



**University of
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Healthy Ageing Challenge
Social, Behavioral and
Design Research

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Exploring the lives of care workers through an 'ecology of care' lens

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Introduction

- This presentation will:
 - Introduce our *Healthier Working Lives for Care Workers (HWL)* research project
 - Discuss the development of our 'ecology of care' approach

The *Healthier Working Lives (HWL)* research project

- Part of the *Healthy Ageing Challenge*
- Focus: improving the lives of *over 50s* working in residential care for elderly people
- Co-designing with them new services or ways of working to improve care workers' lives

Stages in the HWL Project

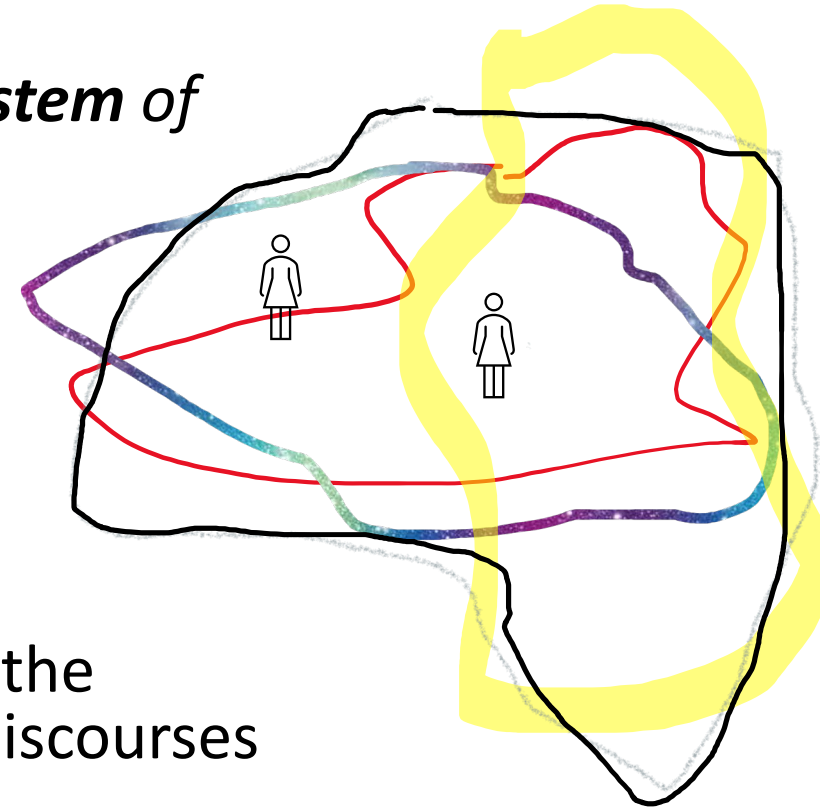
- Access residential care homes with Scottish Care
- Ethnographic work in six homes
- Six co-design workshops in each home to develop ideas
- Pivot workshop March 2023 to develop mentor-supported innovation groups
 - Training
 - Recruitment to the sector
 - Effectiveness of everyday systems
 - *Circle of care* to improve organisational culture
 - Predictive technology
- The ethnographic & co-design process identified elements of the 'ecology of residential care' of these care workers (discussed later)

Developing an 'ecology of care' approach

- How to conceptualise the dynamic context in which residential care workers are situated?
- We had started developing the idea of an 'ecology of care' focused on *informal carers* (Bowlby & McKie 2019)
- i.e. looking at the interactions between *informal carers* & their *environment*
- But how to adapt this approach to think about the situation of *formal carers* – in this case *residential care workers*?
- Requires changing focus to think about the *environment* facing *residential care workers*

An 'ecology of care' approach for residential care workers

- We conceptualise the 'environment' as a ***complex system of overlapping interacting systems*** incorporating:
 - Unexpected interactions & outcomes
 - Intersectionalised inequalities
 - Infrastructures of care:
- **Infrastructures of care** include material entities *and* the institutional arrangements, social relationships and discourses involved in their ongoing creation and operation



Infrastructures of care for residential care

- Shelter - Residential care homes & equipment
- Food – Food supply for residents & care workers
- Mobility - Transport – for workers, suppliers
- Communication – phones, web, tablets, IT; interactions within the home/amongst team members
- Health care – access to doctor/hospital care for residents



Need to consider the institutional arrangements, social relationships & discourses involved in the creation & operation of these infrastructures.

Interacting elements of an *ecology of residential care*



Advantages of an 'ecology of care' approach?

- Imagines society as a *complex system*
- *Flexible* – scale (room, region, globe); types of care (one-to one, communal, for profit; for children, for older people....) - you have to choose your focus
- Acknowledges that effective care exchanges require appropriate *socio-material infrastructure* – not just 'good individuals'
- Emphasises the significance of *intersectionalised inequalities*
- Embraces both the complexity of relations of care and the need to identify the aspects most salient to the problem at hand
- Expects unexpected outcomes!

Key References

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