The experiences of early career academics from health and social care registered professions – A survey of academic staff

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Objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to obtain experiences of academics who transitioned from clinical roles by addressing the following objectives:

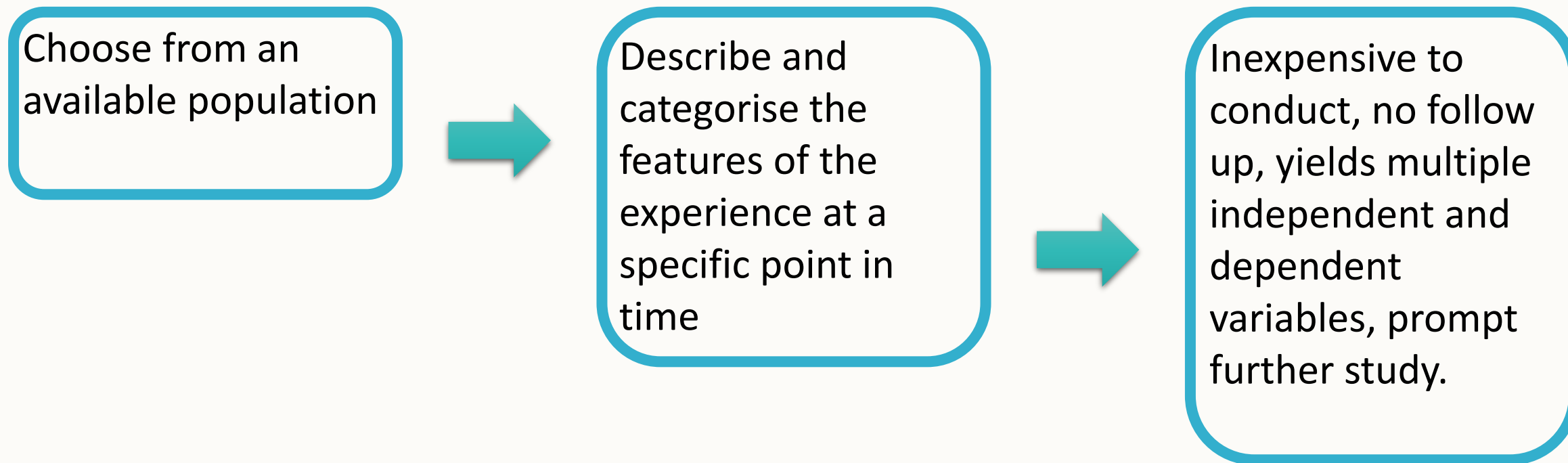1. Ascertaining prior understanding of the academic role.

2. Understanding motivations to transition to academia.

3. Determining whether expectations reflect reality.

4. Identifying support needs for successful transition.

Design and methods:
Descriptive cross-sectional study

Choose from an available population

Describe and categorise the features of the experience at a specific point in time

Inexpensive to conduct, no follow up, yields multiple independent and dependent variables, prompt further study.

Wang and Cheng, (2020); Capili, (2021)

Sample

Inclusion criteria: Registered health/social care professionals who had made the transition from a clinical to academic role.

Electronic invite via all academic staff networks known to the research team & via other social networks including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. National and international responses.

122 survey responses; 103 females, 89.3% UK participants, 65.6% nurses. Average years as clinician was 14.49 (SD 8.44), average age at time of transition was 39.99 (SD 8.28), average length of time in academia was 4.36 years (SD 6.51) and most were employed as a senior lecturer (36.9%) or lecturer (28.7%).

Data Collection

1. Validated Career Transition Inventory (CTI - assesses psychological resources related to career change) (Heppner et.al. 1994) adapted and modified for relevance to study 72 items all answered on a 6-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

2. Validated 100-item HEXACO personality inventory (Ashton and Lee, 2004) was used to explore personality factors on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

3. Demographic questions, including age, gender, and ethnicity, were constructed using recognised demographic data templates and additional questions to gather data on profession, length in service, and job roles were included

4. Five open questions were included to enrich the data collection (table one). This questionnaire was piloted and amended prior to dissemination.

And ethics!

1. Why did you make the transition from a clinical role to an academic role?

2. What 3 pieces of advice would have helped you in your transition from a clinician to an academic?

3. What was the most important support you received, or missed, in your new academic role?

4. What were the most stressful aspects of your new role?

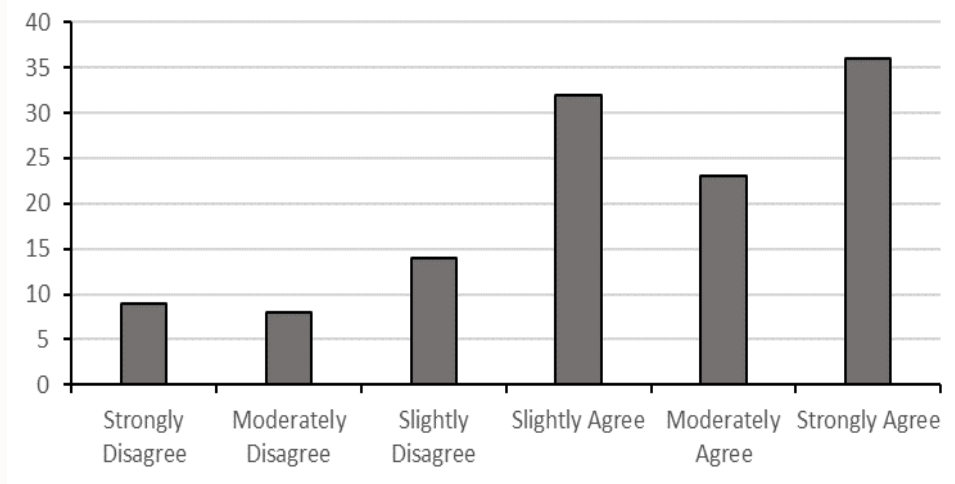5. What were the most rewarding aspects of your new role?

Results - CTI

"I felt like a novice again" showed strong agreement with 73% either strongly or moderately agreeing.
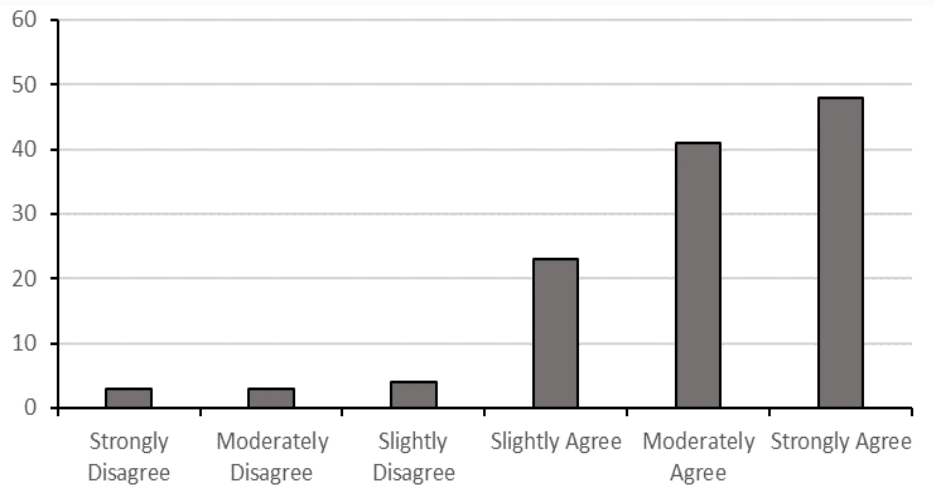
"I felt overwhelmed in my first year of academia" had high levels of agreement
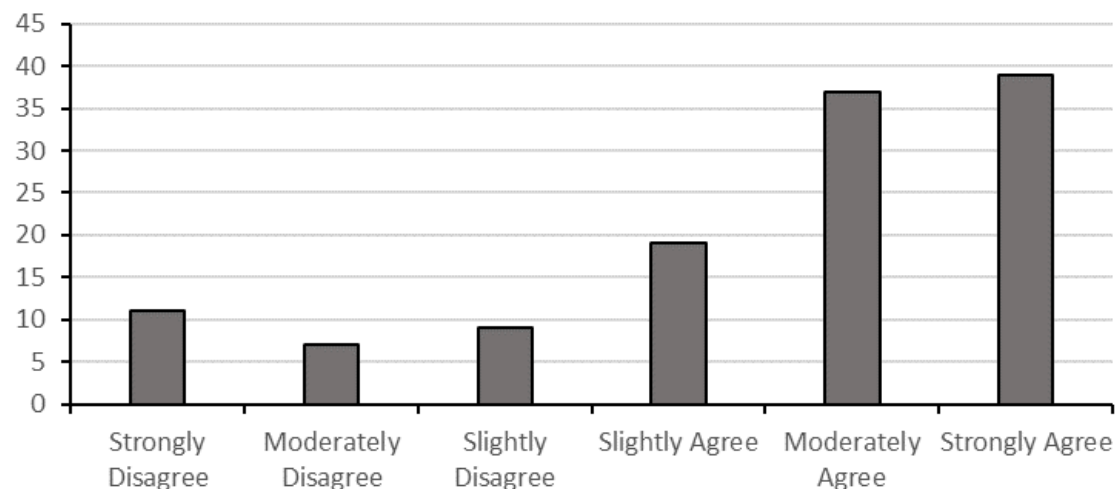

Both items suggest that the transition to academia was a difficult process for most participants.

However, most participants also agreed with the statement **"my line manager supported me during my probationary period"** suggesting that help was received when required but this may not have moderated the feeling of being overwhelmed.

There was agreement with the statement **"I felt as though I had made the right decision to move from a clinical/professional role to an academic role"** suggesting that, despite the challenges faced in transitioning, most participants felt it was a good decision.
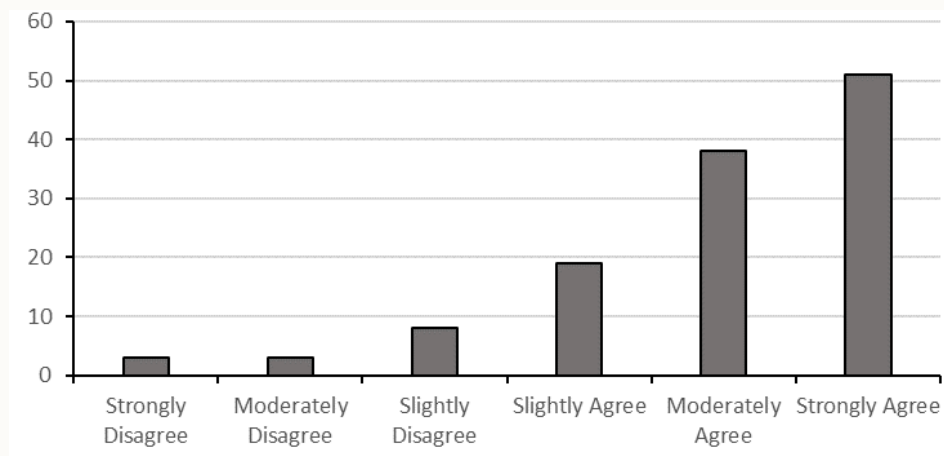
Correlations with HEXACO

HEXACO factor **Extraversion** had weak positive correlations with scores on the CTI factors Readiness (r = .29, p = .001), Confidence (r = .21, p = .021), Control (r = .25, p = .005), and Perceived Support (r = .21, p = .018).

Suggests those who are higher in extraversion are better able to deal with the transition from a clinical role to an academic role.

HEXACO factor **Agreeableness** also showed a weak positive correlation with the CTI factors Control (r = .25, p = .006) and Perceived Support (r = .24, p = .009)

Suggests those who are more agreeable are likely to feel more in control of their transition to academia, and to feel more supported.

HEXACO factor **Openness** to Experience had a weak positive correlation with the CTI factors Readiness (r = .21, p = .019) and Confidence (r = .19, p = .039)

Suggests the more open one is to new experiences, the more likely they are to feel ready and confident in their career transition.

My transition from a clinical role to an academic role was fundamentally driven by a need to do something different

Sub themes

- I wanted to progress in my career and needed a new challenge
- I did not want to go into management
- I wanted to engage in scholarship and research activities
- I became disillusioned in practice, and the physical and emotional stress was impacting on my wellbeing
- I want to have a positive impact on the development of future professionals

Qualitative data – Theme two

My expectations did not reflect reality

Sub themes

- I expected a favourable work life balance
- I was not prepared for the reality of the workload
- I did not appreciate the complexity of pastoral support
- I did not think I would spend so much time on administrative tasks
- There is a whole load of new bureaucracy in Higher Education
- Learning how to use the University learning platforms was a challenge
- I thought teaching would be the easy part
- I went from being an expert to feeling like a complete novice and an imposter, but that's okay
- Studying for a further qualification in your first year is stressful

You need a lot of support, and this can have such an impact on your experience

Sub themes

- It took a while to understand my role and what was required of me
- Find a good mentor
- A supportive line manager can make all the difference
- Developing good relationships with colleagues is so important
- Getting to grips with marking takes time

Education has been such a transformative experience for me

Sub themes

- Seeing that 'penny drop' moment
- Receiving positive feedback is so motivating
- Seeing the students develop and progress is really fulfilling
- Being a personal tutor is so rewarding
- I have developed so much personally

Discussion

- Work role transitions are any change in employment status and any **major change in job content**, transitioning to a new role can have a powerful impact on that person's future development and on their organisation (Nicholson, 1984).

- The move from a clinical to academic role can be exciting yet it "*marks a period of brutal dis-orientation*" (Massey et.al. 2019, pg. 3371).

- A "*disconnect*" between expectation and reality (Chen et.al. 2023, pg. 3).

- **Job novelty** - the similarity between the new and old role (transferable knowledge, skills, habits). Low job novelty is reflective of the old role but minimal opportunity for development. High job novelty, gives less opportunity to replicate familiar knowledge and skills, but more personal learning and development (Nicholson,1984).

Recommendations

Identify a) the scale of the recruitment crisis faced by higher education institutions and b) what can be done to address the recruitment and retention of academics in higher education institutions

Pilot a preceptorship and induction package (that includes aspects of socialisation as well as skills development) with a robust longitudinal evaluation to measure the impact of more formalised and consistent preparation and support on the experience, progression and self-measured performance of new academics who have transitioned from clinical practice.

References

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Thank you for listening