A survey of the personal and social factors predicting the career progress of minoritized researchers

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INTRODUCTION

Academic researchers with certain demographic characteristics, such as being male, White, not disabled and heterosexual, dominate the landscape of producing knowledge.[1] This majority status biases both the building of knowledge and career progress of minoritised researchers.[2] The majority status effectively makes minoritised researchers invisible.

Disabled researchers must adapt to physical spaces, to conform to the able-bodied model and internalise the idea of what is normal.[3] Thus, disabled researchers have become activists for their marginalisation to address these issues, rather than progress their primary field of research.[3]

Racially minoritised academic are under-represented at universities, conferences and leadership roles due to lack of role models.[4,5,6] Women publish less and their ideas are supported less by funding organisations.[7] Mothers, especially of infants and children, receive little support with their caring responsibilities.[8] Early career researchers who were primary caregivers experienced slower research progress than those who were not caregivers or parents.[9]

We wanted to test the social cognitive career theory[10] which focuses on the individual's intrinsic qualities and not social barriers. The theory also does not consider how career progress is determined by marginalised characteristics. The aims are:

1. To understand the individual and social factors that predict the career progress of minoritised researchers in the UK, and

2. To understand how the COVID pandemic contributed to the career progress of minoritised researchers in the UK.

METHODS

Data were collected in three stages:

1. Focus groups and interviews: Two focus groups and two interviews were conducted with minoritised researchers at early-, mid- and late career stages. Participants represented the four protected characteristics, namely disability, race, gender and caring responsibilities. A thematic analysis was performed.
2. Online survey: A survey was designed from the themes identified from the thematic analysis.
3. One-to-one interviews: Participants in the online survey were invited to an online interview.

This poster reports only the results of the survey.

Participants

Hundred and twenty-eight researchers from academic institutions and networks across the UK completed the survey.

Designing the survey

The survey contained 60 questions asking about identifying with four protected characteristics. The survey also covered others themes, e.g.,

A. Reasons for participants chosen career pathway, such as (a) Giving something back to the community and society more widely, (b) Wanting to help other people, (c) Changing society, and (d) Seeking social justice.

B. What counts as research success, such as (a) Having the flexibility and freedom to do impactful research, (b) being recognised for their academic contribution, and receiving pay that is equal to their experience.

C. Being supported with career progress, such as the line manager recognising workload challenges and protecting time for research.

D. Negative impact of COVID pandemic on research, such as (a) health problems, and (b) increased pressure to support family

E. Positive impact of COVID pandemic on research, such as accessibility of online meetings, giving their disability a 'normalised' online identity and the convenience of remote working.

RESULTS

Those with sensory impairments or multiple impairments perceived more support during the pandemic than those with no disability (Figure 1). Academics from a Global South ethnicity chose a research career for practical reasons more than White academics (Figure 2).

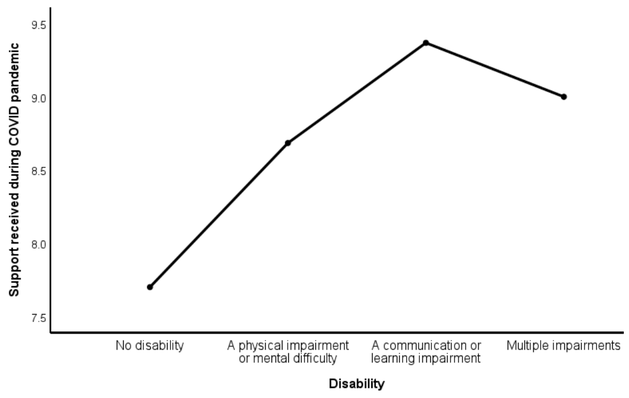

Figure 1. Perceptions of the research benefits of the COVID pandemic based on disability

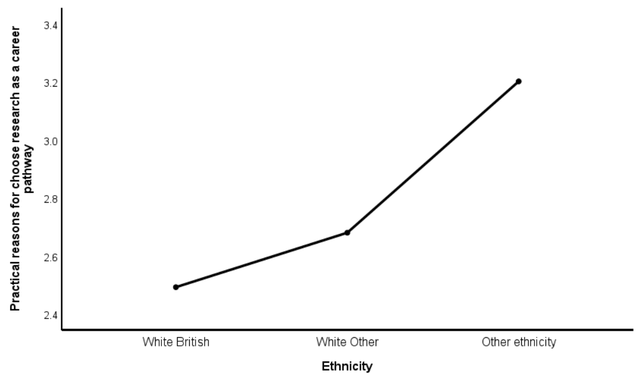

Figure 2. Racial differences in the road to career success

Greater perceived support from the institution predicted a greater sense of career progress among disabled researchers. A sense of stability in a career in research predicted a greater sense of career progress among racially minoritized researchers. Having a permanent employment contract predicted a greater sense of career progress among women and those with caring responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic affected the career progress of minoritised researchers as defined by their disability, race and caring responsibilities. Minoritized researchers valued institutional and external support, and this support positively influenced the perception of career progress. Having a mixture of internal and external mentors can advance career rank and publications.[10] Having mentors congruent with their minoritised status creates a safe space to discuss racial, bullying and cultural issues.[11] It also enables minoritized researchers to set practical goals for career progress. Training in teaching, scientific and grant writing also boost self-efficacy. Training should be across career stages, since training is typically offered to early career researchers.[10] Equitable policies must be translated into practical action to enhance career equity of minoritized researchers.

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