *For love and money: Care provision in the United States*. (21–39). Russell Sage Foundation.

- Eurostat. (2020a). Employment by sex, age and economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2) – 1 000 [lfsa_egan2]. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/page/lfsq_egan22d
- Eurostat. (2020b). Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), by sex and age – annual data [lfsi_neet_a]. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data-browser/product/page/lfsi_neet_a
- Gagne, M. (2014). *The Oxford handbook of work engagement, motivation, and self-determination theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Genece, A.M. (2021). Social workers perspective on the challenges and rewards of working with the aging population. *Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*, 1335. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/1335>
- Hassan, S., Ansari, N., & Rehman, A. (2021). Public service motivation, workplace spirituality and employee well-being: a holistic approach. *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, 39(4). <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEAS-05-2020-0072>
- Hjelte, J., Stenling, A., & Westerberg, K. (2018). Youth jobs: Young peoples' experiences of changes in motivation regarding engagement in occupations in the Swedish public sector. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 23(1), 36–1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1269653>
- Hodgkin, S., Warburton, J., Savy, P., & Moore, M. (2017). Workforce crisis in residential aged care: insights from rural, older workers. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 76(1), 93–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12204>
- Houston, D.J. (2000). Public-service motivation: a multivariate test. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10(4), 713–728. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024288>
- Howe, A., King, D., Ellis, J., Wells, Y., Wei, Z., & Teshuva, K. (2012). Stabilising the aged care workforce: an analysis of worker retention and intention. *Australian Health Review*, 36(1), 83–91. DOI: 10.1071/AH11009
- Hu, J. & Hirsh, J.B. (2017). Accepting lower salaries for meaningful work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8(2017), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01649>
- Hussein, S. & Manthorpe, J. (2010). Attracting young adults (18–25 years) to work in social care in England: How secondary data analysis may assist policy makers and providers. *Diversity in Health & Care*, 7(4), 229–239. <https://www.primescholars.com/articles/attracting-young-adults-1825-years-to-work-in-social-care-in-england-how-secondary-data-analysis-may-assist-policy-makers-and-providers.pdf>
- ILO, OECD. (2019). *New job opportunities in an ageing society*. Paper prepared for the 1st Meeting of the G20 Employment Working Group. <https://www.oecd.org/g20/summits/osaka/ILO-OECD-G20-Paper-1-3-New-job-opportunities-in-an-ageing-society.pdf>
- Kanter Moss, R. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. Basic Books.
- Kim, J., Kang, H., & Lee, K. (2021). Transformational-transactional leadership and unethical pro-organizational behavior in the public sector: does public service motivation make a difference? *Public Management Review*, 25(2), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1974714>
- Kjeldsen, A.M. & Jacobsen, Ch. B. (2013). Public service motivation and employment sector: attraction or socialization? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 23(4), 899–926. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mus039>

- Kroll, A. & Vogel, D. (2018). Changes in prosocial motivation over time: a cross-sector analysis of effects on volunteering and work behavior. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 41(14), 1119–1131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2017.1347945>
- Kubiciel-Lodzińska, S. (2021). Can migrant men become more present in elderly care? Comparative analysis of migrant women and men in senior care. Case study from Poland. *Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Social Policy Issues*, 55(4), 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.31971/ppp/146118>
- Luken, T. (2020). Easy does it: an innovative view on developing career identity and self-direction. *Career Development International*, 25(2), 130–145. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-05-2019-0110>
- Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution. AUT Klagenfurt.
- Maree, J.G. (2019). Self- and career construction counseling for a gifted young woman in search of meaning and purpose. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 19(2019), 217–237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-018-9377-2>
- Mążeikiene, N. & Dorelaitienė, A. (2011). Socialinių darbuotojų vyrų nehegemoninio vyriškumo patirtys iš feministinės biografinio tyrimo perspektyvos. *KULTŪRA IR VISUOMENĖ Socialinių tyrimų žurnalas*, 2(2), 55–74. <https://portalcris.vdu.lt/server/api/core/bitstreams/cc317d92-67a2-4480-9916-f7f5b8d2cf84/content>
- Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Security and Labour. (2007). Įsakymas dėl slaugos ir socialinių paslaugų bendro teikimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo. 2007 m. liepos 4 d., No. V-558/A1-183. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.301549?jfwid=-9dzqnu48b>
- Ministry of Social Security and Labour. (2014). Įsakymas dėl socialinių paslaugų srities darbuotojų pareigybių ir atliekamų funkcijų sąrašo patvirtinimo. 2014 m. spalio 13. No. A1-487. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/36005a60531c11e485f39f55fd139d01/asr>
- Montgomery, T., Mazzei, M., Baglioni, S., & Sinclair, S. (2017). Who cares? The social care sector and the future of youth employment. *Policy and Politics*, 45(3), 413–429. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557316X14778312165186>
- Näre, L. (2010). Sri Lankan men working as cleaners and carers: Negotiating masculinity in Naples. *Men and Masculinities*, 13(1), 65–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X10382881>
- Nelson, K.B. (2004). Sociological theories of career choice: a study of workers in the special events industry. *UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations*, 2588. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/hrul-kcbj>
- Perry, J.L. & Vandenberg, W. (2015). Public service motivation research: achievements, challenges, and future directions. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 692–699.
- Perry, J.L. & Hondeghem, A. (2008). Building theory and empirical evidence about public service motivation. *International Public Management Journal*, 11(1), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967490801887673>
- OECD. (2020). *Who cares? Attracting and retaining care workers for the elderly*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/92c0ef68-en>
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2018). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.

- Robert, R. & Mosher-Ashley, P.M. (2000). Factors influencing college students to choose careers working with elderly persons. *Educational Gerontology*, 26(8), 725–736. <https://doi.org/10.1080/036012700300001386>
- Robinson, A., Andrews-Hall, S., Cubit, K., Fassett, M., Venter, L., Menzies, B., & Jongeling, L. (2008). Attracting students to aged care: the impact of a supportive orientation. *Nurse Education Today*, 28(3), 354–362. DOI: 10.1016/j.nedt.2007.06.010
- Roe, A. & Lunneborg, P. W. (1990). Personality development and career choice. In D. Brown and L. Brooks, *Career choice and development: applying contemporary theories to practice*. (68–101). Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Rubery, J., Hebson, G., Grimshaw, D., Carroll, M., Smith, L., Marchington, L., & Ugarte, S. (2011). *The recruitment and retention of a care workforce for older people*. London: Department of Health. EWERC. <http://envejecimiento.csic.es/documentos/documentos/universitymanchester-recruitment-01.pdf>
- Russell, R. (2007). Men doing “Women’s work:” Elderly men caregivers and the gendered construction of care work. *Journal of Men’s Studies*, 15(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1501.1>
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in nursing & health*, 23(4), 334–340. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X\(200008\)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G)
- Schott, C., Neumann, O., Baertschi, M., & Ritz, A. (2019). Public service motivation, prosocial motivation and altruism: towards disentanglement and conceptual clarity. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 42(14), 1200–1211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2019.1588302>
- Scrinzi, F. (2010). Masculinities and the international division of care: Migrant male domestic workers in Italy and France. *Men and Masculinities*, 13(1), 44–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X10382880>
- Sutcliffe, J.E. & Dhakal, S.P. (2018). Youth unemployment amidst aged care workers shortages in Australia: Why care about the millennials? *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 37(2), 182–198. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-05-2017-0105>
- Tong, R. (2009). Long-term care for the elderly worldwide: Whose responsibility is it? *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*, 2(2), 5–30. <https://doi.org/10.2979/fab.2009.2.2.5>
- Vandenabeele, W. & Schott, C. (2020). Public service motivation in public administrations. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1401>
- Wang D. & Chonody J. (2013). Social workers’ attitudes toward older adults: A review of the literature. *Journal of Social Work and Education*, 49(1), 150–172. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42000145>
- Weng, S.S., & Valenzuela, J. (2022). Working with older adults in integrated health care: Social workers’ perspective. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 41(10), 2235–2243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07334648221105266>
- World Health Organization. (2021) Closing the leadership gap: gender equity and leadership in the global health and care workforce. *Policy Action paper*, June 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240025905>

