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In this series, our researchers welcome experts in the field and those giving or receiving care to discuss crucial issues in social care. As we collectively attempt to make a positive difference to how care is experienced and provided.

How Language Matters- Introduction with Majella Kilkey and Jayanthi Lingham

Majella Kilkey:

Hello. My name is Majella Kilkey, I'm professor of social policy at the University of Sheffield, where I'm also a co-investigator in the Centre for Care. And in the Centre for Care, I lead the research group 'Care Trajectories and Constraints'.

Jayanthi Lingham:

Hi everyone. My name is Jayanthi Lingham and I am a research associate in the centre for care here at Sheffield and I'm working with Majella within the research group Care Trajectories and Constraints, and we're working together on a research study called Borders in Care, which is looking at the lived experiences of people who have crossed international borders, who are now in the UK and have care, experiences and needs.

So this is an introduction to a podcast mini series, which is called How Language Matters, and it's part of the Centre's care Matters podcast series. In our early co-production work, it became quite clear to us that it's really important for us to think about the language that we use around care when we're communicating our research and when we're communicating with potential research participants.

And the language that we use needs to be reflective of people's realities. For example, the terms that we use when we're talking about carers, do we use the term unpaid carers or informal carer to describe what people do? Do we even use the word carer? How reflective is it of the reality that people provide and receive and need care all at the same time?

Another issue that has come up, particularly in the Borders and Care study, relates to how we use language in the process of doing research. So we can't assume that people will communicate in English or even a dominant other language, such as Hindi or French. And we need to make sure that that the language tools that we use in research are inclusive.

And we also need to be aware that people communicate non-verbally as well as verbally, and may prefer to communicate and participate in research with us non-verbally. So we

want to pick up on these and other matters, and we're doing so in this podcast mini series. The themes and topics that we're going to cover in the rest of the mini series are not actually specific to their research group. Care trajectories and constraints, or to borders and care. They're relevant, we think, to all of the research that's been carried out within the centre for care.

Majella Kilkey:

So in this introduction to the podcast mini series, we want to set out some of the common themes we intend to run through the series as a whole. These themes were identified in collaboration with the centre for Care Voice Forum, and we gratefully acknowledge the valuable contribution Voice Forum members have made. So in total, we have four key themes that we want to introduce in this introduction.

Jayanthi Lingham:

And actually, as you were saying, Majella, the Voice forum has played a really valuable role in helping signpost what these common themes are going to be. And one of the dominant ones that that one of them raised is a bigger question. We're talking about language in this mini series, but it's talking about language, a distraction from talking about the real issues.

So we need to really be aware all the way throughout this series that it's not enough to only change our language. We also need to be thinking about how do we challenge the structures, the economic structures, the political structures, the social structures that are preventing people from receiving and getting good care?

Majella Kilkey:

So going back to an example, you introduced at the beginning the debate around the language on paid care versus informal care, unpaid carers versus informal carers. One could argue that that is, that debate is a distraction from the real issue, which is that this critical role in our society is undervalued and it's insufficiently rewarded financially. Shouldn't our attention be focussed on changing those conditions rather than arguing and debating over the terminology?

I've just said that, but I'm also thinking, though, that language remains really important because language is a vital tool for recognition.

Jayanthi Lingham:

And keeping with that example that you gave, I guess using the term unpaid carer rather than anything else does explicitly draw our attention to the fact that what the person is doing is labour, its work, and that they're not being paid for this work so it can signpost us to those bigger structural issues and to the things that need to be changed.

A third issue that we discussed with our Voice forum colleagues is the fact that language can be stigmatising.

Majella Kilkey:

So an example here, I think, is in the use of terms such as dependent and dependency. So these are terms that are commonly used to describe people who receive care. But I think that kind of language constructs people as passive, as lacking in agency and can ignore the reality that the care relationships are frequently interdependent and people can be at the same time both giving care and receiving care.

Majella Kilkey:

And this is certainly what we're finding in our work on borders and care. But for example, older people that we're interviewing, they may need care. They may receive care themselves from their adult children, but they're also doing a lot of work for their adult children, a lot of care work that they're looking after, the children, that picking them up from school and really taking care of their families. So we need to ensure that the language we use is reflective of those realities.

Jayanthi Lingham:

And I think, as you've said in previous discussions, that you and I have had, that this is a matter that has been raised consistently by the disabled rights movement.

Majella Kilkey:

So the final theme that we're going to introduce and run through the series is the issue of the language used within the social care system itself and by the professionals who work within it. A voice for our members told us that they experience that language is often opaque, and this also constantly changing. They explained that those factors working together mean that people who do not know the right language. So what's the right language to use to get the services, the support that they need, that these people risk being excluded and having their needs are met.

Jayanthi Lingham:

So these are the key themes that will run throughout the podcast mini series, and we're really looking forward to picking up on these throughout. And we will have a range of different episodes covering different topics. And in those we will have a range of guests with different types of expertise who we will discuss these with. So thank you very much and we're looking forward to creating the mini series.