Social care PAs – the forgotten home care service during COVID-19

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https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19

Social Care Personal Assistants:
Covid and Care

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Study 1 - 2019

King's College London

NIHR | Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce
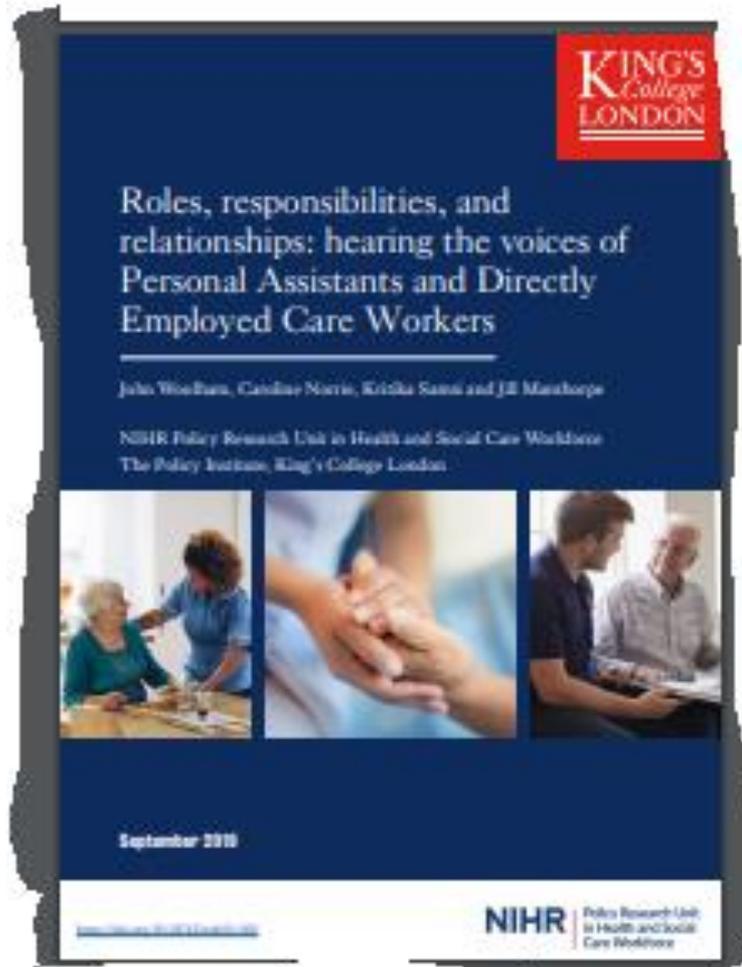
Interviews with PAs (n=105)

Directly employed by/self-employed and hired by someone with care and support needs

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And then there was COVID-19 ..Study 2 – 41 PA interviews April-May 2020

- **'Invisibility' 'uncertainty' and 'ineligibility'**

- Patchy local support and generally only for employers.

- We call for a greater role for Local Authorities in registering PAs (which happens in some areas but not others) as a way to identify and contact them in any crisis and offer information, support and resources.

- PAs were unsure if they were 'key workers' even though their employers depended upon them and did not know how this status was conferred.

- Many spent hours queuing for food etc as they lacked the accreditation needed to take advantage of the dedicated shopping times for NHS and care staff.

- Many unable to obtain furlough money; only some employers paid PAs if they were not working.

- Some not able to work as family stepped in or care was stopped.

- Many PAs lacked access to local information including where to access PPE, were ineligible for NHS distribution hubs (set up to distribute PPE) Some PAs got PPE but it was difficult to obtain and very expensive.

- Most PAs also relied almost entirely on mainstream media for information about the virus and how to protect themselves and their employers.

PAs = much like home care workers

Our initial sample:

- 87% female

- 86% white - 92% British citizens

- Mean age 45 years

- 38% with dependent children

- 37% also supported someone in own family

- Half in other jobs

- Most had previous care work experience

- 2/3 Directly employed 1/3 self-employed

- Working as PA: 4.5 years on average.

- Most common reasons for employment turnover: death of employer or abusive behaviour.

- Average number of employers = 3.2

2. Employment conditions: contracts in COVID

All workers should have an employment contract – in 2019

- 24% of PAs did not have any contract

- 20% said they had a contract from some but not all employers

In COVID times

- What were their rights if not needed, to prove they were key workers, roughly a quarter were not NI or pension covered

2. Employment conditions: Sick pay – COVID salient

Employers have a legal responsibility to pay statutory sick pay.

Eligibility = sick for 4 consecutive days, be paid more than £113p.w. & tell employer within 7 days.

- 69% of directly employed PAs earnings exceeded this threshold in 2019.
- But of this group, only 19% said they would get sick pay, 69% said it wasn't available and 13% did not know.

Pay if work was interrupted

- 52% said they would not be paid if work suddenly ceased or was interrupted for a long time
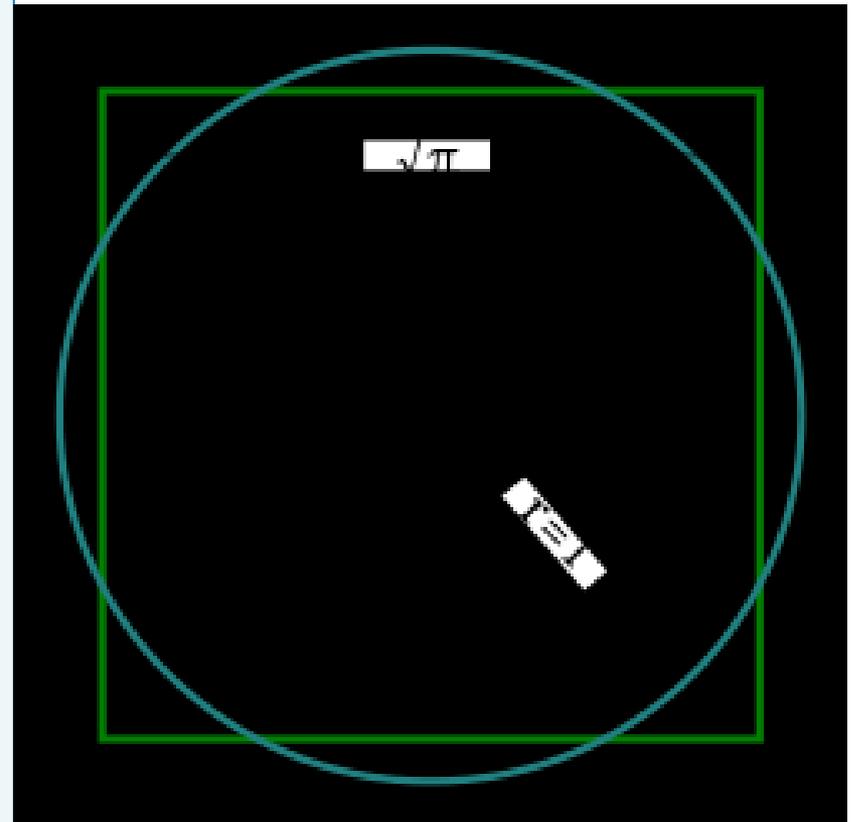- 21% did not know if they would be paid

Rewards and relationships
How to square the circle

- Very high levels of job satisfaction

- Genuine opportunities for person-centred, relationship-based care and support

- Large proportions of PAs receiving neither statutory employment rights or protections

- Covid amplified existing problems

- And sacrifices

Study 2 (a) More relationships …
GPs & Personal Assistants – 20 GPs interviewed and PAs about Healthcare staff and about relatives too

GPs mostly did not know about PAs:

They expressed

(a) anxieties about the identity of the PA, and their relationship to their employer;

(b) encountered experiences of relationship-based care;

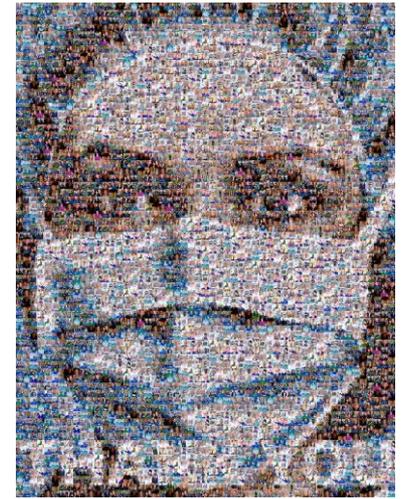(c) uncertainty about tasks carried out by PAs.

How to develop these links in a continuing Covid world?

'Under the radar: General practitioners' experiences of directly employed care workers for older people'

Wilcock, Iliffe, Moriarty & Manthorpe (2020) Health & Social Care in the Community https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12943

New Study 2020-22 – missing bits of jigsaw

Experiences of Personal Assistant Employers during COVID-19

By Samsi, Manthorpe & Woolham

Funder:

NIHR School for Social Care Research

Sampling for range of characteristics including BAME employers – please get in touch !

Webinar: Social care PAs – the forgotten home care service during COVID-19

Dr Ossie Stuart
September 2020

The problem with Social Care

COVID-19 merely magnified these problems

- Social care is a legacy system designed for the 20th Century

- Inflexible

- Recruitment

- A lack of trust

- Limited or no employer support

- A post code lottery

Employing PA's during COVID-19

Abandoned

- Safety for PAs and for employers
- Urgent need for flexibility
- No guidance from local authorities
- Employment issues/recruitment/contractural/sickness
- Isolation from family and friends
- PPE and a lack of training

The winter with COVID-19

What is needed to make this work

- Peer support

- Clear and unambiguous guidance

- A system built on trust: that "we know best"

- Flexible use of direct payments

- Access clear and easy guides on employment law

- A values-based understanding of the role of a PA

- A workforce who are 'respected' allies, not "carers"

- Greater understanding within whole community of the role of PA