

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence Predicts Interest in High-Impact, Long-Term Oriented Careers

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Received: 19 September 2025 | **Revised:** 22 June 2026 | **Accepted:** 20 July 2026

Keywords: career choice | impartial intergenerational beneficence | intergenerational concern | longtermism | prosociality

ABSTRACT

People spend around 80,000 h working in their lifetimes, making career choices highly impactful for personal and societal outcomes. This research explores whether impartial intergenerational beneficence (IIB)—the belief that future lives deserve high and equal moral consideration to present lives—predicts interest in future-oriented, high-impact careers. In Study 1 ($N = 1133$), undergraduates with IIB showed greater intention to pursue long-term impact careers. In Study 2 ($N = 916$), working adults with IIB perceived their careers as more beneficial to future society, though external/third-party ratings did not confirm this. Study 3 ($N = 816$) found that an IIB-based thought experiment increased concern for future generations, but not career-related behaviour. Individual differences in concern for future generations predicted increased interest in pursuing impactful paths. Across these three studies, IIB, in addition to intergenerational concern, was consistently linked to long-term career intentions, suggesting it may be a key factor in shaping future-oriented, high-impact careers.

1 | Introduction

Scholars across disciplines, from ethics to economics, have long argued that humanity has a moral imperative to prioritise the well-being of future generations (e.g., Parfit 1984; Raworth 2018; Bostrom 2013). As the far-reaching consequences of present-day decisions become increasingly evident amidst pressing challenges such as climate change, artificial intelligence governance and biodiversity loss, discussions about how people today can make a meaningful impact on the collective future are becoming all the more important. These conversations span philosophy (e.g., longtermism; MacAskill 2022; Ord 2021), psychology (Caviola et al. 2021; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos,

O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024), management (George et al. 2016) and public discourse (McLamb 2022), reflecting a growing societal recognition of our obligations to those who will come after us—not just in the decades ahead, but in the centuries and millennia that will follow. Yet, despite this interest, research consistently highlights a temporal bias in decision-making; even individuals who care about the near-term future tend to prioritise immediate concerns over long-term outcomes, limiting the motivation to take action on behalf of distant future generations (Coleman and DeSteno 2024; Hauser et al. 2014; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Markowitz, et al. 2023; Syropoulos, Watkins, et al. 2023; Syropoulos, Law, Amormino, and

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Young 2024; Wade-Benzoni and Tost 2009). This bias is often linked to a basic decay in the moral responsibility people feel for others as they are represented farther away in time (Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024) that is compounded by uncertainty about whether future-oriented actions will actually make a difference (Law et al. 2024). Given these barriers, what kinds of choices might allow people to act on concern for future generations in ways that feel feasible and effective?

Career choice may offer one promising answer. People spend much of their waking lives at work, making it one of the most sustained and practical domains through which to pursue future-oriented goals (MacAskill 2022; Singer 2015). Psychological research has begun to identify subsets of the population who defy tendencies to discount the welfare of distant future targets (see Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025). Yet, while much research in this domain has focused on how far-future concern predicts isolated behaviours and intentions, such as donating to future-focused causes or supporting relevant policies (e.g., Paek et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024), career decisions may offer a more concrete and tractable means of reducing risks to future generations. Organisations like 80,000 Hours have emphasised this point, arguing that career choice is among the most significant avenues for long-term impact (80,000 Hours 2023).

Using a combination of impact evaluations and expert interviews, such organisations have identified fields like AI safety, climate policy, biosecurity and global health as especially actionable paths for those seeking to help humanity over long timeframes. Here, we test whether individuals who express exceptional concern for future generations, especially those who believe people have a moral obligation to help others no matter when in time they live, are more likely to pursue careers aimed at shaping the far future. Of course, career choices require considerable and often lifelong dedication. They are shaped by many practical and contextual constraints (Hirschi 2010). Thus, it remains plausible that lofty moral beliefs about the welfare of temporally-distant, hypothetical populations (e.g., Paek et al. 2024; Wade-Benzoni and Tost 2009) alone might not invariably translate into such high-stakes domains as professional commitment. Nonetheless, drawing on disparate insights from research on intergenerational concern (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025; Law, Colaizzi, et al. 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2025; Law, Young, and Syropoulos 2025) and from the literatures at the intersections of vocational behaviour with prosociality (e.g., Nesje 2015), moral identity (Aquino and Reed 2002) and work meaningfulness (Allan 2017; Rosso et al. 2010), we reason that such a relationship is likely. Moreover, we contend that such a relationship is worth studying, as it can reveal who is drawn to careers that benefit future generations tomorrow while also enhancing purpose and well-being for workers today (e.g., Manalili et al. 2025).

1.1 | The Emerging Psychology of (Long-Term) Intergenerational Concern

Intergenerational concern (IGC) refers to the degree to which individuals care about the welfare of future generations. While

psychological research has examined IGC through multiple lenses, including moral obligation (Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024), legacy motives (e.g., Zaval et al. 2015) and concern for distant future others (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025), perhaps the most compelling insight is that IGC reflects a powerful form of expansive prosociality (e.g., Law et al. 2024). Unlike most prosocial behaviour, which tends to prioritise close, present and identifiable others (Caviola et al. 2021), IGC extends moral concern to individuals who are temporally, socially and psychologically distant—those who are simultaneously anonymous, hypothetical and not yet born (Syropoulos, Law, Amormino, and Young 2024; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024; Wade-Benzoni and Tost 2009). Some of this concern reflects a sense of moral responsibility to safeguard the future, as well as a desire to leave behind a lasting, positive legacy (Agneman et al. 2024; Watkins and Goodwin 2020; Zaval et al. 2015). These motivations have been linked to a range of future-oriented behaviours, including climate action, sustainability efforts and intergenerational solidarity (Syropoulos et al. 2026; Vlasceanu et al. 2024).

Yet, perhaps the most psychologically distinctive form of IGC involves concern for the *far* future: people who may live hundreds or even thousands of years from now (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025). This temporal expansion of moral regard reflects a truly exceptional and far-reaching form of prosociality, extending care well beyond conventional time horizons. Importantly, recent research suggests that concern for future generations is not at odds with concern for those in the present. Instead, individuals who express greater concern for the far future are also more likely to care about socially distant others who are already living now, including present-day outgroups and marginalised communities (Capozzoli et al. 2025; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024). This overlap suggests that the cognitive, affective and moral processes that support concern for distant future generations, such as empathy (Coleman and DeSteno 2024), moral expansiveness (Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025) and imagination (Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026, Law et al. 2024), mirror those that support concern for distant others more generally (be it in time, or in space). In this way, intergenerational concern may reflect a broader prosocial orientation towards inclusivity across broad dimensions of psychological distance.

Despite this growing literature which suggests that IGC is closely linked to prosociality, most studies focus on how concern for the far future predicts low-cost or transient forms of prosociality, such as one-shot donations, endorsements of sustainable policies, or self-reported intentions (e.g., Paek et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025). These actions, while meaningful, offer only a limited view of *how deeply* individuals who express a psychological disposition towards intergenerational concern are actually willing to invest in a distant collective tomorrow. What remains largely unexplored is whether IGC predicts high-investment, real-world decisions, such as how

individuals choose to spend their professional lives. If IGC truly represents one of the most expansive forms of prosocial concern, it may also guide choices that are not only value-driven but also concrete, sustained, and far-reaching in their impact, like one's career.

1.2 | Work as a Vehicle for Enacting Prosocial Moral Values and Deriving Meaning Through Helping Others

While no prior research has directly examined whether concern for the far future predicts the pursuit of high-impact careers aimed at benefiting future generations, a large body of literature has established a robust connection between prosocial motivation and career choice more broadly. And, given the robust connection between concerns for the far future with prosociality, these lines of inquiry taken together suggest the likelihood of a link.

People often choose professions not just for financial security or personal advancement, but because they confer opportunities to help others and contribute to something larger than themselves (Bolino and Grant 2016; Bunderson and Thompson 2009; Duffy et al. 2011). This prosocial orientation is evident across a range of fields. For example, research shows that nursing students are more likely to enter the profession out of a desire to contribute to societal well-being (Ait Ali et al. 2024), while employees in diverse organisational settings who are motivated by helping others are more likely to engage in collaborative knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving (Tian et al. 2021).

Prosocially motivated workers also report greater job satisfaction, engagement and perceptions of meaning in their work (Dobrow et al. 2023; Grant 2007, 2012), and their actions often enhance positive outcomes at the broader organisational level (Podsakoff et al. 2009; Grant 2008). Even in high-stakes professional environments, individuals who prioritise collective welfare over individual gain show greater openness to feedback and are more likely to course-correct when needed (Meglino and Korsgaard 2004).

This growing literature suggests that prosocial motivation is not just a personal trait; it is a powerful force in shaping how people work, what careers they choose, and how they define success. Zikic's (2022) concept of 'career sacrifice' provides insight into how individuals align professional decisions with deeply held moral values (see also Righetti et al. 2020). When motivated by a sense of communal obligation, especially towards people who cannot reciprocate, individuals may be willing to postpone promotions, change career paths, or forgo personal gain in favour of social impact. Relatedly, the desire to matter and to positively influence others' lives, central features of intergenerational concern (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025), has been shown to shape career choices and contribute to a sense of purpose.

For instance, Allan (2017) found that task significance, or the belief that one's work improves others' welfare, significantly predicts perceptions of work-meaningfulness over time. Moreover,

research shows that when career choices are driven by communal motivation—a desire to increase others' well-being—they can enhance self-evaluative emotions such as pride, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Impett et al. 2014). Perhaps most compellingly, recent research suggests that, like prosocial career decisions, the motivation to protect future generations can serve as a vital source of meaning and psychological well-being (Manalili et al. 2025), further reinforcing the link between intergenerational concern and purposeful life decisions.

1.3 | Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence: A Vehicle for Guiding Workers Towards Forward-Looking, High-Impact Careers

Beyond studying intergenerational concern in the broad sense, at the centre of our investigation is Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence (IIB), an ethical disposition characterised by high and equal moral regard for all future generations regardless of when in time they live (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025). A growing body of research on the psychology of long-term intergenerational concern has operationalised this construct using the Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence Inventory (IIBI), a validated scale designed to assess and classify individuals who exhibit this orientation. Rooted in the belief that moral worth should not depend on temporal proximity, IIB captures a commitment to safeguarding the welfare of future generations whether near or distant in time. Notably, although it builds on principles from the longtermist ethical philosophy (MacAskill 2022; Ord 2021), IIB is conceptually distinct. Whereas longtermism has been critiqued for its strict utilitarian logic in which longtermists prioritise future lives over present ones due to the sheer number of people that may occupy the many generations to come (Crary 2023), IIB reflects temporal impartiality without requiring such tradeoffs. In fact, individuals who exhibit the ethical disposition of IIB tend to support both future- and present-focused prosocial action to a greater extent than those who do not (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025; Law, Colaizzi, et al. 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2025; Law, Young, and Syropoulos 2025), indicating a broader extension of concern to those most temporally distant without being accompanied by reduced concern for those in the here and now.

As a construct, IIB is also conceptually distinct from other widely studied forms of future-oriented concern, such as legacy motivation and perceived responsibility to future generations (e.g., Agneman et al. 2024; Watkins and Goodwin 2020; Zaval et al. 2015). While those constructs capture important psychological motivations, they have typically been studied in the context of near-term future and self-relevant considerations (e.g., actions to steward a better future for one's reputation, direct descendants, or the subsequent generation). IIB, by contrast, reflects an impartial ethical stance that is not anchored to personal impact, familial obligation, nor the near-term, but instead captures a broader concern for the long-term well-being of all humanity. Thus, although it relates positively to legacy and responsibility-based orientations (Law, Colaizzi, et al. 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2025; Law, Young, and Syropoulos 2025; Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young,

et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025), IIB represents a unique and temporally expansive form of prosociality.

On the basis of the existing literature on intergenerational concern and the body of research at the intersection of prosociality and vocational behaviour, we theorise that IIB may be a strong and understudied predictor of vocational decisions—specifically, interest in high-impact careers that aim to improve the well-being of others over long timeframes. We argue that IIB may be especially relevant for understanding motivations to act on behalf of future generations in domains where the beneficiaries are profoundly psychologically remote, such as existential risk mitigation, preparation against future pandemics and societal resilience to emerging technologies like AI—precisely the kinds of challenges many scholars argue require the most urgent attention today (MacAskill 2022; George et al. 2016; Ord 2021). Although we do not test mechanisms directly, prior findings suggest several plausible pathways linking impartial concern for the far future to forward-looking career preferences, which inform our hypothesis of a positive association between the two.

First, we reason that the strong sense of moral responsibility associated with IIB (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025) may be associated with greater interest in careers that align with their ethical commitments to future generations. This is consistent with research showing that people often seek to express their moral identity through meaningful action (Aquino and Reed 2002; Zikic 2022). Relatedly, research linking broader prosocial dispositions to interest in helping professions (Ait Ali et al. 2024; Nesje 2015), along with evidence that IIB reflects a remarkably expansive prosocial orientation (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025; Law, Colaizzi, et al. 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2025; Law, Young, and Syropoulos 2025), suggests that this ethical stance may predispose individuals towards careers with significant positive externalities for others, including those not yet born. Although career decisions represent a more substantial and sustained commitment than one-time donations or stated prosocial intentions, the broader literature linking IIB to prosociality nonetheless supports a plausible connection to vocational outcomes (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

In addition to aligning with moral identity and prosocial values, career choice may also offer a route to overcoming one of the most substantive psychological barriers to future-oriented action: the perceived difficulty of making a meaningful difference (e.g., Hackman and Oldham 1975). Prior work on intergenerational concern suggests that uncertainty about whether present-day actions can effectively benefit the future is a key factor inhibiting engagement (Law et al. 2024). Choosing a career aimed at long-term societal impact may offer a concrete way to overcome this barrier, providing individuals with an actionable, sustained avenue for expressing their concern for future generations, while also reinforcing their belief that their efforts matter.

Finally, beyond candidate pathways rooted in other-oriented motivations like prosociality and moral responsibility, another possible route relates to a benefit future-oriented careers

might confer to workers themselves: a sense of meaning and purpose. Stemming from foundational studies of job characteristics (Hackman and Oldham 1975), perceiving one's work as beneficial to others predicts meaningful work experiences. For those who manifest the ethical disposition of IIB, careers that promise substantial positive impact on future generations may be particularly attractive sources of personal fulfilment. After all, research shows that people who feel impartial concern for all future generations also tend to experience greater mental well-being, meaning in life and feelings of connectedness oneself across time (Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2025, 2024b; Law, Colaizzi, et al. 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2025; Law, Young, and Syropoulos 2025; Manalili et al. 2025). Thus, individuals high in this trait may seek careers that provide a sense of purpose through contribution to humanity's future.

1.4 | Situating IIB Within Broader Career and Institutional Contexts

Before describing the present studies, we note several broader contextual considerations that frame our investigation. First, the temporal bias described earlier, where people tend to prioritise near-term outcomes over those that unfold over longer time horizons, is *not* merely a cognitive phenomenon. It is also sustained by broader cultural and institutional arrangements that privilege short-term outcomes, immediate measurability and individual accountability (Adam 1998; Adams et al. 2009). Within such temporal regimes, the capacity to sustain concern for future generations depends in part on the discursive, organisational and institutional contexts in which individuals are embedded (Wade-Benzoni and Tost 2009). Although we focus here on IIB as an individual-level ethical disposition, we recognise that its expression is shaped by the structural and normative environments in which people live and work. Similarly, career decisions do not unfold in a vacuum. Scholarship on career construction has emphasised that careers are socially constructed processes, shaped by structural constraints, unequal access to opportunities and culturally embedded narratives of success and worth (Savickas 2005; Blustein 2013). We acknowledge these constraints while focusing on one individual-level factor—IIB—that may shape vocational interest within the range of opportunities available to individuals.

Second, from a social-psychological perspective, career aspirations are shaped not only by individual dispositions but also by social identity processes, group norms and interpersonal influence (Lent et al. 2000). Individuals who endorse IIB may identify with communities and networks that share and reinforce future-oriented professional values and the salience of group membership in such communities may amplify the link between intergenerational concern and career interest. Social comparison processes may also play a role, where exposure to peers who pursue high-impact careers could strengthen the perceived feasibility and desirability of such paths among those already inclined towards future-oriented work.

Third, we note an important conceptual distinction relevant to the special issue in which this work appears. The sustainable careers framework, as developed in vocational and organisational

psychology, refers to careers that are healthy, productive and sustainable for the individual worker across time, health and life domains (De Vos et al. 2020; Van der Heijden and De Vos 2015). This is conceptually distinct from sustainability-oriented careers—careers aimed at addressing environmental or societal sustainability challenges. Our primary focus is on the latter: whether IIB predicts interest in careers oriented towards long-term societal impact.

However, we recognise that these concepts may intersect. More recent extensions of the sustainable careers framework add social empowerment, the worker's contribution to positive social change, as a core dimension of career sustainability alongside health, happiness and productivity (Russo et al. 2023). Reframed in these terms, social contribution becomes a central dimension of career sustainability rather than an outcome external to it. Pursuing work that aligns with deeply held ethical values, as IIB may encourage, could also broadly promote adaptive career development and long-term career well-being (see Allan 2017; Manalili et al. 2025). Recent work demonstrates that young adults with stronger adaptability resources also report greater life satisfaction and flourishing (Parola et al. 2026; Santilli et al. 2026) and values-aligned work is associated with enhanced meaning and career satisfaction (Allan 2017; Dobrow et al. 2023). This perspective also resonates with calls for 'green guidance', in which career practitioners help individuals translate concern for ecological, social and intergenerational issues into realistic and sustainable career projects (Rochat 2026). We return to this intersection in the General Discussion.

1.5 | The Present Research

Here, we explore the relationship between exceptional concern for the long-term future of humanity with interest in pursuing high-impact, forward-looking careers through three complementary studies. In Study 1, we investigate whether undergraduate students who demonstrate the ethical disposition of impartial intergenerational beneficence (IIB) show greater interest in pursuing careers that can stand to benefit the far future and whether they show greater interest in aligning their future careers with the principle of impartial intergenerational beneficence from longtermist philosophy. In Study 2, we explore how current professionals' identification with longtermist principles relates to their perceived career impact, utilising multiple assessment methods including self-reports, third-party evaluations and AI-assisted analysis. This multi-method approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how intergenerational concern manifests in professional contexts. Finally, in Study 3, we experimentally examine whether inducing intergenerational concern increases individuals' likelihood of self-identifying as longtermists and seeking career guidance focused on long-term impact. Together, these studies aim to illuminate how moral beliefs about far-future generations shape one of life's most consequential decisions: the choice of how to spend one's professional years in service of both present and future humanity. All data files, materials, and code for the studies is available on the Open Science Framework (OSF): https://osf.io/mkcg8/?view_only=8b0127a4977046a094857c5198a0f072. As described in greater detail

below, the [Supporting Information](#) provides additional information on scoring procedures and stimuli.

2 | Study 1

Our first study examined whether undergraduate college students who demonstrate the ethical disposition of impartial intergenerational beneficence—broad alignment with the principle that all future people, no matter when in time they exist, deserve the same amount of moral worth as people living today—would be interested in pursuing high-impact career options that stand to benefit the long-term future of humanity. Study 1 was not pre-registered.

2.1 | Methods

2.1.1 | Participants

A total of 1133 undergraduate students were recruited via SONA from four large universities in the Northeastern United States. All participants provided informed consent. After excluding 163 participants who failed an attention check (a multiple-choice question), the final sample included 970 participants. Of these, 384 identified as men, 565 as women and the remainder as nonbinary or another gender identity. The majority of participants were White ($N=573$), followed by Black participants ($N=140$). The average age was approximately 20 years ($M=19.63$, $SD=1.77$). On average, participants reported an upper-middle socioeconomic status ($M=6.69$, $SD=1.48$; 1='bottom of the ladder', 10='top of the ladder') and moderate political orientation ($M=3.33$, $SD=1.48$; 1='Very Liberal', 7='Very Conservative'). Students received research credit for their participation.

2.1.2 | Materials

2.1.2.1 | Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence. Impartial intergenerational beneficence was assessed using the validated Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence Inventory (IIBI; Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025). The measure includes seven items (e.g., 'We should always have in view not only the present but also future generations') rated on a 0–100 sliding scale and is completed simultaneously for four future timeframes (i.e., 28 items in total): 1000, 10,000, 100,000 and 1,000,000 years from now. Following established scoring procedures, participants were classified as displaying IIB if they scored 75 or higher for the 1000-year timeframe and gave equal or higher scores for all subsequent timeframes. This pattern reflects a strong and sustained sense of intergenerational concern for future generations, indicating that the individual not only values the near future highly (at the level of at least agreement with the scale's items) but maintains or increases that concern as the beneficiaries become more temporally distant. In this sample, 200 participants (20.6%) met the criteria for IIB, while 770 (79.4%) did not.

2.1.2.2 | Long-Term, High-Impact Career Interest. For measuring long-term, high-impact career intentions,

TABLE 1 | Comparisons of participants with and without IIB for career intentions and Longtermist-Alignment for their future career.

Outcome	IIB		Non-IIB		<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
AI safety and policy	27.6	30.2	26.6	28.4	−0.37	203.2	0.715	0.04
Global health and development	51.9	34.9	37.2	30.3	−4.53	193.0	<0.001	0.47
Biosecurity and pandemic preparation	32.7	32.3	23.4	27.2	−3.07	182.8	0.002	0.33
Animal welfare	36.9	31.7	30.1	29.2	−2.29	196.6	0.023	0.23
Nuclear security	23.8	30.3	21.1	27.1	−0.94	193.1	0.350	0.10
Climate change and global warming	39.1	33.0	29.8	29.7	−2.99	192.3	0.003	0.31
Policy and government	41.7	33.5	34.0	30.5	−2.46	200.3	0.015	0.25
Teaching	48.5	31.4	37.4	33.7	−3.47	197.9	<0.001	0.35
Longtermism Career Alignment	75.8	20.7	59.1	23.1	−8.28	244.1	<0.001	0.74

Note: Tests with $p < 0.05$ are statistically significant.

we drew upon the guidance provided by the website of 80,000 Hours (<https://80000hours.org/>). This organisation identifies several career areas as particularly promising for improving long-term outcomes, including: AI safety and policy, global health and development, biosecurity and pandemic preparation, animal welfare, nuclear security, climate change and global warming, policy and government and teaching.¹ These domains were used to inform our operationalisation of long-term, high-impact career interests. Participants rated their interest in working in each of these eight areas using separate 0–100 slider scale items.

2.1.2.3 | Longtermism Career Alignment. Finally, future job alignment with longtermism was captured using 1-item measured on a 0–100 slider scale. Students were first provided with a definition and overview of key concepts from longtermist philosophy (see the full text of this overview in the [Supporting Information](#)) before responding to the following question: ‘Given this information, how much do you want your future profession to align with the philosophy of longtermism?’

2.2 | Results

2.2.1 | Differences Between IIB-Aligned Subjects and the General Population

When comparing participants with IIB to participants without IIB, significant differences arose for all career intentions, except AI safety and policy and nuclear security. For interest in future job alignment with longtermist principles, participants who were identified as having IIB expressed significantly higher motivation to pursue a longtermist-aligned career compared to participants without IIB.

2.3 | Discussion

Study 1 examined whether undergraduate students who identified with impartial intergenerational beneficence (IIB), the

belief that future generations deserve the same moral consideration as current ones, were more likely to pursue high-impact, long-term oriented careers. The results demonstrated that students with IIB were significantly more interested in pursuing forward-looking careers across all categories other than AI safety and policy and nuclear security, compared to those without IIB (see Table 1). Moreover, these individuals were more likely to express interest in aligning their future career with the principles of longtermist philosophy. These findings suggest that students who value the well-being of future generations may be more motivated to pursue impactful career paths that have the potential to safeguard humanity's long-term future.

We also acknowledge several methodological limitations of this study. Study 1 was not pre-registered and no formal power analysis was conducted prior to data collection; the sample size reflects the number of participants who completed the survey during the designated collection period. Additionally, career interest was assessed using single-item slider scales for each career domain, which limits the depth of inference relative to multi-dimensional measures of career intention that capture not only interest but also perceived feasibility, commitment and self-efficacy (Lent et al. 2000). We therefore interpret these results as indicators of initial career interest rather than as comprehensive assessments of vocational intention and we encourage future research to employ more comprehensive measures of career intention.

3 | Study 2

Our second study examined whether individuals perceive their professions as more aligned with longtermist principles if they align with the ethical disposition of IIB. It also sought to determine whether others (humans and AI) would identify these professions as aligned with longtermist principles. Specifically, we approached this question in three ways: (a) self-reported alignment, (b) other-reported alignment and (c) evaluations of alignment made by GPT-4o. All aspects of this study were pre-registered <https://aspredicted.org/mmh-z-9f3h.pdf>.

3.1 | Methods

3.1.1 | Participants

3.1.1.1 | Sample for Self-Reports. We recruited 916 participants from across the United States via Prolific. All participants provided informed consent. After excluding 123 individuals who failed an attention check and an additional 43 whose job descriptions were unclear, the final analytic sample included 750 participants. Of these, 461 identified as men, 283 as women and the remainder as nonbinary or another gender category. Most participants identified as White ($N=542$), followed by Black participants ($N=93$). The average age was approximately 41 years ($M=40.71$, $SD=11.97$). Participants reported a mean socioeconomic status of upper-middle class ($M=5.36$, $SD=1.71$; scale: 1='bottom of the ladder', 10='top of the ladder'), a moderate political orientation ($M=3.45$, $SD=1.81$; 1='Very Liberal', 7='Very Conservative') and an average education level between an associate's and bachelor's degree ($M=4.49$, $SD=1.36$; 1='Less than high school', 6='Postgraduate degree'). Participants were compensated via Prolific.

3.1.1.2 | Sample for Other-Reports. An additional 450 participants were recruited to rate a random subset of 30 job descriptions from the 750-person sample. Each job description received an average of 18 independent ratings.² This sample included 209 men, 229 women and the remainder nonbinary or another gender identity. The racial breakdown was again majority White ($N=321$), followed by Black participants ($N=72$). The average age was 41 years ($M=40.55$, $SD=13.24$). Socioeconomic status averaged around the middle of the scale ($M=4.92$, $SD=1.77$), political orientation leaned slightly liberal ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.73$) and average education fell between an associate's and bachelor's degree ($M=4.24$, $SD=1.33$). These participants were also compensated through Prolific.

3.1.1.3 | GPT-4o. We also employed GPT-4o to provide ratings of longtermism-alignment for participants' professions (see below for more information and the [Supporting Information](#) for a full description of this procedure).

3.1.2 | Materials

3.1.2.1 | Sample for Self-Reports. After describing their profession and daily tasks, participants were presented with the same description of longtermist philosophy from Study 1 and were then asked to rate their own professional alignment with longtermism using the same single item from Study 1 on a 0–100 slider scale. Impartial intergenerational beneficence was again captured with the IIBI (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025). In this sample, 186 (24.8%) were identified as aligning with the ethical disposition of IIB and 564 (75.2%) were identified as not being in alignment.

As a secondary outcome, participants in the self-report sample were also presented with a list of seven careers identified by 80,000h as being high-impact and long-term oriented (i.e., AI safety and policy, global health and development, biosecurity and pandemic preparation, animal welfare, nuclear security, climate change and global warming, policy and government).

Participants were asked to indicate whether their own career aligned with each of those identified by 80,000h using 7 binary items (No=0, Yes=1). As described in the results below, this secondary outcome served as a means to validate the self-, other- and GPT-4o- ratings against the objective baseline of longtermism alignment provided by 80,000h. If participants selected that their career aligned with any of those identified by 80,000h, they were labelled as having high-impact and long-term oriented professions. In this sample, 293 subjects' professions (39.1%) were identified as being high-impact and long-term oriented, while 457 (60.9%) subjects' professions were not.

3.1.2.2 | Sample for Other-Reports. In a separate survey, 450 participants (distinct from the self-report sample) each received a randomly selected subset of 30 professional descriptions from the full pool of 750 descriptions provided by Prolific workers in the self-report sample. Each of the 750 descriptions was thus rated multiple times across the sample. Participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which each profession aligned with long-termist values, using the same 0–100 slider scale described above.

3.1.2.3 | GPT-4o. Each of the 750 job descriptions was fed into GPT-4o which was prompted to return ratings of alignment with longtermism for each job description. This procedure is outlined in full in the [Supporting Information](#).

3.2 | Results

The three types of ratings were correlated positively with each other. Self and other (human raters) ratings had weak to moderate associations ($r=0.25$, $p<0.001$), as did self and GPT-4o ratings ($r=0.23$, $p<0.001$). The two categories of third-party ratings (GPT-4o and other ratings) had a moderate to strong association ($r=0.47$, $p<0.001$). Below we present analyses for each of the three ratings, as well as the average across all ratings. Job descriptions for professions self-reported as being aligned with at least one of the careers listed by 80,000h as high-impact and long-term oriented received higher ratings of longtermism alignment across all four rater categories (self, other, GPT-4o, and total, indicating the average across rater categories; see Table 2). These results provide evidence for the validity of each category of ratings against a more objective baseline (the evidence-based analysis of 80,000h).

For our primary analysis, we examined whether professions held by individuals aligned with the ethical disposition of IIB received higher ratings of longtermism alignment across the four rater categories. As indicated in Table 3, participants identified as endorsing IIB saw their careers as more aligned with longtermism, but this was not the case for third-party ratings (other and GPT-4o ratings). Nonetheless, the average rating across self, other and GPT-4o did produce a significant difference in the expected direction as well (see Table 3).

3.3 | Discussion

Study 2 examined whether individuals who manifest the ethical disposition of Impartial Intergenerational Beneficence

TABLE 2 | Differences in rated long-termism alignment between careers that are high-impact and long-term oriented versus careers that are not.

Outcome	Aligned		Non-Aligned		<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Self-ratings	48.3	30.4	39.8	32.3	3.63	649.58	<0.001	0.27
Other ratings	41.5	12.7	35.1	11.8	6.89	589.1	<0.001	0.52
GPT-4o ratings	20.9	13.2	15.5	9.4	6.17	482.0	<0.001	0.50
Total rating	36.9	13.9	30.1	13.6	6.55	611.4	<0.001	0.49

Note: Tests accounting for unequal variances between groups were estimated.

TABLE 3 | Differences in rated longtermism-alignment for careers of participants with and without IIB.

Outcome	IIB		Non-IIB		<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Self-ratings	51.3	34.3	40.5	30.6	3.81	288.0	<0.001	0.34
Other ratings	36.9	13.0	37.8	12.4	−0.82	304.3	0.410	−0.07
GPT-4o ratings	17.1	10.9	17.8	11.5	−0.72	330.7	0.469	−0.06
Total rating	35.1	15.1	32.0	13.7	2.46	292.6	0.014	0.22

Note: Tests accounting for unequal variances between groups were estimated.

(IIB) perceived their professions as more aligned with the ethical principles of longtermism and how others, including third person evaluators and GPT-4o, rated those same professions. Participants with IIB rated their own jobs as significantly more longtermism-aligned compared to those without IIB. However, this difference did not emerge in third-party or GPT-4o evaluations. These findings suggest that while IIB may shape individuals' internal sense of purpose and future-oriented identity, external perceptions may not track with these internal judgments, possibly because the greatest opportunity to align one's career with future-oriented goals presents earlier on in one's career trajectory, such as at the point of initial selection rather than in the nature of current day-to-day work. This interpretation aligns with Study 1, which found that IIB predicted stronger interest in high-impact, long-term career paths among students. Nonetheless, an alternative (and not mutually exclusive) interpretation is that individuals with IIB may be *motivated* to view their current work as more ethically consistent with longtermism, suggesting that IIB functions not only as a guide for career choices early on, but also as a lens through which people interpret and affirm the moral value of their existing roles even later in their careers.

A further possibility, consistent with research on meaning-making at work (Rosso et al. 2010; Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001), is that individuals with IIB may actively construct the moral significance of their work to maintain narrative coherence and a stable ethical identity. From this perspective, IIB may function not only as a predictor of career choice but also as a symbolic resource through which existing work is rendered ethically meaningful, particularly when structural opportunities for career change are constrained. This interpretation connects to broader literatures on self-enhancement in professional contexts (Sedikides and

Gregg 2008) and raises the important question of whether promoting high-impact, future-oriented careers requires not only fostering moral dispositions but also supporting accurate self-awareness about the societal value of one's work. Nonetheless, professions classified by 80,000 Hours as high-impact and long-term aligned (e.g., AI safety, global health, climate policy) received higher ratings across all rater categories, supporting the construct validity of the long-term alignment measure.

4 | Study 3

Study 1 demonstrated that college students high in IIB are more likely to express early interest in high-impact, long-term-oriented careers. Study 2 found that, while people with IIB perceive their current careers as more aligned with longtermist principles, this perception is not shared by external evaluators or AI, suggesting that internal ethical orientation may not always translate into externally visible career paths, perhaps because the most meaningful shifts happen earlier in the professional journey or because career impact is merely perceived subjectively. Building on these findings, Study 3 experimentally tested whether inducing intergenerational concern would motivate individuals to take tangible steps towards pursuing high-impact, future-oriented careers. We also examined whether individuals already exhibiting exceptional levels of intergenerational concern (consistent with IIB) would be especially receptive to such guidance. Specifically, we assessed whether a targeted manipulation could increase intergenerational concern and openness to receiving career resources focused on long-term societal impact. All aspects of this study were pre-registered: <https://aspredicted.org/h2t3-xb4z.pdf>.

4.1 | Methods

4.1.1 | Participants

After removing participants with duplicate IP addresses, a final sample of 816 individuals recruited via Prolific was retained for analysis. All participants provided informed consent. Of these, 397 identified as men, 407 as women and the remainder as non-binary or another gender category. The majority of the sample was White ($N=579$), followed by Black participants ($N=150$). The average age was approximately 40 years old ($M=40.56$, $SD=13.38$). Socioeconomic status averaged towards the upper-middle range ($M=5.31$, $SD=1.76$, on a 1–10 scale). Political orientation was roughly moderate ($M=3.64$, $SD=1.78$, where 1 = ‘Very Liberal’ and 7 = ‘Very Conservative’). Participants were compensated through Prolific for their participation.

4.1.2 | Materials and Procedure

4.1.2.1 | Experimental Manipulation. Participants were first randomly assigned to one of two conditions. A baseline (control) condition where no additional information was displayed and our treatment condition. In this condition, participants completed a thought exercise focusing on the philosophy of longtermism, which asked individuals to engage in an action to prevent harm for people in the future and then prompted them to think about the morality of engaging in this action no matter when in the future the person who would be harmed would exist. This exercise was adapted from the book ‘What We Owe The Future’ by William MacAskill (2022).

4.1.2.2 | Career Guidance Resource Selection. Then, participants reported their willingness to receive long-term career guidance through a multiple-choice question asking participants to select any or all of three different free career guidance resources from the nonprofit organisation 80,000Hours, an organisation with the mission of helping individuals work in high-impact sectors. These resources included: (1) a career guide (e-book) (<https://80000hours.org/book/>), (2) personalised one-on-one career advising (<https://80000hours.org/speak-with-us/>) and (3) a copy of the book ‘The Precipice’ (<https://80000hours.org/the-precipice/>).

4.1.2.3 | Intergenerational Concern. Finally, intergenerational concern was captured using an adapted measure of obligation to protect future generations (OFG) (Syropoulos, Law, Kraft-Todd, Mah, et al. 2025). Participants were asked: ‘Compared to people currently living, to what extent do you, personally, feel a moral obligation or responsibility to help or protect people in future generations, even when that means making some sacrifices today? To answer, please use the below sliding scale, which can be used as follows: Answering “100” means that you feel the same moral obligation to help/protect someone born in the specified year as someone living today. Answering “50” means that you feel half as much moral obligation to help/protect someone born in the specified year as someone living today. Answering “0” means that you feel no moral obligation to help/protect someone born in the specified year’. Six items were then presented for the following future years: (1) 2124 (100 years from now), (2) 2524 (500 years from now), (3) 3024 (1000 years

from now), (4) 12,024 (10,000 years from now), (5) 102,024 (100,000 years from now) and (6) 1,002,024 (1,000,000 years from now). This measure of obligation to protect future generations was used to reduce participant fatigue given the length of the survey (due to the treatment condition). Extant research shows strong correlations between this measure and the IIBI (see Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025).³

4.2 | Results

To evaluate the effect of condition on our proposed mediator of intergenerational concern, we conducted an independent sample *t*-test. Participants in the treatment condition ($M=55.46$, $SD=32.7$) reported significantly higher levels of intergenerational concern ($t(801.36)=6.55$, $p<0.001$, Cohen's $d=0.46$) compared to the control ($M=41.10$, $SD=29.7$). No significant difference of condition was observed for choosing any of the three behavioural outcomes as evaluated via a Poisson regression ($b=-0.01$, $SE=0.06$, $p=0.817$, $IRR=0.99$). In the absence of a direct effect of condition on the outcome, we proceeded to reexamine how intergenerational concern predicted the behavioural outcomes controlling for any condition-based variability. Intergenerational concern had a significant positive association with selecting any of the three choices ($b=0.003$, $SE=0.06$, $p=0.001$, $IRR=1.003$). This association remained statistically significant even after controlling for age, socioeconomic status, religiosity and political orientation ($b=0.002$, $SE=0.0009$, $p=0.02$, $IRR=1.002$).

4.3 | Discussion

Study 3 sought to experimentally examine whether inducing intergenerational concern through a thought experiment would increase their concern for future generations and their willingness to seek career guidance focused on long-term impact. A secondary goal was to determine whether individuals who already exhibited greater long-term intergenerational concern (in a manner similar to IIB) would be more open to receiving career guidance. While the experimental manipulation successfully increased intergenerational concern, it did not significantly influence participants' likelihood of selecting career resources. Participants in the treatment group reported significantly higher intergenerational concern ($M=55.46$, $SD=32.7$) than those in the control group ($M=41.10$, $SD=29.7$), confirming the effectiveness of the manipulation in increasing moral obligation towards future generations. However, there was no direct effect of condition on the selection of career guidance resources ($b=-0.01$, $p=0.817$), indicating that heightened intergenerational concern did not translate into greater engagement with long-term career planning. Instead, our analyses suggest that pre-existing levels of intergenerational concern played a more substantial role in determining career guidance interest. Independent of condition, individuals with higher intergenerational concern were significantly more likely to select at least one career resource ($b=0.003$, $p=0.001$). This relationship remained significant even after controlling for demographic factors such as age, socioeconomic status, religiosity and political orientation ($b=0.002$, $p=0.02$). These results suggest that,

while short-term interventions can increase individuals' moral concern for future generations, this concern alone may not be sufficient to drive behavioural engagement with career-related longtermist resources. Instead, deeper, pre-existing commitments to intergenerational beneficence may be stronger determinants of career-related decision-making.

We note, however, that the interpretation above should be considered alongside the inherent limitations of the experimental design. Career decisions involve substantial identity investment, temporal commitment and material risk, and they typically unfold over extended periods rather than as immediate responses to brief cognitive interventions (Savickas 2005). The behavioural outcome—selecting free resources from an advocacy organisation's website—may not fully capture the complexity of career-related decision-making, and the count variable based on three resource options may have limited variability. Thus, the null direct effect may reflect limitations of the outcome operationalisation as much as a genuine boundary on the relevance of intergenerational concern for career behaviour. Consistent with this view, the finding that pre-existing levels of intergenerational concern predicted resource selection further supports the interpretation of IIB as an orientation constructed over time rather than one that can be readily activated through brief interventions.

5 | General Discussion

The present research sought to explore the relationship between intergenerational concern, impartial intergenerational beneficence (IIB) and individuals' career-related decisions. Across three studies, we examined how exceptional concern for far-future generations influences career interest, professional alignment, and openness to career guidance interventions. Our findings contribute to the growing body of literature on intergenerational ethics, prosocial motivation and career decision-making, offering theoretical, empirical and practical insights.

In Study 1, we demonstrated that undergraduate students who aligned with the ethical disposition of IIB were significantly more likely to express interest in high-impact, long-term oriented careers, such as those addressing climate change, global health and biosecurity. These findings align with previous research suggesting that prosocial motivations are key determinants of career choice (Ait Ali et al. 2024; Bolino and Grant 2016). Interestingly, while IIB predicted career interest across many domains, fields such as AI safety and nuclear security were exceptions, indicating that specific career paths may require additional contextual motivations or awareness to attract individuals with intergenerational concern. In the specific case of these two high-impact fields, however, we believe their current reputations may evoke fear and doom rather than being perceived as opportunities for meaningful, high-impact contributions.

Study 2 extended these findings by examining professionals' perceptions of their careers. Individuals aligned with IIB rated their professions as more aligned with longtermist principles, although external evaluations (from both third-party raters and GPT-4o) did not consistently reflect this alignment. These

results suggest a potential discrepancy between self-perception and external validation, highlighting the subjective nature of professional alignment with abstract ethical principles like longtermism. This discrepancy is particularly noteworthy as it reveals how individuals with strong intergenerational concern may perceive greater impact potential in their work than external evaluators identify, suggesting that personal values significantly shape professional identity and perceived contribution to future welfare. Nonetheless, we also reasoned it was possible that, while a disposition towards long-term intergenerational concern may predict interest in making an impact on the future through work, as suggested by the results from Study 1, it may be early on in one's career when professionals may be best situated to act on that interest.

We regard this divergence between self-perceived and externally rated alignment as one of the central findings of the present research. It points to a tension between the subjective moral meaning individuals attribute to their work and the degree to which that work has externally recognisable or demonstrable social impact. Individuals high in intergenerational concern may experience their work as a vehicle for future-oriented contribution even when its societal value is not externally verifiable, a distinction with direct implications for how professional identity and meaning at work are constructed and sustained over time (Rosso et al. 2010; Sedikides and Gregg 2008). Promoting high-impact, sustainable careers may therefore depend on supporting accurate self-awareness about the societal value of one's work, alongside the cultivation of moral concern itself.

Building on the findings from the first two studies, Study 3 experimentally investigated whether a brief intervention could enhance intergenerational concern and increase openness to long-term oriented career guidance. While our manipulation successfully increased intergenerational concern, it did not significantly impact resource selection directly. However, participants' baseline levels of intergenerational concern positively predicted engagement with career resources, suggesting that pre-existing moral dispositions may play a more substantial role in career-related decision-making than brief interventions. These findings indicate that, while intergenerational concern can be temporarily heightened, translating this concern into concrete career-related actions may require deeper, more sustained engagement with forward-looking principles.

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

Our findings advance theoretical understanding in several key areas. First, they contribute to the emerging literature on intergenerational concern by empirically linking IIB to sustained, high-stakes real-world decisions. Prior work has shown that intergenerational concern relates to low-cost or symbolic actions, such as policy support or donations (Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2026; Law, Syropoulos, O'Connor, et al. 2026; Law et al. 2024; Paek et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024; Syropoulos, Law, Young, et al. 2024a, 2024b, 2025), but our findings extend this literature to the domain of career choice and interest, a domain that not only spans decades of a person's life but also offers a sustained mechanism through which individuals can shape the welfare of future generations (80,000 80,000

Hours 2023; Zikic 2022). By identifying IIB as a predictor of long-term professional aspirations, we provide evidence that this ethical disposition may serve as a guiding force in shaping lifelong commitments.

Second, our results enrich psychological research on prosocial motivation and moral identity by showing how concern for temporally distant others intersects with career values. Whereas prior studies have focused on helping professions or near-term prosocial behaviour (Liao et al. 2022; Nesje 2015), we show that individuals with IIB are drawn to long-term, impact-driven careers that may not offer immediate interpersonal rewards, but that align with deeper ethical commitments to those who will come after us. This expands our understanding of how prosociality manifests not just across space, but across time, complimenting recent theorising on the receiving and enactment of legacies in the workplace (Colquitt et al. 2023).

Third, by operationalising and testing constructs derived from ethical philosophy, specifically, the idea that future persons deserve equal moral regard (MacAskill 2022), we offer an empirical bridge between philosophy and psychology. Although longtermist philosophy itself has sparked debate over its utilitarian ideals (Crary 2023), our focus on impartial intergenerational beneficence avoids the need for trade-offs between present and future concern. Instead, extensive research suggests that IIB represents a form of moral inclusivity that extends care without displacement (e.g., Capozzoli et al. 2025; Syropoulos, Law, Amormino, and Young 2024). Our findings suggest that concern for future generations, when rooted in impartiality rather than optimisation, may inspire meaningful behaviour change without reducing investment in present-day needs. Moreover, the literature on psychological meaning, both a known correlate of IIB (Manalili et al. 2025) and a key driver of career decision-making (e.g., Allan 2017), suggests that contributing to the future of humanity may offer deep personal fulfilment. Such future-oriented work may in turn confer benefits not only to present-day workers themselves, but also to the organisations that support them and the future generations they aim to serve.

Our findings also speak to the intersection between sustainability-oriented career interest and individual career sustainability. The sustainable careers framework emphasises careers that support the worker's own health, well-being and adaptive capacity over time (De Vos et al. 2020). More recent work extends this framework by positioning social empowerment, defined as the worker's contribution to positive social change, as a core dimension of career sustainability (Russo et al. 2023). Read through this lens, the present findings provide evidence relevant to the social empowerment dimension of sustainable careers. Individuals high in impartial intergenerational concern may be especially inclined to imagine, pursue and construct careers that contribute to societal betterment beyond their own health, happiness and productivity. Our data suggest that IIB may promote not only interest in careers addressing global needs but also, potentially, more sustainable career experiences for the workers themselves. Individuals high in IIB who pursue values-aligned work may derive greater meaning and purpose from their careers (Manalili et al. 2025; Allan 2017), which in turn is associated with enhanced career

satisfaction, commitment and well-being (Dobrow et al. 2023). Future research should directly test whether IIB promotes adaptive career development, long-term career commitment and career crafting in service of purposeful work and whether the pursuit of sustainability-oriented careers among those high in IIB also yields more sustainable career trajectories for the individuals themselves.

Finally, we recognise that future-oriented career trajectories are enabled or constrained by organisational, economic and institutional conditions that extend beyond individual moral dispositions. Incentive systems, normative expectations within organisations and responsibility narratives embedded in professional life all shape the extent to which intergenerational concern can find expression through career choices (Wade-Benzoni and Tost 2009). As such, IIB should be understood not as an exceptional individual trait operating in isolation, but as a moral orientation whose vocational expression depends on the availability of structural supports, such as accessible career pathways, organisational cultures that value long-term thinking and labour market conditions that permit values-driven career decisions. Our findings identify who is drawn to future-oriented careers; understanding the structural conditions under which they can act on that orientation remains an important direction for future research.

5.2 | Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, these findings offer actionable insights for career counselling, organisational practices and educational interventions. For instance, career advisors and institutions like 80,000h might consider incorporating measures of intergenerational concern, such as the IIBI, into their assessment tools to guide individuals towards high-impact, long-term oriented professions. Our findings from Study 3 suggest that tailored resources, like those offered by 80,000 Hours (2023), could be especially effective when targeted towards individuals already inclined to act on behalf of future generations. Moreover, organisations aiming to recruit for roles in AI safety, global health, or climate policy could highlight the long-term societal impact of these roles in recruitment materials, appealing to individuals motivated by concern for the far future of humanity. More broadly, these findings connect to the emerging practice of green guidance, in which career counsellors are increasingly called upon to support career choices that are both environmentally and socially sustainable (Rochat 2026). Within this framework, helping clients translate concern for ecological, social and intergenerational issues into realistic and sustainable career projects becomes a central aim of guidance and assessing dispositions such as IIB may help practitioners identify those for whom this aim resonates most strongly.

Additionally, fostering workplace cultures that emphasise long-term sustainability goals and ethical responsibility beyond the present may enhance employee satisfaction and retention. Indeed, extensive research shows that when employees feel their work aligns with their values and contributes to meaningful outcomes, it fosters greater collaboration, commitment and productivity within organisations (Dobrow et al. 2023; Grant 2007, 2012; Podsakoff et al. 2009). Our results suggest that

a non-negligible subset of individuals exhibit exceptionally high concern for the future of humanity. Thus, even organisations not explicitly focused on long-term societal impact may benefit from creating pathways for employees to engage in future-oriented, purpose-driven work. Doing so could enhance worker well-being, strengthen organisational culture and support broader efforts to build a more sustainable and resilient future for generations to come.

Finally, though our findings in this domain are limited, our results hint that *fostering* intergenerational concern could be a key strategy for motivating long-term decision-making. While our brief intervention in Study 3 had limited effects on behavioural outcomes, more intensive or longitudinal approaches, such as workshops, mentoring programmes, or immersive simulations, may be more effective in cultivating moral concern for future generations. The results from Study 1 suggest that these programmes could be particularly impactful in educational settings, where students are forming their professional identities and long-term aspirations.

5.3 | Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this research is not without limitations. First, the reliance on self-report measures introduces potential biases, such as social desirability effects or inflated self-perceptions of long-term impact. Although we mitigated these issues by incorporating external evaluations in Study 2, future research should explore alternative measurement approaches, such as behavioural tasks or longitudinal assessments of career trajectories. Relatedly, our assessment of career interest relied on single slider items. Career intention is a multidimensional construct that cannot be fully captured through isolated ratings of interest and future studies should incorporate more comprehensive measures assessing not only interest but also commitment, perceived feasibility, career self-efficacy, perceived barriers and perceived social contribution (Lent et al. 2000). This constraint limits the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn about actual career intentions or future career behaviour.

Second, our samples were predominantly drawn from the United States, limiting the generalisability of our findings to other cultural contexts. Research indicates that cultural norms and values significantly influence prosocial behaviour and intergenerational attitudes (Guo et al. 2018; Knight et al. 2016). Future studies should replicate these findings in more diverse international samples to explore potential cultural variability in how intergenerational concern shapes career decisions.

Third, the short duration of our experimental manipulation in Study 3 likely limited its effectiveness in influencing behaviour. Interventions designed to enhance intergenerational concern may require repeated exposure or more immersive experiences to drive lasting changes that translate into career-related actions. Future research could explore in-person workplace interventions, open-source online courses, or recurring weekly group meetings. Additionally, investigating the interaction between intrinsic motivations (e.g., IIB) and external interventions could offer valuable insights into optimising the impact of such programmes.

Fourth, our reliance on 80,000 Hours as the primary framework for defining high-impact, long-term oriented careers warrants critical reflection. 80,000 Hours is an advocacy organisation with an explicit agenda rooted in effective altruism and long-termist philosophy and its career taxonomy reflects a particular normative perspective that privileges global, scalable and technocratic forms of work while giving less attention to other forms of socially consequential labour such as care, education and community-based work (Rosso et al. 2010). This introduces a potential circularity: careers are classified as high-impact because a longtermist organisation identifies them as such and IIB predicts interest in those careers, which may partly reflect shared philosophical priming rather than a fully generalisable psychological pattern. Alternative frameworks for classifying career impact, such as those grounded in social determinants of health, community-level outcomes, or direct care provision, might yield different patterns and would provide a more independent test of the IIB-career link. Future research should examine whether IIB predicts interest in a broader range of socially consequential careers beyond those highlighted within the effective altruism tradition.

More broadly, an emphasis on domains such as AI safety, biosecurity, policy and global health risks implying a hierarchy in which only large-scale or technocratic fields qualify as high-impact. Many every day, relational and contextually embedded forms of work, including care, education, community-based work and inclusion-oriented professions, also contribute to societal and intergenerational well-being at local and interpersonal levels. Consistent with the green guidance perspective (Rochat 2026), future research and career practitioners alike might attend to these broader forms of socially and environmentally sustainable contribution rather than privileging a narrow set of globally scaled careers.

Fifth, the inclusion of GPT-4o as an external evaluator, while intended to provide an additional assessment perspective, introduces its own limitations. Algorithmic assessments are grounded in culturally dominant definitions of concepts like longtermism and impact, and they tend to reproduce existing normative assumptions rather than offer fully independent judgements. We therefore interpret the GPT-4o ratings as reflecting one culturally situated perspective rather than as an objective standard of career alignment.

Building on these findings, future research could address several open questions. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in examining how intergenerational concern evolves over time and across life stages. For instance, do older adults, who may have a heightened sense of legacy (Hunter and Rowles 2005), show greater care for future generations compared to younger individuals? If so, what are the psychological and cultural factors driving this divide? Similarly, research on generativity (i.e., a concern for and commitment to care for future generations, often emerging during midlife development) has shown that life events such as parenthood and exposure to existential risks shape intergenerational attitudes, including how parenthood may influence environmental and climate engagement (Shrum et al. 2023; Mah et al. 2024). However, such generative concern is not exclusive to midlife; studies suggest it can emerge as early as young adulthood (Lawford et al. 2013),

with community and environmental generativity displaying comparable levels between emerging and middle-aged adults (Pratt and Lawford 2014). This supports McAdams' (2001) assertion that generativity unfolds across the lifespan rather than being confined to a specific stage. Furthermore, the construct has expanded beyond biological and parental forms to include social and ecological generativity, which remains prominent throughout adulthood (Di Fabio and Svicher 2023; Kim et al. 2017). Given this broader conceptualisation, future research could explore how career decisions intersect with different forms of generativity. Do individuals in early adulthood, whose generative concerns may lean more towards social or ecological engagement, make career choices that reflect these priorities? And to what extent do major life events shape these career trajectories compared to midlife generativity, which has traditionally been tied to family and mentorship?

Importantly, while IIB and Eriksonian generativity share a concern for the welfare of future others, they differ in meaningful ways. Generativity is typically rooted in personal legacy, parental care and mentorship, and is often tied to specific developmental stages or life events. IIB, by contrast, reflects a temporally impartial ethical stance that extends concern to all future generations regardless of personal connection or temporal proximity. Future research could productively integrate these constructs by testing whether generative motives mediate or moderate the link between IIB and career interest and whether different forms of generativity (biological, parental, social and ecological) differentially predict interest in particular types of future-oriented careers.

Another promising avenue involves further examining the role of education in fostering intergenerational concern. Research on longtermist education interventions has shown they can increase concern for future generations (Law, Colaizzi, et al. 2025; Law, Syropoulos, Coleman, et al. 2025; Law, Young, and Syropoulos 2025; Syropoulos, Law, Mah, et al. 2024). Our findings here replicate these earlier ones. However, these interventions, including the one used here, have typically been short in duration and not tailored to specific age groups. Assessing their effectiveness across different age groups, settings and durations—such as semester-long programmes, virtual classrooms, or curriculum integration at various educational levels—could provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to promote longtermist values.

Finally, future research could systematically test the psychological mechanisms hypothesised to link intergenerational concern to high-impact vocational interest. One approach would be to examine moral identity alignment by manipulating the salience of moral values (e.g., via priming or reflection tasks) and assessing whether this increases interest in future-oriented careers, particularly among those high in IIB. Researchers could also measure whether moral self-concept mediates the relationship between IIB and long-term career intentions, using established moral identity scales (e.g., Aquino and Reed 2002). To test the role of perceived efficacy, experimental designs could manipulate the perceived tractability or effectiveness of future-oriented careers. For instance, participants could be randomly assigned to read career descriptions that emphasise concrete vs. abstract long-term impact and researchers could measure whether this

moderates the link between IIB and willingness to pursue these paths (Law et al. 2024).

Generalised prosociality could be examined using structural equation modelling, where IIB is positioned as a higher-order factor alongside other prosocial traits (e.g., empathic concern, moral expansiveness), predicting career intentions via domain-general prosocial motivation (Nesje 2015; Ait Ali et al. 2024). Alternatively, longitudinal designs could assess whether stable prosocial dispositions prospectively predict high-impact vocational trajectories. Lastly, meaning and purpose could be explored through experimentation. Researchers might test whether the relationship between IIB and career interest is mediated by perceived meaningfulness of work (Allan 2017), or conduct experimental interventions (e.g., narrative writing tasks, exposure to role models; see Rogers et al. 2023) designed to heighten meaning in future-oriented careers and assess differential uptake based on baseline IIB. Together, these approaches would move the field from the correlational understanding we begin to build towards here to causal inference, shedding light on not just whether, but *how*, concern for future generations translates into long-term, high-stakes action, and ways we might leverage this understanding to cultivate meaningful and impactful careers at scale.

5.4 | Conclusion

This research demonstrates that individuals who manifest exceptional concern for humanity's far future, specifically those who show an ethical disposition towards impartial intergenerational beneficence, are more likely to be interested in pursuing careers with potential for significant long-term impact. By illuminating the relationship between concern for future generations and professional aspirations, our findings highlight an important pathway through which ethical values can translate into consequential real-world decisions. As society continues to face unprecedented global challenges that will affect generations to come, understanding and cultivating intergenerational concern may be crucial for mobilising talent towards addressing humanity's most pressing long-term problems. Though our intervention findings are limited, our results nonetheless hint that appealing to individuals' concern for future generations could be an effective strategy for encouraging high-impact career choices and, ultimately, creating a more sustainable and flourishing future for humanity.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: A.A., K.F.L. and S.S. Methodology: A.A. and S.S. Software: A.A. (lead) and S.S. Validation: A.A. (lead) and S.S. Formal analysis: A.A. Investigation: A.A. and S.S. Resources: L.Y. Data curation: S.S., K.F.L., D.G.-T. and P.A. Writing – original draft: A.A., K.F.L. and S.S. Writing – review and editing: All authors. Visualization, supervision: S.S. Project administration: S.S. Funding acquisition: L.Y.

Acknowledgements

GPT-4o was used to aid in the coding of responses, as described in the article. Additional assistance from large language models (GPT-5, Claude Opus 4.6) was leveraged by the authors to proofread and help streamline passages of text generated by members of the research team. All AI output was independently validated by members of the research team, who take full responsibility for the content of the article.

Funding

This research was supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, Grant Number 62221, 'The Impact of Social Norms on Virtue'.

Ethics Statement

All studies were conducted in compliance with the Institutional Review Boards of (1) Boston College, (2) University at Albany, State University of New York, (3) University at Buffalo, State University of New York and (4) Georgetown University.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

All data files, materials, and code for the studies are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF): https://osf.io/mkcg5/?view_only=8b0127a4977046a094857c5198a0f072.

Endnotes

¹Teaching was not included in the categorisation by 80,000h, but we opted to include it because teachers have the ability to shape the knowledge and values of future career aspirants.

²In our pre-registration we had stated that we would also obtain expert ratings from 80,000h. However we were unable to secure a professional collaboration with the organisation to obtain these ratings after a discussion of the project. Therefore, these analyses were not conducted as there was no data to inform them.

³In similar fashion to the IIBI, participants were classified as displaying impartial intergenerational beneficence if they scored above 75 across all temporal timeframes. In this sample, 148 (18.1%) were identified as having IIB, and 668 (81.9%) as not.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Data S1:** casp70310-sup-0001-Supinfo.docx.