The page is decorated with several stylized virus icons, each consisting of a central circle with several smaller circles attached to its perimeter, resembling a coronavirus. These icons are scattered across the page in various sizes and orientations.

Understanding fairness between different generations in times of COVID-19



**University
of Brighton**



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University of Brighton
Research report

In collaboration with SEEFA

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Understanding fairness between different generations in times of COVID-19

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Preface

The coronavirus pandemic has surfaced a potential conflict of interest between older and younger generations. This has largely been presented as the country needing to make a difficult choice between protecting older people or ensuring an economic future for younger people. The perception that the needs of one outweigh the needs of the other plays into an already emerging view among some social commentators that an intergenerational divide exists, where older people enjoy privileges and benefits while younger people face hardship and an uncertain future.

It seems important for both generations that these questions are addressed: is there really a generational divide? Do younger and older people themselves feel affected in the ways some are suggesting? Are the challenges being faced by one generation caused by the benefits enjoyed by the other?

The pandemic has also drawn attention to the way in which frail and vulnerable older people are cared for and exposed the shortcomings of the systems in place to provide such care. This seems to suggest that there is another dimension to the issue of intergenerational division: how should society deal with ageing and is there a need to think about what today's younger people might want for their future selves?

We think of ageing as applying only to older people; but we are all 'ageing' from the day we are born. Ageing is an issue that affects us all and it is important, therefore, that, rather than focusing on what divides generations, we should seek to engage younger people in a debate about how we all age well and safely and avoid arbitrary categorisation by age.

The research study described in this report involved both younger and older people in exploring the above questions. It set out to examine the extent to which younger and older people themselves were experiencing the challenges or benefits being assumed on their behalf as a generation and how much insight each had into the world of the other.

The study did not set out to prove or disprove the binary assumption that older people enjoyed privileges while younger people faced difficulties. What it did seek to illuminate was the existence and extent of any conflict or hostility between the generations. Such a generational divide would indeed bode ill for all concerned.

Seeking the views of older and younger people is a first step in establishing whether there is common ground between the generations, whether there is an appetite for an approach that unites the generations and creates a better world for all of us. If common ground rather than conflict exists, then the door is open for dialogue and interaction both of which are likely to produce greater mutual understanding and tolerance – the key to eliminating discrimination and prejudice.

Preface

The more enlightened younger people are about the older generation, the less fearful their view of ageing and the more likely they are to develop an idea of what they want their long-term future to look like. And having arrived at this point, we might hope that they will then think about whether society's current regard for its older citizens measures up to their vision.

This study is a small first step in demonstrating that the priority is to focus on intergenerational understanding and the need to find solutions to what are essentially problems that affect all individuals no matter what their age. The findings presented in this report are an encouraging indication that an intergenerational approach to ageing is possible and that, far from blaming older people for the difficulties they may be experiencing, younger people recognise the value and contribution of the older generation.

Peter Dale
Chair, Board of Trustees
SEEFA (South East England Forum on Ageing)
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Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Brighton Social Sciences Ethics Committee Ref 2020-7093.

Introduction

This report presents findings from a study which explored older and younger people's perspectives on generational differences and relationships. It was developed through collaboration between researchers at the University of Brighton and members of South East England Regional Forum on Ageing (SEEFA).

SEEFA is a regional forum of older people's groups and networks from across South East England and founding member of EngAgeNet which works on ageing issues at a national policy level. The partnership developed from working together on public engagement activities about ageism and the intergenerational divide as part of the 'Care(less)' exhibition at Fabrica Contemporary Art Gallery in November 2019 (Care(less) | by Lindsay Seers | Fabrica, Brighton, UK). Following this we wanted to explore how older and younger people perceive intergenerational issues and whether these reflect a divide between different generations.

Context and background to the study

There has been an increasing tendency in media and political discourses over the last 10 years to project an intergenerational divide between younger and older people, largely based on an underlying assumption that older people are better off at the expense of younger people (Willettts 2010). This tension was heightened following the Brexit referendum when age differences emerged between those who voted to leave the EU and those who voted to remain (Bristow 2020; Coren 2016; Paxman 2015; Wildman et al. 2021).

The context of COVID-19 has expressed two further dimensions of intergenerational relations. Firstly, the policy response has the potential to fuel tension between generations in the need to protect the population from the virus and the need to promote economic recovery. This reflects a projected divergence of interests between older people, who are deemed at more risk from the virus, and younger people, who are deemed less at risk from virus itself but potentially more at risk from the expected economic recession in the wake of the pandemic, (Blanchflower and Bell 2020; Collinson 2020; Elliott 2020; Hill 2020; Proctor 2020). But secondly, the possibility of solidarity across generations has emerged in the public response to the pandemic and the treatment of older people living in care homes (Booth 2020; Coker 2020; Sodha 2020). This has generated greater awareness of social care and wider issues about ageing and the ways in which we look after older people with care needs.

Intergenerational relations have been explored within the academic literature prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Issues such as intergenerational equity have been increasingly addressed by social policy research (Evandrou et al. 2018; Hurley et al. 2017; Kendig et al. 2019; Spies-Butcher and Stebbing 2019) but the evidence base on intergenerational solidarity remains relatively small (Elliott O'Dare et al. 2019; Wildman et al. 2021).

This study aims to contribute to knowledge about intergenerational fairness and shared concerns between different generations. It was carried out during the summer of 2020 as the restrictions from the first Covid-19 lockdown were being lifted. This context inevitably shaped the responses to our questions as the entire county struggled to make sense and understand the changed and uncertain circumstances facing everyone. It is within this context that we are interested in exploring how dialogue between older and younger people may generate common ground and question assumptions about the intergenerational divide and negative perceptions of older people and ageing.

Methods and data collection

The study used a cross-sectional online survey which was co-designed through discussions between the partners. It comprised a self-completion survey to gather data from older and younger participants on their perceptions of intergenerational differences and issues of concern related to COVID-19. The study complied with ethical standards, including confidentiality, anonymity, data protection and received ethical approval from the University of Brighton Ethics Committee.

We used convenience sampling to recruit participants through SEEFA networks and the University of Brighton student body. Two online surveys were available between 29th June and 28th July 2020. One was sent to a younger age group 18-24 year olds which consisted of students at the University of Brighton and another survey was emailed to SEEFA members representing older participants over 70 years of age. During this time participants received email invitations and the survey data was collected using online surveys. A £40 voucher was offered in a prize draw for each age group for all respondents of the survey. The overall sample size was 214 (134 students and 80 older people).

Sample Characteristics

In the student group (total 134) the majority of respondents studied in the School of Applied Social Science (78) and School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics (50). There were 40 male and 78 female, 3 non-binary students; 92 identified as White, 10 from mixed background, 16 Asian, 5 black and 8 others. About half of the students said they have a job (69) alongside their studies and about half were shielding during lockdown (66).

There were 22 males and 58 females in the older age group (total 80); the majority of older respondents identified as White (77) and had grandchildren (72), about a third of this group were shielding (28).

Analysis

The data was analysed by the academic researchers. The closed questions were analysed initially using SPSS to describe the results for age groups and test for statistical significance where possible. The free text answers given response to the open questions were coded and analysed thematically to identify emergent themes.

Results

Results are described for the sample of students (62.6%) and older people (37.4%). Chi square tests were carried out to establish the statistical significance between the age groups for yes/no questions asked. To determine statistical significance testing for ranking questions, such as level of concern/agreement, Mann Whitney U tests were carried out and median responses were recorded. The median is the middle value (separating the higher half from the lower half of responses and therefore ignoring outliers). A statistically significant result indicates that the difference in answers between the age groups is likely to be true for the wider population of younger and older people (with a probability level of 95% ($p < .05$) likelihood to be true). We report if the result is statistically significant, and where this is not stated, this indicates that any differences in answers by age groups are random results, describing the responses for this survey only.

The full results, including tables for the statistical results and responses given in the free text examples to the qualitative questions, are available in the separate Appendix to this report.

Participants were asked if they agreed with the statement: ***Older people (over 70s) are often seen as well off and over privileged.***

- Older participants (56.3%) were more likely to report that 'older people (over 70s) are often seen as well off and over privileged than students' (14.9%). 85.1% of students thought that older people are not well off or over privileged in comparison to only 43.8% of older respondents and this difference was statistically significant $\chi^2 = 40.6$, $df = 1$, $p = .0001$).

Participants who agreed with the statement were asked to give up to three examples of why they agreed with the statement.

Similar examples were given by both groups of participants on the areas of **money**; **housing**; and perceptions about the '**baby boomer**' generation.

In relation to **money** the examples referred to older people's pensions and the assumption that many older people had final salary-linked pensions; having a secure income, less debt and disposable income. The responses from student participants reflected a belief that pensions were better for this older generation, and they have financial security through having a pension and wealth and savings accumulated over their lifetime.

In relation to **housing** both groups gave examples about home ownership, the belief that buying a house was easier in the past, and that many older people are mortgage free and have assets in their property.

Results

Both groups of participants recognised the belief in the advantages bestowed upon the **'baby boomer' generation**, such as education and employment opportunities that have benefitted this generation more than other generations. There was also recognition that the 'boomer' generation is 'blamed' and seen to be responsible for current economic and environmental problems. Some answers referred to (and/or possibly demonstrated) stereotypes about outdated attitudes of the older generation.

Participants were asked if they agreed with the statement: ***Older people (over 70s) can face discrimination and disadvantage.***

- The majority of both age groups agreed that 'older people (over 70) can face discrimination and disadvantage', 74.6% in the student group and 78.8% in the older age group.

Participants who agreed with the statement were asked to give up to three examples of why they agreed with the statement.

The largest number of examples for both groups of participants concerned **ageism and age discrimination**. The examples referred to assumptions based on old age and included older people lacking capacity and intelligence; being out of date and out of touch; older people not contributing to society, being treated as invisible and generally not being taken into consideration.

The portrayal of older people generated responses that included **lack of political voice** and representation, not being valued publicly, or through the media, often highlighted by physical appearance of age and ageing. Some examples made specific reference to the ways in which (initial) responses to **Covid-19** were based on the assumed vulnerability of anyone of the age of 70 regardless of any other factors. They also referred to the treatment of people living in residential care as directly connected to an underlying ageism in the lack of thought given to this group of older people and their care needs.

Both participant groups also gave a wide range of similar examples of the treatment older people receive because of their age. This included less access to health and care services; and a lack of understanding of potential care needs in old age; access to transport; and the lack of accessibility in public spaces, shops and buildings which do not take account of mobility, or sensory needs that may feature more for older people.

Other areas mentioned by both participant groups included **social and living conditions** which acknowledged the financial hardships facing older people, poverty and lack of pensions and barriers to accessing paid work, isolation and loneliness in old age, particularly after bereavement of a spouse.

Both groups mentioned examples of the potential exploitation or abuse of older people because of (perceived) vulnerability but there were more responses from student participants in relation to this.

Some examples related to **technology**, including that older people may lack access to the internet and may lack skills and confidence in using digital technology. Responses also referred to the difficulties created by the digital 'by default' of many routine things and the expectation that services will now be online only.

Both participant groups gave examples of **intergenerational differences** which referred to younger people's attitudes towards older people that appear to be based in ageist stereotypes. These responses indicate a recognition of the representation of conflict between generations. This included references to the 'baby boomers' as a generation benefiting at the expense of younger generations. It was unclear in some of the student participants' responses if these were their own ageist stereotypes uncritically stated as 'the facts' of old age.

Participants were asked if they agreed with the statement: ***younger people (18-25s) are often seen as worse off than previous generations***

- When asked whether 'younger people (between 18-24) are often seen as worse off than previous generations' a higher proportion of older participants (75.0%) answered 'yes' in comparison to 14.9% of student participants. This difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2=77.2$, $df=1$, $p=.000$).

Participants who agreed with the statement were asked to give up to three examples of why they agreed with the statement. For both participant groups many of the responses mirrored areas where older people are seen as privileged and well off, such as **housing** and **financial security**.

In relation to housing, the examples focused on the lack of available, affordable **housing** which means that many younger people have few options and may need to live with parents for longer. The very high costs of property in relation to wages make it very difficult to rent or buy and live independently.

Examples of **economic disadvantage and financial insecurity** included the difficulties of saving, due to low interest rates and low wages. Answers referred to financial crises, austerity and how wages have not kept pace with living costs.

There were also examples offered that connected financial hardship to the lack of **work opportunities** and the cost of living being more expensive than for previous generations; low pay and conditions, the insecure nature of jobs, such as zero hour contracts; and the difficulties of finding work.

Both participant groups offered examples of the impact of **social expectations** which create pressure on younger generations, such as **consumerism, social media, peer pressure**. These were considered to have negative impacts on younger people's mental health and generate anxiety and uncertainty about the future.

Results

Another aspect to financial disadvantage was evident in responses which referred to **education** where examples mainly reflected the high costs of university education. High university fees are seen to leave younger people indebted and mean less access to higher education for those from lower income families.

Amongst student participants, examples were given of **intergenerational issues** which reflected views that younger people were disadvantaged because of the older generation. Answers here covered a wide range of disadvantages respondents felt younger generations experience because of the actions of the older generation. This includes macro level economic issues and climate change.

There were also examples given by student participants which reflected negative stereotyping of younger people (not necessarily just by older generations) and the perceptions that younger people are lazy and over-privileged. These types of responses were not apparent amongst the older participants, although there were a few answers that reflected the perception that the younger generation does not have the same standards or values of their own generation.

Participants were asked if they agreed with the statement: **young people (between 18 – 24) can face discrimination and disadvantage**

- Student participants (74.6%) were more likely to agree that ‘young people (between 18-24) can face discrimination and disadvantage’ than older respondents (61.3%) and this difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2=4.3$, $df=1$, $p=.040$)

Participants who agreed with the statement were asked to give up to three examples of why they agreed with the statement.

Both participant groups offered many examples which referred to **stereotypes and attitudes**. These included a range of areas, such as, appearance, dress, lifestyle, values and behaviour. They included assumptions about the younger generation’s lack of life experience and knowledge which resulted in their opinions and thoughts not being taken seriously.

There were also responses from both participant groups which indicated an assumed generational difference in values and attitudes, and this included examples that suggest the discrimination younger people experience is due to the assumptions the older generation make.

There were also examples given, more from student participants than older participants, that referred to different types of discrimination younger people experience through disability, ethnic background, skin colour, gender and social class.

As in the previous question about the younger generation being worse off than previous generations, there were examples given by both participant groups that referred to factors like **housing, work** and **economic disadvantage**.

In relation to **work** answers referred to the lack of opportunities, particularly in the current situation with the pandemic; the difficulties of getting a job with no prior experience, the tough competition for few jobs and the lower pay and conditions that young people in work receive.

The **economic disadvantages** given in the examples included references to the lack of opportunities, social mobility and the exclusion from benefits because of age. These were framed as impacts from economic crises over the last 12 years and include the difficulties younger people have in establishing an independent home and family life, lack of housing options and issues of homelessness for the younger generation. Both participant groups' responses referred to the impacts on the younger generation resulting from the pandemic and current political situation.

Participants were asked if they face(d) difficulties as a younger person

- Student participants (73.1%) were more likely than older participants (51.2%) to agree that they faced difficulties as a younger person. This result was statistically significant ($\chi^2=10.54$, $df=1$, $p=.001$).

The older participants were reflecting back on their circumstances as a young person and student participants were referring to their current circumstances.

Both participant groups offered examples that referred to **education**. For the older participants these included the lack of educational opportunities for some, particularly for girls and young women and those from low-income families, the high level of competition for university places; and the end of formal education at age 15 for many people. The students' responses referred to the pressure to go to university and the high costs and debts incurred through higher education.

Both participants groups gave examples related to **employment** covering issues of low wages, unemployment and difficulties of finding work, and being treated differently in the workplace on account of age. The student participants also referred to job insecurity characterised by zero hours contracts and high competition for jobs.

Both participant groups gave examples that referred to either the **economic disadvantages** they faced when younger (older participants) or currently face (student participants). These included the costs of housing and lack of money. The older participants also referred to difficult personal circumstances related to family, poor background and social class as well different social expectations of the time. The student responses also referred to the context of the financial crises, and longer-term worries about financial security in the future.

Both participant groups gave examples which referred to **social attitudes** and the pressures these create when you are a young person. For the older participants these included reflecting on the cultural norms of behaviour of the time, which were often experienced as restrictive and limiting.

Results

The students' responses reflected the current social pressures that impact on mental health and wellbeing, such as educational achievement and pressure to be financially independent. They also gave examples such as body image and appearance, pressures around sex and the negative impacts of social media.

Both participant groups gave examples of difficulties that related to being a young age and negative assumptions that younger people face. Examples included issues around self-confidence and being seen as lacking in experience and capabilities.

For the older participants examples also reflected the gendered expectations that were prevalent when they were young. These included fewer work and career opportunities for women and the expectation that women would give up work once they got married and had children. They also reflected the lack of control over pregnancy and childbirth as contraception was not widely or freely available.

The student participants gave examples that reflected different aspects of discrimination that they experience related racism, sexuality, and disability.

Both groups referred to wider social contexts that shape and impact the experiences of younger people. Older participants reflected on their experiences of growing up during WW2 and the disruption to education, the emotional impacts of evacuation and air raids as a child, rationing and shortages.

Student participants reflected on the contemporary challenges facing them related to political uncertainty, climate change and the pressure on the younger generation to address these issues. Some of the responses reflected a generational aspect, and a view that the difficulties the current younger generation face are a direct consequence of an older generation's actions or behaviour.

Student participants were asked if they think that **things were easier for the current generation of older people (over 70s) when they were young** and older participants were asked if they think **things were easier for you as a younger person than the current younger generation**.

- Older participants (62.5%) thought it was easier for them as a younger person than for the current younger generation. Whereas only 36.6% of student participants thought it was easier for the current generation of older people (over 70s) when they were young. This difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2=13.55$, $df=1$, $p=.0001$) with older participants more likely to think that it was easier for their generation of older people when there were young.

Participants who agreed with the statement were asked to give up to three examples of why they agreed with the statement. Both participant groups gave similar examples in relation to **employment, housing and education**.

Examples related to **employment** referred to the greater availability of jobs and work opportunities. They also reflected the better terms and conditions of work, such as good pensions and greater job security.

In relation to **housing** examples included the costs and availability of housing, with shared views across both groups that housing, whether rented or buying was easier relative to wages, and more social housing was available.

In relation to **education** examples referred to free higher education, including student grants rather than loans. Some older participants referred to the standard of education and less emphasis on testing and assessment. Whilst some student participants referred to less pressure to go university in the past.

Student participants also gave examples which reflected a better **economic situation** contributing more generally to better living standards. These included the costs of living being more affordable relative to wages, better funded public services and benefits.

Both participant groups gave examples related to the different **social norms and expectations** that existed when the current older generation were young. There was some similarity in the responses of both participant groups regarding less social pressure from consumerism and social media, with fewer expectations of material choices and travel.

The responses from older participants reflected more restrictive social structures and class and gender inequalities which impacted educational access. Some responses from the student participants referred to more restrictive and oppressive norms around sexuality and expression.

Responses from student participants also indicated that they thought social conditions were not necessarily better or worse, just different to today.

Older participants were asked if they think **life has generally improved over their lifetime**.

- 87.5% of older participants said they think that life generally has improved over their lifetime. Student participants were not asked this question.

Student participants were asked if they think that **there are opportunities and benefits in life now that were not available in the past for today's older people (over 70s)**

- 88.1% of student participants said they think there are opportunities and benefits in life now that were not available in the past for today's older people (over 70s). Older participants were not asked this question.

Participants were asked to give up to three examples to explain their answer. Both participant groups gave examples in **health and medicine, technology and communication, living standards** and **social attitudes** which illustrate a shared understanding of areas where life had generally improved.

Results

In relation to **health and medicine** examples included improvements in medical knowledge and better healthcare which has impacted increased life expectancy. The NHS was referred to as fundamental to improvements in health and better access to healthcare. Improvements in awareness of mental health and less stigma attached to mental health were also mentioned.

Both participant groups offered examples related to **technology and communication**. Answers referred to the ways in which technology has enabled communication and the impacts of this, from greater work opportunities, learning and education, personal connections and keeping in touch with people. Older participants also referred to technological developments which have led to improvements in domestic appliances, and radio communication and improvements in engineering.

In relation to **living standards** examples from both participant groups covered a wide range of areas from generally improved standards of living in relation to housing, financial aspects such as wages and access to credit, having more disposable income to longer life expectancy.

There were also examples in both participant groups that referred to the increased availability of consumer products, such as food and clothing; greater opportunities to travel all over the world.

In relation to **social attitudes** both participants groups referred to more tolerance of differences, improvements in gender equality and less discrimination based on disability, ethnicity and sexuality.

There were fewer examples given by both participant groups in relation to **employment and education**, although areas that were mentioned here included increased educational opportunities and access to higher education, new career paths and opportunities linked to technology.

Participants were asked if they agreed with the statement: ***life generally has got worse over your lifetime?***

- A higher proportion of student participants (38.8%) than older participants (25.0%) thought that life has generally got worse over their lifetime. This result was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.28$, $df=1$, $p=.039$).

Participants who agreed with the statement were asked to give up to three examples of why they agreed with the statement.

There were responses from both participant groups in relation to **living conditions**. Examples given referred to income inequality, poverty, financial insecurity, housing and unemployment and employment conditions.

Image 4: Older participants' description of their generation



The word clouds are a graphic representation of intergenerational differences and perceptions held by both participant groups about their own generation and the other generation. There are similarities in the descriptions of the older generation by both groups with **experienced**, **caring**, and **lonely** appearing in both word clouds. However, there were also divergences, such as **vulnerable** as the most prominent word that the student participants used to describe older people. In contrast, older participants used words such as, **resilient**, **comfortable** and **relaxed** to describe people of their generation. The older participants used a number of the same words to describe both generations, including more negative descriptions, such as **complacent** and **intolerant**. The student participants used noticeably different words to describe each generation with only the word **hardworking** appearing to describe both older and younger people.

Participants were asked to rate their concern about: getting the virus; their health (not Covid-19 related); the health of their family (living in different households); their wellbeing; the wellbeing of their family (living in different households); losing their job; financial worries; social isolation; childcare arrangements for children/grand children

Table 1 shows the average levels of current concern for younger and older people for a range of aspects. Both age groups showed the most concern for the health and wellbeing of their families living in a different household. Statistically significant different results were recorded for younger people who showed a higher average level of current concern for personal wellbeing, financial worries and social isolation than the older age group.

Results

Table 1: Average levels (medians) of current concerns for a range of aspects by age group

	Student participants	Older participants
Getting the virus	3	4
My health not Covid-19 related	3	3
Health of my family in different households	4	4
My Wellbeing	4*	3*
Wellbeing of my family in different households	4	4
Losing job	3	1
Financial worries	4*	2*
Social isolation	4*	2*
Childcare worries	2	2

*statistically significant $p < .05$

Medians (the middle value in a sorted list of responses) are presented and refer to the following categories: 1- not at all concerned, 2- not concerned, 3- neither not concerned nor concerned, 4- concerned, 5 - very concerned

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement for the following statements:

The government has done enough to protect older people who are deemed more at health risk from the virus during the pandemic

- The student group were more likely to disagree (Median = 4 (disagree)) than the older age group (Median = 3 (neither agree nor disagree)). This difference was statistically significant (U (student group = 143, older age group = 80) = 4131, $z = -2.89$, $p = .004$).

The government has done enough to protect younger people who are deemed more at economic risk during the pandemic

- Student participants (Median = 4 (disagree)) were more likely to disagree with the statement than older participants (Median = 3 (neither agree nor disagree)). This result was statistically significant (U (student group = 143, older age group = 80) = 3317, $z = -4.81$, $p = .0001$).

Participants were asked if ***social care and support has been an important factor for them and their family during Covid-19***

- 22.4% of student participants and 17.5% of older participants have said that social care and support has been an important factor for them and their family during Covid-19.

- Similar proportions for both participant groups had someone in their family who receives social care, 11.9% of students and 11.3% of older participants. Of those, 7 (43.8%) received care in their own home and 9 (56.3%) in a residential care home for students and for older participants it was 4 (44.4%) in their own home and 5 (55.6%) in a residential home.

Participants were asked: ***has the government done enough to protect care home residents?***

- Student participants answered with 6.0% yes, 67.9% no, 26.1% unsure and by older participants with 73.8% no and 26.3% unsure.

Participants were asked: ***were you confident in the social care system before the Covid-19 pandemic?***

- Older participants were less likely to be confident (Median = 2 (not confident)) in the social care system before the Covid-19 pandemic than student participants (Median = 3 (neither confident nor not confident)). This difference was statistically significant U (student group = 143, older age group = 80) = 3439, $z = -4.62$, $p = .0001$.

Participants were asked: ***are you confident in the social care system during the Covid-19 pandemic?***

- Older participants were also less likely to be confident (Median = 2 (not confident)) in the social care system during the Covid-19 pandemic than student participants (Median = 3 (neither confident nor not confident)). This difference was also statistically significant U (student group = 143, older age group = 80) = 3508, $z = -4.41$, $p = .0001$.

Participants were asked if ***they have given any thought about their own need for social care or support now or in the future?***

- Older participants (75.0%) were more likely to have thought about their own needs for social care and support than student participants (25.4%). This result was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 50.1$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$).

Participants were asked to explain their answer. Older participants cited the **costs of future care** as an area of social care they had thought about. Answers included awareness of the costs of care and the likelihood that care costs will need to come out of own funds. Some responses indicate planning around finances and discussions with family members. Others indicate concern about the costs without any specific plans in place and whether care required will be affordable, fears that it may involve selling their home.

Results

Other responses indicated that older participants had thought about their **care preferences**. Answers referred to possible options, including living in their own home or residential care. Many responses indicated concerns about the availability and quality of care, family members looking after them and negative perceptions about social care provision and considering what happened in care homes during the pandemic.

Although less student participants responded that social care was something that they had thought about, those who had, gave similar examples to the older participants. These included concerns about the **costs of care** and **negative perceptions** of the social care system. Some indicated prior knowledge due their own or a family member's care needs. Others indicated more awareness of social care because of the pandemic.

There were responses from both groups of participants (although more from student participants) that indicated that social care was not something they had thought about. The responses included care was not needed at present, life is too busy with other things, avoidance as a difficult area to think about. Some student participant's responses also reflected a lack of knowledge about social care or could not imagine personally needing care because it would be too far into the future.

Participants were asked: ***in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic which do you think the government should focus on more – the economy or people's well-being?***

- Student participants were more likely to state that the government should focus on wellbeing (36.6%) in comparison to the older age group (15.0%). 75.0% of the older respondents thought economy and wellbeing are equally important for the government to focus on compared to 59.7% of student respondents. These differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2=13.2$, $df=2$, $p=.001$).

Participants were asked to ***describe the current care system with three words***. Word clouds were produced from the answers given for each age group. Larger and bolder words were mentioned more frequently.

Image 5: Student participants' descriptions of the current care system

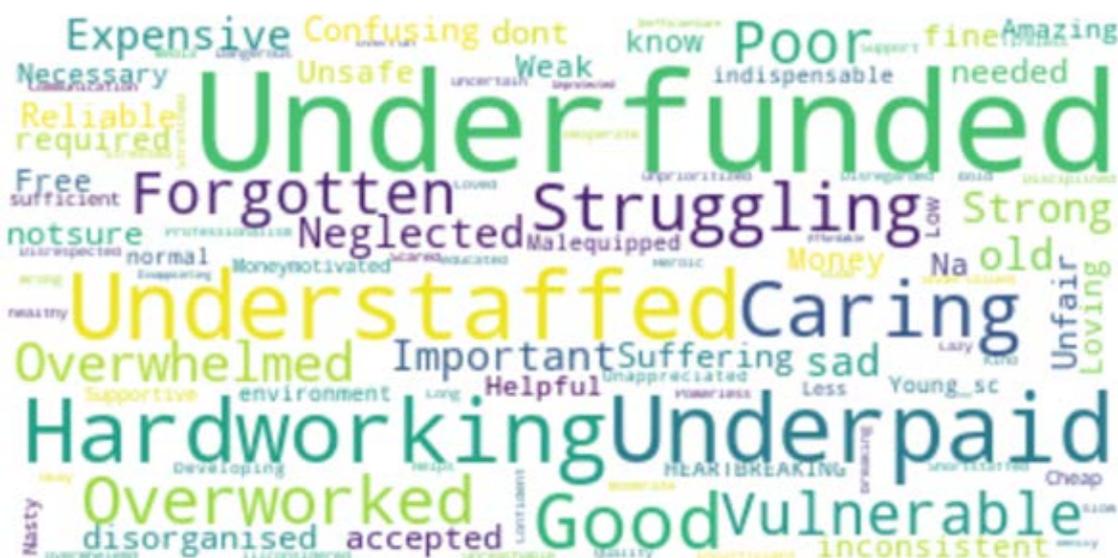


Image 6: Older participants' descriptions of the current care system



Answers from both age groups reported shared concerns about the current care system in terms of it not having enough funds to operate effectively.

Participants were asked to **rate their concern that the pandemic has raised in relation major 'political' issues: access to essential services and supplies; climate change; the economy; education; employment; immigration; NHS funding; provision of social care; any other issues.** (rated by: not at all concerned; not concerned; neither not concerned nor concerned; concerned; very concerned)

Results

- Concerns for a range of major 'political' issues during the pandemic are reported in table 2. Most concerns were equally shared in both age groups. Statistical differences were found for the economy, although the difference between the age groups was small (both groups reported a median of 4), older participants were slightly more concerned (Mean= 4.3, SD=.62) than student participants (Mean= 3.95, SD=.1.01). Another statistical difference was found where older participants were more likely to be 'very concerned' about the provision of social care where student participants reported they were 'concerned'.

Table 2: Average levels of concerns for a range of major 'political' issue by age group

	Student participants	Older participants
Access to essential services and supplies	4	4
Climate crisis	4	4
The Economy	4*	4*
Education	4*	4
Employment	5	4
Immigration	3	3.5
NHS funding	5	4
Provision of social care	4*	5*

*statistically significant $p < .05$

Medians (the middle value in a sorted list of responses) are presented and refer to the following categories: 1- not at all concerned, 2- not concerned, 3-neither not concerned nor concerned, 4-concerned, 5 - very concerned

Participants were asked **if the current pandemic raised concerns about any other major 'political' issue?**

- 37.5% (30) of older participants and 26.1% (35) of student participants had concerns about other issues.

Participants were asked to give details. Both participant groups gave responses that indicated concerns about **social and political** issues following the pandemic. These included issues concerning local government and further nationalisation of the NHS, inequality, populist politics, racism and hostility to migrants, worries about the younger generation, anxiety and mental health.

Both participant groups expressed concerns about **Covid-19**. This included the government's management of the pandemic, further transmission of the virus and possible spikes or waves, and the disruption to education.

Participants were asked if **they thought that the impact of Covid-19 could fundamentally change society?**

- 67.5% of older participants said yes, 1.3% answered no and 31.3 were unsure. The student group responded similarly 67.2% said yes, 7.5% no and 25.4% were unsure.

Participants were asked to give details for their answer. The largest areas of change that both participant groups spoke about concerned **values and social attitudes**. Answers referred to changed values and a process of reassessment of what is important because of the pandemic. There were two different views, one a positive interpretation of more community-mindedness and awareness of human interdependence leading to a 'kinder' attitude towards others. The other more negative which envisaged more selfish and individualistic attitudes and behaviour.

Both groups of participants identified **economic, social and political impacts** as areas of societal change. Answers from both groups referred to different impacts related to age, with older people living more restricted lives for fear of the virus, young people experiencing the loss of education and work experience; increased inequalities arising out of the expected economic recession; increased mental health needs; increased mistrust in governments and changed political priorities and challenging the complacency of governments.

Both groups of participants also referred to the impact of Covid-19 on **employment**. Answers referred to different ways of working, including remote online working, more reliance on technology, potential flexibility and less travelling for people with jobs. There were also references to unemployment and the impacts particularly on younger people and less job security due to economic situation.

Both participant groups talked about the impacts on the **environment**. Answers referred to increased awareness of environmental issues brought about by changes in travel, an appreciation of living less materialistically, our relationship to the natural world and the impacts of this for creating policies on climate change.

Discussion

This study has explored how ideas about older and younger generations were expressed in the sample of students and older participants within the context of assumptions about an intergenerational divide.

Within the survey, there were opportunities for participants to expand on the answers given to the closed questions. This has provided the qualitative data giving some context to the quantitative results and these provide a useful starting point to develop more understanding about intergenerational relations and examine the impacts of generational unfairness discourses on younger and older people. We include some of the free text answers participants gave as illustrative quotes here.

The generational divide is usually expressed in terms of older people enjoying benefits and privileges while younger people face difficulties and challenges, the underlying implication being that the former exists at the expense of the latter (eg Willetts 2010). It might, therefore, be expected that younger people would have a strong sense of unfairness and little tolerance of any proposition that older people do experience discrimination and disadvantage.

Able to buy a home when house prices were affordable
(older participant)

(older people) Had the time to accumulate wealth
(student)

However, the survey results show that there is a consensus among the student participants that older people do experience discrimination and disadvantage, and that there is a clear understanding on their part that age stereotypes are prevalent in society.

Some see old people as frail and in need of help and talk to them condescendingly
(student)

Discussion

Similarly, the majority of older participants do recognise that younger people are worse off than previous generations. Indeed, a higher proportion of older participants believe this to be the case than do the student participants.

The level of stress for young people is much higher and the pressures on them from capitalism is 24/7.
(older participant)

As young people they are at the bottom of the pay structure. Wages have not increased significantly over the past decade. They are struggling to pay rent
(older participant)

Although there were a few examples of responses which reflect negative stereotypes in both participant groups, our findings indicate many shared concerns in both generations. They also show that the student participants had extensive awareness about age discrimination and ageism and the issues that confront older people.

Truly dreadful negligence by the current government to send thousands of potential covid-19 cases untested into care homes (older participant)

Discrimination - during this pandemic senior homes have been hit hard and not protected. (student)

The impact of Covid-19 on school, college and university education has been considerable. Some young people may have managed well, but others have experienced a major disadvantage with significant implications for later job opportunities (older participant)

Similarly, the older participants' responses indicate concern and awareness about the issues that the younger generation experience.

Responses from both groups of participants demonstrate an awareness of the discourse of intergenerational conflict, the blaming of 'boomers' but these were not largely prevalent and did not feature to any large extent in either group's responses.

Because people think they ruined the economy (student)

Accusations of stealing the younger generations finances (older participant)

Rather there was a synergy over the shared concerns about economic, social and political issues.

Neglect in care of elderly people in care homes... there is less funding or accessible support for older people (student)

Social care provision for older people is poor and underfunded and reflects the extent to which older people are not seen as a priority. (Older participant)

Those promoting a generational divide highlight the fact that younger people currently face difficulties while older people 'had it easier' when they were young (Bristow 2020). While the older respondents themselves appear to agree with this proposition, the student participants were less convinced that this is the case. Overall, there appears to be a mutual recognition of the challenges each generation is facing or has faced, and among the respondents to the survey there is little evidence of any appetite for a 'race to the bottom' in terms of which generation is worse off.

While the majority of older respondents felt that their lives had generally improved over their lifetime, the majority of students thought they were in a position to take advantage of opportunities and benefits that were not available to older people when they were younger. The majority of student respondents indicated that they feel that

Discussion

their generation faces many challenges and difficulties there is a clear acknowledgment that any comparison between generations is complex and nuanced.

Advances in technology have created new jobs that simply didn't exist for older generations (student)

There was massive discrimination against many disabled people and their carers when I was younger more opportunities to change and try new things, not such rigid male and female roles (older person)

The qualitative findings summarised above indicate the complexity of generational understanding and the need for deeper conversations to explore similarities and differences. They highlight areas for further study and suggest that the stereotypes that abound in discourses of intergenerational conflict do not represent an accurate picture of what either generation thinks or believes in relation to their own generation or other generations.

One limitation of this report is the sample of research participants is not representative for the age groups it corresponds to. The sample included a large proportion of students studying social science related degrees who may have a higher awareness of the social and political issues surveyed. Further, it needs to be pointed out that students only form one part of the 18-24 year age group. Similarly, the sample of older participants drawn from SEEFA networks will not necessarily reflect responses for the older population more widely across the country. However, both age groups could be seen as fairly homogenous in their views and opinions.

The significant level of common ground and mutual understanding across both generations of survey respondents suggests that more extensive dialogue between younger and older people would be productive in casting further light on the issues explored in this study. The willingness of younger and older people to work together better to understand each other carries the potential to demonstrate [a] that intergenerational differences do not have to result in intergenerational conflict, and [b] that blaming one generation for the challenges faced by another can obscure the root causes of the disadvantage experienced by both.

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