

Guest editorial

Michael Brannigan, Alessandra Vicentini, Kim S. Grego and Simone C. Bacchini

Welcome to our special issue

Our journal is called “Working With Older People”, if you did not know that, you might wish to take note *now*, so as to avoid disappointment! Those of you who have been frequenting its pages know that we aim to publish quality content on various matters relating to ageing and about older people. (Even as the editor of the journal, I was about to type “on the *problems* of ageing”; engrained mind-sets are resilient!).

Our main aim is to shed light on the experience of ageing, mainly to assist all those who actually work with older people, be it in a professional role – as professional carers, social workers, health professionals and the like – or as informal caregivers, those who – according to the definition given by the UK-based Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) – “support [...] and care [...] for a relative or friend who is living with a disability, long-term illness or has additional daily support needs.”

Somewhere in between is the growing number of foreign caregivers who – increasingly – are tasked with looking after older people. They are “in between” because very often they do not possess formal health or care qualifications. In many cases, they are employed illegally and may even be illegally in the country, thus making them especially vulnerable. They are not family members but often end up making up for weak or non-existent family networks, and their relationship with the older people they look after often merges into that of an unofficial relative. They are relied upon, confided in. Of course, many foreign carers are employed legally by individuals and/or their families or work in public and private structures. However, the fact remains that their role is increasing both numerically and in terms of impact, and it is something we should pay attention to.

Focussing on the role of foreign carers, their interactions with those they care for and their families, the resulting exchanges and the cultural opportunities and challenges that arise as a result is both interesting and useful. It constitutes, in my view, an exercise in total translation: linguistic, cultural, social and generational. Each encounter of this type produces a “text” that can and should be studied for what it can teach us about people, young and old, their encounters and their challenging, as well as about ageing and the experience of being a carer.

It is to this experience that the conference “Seniors, foreign caregivers, families, institutions: linguistic and multidisciplinary perspectives” held in Varese, Italy, from the 9th to the 10th of April 2021, was organised as part of the research project “Age.Vol.A. Ageing, Volunteers, Assistants. Multilingual Tools for Assisting the Ageing”, funded by Fondazione Cariplo (2018–2021). The broader aim of the conference was to “pay close attention to the linguistic, social, economic and ethical aspects regarding the ageing population, those who assist them, their families and the institutions/organisations that offer services for them”. All of the above is reflected in the articles you are about to read.

They were originally presented during the conference. The contributors adapted them for publication with the particular needs of the readership of *Working With Older People* in mind.

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You will read how foreign live-in carers are able to construct agentive identities which counteract negative discourses regarding care work, gender and nationality and caregivers' discursive constructions and responses to their undesired (familiar and social) function as resulting in exchanges on social media. One of the papers examines the role caregivers play within the process of shared understanding occurring between healthcare professionals and elderly patients whilst another reflects on the meaning on the meaning of "senior", quite common in North America, though less so in the UK. The underexplored concept of visual ageism is discussed, as well as the evolution of the terminology and stereotypes used to talk about old age in readers' letters to the editor as compared to newspaper articles published in English quality newspapers.

Professor Michael Branningan – a philosopher and one of the guest co-editors of this special issue, discusses the moral meaningfulness of the embodied encounters that arise in person-to-person communications during the care (and caring) encounters with which we are concerned.

We believe the topics discussed in this special issue will be of particular interest to you. We hope they will prove to be enlightening and stimulating to you as they have been to us.

Most of all, we hope that they will be the beginning of a conversation, amongst you –the readers – and between you and the contributors (authors' contact details are there for a reason!).

Thank you for being with us.

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