



# European Conference on Social Work Research 2026

Aberdeen



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## | Welcome to Aberdeen

Dear colleagues,

We are looking forward to seeing you all to the 15th European Conference for Social Work Research.

We hope you enjoy the programme and the city of Aberdeen.

We also hope that you will have many opportunities to catch up with colleagues and friends, form new connections and gain fresh insights from the wide range of research findings that are being shared by social work researchers across Europe and beyond.

We would like to let you know that building on the success last year, we will be offering supported dialogues sessions again this year. Details can be found on the online programme. The purpose of these space is to have international dialogue around what is important to you. These will be supported by Jassy and Katharine.

We look forward to seeing you all very soon.

Best wishes,

Gary, Richard and Nikki (the local organising committee), Karen (Chair of ESWRA) and Florin Vice Chair

## | ESWRA Information

# | Outline Programme Schedule |

## Wednesday 15 April 2026

### Pre-conference Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

|               |                                        |          |
|---------------|----------------------------------------|----------|
| 08.00 – 09.00 | SIGs Registration                      | RGU      |
| 09.00 – 12.00 | Morning Half Day SIGs                  | RGU      |
| 12.00 – 13.00 | Lunch                                  | RGU      |
| 12.30 – 15.00 | Afternoon Half Day SIGs                | RGU      |
| 09.00 – 15.00 | Full Day SIGs                          | RGU      |
| 15.15         | Bus from RGU to P&J Live               | RGU      |
| 15.30 – 16.30 | Registration                           | P&J Live |
| 16.30 – 17.15 | Opening Ceremony                       | P&J Live |
| 17.15 – 18.15 | Keynote Speaker                        | P&J Live |
| 18.15 – 21.00 | Opening Ceremony and Welcome Reception | P&J Live |

## Thursday 16 April 2026

|                 |                                 |            |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| 08.00 – 09.00   | Registration                    | P&J Live   |
| 09.00 – 10.00   | Poster Session and Refreshments | P&J Live   |
| 10.00 – 10.45   | Keynote Speaker                 | P&J Live   |
| 11.00 – 12.30   | Parallel Session 1              | P&J Live   |
| 12.30 – 13.45   | Lunch                           | P&J Live   |
| 13.00 – 13.45   | ESWRA General Assembly          | P&J Live   |
| 13.45 – 14.30   | Keynote Speaker                 | P&J Live   |
| 14.45 – 16.15   | Parallel Session 2              | P&J Live   |
| 16.30 – 18.00   | Parallel Session 3              | P&J Live   |
| 19.30 for 20.00 | Conference Dinner               | Union Kirk |



**Friday 17 April 2026**

|               |                       |          |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------|
| 08.30 – 09.00 | Registration          | P&J Live |
| 09.00 – 09.45 | Keynote Speaker       | P&J Live |
| 10.00 – 11.30 | Parallel Session 4    | P&J Live |
| 11.30 – 12.00 | Refreshments          | P&J Live |
| 12.00 – 13.30 | Parallel Session 5    | P&J Live |
| 13.30 – 14.30 | Lunch                 | P&J Live |
| 13.45 – 14.30 | Journal Board Meeting | P&J Live |
| 14.30 – 16.00 | Parallel Session 6    | P&J Live |
| 16.15 – 17.45 | Parallel Session 7    | P&J Live |
| 17.45 – 18.45 | Closing Ceremony      | P&J Live |

# | General Information |



## **Conference Venues**

### **Wednesday 15 April 2026**

**Special interest groups**

RGU Garthdee Campus, Garthdee Road, Aberdeen, AB10 7QB

**Opening ceremony and welcome reception**

P&J live, East Burn Road, Stoneywood, Aberdeen AB21 9FX

### **Thursday & Friday 16 and 17 April 2026**

**Main conference venue**

P&j live, east burn road, stoneywood, aberdeen ab21 9fx

**Accessibility information:**

You can find information on accessibility at the venue at p&j live – accessibility

**In General:**

**Toilets:** there are accessible toilets on all levels

**Lift and Sscalators:** there are lifts and escalators to all levels

**Concourse (Ground Floor):** Registrations, Catering, Visual Presentations and Exhibition

**The View (First Floor):** Help Desk, informal seating area, all conference rooms

**Taxi rank:** Aberdeen Taxis pick-up and drop-off point

**Parking:** On-site parking is available, pay on exit

**No Cash Machine/ATM:** in support of P&J live's green credentials, all the bars, kiosks and restaurants accept card payments only, this is more efficient, safe and ensures a speedy transaction.

**WiFi:** FREE WIFI is available at the venue. No need for a code, simply connect via the landing page when prompted.

**Smoking:** P&J live is a no-smoking building, this includes the use of e-cigarettes and vaping, but they do have specific outside smoking points for those wishing to smoke outside.

**For more faqs regarding the conference venue.** Visit the P&J live website:

[www.pandjlive.com/faq/#visiting-faq](http://www.pandjlive.com/faq/#visiting-faq)

### **Thursday 16 April 2026**

**Conference Dinner** Union Kirk, 333 Union Street, Aberdeen, AB11 6BS

Union Kirk is in the city centre and easily accessible from throughout the city. The entrance is on Bon Accord Street. The venue is accessible and we will have a team on hand to help if required.

**Dress code:** Smart-casual.

## Bus Services

The jet service 727 will take you direct from aberdeen union square bus station via p&j live to aberdeen airport. The fleet of jet 727 buses feature contactless payments, leather seats, free wi-fi and usb charging available onboard.

| Departing from           | To               | First Bus | Last Bus |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|
| Union Square             | Aberdeen Airport | 0250      | 2345     |
| Bucksburn Police Station | Aberdeen Airport | 0309      | 0006     |
| P&J Live                 | Aberdeen Airport | 0315      | 0011     |

[www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com)

**How to Pay:** Cash (change given), Contactless Card Payments, Mobile tickets with Stagecoach Bus App: [www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/national/stagecoachbusapp](http://www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/national/stagecoachbusapp)

A discount is available for conference delegates using the code XXXXXXXXX

## Currency and Banks

The official currency of the UK is £ sterling. Commonly accepted credit cards are Visa and Mastercard. Display signs are usually visible in all restaurants and shops indicating which cards they accept.

There is a range of banks in Aberdeen City Centre with ATMs. Most banks are only open until early afternoon on Saturdays and closed all day Sunday. There is no ATM at P&J Live.

## Smoking

The Smoking, Health and Social Care (Scotland) Act 2005 made it an offence to smoke, or permit someone else to smoke, within premises which are enclosed or substantially enclosed. All conference venues are no-smoking buildings, this includes the use of e-cigarettes and vaping, but there are specific outside smoking points for those wishing to smoke outside.

## Restaurants

A selection of restaurants, eateries and bars can be found on VisitAberdeenshire's website

[www.visitabdn.com/food-and-drink](http://www.visitabdn.com/food-and-drink)

But to help you chose the local's have suggested some of their favourite places to eat and drink:

| Restaurants                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Pub                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Site Seeing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Jewel in the Crown</b> – Indian</li> <li>• <b>The Albyn Bar and Restaurant</b></li> <li>• <b>The Atrium</b></li> <li>• <b>Silver Darling</b> (noting its pricey but iconic fish restaurant)</li> <li>• <b>Mi Amore</b> – great value Italian</li> <li>• <b>Café Bohème</b> – excellent French food</li> <li>• <b>Muzo's Turkish Kitchen</b></li> <li>• <b>Rishis</b> (amazing Indian Restaurant on George Street)</li> <li>• <b>Rustico</b> - Italian</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Howff</b></li> <li>• <b>Under the Hammer</b></li> <li>• <b>Ma Cameron's</b></li> <li>• <b>The Prince of Wales</b> – very traditional Scottish pub</li> <li>• <b>The Grill</b> – the most traditional pub in Aberdeen – good range of whisky</li> <li>• <b>O'Malley's</b> – new Irish bar on Crown Street</li> <li>• <b>The Globe</b></li> <li>• <b>The Noose and Monkey</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Grampian Transport Museum (Alford)</b></li> <li>• <b>Aberdeen Beach</b> – especially Don Mouth</li> <li>• <b>Seal watching at Newburgh</b> – but you need to watch where you go as some areas are prohibited to the public</li> <li>• <b>Greyhope Bay</b> – great coffee shop with dolphin and seal watching</li> <li>• <b>Balmedie Beach</b></li> <li>• <b>Old Deeside</b> – Railway path</li> <li>• <b>King's college , Old Aberdeen and Botanic Gardens</b></li> <li>• <b>Marchall College</b></li> <li>• <b>Duthie Park</b> has a botanical garden</li> <li>• <b>Gordon Highlanders Museum</b></li> <li>• <b>Open top bus tours of Aberdeen City</b></li> <li>• <b>Old Deeside Railway path</b></li> </ul> |

## Extending your stay

If you are keen to extend your stay and see what Aberdeenshire and the rest of Scotland has to offer, you can find more information at

[www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com) and [www.visitabdn.com](http://www.visitabdn.com)

# | Keynote Abstracts |

## The Master's Tools Will Not Save Us: Reclaiming Social Work from Coloniality through Critical Hope

Kris Clarke<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Helsinki

As the world grapples with the multiple intersecting polycrises of genocide, wars of aggression, the erosion of democracy, widening social inequality, and environmental collapse, social work finds itself at a crossroads. Rooted in the industrial revolution and modernity, the discipline of social work has long been shaped by what Quijano terms “the coloniality of power.” Social work has a rich double legacy, a history of mutual aid, community organizing and transdisciplinary creativity; alongside one entangled in paternalism, carcerality, and Indigenous child removal.

Drawing on the work of Avery Gordon, the keynote explores coloniality as a haunting force or unresolved structure that continues to shape institutions, knowledge and practices. I argue that social work cannot meet the demands of the present with the very tools that helped build the problems. Instead, it must embrace a pluriversal ethics of epistemic justice, co-creation, ontological diversity, community governance, and critical hope. By embracing these orientations, we can reclaim social work's transformative potential in a world that urgently demands not one future, but many.

## Beyond Presentism: Reclaiming History and Comparison in Social Work Research

Prof Vasilios Ioakimidis

This keynote addresses the methodological significance of historical and comparative inquiry in understanding contemporary social work. It argues that the profession, and the lives of those it works alongside, cannot be grasped without examining their historical trajectories and the wider structural conditions that have shaped them.

Historical approaches illuminate the continuities of exclusion, intervention, and resistance within welfare systems, while comparative analysis enables us to discern patterns and divergences across national and disciplinary boundaries. Used critically, these methods move us beyond the narrowness of individual case narratives and the fragmentation often associated with postmodernism, revealing the broader social forces underpinning key social work themes such as child protection, colonial legacies, and environmental degradation.

By reconnecting social work with time and context, we can resist presentism and rediscover its transformative mission. Comparative and historical methodologies do not merely describe difference, they uncover the shared processes of power, suffering, and solidarity that make a critical and universal understanding of social work not only possible, but imperative.

## **Replicating the issues or reimagining the solutions: the complexities and contexts of researching social work responses to extra-familial harm**

Prof Carlene Firmin

Young people's experiences of exploitation, violence and abuse in extra-familial contexts blur binaries, and disrupt paradigms, that characterise child protection practice and research. In this keynote address, Prof Carlene Firmin will explore the tensions this disruption causes to social work in three ways, using her research to develop and track the implementation of 'Contextual Safeguarding' since 2008 as a consistent point of reference. Firstly, she will identify the ways in which extra-familial harms, and the young people, families and contexts impacted by it, have been positioned beyond the parameters of child protection social work, in both research and practice. Secondly, she will demonstrate the ways in which policing cultures and practices, and associated criminological research, have filled this gap – and the deleterious effects this has had on achieving a welfare-orientated response to young people impacted by extra-familial harm. Finally, she will argue that this shortfall in social work research and practice is further troubled by neoliberal cultures; in which individual behaviour change is sought and evaluated, abstracted from the contexts in which such change occurs. Using a care ethic to draw these three challenges together, Prof Firmin will argue for the importance of interdisciplinary practice and research responses to extra-familial harm in which social work values shape how others approach the issue, rather than social work being lost in partnerships which are not culturally, ethically or practically aligned to social justice, collective care, and support. She will conclude that without increased social work leadership in this space, social work research into extra-familial harm may risk replicating the harms caused to young people already punished more than they are protected, and lose an opportunity to reimagine solutions in which young people at risk of significant harm can be afforded protection, regardless of the contexts in which they are unsafe.



## **Bridging Research, Practice, and Policy in Social Work: Interdisciplinary and Technology-Driven Pathways from Evidence to Impact**

Prof Eric Chui

Social work professionals encounter major challenges in turning research evidence into practical actions and shaping policies at scale, especially when dealing with complex social issues that demand interdisciplinary collaboration and technological innovation. Despite the growing emphasis on evidence-informed practice, a considerable gap remains between robust research outcomes and everyday service delivery. This presentation explores how interdisciplinary research teams and technology-driven platforms can serve as structured pathways for translating evidence into practice, fostering more reciprocal connections among researchers, practitioners, service users, and policymakers.

# | Special Interest Groups |

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Dr. Paul Mccafferty<sup>1</sup>

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Prof. Dr. Claudia Olivier-Mensah, Dr. Pascal Debruyne, Prof. Dr. Nadia Baghdadi Baghdadi, Prof. Dr. Myrian Carbajal, Dr. Sarah Pollock, Prof. Dr Sonja Preißing, Mrs. Kerstin Reith

#### **Concepts and Practices of Solidarity and Social Work**

Professor Thomas Geisen, Maria Jastrzebska, Prof. Roland Becker-Lenz, Prof. Nuzha Allasad Alhuzail, Pat Cox

#### **Critical Realism and Social Work Research**

Associate Professor Emerita Monica Kjørstad

#### **European Network for Gerontological Social Work**

Professor Sarah Lonbay, Dr Tove Harnett

#### **Mental Health Social Work Special Interest Group**

Prof. (Dr). Kevin Stone

#### **Research on Social Work and Policy Engagement**

Prof John Gal, Prof Idit Weiss-Gal, Prof Riccardo Guidi

#### **Social work and conversation analysis:**

##### **Unpacking core concepts and analyzing them in action**

Professor Karin Osvaldsson Cromdal, Dr. Jon Symonds, Docent Clara Iversen, Docent Marie Flinkfeldt

#### **Social Work History and Research**

Prof. Em. Dr. Susanne Maria Maurer, Prof. Dr. Darja Zavirsek, Dr. Darren Hill

#### **Social work workforce and interdisciplinary research: Research on social work practitioner wellbeing, education and training, social work policy and the protection and safeguarding the workforce and quality of services provided**

Professor Paula Mcfadden, Professor Pia Tham, Dr Maija Mänttari-van der Kuip

**Substance Use and Social Work**

Dr Sari Kaarina Lindeman, Dr Ines Arendt

**User Involvement**

Sidsel Natland, Gisela Meier, Kristel Driessens

**Morning SIGs****Adult Protection and Safeguarding SIG Launch Event**

Dr Jeremy Dixon, Professor Lorna Montgomery

**Challenges and possibilities in transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research**

Professor Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås, Dr Sidsel Natland, Dr Kristel Driessens, Hoofddocent Bas van Laanen

**Decoloniality in Social Work**

Aniek Santema

**Evidence into Practice Special Interest Group EIPSIG**

Ms Anne Patricia McGlade

**Social Work with Adolescents:****Leading, Following, and Finding Our Way with Young People'**

Kristine Langhoff

**More-than-human theory between AI and social work: a More-than-human and Digitization SIGs collaborative event**

Dr. Tina Wilson, Dr. Heather Lynch, Judit Judit Castellví-Majó, Samuel Salovaara, Jana Verplancke

**Social Work Practice Education and Supervision**

Dr Elaine Wilson, Prof Prospera Tendam, Prof Kristina Urbanc, Prof Jo Finch, Dr Claudia Psalia, Ms Paula Slavin, Ms Jean Cummins, Dr Vanja Branica, Dr Niamh Flanagan

## Afternoon SIGs

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Professor Heather Lynch, Dr Tina Wilson

### Arts-Based Research in Action- Theories, Methods, Ethics, and Collaboration

Dr. Nesrien Abu Ghazaleh, Prof. Ephrat Huss

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Professor Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås, Hoofddocent Bas van Laanen, Dr Elke Plovie, Dr Sui Ting Kong, Martine Ganzevles, Prof Silvia Fargion

### Death and bereavement in Social Work : Contemporary Challenges for Education and Practice

Professor Denise Turner, Dr Sally Paul, Dr Sue Taplin, Dr Vida Douglas, Ms Marva Pickersgill-McKenzie

### Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) - Group judgement and decision-making

Dr Duncan Helm

### PhD and early career researchers SIG

Ippokratis Efstathiou<sup>1</sup>

### Social Work Ethics Research Group (SWERG)

Prof Sarah Banks

Social work ethics as inter-disciplinary practice, detailed programme on ESWRA website:

[www.eswra.org/sig\\_page\\_single.php?i=21](http://www.eswra.org/sig_page_single.php?i=21)

### Social Work Research on Digitalization and Technology

Dr. Judit Castellví i Majó, Dr. Samuel Salovaara, Prof. Jana Verplancke

### Social work, Crime and Criminal justice

Dr María Inés Martínez Herrero<sup>1</sup>

### What are the really important questions we need to ask about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them?

Dr Louise O'Connor, Dr Sara Carder, Dr Matthew Gibson

# | Full Day Special Interest Groups |

## Beyond Borders, Within Limits: Transnational Social Work Practice Challenging Political Contexts

Prof. Dr. Claudia Olivier-Mensah<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Pascal Debruyne, Prof. Dr. Nadia Baghdadi Baghdadi, Prof. Dr. Myrian Carbajal, Dr. Sarah Pollock, Prof. Dr. Sonja Preiing, Mrs. Kerstin Reith

<sup>1</sup>IU International University of Applied Sciences

The increasingly interconnected yet politically fragmented world presents unprecedented challenges for social work practitioners operating across national boundaries. This full-day Special Interest Group event examines how social workers navigate transnational spaces while confronting hostile political environments, restrictive migration policies, and structural barriers that limit their capacity to serve vulnerable populations effectively.

Transnational social work has emerged as a critical field encompassing diverse practice areas. Social workers must simultaneously address individual client needs while engaging with complex political advocacy dimensions beyond traditional service delivery models. This reality demands innovative strategies for organizing services, building professional networks, and sustaining effective practice despite political hostility.

The morning session, delivered in hybrid format to maximize international participation, features a fishbowl discussion centered on six key transnational social work domains:

1. **Transnational Aging** – Prof. Dr. Nadia Baghdadi and Prof. Dr. Myrian Carbajal (Switzerland) will address challenges of supporting aging populations across borders, examining care coordination, family separation, and policy barriers affecting older migrants and their transnational family networks.
2. **Transnational Return** – Kerstin Reith (PhD student/Germany) will explore return migration complexities, focusing on reintegration challenges, professional support strategies, and voluntary/involuntary return dynamics.
3. **Transnational Youth** – Prof. Dr. Sonja Preiing (Germany) will examine youth services across borders, addressing educational transitions, identity development, and support systems for young people navigating multiple national contexts.
4. **Linguistic Diversity** – Dr. Sarah Pollock (UK) will discuss language barriers in service provision, interpretation challenges, and strategies for culturally and linguistically responsive practice in transnational contexts.
5. **Asylum** – Dr. Pascal Debruyne (Belgium) will present social work challenges, including legal advocacy, trauma-informed practice, and navigating restrictive immigration policies while supporting refugee families.

Each expert will provide 10-minute statements highlighting field-specific challenges and successful organizational strategies, followed by structured dialogue addressing: How do social workers organize services across transnational contexts? How do practitioners navigate hostile political environments with restrictive policies? How can social workers effectively balance direct client support with necessary political advocacy work?

The afternoon session (on-site) employs a world café format to synthesize morning insights, facilitating deeper exploration of emerging themes while identifying research clusters and potential collaborative networks. A concluding sum-up session will establish future TRANSOW activities for 2026-2027, defining topical priorities and practical frameworks for collaborative research and joint publications.

Expected outcomes include developing practical strategies for transnational social work practice, establishing research collaboration networks, identifying priority investigation themes, and concrete TRANSOW activity planning. Participants will gain enhanced understanding of organizing effective cross-border services while maintaining ethical practice standards in politically challenging environments.

This event addresses a critical research gap by focusing specifically on intersections between transnational practice and political barriers. As social workers increasingly encounter clients whose needs transcend national boundaries, developing effective strategies for practice in restrictive political contexts becomes essential for professional relevance and effectiveness.



## Children's Rights in Practice

Dr. Paul Mccafferty<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Queen's University Belfast

### Children's Rights in Practice –SIG

#### Welcome and Introduction: “Connecting Practice Across Borders”

##### Warm Welcome and Overview

- Welcome from the organiser
- Purpose of today's Special Interest Group: To consolidate learning, highlight key insights from the day, and outline future directions for the Special Interest Group, ensuring ongoing collaboration and momentum in promoting children's rights in social work across Europe.
- Overview of today's session
- Reminder of our shared foundation: the UNCRC

#### Introductions: “Mapping Our Practice”

Each participant is invited to briefly share:

- Name and country/region
- Role or area of work.

#### Small Group Discussion: “What Brings Us Here”

In small, mixed-nationality groups, participants explore:

- What personal or professional experience has shaped your interest in children's rights?  
Each group may share one key reflection with the wider group (optional).

**Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is to foster connection and shared understanding by encouraging participants to reflect on and discuss the personal or professional experiences that have shaped their commitment to children's rights.

#### Presentation 1 – [Esther]

- 10-minute presentation
- 10-minute Q&A

#### Presentation 2 – [Insert Title]

- 10-minute presentation
- 10-minute Q&A

**Group Discussion on Presentations: “Common Threads, Shared Struggles”**

- In what ways can academic work influence frontline social work practice to better uphold children’s rights?
- What gaps do you see in current academic literature around children’s rights in social work, and how might we begin to address them?
- How can academic institutions better support meaningful child participation in research and teaching?
- What responsibilities do we have, as academics, to challenge systems and structures that limit children’s rights in practice?
- **Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is to critically reflect on how academic research and institutions can more effectively contribute to advancing children’s rights in social work practice, and to identify shared challenges and opportunities for collective action.

**Lunch (1 hour)**

- Informal networking and peer exchange

**Afternoon Activity: “Letter to My Younger Practitioner Self”**

- Participants write a short reflective letter to their earlier self—perhaps from when they first started working in the field—sharing what they’ve learned about working in rights-based ways, what they would do differently, and why it matters.
- Volunteers can read out excerpts or exchange letters anonymously for discussion.
- **Purpose** The purpose of this activity is to encourage personal reflection on professional growth y inviting participants to consider how their understanding and practice of children’s rights has evolved over time, and what insights they would share with their younger practitioner selves.

**Closing Reflections and Next Steps**

- Summary of key themes
- Next steps and future SIG plans
- Thanks and close

## Concepts and Practices of Solidarity and Social Work

Professor Thomas Geisen<sup>1</sup>, Maria Jastrzebska<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Roland Becker-Lenz<sup>1</sup>,  
Prof. Nuzha Allasad Alhuzail<sup>2</sup>, Pat Cox<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University Of Applied Sciences And Arts Northwestern Switzerland, School of Social Work FHNW,

<sup>2</sup>Sapir Academic College, School of Social Work,

<sup>3</sup>University of Central Lancashire, MIDEX Research Centre

In daily life, solidarity is commonly understood as people 'standing for each other', whether as individuals, social groups, communities, or nations, and even regarding the global dimension. Practices of solidarity are not inherently contingent upon physical proximity. They can occur over considerable distances, often unilaterally, particularly during wars or other crises. However, they can also evolve into reciprocal, mutually focused practices later.

So far, the concept of solidarity has received little attention as a focus of empirical research in the social sciences. It has often been viewed as a normative and political concept. However, since the turn of the millennium, the importance of solidarity as an analytical tool has grown within social sciences, particularly in domains such as family, activist movements, and civil society initiatives, as well as in debates about welfare state developments. Among other things, the concept of solidarity explains the cohesion of increasingly disaggregated societies and serves as an imagined or actual basis for ongoing and sustained social relations and ties. Examples include collective identities and welfare state structures in modern societies.

Solidarity is conceptualized as a distinct form of moral commitment among individuals. It involves providing direct or indirect support based on a sense of normative obligation toward political, social, and cultural relations. Solidarity bonds and boundaries emerge at various levels and in different contexts, such as among individuals or groups, within families, in neighborhoods, within nations, in national and international social movements, and in global settings.

A notable strand of solidarity studies explores solidarity with nature, which is understood to be shaped by socio-biological and ecological conditions. Discourses and practices of solidarity appear in many forms in contemporary societies, spanning multiple domains including care work, healthcare, social inclusion, and sustainability. These practices may manifest informally within families, social groups, and social movements, but they can also become institutionalized and legally regulated by the state. When informal support is inadequate, specialized professions, such as educators, physicians, and social workers, assume a role in providing services.

On the other hand, it has been observed that civil society assumes the responsibilities of professionals and welfare state institutions during periods of neoliberal policies, crisis, war, or natural disaster when societal demands exceed these institutions' capacity.

During periods of social upheaval when people face new challenges and existing relationships of solidarity weaken or become ineffective, the need for solidarity becomes apparent. Individuals are called upon to provide personalized support and assist community members in a spirit of solidarity. Individuals and social groups increasingly take the initiative to do so. However, when the foundations of solidarity erode at the political or moral level, institutional regulations may become vulnerable, which could compromise their existence and functionality.

In this context, we encourage proposals combining empirical findings and policy implications to enrich the discourse on solidarity within evidence-based social work. The committee welcomes submissions reflecting interdisciplinary thinking and contributions rooted in participatory action research, community-engaged fieldwork, or knowledge co-production between academia and practice. These contributions should demonstrate how solidarity is practiced in real-world contexts.

## Critical Realism and Social Work Research

Associate Professor Emerita Monica Kjørstad<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Oslo Metropolitan University

2026 Special Interest Group: Critical realism and social work research

**Title:**

**Sharing Knowledge:**

**Critical Realist Perspectives on Interdisciplinarity in Social Work Research.**

Complex social problems require both empirical and structural analysis. An interdisciplinary approach is often crucial in addressing these complex issues. However, many efforts at interdisciplinary collaboration have failed, leading to disappointment, professional conflicts, and a tendency towards protectionism. This is, of course, highly relevant for research and practice in social work.

Critical realism as a meta-theory in the social sciences provides an ontological and epistemological basis for understanding and explaining the importance of interdisciplinary research and practice. It consistently supports multidisciplinary approaches grounded in ontological and epistemological principles. There is a considerable body of literature on the subject.

This year's SIG «Critical realism and social work research» aims to explore various approaches to social work research, emphasising interdisciplinarity. Using a critical realist theoretical framework, we will seek to examine more closely WHY and HOW an interdisciplinary perspective can be advantageous in understanding and revealing societal phenomena. We hope this gathering will provide an overview of examples and discussions on how social work researchers from different fields are employing interdisciplinary approaches.

## European Network for Gerontological Social Work

Professor Sarah Lonbay<sup>1</sup>, Dr Tove Harnett

<sup>1</sup> University Of Sunderland

The ENGSW SIG meeting will bring together new and existing members to discuss gerontological social work at this full day SIG event. The event will include presentations from members, discussions of ongoing SIG activity, and space to plan for future collaborative work.

## **Mental Health Social Work Special Interest Group**

Prof. (Dr). Kevin Stone<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of South Wales/prifysgol De Cymru, 2 Leeds Beckett University

To follow

## Research on Social Work and Policy Engagement

Prof John Gal<sup>1</sup>, Prof Idit Weiss-Gal, Prof Riccardo Guidi

<sup>1</sup> Hebrew University

The SIG meeting will include two parts - the first will focus on strategies to increase the policy engagement of social workers including teaching, skills' reinforcement, and organizational supports. The second part will be an open session.



## Social work and conversation analysis: Unpacking core concepts and analyzing them in action

Professor Karin Osvaldsson Cromdal<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Jon Symonds<sup>3</sup>, Docent Clara Iversen<sup>2</sup>,  
Docent Marie Flinkfeldt<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Linköping University, <sup>2</sup> Uppsala university, <sup>3</sup> University of Bristol

Social work is an interdisciplinary field, applying theories and methods from a range of disciplines while adhering to certain core interests and ideals and a close connection with social work practice. Despite international variations, there is broad recognition of a shared conceptual foundation in how good social work is practiced. Such core concepts are part of theoretical frameworks, widely recognized ideals for practice, or integrated parts of methods and techniques. They provide a shared language and thus shape theoretical, practical, and ethical dimensions of social work and serve as a foundation for developing a professional identity, guiding practitioners in navigating complex situations, and stimulating critical reflection on social work practice. However, many of these core concepts tend to be broad, abstract, prescriptive, taken for granted, or normative. They are rarely grounded in the specifics of how practice unfolds in real life interactions with clients in social work, meaning they may also fail to fully address the complexities of the work.

We draw on the originally sociological research tradition of Conversation Analysis (CA), a growing approach to researching both every day and institutional interaction. CA offers a systematic way to examine social work practice in the fine details of real-life encounters. By such means, we aim to show how core social work concepts and values materialize on a practical level. The bottom-up perspective focuses on what professionals and clients in fact do and to what effects, thus aiming for the unveiling of good practice, unpacking abstract theories, and bridging social work research and practice. When these concepts are examined and refined based on real-life practice, they provide a foundation for practitioners to question, adapt, and innovate within their work. This not only improves applicability but also contributes to the development of the profession by generating context-specific knowledge that enriches theoretical frameworks both within the field of social work research and conversation analytic research.

In this SIG event we will thematize foundational concepts in relation to communication skills, relationship-building and collaboration. Empirical data consist of audio- and video recordings of real-life interactions between social workers and clients. Each presentation will take a core concept as its starting point, such as active listening, open questioning, meta-communication, positive reinforcement, trust, empathy, rapport, warmth and respect, working alliance, engagement and participation. Using conversation analysis, the presentations will demonstrate how these concepts and ideals can be understood as interactional phenomena that are accomplished collaboratively by social workers and clients in and through interaction. By focusing on in situ interactions in social work encounters, the ambition of the SIG event is to bridge theoretical ideals with the realities of practice, thus providing a more grounded understanding of social work practice and the values which guide the work.

## Social Work History and Research

Prof. em. Dr. Susanne Maria Maurer<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Darja Zavirsek, Dr. Darren Hill

<sup>1</sup>University Of Marburg, Germany

We will held a full-day SIG event with one part being a thematic focussed one, and the other part will give space for reports related to ongoing research projects, especially for our younger colleagues and their (f.e.) doctoral or post-doc research.

Right now we are working on the Call for Papers which will be completed and shared (among members and not-yet-members of the SIG) as soon as our SIG event is integrated into the planning process of the conference.

## **Social work workforce and interdisciplinary research: Research on social work practitioner wellbeing, education and training, social work policy and the protection and safeguarding the workforce and quality of services provided**

Professor Paula Mcfadden<sup>1</sup>, Professor Pia Tham<sup>1</sup>, Dr Maija Mänttari-van der Kuip

<sup>1</sup>Ulster University

The WRSIG was first formed in 2020 and has over 40 members from a range of international countries. We extend our WRSIG to those unable to attend the conference using Zoom technology, which provides access to research for those without funding, particularly those in the practitioner community who don't get access to research via conference attendance. This is particularly important as the research from the WRSIG is directly relevant to practitioner wellbeing. We feel this action is true to our social justice principles whilst also aligning with the overall conference theme on democratic approaches to social work practice, human rights and social justice.

The research conducted by members of the WRSIG group covers a range methodological approach to multiple topic areas associated with social worker education, wellbeing, health, workforce retention, safe and effective services and the ultimate protection and safeguarding of citizens. Research includes educational and practice issues, preparation for practice, workforce challenges and working conditions, social worker wellbeing and coping, supervisory supports for social workers, emotional and social wellbeing, and resilience and burnout in social workers. Workforce issues and challenges impacts on service users directly and indirectly, for example, through turnover and multiple changes of social worker to delays in service provision due to vacancies and staff absence. The group proposes a number of presentations for a full day at the ESWRA Aberdeen SIG 2026, which will provide members with current evidence from workforce research, across a number of cultural and geographic contexts internationally.

## Substance Use and Social Work

Dr Sari Kaarina Lindeman<sup>1</sup>, Dr Ines Arendt

<sup>1</sup>Western Norway University Of Applied Sciences

We, SIG Substance use and social work, want to organize a Special Interest Group (SIG) event for the SIG events scheduled on Wednesday, 15th April 2026.

### **Details of the event are as follows:**

**Event Format:** Full day

**Duration:** 5 hours

We wish to conduct a full-day session to ensure there is ample time for thorough discussions and activities in this active group. Given the diversity and potential output of our group, we believe a full day will be beneficial for all participants involved.

## User Involvement

Sidsel Natland<sup>1</sup>, Gisela Meier, Kristel Driessens

<sup>1</sup>Oslo Metropolitan University, <sup>2</sup>ZHAW Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften,

<sup>3</sup>Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Art

NB: The first half of the day will be a joint meeting between SIG Service User involvement and SIG Social Work Practice Research.

### Introduction

Transdisciplinarity challenges power relations and our ideas of evidence in social work practice and research, by the crossing of academic knowledge for different disciplines and experiential knowledge.

In the SIG pre-conference, we will explore transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research, and we will do it by different methods to engage and interact with the participants.

### Morning Session

This will be a joint meeting between the two SIGs (Convenor in the Practice Research SIG: Catrine T. Halås, Norway).

The meeting will be facilitated by the World Café method. We work with what the participants bring into the dialogue from their own experiences, as we elaborate over following questions:

- How and why to involve service users, when this collaboration is not evident for other academic disciplines?
- What is the role of the social work researcher in epistemological clashes with academic researchers from other disciplines?
- Which strategic approaches can we use to foster respectful and empowering collaboration with service users, including in contexts beyond social work research?

### Afternoon Session

This is for the SIG User Involvement separately.

**Convenors:** Natland, Meier and Driessens.

In the afternoon session we aim for presentations (20–30 minutes) in which researchers present their experiences, perspectives, and empirical findings on service user involvement in interdisciplinary research projects. The call for abstracts will be sent out when the SIGs are confirmed.

Contributions addressing the following topics are especially welcome:

- Opportunities and limitations of participatory approaches, particularly with regard to differing views on the equivalence of scientific and experiential knowledge across disciplines;

- Ethical considerations on service users involvement in interdisciplinary research projects, including power asymmetries, research ethics, and informed participation;
- Tensions between the methodological requirements of individual disciplines and the principles of participatory research;
- Strategic approaches to fostering respectful and empowering collaboration with service users, including in contexts beyond social work research.

Also, in the SIG, any other businesses and sharing of experiences, networking and strategies to keep the group active, will be addressed.

NB: Our collaboration with the SIG on Practice Research means that those two SIGs share one room in the morning, and then needs one separate room each in the afternoon. It is very convenient if our two SIGs may be allocated in seminar rooms close to each other.

# **Morning Special Interest Groups**

## Adult Protection and Safeguarding SIG Launch Event

Dr Jeremy Dixon<sup>1</sup>, Professor Lorna Montgomery<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cardiff University, <sup>2</sup> Queen's University Belfast

This will be the first meeting of the Adult Protection and Safeguarding SIG. Our pre-conference event will address the conference sub-theme – Social work research, policy, practice or education across national, social, cultural, disciplinary and professional boundaries.

### Introduction

Jeremy Dixon and Lorna Montgomery will introduce the session and explain how the special interest group came about.

### Schedule

The first half of the session will focus on developing research methods to study adult protection and safeguarding and will include three presentations.

- Megan Robb (University of Bath, UK) – Using co-production when designing research focussed on adult safeguarding for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Martina Koch (FHNW University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland) – Using a multi-method design when researching assessments relating to older adults in need of protection in Switzerland.
- Maria Wolmesjö (University of Borås, Sweden) - Co-creating research on missing persons living with dementia/cognitive impairments with the Swedish Police and Swedish Dementia Centre.

The second half of the session will be an open discussion in which we will i) introduce ourselves and our research interests in the adult protection and safeguarding area ii) identify how to expand the membership iii) set out activities within the coming year.



## Bridging Disciplines and Cultures: Indigenous Knowledge as a Resource in Social Work Practice

**Theme:** Indigenous Knowledge as a Resource in Social Work Practice

Indigenous knowledge represents accumulated wisdom, relational ethics, and community-based practices that sustain social and ecological well-being. This Special Interest Group (SIG) explores how Indigenous knowledge can inspire transformative approaches to social work theory, practice, and education, bridging disciplinary, cultural, and geographical boundaries.

Indigenous knowledge systems embody holistic understandings of life, rooted in reciprocity, respect, and interconnectedness between humans, land, and nature. In many contexts, these systems challenge Western epistemologies by emphasizing collective responsibility, oral traditions, and lived experience as valid sources of knowledge. For social work, engaging with Indigenous epistemologies offers opportunities to rethink practice ethics, promote decolonization, and strengthen community resilience in the face of social and ecological crises.

The workshop invites contributions that reflect on how Indigenous knowledge informs social work across diverse regions, including collaborations between the Global South and the Global North, and between academia and Indigenous communities. It aims to create a dialogical space where practitioners, researchers, and Indigenous knowledge holders can co-produce knowledge grounded in respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability.

### Topics for Discussion

- How can Indigenous knowledge systems inform and transform social work theory, ethics, and education?
- In what ways can Indigenous knowledge bridge disciplines such as anthropology, education, environmental studies, and psychology?
- How can land-based and community-based methodologies enrich social work research and practice?
- What are the challenges and possibilities of decolonizing social work through Indigenous perspectives?
- How can Indigenous worldviews contribute to solidarity, healing, and sustainable community development?
- What international or intercultural collaborations illustrate the integration of Indigenous epistemologies into social work?

## Challenges and possibilities in transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research

Professor Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås<sup>1</sup>, Dr Sidsel Natland<sup>2</sup>, Dr Kristel Driessens<sup>3</sup>,  
Hoofddocent Bas van Laanen<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nord Universitet, <sup>2</sup> Oslo Metropolitan University, <sup>3</sup> University of Antwerp, <sup>4</sup> Han University

The general aim of the Social Work Practice Research SIG is to strengthen possibilities for knowledge-based social work practice throughout Europe. In line with the goals of ESWRA, we offer an opportunity to promote cross-national practice-based research projects as well as scholarly debates and knowledge exchange among the various research interested stakeholders related to social work practice. Our group considers itself as an open forum for the diverging approaches and different partners in social work and related research.

In the pre-conference for the SIG in Social work practice research we would like to elaborate on the main conference's theme "Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence informed practice and policy", in relation to social work practice research, as we set a critical and constructive view at social work practice research in an interdisciplinary context.

The first half of the day will be a joint meeting with the SIG Service User involvement. The second part of the day will be for SIG Social work practice research alone (see program for afternoon session).

In the joint SIG-session in the morning we will explore challenges and possibilities in transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research.

Transdisciplinarity challenges power relations and our ideas of evidence in social work practice and research, by the crossing of academic knowledge for different disciplines and experiential knowledge. The joint meeting will be facilitated by the World Café method.

We work with what the participants bring into the dialogue from their own experiences, as we elaborate over following questions:

- How and why to involve service users, when this collaboration is not evident for other academic disciplines?
- What is the role of the social work researcher in epistemological clashes with academic researchers from other disciplines?
- Which strategic approaches can we use to foster respectful and empowering collaboration with service users, including in contexts beyond social work research.

## Decoloniality in Social Work

Aniek Santema<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Han University Of Applied Science

To be developed

## Evidence into Practice Special Interest Group EIPSIG

Ms Anne Patricia McGlade<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NI Social Care Council

This is not the detailed abstract for our Pre-Conference SIG. Rather but is being submitted at this date as per required date by Anne McGlade, as Convener of EIPSIG, to secure a room Half day event at Pre-Conference in the morning.

I have also sent an email to Conference organizers to make this request also.

Our programme is tentative but we will definitely be hosting a Pre-Conference half day event in the Morning with members of EIPSIG presenting. As per email if we could share the same room with DARSIG colleagues who will host their SIG in the afternoon as some of the members are members of both SIGS. That would be very much appreciated

### Tentative outline

#### **Evidence into Practice Special Interest Group Pre- conference meeting**

#### **Date Wednesday 15 April 2026**

As part of the 15th European Conference for Social Work Research 2026, Aberdeen, United Kingdom

#### **Members' Presentations - Getting Evidence into Practice:**

9.30 -11.00

**First Presentation by** Dr Ligat Shalev Hebrew University of Jerusalem and  
Professor Florian Spensberger Munich University

**Second presentation:** Tentative only Bruce A.Thyer Research Professor Florida State University, College of Social Work

#### **Title and content TBC Followed by:**

11.00-11.30am Coffee and networking

11.30 -12.30pm Business agenda

## Social Work with Adolescents: Leading, Following, and Finding Our Way with Young

Professor Kristine Langhoff<sup>1</sup>, Professor Carlene Firmin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Sussex, <sup>2</sup> Durham University

This is the fifth annual meeting of the Social Work with Adolescents SIG. For the past several years, we have designed a day in two parts:

- 1) a session to explore shared research interests, and to engage in rich, wide-ranging and creative conversation about key issues in research and practice with adolescents, and
- 2) a session designed for us to learn something together.

This year, we are still working out the details for what we hope to offer attendees as part of a 'learning together' session in the afternoon (last year, we visited the Haus Der Kunst art museum together to hear about their youth participation work in Munich). But for the morning, our official pre-conference SIG workshop will be organised around a discussion of two topics that emerged amongst SIG members (via online meetings and ongoing dialogue) throughout this past year.

1. In social work practice, is 'adolescence' a first thought or an afterthought? We are interested in exploring the similarities and differences across contexts in relation to how adolescent age, culture, time, development, or experience is position within the systems that govern their lives (e.g. education, social work, justice, health)
2. Are we-as researchers interested in the safety, health, and well-being of young people-leading or following an agenda set by policy and legislative frameworks, and/or social and cultural norms?

We are interested in understanding where researchers see themselves, and how we collectively work towards leading an agenda that is rooted in evidence and promotes young people's own views and needs.

We hope that these two provocations will open up a discussion that attendees can relate to their own research experience and interests, and welcome anyone to join us on the day. We also encourage people to come prepared to share briefly about their research interests and/or to bring any relevant research/publications they would like to share with the group.

If you have any questions about the SIG, please contact Kristi Langhoff at

[k.e.langhoff@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:k.e.langhoff@sussex.ac.uk).

## More-than-human theory between AI and social work: a More-than-human and Digitization SIGs collaborative event

Dr. Tina Wilson<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Heather Lynch, Judit Judit Castellví-Majó, Samuel Salovaara, Jana Verplancke

<sup>1</sup> University of British Columbia, Vancouver

The pace of technological development is impacting all aspects of human life. The internet now dominates globalised communications, and social media shapes culture, business and politics. Large language models of artificial intelligence are making swift inroads into business and education, and, depending on your viewpoint, threaten or promise a 5th industrial revolution. This, according to Google CEO Sundar Pichai, will be more impactful than electricity.

These technologies are also changing social work in the broadest sense of how data is managed and research undertaken, but also the daily operation of social services. These changes threaten long-held values of person-centred practice, inclusion, and anti-discrimination (Barfoed, 2019; Steiner, 2021), and yet, social work scholarship has been slow to develop a knowledge base relevant to infrastructures (Goldkind et al., 2023; Garkisch and Goldkind, 2024).

Critical social work raised concerns with how early developments in information and communication technologies turned assessment into a tick box exercise, and practice into a desk-based case management role (Parton, 2006). From this past critique to the current siren calls within the world of AI of potential risks, there is a need for scholars to give attention to this field. In response, the More-than-human and new Digitization SIGs have organized a collaborative event at ECSWR 2026 in Aberdeen that will provide a platform for innovative thought interrogating the use and potential purpose of AI in social work as a more-than-human development.

Technological developments since the Oldowan choppers of the Paleolithic age are a more-than-human production that extends, adapts and changes the human form. The changes brought about by AI on what it means to be human are profound, as the human becomes transhuman (More, 2013). AI is already enhancing medical research and screening, improving efficiency in a wide range of industries and aiding scientific discovery. At the same time, the downside impacts are worrying and at times terrifying. Job displacement, widening inequality, social manipulation, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and deepfakes, as well as data privacy risks, security threats, erosion of skills, psychological harm, and diminished human interaction, are just some of the risks presented by Google's Intelligence Search. This feels like a threshold moment as artificial intelligence is with us, yet the extent and ways in which it will shape human life depend on how this technological force is managed.

There is a strong seam of more-than-human scholarship since George Canguilhem's insight into the relationship between human development and environment (Canguilhem, 2008) and Gilbert Simondon's (Scott, 2014) life of technical objects challenging the human/machine binary. Through her allegory of OncoMouse Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1997) argues that

technology and capitalism have and are implicated in how human life is shaped and how it relates to the environments that produced it. These voices offer a critical vantage point on questions of equality, discrimination and what it means to relate that are key to social work practice. By bringing together work interrogating developments in AI with more-than-human thought, this collaborative SIG event aims to contribute to emergent social work scholarship in this field.

## Social Work Practice Education and Supervision

Dr Elaine Wilson<sup>1</sup>, Prof Prospera Tedom<sup>1</sup>, Prof Kristina Urbanc<sup>2</sup>, Prof Jo Finch<sup>3</sup>,  
Dr Claudia Psalia<sup>4</sup>, Ms Paula Slavin<sup>1</sup>, Ms Jean Cummins<sup>5</sup>, Dr Vanja Branica<sup>2</sup>,  
Dr Niamh Flanagan<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University College Dublin, <sup>2</sup> University of Zagreb, <sup>3</sup> Suffolk University, <sup>4</sup> University of Malta,

<sup>5</sup> Maynooth University

SIG theme: Supporting And Enhancing Student Experiences On Social Work Practice  
Placements: Learning From International Experiences

Social work practice education internationally faces both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. These opportunities and challenges are shaped by evolving societal needs, technological advancements, and shifting professional expectations. This SIG addresses the first subtheme of the conference “Challenges and opportunities for social work research, practice, policy or education in contemporary contexts” by facilitating a discussion amongst international practice educators, with the intention of harnessing and learning from best practice.

### Contemporary Challenges

Practice education bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application, with the aim of fostering critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and competent practice. The ideal practice placement will empower the student to apply learning already achieved and stretch them to grow and develop into skilled practitioners. One of the primary challenges internationally lies in the availability and quality of practice placements. The recruitment and retention of social work staff is an increasing problem which has a direct impact on the number of social work practitioners available to take a student on placement. Factors such as organisational austerity, high staff workloads, and service user complexity can strain agencies’ capacity to host and effectively support students. Additionally, disparities in placement access and experience can disproportionately affect students from marginalised backgrounds, raising equity concerns within the profession.

The integration of academic learning with practice education remains a contemporary challenge. Both students and practice educators report a disconnect between theoretical content delivered in university settings and the reality of frontline work. Where agencies are short-staffed and practice educators are under significant pressure and stress, there may not be sufficient time to help students link theory to practice which can hinder students’ ability to develop a coherent professional identity and apply critical frameworks in practice.

### Opportunities

Technological advances have the potential to enhance learning with virtual simulations and online reflective tools, to name just two, widening access to high-quality educational experiences.



Furthermore, there is growing recognition of the value of interprofessional education, where students engage in collaborative learning across health, education, and social care disciplines, enriching their understanding of holistic care.

Culturally responsive and anti-oppressive practice is another vital area gaining prominence. Social work education has a responsibility to confront systemic inequalities and embed principles of social justice, diversity, and inclusion throughout the curriculum and practice learning. Strengthening partnerships with service users and communities in the educational process can empower students to develop more empathetic, grounded, and ethically sound approaches to practice.

To address these challenges and harness emerging opportunities, a collaborative, systemic approach amongst social work educators nationally and internationally is essential. This SIG provides the opportunity for the conversations to take place and strong student centred collaborations to commence.

# | Afternoon Special Interest Groups |

## AI and more-than-human social work

Professor Heather Lynch, Dr Tina Wilson

The Social Work and the More-than-human Special Interest Group (MTH SIG) brings together transnational scholars working on the ways in which the more-than-human, broadly defined, challenges human-focused social work research, education and practice.

### Open Space event

Artificial Intelligence is fast embedding in everyday life, in ways that may be helpful, and also problematic. These technological shifts have implications for the operations of wider society and, therefore, concerns of equality and justice that are central to social work. This session will explore the uses and misuses of AI, from the vantage point of the more-than-human. There is emergent scholarship in this area that deals with science, politics and ethics of AI. We are interested in the ways in which the expanding reach of AI is disrupting and/or enhancing human relationships and, therefore, what it means to be human in the age of accelerating machine intelligence.

In this session, we will facilitate an Open Space discussion on the uses and problems of AI in social work research, practice and education. Open Space is a form of conferencing that centres the knowledge and experience of participants and promotes active dialogue over passive listening. This session will be of interest to all who are grappling with the ways in which AI is impacting their practice as researcher, scholar and/or educator. Discussion will contribute to our plans for publication and wider dissemination of thought.

### Social Work and the More-than-human Special Interest Group Annual Meeting

We will reflect on the year's achievements, including the publication of a special issue for the Journal of Ethics and Social Welfare and our collaboration with the new ESWRA digitalisation and technology sig. We will also develop plans for the coming year. We welcome older members and new, as well as all who are interested or even curious about more than human thought and how this intersects with social work research in the contemporary globalised context. You are welcome to come and help us shape an agenda for activity during 2026/27.

## Arts-Based Research in Action- Theories, Methods, Ethics, and Collaboration

Dr. Nesrien Abu Ghazaleh<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Ephrat Huss

<sup>1</sup> Hva, <sup>2</sup> Ben-Gurion University

In this half day SIG, members members of the SIG ( we will provide a list of exactly who a little later on) will together:

- A.** Discuss and produce a theoretical rational for using arts in research
- B.** Provide sets of experiential hands-on arts-based research methods that they have implemented in research
- C.** Together, create connections between these arts-based theories and methods and the participants personal research projects, so that participants will leave the Sig with a rational and sets of methods -to include arts-based methods within their specific research projects. D Think together, how to deal with ethical, and validation issues of arts based research, based on presented case studies
- D.** Answer participants questions, hear about their projects, and create a support network, and potential collaborations between participants on shared grants, projects, and panels. (for example, we now have a symposium that we created together, of people from our Sig, and we have published two books together and a third one is now coming it: We have engaged in many research projects together),

We look forward to seeing you there!

## Building a framework for addressing epistemic injustice in Social Work Practice Research

Professor Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås<sup>1</sup>, Hoofddocent Bas van Laanen<sup>2</sup>, Dr Elke Plovie<sup>3</sup>, Dr Sui Ting Kong<sup>4</sup>, Martine Ganzevles<sup>5</sup>, Prof Silvia Fargion<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nord Universitet, <sup>2</sup> Han University, <sup>3</sup> University of Applied Sciences UC, <sup>4</sup> Durham University,

<sup>5</sup> HU University of Applied Sciences, <sup>6</sup> Trento University

The general aim of the Social Work Practice Research SIG is to strengthen possibilities for knowledge-based social work practice throughout Europe. In line with the goals of ESWRA, we offer an opportunity to promote cross-national practice-based research projects as well as scholarly debates and knowledge exchange among the various research interested stakeholders related to social work practice. Our group considers itself as an open forum for the diverging approaches and different partners in social work and related research.

The first half of the day will be a joint meeting with the SIG Service User involvement (see separate invitation). In the second part of the day, we will follow up our work from the last SIG meeting in Munich 2025, where we took a critical view on democratisation of knowledge production, as we elaborated on dilemmas presented from participants. After the conference, inspired by Silvia Fargion's lecture on epistemic injustice, those who shared their dilemmas has cooperated in writing a short article. In the article we discuss the challenges and opportunities of social work practice research in promoting epistemic equality.

Social work practice research involves bringing a variety of perspectives and voices to the forefront—even when these voices are in opposition to one another—and within social contexts where power imbalances exist (Joubert & Webber, 2020). In our SIG meeting 2026 we will build upon Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice. She argues that injustice related to knowledge can be linked to societal inequalities. These inequalities primarily influence how people's knowledge is considered credible or less so in particular contexts and can be of two types: testimonial injustice implies a non-recognition of a subject as a valid epistemic agent, and hermeneutic injustice happens when the dominant language does not sustain the conceptualisation of minorities' experiences. In Social work practice research, we can identify many issues for which epistemic injustice appears to be relevant.

We invite our participants to take part in a Co-research workshop, to share experiences, perspectives and elaborate deeper about social work practice research, addressing challenges and possibilities related to the two forms of epistemic injustice. In the workshop we will facilitate a process where we categorise different kinds of epistemic injustice, where the goal is to create the foundation for a framework for addressing epistemic injustice.

After the ESWRA conference those who have participated will be invited to join Co-research workshop part II in an online meeting, where the goal is to build a framework for addressing epistemic injustice in social work practice research. The idea is to present this framework in a joint publication.

ABSTRACT: It will be possible to send an abstract for giving a 15-minute presentation in connection to the Co-research workshop after lunch. The abstract must be from 300 - 400 words, addressing questions and challenges related to epistemic injustice, based on the authors own experiences in social work practice research. If you want to present, send your abstract to [catrine.t.halas@nord.no](mailto:catrine.t.halas@nord.no) before 1st of December. Notification will be given before 22nd of December.

## Death and bereavement in Social Work : Contemporary Challenges for Education and Practice

Professor Denise Turner<sup>1</sup>, Dr Sally Paul, Dr Sue Taplin, Dr Vida Douglas,  
Ms Marva Pickersgill- McKenzie

<sup>1</sup> University Of Hertfordshire

This workshop will introduce participants to the new ESWRA Special Interest Group which aims to explore the fields of death, loss and bereavement within social work education and practice. The study of death and dying is still commonly confined to palliative and end of life care in social work, with traditional theories not always representing more contemporary issues and ideas. This workshop will help members to explore complex contemporary issues, for example, but not limited to, the impact of the internet and AI on the experience and practice of death and dying, together with other issues of great debate, for example assisted dying and suicide.

Participants will also be able to share their own experiences of death and bereavement , in a way which is comfortable within a contained space and to explore how these impact on them as practitioners and educators.

## Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) - Group judgement and decision-making

Dr Duncan Helm<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of Stirling

DARSIG is a vibrant and collegiate SIG with regular online meetings promoting collaboration in research and knowledge mobilisation. Our half-day event at ESWRC 2026 continues DARSIG's tradition of pre-conference events with engaging themes and lively discussion. This year's DARSIG pre-conference event will consider group judgement and decision-making in social work.

Social work practice frequently requires two or more people to be collectively involved in gathering and evaluating information before deciding between different courses of action. Examples include working in teams, multi-disciplinary practice, case conferences and exchange-model approaches in assessments with people using social work services. Many aspects of group judgement and decision-making in social work have been researched and theorised by DARSIG members (see for example Taylor et al. (2023) Sage Handbook of Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work). This year, our ESWRC pre-conference event gives space for debate and reflection on this fascinating and fundamental element of practice.

Group judgement and decision-making brings a range of opportunities and challenges which distinguish it from individual judgement and decision-making. Power relationships and dynamics within groups can influence the way that information is presented, considered and utilised. Groups can be a powerful facilitator of rigorous, deliberative thinking but they can also serve to exacerbate cognitive biases and to diminish accountability. Groups have the potential to consider multiple perspectives but messages from research and practice indicate that groups can also stifle dissent and perpetuate professional status, hierarchies and dominant voices.

Our event will open with a set of linked presentations on different aspects of group judgement and decision-making. Confirmed presentations include Mark Gregory (University of East Anglia, England) exploring teams as a "secure base" for decision-making, and Duncan Helm (University of Stirling, Scotland) building theory on distributed and peer-aided sense-making. Each presentation will explore a distinct element of the field of inquiry, considering the latest messages from research, theory and practice. Following presentations, small-group discussions will give participants the opportunity to contribute, reflect and consider the implications for future developments in research, education, policy and best practice.



## PhD and early career researchers SIG

Ippokratis Efstathiou<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of West Attica, <sup>2</sup> IASIS NGO

The PhD & Early Career Researcher SIG is a meeting point where doctoral candidates and early career researchers within ESWRA can connect, exchange ideas and build supportive networks that last beyond the conference itself. Early academic life often comes with its own challenges. From navigating publication pressures to juggling career uncertainty and sometimes even a sense of isolation. This SIG intends to turn those challenges into opportunities with a lively, collegial space where participants can reflect, collaborate, and imagine their future as part of a wider community of Social Work researchers.

The 2026 event builds on the momentum of previous years while bringing in fresh formats to spark dialogue and interaction. Our aim is not only to share experiences but to create the kinds of connections and collaborations that continue long after Aberdeen, through co-authored papers, joint panels and new friendships across borders.

### Introduction & Welcome

Convenors will welcome participants and outline the objectives of the session, emphasising the importance of teamwork, collaboration, and mutual support.

### Speed Networking

Through short, timed conversations, participants introduce themselves and their research interests. The activity will foster immediate connections and create the basis for future collaborations.

### Research Snapshots (3-Minute Thesis Style)

Selected participants present their projects in three minutes using accessible language and one visual aid. Following all presentations, a facilitated discussion will allow questions, connections and reflections, encouraging clarity in communication and cross-disciplinary understanding.

### Surviving the PhD / Career Journeys

Senior PhDs and early career researchers share personal insights and practical strategies for navigating doctoral research, publishing, funding applications and career transitions. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and share their reflections, highlighting diverse pathways and challenges.

### Collaboration Lab

In small groups, participants work together to generate ideas for collaborative outputs (e.g. joint articles, cross-institutional projects, co-organised panels or workshops). Each group will propose one concrete next step, reinforcing the role of PhD and early career researchers as active contributors to the wider Social Work research community.

**Closing Reflections**

The session concludes with a collective reflection on key insights, lessons learned and the role of early career researchers in shaping the future of Social Work research in Europe.

This SIG event is designed to provide participants with a constructive and engaging experience. By combining interactive activities with opportunities for reflection, it will enable PhD candidates and early career scholars to exchange knowledge, explore potential collaborations, and strengthen their research networks. Participants will leave the SIG with new ideas, practical insights and concrete ideas that can support both their ongoing projects and their broader academic development.

## Social Work Ethics Research Group (SWERG)

Prof Sarah Banks<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Durham University

### Social work ethics as interdisciplinary practice

This pre-conference workshop aims to bring together researchers with an interest in social work ethics to enable sharing of ideas, networking and developing plans for future collaboration. The workshop will start with sharing expertise and interests in an informal and friendly way. We will then focus on the substantive theme for this workshop: social work ethics as interdisciplinary practice, with a programme of presentations, provocations, group exercises and discussions. At the close of the workshop we will draw together conclusions and consider next steps for the group, including future publications, meetings and workshops. The programme will be determined following a call for contributions in Autumn 2025.

### About the theme: Social work ethics as interdisciplinary practice

Social work ethics as a topic tends to be concerned with the ethical being and action of social workers facing challenging situations in their daily work, and with articulating and explicating the values and principles upon which ethical practice is or should be based. This workshop will address the theme of inter-disciplinarity and the implications for professional ethics in social work from two perspectives: firstly considering inter-disciplinary approaches to theorising social work ethics; secondly the ethical challenges experienced as social workers practice alongside people from other professions and disciplinary backgrounds.

1. Theorising social work ethics. Traditionally social work ethics draws on moral philosophy for its theoretical underpinnings (e.g. deontological, consequentialist, virtue and care ethics). What can we learn from recent work in moral philosophy on themes such as empirical, contextual, indigenous, post-human, embodied and relational approaches to ethics? What might be the contribution of other disciplines, which have developed their own perspectives on thinking and theorising about ethics, such as moral geography, moral anthropology and moral psychology? What are the implications for how we conceptualise and practise social work ethics and for theoretical and empirical research on the topic?
2. Interdisciplinary working. The interdisciplinary nature of contemporary social work practice complicates the ethical considerations. When social workers collaborate with professionals from medicine, law, psychology, and emerging fields like artificial intelligence, they encounter competing professional codes and conflicting approaches to the well-being of people using services, confidentiality, and intervention strategies. These intersections create new ethical dilemmas that traditional frameworks may not adequately address. What are the findings and implications of recent research on this theme and what is the potential for further studies?

## Social Work Research on Digitalization and Technology

Dr. Judit Castellví i Majó<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Samuel Salovaara<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Jana Verplancke<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitat de Lleida, <sup>2</sup> University of Lapland, <sup>3</sup> Artevelde Hogeschool

This new Special Interest Group (SIG) brings together researchers who are interested in the intersection between social work, digitalization, and technology. Our aim is to explore how technological transformations – such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic decision-making, digital platforms, and online service delivery – are reshaping social work practice, management, education, research, and policy. At the same time, we critically examine the risks, inequalities, and ethical implications that accompany these changes, including issues of digital exclusion, surveillance, and professional boundaries.

The SIG acknowledges that digitalization creates both opportunities and challenges for social work: from innovative tools for practice and research to the emergence of new vulnerabilities and needs in society. There is a growing need for research in social work to enhance our understanding of how technology is integrated into practice in ways that do not reduce or oversimplify knowledge about clients and social phenomena. Such simplification risks erasing the multidimensionality of human experience and the inherent complexity of social life. It is also essential to develop critical responses to dominant forms of technical-rational thinking, which tend to marginalize the epistemological foundations of social work and its professional expertise. These perspectives often seek to harness technology as a tool of control in the name of efficiency, overlooking the nuanced and relational nature of social work.

At the same time, technology opens up unprecedented opportunities for both social work practice and research. Emerging and innovative technological developments enable new ways of processing and utilizing information, while also generating new competency requirements for social workers, managers, and researchers operating within the field of social work. We seek to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration across Europe and beyond, encouraging participatory and innovative approaches to studying and shaping technological practices in social work.

As a newly established SIG, this first meeting offers a valuable opportunity to introduce our thematic focus, engage with interested colleagues, and collectively explore directions for the group's future development. We look forward to building a robust research network, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices, and initiating joint projects that critically and constructively engage with the digital transformation of social work. A central objective is also to enable shared knowledge creation through inclusive and dialogical processes.

Participants will be asked to provide a brief overview of their respective research areas. These contributions will serve as a foundation for identifying shared interests, thematic intersections, and potential avenues for collaboration. The session will conclude with a structured collective discussion aimed at outlining prospective activities and joint initiatives within the SIG. We warmly welcome all researchers and academics interested in the role of technology and digitalisation in social work to join us.

## **Social work, Crime and Criminal justice**

Dr María Inés Martínez Herrero<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNED (National University of Distance Education, Spain)

Annual SIG event

## What are the really important questions we need to ask about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them?

Dr Louise O'Connor<sup>1</sup>, Dr Sara Carder, Dr Matthew Gibson

<sup>1</sup> Royal Holloway, University Of London

### What are the really important questions we need to ask about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them?

Join us to debate this central question, and hear from Guest Speaker Prof. Karen Winter, Queens University Belfast.

Emotions are a really significant dimension in all forms of social work. They are both important phenomena at systemic, organisational and intra-organisational levels, and in the relationship-based critical practice which underpins the profession. They are also an often neglected aspect of social work research. This Researching Emotions Special Interest Group will address the conference theme of Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence informed practice and policy by bringing together researchers, practitioners and people with lived experience to share perspectives, explore new and developing knowledge and to collaborate on answering this key question: What are the really important questions we need to be asking about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them? The half-day session combines discussion with interactive activities to facilitate participation, critical reflection and collaborative planning. Guest speaker Prof Karen Winter will share her research on the significance of emotions for practitioners, concentrating on two themes, firstly the emotional labour and costs to practitioners engaged in complex practice dynamics, and secondly the types of practice skills required for engaging in meaningful and sensitive direct work with children. Building on shared information about existing research and research interests there will be structured activities to discuss what key research questions might be most important to address in contemporary social work, and what research methods might be best suited to answer these questions.

All are welcome - the broad topic of researching emotions crosses all social work sectors. New members will be added to our growing network, which aims to build collaboration and develop new research in this important area. Do register for the SIG at ESWRA and if you'd like to join our mailing list contact our conveners. We look forward to meeting you in Aberdeen!

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# | Oral Presentations |

## From City Strategy to Neighborhood Reality: The Role of Social Work in Digital Local Governance and Citizen Participation

Elodie Müller<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Applied Sciences Münster

Smart City strategies and the proliferation of online participation platforms promise more inclusive civic engagement and accessible public services for every resident. Although municipal administrations often launch ambitious programs, translating such initiatives from the citywide level to the neighborhood scale remains a critical challenge. However, the implementation of these digital services rarely unfolds evenly across the city. Urban neighborhoods are often highly heterogeneous in terms of both social and spatial factors; what works in one context may be irrelevant, inaccessible, or mistrusted in another. The assumption is that individual digital practices themselves are shaped by the social structure and the material and spatial resources of each neighborhood, the place where the residents live and cope with everyday life. Consequently, locally specific approaches are essential if digital citizen services are to become truly accessible and meaningful.

This presentation explores the potential and responsibility of Social Work, especially community-based Social Work, as a local mediator and translator in the digital transformation of municipalities. Social Work operates precisely at the intersection of municipal governance and the everyday lives of residents. With its knowledge of neighborhood dynamics and established presence in community networks, social work can make city-level strategies intelligible and relevant to residents and, conversely, bring local needs and perspectives back into municipal planning.

This contribution draws on the work of an interdisciplinary research team that combines expertise from Social Work and Urban Planning. The DFG – funded research is being conducted in four neighborhoods in Cologne, Germany. The neighborhoods were selected using a theoretical sampling approach, in which different types of neighborhoods were chosen. We did in-depth interviews with residents to explore their everyday digital practices at the neighborhood level, as well as interviews with municipal stakeholders responsible for digital services or local politics. In parallel, we did spatial analyses of the neighborhoods, including local social service infrastructures and spatial typologies of neighborhoods' material structures, as well as the local digital infrastructures. The resident survey, which is intended to supplement the qualitative analyses, will be conducted this autumn. This collaboration provides an in-depth understanding of local digital practices and their influence on coping with everyday life, as well as how these practices vary across neighborhoods within a city.

The analysis highlights the gap between the intentions expressed at the municipal level and the lived realities in the neighborhoods. It identifies strategies through which Social Work can help bridge this gap, such as co-design processes, locally tailored communication channels, and partnerships with community organizations.



**References:**

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Hatuka, T./ Zur, H. / Mendoza, J.A. (2021): The urban digital lifestyle: An analytical framework for placing digital practices in a spatial context and for developing applicable policy. Cities. The international Journal of urban policy and planning. Vol. 111

## Social Work Digital Transformation in Japan: Challenges and Roles of Japanese Social Workers

Professor Mai Yamaguchi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Japan Lutheran College

Due to hyper-aging and depopulation, Japanese government takes initiatives to promote a human-centered, AI-ready society. Under the strong governmental-led political context, Japanese social workers have experienced Digital Transformation (DX) of social work in daily practice. How do social workers face challenges and roles in Digital welfare state? The purposes of this presentation are to explore Japanese political developments and literatures related to DX of care and to discuss the challenges and roles faced by Japanese social workers in developing critical knowledge and collaborating within interdisciplinary care team from human right perspectives. The findings indicate that Japanese political discourse has prioritized the use of technology, especially AI technologies, to promote digital healthcare, evidence-based long-term care, and an inclusive society with a focus on improving productivity. Despite of these government-led promotion of DX in care, literatures also mention social workers' difficulties in use of digital technology in daily practice within interdisciplinary and trans disciplinary practice because of financial, technical, and organizational constrains. It is also revealed that the discussion on use of technology among social workers in Japan has been insufficient. This presentation will address emerging issues of social work profession within interdisciplinary and trans disciplinary practice in DX of care in the Japanese Digital welfare state. It concludes that Japanese social workers have faced ethical and practical challenges and that social workers need to play more crucial roles to advocate from human rights perspectives. Implications of my presentation for practice include the importance of improving competences of social workers to understand social workers' roles in digital era. Policy related to DX of care needs to address more thoughtfully from human-right approach. Further social work and interdisciplinary research to facilitate informed practice of social workers, to reveal the impact of human-centric human-AI collaboration, and to find out social workers' essential roles in DX in care are needed.

## Time Saved Is Time with Children: Exploring AI as a Collaborative Partner in Enhancing Services for Children and Youth

Riina KIIK<sup>1</sup>, Anne Wullum Aasback<sup>2</sup>, Wibeke Johansen<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>NTNU, Department of social work, <sup>2</sup>NTNU Social Research, <sup>3</sup>NTNU Social Research

### Background and Purpose:

Pedagogical-Psychological Services (PPT) in Norway are specialized welfare services that support children, adolescents, and educational institutions by providing assessments, guidance, and interventions related to learning, development, and psychosocial challenges. They manage extensive documentation related to children and youth in educational settings. The complexity and volume of this information present challenges for effective decision-making and knowledge-based practice. This exploratory study investigates how artificial intelligence (AI) can be leveraged to support professional judgment in PPT.

### Methods:

A qualitative research design was employed. Initially, a workshop was organized with participants from six different PPT offices, including leaders, case workers, and administrative staff. Subsequently, seven individual and paired interviews were conducted with PPT employees representing diverse geographical locations, organizational structures, and service sizes. The interviews and workshop discussions focused on current documentation practices, barriers and facilitators to efficiency and quality, as well as potential areas for AI support. Additionally, follow-up digital meetings were held with three groups of workshop participants to discuss and gain further insights into preliminary findings. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and coding.

### Findings:

Current work processes in PPT are characterized by manual, time-consuming tasks, including scanning, archiving, and duplicative data entry. Fragmented systems across social service and health institutions hinder information exchange. The lack of integration between systems necessitates manual organization and contributes to inefficiencies and an increased risk of errors and information loss. AI was identified as a promising tool to address these challenges. Participants expressed interest in AI-supported features such as automated reminders, task management, structured overviews, and tailored intervention suggestions. AI could also assist with summarizing complex cases, improving language clarity, and translating documents for non-native speakers. However, concerns were raised about the limitations of AI in capturing contextual nuances and ensuring quality. Participants emphasized that AI should complement, not replace, professional judgment.

### Conclusions and Implications:

This study reveals a pressing need for improved digital tools and integrated systems in PPT to enhance efficiency, quality, and information flow. The informants identified AI as a promising tool for supporting professional practice. By automating routine administrative tasks and improving information management, AI has the potential to free up valuable time, enabling staff to focus more directly on relational work and individualized follow-up.

with children and youth. Future development should focus on context-aware AI solutions that support individualized assessments and operate within secure, user-friendly systems. Crucially, AI must not undermine the relational and ethical dimensions of professional practice. Overreliance on AI-generated summaries risks obscuring critical nuances, especially in complex or evolving cases, and may introduce automation bias, where flawed information is accepted without scrutiny. These findings are transferable to other welfare services that rely heavily on documentation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional judgment, where AI may similarly offer support in streamlining administrative tasks and enhancing information flow, provided its use is critically assessed for bias, contextual relevance, and ethical integrity.

## Waiting for Models: the Materialities of AI Imaginaries in Social Work

Dr. Valter Sandell-Maury<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helsinki Practice Research Centre, University of Helsinki

This paper presents the first findings of a two-year collaborative practice research project on the relationship between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and statutory social work practice in Finland (2025-2027). The project is conducted at the Helsinki Practice Research Centre at the University of Helsinki in collaboration with five regional social service authorities in Finland, who are responsible for organising statutory social work services. In this paper, I explore what kinds of promises, hopes, and fears – which I conceptualise as AI imaginaries – are assigned to AI by social workers, senior management, service users, and software developers who develop AI tools for social work. The paper argues that these affective imaginaries of AI shape social work practice also prior to de facto implementations of AI tools in client work, as they reconfigure the horizons of what social work can and should be. The data consist of semi-structured interviews with the aforementioned groups in Southern and Western Finland, analysed abductively.

AI is significantly reshaping multiple sectors in society. The implementation of Large Language Models (LLM) in sectors such as engineering, finance, health care, and technology has reshaped ways of working and producing, and prompted evaluations of what proportions of the present labour power will be ‘replaced by machines’ (Rion and Any 2025). In the context of social work, the scholarly discussion has been focused on preparing for and tackling the implications that wide-scale implementations of AI will have for social work practice in the future (O’Leary and Tsui 2023; Ahn et al. 2025; Nuwasiima et al. 2024). What is striking in the emerging literature on the relationship between social work and AI is the grand attention that preparations for large-scale implementation of AI tools in social work have gained, and the very limited attention devoted to concrete implementations of AI in social work practice. This imbalance mirrors the present interregnum (Gramsci 1971) of AI in social work, the in-between period when the ‘old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born’, which constitutes the main backdrop of this paper.

I operationalise this interregnum into a framework for analysis by leaning on Casilli’s (2025) notion of ‘waiting for robots’ that helps to understand how AI imaginaries operate across scales, and on Pasquinellis (2023) social genealogy of AI in relation to capitalist economies over time. Casilli’s paraphrase of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* describes the collective form of waiting for something grand that significantly affects ways of working and living, irrespective of whether Godot – or, in this case, AI tools that will totally reshape social work practice – materialises or not. Pasquinelli’s genealogy enables an analysis of AI in social work in relation to wider economic processes where social behaviour (language, communication, words) is increasingly ‘enclosed’ and commodified as ‘data’. The paper’s original contribution is to show how AI imaginaries actively shape social work practice, even in settings where de facto implementation of AI remains limited.

## Working Through Ambiguity: Exploring Religion and Spirituality in Social Work training placement through a Metamodern Lens.

Mr Ged McGurn<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leeds Beckett University, <sup>2</sup> University of Leeds

### Background and purpose:

Religion and spirituality remain underexplored in social work practice and education, despite the significance of religion and spirituality in the lives of many service users. Studies in the UK have continued to highlight gaps in student preparedness (e.g. Gilligan & Furness, 2014). Students often enter practice with limited preparation for engaging with religious or spiritual beliefs within secular institutions, leading to uncertainty, tension and ineffective engagement.

Drake and Hodge (2022) have described social work as being at an “empirical inflection point”, caught between the “empirical highway” and the “postmodern/critical off-ramp. This presentation builds on these ideas by exploring how students experience and interpret encounters where religion and spirituality emerge in practice. It considers how metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010) can offer a framework for understanding and training. Situated within a metamodern perspective I will use this theoretical base to understand the complexities of navigating religion and spirituality in practice environments. Metamodernism can be understood as the oscillation between empirical accounts of practice and the lived narratives of service users, holding both forms of knowledge together without collapsing one into the other.

### Methods:

The presentation reports the findings of a qualitative study, which included reflective accounts and semi structured interviews with final-year undergraduate social work students at a University in the North of England. Participants were purposively selected if they had experienced this issue in practice after a call out to the whole year group was made. The methods resulted in rich data, with analysis undertaken thematically, using a reflexive thematic approach. Metamodernism provided a theoretical lens for interpreting oscillations in student accounts between modernist (universal, empiricist) and postmodernist (pluralistic, narrative, meaning-centred) perspectives.

### Findings:

Students described scenarios where religion and spirituality shaped clients' lives, decisions, and interactions with services. Examples included faith as a source of support and transformation, as well as beliefs intersecting with mental health, individual and family dynamics. Students highlighted uncertainty in how to respond, oscillating between professional bio-medical views that emphasised risk and more contextual, culturally sensitive understandings. Across accounts, participants stressed the need for education that better prepares them to manage such complexity. Participants noted social work education should not only teach facts about diverse religions and spiritualities but also prepare students for tensions, negotiations, ambiguity, and a need for frequent oscillation between competing perspectives.

**Conclusions and implications:**

The findings suggest social work practice and education would benefit from moving towards a metamodern approach. Embedding this in training will equip students with skills to navigate the tensions between secular environments and lived experience of religion and spirituality, potentially enhancing cultural humility and wellbeing outcomes for clients. Implications include a need to develop curricula that better integrate religion and spirituality, and moving beyond empirical vs narrative based models towards metamodern understanding within social work education.

## **“We go home, we cry and we’re back to work the next day”: EMDR and psychoeducation as tools for tackling vicarious trauma.**

Dr Louise O'Connor<sup>1</sup>, Ms Maisie Nicholls, Ms Alix Walton, Ms Amy Syder

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Social workers experience high levels of exposure to trauma through repeated engagement with the trauma of others. Organisational practices and environments also contribute to vicarious trauma. Burnout, staff retention and well-being are recognised globally as significant workforce challenges (Giménez-Bertomeu et al, 2024; McFadden, 2020). And yet daily, social workers skilfully engage in emotionally complex relational practice. Such tensions are encapsulated in a participant’s comment: “We go home, we cry and we’re back to work the next day”.

We report on a two-stage interdisciplinary study which aims to evaluate the effectiveness of group-based input to social workers on using psychoeducation tools and a therapeutic technique, Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR), to address the impact of vicarious trauma. EMDR is a recognised approach in the management of vicarious trauma, with evidence of its value to frontline responders (Farrell et al., 2023) and mental health workers (Pink et al. 2022).

Our research question explored whether group-based training in EMDR provided techniques for practice which improved practitioners’ well-being and reduced the impact of vicarious trauma and burnout in an English Local Authority Children’s Sector. A key principle underpinning this study is the recognition that vicarious trauma is not an issue of individualised ‘blame’ for workers. We challenge this common construction by exploring whether equipping professionals and organisations with new techniques and knowledge has the potential to change organisational practices, enhance skills, improve practitioners’ well-being, retention and ultimately service delivery.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in stage I, an initial pilot delivering group workshops to 8 social workers. Stage II extends this programme of group-based workshops to a cohort of newly qualified social workers in their first assessed year in practice (ASYE). Delivery overlaps into their second year when they no longer have protected caseloads. Co-facilitated by an accredited EMDR therapist/qualified social worker and a clinical psychology trainee, workshops use a group traumatic episode protocol (GTEP, Shapiro & Moench, 2017) combined with reflective discussion. Quantitative data comprises standardised pre-and post-questionnaires (IES-R, Weiss & Marmar, 1997; CBI, Kristensen et al., 2009; PROQOL, Stamm, 2009). Stage II includes input on EMDR and psychoeducation to training leads/supervisors. The study received University ethical approval.

Findings from an analysis of workshop transcripts and quantitative data showed that development of new EMDR-based techniques helped recognition of vicarious trauma and positive skill development in the pilot study. The need to embed these skills organisationally,



and the potential value of introduction of these methods early in practitioners' careers was identified. Data analysis from stage II will be available by the time of Conference.

This presentation is directly linked to the primary conference theme: social work and interdisciplinary research, as it addresses contemporary practice challenges, developing evidence to inform practice and policy. Sub-themes 1, 2 and 7 are addressed by presenting interdisciplinary and novel research to explore and share opportunities for professional practice, policy and education. It illuminates new co-created knowledge drawing on social work, psychology and therapeutic knowledge, developed in collaboration with practitioners, supervisors and organisational training / development leads.

# The Application of the Social Quality Approach in Social Work. Opportunities for Scientific Substantiation and Further Development of the Profession.

Dr. Lisbeth Verharen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mariël Van Pelt<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HAN University of Applied Sciences, <sup>2</sup> Fontys University of Applied Sciences

## Background

In today's increasingly layered and complex societies, the work of social workers has become equally multifaceted. To strengthen the profession, a solid scientific foundation is essential for substantiating and evolving the approaches used in practice. In the Netherlands, two major developments have embraced the Social Quality Approach (SQA) as a guiding framework.

First, the Dutch National Social Work Knowledge and Research Agenda (NSWKRA), published in 2020, identifies the SQA as a valuable conceptual architecture for advancing the profession—particularly within the theme of “strengthening ordinary lives” (Hooghiemstra & Van Pelt, 2020). Second, all bachelor-level Social Work programs in the Netherlands have adopted the SQA as the overarching framework for their curricula for the coming years.

This study explores how the SQA is currently applied in social work, both within and beyond the Netherlands.

## Methods

We employed three complementary methods:

1. **Literature Review:** We searched for peer-reviewed articles published between January 2000 and October 2023 using the terms ‘Social Quality’ AND ‘Social Work’ and ‘Sociale Kwaliteit’ AND ‘Sociaal Werk’. Searches were conducted via Google Scholar and focused on five key journals: International Journal of Social Quality, British Journal of Social Work, European Journal of Social Work, Journal of Social Intervention, and Community Development. Reference lists were screened for additional sources.
2. **Online Survey:** On 8 March 2023, we distributed a survey to professors and project leaders affiliated with the Association of Workplaces in the Social Domain (AWSO). Respondents were selected based on their involvement in the AWSO's 2023–2026 umbrella program, “A Social Basis for Social Quality,” which focuses on applying the SQA in social work. The survey collected examples of projects and research applying the SQA, including titles, summaries, objectives, central questions, and available outputs.
3. **Online learning community:** In the autumn of 2025, we started a (online) learning community with teachers in the bachelor's programmes in social work in order to enhance the translation and use of SQA framework in SW education.

**Findings**

Our presentation begins by clarifying the concept of “the social” from the SQA perspective and its relevance to social work. We then outline the analytical framework of social quality, which comprises three interrelated sets of factors: conditional, constitutional, and normative. Finally, we present findings from our literature review, survey and learning community illustrating how and where the SQA is being implemented in social work practice and education.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Our analysis identified four concrete applications of the SQA in social work. These demonstrate that the framework enables professionals and social work students to:

- Make a comprehensive assessment of situations across multiple levels and perspectives.
- Find entry points for action at individual, group, community and societal levels.
- Scientifically substantiate and legitimize their actions.

The SQA offers a solid theoretical foundation for social work. Its conceptualization of “the social” provides an opportunity to recalibrate the discipline—placing the dialectic between self-realization and collective identity formation at the heart of social work practice.

## Facilitators and Barriers to Help-Seeking for Child and Adolescent Mental Health: A Systematic Review Bridging Research, Policy, and Practice

Ita Kofman<sup>1</sup>, Dr Rena Bina<sup>1</sup>, Dr Ana Uka<sup>2</sup>, Dr Jennifer Hall<sup>3</sup>, Dr Anastasia Giannaki<sup>3</sup>, Daniela Fidalgo<sup>4</sup>, Dr Raquel Costa<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Bar Ilan' university, <sup>2</sup> Western Balkans University, <sup>3</sup> WHO Greece, <sup>4</sup> Lusófona University

### Background and Purpose

Seeking help for mental health problems in childhood and adolescence is crucial for healthy developmental trajectories, yet many families do not seek help for their child's condition. Hence, they may remain undiagnosed and untreated for years, affecting not only children and families but also schools, service providers, and communities-at-large. Understanding the factors that hinder or facilitate help-seeking is crucial to designing evidence-informed policies and practices. These insights are central to social work research and practice, as social workers are at the forefront of identifying needs, engaging families, and bridging communities with service systems. This review synthesizes existing research on facilitators and barriers to help-seeking for child and adolescent mental health, highlighting the interconnected roles of families, health care systems, and society.

### Methods

This systematic review followed PRISMA guidelines and was registered on PROSPERO. A systematic literature search was conducted across PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and SCOPUS by two independent researchers. Empirical studies on help-seeking for childhood or adolescent mental health problems were included, while studies on informal help-seeking were excluded. Ultimately 39 studies, published up to September 2024, met inclusion criteria and were included in the study.

### Results

The Behavioral Model of Health Service Use (Andersen, 1995) was used as a framework for organizing and presenting the results. Results indicate that a complex relationship between societal determinants (e.g., stigma and cultural beliefs discouraging help-seeking), the health care system with its structural and organizational barriers (e.g., long wait times, limited service availability, bureaucratic referral processes, unequal resource distribution across communities and geographical areas, language barriers and fragmented systems), and individual characteristics shape parents help-seeking process for mental health support for their children. The individual characteristics include predisposing factors that may hinder help-seeking (e.g., beliefs that problems will resolve on their own and discomfort discussing emotional concerns) and enabling help-seeking factors (e.g., parental advocacy, health literacy, familiarity with navigating the system, and community support), and perceived and professionally assessed need factors (e.g., recognition of the child's distress and receiving a formal diagnosis) that may serve as facilitators for seeking help.

### Conclusions and Implications

This comprehensive systematic review highlights societal, health care system, and individual factors that affect parents' help-seeking for child and adolescent mental health and identifies key factors for policy and practice. At the societal level, public campaigns are needed to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and normalize help-seeking, with social workers leading such efforts through culturally adapted education and advocacy. Within the health care system, expanding school- and community-based services, simplifying referral processes, and reducing waiting times are crucial for equitable access. At the individual level, strengthening parents' understanding of mental health, addressing practical barriers, and promoting early identification through schools and primary care are critical. Ultimately, clarifying the factors that hinder or facilitate help-seeking is vital for evidence-informed policies and practices and directly relevant to social work, where practitioners identify needs, engage families, and bridge communities with service systems.

## Should I stay, or should I go? Navigating role complexity and emotional strain in social work.

Phd Martina Andersson Søre<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Julia Salado-Rasmussen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Sofie Dencker-Larsen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Frank Cloyd Ebsen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University College Copenhagen

Social workers are under pressure, as research shows that they experience high levels of stress and burnout. It is therefore not surprising that many leave the profession earlier than colleagues in comparable fields. Drawing on qualitative focus group data from social workers and their leaders from multiple Danish municipalities (N = 70), this study explored how the professionals themselves experience this trend of turnover. Two central themes emerged: (1) tensions in defining and executing the core task of social work, and (2) the emotional burdens of practice and conditions that either buffer or exacerbate it.

Preliminary findings indicate that social workers are deeply motivated by a desire to help others. However, this “core task” is increasingly challenged by unclear role expectations, challenging rules of law, complex interprofessional collaborations, and expanded coordination responsibilities - often without a corresponding reduction in caseloads or accountability. These challenges contribute to a sense of role ambiguity and threaten professional agency - particularly among newly graduated workers.

The study, moreover, confirmed that social work seems to be characterized by high emotional demands. Not, however, necessarily due to high caseloads, but rather because of the intensity of case content and the dual mandate of social workers having a supportive as well as a regulatory function towards clients. While informants viewed regular supervision and accessible leadership as important to buffer the risk of experiencing emotional strain, these were not sufficient per se. Instead, what emerged as critical was a workplace culture that legitimized vulnerability and fostered psychological safety.

Finally, a paradoxical pattern emerged in our analysis in relation to how responsibility for managing emotional burdens was experienced by informants. While poor structural and organizational matters were commonly described as contributing to creating strain, solutions were often experienced as being defined within an individualized understanding, emphasizing personal resilience and individual coping strategies, such as breathing exercises. We conclude that such a tendency to individualize what are often structural issues may obscure more profound organizational changes needed to sustain social workers' professional longevity. Thus, we suggest the need for an interdisciplinary approach to social work research to enable a heightened focus on organizational support in creating a psychologically safe work culture and environment.

## From Promise to Practice: Insights for Empowering Advocacy in Canadian Child and Youth Advocacy Centres

Ms Cathy Vine, Prof Ramona Alaggia

<sup>1</sup> Boost Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, <sup>2</sup> University of Toronto

### Background and Purpose:

The criminal justice system can be traumatizing to child victims and their families. Serving more than 10,000 children and families a year, Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (CYACs) were established in Canada to help minimize further distress and trauma. Core to the CYAC response is the multidisciplinary team (MDT), bringing together law enforcement, child welfare, healthcare, and advocates—a unique role, often performed by social workers—to provide a child-focused, trauma-informed response to children disclosing abuse. Despite the promise, there is a limited evidence base for the approach. While national guidelines set standards for 44 CYACs, there is little collective understanding about what advocates do, what affects their practice, and what could strengthen their impact.

In response to a growing desire by CYACs to establish promising practices for advocates within inter-disciplinary collaborations, we worked with Boost Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, one of the largest CYACs in Canada, to examine the role of child advocates within MDTs. We conducted a literature scan and carried out interviews with CYAC leaders and advocates, guided by our research questions.

### Methods:

The study was informed by a theory of change: to help reduce the potential harms of the criminal justice system and to support recovery from abuse, advocates must be effective in their work with children, families, MDTs, and community resources. Our key research questions were:

- What do child victims and their families need?
- How do advocates help?
- What factors influence the advocate role?

Using purposive, proportional sampling, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews until thematic saturation was reached. In total, 25 CYAC leaders and advocates were interviewed across 14 CYACs operating in diverse contexts and communities. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes and to refine the findings. Debriefing with team members and experts was used to review for consensus and to ensure themes were not missed. Quotes are provided to confirm the themes.

### Findings:

There are pockets of practice expertise throughout Canada and a growing knowledge base which helped to develop promising practices. However, we also found the advocate role itself needs empowerment. CYACs can end up mirroring power relations in the larger system and contextual factors—CYAC clarity of purpose, service flow design, and MDT support, among others—affect the extent to which advocates can speak up on behalf of child victims.

If the purpose of CYACs is to reduce system harms, what do advocates for child victims and families need to succeed?

**Conclusions and implications:**

To be effective, the CYAC, MDT and advocate all need to be aligned on purpose. Advocates need to be involved at the very start of the child and their family's journey with a clear mandate to speak on their behalf when decisions are being made. A guide was developed for CYACs describing the foundational and operational conditions and practices needed to support advocacy as well as trauma and violence-informed practices advocates can use to help increase child and family knowledge and skills after abuse. These will be discussed.



# Career Sustainability in Social Work: A Student Perspective

Ilona Fagerström<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Christian Kroll<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Helena Blomberg-Kroll<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Helsinki

## Background

Research into the sustainability of social work careers is motivated by the high turnover rates and the prevalence of burnout and mental health issues among social workers (Rantonen, 2025; Petersen, 2023; Astvik et al., 2020; Frost et al., 2018). These challenges threaten both the quality of practice and the integrity of the profession. Drawing from De Vos's conceptual model of sustainable careers (2020), this study defines sustainable careers as systemic and dynamic, characterized by well-being, health, and productivity. The analysis incorporates individual, contextual, and temporal dimensions, emphasizing that a sustainable career allows individuals to maintain balance and satisfaction while adapting to personal and contextual changes in alignment with their core values.

This study posits that the foundation for sustainable career paths is laid during social work education, often through placements or temporary social worker positions. By examining master's degree candidates in social work as active agents capable of making meaningful choices, we aim to gain insights into their sustainable career paths.

## Research Questions

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do social work students picture their career paths?
2. What individual and systemic factors can contribute to career sustainability, particularly during the transition from academic studies to professional practice?

## Methods

The data consists of 14 in-depth interviews with social work students from two Finnish universities conducted in 2025. The participants are master's degree candidates who have engaged in field experiences through placements and temporary positions. Interview themes included: 1) motivations for entering the profession and prior experiences, 2) academic studies and the transition to practice, 3) well-being during academic and professional phases, and 4) career aspirations and sustainability. Inductive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed for data analysis.

## Findings

The findings reveal a complex landscape of motivations and diverse career trajectories preceding the pursuit of social work studies. Participants shared insights from their placements, highlighting challenges such as assuming excessive responsibility too early and inadequate support, which can lead to burnout and hinder future career prospects in public organizations. Many students voiced concerns about the lack of support, contrasting these feelings with experiences where adequate support was available. Additionally, several interviewees expressed anxiety about the future, particularly regarding how ongoing policy changes and economic constraints may affect their ability to provide effective social work, posing significant challenges to sustainable career paths.

**Conclusions**

Insights gained can inform student selection processes, curriculum development, and service organization solutions, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of social work careers.

## Developing an evidence informed communication skills training for child and family social work practitioners

Assistant Professor Elina Aaltio<sup>1</sup>, Dr Nanne Isokuortti, Dr Johanna Moilanen, MSc Kaisa Pasanen, Assistant Professor Maija Jäppinen

<sup>1</sup>Tampere University

### Background and purpose:

Advancing evidence-informed practice in social work requires systematic development and evaluation of promising interventions. Currently, a guidance for developing complex interventions has been established in health and healthcare (O’Cathain et al., 2019). However, there are few empirical examples on how to utilise such guidance in the context of social work. Meanwhile, despite that good communication skills are essential for effective social work practice, evidence-based communication approaches are rarely applied in child and family social work.

This presentation focuses on developing an evidence-based communication skills training for social work practitioners by applying the key principles outlined by O’Cathain and colleagues’ (2019) guidance. The training focuses on one promising intervention, namely Motivational Interviewing (MI). MI is a widely used approach to behaviour change discussion that has shown positive effects in e.g., substance use, health-related behaviours, and gambling (Lundahl et al. 2010; Smedslund et al. 2011). It has also shown promise in enhancing practitioners’ skills and outcomes in child and family social work in the UK (Forrester et al., 2018).

### Link to the conference’s aims and themes:

By combining a guidance and a promising intervention from health care research, the presentation provides an interesting interdisciplinary example of an effort to develop and evaluate communication skills training in child and family social work.

### Summary of the main points:

Following the above-mentioned guidance, we seek to improve the training design and content in an iterative, evidence informed process by involving stakeholders and paying attention to future implementation in the real world. The presentation unfolds as follows. First, we present findings from our previous research project in which we adapted a UK-based MI in child and family social work training programme to the Finnish context. Despite both the training and MI was well received among social workers (n=33), only minor improvements were found in the training participants’ communication skills. Second, we reflect strategies to improve the effectiveness of the training in the second phase of our project based on the findings of the first phase. Our aim here is to refine the content of the training based on observations made from the analysis of the training participants’ communication skills. To improve skills acquisition, new pedagogical methods, such as coding one’s own practice, will be implemented. Moreover, to ensure provision of high-quality training in the future, a home-base for the training materials and training-of-trainers will be developed in collaboration with an expert organisation working in the interface/ intersection of research and practice.

**Conclusions and implications:**

The field of social work can benefit from long-term methodological development and experiences of other disciplines evaluating complex interventions designed for service-users with complex service needs. By providing structure, and enhancing the rigor and quality of the development and evaluating process, the guidance by O'Cathain et al (2019) holds promise for promoting evidence-informed practice in social work.

## Safe to Speak? Mental Health Disclosure and Help-Seeking in Social Work Students

Dr Aggie Bezzina<sup>1</sup>

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There is growing evidence indicating an upsurge in mental health distress among university students, with international data suggesting that one-third of students enter university with signs of a common mental health issue (Osborn et al., 2022). Despite this, in the UK, only 6.7% of UCAS applicants in 2024 declared a 'mental health disability'; this was up from 0.7% in 2011 but still highlights a persistent gap in disclosure (Lewis & Stiebahl, 2025). Underreporting is concerning, given the strong link between mental health challenges and academic issues such as course discontinuation (Revell & Nolan, 2023).

A consideration of the mental health of students in helping professions, such as social work, unearths further complexities. Firstly, background factors, including experiences of adversity and trauma, can influence career choices in the helping professions. Indeed, there is a high prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among social work students (Esaki & Larkin, 2013), and a strong connection between childhood adversity and mental health difficulties later in life. Moreover, the academic and emotional demands of university social work programmes can adversely affect students' mental well-being.

A rapid literature review was carried out focusing on the research question: What are the barriers and facilitators to mental-health disclosure and help-seeking of students on Health and Social Care (HSC) professionally regulated programmes in the UK, and what strategies could such programmes consider to support student mental-health disclosure and help-seeking? Following Cochrane rapid review guidance, the literature search focused on social work, nursing and medicine, UK-based literature, published since Universities UK's 2015 Good Practice Guide. The database search conducted in March 2024 across Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science, and CINAHL identified 585 papers. After removing 290 duplicates, 295 titles and abstracts were screened, with 262 excluded. Full-text review of the remaining 33 papers found 13 eligible studies, and one additional article was identified through manual reference checks, resulting in a final sample of 14 studies.

The review highlighted key factors that either hinder or encourage mental health disclosure and help-seeking among students in professionally regulated programmes, spanning three tiers: individual, programme-specific, and broader university contexts. It also outlined strategies to enhance support, such as fostering educational settings that promote openness and psychological safety around mental health conversations. Mental health-sensitive Social Work Education must foster self-care and self-compassion, where seeking help for mental health distress is normalised. Educators should discuss openly, with social work students, the professional requisites of self-awareness, and its relevance to the development of an 'integrated' and 'whole' professional identity. Students' wellbeing benefited from connectedness with each other and with academic staff, which connections could be nurtured through student mental health strategies coproduced in dialogue between staff and students.

This review underscores the need for mental health-sensitive social work education that normalises help-seeking, fosters self-care, self-compassion, and psychological safety, and promotes co-produced strategies to support student wellbeing across individual, programme, and institutional levels.

## Do PhD's in Social Work provide a warning of future crisis? Brazilian reflections.

PhD Maria Lucia Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Ms Joanna Santos-Petiot<sup>2</sup>, Prof Gary Spolander<sup>2</sup>, Prof Inez Stampa<sup>3</sup>

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### Abstract:

The global landscape of doctoral education in social work has shifted over the past decade. Doctoral candidate numbers have decreased in many countries (due to neoliberal policies, marketisation, global pandemic impacts and worsening professional labour conditions). Appropriately trained and research active academics are important to the disciplines future, professional identity and knowledge creation. There is limited information pertaining to social work doctoral candidates, their doctoral education, and the experience of study at this level, especially given its importance as the highest professional academic level of study. This presentation, explores findings from the project 'Mapping the challenges and opportunities to encourage, diversify and retain social work PhDs' in Brasil'. Twenty-three PhD programs form part of the professions ethical political project, with its commitment to overcoming social inequalities and combating all forms of oppression underpinned by professional academic development.

### Methods:

The study comprised three stages. Firstly, documentary analysis of Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education data to ascertain the context of social work doctoral education in Brazil. Secondly, online surveys with doctoral candidates in Brazil (n=300), which included topics about socio-demographic variables, barriers and motivation for pursuing a PhD in social work. Finally, data from two workshops involving professional academics, PhD candidates and Brazilian social work organisations to explore the challenges and opportunities in social work doctoral education. Results were statistically and thematically analysed.

### Findings:

Social work PhD candidates are predominantly female), reflecting the profile of social workers in Brasil. Their age ranged from 25 to 69 years (median 37) and 54.8% were white. Forty percent had children, often of pre-school age, and many reported difficulties balancing caregiving responsibilities, employment, and study. More than half received doctoral scholarships, yet these are widely considered insufficient to meet basic living costs, particularly among women juggling paid work and caring roles. Students often progressed quickly through undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies, reflecting both limited job opportunities and the pursuit of scholarships or academic careers. These findings, point to numerous issues for social work PhD candidates, including financial precarity, diversity and inclusion, and academic job market challenges. The findings also raise key questions about the role of doctoral education in positioning the wider profession. Overall, the results highlight structural challenges that risk narrowing access to doctoral education and reinforce existing inequalities and social injustices.

**Conclusion/Implications:**

The findings highlight the importance of embedding political, financial, and equity considerations into PhD program design. They also call for social work education globally to consider doctoral student recruitment, but their retention, participant diversification, and sustainability of doctoral pathways and their importance to the health of the discipline. The context and trends surrounding social work doctoral education in Brasil cannot be disentangled from the wider political underpinnings of the global profession, we will explore implications for professional knowledge, vitality and identity.



## What's in a word? Unpacking “Community-Based” interventions for Underserved Populations

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Community-based interventions are increasingly promoted as a means to improve access to primary care, especially for underserved populations. However, the term “community-based” remains inconsistently defined and interpreted across sectors—including health, social work, and public policy—leading to ambiguity in both research and practice. This scoping review explores how community-based interventions are conceptualized and implemented across disciplines, with a particular focus on their impact on primary care accessibility.

Underserved populations experience multiple barriers in their access to care (Morelli, 2017). Levesque et al. (2013)’s theoretical framework of Patient-centered-access-to-health-care argues that broad factors, both on the demand and supply side of care, need to be taken into account. The framework displays access to health care as an continuous interplay between five individual determinants of accessibility – is the population able to self-perceive, seek, reach, pay, and engage in a context of health needs? – and five structural determinants – Is the system Approachable, Acceptable, Available, Affordable and Appropriate?

We conducted a scoping review building on the framework of Levesque et al. (2013). Articles that study interventions focusing on or relating to a community, and their impact on the accessibility of primary care were selected from three databases, i.e. Pubmed, Scopus and Embase. Articles were screened at the title and abstract level by two independent reviewers. Subsequently, full-text articles were reviewed by one reviewer, with discrepancies resolved by another. Finally, data from the included articles was mapped against Levesque et al.’s framework.

The analysis revealed considerable variation in how the term “community” is conceptualized across different sectors—ranging from geographic and demographic definitions to situational or socially identified groups. Similarly, the notion of “community-based interventions” is defined, operationalized, and evaluated in diverse and often inconsistent ways. The study highlights the overlapping and frequently interchangeable use of terms such as “community engagement”, “outreach”, “participation”, and “collaboration”, which contributes to ongoing conceptual ambiguity. By bridging these fragmented sectoral understandings, the research advances the development of more inclusive and effective models of care. It further emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to address structural inequities and to promote accessible, person-centered primary healthcare.

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# Navigating Grief and Substance Use: Implications for Social Work Research and Practice

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## Background and Purpose

Individuals burdened by problematic substance use face significant challenges, including the risk of overdose and the loss of close relationships due to drug-related deaths. This dual burden has direct implications for social work, where both bereaved individuals and practitioners often lack adequate frameworks to address combined grief and substance issues. Prior studies reveal a mutual influence between substance use and complicated grief, suggesting that grief can both precede and predict increased substance consumption. Moreover, interventions focused on managing grief have shown promise in alleviating complicated grief reactions and substance use issues. Given these findings, social work research, practice, and policy face both significant challenges and opportunities to make impactful contributions. In this presentation, we aim to highlight key results from a scoping review, drawing insights and discussing possibilities that can strengthen contemporary social work frameworks.

## Methods

A scoping review covering literature from 1997 to 2024 synthesised international evidence focusing on individuals experiencing bereavement and problematic substance use. In this presentation, we highlight the synthesised insights rather than detailing the scoping review process.

## Findings

The findings presented in this abstract are preliminary but provide insights into the current understanding based on existing research. Our results reveal the complex interplay between substance use and bereavement, demonstrating that individuals struggling with problematic substance use often show signs of complicated grief. Bereavement can lead to increased substance consumption, while complicated grief can worsen substance use problems.

Our ongoing review has already identified significant gaps in current knowledge and services, which hinder the delivery of effective support and interventions. Understanding these gaps is vital for developing strategies to address both complicated grief reactions and problematic substance use. Furthermore, both bereaved individuals and their carers often report insufficient support. Carers frequently feel unprepared to provide the necessary assistance, highlighting an urgent need for improved support systems.

## Conclusions and Implications

These findings pose significant challenges for modern social work but also offer opportunities to develop grief-informed substance use interventions that link research with practice. Integrating grief management into substance use treatment could improve services for both issues. Strengthening support systems for bereaved individuals and their carers is essential. As this research progresses, we emphasise the need for ongoing investigation to create practical tools for mapping complicated grief and to develop robust intervention strategies tailored to those facing the dual challenges of bereavement and problematic substance use.

## Using Linked Administrative Data to Understand Special Guardianship in Wales: Building Capacity for Evidence-Informed Service Provision

Dr Lorna Stabler<sup>1</sup>, Ms Ellie Dorrans<sup>1</sup>, Dr Nell Warner<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CASCADE, Cardiff University

### Background and purpose

When there is no realistic prospect of a child returning to their birth parents, legal options are explored to enable permanent care with substitute carers. In the England and Wales, this can be via adoption, long-term foster care, or a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). SGOs, usually granted to relatives, former foster carers, or others known to the child, now represent a more common exit from care than adoption. They can also be made through private law without social work involvement. Despite their growing use as a permanency option for children, little is known about the characteristics, health, and educational profiles of children with SGOs, or the families caring for them. This limits local authorities' ability to design consistent, needs-based support services, and to adequately allocate resources to this group of families. There is significant variation in practice around the level of support that children with an SGO are entitled to.

### Methods

The Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank in Wales offers the opportunity to use routinely collected data to address many important knowledge gaps in social work research. SAIL Databank enables the linkage of routinely collected data from health, social care and education. Using this resource, the project used population-level linked data to map the SGO population in Wales and explore the factors associated with SGOs being granted, and the characteristics of children and carers who received an SGO.

Using the SAIL Databank, children who entered care between 2005 and 2019 were identified from looked after children data. This was linked additional data from social care, health and education to explore factors associated with the likelihood of children receiving a Special Guardianship Order. These include child characteristics and social care history. Analyses include descriptive statistics comparing children in care who receive SGOs with those that do not. Survival analysis and Cox proportional hazards models explore which factors predict an SGO being granted.

### Findings

At the conference, we will present the population-level description of which children in Wales receive an SGO. This will include the comparative analysis of which children among the care population are most likely to receive SGOs. Results will also highlight disparities in SGO access linked to child demographics including ethnicity and disability, previous history in care, or local authority area.

**Conclusions and implications**

This study demonstrates the value of securely linked population-level data for answering questions directly relevant to service design and delivery. By integrating social care, health, and education data, we can identify potential support needs that might be over-represented in children with an SGO, prevalence of household or carer level factors that could indicate a need for additional family support or resource, and ultimately address inequalities. The approach builds research capacity, offering a scalable model for monitoring permanence outcomes. Future work will extend analyses to examine child, adolescent and early adulthood outcomes, further informing policy and practice. This has significance beyond children with an SGO to all children who are no longer looked after, but many still have similar needs.

## Capacity Building and Knowledge Co-construction in Social Work: The Positive Parenting Promotion Project in Piemonte (Italy)

Faustino Rizzo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Padua

In contemporary social work, evidence-informed practice requires not only the transfer of knowledge but also its co-construction by practitioners, researchers, and families. The project *Promozione della Genitorialità Positiva*, implemented in Piemonte under Regional Law 17/2022 and supported by the FSE+ 2021–2027 programme, represents an innovative example of capacity building grounded in action-research paradigms. Drawing on co-research approaches, the project focuses on strengthening the welfare system by training professionals and creating multidisciplinary teams capable of reflexive practice and knowledge co-production. This presentation analyses the first year of implementation, highlighting how the training process and team development have generated new professional knowledge and systemic transformations.

### Methods

The intervention combined:

1. Participatory training involving over 600 practitioners (social workers, educators, psychologists, teachers), designed not only to transmit content but to foster critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and practitioner-led research.
2. Formation of multidisciplinary teams at local level, functioning as living laboratories for co-research and joint problem-solving with families.
3. Methodological accompaniment by the University of Padova, applying principles of action-research (cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting) and supporting the documentation of practice-based knowledge.

Data include training attendance and evaluation, records of team activities, and qualitative materials from reflective groups and supervision sessions.

### Findings

Preliminary evidence shows that training and team processes enhanced a shared professional language, increased confidence in inter-professional collaboration, and stimulated practitioner-led innovation in family support practices. Professionals reported a stronger capacity to critically analyse their work, co-design interventions with families, and integrate academic frameworks into daily practice. At the systemic level, territorial services have begun to institutionalize reflective spaces and collaborative routines, thereby embedding co-constructed knowledge into organizational structures.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The Piemonte project demonstrates that capacity building in social work is most effective when it is conceived as co-construction of knowledge rather than knowledge transfer. By integrating training, multidisciplinary teamwork, and academic partnership within an action-research framework, the initiative has fostered both professional empowerment and systemic change. This resonates with international recommendations, such as the WHO Handbook on Parenting Interventions (2024), which emphasizes human resource development, participatory design, and system strengthening as prerequisites for sustainable scaling-up. The experience suggests that co-research approaches can bridge the gap between research and practice, offering a replicable model for other regions aiming to build resilient, evidence-informed and family-centered welfare systems.

## How administrative data can set the scene - pathways to permanence for a cohort of care experienced children in Scotland

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Since 2014, the Permanently Progressing? study has been exploring the routes and timeframes to permanence (or impermanence), experiences, and wellbeing of 1,836 children who became looked after in Scotland in 2012-13, aged five and under. The study focuses on children living with kinship carers, foster carers or who are adopted. It is unique in that it is the largest longitudinal cohort study in the UK into care-experienced children's pathways to permanence.

Phase 1 (2014-18) analysed children's pre-care experiences, pathways and early outcomes. Phase 2 (2020-24) revisited children in middle childhood. Phase 3 will start in 2026. The study uses mixed methods – drawing on administrative data, surveys and interviews to build a picture of children and young people's lives over time which has both breadth and depth.

Administrative data provides important information for practitioners and policy makers about children's lives, experiences and their journeys to permanence or impermanence. In Phase 2 of the project, we analysed the newly created Administrative Data Research longitudinal Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS) dataset for our full cohort of 1,836 children, covering their care histories spanning 2007-22.

When exploring the experiences of becoming and being a family, understanding children's routes and times to permanence (legal and felt security) is vital. Using descriptive statistics, data visualization and survival analysis the CLAS data enabled us to see how children moved into and out of care over time, how many children were living in homes intended to be legally permanent, and how long this took.

By linking CLAS to information on children's maltreatment histories and the reasons they became looked after (collected from social workers for 726 children) we were able to consider the characteristics of children for whom permanence away from home was achieved and those where it was not. Children's characteristics and background experiences, including maltreatment experience, age when they first became looked after and first placement type, were related to the type of permanence achieved, and how long this took.

By the end of July 2022, the majority (79%) of the 1,836 children were living in homes intended to provide permanence. Overall, the median time to legal permanence for children was 32 months – so almost three years. This varied by the 'type' of permanence (home, kinship care, permanent foster care, adoption). We found that one in ten children who had been cared for away from home had experienced five or more placements.

The implications of these findings, for children and families, policymakers and practitioners will be discussed.

**Keywords:** permanence, care pathways, children



## Transformation of university teaching through AI: An analysis of the Implementation of digital tools in Social Work and Social Education

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In recent years, the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun to transform various aspects of daily life and professional sectors, particularly in education. This phenomenon presents significant challenges, but also offers opportunities to enhance teaching and learning processes in higher education. This study forms part of the SocialT<sup>2</sup> Teaching Innovation Project, funded by the University of Huelva, which explores the integration of AI-based tools in Social Work and Social Education training. A pilot experience was designed to develop and evaluate an educational intervention introducing AI tools into academic activities, analysing their impact on students' confidence in using them in future professional practice. SocialT<sup>2</sup> contributes to understanding the relevance of digital competences in the university system and to addressing growing demands for flexibility and adaptation to new digital labour skills. It also provides empirical evidence on effective and responsible technological integration in teaching, although implementation in the social sciences remains incipient.

The methodological design is a pre-post quasi-experimental study, analysing the impact of a classroom-based training intervention by evaluating several student dimensions: knowledge, perceived usefulness, willingness for future application, and awareness of ethical boundaries. Two ad hoc questionnaires were used for data collection: a pre-test and a post-test. The analysis was univariate and multivariate, conducted using SPSS software. The sample comprised 153 students in the pre-test and 141 in the post-test, all from Social Work and Education programmes.

In the pre-test, knowledge of search tools was low, although frequency of use showed a significant positive correlation. Confidence in using AI for academic work correlated positively with both knowledge and frequency of use. Despite high interest in AI for professional purposes, no significant correlations were found with other variables. Post-test results indicated a significant improvement in AI knowledge, positively correlated with the likelihood of future use. Increased confidence was significantly associated with acquired knowledge and perceived likelihood of professional application. The likelihood of applying AI correlated especially with improved confidence and ethical boundary identification. Confidence in identifying these boundaries showed significant correlations with all variables. A Chi-square analysis revealed significant differences in perceived confidence between pre- and post-test, indicating increased confidence following the intervention.

SocialT<sup>2</sup> demonstrates the impact of a training intervention on AI tool use among Social Education and Social Work students. Although students showed high interest in AI, a discrepancy existed between frequent use and their knowledge and confidence. The intervention significantly improved self-perceived confidence and AI knowledge, correlating with greater willingness to use it academically and professionally. The findings highlight the need for ongoing ethical training and a pedagogical approach promoting critical, responsible technology use.

## Navigating Barriers: Examining the Challenges Faced by Social Workers in Addressing the Social Needs of Looked After Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People in Scotland

Mr Akeem Babatunde<sup>1</sup>

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This qualitative research examines the challenges encountered by social workers in addressing the social needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in Scotland. Against the backdrop of global displacement and complex UK asylum policies, UASC present unique needs shaped by trauma, cultural dislocation, legal precarity, and developmental vulnerability. While policy frameworks exist to safeguard these children, the operational reality for frontline practitioners remains fraught with systemic tensions. Drawing on critical social work theory and intersectionality theory, this study examines how social workers navigate the intersecting boundaries of national immigration systems, cultural identities, organisational constraints, and professional ethics to address UASC's social needs.

Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with eighteen social workers, including four team managers across diverse Scottish local authorities. Participants were purposively sampled for direct experience in UASC casework. Reflexive thematic analysis, guided by theoretical frameworks, revealed four primary challenge domains operating at critical boundaries. Legal-practice boundary tensions emerged as social workers described profound difficulties operating within restrictive UK immigration and age assessment regimes, which frequently conflict with core social work values of empowerment and child welfare. Additionally, cultural and identity intersections highlighted the complex interplay of trauma, race, religion, language, and gender shaping UASC needs, with inadequate interpretation services and cultural competence gaps creating significant barriers to culturally safe interventions. Resource and systemic fragmentation revealed under-resourcing, coupled with fragmented service pathways across health, legal, and third-sector boundaries, creating unsustainable caseloads and hindering effective interdisciplinary collaboration. Ethical dissonance and power imbalances consistently emerged as practitioners reported distress from simultaneously enforcing state control functions while advocating for children's best interests, illuminating inherent contradictions within asylum systems that position social workers as both agents of support and potential instruments of state control.

The preliminary findings underscore that effectively addressing UASC social needs requires transcending traditional professional and systemic boundaries. Critical social work theory highlights the necessity of structural analysis and advocacy to challenge oppressive policies. Intersectionality theory provides the essential lens for understanding how overlapping systems of disadvantage (migration status, age, race, trauma) uniquely impact each child, demanding individualised, culturally responsive approaches beyond generic care models. The research revealed innovative practice strategies, including collaborative working with community organisations, trauma-informed approaches adapted for displacement

experiences, and advocacy at policy levels, though significant variations existed across local authorities in resource allocation and support systems. These findings contribute to evidence-informed practice by demonstrating how frontline experiences can inform both local service improvements and broader policy reform initiatives that prioritise child welfare over immigration enforcement.

This research will contribute significantly to the international discourse by centring frontline practitioner voices within the specific Scottish context, while offering transferable insights for global migration-related practice. It will demonstrate operationalisation of critical social work and intersectionality theories to identify systemic barriers and evidence boundary-spanning solutions including enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration, specialist resource allocation, trauma-informed practice models, and advocacy frameworks. The study argues that empowering social workers to effectively support UASC necessitates dismantling restrictive operational silos and actively fostering praxis that bridges national legal frameworks, cultural understanding, and anti-oppressive principles.

## IP – Future : Interdisciplinarity and sustainability research for a better future.

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### Description of the problem

Health professions traditionally tend to act in isolation from, or even in competition with each other. Although increasing interprofessional education (IPE) initiatives have emerged around the world, students are still predominantly taught in professional-silos. A redesign of health education is necessary in order to secure sustainable health and social care services. interaction.

### Background

The starting point in the research project “A circular educational framework to help solve healthcare challenges: interprofessional education and collaborative practice for the future” (IP-future) is the workplace-based IPE called TVEPS, where students are in the final stage of their education, they carry with them their professions’ basic competencies, which allows for independent IP learning among students from different professions and enables innovation and creative thinking.

TVEPS has 900 students per year from 17 education programs from two institutions (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL)N and University of Bergen (UiB)). The workplaces include traditional arenas for elderly people such as nursing homes and home care services, but also arenas for younger persons such as healthy life centers and labour- and welfare services.

### Methods and collecting data

In the IP- future research, we will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods carefully tailored to suit the data. Data will include the TVEPS students’ patient care plans, action plans, and reflection notes with demographic questions. An internationally validated questionnaire tool, ICCAS, Interprofessional Collaborative Competencies Attainment Survey, will also be used to assess the students’ learning outcome.

Through 20 items, ICCAS measures the IP core competencies: communication, collaboration, roles/responsibilities, collaborative patient-family-centered approach, conflict management, and team functioning. Students report their IP competencies both before and after they have participated in TVEPS practice.

In this presentation I would like to focus on social work students learning outcomes after attending TVEPS workplace based IPE.

**Results**

In the academic year 2024/25, a total of 41 social work students participated in TVEPS. Learning outcome measured by the ICCAS score was very high with a Cohen's D of 1.09. In general, learning outcome is considered low if Cohen's D is below 0.5, medium if Cohen's D is between 0.5 and 0.8 and high if Cohen's D exceeds 0.8.

A presentation of social-work student learning outcome at HVL participating Tveps:

"I have learned how important it is to collaborate with other professions, especially when it comes to users with complex needs. Through TVEPS practice, I have learned that it can be difficult for one profession to meet all needs alone, and that interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial to ensure a holistic and coordinated service".

**Conclusions**

Our findings suggest that work place based IPE may be of particular value for social work students to learn how to collaborate across disciplines.

## Motivation, sources of stress, and coping strategies among foster parents in Croatia

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Foster care in Croatia represents a key form of alternative care, ensuring that children without adequate parental care grow up in a family environment rather than in institutional settings. Despite its importance, the number of foster families remains insufficient, and systemic challenges persist. This study aimed to examine the relationship between foster parents' motivations, the sources of stress they experience, and the coping strategies they employ. The research addressed several questions: whether sociodemographic characteristics, motivation, and perceived stressors are associated with coping strategies; how motivation influences the choice of coping strategies; how stressors shape coping behaviors; and to what extent sociodemographic characteristics, motivation, and coping strategies contribute to the perception of stress.

A quantitative study was conducted with a sample of 165 licensed foster parents across Croatia. Data were collected using validated instruments: the Scale of Personal Motives for Becoming a Foster Carer, the Questionnaire on Sources of Stress among Foster Parents, and the Coping with Stress Questionnaire. Analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations, and hierarchical regression analysis.

The findings show that intrinsic motives, especially altruism and the desire to care for a child, were the most prominent reasons for becoming foster parents, while extrinsic motives such as religion or patriotism were less significant. The most common stressors identified were related to the characteristics of foster children, particularly behavioral and emotional difficulties, while additional stress was associated with insufficient collaboration and support from social workers. Stressors linked to foster parents' own characteristics were less frequently reported. In terms of coping strategies, foster parents most often relied on emotion-focused coping, while problem-focused coping was less frequently applied but significantly contributed to stress reduction. Regression analyses revealed that religious and patriotic motives, as well as lower levels of altruistic motivation, predicted higher levels of stress. Furthermore, reliance on emotion-focused coping and avoidance strategies was associated with increased stress, whereas problem-focused coping contributed to stress reduction.

These results highlight the complex interplay between motivation, stressors, and coping in the foster care context. While intrinsic motivation enhances resilience and satisfaction in fostering, the presence of stressors and the choice of coping strategies significantly shape foster parents' experiences. The findings underline the importance of enabling foster parents to strengthen their skills in applying problem-focused coping strategies, alongside ensuring systemic and continuous support, particularly regarding the challenges arising from children's behavioral and emotional difficulties. Providing ongoing training, supervision, and accessible professional support within the community is crucial for improving foster parents' well-being and the stability of placements. Strengthening these resources will improve the quality and sustainability of foster care as a form of alternative care that prioritizes the best interests of children.

**Keywords:** foster parents, motivation, stress, coping strategies, alternative care, Croatia

## Social Work CPD Education Across Cultural and Professional Boundaries: A Relational Pedagogy Approach in Dubai

Professor of Social Work Anne-Marie Glover<sup>1</sup>

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This presentation explores the author's experience of designing and delivering an interdisciplinary Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for social workers in Dubai, UAE. Drawing on Walker's (2015) framework of Relational Pedagogy the presentation proposes that relational and culturally sensitive approaches can foster effective interdisciplinary professional development in this transnational context. It will reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities of developing an appropriate and inclusive curriculum that respects the varied backgrounds of learners in a culturally diverse and professionally complex environment.

Social work is an interdisciplinary profession, and the value of interdisciplinary learning is now well established. By engaging with other disciplines, social workers can develop a greater understanding of the diverse skills and knowledge of other professions. The presentation shares insights from the development of an interdisciplinary Dubai social work CPD curriculum. It also reflects on the unique challenges and opportunities related to delivery in this context. Drawing on Walker's (2019) six principles of the relationship-based pedagogy framework - Mutual Engagement, Empathy, Empowerment, Conversation, Collaboration and Culture – it explores the importance of inclusive, interdisciplinary, and relational pedagogy. Effective integration of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary education requires intentional curriculum design. The paper considers how key strategies - including establishing shared perspectives and case studies drawn from local practice - valued learner diversity and encouraged critical thinking. It suggests that fostering an environment of trust-based respectful relationships supported personal and professional reflection, encouraged delegates to examine their own assumptions, and supported effective learning. It explores how this unique programme contributes towards enhancing interprofessional skills and knowledge and understanding of local practice.

This presentation directly addresses the conference's main theme of exploring evidence informed approaches to interdisciplinary learning by highlighting a relational, culturally responsive approach to CPD. It also contributes to the sub-theme by reflecting on social work education across cultural, disciplinary, and professional boundaries. It explores some of the challenges and opportunities of delivery in this unique context demonstrating how social work is uniquely positioned to facilitate inclusive, interprofessional learning in global contexts. It also demonstrates the importance of enhancing professional practice across local and (inter)national boundaries and how these programmes are key in preparing practitioners to meet the challenges of contemporary social issues.

The presentation, informed by the researcher's experience of social work curriculum development, demonstrates how adopting a relational pedagogy approach can create an inclusive and effective interdisciplinary learning environment. It advocates for an approach that values the professional diversity of learners and builds respectful relationships based



on trust. It concludes that a culturally diverse curriculum aligned to global standards and case studies drawn from local practice can facilitate opportunities for personal and professional reflection. Although further evaluation is needed to assess the impact and long-term outcomes, this approach offers a useful continuing professional development model for Dubai based social work and social care professionals and equip them to address the complexities of practice.

**Keywords:** Relational pedagogy, Dubai, interdisciplinary learning, cultural competence, social work CPD



## Multidisciplinary practicum of disadvantaged minority students with hegemonic majority colleagues: Opportunities and challenges

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### Background and purpose

Reform improving access to higher education in Israel, tripled Israel's social work training institutions, creating shortage of suitable practicum settings. Multidisciplinary organizations, such as the prison service and different types of hospital were forced to absorb large numbers of practicum students from various professions.

These 'force of circumstances' multidisciplinary practicum institutions operate in Hebrew, most supervisors are Jewish, and the institutional climate (symbols, festivals, administration) is dominated by an Israeli Jewish ethos. This pioneering study bridges a research gap, exposing opportunities and challenges facing social work students from the disadvantaged Arab minority in Israel, Participating in a practicum with majority population colleagues from different disciplines (psychologists, criminologists, educators and art therapists) in the prison service.

### Methods

A qualitative phenomenological research, collected data regarding the practicum settings from documentary content analysis, and concerning opportunities (positive experiences regarding the process and products) and challenges (problems and blocks) during the practicum from semi-structured interviews. The sample included members of an ethno-national minority (Muslims, Christians and Druze), appointed to multidisciplinary practicums, who complete their degree in the same academic year. Due to low response regarding potential candidates by practicum settings, snowball sampling was adopted. The interview process began in July 2021 until saturation was reached in January 2025. Fourteen out of 56 interviews were from students practicing in prisons. Thematic data analysis enabled elicitation of themes and categories.

### Findings

A few Druze, Bedouin and some Christian students, serving in the security forces, "were awarded a preparatory learning experience" through "inductive familiarization" with other professions' "knowledge", "values" and "skills", relating to concrete cases. Contrastingly, Muslim students felt they were seen as potentially hostile by the Israeli establishment, complaining they were not prepared beforehand and lacked 'protection" during the practicum by responsible representatives of academia. Their main challenge was Zionist students' attempt to leverage their hegemonic status during shared intervention processes in five ways (1) exploiting superior Hebrew skills to empower their professional opinion (2) Deciding unilateral professional decisions perversely on Muslim holidays (3) Overemphasizing professional hierarchies to benefit clinical psychologists, so that Arab opinions were largely excluded (4) leveraging military backgrounds to influence professional committees (5) using homogeneity with the administration for preferential allocation

of prison facilities for treatment. This process failed to prepare minoritized students for professional practice in multidisciplinary contexts.

### Conclusions and implications

Social work grounded in a bio-psycho-social (and spiritual) approach, is forced to suffice with limited multidisciplinary training. Consequently, in addition to further research, training settings should leverage interdisciplinary practicums' potential for each profession, to benefit service users. In this process, special attention is needed for hegemonic majority - disadvantaged minority relations.

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# Social Workers in Housing First for Youth: Interdisciplinary Coordination and Evidence-Informed Practice Across Europe

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## Background and purpose

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) offers immediate access to housing alongside tailored support that reflects young people's developmental needs. Within this model, the contribution of social workers is often variably defined and, at times, insufficiently visible within interdisciplinary teams operating in fragmented welfare and housing systems. This study examines how social workers enact their roles in HF4Y, how collaboration is organised, and how coordination activities shape practice in contexts of constrained housing supply.

## Methods

We conducted nine semi-structured interviews with HF4Y practitioners across five European countries. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymised and, where necessary, translated. Analysis followed an iterative, thematic approach with reflexive memoing and team discussions to enhance analytic rigour. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of KU Leuven.

## Findings

Four themes were identified.

1. Role elasticity and boundary work. Social workers undertook a wide repertoire of tasks, including landlord negotiation, benefits navigation, advocacy across agencies, and sustained relational support. In some contexts they were central to team operations; in others their functions were distributed among youth workers or educators.
2. Coordination as a modality of care. Activities that are often labelled administrative, such as referrals, follow up and interagency brokerage, were described by practitioners and experienced by young people as relational and trust-building. Coordination contributed to continuity and reliability in service encounters.
3. Ethical strain under structural scarcity. Limited housing stock, age-based eligibility thresholds and short-term funding generated moral distress, as practitioners witnessed relational gains being undermined by system constraints.
4. Contingent interdisciplinarity. Collaboration was widely regarded as necessary, yet it frequently depended on interpersonal ties rather than formalised mechanisms. Tensions emerged where HF4Y's unconditional ethos met conditional, threshold-driven services.

## Conclusions and implications

HF4Y foregrounds a distinctive professional contribution: social workers integrate ethical attentiveness with rights advocacy and system navigation. This contribution is central to outcomes yet remains weakly captured by conventional performance metrics. Services and policymakers should:

- a) recognise coordination as a form of care within role profiles, supervision and evaluation frameworks;
- b) invest in housing-specific training and clarify responsibilities within interdisciplinary teams;
- c) develop age-bridging pathways to prevent discontinuities at key transitions;
- d) align funding with the time required for consistent, relationship-based practice.

**Keywords**

Youth homelessness; Housing First for Youth; social work roles; interdisciplinarity; coordination; evidence-informed practice; Europe

## Looking at aging in place from a multidimensional perspective. A qualitative study of in aging in place in two Dutch neighbourhoods

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The global population is increasing because of extended life expectancy and decreasing birth rates. The implications are considerable in many fields, including the economic, social, and political spheres (Barišić et al, 2024; Acero et al, 2025). Consequently, many countries are shifting towards aging in place policies so that people can live in their community as long as possible, maintaining quality of life and reducing costs (Wiles et al, 2011; Wang, 2019; Lewis and Buffel, 2020). Aging in place supports independence, autonomy and connection to familiar social support and places (Hammond and Saunders, 2021; Raap et al, 2022; Jing et al, 2024).

Aging in the community also creates challenges for individuals and communities that call for a transdisciplinary approach in neighbourhood settings. Nevertheless, existing initiatives and literature largely centre on medical and psychosocial aspects of aging, overlooking environmental determinants as well as the perspectives of older adults. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the necessity of adopting a multidimensional perspective on aging in place (Teater and Chonody, 2020; Barišić et al, 2024). This means that the needs of people as they grow older as well as the community they live in are taken into account (Lewis and Buffel, 2020; Kavanagh and Lewis, Camilla, 2024). Both have been identified as important, yet understudied, elements of aging in place. Moreover, the social work profession has been rather quiet in the discussion regarding aging, despite their expertise being rooted in a multidimensional perspective.

To address this gap, a qualitative study was performed. This study aimed to explore the multifaceted relationship between people and their environments when aging at home, considering both personal and environmental factors. We draw on empirical research performed in two Dutch neighbourhoods. In these two neighbourhoods, we trained eight social and health care professionals to interview 142 adults over the age of 67 with the Capability Cards. This narrative tool was developed in collaboration with social work professionals and researchers and is based on the capability approach. The capability approach centres on the individual values people consider essential for their wellbeing and the belief that the realisation of these values relies on personal and environmental opportunities. The data were analysed by researchers based on a multidimensional perspective on aging derived from Capability Approach theory (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Sen, 1999; 2009).

In our presentation we will provide insight into the personal and environmental factors (corrosive disadvantage) that impede and promote (fertile functionings) aging in place, and the differences we see in the two neighbourhoods. We believe that our findings contribute to the debate on aging in social work and add further understanding of how aging in place is experienced by older adults and how transdisciplinary practice can support people growing old in their home.

## Developing an evidence base to guide the reform of family law proceedings: A comprehensive study on the operation of the in camera (privacy rule) in family law courts in Ireland

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### Background and purpose

The 'in camera' rule in the Irish family law context operates to protect the identity and privacy of the parties and any child(/ren) to whom the proceedings relate in sensitive cases. The Department of Justice commissioned the researchers to examine the operation of the rule to provide a robust evidence base to support a reform process (report published in 2025).

### Methods

This was a mixed-method study which involved data collection from parents and family members, social and legal professionals, judges, policy makers and the civil society sector. First, a comprehensive review of the literature and legislation was undertaken to examine the law regarding the phrase 'otherwise than in public' in Ireland (including an analysis of four jurisdictions). Second, a national online survey of parents, grandparents, foster parents and anyone over the age of 18 years who had an experience of family law or child care proceedings in Ireland was circulated (n=300). Third, 13 Judges with experience of family law or child care proceedings were interviewed. Fourth, 18 focus groups with professionals and civil society actors were undertaken (n=84). Ethical approval was obtained from two research ethics committees.

### Findings

#### Case law analysis:

A review of the case law and the relevant legislation suggests that the in camera rule and its application have, over time, come to be interpreted in a manner that has resulted not only in transparency in certain types of legal proceedings being limited, but has arguably negatively impacted the rights of children and family service users.

#### Parents survey:

1. The in camera rule was not explained in 55% of cases.
2. Just over one third (37.3%) of survey participants either strongly agreed or agreed that they had a clear understanding of what the in camera rule allowed.
3. The rule was breached in close to half of all cases.
4. Nearly two thirds of survey participants (65%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that 'the in camera rule is fine, no need to change it'.

Qualitative focus groups:

There was little consensus amongst professionals concerning the scope of the in camera rule in terms of its operation. Professionals spoke about a collective lack of clarity and understanding of the in camera rule that extended to a misinterpretation and misapplication of the rule in some instances in practice.

Judicial interviews:

All of the Judges interviewed agreed that the main strength of the rule lies in its ability to protect the privacy of parties to the proceedings, and more importantly, any children impacted as a result. The strength of agreement amongst Judges deteriorated as more aspects of the rule's operation were explored.

**Conclusions and implications**

This interdisciplinary research report made 21 recommendations to inform the development of policy and practice in family law proceedings. It is clear that what is permitted by this constitutionally established rule is unclear, and the operation of the rule in practice suggests that significant reform is required. The study provides an evidence base on how the in camera can be reformed.

## Recognising and Responding to Honour-Based Violence: A Study of the Swedish Social Services' Assessment and Practice Development

PhD Stina Lindegren<sup>1</sup>, PhD Siv-Britt Björktomt<sup>1</sup>, Professor Maritha Jacobsson<sup>1</sup>

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### Background

Honour-based violence and oppression (HBV) against children and young people is a serious social problem. Assessing the circumstances of children and young people is often described as highly complex, as it requires social workers to navigate multiple ethical and legal considerations. HBV poses particular challenges when conflicts arise between Swedish family law and families' own cultural norms and values, such as parental control over children's social lives, which may heighten the risk of threats and violence. Despite these challenges, evidence-based methods to guide prevention and response to HBV remain scarce.

Existing research has examined prevalence, young people's experiences of HBV (1), and their encounters with social services. However, systematic knowledge of how Swedish social services address HBV in practice is largely absent. Such knowledge is essential for developing evidence-informed practice and policy, and for strengthening the links between research, frontline practice, and service users.

### Purpose

This study aims to investigate how HBV is represented and articulated in child welfare investigations conducted with the BBIC model (Barns Behov i Centrum, Children's Needs in Focus), and how cases are managed by social services. BBIC is a standardised tool for child welfare investigations, adapted from the UK's Integrated Children's System and subsequently modified for the Swedish context.

The study forms part of the larger research program "What Works? Early identification of children and youth at risk: Developing knowledge and methods in collaboration with social services, schools, the police, and service users," which seeks to co-create knowledge to improve practice across institutional boundaries.

### Methods

The study is based on a review of all BBIC investigations concerning children handled by a specialised HBV child welfare unit in a large Swedish municipality during 2023 (n=138). The material was quantitatively coded using a content analysis approach and analysed with a range of statistical methods. Qualitative analyses are ongoing.

### Findings, conclusions, and implications

Preliminary findings suggest that strong social control (e.g., control over clothing, friends, and leisure activities) is the most frequently reported form of violence (>30%). Physical violence, primarily in the form of assault, also appears relatively common, as do suspicions of abduction abroad. In contrast, documentation of sexual violence and certain honour-specific



practices, such as disciplinary “upbringing trips,” virginity control, and attempts to convert LGBTQI persons, was absent in the documentation. This may point to a need for targeted measures to ensure these forms of violence are better recognised and addressed by social services. Girls appear particularly vulnerable and are more often subjected to coercive care, according to the data. In over 85% of cases where social services proposed an intervention, the intervention was implemented, indicating that most children identified as needing support received it.

The study contributes new knowledge about how HBV is understood and managed in social services practice, highlighting areas where recognition and intervention can be strengthened. The findings carry direct implications for evidence-informed practice and policy, and will be discussed further.

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## Welcome in Valesia – a participatory theatre as a tool of co-creation of knowledge

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The theatre project Welcome in Valesia was initially developed by social workers to present their experiences of how legal structures shape their everyday work with migrants. What started as professional reflection soon evolved into an interdisciplinary collaboration with migration law research. Today, the project goes beyond performance: it translates socio-legal findings into lived experiences for the public, encouraging reflection on coexistence, shared responsibility, and social cohesion (Erel et al. 2017).

The Swiss legal context provides the framework for the play. Recent reforms introduced a 'step-by-step' integration model, whereby the greater the rights attached to a prospective residence status, the greater the integration requirements. In other words, residence rights are conditional and differentiated from the outset. Foreign nationals receive different entry permits depending on nationality and country of origin and must meet specific integration criteria for prolongation or permanent residence. These criteria can include exams, proof of language acquisition, or employment status. To ensure the integration of foreign nationals, the competent authorities (e.g. integration offices or social services) implement integration measures and are obliged to communicate with the migration authorities. This makes integration a regulated and bureaucratic process that directly affects migrant's life.

Welcome in Valesia transforms these legal mechanisms into a participatory theatre setting. By entering the fictional borders of Valesia, spectators become participants: they are assigned an unknown residence status and must play the role of a migrant. Based on this status, they receive tasks such as applying for jobs, requesting social aid or learning the national language. Although the Valesian authorities provide formal support, participants must navigate bureaucratic structures to secure an extension to their stay. This experience reveals how legal frameworks, institutional social work practices and power dynamics intertwine in everyday life.

Through the project Welcome in Valesia, this presentation highlights the potential of participatory theatre for co-creating knowledge on four interconnected levels (Enria 2016):

1. Practice level: social workers originally performed the play to demonstrate how law affects their professional practice.
2. Research–practice collaboration: through cooperation between social work and migration law scholars, the contents of the play were deepened and connected to socio-legal research.
3. Rehearsal process: exchanges between researchers and actors created a space for knowledge transfer. Additionally, actors with migration backgrounds enriched the narrative with their experiences, broadening perspectives.

4. Societal level: the performances themselves generated collective knowledge by creating a social space where researchers, practitioners, policymakers and the public could interact. This was extended after the play through discussions, ensuring that insights were reflected upon and reconnected to real-world contexts.

Welcome in Valesia makes legal structures tangible through embodied experience, illustrating how participatory theatre can act as a tool for socio-legal research, public engagement and civic dialogue. It fosters critical awareness of integration policies, challenges existing power relations and encourages reflection on shared responsibilities in diverse societies.

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# An Interdisciplinary Quality Framework for Digitally Mediated Social Work

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## Background & purpose

Digitalisation in social work is accelerating while the regulatory landscape (e.g. GDPR, NIS-2, EU AI Act, MDR) grows more complex. Practitioners, organisations, developers and clients increasingly ask what “good” digitally mediated social work looks like. We address this by developing an interdisciplinary quality framework for digital care, assistance and support, co-created with stakeholders and grounded in established models across technology (International Organization for Standardization, 2021), organisation (Kristensen et al., 2017) and professional competence (Bocklandt et al., 2025).

## Methods

We applied a mixed-methods, multi-stage design:

- 1) a landscape analysis combining a narrative review (279 sources) with ten policy-stakeholder interviews;
- 2) a four-round Delphi with experts (N=50) from practice, policy, technology, inclusion and ethics; and
- 3) four focus groups (N=25) plus additional expert interviews to refine criteria and wording.

## Findings

The quality framework consists of 119 criteria, divided over three pillars: technology, organisation and professionals. 73 criteria are minimum standards, 46 guide further optimisation. Illustrative criteria for each pillar include: (a) Technology: GDPR-compliant data protection with encryption; (b) Organisation: maintaining non-digital alternatives and multichannel access to care, support and assistance; (c) Professional: assessing and supporting clients’ digital inclusion and readiness.

The framework is operationalised as a self-assessment instrument that generates an improvement roadmap, supporting proportionate, risk-aware choices.

## Conclusion and implications

The quality framework provides a shared language and practical tool for practitioners, developers and policymakers to assess, implement and continuously improve digital support. By linking normative standards to professional judgement and organisational conditions, it enables evidence-informed decision-making and strengthens accountability and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The work explicitly aligns with ECSWR sub-themes: (7) linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge; (2) social work research, policy, practice and education across disciplinary and professional boundaries; and (5) linking Industry 4.0 and the digital welfare state. It also contributes to (8) methodological development and

capacity building by translating multi-source evidence into actionable criteria and a usable self-assessment instrument.

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## **Decolonial Praxis Interrogates Eurocentric Social Work - Evidence from Internship Semesters in the Global South**

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A critical phase in the education of social work students is the internship semester during which academic learning is tested in field practice. Social work theory and principles are applied to a diversity of groups and communities experiencing challenging life-situations under extreme situations of need and life-threatening circumstances. In the past several years, social work students have availed of generous scholarship programs that allow them to undertake a semester of internship in a country not their own - which from their own choosing is a country in the Global South. For a great number of these students, their internship semester ushered life-changing learning experiences because it is within the framework of postcolonial analyses and decolonial practices that they can reference a methodology of effectively working with people in situations of need. Their Eurocentric social work education as acquired from universities is upended by critical realities obtaining in societies, who to this day, still bear the injustices of a colonial and neo-colonial world order. This presentation will respond to questions on the quality of preparation and intensive mentoring that students in international social work undertake. Based on qualitative feedback acquired from both European and Global South teachers and students, this presentation gives evidence on how a postcolonial social work encounter can yet enrich our journey to a decolonizing consciousness.

## Cumulative Harm or Inclusive Futures? Rethinking AI, Disability, and Social Work in the Digital Welfare State

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in welfare systems, promising to improve efficiency, autonomy, and inclusion. Yet alongside these opportunities, AI risks reproducing ableist biases and reinforcing discriminatory cultural narratives. This paper examines how AI-driven technologies shape disability inclusion and exclusion, situating these dynamics within debates on Industry 4.0 and the digital welfare state.

The study draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from social work, disability studies, ethics, and technology research. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with researchers, innovators, and disability activists between November 2024 and March 2025. A thematic analysis produced seven categories: Bias and Representation; Policy and Governance; Inclusive Design and Co-Creation; Technoableism; Ethical Challenges; Economic and Practical Barriers; and Applications and Impact on Lived Experience. Findings reveal that AI systems in welfare and care contexts reproduce societal ableism. Recruitment algorithms filter out neurodivergent candidates, facial recognition fails to identify individuals with atypical features, and assistive technologies frequently frame disability as a 'defect' to be fixed. Experts emphasized how technoableism and the supercrip narrative continue to shape expectations, pressuring people with disabilities to assimilate into technological systems rather than demanding structural inclusion. Such patterns reflect how Industry 4.0 logics of productivity and standardization can undermine social work's commitment to human rights, diversity, and justice.

At the same time, the study identifies pathways toward more inclusive futures. Disability-led design, based on the principle "Nothing about us without us," ensures technologies are socially meaningful rather than tokenistic. The concept of cumulative technoableist harm—small but persistent exclusions across digital systems—emerges as a new analytical tool for social work and policy. Experts further highlighted that universal design, regulation attentive to disability, and investment in accessible infrastructure are essential if the digital welfare state is to reduce rather than reinforce inequalities.

The study demonstrates that social work has a critical role in shaping the governance of Industry 4.0 transformations. Social workers can advocate for disability-centered safeguards in AI regulation, ensure that technologies complement rather than replace human care, and facilitate participatory approaches that elevate lived experience as expertise. By engaging with interdisciplinary research and evidence-informed practice, social work can help redirect AI development away from technoableist assimilation toward genuinely inclusive and emancipatory futures.

## Digitalization and Social Care in Municipal Home Care Services for Older People: Lessons from Two Swedish Municipalities

Professor Björn Blom<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Katarina Andersson<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Magnus Bergmark<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Leif Sundberg<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Sheila Zimic<sup>1</sup>

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### Background and Purpose

Digitalization is regarded as one of the key solutions to the challenges facing welfare services, particularly within social care and services for older people. In Sweden, digital technology is promoted both as a means to enhance quality and as a response to staff shortages in adapting to demographic changes. This study investigates what digitalization means in practice for eldercare digitalization in two municipalities. It explores how digital tools affect autonomy, participation, care quality, and professional roles.

The study is inspired by research by Frennert (2020) Approaches to welfare technology in municipal eldercare, *Jnl of Technology in Human Services*. Our paper contributes to interdisciplinary social work research that informs policy and practice in the evolving digital welfare state. It addresses how digitalization intersects with broader transformations associated with Industry 4.0, including automation, datafication, and reconfiguration of professional boundaries in care work.

### Methods

The research comprises three sub-studies using mixed methods:

1. A web-based survey of home care staff (n = 508) assessing attitudes, knowledge, and involvement in digitalization processes.
2. Participatory photo interviews with care staff, unit managers and needs assessors (n = 28) to explore care processes and the role of technology.
3. Individual interviews with 19 older service users (65+) on their experiences with digital interventions.

The analysis draws on care and gender theory, critical information systems research, and theories on organizations and professions to explore digitalization's impact on home care practices and conditions. This interdisciplinary approach enables a nuanced understanding of how digital technologies are shaped by and reshape social work environments and relationships.

### Findings

Service users generally perceived digital interventions—such as safety alarms, medication dispensers, and cameras—as enhancing safety and independence. However, they expressed ambivalence about reduced personal contact and feelings of control or surveillance. Digital technology was consistently seen as a complement to, not a substitute for, human care.



Staff attitudes were neutral to positive overall, with technology viewed favourably when it streamlined workflows and freed time for personal interaction. However, care staff and needs assessors reported feeling less included in the digitalization process compared to managerial roles. Inclusion was influenced by factors such as age, ethnicity, and perceived usefulness of technology. Technical disruptions and system complexity were noted as challenges.

Across all groups, human contact was emphasized as irreplaceable, underscoring the need for balanced integration of digital solutions.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The introduction of digital technology in municipal home care is a double-edged sword, requiring deliberate balance to ensure that the “benefits” outweigh the “challenges” Moreover, the maximization of benefits can only be defined by those who use the technology; the service users and staff. In this way, the focus remains on quality care rather than on technical aspects. At the same time, the technical components must be robust and function reliably so that they support, rather than hinder, care work.

## Operational yet Opaque: Paradoxes in the Digitalization of Child Protection

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<sup>1</sup> University of Lapland, <sup>2</sup> University of Helsinki

### Background

This paper examines the paradoxes embedded in the digitalization of child protection by combining theoretical perspectives from multiple disciplines. Child protection is inherently multi-agency, requiring coordinated efforts across professional and organizational boundaries. Increasingly, these interactions are mediated by digital infrastructures, which shape both the possibilities and limitations of collaboration. Despite substantial public investments in technological solutions, that are often justified by promises of increased efficiency, many initiatives fall short of their stated goals (Alami, 2016), and systematic evaluations of their long-term impacts remain scarce.

### Purpose and theoretical approach

Our interdisciplinary approach integrates the network theory and the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009) to investigate how technological infrastructures influence multi-agency collaboration in Finnish child protection. Network theory enables us to analyze the structural dimensions of collaboration by mapping regional networks and technological connections that enable interaction. In parallel, the lens of sociotechnical imaginaries allows us to explore the shared visions, assumptions, and institutional logics that guide the development and implementation of these technologies. Together, these frameworks offer a richer understanding of how technological infrastructures both reflect and shape the imagined futures of child protection.

### Data and methods

Empirically, our paper is based on interviews (N=21) with child protection managers and ICT specialists across three wellbeing services counties. The interviews combined structured and thematic elements, producing both quantitative and qualitative data. Methodologically, we integrate computational social network analysis (SNA) with qualitative content analysis to examine both the structural and interpretative dimensions of technological infrastructures. While SNA as an interdisciplinary research methodology offers powerful tools for analyzing relational patterns (Scott 2017), its application in child protection research has been limited, highlighting the value of our approach.

### Findings

Our preliminary findings reveal substantial regional variation in technological infrastructures, as well as divergent and often paradoxical perceptions of their potential. In some areas, systems are entirely absent; in others, they exist but remain unused. These disparities illustrate how digital technologies can simultaneously enable and constrain collaboration. Moreover, the presence (or absence) of sociotechnical imaginaries plays a critical role in shaping the trajectory of digital transformation, revealing tensions between what is considered desirable and what is deemed possible.

### Conclusion and implications

By combining interdisciplinary social network analysis with the conceptual framework of sociotechnical imaginaries from science and technology studies, our paper generates a more nuanced understanding of technological development in child protection. It also offers practical insights to support decision-making on digitalization by emphasizing the need for ethically grounded and evidence-based technology investments. Finally, our paper demonstrates how a multidisciplinary approach can enrich the analysis of complex socio-technical systems and uncover the paradoxes that lie at the heart of digitalization efforts.

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## Empowering Social Workers: Leveraging AI to Support Employment Decision-Making for Clients with Disabilities

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

### Background:

Social workers play a pivotal role in supporting individuals with disabilities as they navigate employment decisions and workforce integration. As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly prevalent in information-seeking behaviors, social workers must understand how these technologies can enhance their practice while recognizing potential risks. AI systems offer unprecedented access to employment resources, career guidance, and decision-making support, yet they carry inherent cultural and historical biases that may perpetuate stigma and marginalization of individuals with disabilities. For social workers committed to empowering client self-determination, understanding how AI responds to employment-related inquiries is crucial for effective advocacy and service provision.

**Methods:** This study examines how AI language models respond to employment-related requests when intermediated by social workers versus direct client or family inquiries. Three carefully constructed vignettes portrayed a 30-year-old woman with physical, intellectual, and mental disabilities seeking workforce entry. Each scenario was presented from three perspectives: the individual herself, her mother, and a social worker advocating on her behalf. We evaluated responses from three major language models (Copilot powered by ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude) using systematic content analysis to identify patterns in information quality, bias manifestation, and professional framing.

### Findings:

Preliminary findings do not reveal significant variations in AI responses based on who initiates the inquiry. The analysis demonstrates both opportunities and challenges in the use of AI for employment related decisions in social work practice. Results highlight differential recommendations across disability types, with intellectual disabilities and mental illness receiving more paternalistic responses regardless of the inquirer's professional status.

**Implications:** This research provides critical insights for social workers utilizing AI tools in disability employment services. Findings suggest that social workers must remain vigilant about embedded biases that may undermine client autonomy and self-determination. The study offers practical recommendations for social workers to leverage AI effectively while maintaining ethical practice standards, including strategies for prompt formulation, bias recognition, and client empowerment.

### Conclusion:

As AI becomes integral to information access and decision-making support, social workers must develop competencies in AI-mediated practice to better serve clients with disabilities in employment contexts. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on technology-enhanced social work practice, offering evidence-based strategies for harnessing AI's potential while safeguarding against discriminatory outcomes. The presentation will conclude with actionable recommendations for social work education, practice guidelines, and advocacy efforts to ensure AI serves as a tool for empowerment rather than further marginalization in disability employment services.

## Challenging Antisocial Behaviour in Probation Practice: Using conversation analysis to understand non-confrontational challenge

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### Background/ purpose:

Challenging clients' antisocial comments and behaviours is a critical skill for probation officers and social workers working with people who have offended. This is a central element of Trotter's (2022: 123) prosocial modelling approach, which involves "identifying client pro-social comments and actions; rewarding those comments and actions; presenting oneself as a pro-social model; and challenging antisocial or pro-criminal comments and actions." Employing a prosocial modelling approach has demonstrated positive outcomes in probation and child protection contexts. Previous research has broadly distinguished between confrontational and non-confrontational styles of challenge, demonstrating non-confrontational approaches are more effective. However, this binary categorisation lacks detailed guidance on how to challenge non-confrontationally or when it is not effective, as the descriptions of non-confrontational challenge are broad, e.g., 'firm but fair'. Furthermore, research shows practitioners infrequently challenge clients in non-confrontational ways. This study examined how probation officers challenge antisocial talk in a non-confrontational manner during supervision sessions and explored the interactional resources used to achieve this, opening up the 'black box' of social work and probation practice.

### Methods:

Using conversation analysis, we analysed 25 video-recorded probation sessions between practitioners and clients which were originally collected as part of the Jersey Supervision Skills Study. The secondary data analysis involved the detailed transcription of these videos, noting not only what has been said but how. This is essential for conversation analysis, where talk is considered to create and maintain social order and achieve social action. We examined how practitioners responded to clients' antisocial comments or behaviour and how these responses influenced the unfolding interaction, particularly regarding client engagement and perspective shifts in situ.

### Findings:

We identified three key interactional resources probation officers used to challenge antisocial talk: formulations, questions, and assessments. These responses were used to shifted clients' perspectives while preserving the progressivity of engagement in the interaction. We found that by aligning with clients' talk, these resources encouraged clients to engage in dialogue about, and reflect on their behaviours. We further identified shifts in perspective often happened over the course of an interaction, as practitioners drew on multiple resources. When the challenge was not well-aligned, it could lead to client disengagement. Additionally, we noted features of non-confrontational challenges which were not always successful in altering the client's perspectives, such as the challenge being presented as advice or the response lacking clear disapproval. In these instances, clients also became disengaged.

**Conclusions and implications:**

This study highlights the delicate balance required in probation practice to challenge antisocial behaviour without disrupting client engagement. Non-confrontational challenges that align with clients' perspectives appear to be effective, but they must be carefully designed to avoid unintended consequences. The findings indicate challenge in probation is a long-term endeavour, requiring multiple interactions to gradually shift clients' perspectives. These insights can helpfully inform training for probation officers and social workers in prosocial modelling and the development of practice frameworks to better support client engagement and reduce recidivism. Further research should explore how these interactional strategies unfold over time and in different probation contexts.

## Improving the analysis of socio-economic context and intersectionality in Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Dr Rafiyah Khan<sup>1</sup>, Professor Anna Gupta, Mr James Blewett

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### Background and purpose:

Child abuse and neglect (CAN) are major public health issues, with far-reaching consequences, both nationally and internationally. In England, prevention and responses to CAN have often adopted an individualised approach with little consideration of the wider context in which families live. Intersectional factors such as the socioeconomic circumstances of the family, immigration status, disability, ethnicity or gender are rarely explored together, providing little insight into how different families experience harm and child protection intervention.

In England, whenever a child dies or is seriously harmed as a result of CAN, a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LSCPR) is established to better understand how policy and practice can be improved. However, LSCPRs and their predecessor, Serious Case Reviews, have been criticised for failing to include information about either the socioeconomic context or intersectionality in their analyses.

This project aims to improve the quality of social work practice through an intersectional analysis of LCSPRs. Specifically, our objectives are to identify whether socioeconomic, intersectional factors are addressed in LCSPRs and to understand how the connections between socioeconomic circumstances and intersectionality are understood by practitioners. In consultation with key stakeholders, including parents with lived experience of the child protection system we make recommendations for future LCSPRs.

### Methods:

A mixed-methods design was employed, involving a quantitative content analysis of 239 LCSPRs placed in an open access repository between 2020 and 2024 and a qualitative reflexive thematic analysis of a sample of LCSPRs. All materials and analysis were co-created with the support of parents with lived experience and practitioners including reviewers and social workers.

### Findings:

Early preliminary findings from this research show that LCSPRs reported on individual and family level difficulties such as poor mental health, alcohol and substance misuse and crime which often dominated responses from practitioners. However, information providing insight into the lived experience of the child such as ethnicity was often absent or superficially analysed leading to the perpetuation of stereotypical narratives. Housing and financial issues were reported more than any other socioeconomic domain, however, these were not explored in relation to any presenting family difficulties or intersectional factor resulting in an absence of in-depth explorations.

**Conclusions:**

These findings present an evidence informed understanding of the contribution that the intersectional socioeconomic context of children's lives can make to incidents in which CAN results in serious harm or death. Drawing upon an intersectional framework which focuses on socioeconomic inequalities, our findings show that professional responses to CAN in LCSPRs tend to focus on parental difficulties, minimising the role of structural factors such as poverty in contributing to these problems. Social workers can benefit from a deeper understanding of the impact of structural inequality and prejudice in shaping the intersectional socioeconomic factors that can contribute to harm against children. In order to appropriately safeguard all children, practitioners must consider such harm and the enduring effect it has on the lives of children which must be reflected in reviews aimed at learning lessons for the future.



## Negotiating Child Participation in Finnish Child Welfare Services: Insights from a Client Perspective

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### Negotiating Child Participation in Finnish Child Welfare Services: Insights from a Client Perspective

Subtheme: 7. Linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge

#### Background and purpose:

A recurring charge against child protection and welfare services is that they disempower the very children they are meant to protect. This presentation addresses that concern by exploring children's views on client participation in interactions shaped by systemic practice within Finnish child welfare services, drawing on Lundy's (2007) model of participation as its theoretical and conceptual framework. Grounded in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), the model highlights four interrelated factors that foreground children's participation: space, voice, audience, and influence. Systemic practice, adapted from the Reclaiming Social Work (RSW) model (Goodman & Trowler 2012) emphasizes family therapy by placing the child and family at the center of interventions, and since 2017 it has been applied in Finnish child protection as well as in family social work and leaving care. Based on a multiple case study conducted as part of the state-funded Multiprax project (2022–2024) in three bilingual Finnish welfare districts, this presentation introduces research findings obtained through interviews with children, families, and leaving care clients engaged in child welfare interventions. It examines negotiations of client participation by investigating how children experience participation in their interactions with child welfare, encapsulated in the following research question:

How do clients understand and experience participation in systemic practice within three Finnish welfare districts?

#### Methods:

The multicase research data consists of in-depth qualitative interviews from two separate studies conducted in three Finnish welfare districts. The first focuses on children who are clients at child protection or family social work, and their parents. The participants included 16 children between the ages of 4-18 years, and 13 parents. The second study focuses on young adults with clientship in leaving care services. The participants within leaving care services included 5 young adults aged 19-22. Audio recordings of interviews were deleted after transcription into written form, once the researchers verified that the transcribed text corresponded to the interview content. Documentation from client meetings was collected and pseudonymized and transferred to the University of Helsinki's secure storage space for sensitive data. All interview material was coded in the software Atlas.ti and abductively analyzed by the responsible researchers.

**Findings:**

Preliminary findings show that child participation varied depending on enabling and disabling factors. Enablers included respectful personal chemistry, effective listening, child-directed contact, tailored supports, and both tangible and intangible elements that fostered trust and confidence, while barriers such as condescending attitudes, adult-driven agendas, limited information, lack of feedback, and frequent staff changes often left children feeling unheard and undermined meaningful involvement.

**Implications for practice:**

Given the limited research on children's perspectives in Finnish child welfare services, this study highlights the need for both methodological and practical development of child welfare services. Addressing power dynamics becomes crucial, and Lundy's framework could offer a useful lens for strengthening client involvement and fostering more empowering practices.

## Improving social work practice with disabled parents: Results of a training intervention

Distinguished Professor of Social Policy Elizabeth Lightfoot<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Kelley Hollie<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arizona State University

### Background:

Disabled parents face disproportionate involvement with child protection systems worldwide, and in every country studied, they experience higher rates of child removal (Bakkum & Schuengel, 2025; Tøssebro et al., 2017). There is ample research that biases about disabled parents are common among social workers and social workers (Leifsson et al, 2024). Unfortunately, social workers receive limited training on disability in general, and even less on working with disabled parents. To address this issue, this project developed and tested a training on core concepts and best practices for social workers in working with disabled parents. As the first social work study internationally to evaluate training about working with disabled parents, this project translates current research and stakeholder expertise into a curriculum and empirically tests its contribution to evidence-informed practice and policy.

### Methods:

A training curriculum was developed with input from an expert panel of disabled parents, national experts, and advocates, as well as current research. Using a pretest-posttest design, a 90-minute training was delivered to 113 social service providers at four sites in one U.S. state in the summer of 2024. Surveys assessed knowledge, attitudes, and self-assessed ability to work with disabled parents. Analyses used paired t tests. Open-ended responses on key concerns when working with disabled parents were coded using thematic analysis.

### Findings:

Participants showed large, statistically significant gains in knowledge about core concepts, including parental supports, good enough parenting, and bias. Knowledge of parental supports increased from  $M=3.3$  (1 to 7 scale;  $SD=1.75$ ) pre-training to  $M=5.45$  ( $SD=1.20$ ) post-training ( $t=11.754$ ,  $p=.0001$ ). Attitudes toward the likely parenting ability of disabled parents improved from pre  $M=5.75$  ( $SD=1.47$ ) to post  $M=6.43$  ( $SD=1.09$ ) ( $t=4.273$ ,  $p=.0001$ ). Self-assessed ability increased across domains; the largest change was confidence in providing parental supports, from  $M=4.60$  ( $SD=1.67$ ) to  $M=5.98$  ( $SD=1.08$ ) ( $t=10.704$ ,  $p=.0001$ ), with additional improvements in using a strengths-based approach, accessing information, and providing tailored accommodations. Thematic analysis showed a shift in top concerns from presumed individual deficits to resource gaps, discrimination and bias, and knowledge of accommodations.

**Conclusions:**

A single session cannot be expected to change behavior on its own, yet this 90-minute curriculum produced large and significant short-term shifts in provider knowledge, attitudes, and perceived ability related to disabled parents. By integrating disabled parents' lived expertise with current research and practitioner input, the study links research and practice and offers a pragmatic route for workforce development, supervision, and agency policy to advance socially just services for disabled parents.

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## Entering residential care: an exploration of social work practice when removing children from their families to place them in residential care in Italy.

Sara Teresa Tornielli<sup>1</sup>

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Social workers in Italy may place children who are at risk of significant harm in residential care through a court order, following an assessment, or through an emergency placement, if the child is exposed to immediate danger. Currently, 48% of children out-of-home are in residential care. Social workers are bound to the Code of Ethics and to National Guidelines, however little is known about social work practice when placing children. This research investigates the practice of social workers when planning and placing a child in residential care through these areas:

- Social workers' cooperation with other stakeholders, including law enforcement and the courts;
- The differences between an emergency and a planned placement;
- The level of participation of children and families, investigated through Arnstein's Ladder of Participation for the parents and the Lundy Model for children;
- The impact of structural issues of poverty and migration.

The study uses mixed-methods: firstly, a national closed-question survey was disseminated by regional accreditation bodies to social workers. Participants were asked to self-select if they had placed a child in residential care within the last 5 years. The unit of analysis was the social workers' latest placement. Data analysis on 2752 responses was conducted using SPSS to identify statistically significant relationships. A random selection of social workers who gave their availability for a follow up interview through the survey were then invited to take part in focus groups to discuss results.

Results show that emergency placements accounted for 40% of reported placements and law enforcement was involved in 58% of reported placements, despite guidelines recommending minimal involvement. Families of migrant background were more likely than Italian families to have a child placed via an emergency placement and more likely to have police involvement in the placement. Social workers who felt personally at risk during the removal and placement were more likely to have law enforcement present. 26% of social workers stated that the decision to place the child out-of-home was made by the courts, as their assessment proposed alternative forms of support. 80% of social workers agreed that they gave parents enough information about the placement, however, only 17% agreed that they took the parents' views into account when choosing the residential care provider, showing a lack of shared decision-making. Children participation showed similar trends: they were given a voice in assessments for the courts (62% of social workers agree) but their influence was limited (28% of social workers agreed to the child's views influencing the choice of placement). Finally, 28% of social workers believe the placement could have been avoided with more resources to work with the family at an earlier stage.

These results describe hegemonic practice and underline the impact of structural disadvantages. By showing the prevalence of cooperation between social workers and law enforcement, this study invites further critical thought on the issue. This research offers a broad snapshot of practice through an anti-oppressive and critical perspective, and welcomes further research with affected children and parents to co-construct participatory knowledge.

## Child Welfare Work with Parents Facing Cognitive Challenges: Practices of In-home Support and Counseling

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### Background and purpose

Parents with cognitive difficulties are consistently overrepresented in child protection proceedings and face systematic disadvantages. By cognitive difficulties it is meant a broad understanding of functional challenges, not limited to clinical diagnoses, but includes difficulties with learning, reasoning, memory, and problem-solving that may affect parenting and the ability to benefit from support. While research has documented risks and outcomes, little is known about how in-home support and counseling truly are delivered and adapted in practice. This study addresses this gap and speaks directly to the conference theme of 'Exploring the impact and effectiveness of social work practice.' The study aims to explore how child welfare professionals work with parents who have cognitive difficulties providing in-home support and counseling.

### Methods

The study is based on qualitative interviews with 15 professionals employed in the Norwegian Child Welfare Service, recruited to reflect variation in geography, municipality size, and organizational models. All participants had substantial experience with family support, supervision, and counseling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a guide that ensured comparability while allowing participants to elaborate on their everyday work with parents perceived to have cognitive difficulties. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. The material was analyzed thematically using an inductive approach. Transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity, initial codes were generated openly and iteratively, and codes were compared and refined collaboratively to enhance reflexivity. Through this process, codes were grouped into broader categories and developed into three main themes.

### Findings

The thematic analysis identified three interconnected themes:

1. Customization postponed by routine practice: support typically began with standardized interventions, with adaptations introduced only after conventional approaches had failed.
2. Unpredictable change in uncertain conditions: progress was described as fragile, situational, and challenging to sustain, leaving professionals unsure about how to evaluate outcomes.
3. The duality of control and support: professionals grappled with the ethical tension of simultaneously supporting parents and assessing their caregiving capacity.

These themes were further shaped by four cross-cutting dimensions: (1) the timing of adaptation, (2) criteria for meaningful change, (3) tensions between documentation and everyday practice, and (4) the ethical blending of support and control.

**Conclusions and implications**

The findings demonstrate how standardized routines, fragile progress, and the ethical complexity of combined supportive and supervisory roles shape professionals' work with parents who have cognitive difficulties. Standardized starting points, while designed to secure equal treatment, may in practice defer equity by delaying necessary adaptation. Fragile and context-bound progress also challenges the application of dominant criteria for 'good enough' parenting, while documentation systems risk oversimplifying complex developmental trajectories. In addition, the dual role of supporting and assessing parents creates stress that can weaken the very processes professionals aim to foster. Taken together, the study highlights the importance of early and flexible adaptation of interventions, documentation formats that capture sustained change, and strategies designed to mitigate the unequal effects of the dual role.



## Do Intensive Parenting Attitudes Explain Noise in First-Incident Decisions in Child Protection?

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### Background:

Child protection professionals must make complex judgments in first-incident cases of suspected maltreatment – decisions with potentially lasting consequences for both children and families. These assessments are of critical importance, as they determine whether state intervention is warranted or not. Errors at this stage risk either insufficient protection for the child or unwarranted intrusion into family life and parental rights. Prior research has consistently demonstrated notable variability (“noise”) in professional judgments of identical or comparable cases. Yet the underlying cognitive and attitudinal factors contributing to this variability remain poorly understood. One potentially important but under-researched factor is the role of professionals’ personal beliefs – particularly gendered assumptions about caregiving roles and normative conceptions of “good” parenting – which may shape risk perceptions and intervention recommendations in first-incident assessments.

### Objective:

This study examines how social workers’ attitudes toward gender roles in parenting (essentialism) and conceptions of “good” parenting (intensive parenting) influence risk assessments and recommendations for legal intervention in child protection cases. Specifically, it investigates (1) whether professionals’ attitudes toward legal intervention into parental rights predict level noise – that is, difference in general judgment tendencies across cases, (2) whether professionals’ intensive parenting attitudes and (3) whether essentialist attitudes account for systematic differences in judgements between cases involving maltreating mothers versus fathers, thereby contributing to stable pattern noise.

### Methods:

A factorial survey design was employed, with each participant evaluating eight experimentally varied vignettes of fictional yet realistic child protection cases. Four case characteristics were systematically manipulated. Parental gender was varied as between-subjects factor, while maltreatment, quality of the child–parent relationship and child stimulation were varied within subject. After each vignette, participants rated the perceived risk to the child and the likelihood of recommending legal intervention. Attitudinal data was collected using adapted scales measuring essentialism and intensive parenting attitudes. The study sample consists of qualified child protection professionals in German and French-speaking Switzerland. Data will be analysed using multilevel modelling to account for the hierarchical structure of the factorial survey data, with vignettes (Level 1) nested within professionals (Level 2). Random intercept and random slope models with cross-level interactions will be employed to examine how individual attitudes influence both general judgment tendencies and the weighting of specific case characteristics.

**Contribution:**

Data collection is currently ongoing and is expected to be completed by October 30, 2025. To date, 320 social workers have participated. This study advances the understanding of how personal attitudes about parenting influence professionals' judgments in child protection and applies the concept of noise to identify judgment patterns among social workers. The findings will contribute to theory by clarifying the role of attitudes in generating both level noise and pattern noise, and to practice by informing training, policy development, and reflective practice. Ultimately, the study seeks to support efforts to reduce variability in decision-making and to promote greater consistency in child protection assessments.

## Effects of extending the periode of aftercare support

Professor Inger Oterholm<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Nina Drange

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### Background and purpose

A number of studies reveal that children receiving help from Child Welfare Services (CWS) are more marginalized compared to youths without this experience. This difference is evident in outcome variables such as education, employment, income, and health. Which underscores the importance of supporting young people when they age out of care. However, the type of support that care-experienced youth receive after turning 18 varies. In Norway, such support, known as aftercare, can include extended care, supervision, housing support, financial assistance, and other forms of aid.

Given the challenges faced at the brink of adulthood, it is crucial to understand whether aftercare support can contribute to better transitional outcomes. This presentation explores the impact of social work aftercare practices, aiming to facilitate evidence-informed practice and policy.

We are aware of only a few studies that have sought to address the potential selection into aftercare services and utilized natural experiments to investigate their effects (e.g., Courtney et al., 2021).

### Methods

The study is based on registry data covering all Norwegian residents and data on all services provided by the CWS. In 1998, there was a legislative change expanding the age limit for receiving aftercare from 20 to 23 years, which affected youth born from 1979 as they turned 20 in 1999. We utilized this legislative change to study the effect of aftercare on outcomes related to education, income, and accessed health-related benefits.

To examine the effect, we included the next three birth cohorts born from 1979 to 1981 in our sample. To identify a suitable comparison group of at-risk young people, we used background characteristics data to predict the likelihood of receiving services from the CWS in birth cohorts who had turned 20 and thus had not had access to aftercare after turning 20. We also accounted for demographic background data. For more precise estimates of the effects, we compared the groups in the figures in a regression framework.

### Findings

We found that young people in the cohorts exposed to the new aftercare legislation were more likely to receive aftercare at age 19 compared to earlier cohorts. Both the share of youth in education and completion was higher, and use of other public transfers benefits decreased when aftercare became available for these age groups. This suggests that the availability of aftercare increased following the law change and confirms that the policy change benefited this group of young people.

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings demonstrate that a more liberal aftercare scheme increased the likelihood of care experienced youth completing high school. This implies that aftercare has a positive effect and should, therefore, be implemented in practice.

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## Advancing participatory democracy: Social work and the challenge of local government responsiveness

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### Introduction

Across diverse contexts, social workers promote initiatives that enable communities to shape the policies affecting their well-being. However, such initiatives often fall short, as they prioritize community empowerment while neglecting the equally critical task of enhancing local government responsiveness to community demands. The outcome is empowerment without corresponding improvements in responsiveness, a gap this paper seeks to address. Drawing on our experience with a community-based initiative, designed and implemented in collaboration with a civil society organization in the municipality of Durrës (Albania) during 2024–2025, the paper examines efforts to increase the responsiveness of local government officials to community demands. The initiative illustrates both the promise and the difficulties of advancing participatory democracy in contexts where government responsiveness is weak.

### Methodology

The initiative employed a participatory action approach designed to strengthen both citizen engagement in decision-making and local government responsiveness. A community group of professionals and activists was established and trained in data collection methods, such as storytelling, photography, video, and interviews. Members selected and applied methods to document community priorities, identify problems, and press the municipality to act. The priorities spanned a wide range of issues, including sewage systems, roads, school infrastructure, cemeteries, sidewalks, parks, and street lighting. The evidence, combining narratives, interviews, and visual documentation, formed the basis of an advocacy campaign that deployed multiple strategies: submitting written requests to officials, publishing findings in the local media, presenting data to the municipality, creating a social media page to disseminate results, contacting elected representatives, raising concerns in public hearings, and holding direct meetings with municipal staff. These measures were deliberately designed to complement one another and to address the broader context of weak local government responsiveness in Albania.

### Findings

The initiative generated valuable outcomes at the community level: it strengthened local capacity for data collection and advocacy, increased public awareness, and created a platform for community engagement with local government officials. At the municipal level, however, the results were far more limited. While officials appeared receptive, they largely avoided assuming responsibility for addressing community demands. To justify inaction, they invoked competing priorities across administrative units, blamed residents for inadequate tax contributions, shifted responsibility to subordinate agencies, or dismissed requests as vague or unrealistic. These responses often overlapped, amounting to a consistent pattern of resistance from local government to community demands.

**Conclusions and implications**

The initiative was designed and implemented to address a weakness of many community-based interventions: their greater emphasis on community empowerment than on local government responsiveness. Its goal was to connect the two by strengthening community voice while pressing local authorities to act. The experience demonstrated, however, that increasing local government responsiveness is very challenging. While the initiative strengthened community capacity for data collection and advocacy, these gains did not translate into meaningful change. Municipal authorities engaged with community demands but largely through avoidance and resistance, leaving most priorities unaddressed. In light of these findings, we reflect on the lessons learned and share suggestions for advancing participatory democracy in future initiatives.

## Evaluating Social Assistance Sanctions Using Client Information System (CIS) Registry Data

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Social assistance is Finnish minimum income scheme, and the sanctions associated with it are part of activation policies both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. The primary aim of these sanctions is to encourage clients to apply for jobs or education, or to participate in active labour market measures. However, previous studies have raised concerns that sanctions within minimum income schemes may worsen the situation of the target groups and deter clients from engaging with services. Therefore, potential negative impacts on clients' circumstances should also be considered in evaluations of activation policies. Social assistance clients are particularly vulnerable to the negative side effects of monetary sanctions, as they often face multiple barriers to employment, including long-term unemployment, poor physical or mental health, low educational attainment, and other social challenges.

In this study, we examine Finnish social assistance sanctions from the perspective of case management. We have two research questions: 1) can data from social service client information systems be used to assess the impact of social assistance sanctions on social service clients, 2) how do social assistance sanctions affect clients' use of social services? We use a small sample (N = 318) of social service clients from Central Finland to assess how clients are reached and what kinds of services they are guided to after receiving a social assistance sanction. Social assistance sanctions are often targeted at job seekers who fail to meet certain obligations concerning unemployed job seekers. The sample consists of clients whose social assistance has been reduced by 40%. Their social assistance has been reduced because they have repeatedly, for example, refused to participate in active labour market measures or failed to take part in the joint application for education.

We analyze registry data using logistic regression. Our aim is to identify potential positive or negative effects of social assistance sanctions on social service clients. This study contributes new insights into the effectiveness of minimum income sanctions on vulnerable groups and how data from social service client information systems can be utilized to assess the effectiveness of interventions.

## Subtle subversion: Mapping social justice practices in public social services

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### Background and purpose:

Internationally, social work scholars and practitioners agree that social justice is a vital dimension of social work and that social workers are, or should be, agents of social justice. Despite the wide agreement regarding the centrality of social justice in the discipline, only limited empirical work has been conducted on how social workers actually engage in social justice work in their everyday practice. In this presentation, we will discuss an ethnographic study that aims to contribute to the conceptualization of practice-informed social justice work. Using Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional model of social justice as a theoretical framework, we identify and outline social justice practices in public social services.

### Methods:

The study presented is an institutional ethnography carried out in two social services departments (SSDs) in Israel. Fieldwork included three months of participant observations in each SSD, and individual interviews with the social workers at the SSDs. Observations involved participation in professional and supervision meetings as well as ad-hoc consultations. Informal observations included 'deep hanging out' in the department. In total, about 200 hours were spent in each SSD. Interviews were conducted with 53 staff members, including the department managers, team leaders, social workers in various roles, and semi-professionals working at the department.

### Findings:

First and foremost, we found that commitment to social justice stands at the heart of social workers' everyday work. Moreover, practices designed to promote social justice are intertwined with the daily work of the social workers. Based on Fraser's three-dimensional model for social justice, we recognized how representation, recognition, and redistribution transpires in four main practices: Insisting on creating the needed conditions so that service-users can speak their voice; Assisting service-users to narrate their stories in a way that 'fits' the institutional criteria; Eliminating 'auto-pilot' mode: creating internal mechanisms to distribute resources to service-users; Not "giving in" to bureaucracy: prioritizing relationships with service-users. Through examples from social workers' everyday work at the departments, we will demonstrate how these four practices are a manifestation of Fraser's three dimensions of social justice.



**Conclusions and implications:**

The findings suggest that in a neoliberal climate, social workers in public welfare services who wish to promote social justice are required, on an everyday basis, to undermine the system in which they work. In other words, we suggest that social workers embody “subtle subversion” against the institutions within which they operate to do social justice work. We emphasize that social justice is promoted thanks to social workers, and despite the system, rather than because of it. It appears that the system, with its laws and procedures, often does not promote justice, and sometimes even limits the ability of social workers to promote social justice. Therefore, we propose a fourth dimension to Fraser’s three-dimensional model: subtle subversion. This fourth dimension is a prerequisite to social workers’ everyday social justice work. By conceptualizing social justice practices and the prerequisites they require, we wish to contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the everyday meaning of social work as a profession committed to social justice.

## The CARERS Trial: Testing the feasibility of a supportive intervention for carers

Professor Martin Webber<sup>1</sup>, Ms Karen Bulsara<sup>1</sup>, Dr Laura Tucker<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of York

### Background and purpose

People with chronic emotion dysregulation (CED) experience impulsivity, self-harm, suicidality and impaired interpersonal functioning. Families and friends caring for these people can experience significant detrimental psychological and economic effects, with high levels of depression and burnout. In the UK, arranging carer support is a social work responsibility, though targeted support for carers of people with CED is not routinely offered.

Family Connections is a 12-session carer-focused skills and support group intervention based on dialectical behaviour therapy (Hoffman et al., 2005). It has been evaluated in a randomized controlled trial in Spain (Guillén et al., 2024), but not in the UK.

This study aimed to test the feasibility and acceptability of implementing Family Connections in the National Health Service (NHS) in England. It sought to evaluate if it is possible to recruit and retain dyads of service users and carers in both intervention delivery and outcome data collection over a nine-month window for a randomised controlled trial, while also evaluating the acceptability of both the trial and the intervention.

### Methods

We undertook a feasibility randomised controlled trial with an embedded qualitative evaluation, co-developed by a carer with lived experience. We recruited 49 dyads of carers and service users in three NHS Trusts. Participants were randomised by site to Family Connections or care as usual. Outcome data were collected from carers and service users on mental wellbeing, health-related quality of life, capability wellbeing and costs, along with burden and relationships (carers) and social functioning (service users) at 14- and 40-weeks post-baseline.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with carers, service users and staff involved in recruitment and intervention delivery to explore trial processes and experiences.

### Findings

The key criteria for progression to a full trial were met. 48 dyads of carers and service users provided baseline data and were randomised within a six-month recruitment period. 90% of dyads completed outcome measures at the end of the intervention. 67% of intervention group carers attended a minimum of nine of the twelve sessions and we learnt that attendance rates can be increased with more flexibility in supporting carers with lower attendance.

Carers and service users reported positive experiences of the Family Connections group intervention, recognizing improved skills and wellbeing which impacted positively on their relationships. More generally, carers in both intervention and control groups reported an overall lack of support, even in NHS Mental Health Trusts which offered formalized carer support. Implementation of a trial for a social intervention in a health-led context was procedurally challenging but carers and service users found the trial procedures overall acceptable, and staff involved in the trial reported the positive influence of an effective trial manager helped to make the trial a success.

**Conclusions and implications**

Providing support and skills to carers of people with CED is important and this study demonstrates that a randomised controlled trial can be undertaken in this context. This is a key step for social work in developing an interdisciplinary evidence base which aims to improve outcomes for carers and service users.

## Promoting the Paradigm of Inclusion through Foster Care for Children and Youth with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases in Germany

Dr. phil. Friedegard Föltz<sup>1</sup>

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Children and youth affected by disability or chronic diseases in foster care is still a rare situation in Germany. Finding themselves in a situation of needing Out-of-Home-Care, they are mostly cared for in (special) residential homes. In the area of foster care for children and youth with disabilities, there is sparse research and knowledge. The German child and youth welfare system can still be described as excluding, even with recent legal improvements in 2021. The officially embraced inclusive paradigm in this area especially lacks engagement and development to expand on the societal basis and create an inclusive atmosphere of belonging. Inclusion presents itself as a complex value- and attitude-based paradigm, whose objective is to understand diversity as a social reality as expressed in unconditional belonging, participation and self-determination. In lived social reality though a discrepancy becomes obvious between this objective of inclusion and actual experienced social exclusion and stigmatization in society.

The purpose of the study was to understand how caregivers manage their lives with a child or youth with extra needs and meet the challenges of assisting them adequately.

The qualitative research design deployed 19 in-depth interviews with caregivers. For a follow-up study, 58% of the original sample families of caregivers were revisited after 9-18 years.

Results show that caregivers and dedicated persons around them build strong relationships with the children and youth and among partners in the support net. They also show that the families in living their “new normal” and building close relationships with the children and youth in their care, these ties often last for a lifetime. It seems that strong familial bonds and relationships have a great potential to support, protect, care and advocate for children affected by disability and chronic diseases. These bonds constitute an unquestioned existential space for being and belonging.

This inclusive endeavor can be made visible on the grounds of consciously building and developing family ties with children and youth with disabilities in foster care. It could be an example of how unconditional living together can be successfully achieved under special conditions. This model of social parenthood can provide new opportunities of feeling a sense of belonging and of being an appreciated member of society on the one hand. On the other, it can provide new opportunities of learning what it takes to make room for everybody, with or without impairments, and what it means to live inclusive values and exert care for all members in a community. Informed social work can enhance inclusion for this special population at risk.

## A critical exploration of the multi-directional emotional labour of managers in older long-term care residential homes in South Africa.

Ms Bernadine Rogers<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Gordon University

Global population ageing is intensifying pressure on health and social care systems worldwide, presenting complex challenges for sustainable provision. In South Africa, the long-term residential care (LTRC) sector for older people operates within a landscape shaped by deep historical inequality and longstanding social and economic divides that continue to influence both the composition of care workforces and the experiences of residents, raising important questions about how care can be sustained.

While existing research has focused on the emotional labour of frontline care workers, the complex role of managers in LTRC facilities for older persons remains critically under-examined. This study addresses this gap by applying and extending Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour to explore the multi-directional emotional demands faced by managers. These demands include negotiating the expectations of residents, their families, care staff and organisational hierarchies, all of which have implications for managerial wellbeing and for the quality of care delivered.

Managers are strategically positioned at the intersection of these competing interests, making their work uniquely challenging and deeply consequential. Analysing the emotional labour managers perform is essential for social work and allied fields, which must increasingly engage with the political economy of care and its implications for sustaining person-centred support within marketised and resource-constrained contexts. Preliminary findings are drawn from semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected managers working across a diverse range of LTRC facilities in Western Cape, South Africa. The analysis suggests that managers occupy a profoundly "sandwiched" role, with emotional demands amplified by South Africa's distinctive socio-economic legacy and the sector's structural fragilities. Key emergent themes include: the persistent devaluation of aged care and of women's labour more broadly; the challenge of managing tensions between residents, their families, and staff, tensions that often mirror wider societal divides; and a critical lack of investment in training and support for a workforce facing considerable socio-economic pressures. Managers described how this positioning generates significant emotional strain, contributing to experiences of stress, isolation, and burnout that are closely tied to the weight of their responsibilities.

Importantly, participants also emphasised a strong sense of vocational fulfilment in providing dignified and compassionate care to residents in their later years, despite the structural challenges and emotional toll. Their accounts highlight both the burdens and the rewards of their role in holding together fragile systems of provision.

For social work, these findings underline the importance of interdisciplinary engagement that recognises the complexity of care relationships and the mediation they entail, while also supporting the development of alternative models that resist purely market-driven logics. By better understanding these pressures, social work can contribute to designing person-centred approaches, building supportive organisational cultures, and advocating for investment in training and resources. In doing so, it may be possible to foster a more sustainable and dignified care ecosystem that supports not only older residents but also the managers and staff tasked with their care.

## Between Agency and Structural Disadvantage. Coping strategies for potentially traumatic events - Ukrainian mothers in Germany

Prof. Dr. Alla Koval<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evangelische Hochschule Berlin

### Background and purpose

Ukrainians who fled to Germany after the outbreak of war in 2022 represent a new immigrant group. 80% of adult refugees from Ukraine are women, and the proportion of parents and their children among Ukrainian immigrants is 48 % (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2024). They live in transnational spaces where a temporary situation is increasingly becoming a permanent condition. The research questions are: How do Ukrainian refugee mothers cope with the challenges of everyday life in Germany (Filipp & Aymanns, 2018)? What role does social work play in supporting these coping strategies?

### Methods

The presentation is based on the reconstructive analysis of 17 biographical-narrative interviews. (Schütze 1983) They were conducted with women in Berlin or Dresden, who fled to Germany with their 1-4 children under 18. The interviewees were approached through everyday-life contexts rather than problem-centred settings, in order to avoid framing them as 'clients' or 'help-seekers'. Participants were recruited via community centres, neighbourhood initiatives, chat groups such as 'Mothers from Ukraine in Berlin/Dresden', and through snowball sampling following previous interviews.

The data was analysed using a biographical-reconstructive method based on Schütze's approach. (Schütze 1983; 1984) The analysis combined a thematic-formal text analysis with a structural-content sequence analysis. The aim was to reconstruct cognitive patterns within the social framework and the processual structure of individual life courses.

### Findings

Many women developed creative and adaptive coping strategies—problem-focused, emotion-focused, or accommodative coping (Lübeck 2022, pp. 121f). Such strategies were supported by stable structures and safe spaces, provided by professional social work and civic engagement. Examples included leisure activities, community services, counselling, and civil society initiatives.

Some interviewees described their experiences in large-scale refugee shelters as externally imposed and beyond their control, emphasizing feelings of suffering, endurance, and helplessness. Case examples illustrate the phenomenon of intersectional discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989): living in shared accommodation with many others, caring for very young children, lacking access to the labour market due to limited language skills, and experiencing health issues such as recurring headaches. These factors intersect and reinforce the experience of discrimination. Attempts to cope with unstable living conditions by comparing oneself to others in similar or worse situations often triggered renewed traumatic responses.

**Conclusions and implications**

In professional discourse, traumatic experiences are often primarily associated with the country of origin or the process of forced migration (Schlachzig et al., 2022, p. 67). My study situates experiences of trauma in the host country within broader structures of inequality and intersectional discrimination, highlighting the responsibility of social work in addressing these issues.

The popular narrative in public discourse often casts refugees as victims, characterized by passivity and dependence (Verlinden & Massumi, 2022, pp. 78f). This study demonstrates that, given adequate support and stable conditions, women develop adaptive strategies for managing everyday life. Social work should acknowledge individual resilience and foster a resource-oriented approach.



## Place and Community Attachment among Displaced Residents during times of emergency

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### Background and Purpose:

Following the outbreak of the Gaza war in Israel in October 2023, approximately 160,000 residents were evacuated from their homes. Many were relocated to temporary housing across the country. This study aims to deepen our understanding of place and community attachment through the lens of forced migration during times of emergency and crisis. The research focuses on two central themes:

1. Residents' perceptions of the communities and places from which they were evacuated;
2. The nature of their emotional and symbolic attachment to place in the context of violent rupture and displacement;

### Method:

The study employed a qualitative-constructivist approach. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 residents and 10 social workers from three Jewish communities evacuated from the Gaza Envelope: one city, one Kibbutz, and a Moshav. Data analysis was carried out in three stages: 1. The researchers read the interviews to become empathically acquainted with the participants' narratives; 2. Units of meaning were identified; 3. Similar utterances were grouped into themes.

### Findings:

Four key findings emerged:

1. Attachment systems are activated under threat – The sudden displacement triggered a need for reorientation on three levels: personal identity, community belonging, and sense of place.
2. Leadership as a new dimension of place attachment – In times of crisis, residents expressed a strong need for protective, often paternal leadership. In the city, for example, the mayor was seen as a key attachment figure.
3. Differences between types of communities – Urban residents relied more on municipal leadership and less on community networks, while moshav and kibbutz residents demonstrated stronger internal organization and collective resilience.
4. Age shapes perceptions of future and place – Older adults emphasized limited time and reduced energy for rebuilding, yet expressed a strong determination to return home despite insecurity. Younger participants focused more on children's well-being and long-term planning, with greater reliance on digital communication during the crisis.

**Conclusion and Implications:**

This study demonstrates that place and community attachment are deeply activated during crises involving forced displacement. Residents experienced a need to reestablish personal, communal, and spatial identity, with security emerging as the primary condition for return. While emotional bonds to home remained strong, decisions were governed more by physical safety than by a sense of belonging. Leadership served as a critical source of stability, particularly in communities with weaker social cohesion. Differences among urban, moshav, and kibbutz settings highlight the ways in which social structure shapes coping strategies and resilience. These findings suggest a need to expand place attachment theory and underscore the importance of tailoring psychosocial and policy interventions to community type, age group, and perceived security needs during displacement and recovery.

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## Uncoordinated coordination? Social workers' struggles with Individual Plans in a fragmented welfare system

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Social worker and assistant professor Janne Kristin Tangen<sup>1</sup>

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Interdisciplinary collaboration is widely recognised in providing effective and coordinated services to individuals with complex and long-term needs. In Norway, the “Individual plan” (IP) is a statutory digital tool intended to facilitate such cooperation across health and social services. Despite its legal foundation, our findings suggest that the IPs are rarely used within the Norwegian Employment and Welfare Service (Nav).

This paper presents findings from a research project, based on group- and individual interviews with 30 practitioners at five different Nav offices and 10 service users. Our interlocutors were recruited through a combination of direct contact with Nav offices with reported usage of IPs and the snowball method. The study explores both experiences with and barriers to the usage of IPs. We are inspired by the theoretical framework of integrated social services (Rice & Heidenreich, 2016), which helps explain how specialization and differentiation in welfare services may outpace the integrative capacity of tools like IP. This framework, along with empirical insights from Sweden (Matscheck and Piuva, 2022), informs our analysis of the Norwegian context.

Our findings suggest a paradox: while practitioners acknowledge the importance of IPs, they often perceive them as redundant or impractical. Several factors contribute to this:

- IPs are perceived as redundant since extensive collaboration takes place regardless of the tool.
- IPs ‘compete’ with other planning tools, creating confusion and overlap.
- The digital platforms are perceived as bureaucratic and difficult to navigate.
- There is ambiguity regarding who holds the coordinator role for an IP, despite practitioners already coordinating multiple services.
- A sense of low mastery and lack of resources further hinders implementation.

These findings resonate with international research on coordinated care plans. In particular, we draw on Matscheck and Piuva’s (2022) study of the Swedish Coordinated Individual Plan (CIP), which similarly identifies low levels of collaboration and limited user involvement despite supportive structures. Their work highlights how statutory tools like CIP/IP may fail to achieve their intended impact due to systemic fragmentation and unclear mandates.

Our study contributes to the conference theme “Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence-informed practice and policy” by critically examining how statutory tools for coordination are used, or not used, in practice. We explicitly address subtheme 1: “Challenges and opportunities for social work research, practice, policy or education in contemporary contexts”, by exploring how social work practitioners and service users navigate complex systems and ambiguous mandates.

The metaphor of the welfare system as a “labyrinth” emerged strongly in our data, reflecting both service users’ and practitioners’ experiences of navigating complex services. The study raises important questions about how tools like IPs can be redesigned or better supported to foster meaningful collaboration and user involvement.

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## How educators understand and apply interdisciplinary and interprofessional teaching and learning in social work programmes across the island of Ireland

Dr Niamh Gallagher<sup>6</sup>, Dr Martha Doyle<sup>6</sup>, Dr Joseph Mooney<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Xueer Chen<sup>5</sup>, Dr Simone McCaughren<sup>5</sup>, Dr Leigh-Ann Sweeney<sup>5</sup>, Dr Gloria Kirwan<sup>4</sup>, Dr Rachel Naylor<sup>3</sup>, Dr Calvin Swords<sup>2</sup>

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### Background and Purpose:

Meeting the needs of vulnerable populations who come into contact with social workers and allied disciplines requires collaborative competence and knowledge of interdisciplinary and interprofessional ways of working. Such collaborative competences can have positive outcomes not only for service users, but also for practitioners and the organisations for which they work. Social work education must prepare emerging social workers to embrace interprofessional and interdisciplinary approaches to practice.

### Methods:

This paper reports the findings of an all-Ireland survey, across eight higher level institutions. The first of its nature on the island of Ireland, it explores the perspectives and experiences of educators, delivering on social work programmes, about interdisciplinary and interprofessional teaching and learning. Forty seven educators (45 from social work and 2 from other disciplines) completed an online 21-item survey instrument, which included three open-ended questions. The instrument gathered their perspectives on, and conceptualisations of, interdisciplinary teaching and learning in social work education. Descriptive statistics and a qualitative content analysis were produced.

### Findings:

The findings captured a wide-range of practice and teaching experience. They show that educators value interdisciplinary teaching and learning as an important component of student preparedness for collaborative competence, working effectively in interdisciplinary teams, understanding the professional identity of social worker, as well as the role and functions of other professionals. The findings also highlight that such values are often in conflict with practical and logistical challenges – resulting in some interdisciplinary teaching and learning approaches being aspirational or inconsistent. In this paper, these challenges and benefits are discussed under four domains: Implications for IDTL/IPE on social work programmes, Implications for academic bodies, Implications for regulatory bodies, and, Implications for future research directions.

### Conclusions:

The results highlight the need for greater exploration of interdisciplinary and interprofessional education within social work programmes, its rationale, implementation and conceptualisations. Opportunities for inter-faculty and cross-institutional discussions about IDTL best-practices in relation to social work education are required, alongside opportunities for problem-solving around various policy, institutional and organisational factors challenging such teaching and learning initiatives.

## Worker wellbeing in non-government child welfare services

Dr Erica Russ<sup>1</sup>, Dr Liz Reimer<sup>1</sup>, Dr Darran Stonehouse<sup>1</sup>, Dr Clarissa Hitchcock<sup>1</sup>

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### Background:

Child protection is a complex system. While statutory services delivered or controlled by governments are commonly the focus of these systems, in many jurisdictions there has been an increasing trend towards a broader range of child and family or child welfare services being provided by non-government organisations. These include statutory, family support and youth services where workers engage in complex, interprofessional work with highly vulnerable children and families. Workforce issues in child protection have been identified over many years, particularly in the context of statutory services. Although the system of service provision has changed, less attention has been paid to the workforce in this broader child welfare sector. This paper discusses a scoping review which examined child welfare worker wellbeing to better understand the workforce issues in this sector.

### Methods:

This scoping review applied a systematic approach to examine peer-reviewed literature relevant to workforce wellbeing in the non-government child welfare sector. Following an extensive search and screening process, 148 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2013 and 2023, were identified. A thematic analysis was undertaken with two researchers coding each article and regular team consultations to ensure coding consistency. The analysis identified themes related to the conceptualisation of staff wellbeing in non-government child welfare agencies, and the individual, organizational, and systemic influences that shape wellbeing.

### Findings:

In contrast to consideration of worker wellbeing in statutory child protection services, there was limited consideration of staff providing child protection and child welfare services in the non-government sector. Unsurprisingly, many of the challenges at the individual level are common with colleagues in the government sector including issues of burnout and vicarious trauma. While similarities exist at this level there are apparent differences at the organisational and systemic level with implications for staff wellbeing. Without being appropriately addressed the ongoing transition of child welfare services from government to non-government sectors in many countries will see the current workforce issues exacerbated with potential implications for organisations, workers and the children and families they support.

### Conclusions and implications:

This study highlights the need for changes in organisational approaches to staff wellbeing alongside systemic and policy shifts that recognise and respond to the identified issues. The paper discusses how the study has contributed to current initiatives in one jurisdiction.

## From Care to Independence: Parental Acceptance, Social Support and Emotion Regulation in Rejection Sensitivity and Life Satisfaction of Young Adults

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### Background and purpose:

Emerging adulthood (ages 18–29) is a critical life stage marked by identity exploration, growing independence, and the search for belonging. For young adults who grew up in out-of-home settings such as Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC), this transition is especially challenging due to the absence of stable family support and accelerated assumption of adult responsibilities (Stein, 2006). This interdisciplinary study, conducted in Israel, examines how childhood parental acceptance and rejection shape rejection sensitivity and life satisfaction, and how social support and emotion regulation moderate these associations. The study compares young adults raised in TRC with peers from birth families.

### Theoretical framework:

The study draws on Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPAR Theory; Rohner, 2021), which highlights the long-term developmental effects of perceived parental acceptance or rejection. Extending IPAR Theory to social work with care leavers offers an interdisciplinary perspective that links developmental psychology with social work, providing insights to guide evidence-informed practice and welfare policy for vulnerable young adults transitioning to independence.

### Methods:

The sample included 209 emerging adults aged 18–29: 124 raised in birth families and 85 graduates of TRC. Data was collected using a structured set of validated quantitative questionnaires: the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (childhood experiences), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (reappraisal and suppression), the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. The study received ethical approval from the Bar-Ilan University and all participants signed informed consent.

### Findings:

TRC graduates reported higher parental rejection in childhood, higher rejection sensitivity, lower life satisfaction, and lower perceived social support than peers from birth families. No significant group differences emerged in emotion regulation. Paternal rejection was linked to higher rejection sensitivity in both groups, while maternal rejection showed different patterns. Regression analyses indicated that growing up in TRC predicted lower life satisfaction and higher expectation of rejection. Two moderation effects were found: social support moderated the link between paternal rejection and rejection sensitivity, and emotional suppression moderated the link between maternal rejection and expectation of rejection.

### Conclusions and implications:

This study highlights the vulnerabilities of young adults leaving care in Israel and the importance of interdisciplinary research that connects psychological theory with social work practice and policy. Findings show that rejection sensitivity and life satisfaction are shaped not only by early parental experiences but also by social support and emotion regulation. These insights call for evidence-informed interventions and welfare policies that strengthen support networks, enhance emotion regulation skills, and reduce disparities between care leavers and peers, promoting equitable opportunities for independence and well-being.

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## Responsibilisation of people in precarity in an unequal housing landscape – the role of housing coaches in "social dumping" in Sweden

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### Background and purpose

Since 2019 there have been frequent reports of (mainly) wealthy suburban municipalities with a shortage of affordable housing encouraging – and even coercing – people who have difficulties securing adequate housing to relocate to other, often depopulating, post-industrial mill town, municipalities. In media reports this has been referred to as "social dumping". The government, on the other hand, has coined the term active participation in re-settlement – a term that reflects the extent to which the policy debate has focused overwhelmingly on the actions and practices of municipal actors. There is limited research on this subject, but some research suggest that housing coaches, employed by social services or municipal integration services, are a key actor in the relocation of people facing housing precarity and homelessness to other municipalities (see Rogat, 2022).

The purpose of the paper is to critically interrogate the role of housing coaches in the so called "social dumping" between municipalities. As part of this purpose, we analyse the rationales for their work practices and critically discuss the limitations of focusing on individual and municipal actions.

### Methods and theory

The paper is based on an on-going research project on experiences and politics of "social dumping" in sending and receiving municipalities in Sweden. The data consists of interviews with housing coaches, public welfare and civil society actors, local politicians and affected households in two sending- and three receiving municipalities in Sweden, policy material, and ethnographic fieldwork.

Rose's (1996) work on the responsibilisation of the individual is used as our analytical approach.

### Findings

- The practices of housing coaches – and their rationales – focus on guiding people in housing precarity to be active in – and take responsibility for – finding secure and stable housing.
- However, there are accounts from receiving municipalities of housing coaches having taken direct action in finding housing for people in housing precarity.
- Housing coaches refrain from the concept "social dumping". Rather, they emphasise that their job is to help people find affordable housing, and that the opportunities for that are limited within the municipality.
- The understanding of "social dumping" as "active participation to resettlement" turns focus on the practices of housing coaches, and thereby downplays structural conditions and inequalities on the housing market.

### Conclusions and implications

- The rationales that guide housing coaches' work involve responsabilisation of the individual (Rose, 1996) to find housing (on their own) in an unequal housing landscape.
- A limited focus on the practices of housing coaches neglects the local and national policy decision on housing, and structural inequalities on the housing market that – in effect – shape these practices.
- Inequalities on the housing markets amplifies vulnerabilities, and as such, they create challenges for social work policy and practice.

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## Caring for People and the Planet: A Qualitative Study on Eco-Social Work Practices in Italy

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### Background and purpose

The scientific community is increasingly questioning how to address the economic and social repercussions of ongoing environmental crises. There is a growing recognition of the need for integrated policies and social work approaches that incorporate ecological considerations and promote environmental justice (Healy, 2022). Against a backdrop of environmental crises, social inequalities, and shifts in welfare systems, this study delves into the transformative potential of eco-social work as an integrated approach that champions social justice, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion. The theoretical framework is based on the eco-social approach (Dominelli, 2012; Närhi & Matthies, 2018), which conceptualises sustainability as a multidimensional construct comprising environmental, social, and relational dimensions in line with a transformative welfare perspective. While the international literature has developed a robust theoretical foundation for eco-social work, few empirical studies have explored how to practically integrate the ecological dimension into professional practices.

### Methods

This qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of people in difficulties who have participated in circular economy and/or green care activities in Italian context. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with people engaged in social and occupational reintegration programmes involving eco-social interventions (i.e. social farming, community gardens, beekeeping, reuse and recycling activities, public green area maintenance ...) in 11 Italian non-profit organizations. The interviews aimed to elicit personal narratives, learning experiences and subjective transformations. Participants' personal and work contexts were explored, as well as their perceptions of the specific features of eco-social activities compared to other work experiences and how these experiences develop environmental awareness. The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

### Findings

The research highlights how participation in eco-social work projects can foster significant personal, relational, and environmental transformations among people experiencing social vulnerability. Participants reported acquiring practical sustainability-related skills, as well as a deeper awareness of their relationships with nature, themselves, and others. The natural environment and green care activities were often described as therapeutic, facilitating emotional regulation, self-care, and renewed motivation for change. Reintegration pathways that included contact with nature were more dignified, inclusive and empowering than traditional social work models. Participants emphasised the importance of being seen and supported as whole individuals and expressed a strong desire to see such projects expanded and made more accessible. The findings suggest that eco-social work practices can effectively promote personal and community well-being, as well as environmental responsibility, and that they should be considered as replicable models within social work interventions.

**Conclusions**

This research reflects on eco-social work practices as concrete responses to the current polycrisis era (Cucca et al., 2023; Fritz & Lee, 2023), emphasizing the need for integrated policies that support ecologically oriented social work within a sustainable welfare system. The research contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice by highlighting the transformative potential of nature-based interventions for individuals experiencing social exclusion. The findings emphasise the importance of incorporating ecological considerations into social work, suggesting that eco-social approaches can effectively promote personal and community empowerment, as well as environmental sustainability.

## Safeguarding children's best interests in child welfare proceedings: A study of sensemaking in practice

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### Background and purpose:

Child welfare assessments are vital for the protection of children's best interests but are also known to be vulnerable to bias and error. In many nations, quality assurance systems for judgement and decision making include external scrutiny of assessments and the involvement of independent experts in assessments.

This paper presents the findings from a two-year long ethnographic study of sense making by Safeguarders in child welfare proceedings. Safeguarders are appointed within the Children's Hearings System in Scotland to protect the best interests of children through independent consideration and analysis of information and views provided by the child, their family, and all relevant individuals and agencies. This is the first empirical study to explore how Safeguarders go about this crucial task of making "best interest" judgements in child welfare.

### Research question:

How do Safeguarders carry out their role to provide analytical and objective reporting in the best interests of the child?

### Methods:

This study generated rich qualitative data through 24 semi-structured interviews with 10 Safeguarders and ethnographic site visits. Safeguarders were interviewed at the beginning, middle and end of their allocated investigation. The scheduling of interviews allowed us to capture the ongoing and unfolding process of sense-making in as the investigation progressed. The timing and structure of interviews sought to guard against the potential for post-hoc rationalisation by participants.

### Findings:

The research evidenced endemic delay within the welfare system. Findings also revealed that the Safeguarder role extends significantly beyond independent reporting to include combatting systematic delay, facilitating outcomes through relationship-building, and providing critique of the evidence presented by children, families and professionals in welfare proceedings. Safeguarders reasoning was often affective and intuitive, rather than analytical and objective.

### Conclusions and implications:

Delay and drift were common in those cases where a Safeguarder was appointed. The involvement of solicitors was thought to contribute to delay, but our research also revealed the key contribution that Safeguarders can make in managing systemic delays. We consider the implications for child welfare systems across multiple jurisdictions.

In highly contested welfare cases, trust can be low between all participants. Our findings showed that Safeguarders leveraged their unique position to address barriers to participation and to broker trust between stakeholders. This enmeshed and agentic role challenges the policy construct of Safeguarder as “independent and objective reporter”. We consider the potential of the Safeguarders’ “honest broker” role to facilitate progress and timely outcomes in welfare proceedings.

Safeguarders were observed making carefully considered recommendations based on large amounts of complex, sometimes contradictory, evidence. We identified sense-making processes which blended intuition and analysis: A quasi-rational approach to appraisal, challenge and critique of previous judgements. Our findings significantly extend current insight into rationalities employed in the unfolding process of making “best interests” judgements.

Safeguarders were found to engage in frequent (often informally structured and conducted) discussions with people that they deemed relevant to their investigation. This dialogue supported critical reflexivity and acknowledgement of uncertainty. Insights gained here can inform training and policy developments across many systems.

# Contributions and Limitations of the Incorporation of Artificial Intelligence in Social Services: A Systematic Review

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## Background and purpose:

New technologies have introduced artificial intelligence (AI) into many areas of daily life, including Social Services, particularly following the rapid digitization processes accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sector is increasingly adopting digital tools to transform and optimize management, prevention, detection, and intervention. This shift has stimulated growing scientific interest and led to the development of multiple initiatives aimed at exploring the role of AI in this field.

This study was designed to examine both the potential and contributions of AI, as well as the limitations and challenges associated with its use in Social Services, to build a comprehensive understanding that can guide its efficient, effective, and responsible implementation.

Within this framework, AI is not merely a technological innovation, but also a cross-cutting social and professional turning point: it demands a rethinking of how social workers interact with service users, and how policies can ensure fairness and accountability in the deployment of digital tools.

## Research questions:

What are the main potentialities and contributions of AI in Social Services, and how can they optimize processes and outcomes within this context?

What technical, ethical, and operational limitations do AI applications in Social Services face, and how can these challenges be addressed to enable more effective and equitable implementation?

## Methods:

A systematic review was conducted from 2009 to 2024 on the impact of AI in Social Services. The search and selection process resulted in 20 high-impact publications for analysis, indexed in 3 databases between the years 2009 and 2024: Web of Science (WOS), Scopus, and ProQuest. These were analyzed using the SALSA Framework (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis).

The first and second phases, search and appraisal, provide the foundation for evidence and encompass the principles of systematization. Regarding the third (analysis) and fourth (synthesis) phases, methodological approaches based on grounded theory were applied, using inductive strategies to interpret the data.

**Findings:**

The results show a notable increase in the number of studies on this topic starting in 2020, with particularly significant growth during 2022. Regarding the type of study, qualitative methodology predominates over quantitative, with most studies focusing on Europe (35%) and Asia (30%). In terms of content, the research includes studies that highlight the transformative potential of AI, as well as those proposing specific models for its effective implementation. Special attention is given to the ethical, technical, and practical challenges that arise with the incorporation of AI in this field.

**Conclusions and implications:**

The analyzed studies reveal the need to apply AI to optimize management, prevention, detection, and intervention processes in Social Services. Although several negative aspects have been identified, such as ethical dilemmas and design errors, AI should be viewed as a complementary tool that supports professional teams, while always maintaining the essential human component to address the limitations of these tools and improve service delivery. For social work in contemporary contexts, this implies a profound reconfiguration of roles, competencies, and governance structures.



## Integration barriers of African migrants in Romania

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### Background

Before joining the EU in 2007, Romania has been a transit country for migrants, and immigration was low, but in the last years, it has become a host country, and the number of immigrants has increased. Overall, there are two main categories of immigrants in Romania: voluntary (students, workers, and so on) and forced (refugees and asylum seekers) migrants (Simionescu 2019). Until recently, Romania has been a country from which people migrated and a transit country. Issues related to migrants and their integration in Romania were rarely a concern (Simionescu 2019).

The present study focused on African migrants as they are a special category of immigrants, one that has a long history of trauma (cultural, historical, and intergenerational), cultural hallmarks of suffering, slavery, racism, and discrimination (Ramos 2011). The historical trauma and the present difficulties make African migrants vulnerable to mental health issues. Research showed that in the case of African migrant women, the reason for leaving their native country (threats to one's life) is highly associated with anxiety and depression disorders, while in the case of men mental health issues are associated with illegal status in the host country (Pannetier et al. 2017). Migrants who experienced discrimination after migration were more likely to develop anxiety, depression and/or PTSD (Thela et al. 2017). Research involving African migrants is only at the beginning in Romania and there are no studies focusing only on this specific vulnerable category. The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify and understand the integration barriers faced by African migrants in Romania.

### Methods

A qualitative study was conducted in Romania between September 2024 and January 2025 and included 47 African migrants and 9 key experts. In-depth interviews and focus groups were employed to collect the data, and thematic analysis was performed to obtain a comprehensive synthesis of the data.

### Findings

Three common themes emerged: Low Access to Information, Low Access to Resources and Services, and Discrimination and Economic Exploitation. Key experts emphasized as main difficulties the lack of centralized information, insufficient number of services, educational difficulties, the language barrier, and the lack of community support networks, while African migrants living in Romania emphasized as main difficulties poor access to information, the language barrier, low access to social and medical services, housing difficulties, discrimination in public places, exploitation in the labour market, and gender violence and vulnerability.

**Conclusions**

While Romania has become a host country for people of African descent, discrimination, hate speech, and crime against these people are still common. Women of African descent seem to be a specific high-risk category among migrants, as they face physical and emotional abuse and find themselves trapped in abusive relationships due to the risk of expulsion from the host country if they leave their Romanian husbands. These findings could prove useful in order to facilitate the integration process of people of African descent and to tailor gender-specific services for African migrants.

## Lived experience informed criminal justice social work: A case of Generative Justice?

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Social work internationally is committed to drawing on the knowledge of people with lived experience of social disadvantage and to working in solidarity to promote social justice. Yet those with lived experience of criminalisation remain largely excluded from knowledge production and practice, despite (often) intersecting experiences of trauma, poverty, racism, and state care. This paper explores how Generative Justice can provide a framework to address this exclusion and support more inclusive, evidence-informed practice and policy. Lived experience-informed criminal justice (LE CJ) practice has gained visibility in criminology, mental health and addiction recovery, where peer-led approaches have reshaped services, inspired hope, and brought reciprocal benefits to practitioners and communities. Social work, however, has been slower to embed such practices beyond tokenistic service-user involvement. Structural barriers, such as criminal record exclusions in education and employment, undermine the profession's stated commitment to inclusion. This contradiction challenges social work's ethical responsibilities and its ability to act in solidarity with marginalised groups.

Drawing on our personal and professional experiences as academics, practitioners, and individuals with lived experience of criminalisation, we reflect on the potential of Generative Justice (McNeill, 2022) to reimagine social work. Generative Justice rests on seven interconnected principles: recognition of human worth; communication of hope; material provision and exchange; social connection; reciprocal concern; collective effort; and change beyond the individual. These principles encourage movement away from risk-averse, paternalistic practices toward co-productive approaches that value experiential expertise and foster opportunities for growth, connection, and social change.

Through a reflective, participatory lens, we show how lived-experience practitioners contribute to criminal justice social work by building trust, modelling resilience, and connecting individuals to supportive networks. At the same time, inclusion raises ethical complexities around safeguarding, victim needs, and risks of reproducing inequality within co-production. We argue that engaging with these challenges, rather than avoiding them, is essential to advancing an ethically robust and generatively just practice.

This paper adds to interdisciplinary debates on evidence-informed policy by demonstrating how lived experience-informed approaches can strengthen social work. Integrating Generative Justice principles allows the profession to reclaim its radical traditions of solidarity and collectivism, countering managerialist and technocratic tendencies. Such an approach not only improves practice with individuals and communities but also drives systemic reforms, positioning social work as a transformative force within criminal justice and beyond. Ultimately, we call for research, education, and practice to embrace the experiential expertise of criminalised people as central to knowledge production. Achieving this requires dismantling exclusionary structures and creating inclusive pathways into the profession. Generative Justice offers a framework for interdisciplinary collaboration and for building evidence-informed policies and practices that are more humane, equitable, and responsive.

## How do working conditions contribute to the experience of stress for Romanian social workers

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### Background and purpose

Adverse working conditions in Romania's social work system have become an increasing concern, reflecting a combination of insufficient resources, shortages of qualified professionals particularly in rural areas, high burnout rates, bureaucratic hurdles, frequent legislative changes, and the limited supportive supervision. These challenges contribute to a vulnerable workforce and may undermine service quality. The main objective of this study was to examine which working conditions are most strongly associated with heightened perceived stress among social workers in Romania.

### Methods

An email containing a link to the online survey was sent to all members of the National College of Social Workers (CNASR) during June-July 2024. The survey included several measurements including the Management Standards Indicator Tool which evaluates seven dimensions linked to work-related stress (e.g., demands, control, managerial support, peer support, relationships, control, control, and change), the Perceived Stress Scale to assess the degree to which respondents appraised their current life circumstances as stressful, and several co-variates (gender, age, qualification, years of experience in the field). A total of 937 respondents filled in the questionnaire. Separate regression analyses were run across four primarily fields of practice: child welfare, gerontology, disability, and indirect practice (such as administration of social benefits).

### Findings

The analysis identified distinct predictors of stress across fields of social work practice. For social workers delivering child welfare services, higher stress levels were significantly associated with younger age ( $\beta = -.174$ ), increased workload and unfavorable work patterns ( $\beta = .321$ ), problematic workplace relationships marked by conflict or bullying ( $\beta = .149$ ), and ambiguity in job expectations and responsibilities ( $\beta = -.147$ ). In the context of services for older adults, stress was most strongly associated with workload and unfavorable work patterns ( $\beta = .357$ ), lack of clarity in job expectations and responsibilities ( $\beta = -.313$ ), and insufficient managerial support ( $\beta = -.393$ ). For those providing services to persons with disabilities, elevated stress was predicted by greater work demands ( $\beta = .455$ ) and ineffective communication and organizational change management ( $\beta = -.280$ ). Among practitioners engaged primarily in indirect practice, workload and unfavorable work patterns emerged as the sole significant predictor of stress ( $\beta = .499$ ).

### Conclusions and implications

In the context of systemic changes in the Romanian social work system, this article provides valuable information on the current working conditions of social workers. It sparks the discussion about the importance of improving working conditions to retain qualified professionals in the field.

## Child protection responses to extra-familial harm: using social work values to reshape multiagency safeguarding practice

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In March 2025 the UK Government issued guidance that required English children's social care departments to develop a child protection response to the risks young people faced in extra-familial contexts and relationships – including sexual and criminal exploitation, peer-sexual abuse and community-based violence. The requirement means that child protection processes are being expanded to a new group of young people who were previously screened out of these processes and were instead referred into criminal justice processes. Government advice on this developing child protection response, requires that the pathway be designed to look beyond the capacity of parents to protect, or meet the needs of, their children, and instead assess the collective capacity of a range of agencies, working alongside parents, to meet young people's needs and keep them safe. Using data gathered from the four local authorities who first piloted 'Risk Outside of the Home' (ROTH) Child Protection Pathways, this paper will outline the ways in which social work leadership in cases of extra-familial harm have the potential to influence the cultures and practices of historically policing-led multi-agency partnerships. In 2024 data gathered including, observation of online multi-agency meetings where child protection plans were agreed (n=24), redacted social work plans and assessments for young people supported via ROTH processes (n=12), focus groups (n=5) and interviews (n=6) with professionals. Data was subject to thematic analysis, to identify (mis)alignment of practices and languages on a ROTH pathway as they relate to international social work values. Themes identified reflect both the opportunities and challenges for social work influence in wider multi-agency practice partnerships including the varying ability of social workers to: foreground system and structural harms; advocate in respect of children's best interest and needs; demonstrate care in their approach to practice. The culture of multi-agency partnerships, and the influence of criminal justice organisations within them, interacted with the capacity of social workers to maintain an alignment with social work values. ROTH pathways have the potential to orient multi-agency partnerships towards the needs and best interest of young people harmed beyond their families – many of whom have historically been viewed beyond the parameters of child protection systems. However, inconsistencies suggest there is the need to build in opportunity for critical reflection during the implementation process, to ensure social workers influence multi-agency partnerships that were previously justice-orientated, rather than social workers be influenced by (and take on the cultures of) justice-orientated partnerships.

## Interdisciplinary Approaches to Rural Integration and Social Services in Andalusia

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This paper examines the lived realities of temporeras -seasonal female agricultural workers - whose experiences remain largely invisible in dominant narratives and urban policy frameworks. In Huelva, temporeras contend with precarious housing, limited access to services, and systemic discrimination. Social services find it particularly difficult to reach this population, as existing research often privileges statistics and policy outcomes over lived experience. Advocacy on behalf of temporeras therefore requires stronger, interdisciplinary approaches that draw on sociology, anthropology, and social work to address the intersections of gender, labour, migration, and spatial marginalization (Arab,2024).

### Methodology

Drawing on ethnographic observation and interviews, this study foregrounds the voices of temporeras through the eyes of professionals and city inhabitants. While semi-structured interviews are useful for studying the idea of a "dignified life", which is based on the "capability approach" to poverty and has recently entered academia (Navarro & Jansen, 2023), the analysis revealed the inadequacy of current quantitative analyses of representations of migrant labour, which risk simplifying complex realities. The research process itself revealed the urgent need for creative, participatory methods, particularly photovoice and storytelling (Wang,2023). The use of infographics (Instituto de las mujeres, 2024), on the other hand, has brought to life more impactful research on the need to explain the concept of a "dignified life" for temporeras.

### Findings

About ten interviews and two questionnaires with professionals revealed the entrenched invisibility and stigma surrounding temporeras, whose labour is feminised through narratives of vulnerability and economic necessity. The strawberry-picking industry is structured around the perceived weakness of women, thereby reinforcing systemic inequalities. The idea of a 'dignified life' is closely linked to their ability to earn money and return to Morocco, while their wish to stay in Spain is largely overlooked. This results in their rights and aspirations being undermined. The study also highlights the emotional impact on social workers, emphasising the need for relational ethics and community co-production in support efforts.

### Conclusion

The study highlights how narrative-driven and interdisciplinary research can inform more responsive policies and services for temporeras and argues for social work to be reimagined as a transformative social justice tool. It also identifies innovative practices that could foster resilience and inclusion, such as participatory models, intergenerational dialogue and culturally responsive interventions. Additionally, it explores the ethical issues and emotional labour involved in direct social work and proposes reflective practice based on relational ethics and community co-production.

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## Keywords

Temporeras; Migrant workers; Agricultural labour; Social services; Community empowerment; Health equity; Policy innovation; Welfare access.



## Promoting mental health in school welfare services: a qualitative evaluation of national implementation of Interpersonal Counseling for adolescents (IPC-A) in Finland

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### Background and purpose

As schools increasingly serve as the primary locations for mental health care for young people, school welfare services (SWS), including school social workers, play a key role in promoting mental health. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to develop and implement effective mental health support in these settings. The present study focuses on one such effort, namely the nationwide adoption of Interpersonal Counseling for adolescents (IPC-A) in Finnish school welfare services. School welfare services provide an interesting interdisciplinary context as it includes services of school social workers, psychologists, and nurses. Adapted from a rigorously tested interpersonal psychotherapy, IPC-A is a time-limited brief intervention designed to be delivered by non-specialized mental health providers. While a growing body of research exist on implementation of evidence-based interventions in child and adolescent mental health services, information to support large-scale implementation of school-based mental health initiatives is scarce. Ultimately, to achieve their intended results, effective interventions require effective implementation.

### Methods

The implementation of IPC-A in Finland took place during a series of governmental programs from 2016 onwards. The goal was to train a total of 1600 professionals in IPC-A by the end of 2022. While the leading university hospital advanced the national implementation initiative, local SWS's responsibility was to deliver IPC-A in practice. Guided by the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment (EPIS) framework (Moullin et al., 2019), the study used qualitative interviews of implementation leaders and policymakers (N=21) and analysis of policy documents to examine barriers and facilitators associated with the implementation.

### Findings

The findings revealed a complex interplay between leadership, inter-organizational environment and networks, funding, innovation developers and purveyors. In terms of facilitators, in the preparation phase, collaboration between the leading hospital and one service area enabled the initial implementation and evaluation of IPC-A in Finland. A research-informed adaptation process conducted in co-operation with the international IPC developers aided the establishment of a high-quality training. Furthermore, implementation leaders' joint commitment helped to achieve buy-in of policymakers and dedicated funding to the nationwide implementation. Regarding barriers, top-down implementation decision-making and national roll-out without sufficient collaboration between the leading hospital and the local service areas were seen to hinder the practitioners' commitment to the initiative. Although most interviewees felt positively about the IPC-A as an intervention, some were concerned how it fits to burdened SWS settings. Furthermore, competition and disagreements related to, for example training and funding, between regional stakeholders resulted with a dual training model and a non-decision of who hold responsibility of IPC-A in Finland.



**Conclusions and implications**

The findings underscore the importance of establishing buy-in from multiple levels prior to making the implementation decision and aiming for reciprocal collaboration in all stages. The EPIS, employed in this study as an evaluative framework, can also be applied to the planning of future implementation initiatives to provide structured guidance, thereby enhancing their rigor, overall quality, and contribution to evidence-informed practice.

## Interprofessional discharge planning: governance, conditions and practice

Nicoline Annetorp Roth<sup>1</sup>

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When older adults in need of health and social care transition from hospital to home, adequate interprofessional discharge planning is essential to ensure safety and sufficient care after discharge. In this process, social workers typically assess and decide on social care, while healthcare professionals such as nurses, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists are responsible for planning medical care and rehabilitation. Numerous studies across disciplines and national contexts have identified shortcomings in discharge planning for older adults, such as interprofessional collaboration difficulties, insufficient care provision, compromised patient safety, and limited participation for older adults being discharged. At the policy level, the main emphasis has been on reducing discharge delays, preventing unnecessary readmissions, and fostering interprofessional collaboration, often framed as part of a wider shift from hospital-based to outpatient care. In research and practice, interventions for improving discharge planning have been developed and evaluated, with mixed results. To understand why this care transition remains so challenging, it is crucial to examine the interplay between policy ambitions, professional working conditions, and the realities of practice. This study aims to explore these dynamics by analysing the Swedish case of hospital discharge planning for older adults.

The study draws on a qualitative research design. Empirical data consists of policy documents relating to the Swedish Care Coordination Act introduced in 2018, which regulates the hospital discharge process, alongside group and individual interviews (N=46) with healthcare professionals and social workers responsible for discharge planning for older adults. Vignettes validated by health and social care professionals were used during the interviews to facilitate discussion and capture professional reasoning in discharge planning dilemmas. The data were analysed through a combination of frame-critical policy analysis (Schön & Rein, 1994), neo-institutional theory (Scott, 2008) and Brodtkin's (2010) 'politics of practice' framework.

The results demonstrate that professionals are tasked with operationalising policy objectives and regulations that are often vague, simplified and at times contradictory, while working under conditions that are largely omitted in policy. These include strained resources and time, poor working conditions and highly complex individual client situations and dilemmas. Moreover, local conditions and institutionalised logics and norms, which profoundly impact interprofessional collaboration during discharge planning, are not easily addressed by national legislation.

The study concludes that safe care transitions for older adults require improved working conditions for health and social care professionals. This includes aligning time frames for care planning with the tasks and objectives assigned to the professionals. Furthermore, discharge planning should not be reduced to a technical or administrative assignment, but recognised as a complex web of dilemmas and clashing interests, performed across disciplines and sectors. Instead of simplifying, working around, or covering up these tensions, they should be explicitly acknowledged and addressed in both policy design and professional practice.

# Filling the Gaps or Protecting Themselves? Dilemmas of Frontline School Specialists Confronting Juvenile Delinquency

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## Research Problem

Juvenile delinquency is a multidimensional problem at the intersection of education, social welfare, and justice systems. Schools have become the primary arena for addressing not only academic but also social and psychological difficulties when confronting juvenile delinquency, placing school social workers, teachers, and other professionals on the front line. A recent study (Švedaitė-Sakalauskė et al., 2025) identified a dominant “pseudo-recognition strategy” in Lithuania, where public declarations of support for children fail to match real actions. This policy–practice gap creates immense difficulties for frontline specialists, who are caught between systemic inefficiency and children in urgent need of meaningful help. This study addresses this research gap by asking: How do frontline school specialists define and respond to juvenile delinquency? What do their experiences reveal about systemic shortcomings? And how do these gaps affect their daily work and personal well-being?

## Methodology

This abstract presents preliminary insights from an ongoing grounded theory study. The data is derived from in-depth interviews with various school frontline specialists, including social workers, psychologists, teachers, etc. from different regions of Lithuania.

## Research Results

School specialists define delinquency broadly—from legal violations to learning and social difficulties—yet some stress it reflects systemic failure rather than child pathology. The experiences of specialists confirm a significant gap between policy and practice. They report a constant “shifting of responsibility” between institutions, leaving schools feeling isolated in complex situations. Bureaucracy, a lack of inter-institutional cooperation, and insufficient resources create barriers to effective support and increase staff workloads. This tension is compounded when uncooperative parents shift responsibility onto schools.

Emotional responses are multilayered. Despite striving for professionalism, specialists inevitably experience frustration, helplessness, compassion, and fear. They are especially concerned about the future of children left without adequate systemic support. Nevertheless, they try to maintain positivity and rely on “good people” in other institutions who occasionally compensate systemic gaps.

In response, specialists often face a difficult choice. Sometimes they provide help “at their own expense” when official channels fail. While this demonstrates their dedication, it also masks systemic flaws and leads directly to professional burnout. In other cases the same specialists adopt a self-preservation strategy by consciously staying within the boundaries of their professional roles. This protects them from burnout but means some children do not receive the enough specific help they need, deepening their problems. This choice also carries a heavy emotional burden for the specialists, leading to feelings of helplessness and stress.

**Conclusions**

Operating in an under-resourced and fragmented system forces school-based professionals, particularly social workers, into dilemmas that compromise both practice and well-being. Whether they overextend themselves or prioritize self-protection, the outcome is additional workload, moral distress, and unmet needs for vulnerable children. These findings underscore the need for stronger interprofessional collaboration and evidence-informed policies that reinforce sustainable social work practice in schools.

**Founding**

This research No P-EDU-23-14 is co-funded by the EU (the project „ Breakthrough in Educational Research“ No 10-044-P-0001) under the 2025-04-01 Agreement with the Research Council of Lithuania RCOL) and the 2025-04-15 Joint Activity Agreement with Vilnius University.

## **Paradoxes of participation in statutory child protection proceedings. The potential of recognition in an interdisciplinary field.**

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Child protection is an interdisciplinary field that draws on knowledge from various professions and disciplines in general. In statutory child protection in particular, social work practice and legal regulations play a key role in deciding whether child protection measures are necessary. This is why in Switzerland decisions in statutory child protection proceedings are made by an interdisciplinary decision-making body. Decisions in statutory child protection proceedings must also guarantee the participation of those affected, as this is ethically required and legally enshrined in various ways (e.g. UN CRC; Swiss Civil Code). Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that providing experiences of meaningful participation for those affected (children and parents) remains a challenge for professionals.

The presentation addresses the remaining challenges of participation of children and parents in child protection proceedings. It first argues that statutory child protection needs to be understood as a specific context (Healy 1998): participation takes place in a coercive setting. However, this specific participation setting is rarely addressed or discussed in the current professional discourse. The presentation therefore examines how the coercive context of child protection proceedings affects participation opportunities of those affected.

The presentation uses empirical findings from an interdisciplinary, mixed-methods study on participation in child protection proceedings in Switzerland (Cottier/Müller/Aeby/Schoch, forth-coming) to identify context-specific paradoxes and ambivalence of participation. It will be discussed, whether greater consideration of these paradoxes could help to identify context-specific barriers to participation. Finally, conclusions will be drawn based on recognition theory (Honneth, 1995) on how the practice of interdisciplinary decision-making bodies could strengthen the participation of those affected in the coercive context of child protection proceedings.

## Cross-National Social Work Perspectives on Childhood Obesity Policy

Prof Marit Skivenes<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

#### Cross-National Social Work Perspectives on Childhood Obesity Policy

Childhood obesity represents a critical global health challenge that transcends national, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries, affecting 880 million adults and 160 million children worldwide by 2022. This epidemic carries profound implications beyond individual health outcomes, influencing educational attainment, employment prospects, and life expectancy across diverse societies. While health consequences are well-documented, understanding how different populations perceive government responsibility for addressing this crisis remains underexplored from a comparative international social work perspective.

This study contributes to transnational social work research by examining childhood obesity through a lens that crosses national, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. Drawing on social work's commitment to addressing social determinants of health and promoting social justice across diverse contexts, our research bridges public health policy analysis with comparative social welfare research. The transnational approach recognizes that social workers increasingly operate across nation-state boundaries, addressing complex global challenges that manifest differently in local contexts while requiring culturally competent responses.

Using representative survey data from 41 OECD countries encompassing 41,942 respondents, this study examines cross-national variation in public support for government responsibility in addressing childhood obesity. The comparative methodology enables analysis of how cultural, political, and institutional factors shape public attitudes toward state intervention across diverse national contexts. This approach reflects social work's growing recognition of the need for international comparative research to inform practice and policy development.

Despite significant cross-national variation, a clear majority of the public across diverse cultural and political contexts supports government responsibility in addressing childhood obesity. This broad endorsement suggests universal recognition of the state's role in child welfare, transcending traditional cultural boundaries. The majority preference for health system intervention over child protection services indicates sophisticated public understanding of appropriate intervention modalities.

The study documents causal relationships between risk perception and willingness to accept government intervention, demonstrating how threat assessment influences attitudes toward restricting personal freedom across cultures. However, analysis reveals limited public recognition of structural factors, particularly poverty's impact on childhood

obesity, suggesting opportunities for social work education and advocacy across national boundaries.

### **Implications for International Social Work**

This research advances international comparative social work by providing evidence-based insights into public attitudes toward government intervention in family life across diverse cultural contexts. The findings contribute to understanding how social work values of social justice and child welfare translate across different national boundaries. The broad public support for government intervention provides a foundation for international social work advocacy efforts, while the preference for health system responses suggests strategic directions for professional collaboration across disciplines and sectors.

For social work practice and education, the study highlights the importance of understanding both universal child welfare principles and culturally specific implementation approaches, offering guidance for professionals operating across national and cultural boundaries in addressing childhood obesity and related public health challenges.

## Interdisciplinary Pathways to Evidence-Informed Drug Policy: The Case of Drug Consumption Rooms in Nuremberg

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### Background

Despite strong international evidence on the effectiveness of drug consumption rooms (DCRs), no such facility exists in Nuremberg, Germany. The local drug market is increasingly dynamic, with novel psychoactive substances and potent synthetic opioids creating unpredictable risks for people who use drugs. Although local actors recognize the need for “protected spaces,” implementation is blocked by restrictive state legislation and persistent stigma. The EviDroN project (Evidence-Based Drug Emergency Care) therefore examined the contextual conditions for a DCR in Nuremberg. By applying the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) (Damschroder et al. 2022), the study explored political, organizational, and social factors shaping feasibility, while also highlighting how interdisciplinary collaboration across social work, medicine, and politics can advance evidence-informed practice and policy. The guiding question was: Which contextual factors enable or hinder implementation, and how can these insights inform interdisciplinary, evidence-based practice and policymaking?

### Methods

Seven semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with local stakeholders from social work, medicine, and politics. Participants were purposefully selected based on their local expertise and institutional influence. The interview guide was adapted from a Belgian feasibility study on DCRs and contextualized to local conditions. Interviews were transcribed, processed with MAXQDA, and analyzed through qualitative content analysis, combining deductive coding along CFIR constructs with inductive refinement (Mayring, 2015).

### Findings

The CFIR-based analysis revealed opportunities and barriers across multiple levels. On the opportunity side, stakeholders emphasized broad professional consensus, established cooperation structures, and the potential of DCRs to prevent overdoses, reduce public drug use, and strengthen referral pathways into care. Organizational readiness was supported by a network of social and medical services, though its dependence on individual actors made it fragile. Barriers arose mainly at the state political level: the absence of enabling legislation, unclear jurisdictional responsibilities, and moralized narratives framing drug use as individual failure rather than collective risk. Stakeholders stressed the importance of intersectoral collaboration, sustainable financing, and early involvement of community members, law enforcement, and people who use drugs to build legitimacy. Particularly salient were gender-specific safety concerns and the need for culturally sensitive, low-threshold access. Overall, feasibility depended less on technical or evidentiary grounds than on political, organizational, and symbolic dynamics – issues demanding interdisciplinary cooperation.



**Conclusions**

EviDroN demonstrates the utility of CFIR as a prospective tool for social work research to anticipate and strategically address contextual conditions before implementation. The findings highlight that evidence alone is insufficient: the establishment of a DCR in Nuremberg depends on the alignment of political will, institutional structures, and community acceptance. For practice, the results suggest that DCRs must be designed as reflexive, context-sensitive innovations embedded in existing care networks and supported by interprofessional teams. For policy, the study calls for state-level regulatory change, stable financing models, and proactive communication strategies to shift public and political narratives toward harm reduction. Finally, the research illustrates how interdisciplinary, context-aware approaches can strengthen the role of social work in shaping evidence-informed drug policy, making visible the interplay between empirical evidence, political discourse, and local practice realities.

## Hearing the Voices of Delinquent Children: The First Steps to Helping Them

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### Background and Purpose

In Lithuania, the inclusion of delinquent children in schools and society remains a significant challenge. According to the literature and the few studies in recent years, these children are often excluded from discussions on inclusivity, while their difficult behaviour typically provokes punitive responses, condemnation, and exclusion (Švedaitė-Sakalauskė, Buzaitytė-Kašalynienė, Sakalauskas & Kalpokas, 2025). When problems arise, schools usually involve the Child Welfare Commission (CHWC), and persistent difficulties are referred to the Municipal Commission, which may impose minimal or average care measures. Although Lithuanian law guarantees a child's right to express opinions, in practice, this right is not consistently respected. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged stronger measures to ensure children's voices are genuinely heard in matters affecting them. The research data revealed that children tend not to express their opinions to adults because their proposed solutions may worsen the situation (Ruškus, Chudabienė, Motiečienė & Naujanienė, 2021). Therefore, this empirical study examines how delinquent children's perspectives are considered when minimal care measures are applied, and stresses the broader importance of valuing their input.

### Methods

The study applied a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with 15 professionals: coordinators of CHWC, family social workers and child rights protection specialists. Respondents were drawn from cities, towns, and rural districts of Lithuania. Data were analysed using content analysis.

### Findings

The research found that children's ability to express their views depends largely on specialists' subjective judgments of each child's abilities. Many children experience discomfort during these processes, manifested as nervousness, resistance, or silence. Contributing factors include unclear expectations, difficulty answering complex questions, feelings of being misunderstood, and the intimidating atmosphere of speaking before a commission of 10–15 unfamiliar adults deciding their future. Professionals themselves face obstacles in hearing children's voices. A lack of training in child-centred communication was common, as were systemic issues: limited accessibility to children, poor cooperation among institutions, and shortages of human and time resources. These barriers increase the risk that children's participation is superficial rather than meaningful, leading to support measures that fail to meet their needs.

The findings emphasised that meaningful engagement requires child-friendly communication, safe environments, open-ended questions, and avoidance of assumptions. Empathy and genuine understanding were seen as essential elements for effective listening.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The research highlights the need to strengthen professional competence in communicating with children who exhibit behavioural difficulties. Raising awareness of the importance of hearing children's voices is crucial for aligning support measures with their real needs. In addition, families require greater support, and closer collaboration among schools, social services, and other institutions is essential. A comprehensive approach can help professionals move beyond formal consultation towards genuine inclusion of children's perspectives. Listening to delinquent children is not only a legal obligation but also the first step towards building effective, empathetic, and sustainable support systems.

The problem will be further explored in the project "Children with Delinquent Behaviour: Seeking the Most Appropriate School System Response", funded by the Lithuanian Science Council.

## Social Work Education in Action: Bridging Students, Practitioners, and Transdisciplinary Voices in Research

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Research-based learning is increasingly significant in social work education, preparing students practically and comprehensively for the complex societal challenges they will face. In our practice research project, this pedagogical approach was purposefully employed: students actively participate in various project phases, shaping research processes and becoming critical and effective social workers. The aim is to enable them to critically assess research findings and operate as "reflective practitioners." This project illustrates the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration between research, teaching, and practice to promote evidence-informed social work.

The project seamlessly integrates research, practice, and teaching. Community partners from the local social and health sectors, as well as self-representation groups of the service users and other key stakeholders, were actively involved in developing research questions, selecting methods, and recruiting participants. Students were involved in planning and executing qualitative methods, such as network mapping interviews, neighborhood walk-throughs, the pin method, and Photovoice, and analyzed data using Grounded Theory. This co-creation of knowledge enhances the connection between research and practice, supporting the development of sustainable strategies.

Student involvement introduced new perspectives into the research process and facilitated practical competence development. Students learned to address power asymmetries and mechanisms of exclusion. Community partners reported innovative ideas and welcomed the opportunity to incorporate research findings directly into their local settings, which facilitated immediate knowledge transfer.

The close integration of research, practice, and education strengthens the professionalization of social work and increases the societal relevance of its research. Co-creation fosters iterative feedback loops, enhancing both scientific quality and practical applicability. By integrating research-based learning into social work education, our project contributes to interdisciplinary research by embedding evidence-informed methods in the training of social workers and simultaneously developing innovative approaches for practice and policy. Research-based learning offers significant opportunities for knowledge exchange and effectively prepares students for the diverse societal challenges ahead.

## Practice-Near Research Across Disciplines: A State-of-the-Art Review

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### Background

Practice-near research has gained traction across disciplines, including social work research, care science and education. It is often positioned as a counterpoint to practice-distant paradigms. Despite its growing popularity and ambitions to link research and practice and foster research-mindedness among professionals (e.g., Froggett & Briggs, 2009), the term remains conceptually fluid and methodologically ambiguous (e.g., Serder & Malmström, 2020).

### Purpose

This state-of-the-art literature review synthesises 45 peer-reviewed empirical studies labelled as practice-near across research disciplines. By mapping their disciplinary distribution, theoretical orientations, and operational strategies the review clarifies the concept and reduces methodological confusion, showing ways to link social work research and practice.

### Addressing the Conference's Aims and Themes

Insights into how research labelled as practice-near is operationalised across disciplines demonstrate methodological developments in social work research. It also invites researchers to draw on practice-near ambitions from different disciplines when addressing contemporary challenges. Ultimately, the study provides insights to strengthen the link between research and practice.

### Conclusion and Implications

This presentation illuminates how research labelled as practice-near is operationalised across disciplines. Its interdisciplinary approach has the potential to inspire future research designs that aim to link research and social work practice and foster research mindedness among social work practitioners. This is important because, by situating knowledge creation alongside practitioners and communities, practice-near research strengthens inclusion, empowers marginalised voices, and advances the social justice mission at the heart of social work and education.

### References:

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## Stigma Dynamics in HIV Care: A SEM Exploration of Uncertainty, Self-Efficacy, and Life-Course Empowerment

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### Background and purpose

HIV stigma continues to undermine health and well-being, shaping how people living with HIV (PLWH) engage in care. In clinical settings, stigma is often addressed superficially during brief encounters and without meaningful follow-ups, leaving little room for trauma-informed care planning. Guided by the Theory of Motivational Information Management (TMIM), we examine PLWH's health information seeking behaviors and their association with knowledge gaps, affective response of stigma, and cognitive appraisal of self-efficacy. The analysis accounts for duration of HIV status as a life-course perspective variable and includes gender identity associated with differential stigma experiences. The main research questions are: (1) How does duration of HIV status shape uncertainty, and how does uncertainty, in turn, affect stigma and self-efficacy? (2) To what extent do stigma and self-efficacy mediate the association between uncertainty and health information seeking? (3) How does gender identity relate to stigma and, indirectly, to information seeking?

### Methods

We analyzed restricted cross-sectional survey data from the 2021 Arizona HIV Care and Services Assessment. Purposive sampling includes 940 HIV-seropositive clients. Gender identity was self-reported and recoded into three categories: cisgender male, cisgender female, and gender-diverse participants (e.g., transgender, gender expansive, Two Spirit). Self-efficacy was modeled as a latent construct using three item parcels reflecting comfort discussing sexual risk, mental health, and substance use with one's HIV provider, each on a 3-point scale (higher = greater efficacy). Uncertainty used a 4-point understanding item about HIV treatment plan (higher = more uncertainty) and was standardized. Stigma was binary (1 if respondents reported fear of stigma or a desire to keep HIV status private; else 0). Information seeking was coded 1 when respondents reported no unanswered questions/asked intended questions, 0 when barriers (e.g., fear, language/culture) prevented questions. We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to estimate the latent efficacy factor and test hypothesized pathways among known HIV duration, uncertainty, stigma, efficacy, and information seeking, while controlling for gender identity (reference: cisgender male). We evaluated the model using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 29.

### Findings

The hypothesized model demonstrated good fit,  $\chi^2(22)=59.57$ , CFI=.973, TLI=.945, RMSEA=.043. Longer known duration was associated with lower uncertainty ( $\beta=-.17$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and higher uncertainty was associated with greater stigma ( $\beta=.11$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and lower efficacy ( $\beta=-.29$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Efficacy was positively related to information seeking ( $\beta=.33$ ,  $p<.001$ ), whereas both uncertainty ( $\beta=-.26$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and stigma ( $\beta=-.10$ ,  $p<.001$ ) directly suppressed it. With male as the reference, both women ( $\beta=.09$ ,  $p=.003$ ) and transgender participants ( $\beta=.09$ ,  $p=.002$ ) reported higher stigma. The model explained 26% of the variance in information seeking.

**Conclusions and implications**

Modern HIV care is increasingly characterized with medicalizing approaches, yet social dimensions of disease are pivotal. Stigma is not a fixed constant of living with a traumatic chronic illness; it emerges dynamically from uncertainty and interacts with self-efficacy to shape information-seeking. A life-course–sensitive lens shows that longer time since diagnosis is linked to lower uncertainty, increasing acceptance and stigma attenuation, supporting resilience over time. Findings inform social work practice about uncertainty reduction, stigma-sensitive communication, and peer-informed empowerment in whole-person, gender-affirming care.

# Navigating Paradoxes in Voluntary Mentorship: Empathy, Resonance, and the Ethics of Civil Society

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## Purpose and Original Contribution

Voluntary mentorships are mushrooming across European civil societies as a response to unmet social needs. Yet, the field remains under-theorized, particularly about ethical and existential dimensions. Current mentoring research emphasizes outcomes but neglects ethical and existential challenges—this study addresses that gap through the question: How can you be a good voluntary mentor for a vulnerable young person?

I argue that voluntary mentorship represents a distinct mode of social work: ethically saturated and existentially transformative, it complements yet unsettles neoliberal instrumental rationality of the welfare system. Its originality lies in combining phenomenological inquiry with sociological theory to develop new insights into relational vulnerability, resonance, and ethical practice.

## Methodological Approach and Design

The study is embedded in the HUMpraxis project in collaboration with the Danish NGO Bindeleddet. The organization works with young people in vulnerable positions, including homeless youth, care leavers, young mothers, and those who are socially or psychologically marginalized.

The research design reworks principles of action learning and is framed by phenomenological hermeneutics. Data consist of reflection circles, mentee meetings, mentor diaries, interviews, workshops and field notes, complemented by documents and evaluations.

Analysis follows a hermeneutic process of naïve reading, structural analysis, and comprehensive understanding, with reflexive triangulation ensured through advisory board and mentor feedback.

## Preliminary Findings and Research Implications

Early insights highlight the centrality of empathy, trust, stability, and recognition. Mentors describe themselves as “adult friends” rather than professionals, while emphasizing ethical boundaries.

From this, key paradoxes emerge in role attribution: proximity versus distance, empathy versus neutrality, and intuition versus structure.

To explore these tensions, the study draws on Edith Stein’s phenomenology. Stein’s analysis clarifies how mentors perceive vulnerability and shape their responses, enabling empathy without over-identification and a way to navigate paradoxical demands.



The analysis is further informed by Hartmut Rosa's diagnostic sociology of resonance. This perspective situates "good mentorship" as a relational practice that resists alienation and creates new forms of social connection in contemporary welfare societies.

### **Practical and Social Implications for Mentoring Practice**

This is among the first studies to apply Stein's empathy and Rosa's resonance to voluntary mentoring, showing it as an ethically and existentially charged encounter requiring organizational support.

For practice, mentors need opportunities for ethical reflection, supervision, and organizational backing to ensure sustainability.

For policy, civil society's role in social work should be recognized and supported through clearer guidelines and collaboration with public welfare institutions.

For theory, the integration of Stein and Rosa provides new conceptual tools to understand relational vulnerability, motivation, and resonance in social work research.

### **Link to Conference Theme and Subthemes**

The paper speaks directly to the ESWRA 2026 main theme Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence informed practice and policy. It is situated at the intersection of philosophy, sociology, and social work, thereby addressing:

- Subtheme 1: Linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge (through reflection circles and iterative processes).
- Subtheme 2: Theorizing social work and/or social work research (through the integration of Stein and Rosa).

## Social Workers and AI in Practice: Exploring Attitudes, Emotions, and Ethical Concerns toward Decision Support Systems

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### Background and Purpose

The growing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into public services raises questions about the role of automated decision-support systems (ADS) in welfare provision and their implications for professional practice. While such technologies promise greater efficiency and improved service delivery, their adoption in Israel's welfare services remains limited. Little is known about how social workers perceive ADS and which factors shape their willingness or reluctance to adopt them. This study examines how social workers perceive and emotionally respond to ADS, and the individual, professional, and organizational factors influencing their openness or resistance.

### Methods

The study employs a qualitative research design, well suited for capturing the nuanced emotional reactions, ethical dilemmas, and professional tensions surrounding ADS adoption. Data collection includes 20 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with social workers representing diverse regions, organizational contexts, and specializations. The interviews and focus groups explore participants' current or anticipated use of ADS, the emotions these systems evoke and the professional or ethical dilemmas they raise. Data is transcribed and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019), enabling the identification of themes that link personal experiences with broader organizational and systemic contexts.

### Findings

The preliminary findings from the interviews indicate that the use of automated decision-support systems (ADS) in Israeli social work remains at an early stage. Most participants reported that current applications are confined to routine data collection, while only a minority had encountered or anticipated more advanced functions such as recommendation systems or autonomous decision-making. These advanced applications were typically viewed with caution rather than enthusiasm.

Facilitating factors include professional curiosity and optimism about easing workloads, particularly among younger and tech-savvy social workers. Positive personal experiences with AI tools outside the workplace also foster openness. Inhibitors included skepticism, lack of training, and concerns about conflicts with professional values such as empathy, judgment, and discretion. Organizational context played a decisive role: the stance of supervisors and welfare agencies strongly shaped social workers' openness to experimentation. While some expressed hope that ADS could improve practice, many highlighted risks of de-professionalization, loss of discretion, and ethical concerns.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The findings highlight that successful adoption of ADS in social work depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the emotional and professional dimensions of practice. Equipping social workers with training, ethical guidance, and organizational support is essential to foster trust and responsible engagement with these tools.

Theoretically, this study advances understanding of human–technology interaction in welfare services by showing how emotions, professional values, and organizational cultures shape openness to innovation. Practically, it provides actionable insights for policymakers and organizational leaders on how to integrate AI in ways that uphold professional integrity and protect the well-being of service users.

## Large Language Models in Social Work Practice: Use and expected impact. Findings from the 2025 DIGITASA survey in Germany

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The paper presents empirical evidence on the current use of Large Language Models (LLMs) in social work organisations and discusses implications for evidence-informed organisational and professional policy. It aligns with the conference's main theme and subtheme 5 "Linking the Industry 4.0 and digital welfare state".

Debate about opportunities and risks of generative AI in social work is ongoing (for an overview e.g. Boetto 2025), yet little is known about how often practitioners use LLMs, for which tasks, and what effects are expected for the profession. This paper asks: (1) Who uses LLMs for what? (2) What impacts are anticipated for social work?

DIGITASA is a biennial, empirical online survey in Germany on digital transformation from social workers' perspectives ([www.digitasa.de](http://www.digitasa.de)). In 2025, n=662 respondents completed a questionnaire with a focus on digital literacies and LLMs. While existing empirical research has focused on specific groups of social work professionals (i.a. Báez et al. 2025; Meinhardt-Injac et al. 2025), this survey collected data across social work fields and organisational positions. Outreach included cooperation with service providers. Standardised items were complemented by open responses. Analyses combine descriptive and inferential statistics with qualitative content analysis. Limitations include an open, non-representative sample (possible selection bias).

About one third of respondents use LLMs regularly, while another third does not use them at all. They are mostly used for text production (46%), information seeking (40%), and idea generation (34%). Use declines as direct client contact increases. Managers are more supportive of future use than non-managers, especially for brainstorming, research, and text summarisation. One third expects strong-to-very-strong impacts of LLMs on the profession; expectations correlate positively with usage; respondents at higher hierarchical levels anticipate stronger effects than client-facing roles.

If the findings are generalisable, LLMs already form part of the routine toolkit for a substantial segment of the profession – alongside pronounced non-use in other segments. Respondents in higher organisational positions appear to expect stronger impacts of LLMs on social work. One interpretation is that decision-makers may treat the question of future impact less as a prognosis and more as an expression of intent. This tentatively suggests a divergence between managerial intention and the views of client-facing staff. If verified by further analysis, organisations may need to face the task of developing participatory strategies that reconcile these perspectives. Given our survey finding of relatively low involvement by client-facing practitioners in the implementation of new digital technologies, strengthening their participation could support organisational policy.

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## Online Fostering Panels and Relationship-based Social Work Practice

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### Background

Fostering Panels are conducted to assess the suitability of foster carers for children who may be 'strangers', but in England carers are increasingly likely to be 'Connected Persons Foster Carers' (CPFC) or referred to as 'kinship carers' who have some form of pre-existing connection to the child. The number of children in care in England is rising, and most local authorities hold at least two panels per month. Panels of approximately 8/10 people (including social workers and 'lay members', for example current foster carers and health professionals) are led by a Chair where the report which has been submitted by the social worker is scrutinised and questions are asked of the fostering social worker, the child's social worker and often the carers. The aim is to establish whether fostering standards have been met and whether the carer/placement can be approved. The meetings are formal and the recommendations from all cases go to the agency decision-maker (Children's Director) for final sign-off and approval.

Foster carers, including connected persons and kinship carers, are expected to attend Panel. Panels used to be in-person but have increasingly moved online. This research presents findings from Panel members and attendees regarding the impact on practice, on decision-making and the voice of the child and carer in the context of this new form of digital technology, changes which Byrne and Kirwan (2019) suggest alter the 'social texture of society' (Byrne & Kirwan 2019).

### Methods

Semi-structured interviews with a qualitative methodology were carried out with 8 carers, social work staff and Panel members to explore the decision-making process and experiences of carers and professionals in the light of the move to online working. Thematic analysis resulted in identification of the main themes, to be presented.

### Findings

The study reveals the challenges and benefits of the move to remote online meetings where deeply personal information about children and families is discussed and explored. Carers can feel 'exposed', have tech-anxiety and feel sadness and vulnerability about their adult child and grandchildren being discussed in sometimes quite an impersonal way. These challenges appear to be for all carers but especially in relation to kinship carers and CPFCs. Findings show how social work practice in relation to online meetings has evolved and developed in a post-COVID society to develop new forms of relationship-based practice, for example by practitioners being required to be in the home of carers to provide support and guidance for these complex meetings, despite the move online.

**Conclusion & recommendations**

Foster carers, kinship carers and CPFCs report convenience benefits but also challenges in the light of the move to online Panels. Increased awareness is needed in social work policy and practice of the impact of sharing highly personal and distressing information in Panels, where the power 'asymmetry' (Byrne & Kirwan 2019) between panel members and carers requires adapted forms of relationship-based practice to become embedded.

## AI Integration in Interdisciplinary Child Welfare Practice: Understanding Social Work and Legal Professionals' Experiences

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### Background

AI-based tools have become a part of daily life in many human services systems. However, empirical evidence regarding the experiences of practitioners using them for real-world decisions is scarce. This research gap makes it difficult for educators, policymakers, and practitioners to craft informed responses to AI integration that uphold collective values of ethics and effectiveness. In particular, challenges within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are particularly complex as they sit at the high-stakes interprofessional intersection between social work and the law. This presentation explores and compares social work and legal professionals' exposure to AI, their attitudes toward AI tools, and their views regarding the accuracy required for AI tool reliance in real-world decisions.

### Methods

The study team distributed online surveys to social work students and child welfare legal professionals between September 2024 and February 2025. The surveys contained questions regarding respondents' (1) background, (2) exposure to AI tools, (3) attitudes and knowledge regarding AI, and (4) willingness to rely on tools described in vignettes with varying rates of error. A representative sample of 97 students and 76 legal professionals completed the questionnaire. The research team conducted descriptive, subgroup, thematic and regression analyses to understand patterns in respondent experiences and initial associations between their knowledge, attitudes, and tool intentions.

### Results

Only 16% of legal practitioners reported knowledge that an AI tool had been used in one of their cases, and less than 10% reported using one for their own case decision-making. Less than one-third of those who reported AI use stated that it was discussed in court proceedings. By contrast, nearly all social workers reporting having trying the technology a few times and about half reported using it regularly. Overall attitudes toward AI tools were slightly positive, but respondents had moderate-to-low levels of knowledge and consistently reported concerns about ethical impacts. Most respondents had high standards for AI models' accuracy and level of bias, and legal professionals expressed that model explainability was a crucial component of use in real-world court contexts. Greater exposure to AI was associated with more positive views toward such tools, and female and more experienced professionals were more likely to express intentions to adopt AI-assisted ways of working when appropriate standards were met.



**Implications**

These results suggest that explicit real-world reliance on AI remains fairly low in high-stakes child welfare and legal practice settings despite widespread adoption among emerging professionals. As professionals face the interdisciplinary challenge of addressing AI use in such environments, it is critical that educators and policymakers prepare them for the challenge of ensuring that systems' standards for ethical and accurate high-stakes decision-making are maintained. Further, "shadow AI practices" covertly used by practitioners in many jurisdictions must be brought into the open through rigorous yet safe discussions so that optimal AI integration practices can be understood and advanced in various local, national, and international contexts. Without such efforts, these technologies risk becoming inadequate and invisible substitutes for human judgment that could negatively impact clients' lives.

## Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Power, Support, and Social Justice in Child Welfare Institutions: Co-Developing Knowledge with Youth via Photovoice

Mrs Johanna Wikgren-Roelofs<sup>1</sup>

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Language barriers in child welfare encounters present a complex challenge for social work, particularly for young people who have another mother tongue than the majority population. This qualitative study explores these encounters together with ten young service users in demanding child welfare substitute care in Finland, aiming to co-create knowledge on service needs and barriers for receiving support and care.

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from social work, youth studies and sociology, this study uses the frameworks of intersectionality and Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) to explore how the young service users' lived experiences relate to societal structures and power relations. According to Anis and Malin (2023), the voices of children, youth, and families are often overlooked in favor of professional and institutional perspectives, with limited attention paid to the diversity among the service users in child welfare. This is concerning given evidence that child welfare services in the Nordic countries have not consistently succeeded in improving the well-being of children and youth as intended, underscoring the need for development and change at multiple levels (Pösö, Skivenes, & Hestbæk, 2014).

The aim of the study is to enable service users to identify, visualize, and reflect on their experiences of needs, strengths, and barriers related to institutional child welfare services.

The study uses a participatory approach, positioning young service users as co-researchers. Photovoice is employed to encourage critical reflection and inform policy change. The participants, aged 15 to 17, were recruited from three different institutions across Finland. Data were produced using photographs combined with semi-structured interviews. Photovoice was chosen as a method for its suitability in empowering young people in vulnerable situations to share their perspectives and advocate for change.

Preliminary analysis has identified four themes: power relations and structural conditions, support and care, social justice and access, and advocacy and resistance. These themes highlight young non-majority language speakers' experiences in child welfare and the obstacles they face. Findings will be illustrated using tables, figures, and selected photovoice material. Finally, the result will be discussed in relation to previous research and the frameworks of intersectionality and AOP.

The analysis suggests that co-creating knowledge with young service users provides insight into their lived experiences and needs of support in institutional child welfare settings. The study is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive social work practices, particularly in contexts where language and other social categories create barriers. The implications are relevant for both social work practice and policy and point to the need for further research on power relations, perceived support and care, social justice and participatory methods in child welfare institutional care.

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## Personal advisor practices in Wales: Sharing experiences of co-produced research with care leavers

Dr Phil Smith, Ms Rylea Bowen, Ms Samantha Fitz-Symonds, Ms Sophie Landers, Dr Louise Roberts, Ms Nikita Stokes, Ms Georgia Toman

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### Background and purpose

Each year hundreds of young people leave the care system in Wales (Welsh Parliament, 2024). These young people face significant challenges during this transition from care to independence. In Wales, all young people leaving care are allocated with a personal advisor (PA) whose role it is to support them during the transition. The quality of support they receive can be a critical determinant of their future wellbeing (Prendergast., et al, 2024). Despite being a key source of support, PA practices are not well understood and relatively little is known about how the role is perceived and experienced.

Our presentation reflects on an ongoing study which explores the perceptions, experiences and practices of PAs and young care leavers. The study is being co-produced with care leavers and aims to develop greater understanding about the PA role in Wales; co-produce good practice guidelines with PA teams and young care leavers; and gain insights into the benefits and challenges of co-produced research.

This presentation focuses on the co-produced research process with care leavers.

### Methods

Specifically, we will look to answer one of our central research questions in this presentation - What can we learn from the co-production approach to inform future meaningful research with care experienced peer researchers?

To support our learning, we draw on our discussions from monthly reflection sessions, reflective journal entries, team meetings and individual development plans that were created at the start of the study.

### Findings

Previous literature on co-produced research with care experienced young people has mainly described the process rather than explored the experiences or outcomes for peer researchers (Kelly et al, 2020). In this presentation therefore, we intend to share a descriptive account of our experiences and reflections of the co-produced process. Insights include the social, emotional and personal benefits that have been gained, whilst recognising the power imbalances that exist, alongside the limitations of providing a truly co-produced experience for all. This includes acknowledging the structure of the current academic system, which can make meaningful co-production research more difficult to realise.

**Conclusions and implications**

Through our experiences we provide an important contribution to the field of co-produced research with care experienced young people, offering recommendations for future research of this kind. The young people will share the developmental journeys they have made, and we will highlight the necessity for flexibility during the process. We also suggest how the academic system should be adapted to enable the involvement of more care experienced young people in research of this nature.

The presentation has strongest relevance with the subtheme of the conference – “Linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge”. The peer researchers will highlight how they have informed the design and best approach for data collection in the study. Additionally, the presentation links to “Methodological development, innovation, technologies and capacity building in social work research”. Peer researchers will share the ways in which their involvement has been beneficial on multiple levels, whilst acknowledging the challenges of the work.

## Co-creating a quality of life measure for young people who are adopted (adoptees): knowledge production alongside people with lived experience of child adoption

Mx Nick Burke<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Sheffield

### Background

This research project involves working alongside people with lived experience of child adoption, to co-create a measure of adoptee quality of life which is based on the experiences of young people aged 16-25 who are adopted (adoptees) in England.

There is an established body of qualitative research which highlights the challenges adoptees face, including misrecognition, disenfranchised grief, racism, trauma, and lack of support. In contrast, much of the quantitative research is focused on outcomes which compare child adoption favourably with other child welfare interventions, using measures of emotions and behaviours which are based on the general population. These two areas of research are largely not talking to each other. For example, there is no quantitative research about the effect of access to therapy, or increased openness, on adoptee quality of life, because no appropriate measures exist.

In this context, there is a distinctive role for mixed methods social work research. Combining an emphasis on service user control and epistemic justice, with an understanding of how quantitative methods might be ethically used to benefit people affected by child adoption, I aim to produce findings which are more relevant to adoptees and more useful to social workers.

### Methods

This is a four stage project.

Stage 1 involved establishing an Involvement Group of people affected by child adoption, completing a literature review of existing measures of quality of life, and reviewing the quality of life themes alongside the Involvement Group.

Stage 2 involved developing these themes via focus groups (n = 6), co-facilitated with people affected by adoption.

Stage 3 involved working with the Involvement Group to generate a long list of items for inclusion in a quality of life measure, conducting a series of interviews (n = 9) with adoptees to improve content and face validity, and working with the Involvement Group to shortlist items for the testing stage.

Stage 4 will involve delivering the measure via an online quantitative survey with adoptees aged 16-25 (n ≈ 300), and conducting descriptive and psychometric analyses in order to understand how to optimally measure adoptee quality of life.

**Findings**

Preliminary findings will be presented, as this is an ongoing project. These will include: findings about the process of working alongside people affected by adoption; the experience of co-facilitating focus groups and developing a measure from the ground up; how adoptees shaped the items which in turn improved content and face validity, accessibility and relevance; factor analysis of the preliminary measure; and working alongside people affected by adoption to select the final items for the measure.

**Conclusions**

These are preliminary conclusions, as this is an ongoing project. I aim to situate this mixed methods co-created research project within the interdisciplinary field of adoption research. I hope to add to a growing body of research which shows how methods which put lived experiences at the centre, can produce not just richer data in qualitative research, but also improved validity in quantitative research. Finally, I will present contemporary themes and issues facing 16-25-year-old adoptees in England.

## Co-creating Knowledge for Health, Well-Being and Participation among Seniors in Amsterdam Zuidoost: Participatory Action Research in a Living Lab.

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Urban districts like Amsterdam Zuidoost face increasing population density, superdiversity, and growing inequalities in health and well-being. Among seniors, vulnerability arises from mental and physical health issues, low health literacy, insecure housing, a migration background, social isolation, employment history, or financial debt. Meanwhile, demand for care and social support rises as the population ages, chronic diseases increase, loneliness grows, and poverty persists. These intersecting phenomena affect health and well-being while putting pressure on social and healthcare systems. This project addresses these issues by connecting social work and occupational therapy research and practice through co-creation of knowledge in participatory action research (PAR).

Stichting Kraktie, a community welfare organization in Amsterdam Zuidoost (Southeast Amsterdam), provides a community kitchen, living room, and complementary care and support activities. Its mission is to strengthen resilience and participation among older adults. Over three years, a Professional Doctorate research project has been carried out using PAR in collaboration with seniors, care and welfare professionals, volunteers, shadow workers, local government, and educational institutions. The research focuses on evaluating, innovating, and improving Kraktie's activity programme by embedding co-creation in all stages of the process.

In Kraktie's Community of Practice with a variety of , stakeholders from health and welfare , seniors themselves act as co-researchers. Older adults share lived experience; social work, occupational therapy, and complementary care professionals contribute practice-based knowledge; municipal and research representatives offer policy, funding and systemic perspectives; and educational institutions strengthen research design, evaluation, and pedagogy. This boundary-spanning model generates knowledge that drives service improvement, informs policy, and enhances accessibility of care and support for vulnerable seniors.

From a pedagogical and ethical perspective, the living lab repositions students, educators, practitioners, and community members as co-learners. This stimulates competencies in global citizenship, social justice, and responsiveness to cultural diversity. The interdisciplinary mix promotes holistic insights and innovations that may not emerge within isolated disciplines.

**Reflections highlight critical issues:** power dynamics in which those with formal expertise and institutional authority must share decision-making with older citizens; keeping stakeholders with varied resources engaged; ensuring the knowledge generated is rigorous, actionable, and usable; and bridging the gap between local, situation-specific solutions and broader policy frameworks for healthcare and social work.



The Kraktie living lab shows that co-created knowledge linking research and practice could lead to more effective and equitable services for seniors in vulnerable conditions. The project offers lessons on how living labs contribute to sustainable social impact and community engagement, and invites dialogue on scaling, adaptation, and implementation in diverse urban settings.

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## Older Adults' Self-Descriptions in Harm Reduction Eldercare: Insights for Social Work Practice

Associate Professor Tove Harnett<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Håkan Jönson<sup>1</sup>, Associate Professor Tina Mattsson<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lund University

This paper contributes to interdisciplinary research at the intersection of social work, gerontology, and addiction studies by examining how institutional narratives interact with individual self-understandings in the context of harm reduction eldercare. Social work practice is often structured around predefined categories of need, such as addiction, aging, or homelessness, embedded within broader discursive frameworks that define service eligibility and expected outcomes. While these frameworks help organize social work, they risk oversimplifying the lived realities of those they aim to support.

Focusing on wet eldercare facilities, residential settings for older adults with long-term substance use and care needs, this study aims to investigate how residents narrate their reasons for living in such facilities and how their stories relate to official descriptions of the target group.

Wet eldercare facilities, found for instance in Sweden, Canada, Norway, Denmark, and the UK, challenge conventional treatment paradigms by offering housing and care without requiring sobriety. They represent a low-threshold, harm reduction approach that prioritizes dignity, stability, and inclusion for individuals often excluded from traditional eldercare and addiction services.

The study addresses two research questions: (1) How do residents explain the reasons they live in a wet eldercare facility, and to whom or what do they attribute responsibility? (2) How do their accounts relate to institutional definitions of the facilities' intended population?

Drawing on 42 semi-structured interviews conducted across four Swedish wet eldercare facilities, narrative analysis identified three recurring reasons: "I needed a place to stay," "I drank too much," and "I couldn't manage on my own." These narratives diverged from institutional portrayals of the archetypal older addict with failed treatment attempts, instead revealing diverse pathways into care and complex identity negotiations.

A key finding concerns residents' expressions of agency. While many attributed their entry to external events, such as hospitalizations, evictions, or health crises, they also described choice and control in their daily lives. This ambivalence reflects a relational form of agency, where autonomy is exercised within constraints rather than in opposition to them. Residents often emphasized their ability to make decisions, even if they had had little say in where they lived.

Despite limited control over their placement, several residents reported satisfaction with their living arrangements. The harm reduction model, providing housing, meals, and care without demanding sobriety, was seen as a source of dignity and relief. By foregrounding clients' voices and highlighting the tension between institutional narratives and lived experience, this study offers critical insights for social work practice and policy.

## Misuse of Welfare Transfers or Systemic Adjustment? The Influence of Social Workers' Perceptions of Justice on the Allocation of Poverty Cash Transfers in Poland

Dr Mateusz Trochymiak<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Warsaw University

One of the key ideas of Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory was that street-level workers are those who shape the outcomes of public policy by controlling who gets what and why. When they encounter citizens, they face decision dilemmas and use discretion to adapt the rules to the case in order to close the deal.

Discretion is particularly important in selective cash transfer programs for the poor, which have a long-standing problem of inaccuracy, vulnerability to fraud or in-efficiency. To solve these issue, cash transfers programs to the poor often combined precisely defined in the law eligibility criteria to address the vulnerable (i.e., means-tested, family circumstances, illness) with sanctions based on the behavioral conditionality. From the street-level work perspective, while the former require routine approach, the latter are considered to be "messy" because of the need for an individual assessment of the applicant's history. In daily practice, these procedural guidelines often prove to be contradictory and the criteria require "correction", usually based on the caseworker's sense of what is right and justified in a particular situation. However, the sense of righteousness and social workers morality is something being molded in the organizational and policy framework, alongside the decisional power they have. Therefore, to predict the outcome of the case workers decision, the moral framework in which he/she operate is at least as quite important as the discretion. This paper examines the methods by which social workers in Poland administer welfare cash aid and exercise discretion in their daily activities. In Poland, social workers are tasked with both delivering social work services and determining eligibility for cash transfers to individuals experiencing poverty, as well as overseeing the implementation of sanctions when aid is misused. Previous research found that many social workers in Poland view welfare aid as insufficient to meet recipients' basic needs, with most cash benefits falling below the social minimum standard.

The presented paper is based on the mixed-methods research (qualitative research, ethnography and data analysis) conducted in polish welfare assistance centerers between period 2018 and 2025.

The first goal of presented research was to analyse the moral framework guiding social workers and their views on welfare aid rules, sanctions, and how they assess recipients' behaviour. Second goal, was to show how much discretion social workers have and how they use it, in order to make decision about the financial support that will meet their own moral assessment. Research indicates that social workers may be willing to deviate from established protocols to assist individuals they morally deem as "deserving," even when such actions carry the potential risk of termination. The concluding segment of the research involved examining the decision-making patterns of social workers regarding welfare aid and assessing their influence on the distribution of cash transfers to impoverished populations at the macro level.

## Navigating family ties in the work with unaccompanied foreign minors: the experience and perceptions of legal guardians and social workers

Eugenia Blasetti<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Michela Sempredon<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Stefania Fucci<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Parma

This paper investigates legal guardians' work with unaccompanied foreign minors, by exploring the extent to which legal guardians, as well as social workers, address the involvement of and navigate the relationship with the family of origin of unaccompanied minors. Recent literature has shown that minors often create barriers between their families of origin and legal guardians (Ricucci and Zreg, 2023) and that social workers often fail to involve families of origin, given for granted they do not want or cannot be involved. However, research on this topic remains limited (Oppedal and Idsoe, 2015).

Drawing on empirical research conducted in Italy, this paper analyses how ties with the family of origin are addressed, assessed, promoted and reinterpreted by social workers and legal guardians, drawing from the experience of legal guardians. It also explores the role of social services in mediating the complex relationship between minors, legal guardians and families of origin, highlighting how social work practices can shape the ways in which volunteers and unaccompanied migrants navigate questions of kinship, belonging, and care. Adopting an interdisciplinary perspective at the intersection of social work and migration studies (Boccagni and Righard, 2015) the paper addresses the following research questions:

- (1) How do minors engage with their family of origin and their legal guardian and how do they mediate the relationship between the two?
- (2) How do legal guardians navigate the complex relationship between the minor and the family of origin?
- (3) Do guardians take on familial roles?
- (4) What is the role of social services in this complex network of relationships?
- (5) Which parenting models inform the perspectives of social workers and legal guardians, and how do these models influence their engagement with minors?

The study draws on a set of 20 qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with legal guardians and social workers between September 2024 and May 2025 within the project VOLacross. The qualitative interview data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Findings show a complex and varied landscape in which the perspectives of minors, legal guardians and social workers intersect at multiple levels: from the personal relationships between the minor and the legal guardian, to the more institutional relationship with social services. While minors generally seem to create distance between their families and their guardians, this distance is often interpreted by social workers as a "migration strategy". Within this context, the relationship between minors and their families of origin emerges as highly complex and often marked by significant responsibilities placed on the minors themselves.

By exploring the practices and reasonings that underpin the relationship amongst the minors, their family ties, legal guardians and the institutional role of social workers, this paper contributes to evidence-informed approaches in social work with unaccompanied foreign minors. It sheds light on both challenges and possibilities for developing future policies and practices in social work that are attentive to minors' rights, autonomy, and emotional well-being.

## **Bridging the Gap: Exploring Service Needs of Women with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Who Experience Gender-Based Violence.**

Prof. Anna Przednowek<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Ederer, Leslie Josling, Anna Cook

<sup>1</sup> Nipissing University

### **Introduction**

Women with intellectual (and developmental disabilities) experience disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence, including abuse, assault and partner violence (McConnell & Phelan, 2022). Despite this well-documented need, existing support services remain largely inaccessible. Practitioners working in disability-related services often perceive gender-based violence as outside their professional scope, while those in gender-based violence services frequently report insufficient training and capacity to support the needs of women with intellectual disabilities (Klint et al., 2024). This disjuncture has resulted in a persistent gap between sectors, leaving these women underserved and at continued risk of harm.

### **Methods**

This exploratory qualitative study addresses this gap by centring the lived experiences and service needs of women who identify as survivors of gender-based violence and who have intellectual disabilities. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight diverse women across different service contexts. Data were analyzed using feminist disability theory (Garland-Thomson, 2005), with an emphasis on amplifying participant voices and drawing attention to the structural and systemic dimensions of violence. The study was designed with interdisciplinary relevance, bridging social work, disability studies, and gender-based violence scholarship.

### **Results**

Findings from the interviews revealed complex and multifaceted service needs among survivors, pointing to a pressing need for gender-based violence services that are accessible, flexible, and individually responsive. Participants described experiences of harm not only from perpetrators but also within formal institutions, particularly within the mental health and social services sector, which were often experienced as exclusionary or retraumatizing. These insights highlight the necessity for trauma-informed and anti-ableist service models that actively centre the lived experiences and expertise of women with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, participants underscored the lack of practitioner training at the intersection of disability and gender-based violence, indicating the need for interdisciplinary education, cross-sector collaboration, and structural reform. This includes the reallocation of resources and the development of integrated service models that can meaningfully respond to diverse survivor needs.

## Conclusion

While the study's sample size is small, its findings contribute to a growing body of interdisciplinary, survivor-informed research advocating for integrated, inclusive, and evidence-informed approaches to service provision. Findings emphasizes the need for collaborative reform in both policy and practice, with particular attention to the intersections of disability, gender-based violence, and social work (Klint et al., 2024). By centring the voices of survivors, this research supports the development of responsive systems that are grounded in lived experience and aligned with social work values of equity, justice, and inclusion. Future research should incorporate the perspectives of practitioners working across disability and gender-based violence services to identify opportunities for improved training, service integration, and evidence-informed practice.

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## How can neurodevelopmental profiling of children in Special Guardianship families shape practice for children as they enter school?

Miss Georgia Evans<sup>1</sup>, Dr Amy Paine<sup>1</sup>, Professor Katherine Shelton<sup>1</sup>, Dr Lorna Stabler<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cardiff University

### Background and Purpose

Children under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) or in long-term kinship care often face early adversity - neglect, maltreatment, and placement disruption - that can affect cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural development, with implications for school readiness and later outcomes. Despite SGOs being an increasingly common permanence route in Wales, systematic evidence on children's developmental profiles and educational needs is scarce. Outside of social work, awareness of SGO children is low, meaning they are rarely prioritised for additional resources. Carers frequently report difficulties accessing educational support. This limited focus may stem from assumptions that SGOs provide sufficient stability to offset early adversity, a lack of knowledge about this population, and unclear duties for schools in supporting them. This Nuffield Foundation funded study seeks to generate robust evidence on developmental strengths and challenges to guide early, tailored interventions that promote educational engagement and well-being.

### Methods

Children aged 4–7 years under SGOs or long-term kinship arrangements (n=35) were recruited to participate in two in-person assessment sessions at the Neurodevelopment Assessment Unit (NDAU) at Cardiff University. Children completed a comprehensive battery of social and cognitive assessments informed by the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) Framework (Insel et al., 2010).

Data were triangulated with teacher reports of socioemotional difficulties using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997), alongside structured carer interviews and questionnaires capturing family background, reasons for the kinship arrangement, child behavioural presentation, and existing support arrangements.

The data collected was not used solely for research purposes. An educational psychologist reviewed the results of the tasks that children completed, and a personalised report was sent to the child's teacher with suggested low-level interventions (e.g., games, storybooks, freely available training) that could be used to support the child in the classroom.

### Findings

Data collection and analysis is in progress. At the conference, we will present descriptive statistics on developmental profiles across Cognitive Systems (e.g., language, executive functioning) and Social Processes (e.g., emotion recognition, self-perception) domains as well as rates of socio-emotional difficulties as reported by carers and teachers.



**Conclusions and Implications**

This study offers an innovative, multidisciplinary methodology for linking developmental science with practice. Engaging teachers directly in identifying children with SGOs and providing them with a report raised awareness of this often-overlooked group. Findings will provide the first neurodevelopmental profiling of SGO and kinship children in Wales, supporting early identification of need and targeted intervention design. By embedding co-production and delivering actionable feedback to families and professionals, this project strengthens the bridge between research and practice, informing education practice, social care policy and future longitudinal research into outcomes for this vulnerable population.

## “What Does Safety Mean to You?”: Co-Creating Knowledge on Safety with Older People to Inform Safeguarding Practice and Policy

Professor Sarah Lonbay<sup>1</sup>, Dr Keith Chappel<sup>1</sup>, Mr Paul Hine<sup>3</sup>, Mrs Jess Dougherty, Mr Martin Wilkes<sup>1</sup>, Dr Carole Southall<sup>2</sup>, Ms Claire Nixon<sup>4</sup>, Mr James Babyk-Glynn<sup>5</sup>, Mrs Ileene Byrne<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Oldham Council

Adult safeguarding in social work is often framed in terms of responding to risk, harm, and abuse. However, contemporary practice and policy increasingly emphasises the proactive and preventative approaches that centre the lived experience of those being safeguarded. This requires moving beyond process-driven interventions to approaches that are person-centred, outcomes-focused, and co-produced, as advocated in Making Safeguarding Personal (DHSC, 2025) (UK). Safety is a central concern within adult safeguarding, yet, there is limited research which explores what this concept means to older people, despite safeguarding guidance encouraging practitioners to work with adults to define safety on their own terms (DHSC, 2025).

This presentation reports on a qualitative, arts-based study that brought together older people with care and support needs (n=27) and a multi-disciplinary team to explore meanings of safety and strategies for navigating it in later life. The research explicitly aimed to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and social work practice by employing a co-creation methodology, encouraging participants as active knowledge producers, rather than passive subjects. In this way it also addresses the conference theme, linking research and practice.

Four workshop groups met twice for 2.5 hours of creative sessions, followed by a semi-structured telephone interview six weeks later. The workshops contained metaphor-based discussion, visual arts, and collaborative poetry to elicit rich, multi-modal expressions of safety. This approach enabled participants to articulate nuanced understandings of safety that may have been difficult to capture through conventional methods. Data included field notes, artworks, poems and interview transcripts, all thematically analysed using an iterative process.

Three key themes were identified: 1) Redefining agency with a changing self, 2) Redefining agency in a changing world, and 3) Negotiating safety in place. The participants' insights challenge deficit-based narratives of ageing, reframing older people as active agents who deploy sophisticated safety strategies in relational, physical, and societal contexts. Importantly, safety was not solely about the absence of harm; it was relational, built through trust, familiarity, autonomy, and connection to community.

The co-creation process demonstrated how participatory, arts-based methods can generate actionable knowledge for social work practice. First, it revealed the everyday, strategic, risk management undertaken by older people: knowledge which should inform

safeguarding assessments, care planning, and community safety initiatives. Secondly, it underscored the need for practitioners and policy-makers to respect and build on older people's own definitions and strategies for safety, rather than imposing externally constructed risk frameworks. Thirdly, it highlighted the importance of fostering relational trust and community connectedness as integral components of safeguarding.

This presentation will report on the key findings and implications of this research, as well as providing reflections and insights regarding how the collaborative approach produced findings directly relevant to social work practice and empowered older people who may be most affected by safeguarding interventions to shape the knowledge base that guides them. The findings reported in this presentation are part of a larger NIHR funded project exploring adult safeguarding with older people.

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) (2025). Care and Support Statutory Guidance. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance>

## What does good quality social work practice with families sound like according to experts-by-experience?

Dr Dorottya Cserzo<sup>1</sup>, Dr Rebecca Jones<sup>1</sup>, Prof Donald Forrester<sup>1</sup>, Dr Sophie Wood, Prof David Wilkins<sup>1</sup>, Dr Lorna Stabler<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Children's Social Care Research And Development Centre

The quality of direct social work practice is crucial to engaging families and improving outcomes for children and families (Munro, 2011). This study is the first funded study to research direct practice in children's social care in Wales and the first study we are aware of globally to involve care-experienced people, parents and social workers in evaluating the quality of observed practice with parents.

Research questions:

- i. How consistent are parents, young people and social workers (within groups) in their judgements on the quality of social work practice?
- ii. What is the level of agreement between the three groups on the quality of practice?
- iii. What does each group think is important in defining quality of practice?
- iv. Do the groups identify similar or different factors in making decisions?

In the first stage of the project we gathered recordings of social work family visits in three local authorities in Wales. The participating families had care and support plans or child protection plans in place. Identifiable details were removed, and 17 pseudonymised recordings were selected to be used in the comparative judgment stage.

Comparative Judgement (Pollitt, 2012) is a method developed in education which is well suited to judgements for issues where reliability is hard to achieve, such as direct practice. It determines quality through a process in which "assessors" make judgements about quality between paired examples of "work" (in this case recordings of practice).

We recruited 17 care experienced people, 15 parents with experience of children's services, and 12 social workers as assessors. Each assessor completed 11-17 comparisons of paired recordings providing a short rationale for each judgement. The recordings were compared at least 20 times by each group, producing a reliable ranking and over 600 comparisons in total.

We established within and between-group reliability in judgements about quality of practice through statistical analysis. We also explored the rationales provided in making judgements to identify why individuals and groups made their judgements through qualitative analysis. We ran collaborative sense-making activities to involve the local authorities and assessors in interpreting the findings.

In this talk we will present statistical findings showing how the recordings were ranked, supported by qualitative insights that demonstrate how parents, care experienced people and professionals converged and differed in their views on good practice. We will also reflect on the opportunities and challenges of co-creating knowledge about what constitutes good social work with experts-by-experience from diverse backgrounds.

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## Concepción Arenal's (1820–1893) legacy and the Interdisciplinary and Diverse Roots of Anti-Oppressive Social Work

Dr Miguel Urrea Canales, [Dr María Inés Martínez Herrero](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNED (National University of Distance Education, Spain)

This presentation introduces 19th-century Spanish intellectual Concepción Arenal (1820–1893) as a radical and interdisciplinary pioneer of anti-oppressive social work. While mainstream historical accounts of the profession tend to focus on the contributions of Anglo-American pioneers like Mary Richmond and Jane Addams, Arenal's earlier work already offered a compelling, social justice-oriented vision of social intervention that, we argue, anticipated many key tenets of anti-oppressive and human rights-based practice today.

Arenal's thinking emerged at the intersection of law, criminology, education, theology, journalism, early feminist critique and moral philosophy. Her interdisciplinary worldview, rooted in both lived experience and intellectual activity, allowed her to develop a sharp critique of poverty, institutional violence and moralistic charity. Through her *Manual for the Visitor of the Poor* (1863), a training guide for charity work volunteers, Arenal laid out a model of social intervention grounded in compassion, structural analysis, and radical respect for the poor.

The presentation will consist in three parts:

1. A brief biographical and contextual introduction to Arenal's life, her intellectual influences, and the socio-political landscape of 19th-century Spain.
2. An insight into key extracts of the *Manual for the Visitor of the Poor*, highlighting its anti-oppressive contributions.
3. A concluding reflection on the ongoing importance of reclaiming diverse historical, interdisciplinary figures like Arenal for contemporary social work research, practice and education, especially as the field continues to grapple with its identity, ethical commitments, and role in an era of neoliberal policy, inequality and professional burnout.

Methodologically, this is a historically grounded, conceptual presentation based on textual analysis of primary sources (Arenal's writings) and engagement with contemporary social work theory (e.g. Tendam, 2020; Thompson, 2001). The *Manual* is used as a case study to illuminate Arenal's interdisciplinary and anti-oppressive worldview and pedagogy of social intervention, her radically respectful approach to helping, and her vision of charity as a vehicle for structural transformation.

Given all the above, this paper aligns with the ECSWR 2026 main theme of interdisciplinary research and contributes to Subthemes 4 (social work history and identity), 6 (theorising social work), and 7 (linking research and practice). It underscores the importance of historical and interdisciplinary research, capable of enriching contemporary practice and expanding the profession's genealogy beyond dominant (and often Anglocentric) narratives.

This is as revisiting Arenal invites to understand social work not as a linear evolution from charity to professionalism, but as a plural, ethically grounded field in which critical and interdisciplinary voices and contributions like hers have always existed. Exploring her legacy moreover reminds that the profession's emancipatory potential lies in the ability to challenge injustice in the present, but also in how we remember and build knowledge from the past.

**Keywords:** Concepción Arenal, anti-oppressive practice, interdisciplinary research, social work history, human rights.

## Navigating Support for Male Victims of Interpersonal Violence: Professional Discretion and Organisational Logics in Swedish Social Services

Associate Professor Johanna Sundqvist<sup>1</sup>, Associate Professor Marie-Louise Snellman, Associate Professor Jens Lindberg, Associate Professor Björn Högberg

<sup>1</sup> Umeå University

### Background and purpose

Although Swedish Social Services are legally mandated to support all victims of interpersonal violence (IPV), male victims remain underrepresented in both practice and research. Prior studies have shown that gender norms and organisational structures contribute to unequal access to support (Huntley et al., 2019). Addressing this gap, the present study contributes new empirical knowledge on how support for male victims is understood and delivered within the Swedish Social Services. The study explores how social work professionals describe and enact support, and how organisational conditions influence its provision. Drawing on both theories of professions and organisational theory, the study applies concepts such as professional discretion, institutional logics, and organisational structures to examine how support practices are shaped and constrained in everyday social work.

### Methods

This study is based on six focus group interviews with statutory and therapeutic social workers in three Swedish municipalities. The interviews were conducted using vignette-based scenarios and semi-structured questions. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, informed by Hasenfeld's theory of human service organisations (2010) and Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucracy (1980).

### Findings

Four overarching themes were identified. First, professional practice and discretion highlight how social workers emphasise voluntariness, relational engagement, and motivational interviewing. Participants described how mistrust, shame, and masculine norms often hinder men's help-seeking, and how they adapt their approaches to build trust and validate men's experiences—frequently exercising discretion in navigating policy and client needs. Second, organisational structures and logics reveal how functionally divided support systems and limited resources pose significant challenges. Support for men often relies on improvised solutions due to the lack of gender-inclusive shelters and specialised services. While collaboration between units within the social services is seen as essential, it is sometimes hindered by structural boundaries and competing institutional logics.

Third, support design and accessibility capture the range of available interventions, including psychosocial support, temporary housing, and referrals to psychologists. However, participants noted that access to protected housing and practical support is more limited for men.



Finally, gendered norms and recognition examine how societal and institutional beliefs about masculinity and victimhood shape assessments and decisions. Men are often perceived as less credible victims, particularly in cases involving mutual violence or custody disputes. Social workers expressed a need for more inclusive tools and training to better identify and support male victims of IPV.

**Conclusions and implications**

This study highlights how a complex interplay of professional discretion, organisational boundaries, and gendered expectations shapes support for male victims of IPV. While social workers strive to provide equitable support, structural and cultural constraints limit their capacity to do so. The findings emphasise the need for policy and practice reforms that address gender bias, enhance access to targeted interventions, and support professionals in navigating organisational complexity. The study contributes to the conference theme by offering empirically grounded insights into challenges and opportunities in contemporary social work practice.

## Practice Creativity, Discretion, and Research.

Professor Tony Evans<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Royal Holloway University of London

### Background and Purpose of the Presentation

Creativity is central to social work practice, and professional discretion provides the space within which it can flourish. However, in a context of increasing demands for practice to comply with evidence-based models and guidelines, it is critical to examine the relationship between discretion, innovation, evidence, research, and creativity.

### Main Points of the Presentation

The European Commission frames social innovation as a process involving interventions evaluated by research teams and services specified in guidelines handed down to practitioners for implementation. This approach views practice innovation as top-down and privileges quantitative evaluation research designed to test and validate.

Such a model leaves little room for professional discretion and creativity. Discretion is often mistrusted, and creativity feared as non-compliance. Yet, discretion and creativity are essential for adapting general models of intervention and abstract guidelines to real-world contexts. Moreover, discretion is a fundamentally creative space where practitioners and service users negotiate needs and co-create services.

Discretion and creativity challenge top-down notions of evidence and raise questions about the value of large-scale, slow research strategies. They call for faster, small-scale, and more networked modes of research, evidence generation, and knowledge exchange. In doing so, practice researchers must address concerns that service developments outside formal research and implementation systems may atomise practice, lead to constant reinvention, and struggle to engage strategically with social issues.

In response to these concerns, I outline local and situated approaches to evaluating innovations, facilitating knowledge exchange, and networking to disseminate good practice. I also explore the use of strategic reflection to identify links between creative service responses to private problems and collective action on public issues.

### Engagement with Conference Theme

This presentation is centrally concerned with the nature of research and evidence, and how they can inform practice and policy. It particularly engages with the challenges and opportunities for social work research, practice, policy, and education in contemporary contexts (subtheme 1), the role of social work research (subtheme 6), and how it can explore the impact and effectiveness of social work practice (subtheme 3) through linking research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge (subtheme 7).

### Conclusions and Implications for Practice, Policy, and Further Research

The presentation seeks to revalue discretion not merely as a safety valve or workaround, but as a site of creativity—co-creating new ways of working and knowing with clients and communities. It will also present approaches to capturing and sharing these evolving practices and identify ways in which structural issues encountered in practice can be recognised and translated into structural action.

# Naming the Unspoken: Social and Emotional Consequences of Child-to-Mother Violence among Arab-Palestinian Women in Israel

Dr. Raghda Alnabilsy, Prof. Tal Meler, Dr. Niveen Hassan

<sup>1</sup> Ruppin Academic Center, <sup>2</sup> Ruppin Academic Center

## Background and Purpose

This study examines the phenomenon of adult children's violence against their mothers in Arab-Palestinian society in Israel, a relatively rare topic in academic research and one of socio-cultural importance. The study contributes to the expansion of the body of knowledge regarding gender-based violence of children towards their mothers (CMV), which is sorely lacking, particularly within the context of Arab-Palestinian society in Israel.

## Methods

Using 36 qualitative in-depth interviews with Arab-Palestinian mothers who had experienced violence at the hands of their adult children.

## Findings

Three main themes were identified: the difficulty to conceptualize and name the violence due to shame and silence; types of verbal, physical and economic violence used by the children; and the violence's emotional, social and status-related implications on the mothers. The study exemplifies how the conflict between the cultural expectations of the patriarchy and the mother's main role on the one hand and the objective injury on the other creates great tension and leads to a sense of alienation, subjugation and social ostracizing, in addition to serious emotional implications for the mother.

## Conclusions and Implications

The first, important stage in dealing with children-to-mother violence in Arab-Palestinian society is to provide the problem with a clear name and recognize its existence. This recognition is essential for the breaking of the barriers of shame and silence which prevent the mothers from expressing their distress and receiving proper assistance. Without wide social and cultural recognition of the phenomenon, the violence will remain vague and hidden, and significant intervention will be prevented. Based on the findings of the present study, there is a deep need for the development of assistance programs sensitive to the complex social and patriarchal contexts of Arab-Palestinian society, allowing mothers to express their distress within a safe, supportive framework, and receive help in strengthening their status and providing them with emotional empowerment. It is important to promote cooperation between the education, health and social services systems in order to provide a general, holistic response and raise community awareness of the phenomenon while creating significant social change. In addition, it is important to continue conducting serious research examining the phenomenon and the effectiveness of the interventions, in order to improve the response provided to victimized mothers. Therefore, dealing with violence against mothers necessitates a system-wide approach involving not only individual responses but also general social change and recognition of the problem as structural and gender-related.

**Keywords:** child-to-mother violence, domestic violence, gender and patriarchy, Arab-Palestinian mothers, consequences

## Disasters and the Need for Glocal Social Work

Dr Panagiotis Pentaris<sup>1</sup>, Professor Janet Walker

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Social work is a dynamic profession that requires the ability to adapt to complex and diverse circumstances. Its effectiveness is not only determined by its underlying principles and values but also by its application in different contexts. With changing societal, familial, and individual needs, social work must rethink its core knowledge and skills to better respond to these changes. This is why many higher education institutions offering social work programs are now internationalizing their curricula to integrate responsive, transformational, and socially just frameworks.

The need for international social work as a specialized field that promotes comparative measures to address contemporary social problems is increasing. This paper reports on and explores the learning from the online workshops held in March and June 2022, and February 2023 with over 500 social work attendees from over 18 countries. The workshops were supported by the European Association of Schools of Social Work and the University of Greenwich, London, UK. The aim of the workshops has been to facilitate an international dialogue about the need for international social work in social work education and research, and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. This paper highlights the need and demand for glocal social work and examines how these specialized skills can be integrated into social work curricula and training. By doing so, social work can move towards more sustainable futures and better respond to the changing needs of society.

Glocal social work involves applying social work knowledge and skills across different countries, cultures, and contexts. It requires an understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities in different regions and an appreciation of diverse perspectives. This specialized field aims to promote social justice, human rights, and equality while addressing the unique needs of individuals, families, and communities.

In summary, the paper will explore the intersection of global influences and local social work practices in the face of modern challenges - e.g. neoliberalism, pandemics, and managerialism. The talk will argue that glocalisation—a framework combining global perspectives with local realities—offers a vital lens to rethink social work practice. Social workers must develop a nuanced understanding of how these global forces intersect with local communities to effectively assess and address needs, ensuring equity and justice.

# Institutionalising First-Line Management in Social Service Organisations in Sweden: Navigating Contemporary Challenges

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## Background and purpose

Across Europe, social service organisations are under growing pressure to balance efficiency, accountability, and client-centred care. In Sweden, reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) have reshaped managerial work at every level, presenting new challenges and opportunities for leadership. While first-line managers are recognised as crucial for service quality and staff well-being, far less is known about how senior managers define and institutionalise these roles in this changing context. This study investigates how senior managers in a large Swedish municipality construct the meaning of first-line management and embed it into organisational practice.

## Methods

The study draws on qualitative methods combining semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Eighteen senior managers from different units (elderly care, disability care, health care, individual and family services) were interviewed for 50–85 minutes each. The interviews explored how they perceived and shaped the role of first-line managers, and how they experienced a newly launched leadership development initiative. Internal organisational documents, including role descriptions and programme materials, were analysed to contextualise and triangulate findings. Data were analysed thematically, informed by Smircich and Morgan's (1982) concept of the "management of meaning" and institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

## Findings

Two interrelated processes emerged: amplifying and standardising the role of first-line managers. Amplification involved framing first-line managers as central to addressing rising service demands, staff turnover, and recruitment challenges, thereby legitimising investments internally and externally. Standardisation was pursued through unified role descriptions, collaborative processes for defining responsibilities, and initiatives designed to develop a shared managerial identity or "we-feeling" across functions. Taken together, these processes appear to contribute to the development of a shared and institutionally embedded understanding of first-line management within the organisation.

## Conclusions and implications

This study shows that senior managers in Swedish social services act not only as strategic decision-makers but also as meaning-makers who shape organisational culture and identity. By combining symbolic work—such as framing and justification—with structural work, including unified role descriptions and leadership development initiatives, they embed a shared understanding of first-line management that addresses the current challenges of rising demand, workforce instability, and accountability pressures.

These findings highlight both the challenges and opportunities facing social work organisations today: managerial approaches should explicitly address the tension between neoliberal efficiency and welfare-state values if they are to strengthen leadership capacity and sustain service quality. The research also provides policymakers and practitioners with insights for developing leadership practices that strike a balance between efficiency and professional and ethical commitments in contemporary social service contexts.

**Keywords:** Organisational Change; Social Services; Leadership in Social Work; First-Line Management; Leadership Development; New Public Management; Sweden; Institutional Theory.

## Balancing Independence and Vulnerability: Experiences of Home Social Services Users Ageing Solo

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### Background

Ageing in place in many countries is a preferred long-term care option by older people, their relatives, and social policymakers. However, while ageing in place offers various benefits, such as stronger engagement with the community, better emotional well-being, and overall higher quality of life, it is also associated with certain risks, such as social isolation, higher levels of loneliness, and overall faster decline of mental and cognitive functions, especially for those ageing alone.

### Aim and Methods

The paper aims to explore the ageing in place experiences of older adults who live alone and use home social services, meaning that they require a certain level of support in their everyday lives. In total, 32 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Lithuanian and Italian older adults recruited through convenience/ snowball sampling were conducted from February to June 2025.

### Findings

Research revealed three themes related to the experiences of ageing solo as a home social service user: 1) the circumstances and perceptions of ageing solo, 2) coping strategies that reconcile sense of autonomy with vulnerability, and 3) the role of home social services and care workers. Ageing alone encompasses balancing enjoying the freedom, sense of autonomy and control, with recognising one's own vulnerabilities and limitations. To maintain independence, older adults employed a range of coping strategies, including anticipating potential risks and making proactive practical adjustments to daily routine to avoid them, creatively adapting one's routines to match current physical abilities, maintaining a (flexible) daily routine to avoid boredom and create a sense of purpose, and having something to look forward to as a way to remain emotionally grounded and hopeful. Care workers had a very unique and important role in the narratives of older adults. In all cases, they were seen as vital to maintaining a sense of independence, an essential source of both physical and emotional support, buffering against the isolating effects of living alone and ageing with health limitations.

### Conclusions and Implications.

These findings highlight the dual nature of solo ageing in place: while independence is highly valued, it is inevitably intertwined with vulnerability. Results also emphasise the invaluable role of social work and home social services in supporting older adults' ability to age in place, not only through practical assistance but also by fostering relationships that enable resilience and improve quality of life. By amplifying the voices of older adults, this research contributes to interdisciplinary debates on how social work can inform practice, co-create solutions, and shape inclusive policies for ageing societies. Implications for ageing in place, social work practice, and future research will be further discussed in the paper.



## Preparing students for research-informed practice: On the impact of classroom-related emotions on social work students' research orientation

Prof.Dr. Annabelle Bartelsen-Raemy<sup>1</sup>, Prof.Dr. Daniel Gredig, Dr. Wim Nieuwenboom

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### Background and purpose

Research-informed practice is based on the assumption that professional social work practice draws on scientific knowledge. The reference to research in practice is a call for research to be considered valuable, important and relevant for practice. This is referred to as research orientation. Social work education therefore has a role to play in shaping the research orientation of future professionals. However, research confirmed that social work students are reluctant to engage with research and research courses and students' research orientation remain at a moderate level. Findings also suggest that students' research orientation is associated with class-related emotions (Pekrun et al., 2005) such as fear of research courses, statistics anxiety or computer anxiety (Gleeson et al., 2023). In stark contrast, however, positive emotions and their impact on research orientation have remained unexplored to date.

Against this background and building on former research among first-year BSW students (Gredig, Heinsch, & Bartelsen-Raemy, 2022) this study aimed to assess how students' research orientation evolved over the span of a research course in their first semester and whether and to what extent students' classroom-related emotions affected their research orientation in this time span.

### Methods

Employing a longitudinal design, we assessed first-year students' research orientation (using the Gregory Research Beliefs Scale GRBS) in the first session and at the end of the series of lectures in their research course. We also assessed students' class-related emotions – enjoyment, boredom, anxiety – after the first five sessions of the course using the Academic Emotions Questionnaire. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, latent growth curve modelling, and latent class analysis.

### Findings

We included 302 first-year BSW students, aged 19 to 50 with a mean of 25.3 (SD=6.1) years; 58% identified as female 20% as male, 22% did not specify; 52% were studying full time and 48% part time.

On entering the programme, students (n=279) reached a mean of 4.74 on the GRBS. After the series of lectures, their mean was 4.58 (n=229) and at the end of the course, their mean was 3.85. (n=151). However, the latent class analysis revealed that this was not a general and uniform decrease: 5% of the participants reported continuously and significantly decreasing scores on the GRBS (from 3.80 to 2.96). For 71%, the scores on the GRBS remained stable on a higher level, varying between 4.61 and 4.45. A group of 24% of the participants reported increasing scores on the GRBS (from 5.33 to 5.49), reflecting growth



in their research orientation over the span of the course. Analysis showed further that the initial level of research orientation and the evolution of class-related enjoyment and anxiety predicted students' level of research orientation at the end of the series of lectures.

**Conclusions**

Class-related emotions have an impact on the development of participants' research orientation in the expected direction. We conclude that to strengthen their research orientation, lecturers should not only facilitate the reduction of anxiety among students in the classroom to a manageable level and also take other emotions into account.

## Wellbeing among people living with severe mental illness (SMI): implications for social work

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### Background and purpose

With its roots in positive psychology, wellbeing is a two-dimensional concept including both the absence of illness and the presence of positive mental health. It offers a valuable perspective for individuals with severe mental illness (SMI) by emphasizing that positive mental health may coexist with illness. The aim of this study was to investigate the distribution of wellbeing categories within this population and to examine associated characteristics of disability, needs, and recovery.

### Methods

This quantitative study employed four validated self-report measures: wellbeing (MHC-SF), disability (WHODAS 2.0), needs (CAN), and recovery (QPR-SWE-16). Participants (N = 59), aged 18 years and older, living independently with housing support due to mental illness completed the questionnaires in one-to-one interviews. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via a phone call and began with few background questions concerning the format of housing support. In majority of cases, interviews were completed within one occasion, a handful of research participants needed two different interview appointments to complete the questionnaires. The data analysis combined descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA to test for group differences.

### Findings

The distribution of wellbeing categories was as follows: flourishing (23%), moderately mentally healthy (60%), and languishing (17%). Flourishing individuals showed significantly fewer unmet needs compared to languishing individuals ( $M = 0.3$ ,  $SE = 0.2$  and  $M = 3.4$ ,  $SE = 0.7$ , respectively) and the effect was large (Hedges'  $g = 1.50$ ). A significant difference was found in recovery, with flourishing individuals reporting higher scores ( $M = 71$ ,  $SE = 2.6$ ) compared to languishing individuals ( $M = 43$ ,  $SE = 3.0$ ) and the effect was large (Hedges'  $g = 3.46$ ). No significant differences were observed between wellbeing categories and disability; descriptive data indicated a consistent trend toward lower disability in the flourishing group as compared to the languishing group. The results indicate that the highest disability scores for languishing individuals were observed in life activities and participation. The lowest disability scores for flourishing individuals were found in the areas of mobility and self-care.

### Conclusions and implications

The observed results emphasize the importance of addressing levels of wellbeing among people with SMI. The relatively high percentage of languishing individuals in the groups of people with SMI provides important insights into the direction of social work interventions. Thanks to its capability and strength-based approaches, social work offers unique tools that can be mobilized to strengthen people with SMI in their positive mental health. As such, social work can pave the way for increasing wellbeing among people with SMI.

## Between Appreciation and Devaluation: Positioning of Syrian Refugees in the Family Reunification Process (dissertation project – working title)

Veronika Rosenberger<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of Tuebingen

### Background and purpose

Family reunification represents an exemplary field where politics, law, human rights, and social work intersect. A recent example is the two year suspension of family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, adopted in June 2025 despite human rights objections. Such restrictions not only prolong family separation but also directly shape the context in which social work operates.

Social work carries a legal, ethical, and professional mandate to act in the best interests of the child. Particularly in child and youth welfare, social workers play a central role in supporting young people throughout the reunification process.

Despite this central role, there remains limited empirical research on how refugees themselves experience the process of family reunification and how they interpret the involvement of social work. This study seeks to address this gap by examining these perspectives and also by analysing how prolonged transnational family life reshapes family roles and perceptions.

### Methods

The data is based on 23 narrative interviews with refugees from Syria across Germany, focusing on their experiences with the process of parental reunification. The analysis followed an open, exploratory approach in line with Grounded Theory as outlined by Strauss and Corbin. In the further methodological approach of the dissertation, a situation analysis by Clarke will be carried out in order to make processes of positioning visible.

### Preliminary results and implications for social work

Preliminary findings indicate that social workers may be perceived as substitute family figures, becoming important sources of trust and care. Yet social work operates within a field of tension: while providing essential support, it can also contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities through professional expectations and categorizations. These dynamics are shaped by broader institutional structures, which create conditions of dependency. Expectations of neediness, for instance, may restrict young people's agency and limit their self-determination in coping with the reunification process within this structural framework. The preliminary findings suggest a tension between social work's professional and ethical mandate and politically defined needs. The two logics overlap in practice, with social work can reproducing expectations influenced by policy frameworks.

The presentation introduces a preliminary typology developed within the dissertation, focusing on the dimensions of agency and the ways in which young people navigate external expectations. Based on these findings, the study aims to develop practice-oriented recommendations for social work in order to support young people throughout the family reunification process.

## Policy responses to the "campaign against child removal"—tensions between trust and securitization in social services

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### Background and Aim

In recent years, rumors have been circulating about how Swedish social services wrongfully remove children from families with immigrant/Muslim origin. In public discourse, this is known as "the campaign against child removal". This new criticism bears similarities to established tropes about social services that have surfaced in news media and public discourse over the years. In so-called celebrated child abuse scandals, social services have either been criticized for failing to interfere when parents cannot care for their children, or for being overly zealous in cases where intervention proved unwarranted.

While criticisms against social services were often treated as legitimate in the past, recent concerns are regarded as problematic. The contents of criticisms appear exaggerated and often proven false. Moreover, the spread of such false information has been interpreted as deliberate, originating from forces attempting to harm social services and Swedish society.

This paper aims to investigate policy responses to the campaign against child removal, examining how it has been construed by the Swedish government, authorities and organizations.

### Methods

The aim is pursued through discourse analysis of documents from the Swedish government, governmental authorities and organizations active in the welfare sector, including trade unions. 23 documents were analyzed (eight official decisions/guidelines, three online notices, two reports, six press releases, two blog posts and one op-ed article). The analysis follows the "What's the problem represented to be?" approach (Bacchi 2009), aiming to identify underlying assumptions related to the problem and consider alternative relevant discourses.

### Findings

Two main problem representations are identified: the first casting the new criticism against social services as a trust problem, the second as a security problem.

The documents emphasize that lack of trust may make parents avoid seeking needed help. This problem is discussed as separate from social services' historical challenges. Solutions focus on information and knowledge, mostly in abstract terms.

The dominant perspective frames the criticism as a security problem. False and misleading information is portrayed as disinformation, intentionally spread by forces trying to harm social services and Swedish society in general. Such forces are connected to immigrants and Muslims in Sweden. The criticism is described in terms of a crisis within the context of riots, terrorism, Russia's attacks on Ukraine, and international threats. Solutions to the security

problem are typically repressive: harsher sentencing, more security guards at social service organizations and introducing new crime categories like offending public officials.

### **Conclusion**

The policy discourse does not put the new criticism against social services into the context of certain alternative discourses that are otherwise prominent in public debate. Other expressions of criticism against social services originating from other sources are ignored. Similarly the documents are void of considerations that ethnic majorities and Muslims in Swedish society might face discrimination and have less trust in majority society's institutions.

In conclusion, there exists a tension between security and trust that may impact on the quality of services. Repressive responses to criticism may be counterproductive for social service organizations efforts to gain trust from important target groups.

## Young People's views on welfare services and practitioners: Insights from an Italian Survey

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### Background and purpose

Children's and young people's perspectives are crucial for understanding their relationships with social workers. While research exploring children's experiences with practitioners has predominantly focused on child protection, it has highlighted the complexity of young people's perspectives, which are shaped by individual trajectories, fragmented information and collective narratives (Stabler et al., 2019; Winter, 2010; Weitz, 2024). However, quantitative studies remain limited, and there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding children's and young people's views on social services more broadly, as well as on the role of practitioners. This study aims to address this knowledge gap by examining how adolescents engage with welfare services, focusing on which services they have accessed, their level of satisfaction with the support they have received, and their perceptions of social workers' and other professionals' interventions.

### Methods

This study is based on a secondary analysis of data from a national research project in Italy. This project involved a large-scale survey administered to 6,341 secondary school students in Northern Italy. Specifically, the study focused on the following areas: (1) type of service accessed (e.g. school counselling, municipal social services, family counselling centre); (2) practitioners involved (e.g. social worker, psychologist, teacher); (3) reasons for seeking help and type of support received (practical or emotional); (4) satisfaction with the support received; and (5) perceptions of professionals' attitude (e.g. listening skills, empathy, trustworthiness, involvement, encouragement). Descriptive analysis was conducted.

### Findings

The data show that 25% of adolescents accessed services. The most frequently accessed services were school psychological counselling (10.5%), mental health services (7.6%) and family counselling centres (6%). Young people primarily turned to psychologists (29%) and doctors (19.2%) to address their needs, while contact with social workers (5.8%) was comparatively limited. Overall, most respondents and their families sought one or more services primarily for psychological issues (8%), illness or disability (6%), and school-related problems (6%). Of the adolescents who reported contact with a service, 15.7% did so despite not declaring any difficulties for themselves or a family member, while 36.5% sought help in response to their own difficulties and 32% did so in relation to a difficulty experienced by a family member or significant other. The support received was perceived as being mainly emotional (54.2%) rather than practical (35.7%). Overall, adolescents expressed a positive view of professionals' attitudes, which was associated with higher levels of satisfaction with the help provided.

**Conclusion and implications**

This study offers a comprehensive insight into young people's experiences with welfare services and practitioners. Overall, adolescents report largely positive experiences. Support services connected to schools are perceived as more accessible and valued, whereas experiences with social workers remain more limited. These findings call for reflection on how social work services might strengthen their proximity and accessibility, while fostering a more positive image of the support they can provide.

## Bridging Epistemic Pluralism with Professional Humility in the Context of Collaborative Practice: Finding Ways to Integrate Knowledge, Values and Skills

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<sup>1</sup> Universit   de Moncton

The complexity of problems encountered in social work practice often entails professionals working collaboratively to obtain a global understanding of the situation and to identify solutions in a collective effort to implement interventions that are relevant and adapted to the context (Lanteigne & Lancu, 2020). Collaborative work is described in literature as an interactive process to achieve common goals which requires: negotiating roles, responsibilities and tasks; integrating disciplinary knowledge and experience; developing strategies and using styles that facilitate communication; establishing protocols to promote safe spaces with regards to professional and personal identities of team members (Aiguier, 2020; Boland et al., 2021; Bordeleau & LeBlanc, 2019; Savard et al., 2013; Schot, Tummers & Noordegraaf, 2020). Members of interprofessional (IP) teams must come to an agreement regarding knowledge integration to avoid problems (Bordeleau & LeBlanc, 2019; Kosremelli Asmar & Wacheux, 2007; Ndibu Muntu Keba Kebe et al., 2020). Some challenges when collaborating with various professionals from multiple disciplines refer to a diversity of epistemic stances which influence their views on intervention alongside professional centrism (Cootes et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2013; Williams, 2006). In order to better meet the needs of service users, the contribution of professionals from various disciplines is essential because: « best health practice lies beyond the boundaries of a single professional group, incorporating multiple perspectives, skills and knowledge » (Cootes et al., 2022, p.258). There are also advantages that are highlighted for professionals doing collaborative work in health and social service settings (e.g., knowledge, values, and skills set from multiple professionals as well as greater support and professional satisfaction) and for organizations (Bordeleau & Leblanc, 2017; Morin et al., 2018). This presentation is based on a study conducted in New Brunswick, Canada on the experiences of IP collaboration of health and social service professionals that aimed at: understanding the situations that require interprofessional collaboration in various practice settings; exploring professionals' experiences with collaboration; identifying strategies to facilitate collaborative work; and, grasping ethical issues (confidentiality, competence, power relations, linguistic equity, etc.) related to IP collaboration. The qualitative study was rooted in social constructivism and in an interpretive paradigm (Gauthier & Bourgeois, 2016). Participants who took part in this study were health and social service professionals (n=35) from seven regions of the province. Both semi-directed interviews and field notes were used as well as the researchers' journal for data collection. This phase of the study ended in 2021. Thematic analysis was employed to process the data obtained (Paill   & Mucchielli, 2016). Results presented highlight key findings that include the challenges of collaboration, the strategies to facilitate collaboration in addition to the ways of improving collaborative practice. The findings of this study provide valuable information that can inform social work practice, education and research. Practice can be enhanced by new models of collaboration. Findings can also guide future research and foster collaboration among interdisciplinary team members. The results of this study can guide post-secondary education or professional training when developing curriculum, choosing pedagogical methods, and identifying learning outcomes.



## Professionals rethinking Knowledge in Social Care: Welfare Technology and Epistemic Agency among service users with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Digitalization is taking place at a rapid pace in social care organizations in Sweden. Swedish social care organizations for people with disabilities are increasingly implementing welfare technologies (WT) to improve welfare services for both professionals and service users.

This study explores the impact of WT on the epistemic agency and epistemic (in)justice of service users with intellectual disabilities (ID) and/or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) within Swedish social care settings. WT refers to digital tools that promote participation and autonomy.

This is a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews with social care professionals (n=11), unit managers (n=3), and organizational developers (n=2), along with 4 group interviews involving social care professionals (n=10) and unit managers (n=3) over six months in 2023 and two months in 2024 across four municipalities.

The findings show that WT can significantly influence the epistemic agency of service users, either enabling or disabling their capacity to produce, share, and utilize knowledge. Key themes were identified as gatekeeping actions, creating physical barriers, creating knowledge barriers, and improving awareness. This study highlights the dual role of WT in shaping social interactions and power dynamics, emphasizing the need for professionals to develop digital competencies and engage in ethical reflection. By fostering collaborative knowledge creation and addressing epistemic injustices, WT can enhance service users' autonomy and participation in their care.

## Between Intuition and Algorithm: Artificial Intelligence in the Perception of Social Workers

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The aim of this presentation is to discuss the findings of an empirical study exploring social workers' attitudes toward the presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in everyday professional practice. The study deliberately moves away from the dominant AI discourse that focuses on “strong” metaphysical questions regarding AI's agency or the possibility of replacing humans—questions that often overlook more practical, experience-based visions and insights stemming from real interactions between people and technology (Suchman, 2023; Cugurullo, 2024).

Rather than asking whether AI can replace human workers, this research focuses on how AI is, or might be, present in day-to-day social work practice. The presentation addresses several key research areas:

- the level of knowledge and experience social workers have with AI tools;
- their assessments of the potential use of AI in everyday professional tasks, such as documentation, data analysis, or client interaction;
- perceived barriers and challenges related to the implementation of new technologies;
- concerns regarding decision-making automation, the loss of relational dimensions of work, and algorithmic errors.

The analysis accounts for variations in respondents' attitudes based on their length of professional experience, age, job position, and the size of the locality in which their social assistance institution operates.

At the time of writing (September 2025), fieldwork is ongoing and scheduled to be completed by the end of October 2025. The study employs a mixed sampling strategy: a purposive sample of social workers from selected social welfare centers, as well as a census approach in which a survey was distributed to all social welfare centers in three Polish regions. Data are collected using the CAWI method. The research is conducted by a team from the Faculty of Sociology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, in collaboration with the Regional Center for Social Policy in Poznań, which supports the fieldwork phase. The practical implications of this study include identifying the level of acceptance of AI in social work and the factors shaping this acceptance—both those facilitating and those hindering the implementation of new technologies. Such knowledge can inform the development of tailored support mechanisms for social workers, including mentoring, coaching, practical training, and the creation of accessible educational materials. The main directions for further research involve in-depth qualitative analyses, with particular attention to students and young social workers who—being the most technologically literate—may play a crucial role in integrating AI into social work practice.

## The formal and informal: social workers' use of large language models in Swedish social services

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Among the latest developments in welfare services is the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), particularly large language models (LLMs) in the form of chatbots, virtual conversational agents designed to simulate human dialogue and assist with tasks, queries, or decision-making. The integration of LLMs into social work organizations presents both opportunities and risks. They may support social workers in reflecting on dilemmas during client assessments or guide citizens through the process of applying for social assistance. They also pose ethical dilemmas such as transparency in decision-making, algorithmic bias, and concerns around data access and privacy.

However, unlike traditional digital technologies such as documentation systems, LLM use is not confined to formal, organizationally sanctioned implementations. Increasingly, chatbots also enter practice informally, as social workers experiment with freely available platforms such as ChatGPT, Copilot, or Gemini. With private accounts, they may consult legislation, reflect on practice dilemmas, or draft case notes, introducing new complexities for organizational governance and professional accountability. In this sense, AI and LLMs are seeping into social work in ways that circumvent formal strategies, complicating efforts to regulate, evaluate, or support their use within welfare services.

By using social assistance as a case, and introducing concepts such as delegation and domestication, this paper discusses the formal and informal uses of LLMs by social workers in Swedish social services and its significance for professional discretion. We define formal use as organizationally integrated AI solutions, often customized or procured systems, while informal use captures the individual and creative ways social workers employ private AI tools in everyday reasoning and client-related tasks. Whereas formal use tends to rely on explicit knowledge, informal use is grounded in tacit knowledge.

A key issue arising from this formal/informal dichotomy is the participation of social workers in the development, adaptation, and evaluation of technologies. Scholars have long cautioned that without practitioner involvement, digital tools risk aligning primarily with organizational needs, efficiency and managerial control, rather than professional practices rooted in tacit, relational, and client-centered approaches. Absent such involvement, social workers may experience technostress, disempowerment, or resistance, as tools designed to support them instead impose additional burdens. Ensuring alignment with professional practices is therefore essential if LLMs are to strengthen rather than undermine the ethical and relational dimensions of social work.

In relation to the conference theme Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence-informed practice and policy, this paper demonstrates how attention to dual modes of LLM use can inform strategies for integrating AI into welfare

services. It further highlights how LLMs are already shaping practice on the ground in ways that elude formal governance. We argue that interdisciplinary research bridging technological innovation, organizational policy, and social work practice is critical to the development of chatbot applications that are not only efficient but also ethically robust and relationally sensitive.

## Digital Technologies in Informal Caregiving for Older Adults – researching evidence-informed practices

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### Background and purpose

Informal caregivers are indispensable in providing support for vulnerable older adults, but they often face considerable challenges, including burden, unmet needs, and difficulties combining care with paid work. Digital technologies, such as telehealth, mobile applications, eHealth, mHealth, and digital mental health tools, are increasingly promoted as potential solutions. Existing evidence is dispersed across multiple reviews, which limits its usefulness for social work practice and policy. The purpose of this study is to synthesise the interdisciplinary research of informed practices and evidence on the impact of digital tools in informal caregiving for older adults.

### Methods

A review of reviews was conducted following a registered protocol (OSF, 2025). Systematic searches were undertaken in eight databases covering the past 20 years. Eligible studies were systematic reviews, scoping reviews, or umbrella reviews published in English, with a clear focus on digital technologies in informal caregiving for older adults. Screening and full-text assessment were performed in Covidence by independent reviewers. Quality appraisal followed AMSTAR-2 guidelines. Data extraction was carried out using a structured template, and findings were synthesised narratively and thematically based on the Population–Concept–Context framework.

### Findings

The body of evidence is growing but heterogeneous. Digital tools are reported to support communication, coordination of care, access to information, and caregiver well-being. Barriers consistently identified include unequal access, limited digital literacy, a lack of caregiver-centred design, and insufficient integration into existing health and social care services. Important research gaps remain, particularly concerning employed caregivers, older caregivers, and the long-term impact of digital interventions. Methodological quality across reviews is mixed, with variability in scope and outcomes considered.

### Conclusions and implications

By consolidating existing reviews, this study provides an overview of how digital tools influence informal caregiving for older adults. The findings underscore both opportunities and challenges for social work research and practice, including addressing digital inequalities, ensuring equitable access, and promoting co-design with caregivers. Implications extend to practice (integrating digital tools into everyday support), policy (developing inclusive digital welfare strategies), and research (strengthening interdisciplinary approaches and methodological rigour).

Relevance to ECSWR 2026 themes: This study aligns with the subthemes “Linking the industry 4.0 and digital welfare state” and “Methodological development, innovation, technologies and capacity building in social work research”, and also contributes to “Challenges and opportunities for social work research, practice, policy or education in contemporary contexts.”

**Keywords:** informal caregiving, older adults, digital tools, review of reviews, social work, digital welfare

## Socioeconomic Inequalities and Institutional Abuse

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### Background and Purpose

The World Health Organisation (2002), identified the mistreatment of older people within institutional settings in almost every country which adopted a model of institutional care (Krug et al., 2002). Abuse of older people is predicted to increase as the global population of people aged 60 years and older will more than double, to about 2 billion in 2050.

Whilst social workers play a key role in investigating and responding to institutional abuse, our conceptualization of the causes and consequences of abuse is limited.

We explored the impact of socio-economic conditions on both the rates of institutional abuse and on the approaches taken by social workers to the abuse within Northern Ireland. To our knowledge, this is the first study to explore the links between socioeconomic factors and institutional abuse. The findings are pivotal in theorizing abuse.

### Methods

We identified the number and geographical distribution of residential and nursing home facilities for older people in Northern Ireland. We then linked Adult Safeguarding referrals and case details for each of these institutions using the postcode of the Super Output Area and Multiple Deprivation Measures. Data were analysed for all entries between 2015 and 2022 in relation to Adult Safeguarding screenings, investigations and the development of adult-protection care plans. Both relative and absolute measures of inequality (Ratio of Inequality, Slope Index of Inequality and Relative Index of Inequality) were calculated to examine trends.

### Findings

Overall, we found decreasing numbers of Adult Safeguarding referrals, across the time period. The majority of Adult Safeguarding processes were initiated in relation to females and older adults aged 65+ years. The most prominent abuse type was physical abuse, followed by neglect.

In relation to links with deprivation, referral and outcome patterns were found to be influenced by area level deprivation. There was a clear pattern of decreasing screening rates as deprivation decreased. Screening rates per 100 places were 1.72 times higher in Quintile 1 (area of high deprivation) compared to Quintile 5 (area of low deprivation). Social work responses differed according to location of the home, for example the percentage of investigations to screenings was 45% in Quintile 1 compared to 59% in Quintile 5.

**Conclusions**

Social Workers are tasked with the protection of adults from abuse without a clear theoretical understanding of abuse causes and effective interventions. The findings showed that if you live within an institution in areas with higher levels of deprivation you are considerably more likely to be subject to an Adult Safeguarding referral, and the social work investigation and levels of support, may differ for those individuals living in facilities within areas of low deprivation.

Theories of abuse tend to focus more on individual micro factors, generally located within interpersonal relationships (Biggs & Haapala, 2010). This study identifies the role played by macro structural factors. While this research is based in Northern Ireland, its findings have significant implications for overarching theories of institutional and elder abuse and has practical implications within the UK and internationally.



# Enhancing Research Rigor and Interdisciplinary perspective: Examining Trends in Study Design and Methodological Robustness in European Social Work and Public Health Conferences

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## Background

Social work and public health have much in common, particularly in the populations they serve and the goals they pursue. Amid growing calls to integrate social sciences into public health in response to global health crises, it becomes crucial to examine the alignment between social work and public health research. Conference abstracts summarize research and reflect disciplinary norms, values, and epistemological orientations, showing the direction in which each field is moving. This study aims to assess the alignment between social work and public health as research disciplines, including changes over time, by comparing public health and social work conference abstracts from 2019 and 2022.

## Methods

This study analyzes abstracts presented at the European Social Work Association (ESWRA) and European Public Health Association (EUPHA) conferences in 2019 and 2022. We developed 21 deductively generated variables to characterize the abstracts, including number of authors, research type (original/protocol/conceptual/mixed), use of full abstract structure, and use of references (inadvisable practice), internationality (collaboration and data collection), sample size (reported/omitted), and publication in peer-reviewed journals and year. To ensure data validity, two reviewers collected data blindly in 10 rounds of 10 abstracts each, stopping when they reached at least 85% agreement. Data analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics.

## Results

A total of 3,072 abstracts were included in the study, of which 884 were ESWRA abstracts and 2,445 EUPHA abstracts. Regarding the alignment of social work and public health, no statistically significant differences were found between ESWRA and EUPHA abstracts in international cooperation, use of international data, or years from conference presentation to publication among those that had been published by April 2025. However, all other measures showed significant differences. For all following differences, ESWRA is listed first followed by EUPHA, and 2019 first, followed by 2022; all differences discussed are  $p < 0.001$  unless otherwise noted. Differences included mean number of participating authors (2.1 vs. 5.0; 2.4 vs. 5.5), use of clear abstract structure (46% vs. 82%; 43% vs. 89%), inclusion of references (46% vs. 2%; 22% vs. 2%) and omission of the sample size (38% vs. 15%; 41% vs. 14%). Regarding each disciplines' changes over time, ESWRA abstracts showed a decline of reference use (from 2019 to 2022, 46% vs. 22%), and in mean years from the conference to full-text publication among those that were published by April 2025 (1.6 vs. 0.8). EUPHA abstracts showed increases in use of a clear abstract structure (82% vs. 89%), and proportion of abstracts that had been published as full-text by April 2025 (41% vs. 51%,  $p = 0.03$ ).

**Conclusions**

Our findings suggest that while social work and public health share some alignment in aims and populations served, they differ in research communication, collaboration, and publication trends. Differences in using a formal abstract structure, reference usage, and timely publication reflect distinct disciplinary norms and scientific orientations. Our findings also suggest that rigor in social work conference abstracts is declining in certain respects, while rigor in public health conference abstracts is improving in certain respects. These results offer insights into social work's positioning within the interdisciplinary research landscape and suggest opportunities for further integration between the two fields to enhance collaboration and promote uniformly high standards.

# Science as a Field of Practice? Theorizing Scientific Knowledge and its Appropriation in Social Work Education

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This paper critically explores how scientific knowledge is conceptualized within social work education and its implications for professional identity formation and practice. Drawing on empirical data from the sAwA (Studentische Aneignung wissenschaftlichen Arbeitens; transl.: students' appropriation of academic work) project (2023–2025), involving qualitative interviews with students and educators at two German universities, we investigate diverse understandings of science and how these shape or hinder the development of a professional habitus in social work.

## Background and purpose

The emphasis on evidence-informed practice highlights the need for nuanced theorizing of scientific knowledge and its role in professional practice. Literature and findings suggest students and educators hold multiple, often conflicting conceptions of what “scientific” knowledge entails. This ambiguity affects professional identity and challenges the integration of academic knowledge into practice. This is particularly relevant considering the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) global definition of social work as “a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change, development, cohesion, and empowerment” grounded in social justice and human rights. This definition underscores the complex interplay between theory and practice in social work professionalism internationally.

## Methods

Student researchers conducted interviews to reduce hierarchical bias. We used qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz/Rädiker, 2023) to analyze the interviews. Participants included social work students across semesters and educators responsible for scientific teaching.

## Findings

Six conceptions of science emerged: science as (1) standardization; (2) objective, superior knowledge; (3) an abstract ideal; (4) practice-relevant knowledge; (5) detached, unrealistic theory; and (6) distinct from opinion or ideology. This diversity creates tensions about the role of scientific knowledge in professionalism.

A key finding is a tautological relationship: students justify scientific knowledge via professionalism and define professionalism mainly through scientificity—without clear content. Contradictory expectations from educators overwhelm students, complicating coherent professional identity and scientific practice development.

Educators emphasize distinguishing scientific from everyday knowledge and caution against purely instrumental, technocratic uses of science. They highlight the persistent theory-practice gap that obstructs meaningful co-creation of knowledge between research and practice.

### **Conclusions and implications**

This study contributes to unpacking epistemological ambiguities and reflecting on their impact on professional identity and habitus. The relationship between scientific knowledge and practice, and its significance for social work professionalism, remains unclear. Students (and to some extent also lecturers) perceive academic work as a domain exclusively belonging to science as a specific field of practice.

We argue that successful development of professional habitus in social work depends on mediating science-practice relations. Addressing epistemological ambiguities and fostering integrative knowledge co-creation approaches are essential to advance evidence-informed social work education and practice in line with international professional mandates.

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## Child protection for children with disabilities: Intersectional perspectives on participation and inequalities

Prof. Dr. Judith Haase<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Vanessa Schnorr<sup>2</sup>

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Our presentation examines the complex relationship between childhood and disability in child protection interventions from an intersectional perspective. The 2021 reform of Germany's Child and Youth Welfare Act (SBV III) aimed to enable equal participation for young people with disabilities. Despite political efforts and legal and social advances that have been made in recent years, international studies highlight that children with disabilities remain at a higher risk of violence, neglect, and exclusion and often are invisible within the existing protection systems (cf. Bange 2020).

A fundamental challenge is the distinct responsibilities of integration and youth welfare services, leading to jurisdictional conflicts and care gaps. This complicates the development of a comprehensive protection system. Overcoming these challenges to create an inclusive child protection framework is essential for social work and related professions.

The presentation begins with a theoretical interdisciplinary model developed by the author for analysing childhood in child protection (Haase 2021: 58-86). It explores the tensions in balancing the children's rights and interests, parental interests, and the state's powers of intervention, introducing three child paradigms that are effective in child protection: the child as developing (generational order), vulnerable (vulnerability phenomena and constellations) and competent (agency theories). The model also expands to include 'disability' to address the intersectionality of childhood and disability, analyzing the interplay between vulnerability and agency amid structural inequalities between children and adults. Finally, these phenomena are specified in their interrelationships at the subject, generational and social structural levels.

Moreover, the empirical research results from a current research project by the two authors on how professionals in youth welfare offices perceive children with disabilities and the impact on protective measures, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary approaches are discussed.

The presentation emphasises that inclusive child protection requires integrating vulnerability, agency, and generationality, while considering children with disabilities' subjective experiences. Protection should not be characterised as paternalistic; rather, it must be participatory, barrier-free and accessible, and empowering, necessitating a re-evaluation of theoretical and the practical approaches. Non-inclusive measures perpetuate inequalities, whereas discrimination-sensitive protection promotes participation, justice and children's rights. Interdisciplinary approaches are crucial for implementation of practices as well as policies that are tailored to the specific needs of children with disabilities.

The lecture concludes by inviting critical discussion on the potential and risks of child protection for the participation of children with disabilities and the theoretical and practical implications of the presented heuristic.

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## Social worker wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand: Building evidence of workforce conditions including collegial relationships, workloads and management support

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<sup>1</sup> University of Otago

### Background

Underpinned by the values of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity, social workers have a direct impact on the health and social outcomes of those engaged with social services. Working to address complex challenges and needs across micro, meso, and macro systems, the profession has been widely recognised as a stressful and emotionally demanding occupation, linked to disproportionate rates of burnout (Childs et al., 2024; Hussein, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2024).

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, service contract cuts, changes to Equal Pay legislation and the persistent rise in the cost of living has added further pressures to the profession, and considering the wellbeing of social workers is essential to support, develop and retain this highly skilled workforce. With a lack of systematic evidence on work conditions and workforce wellbeing for social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, this paper aims to address the gap. The study is the first of its size in Aotearoa New Zealand to map social worker's work conditions without being limited to a specific employer or field of practice, providing evidence to inform organisational policies and practices.

### Methods

As part of a global study coordinated with the support of IFSW, an online survey was developed, drawing upon two measures 1. Management Standards Indicator Tool (MSIT) and 2. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). Two iterations of the survey had been completed previously; however, the third iteration was the first time an Aotearoa New Zealand team was established to lead local ethics, recruitment, and a tailored approach to respond to the local practice environment. Working in collaboration with the Aotearoa New Zealand Professional Association, a separate survey link was established to embed content specific to Aotearoa including local ethical approval, te reo [Māori language], and researcher introductions. Circulated to social workers across the country, 136 responses were received. Data was analysed using SPSS and descriptive statistics and independent t-tests were conducted to examine the perceptions of collegiality, workloads and managerial support.

### Findings

Peer and collegial support were social workers' primary form of support within the workplace, accessed more frequently than support from line managers. In contrast to international experience, workload demands were not as chronic as reported in other nations, with only 5.9 % reporting they always faced pressure to work long hours and 22% stating they always (5.1%) or often (16.9%) faced unachievable deadlines. The findings, however, indicate there is still work required to support social worker wellbeing, with more nuanced data and further qualitative research needed to better understand social

worker workplace conditions and wellbeing. A strategic organisational approach that tackles improving team cohesion and collegiality, workloads and management support is recommended to ensure workforce wellbeing is prioritised and does not rely on individual efforts. Repeated studies are needed to assess change over time, and participation in future global studies will increase insights by strengthening international comparisons.



## Fostering Supportive Environments for Childrearing: An Interdisciplinary and Evidence-Informed Approach to Preventive Youth Policy in Ede, The Netherlands

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### Background

Children's opportunities to grow up healthy and thrive are profoundly shaped by the social, cultural, and environmental conditions. In the Netherlands, increasing concerns have been raised about the wellbeing of both children and parents, particularly regarding declining mental health. Municipalities face a dual challenge: rising demand for youth care coincides with shrinking budgets. This situation underscores the urgency of strengthening the pedagogical foundation of childrearing with parents, children, residents, professionals. The professional doctorate Opgroeien in een Kansrijke Omgeving (OKO – Growing Up in a Fostering Environment) examines how supportive environments for childrearing can be co-created in and with the community. OKO is embedded in evidence-informed policymaking and interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and local stakeholders. This presentation presents outcomes of the first year, which explored resident perspectives in two neighbourhoods, allowing for a comparative perspective across differing socioeconomic contexts in child rearing.

### Methods

OKO adopts a four-year participatory action research design (2024–2028) in two neighbourhoods: Enka (high SES) and Horsten (low SES). During the orientation phase (2024–2025), second-year Social Work students collaborated in data collection informed by the Icelandic Prevention Model, which emphasizes community-based action in life domains family, school, friends and leisure time. Following data collection, a dialogue takes place.

Participants included children (ages 4–12), parents, neighbours, education and social service professionals. Data collection included door-to-door interviews, classroom activities, semi-structured interviews, focus groups. In total, 1,105 participants contributed: Enka (n=447) and Horsten (n=658). Data were thematically analysed and synthesized into personas, followed by validation dialogues with community members to assess recognition and prioritisation of issues. This process also laid the foundation for establishing a steering committee of local stakeholders to guide the project's continuation.

### Findings

Preliminary results indicate, next to the different experiences, several key dynamics. First, residents expressed surprise and enthusiasm about newly gained insights into their neighbourhoods, often recognising and validating their lived experiences. Second, this recognition enhanced community motivation and willingness to collaborate with the municipality. Third, collective action emerged, with residents and professionals forming local research groups that prioritised leisure time (Horsten) and social connectedness (Enka) as focal areas for enhancing developmental opportunities. Finally, municipalities face challenges of redefining their supportive role, shifting from bureaucratic, inward-focused practices toward more community-driven approaches.

### Conclusions and Implications

The OKO project demonstrates how municipalities can serve as frontline for interdisciplinary, evidence-informed practice and policymaking. By embedding research into community-driven processes, OKO supports sustainable, bottom-up change. Key implications include the need for long-term learning infrastructures, shared ownership across stakeholders, and valuing practice-based alongside scientific knowledge.

By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration across sectors, professions, OKO demonstrates how social work research can bridge boundaries and contribute to foster supportive environments where children and families can thrive.

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## Strengthening social cohesion in local neighbourhoods through social infrastructure, using an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach.

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Public encounters are important for people's well-being and for an inclusive society where residents live together (Klineberg, 2018). Research has shown that public spaces where people can meet strengthens social bonds and consequently mitigates feelings of loneliness and social disengagement (Klinenberg, 2018; Oldenburg, 1989; Soenen, 2006). Our two-year research project builds upon Klinenberg's (2018) theory of 'social infrastructure'. Klinenberg views social infrastructure as building places where all kinds of people can gather and where social cohesion is developed through repeated human interaction and joint participation.

At the same time, research shows that encounters in public spaces are not always inclusive and accessible for everyone (Blonk et al., 2019; Latham & Layton, 2019). This requires focus and dedication to both the social and physical environments, in which social workers can play an important role as well as other professionals (Li et al., 2023; Mouratidis, 2019). To explore this interdisciplinary collaboration, we conducted participatory action research. The aim of the study is to co-create strategies that social workers, residents, policy workers and other public professionals can use to improve the quality of social infrastructure in their neighbourhood.

In our presentation we will briefly present the findings of the first year of study, in which we have explored the local social infrastructure in three Dutch neighbourhoods. A group of social workers, other professionals, policy makers and researchers collaborated in a Community of Learning to identify local public places that foster interaction and explored the value of these places for the residents. Furthermore, we will focus on the findings of one of the three neighbourhoods: Haterse Hei and Grootstal in the Dutch city of Nijmegen. The data of the study consists of interviews with residents, focus groups with professionals, a public meeting with residents and observations.

We will demonstrate how residents interact with and experience their neighbourhood in distinct ways. We will present the differing perspectives of residents, professionals, and policymakers concerning vital social infrastructure, and the resulting tensions. For example, we found that residents of Haterse Hei and Grootstal value informal, everyday street-level interactions with neighbours more than the formal meeting places favoured by policymakers and professionals.

We will also evaluate the strategies implemented to strengthen local social infrastructure and social cohesion at the street level. Strategies anchored in interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge, as well as resident-led processes. Our findings suggest that social workers can serve as a vital link, connecting different groups, including schools, healthcare providers, local businesses, and community policing agencies.

This presentation contributes to our knowledge about the strategies and tensions behind successful interdisciplinary collaboration in neighbourhoods, focusing on the implications for social workers aiming to foster inclusive and cohesive communities. Furthermore, it sheds light on the residents' perspectives on meaningful social infrastructure and the tensions among various viewpoints and interests.

## The use of the Positive Deviance (PD) approach in social work: A scoping review

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Positive Deviance (PD) is an approach to solving complex social problems through identifying efficacious ‘new knowledge’ (or innovations) in low resource settings and then disseminating and implementing them from the inside-out for wider societal adoption (Dearing & Singhal, 2020). The approach is premised on the notion that knowledge to solve any problem lies in the communities where the problems unfold: In any group of people, in any community or organization, there are always individuals or groups of individuals whose uncommon behavioral strategies and practices enable them to find solutions to problems despite having the same resources and facing comparable challenges as their peers (Pascale et al., 2010; Sternin, 2002). PD investigates what makes those people practice better or more efficient solutions against all odds and with no additional resources (Singhal & Bjurström, 2023). The PD process enables communities to self-discover the wisdom that already exists and to amplify this wisdom and the corresponding behaviors and practices (Mertens et al., 2016).

PD has been widely applied in domains such as health, education, and international development (Albanna & Heeks, 2019). Wolfer and Wilson (2019) argue that the PD approach can be useful for social workers at the individual, organizational, and community levels of practice. However, its application within social work remains largely unexplored. Therefore, a scoping review methodology was applied to map the breadth and nature of the literature on PD in social work. The review aims to synthesise existing research on the use of the PD approach in social work by addressing the following questions:

- (1) How is PD defined in the context of social work?
- (2) What study designs and methods are used at each step of the PD process?
- (3) To what extent are service providers and users involved in the approach, and how is participation operationalized?
- (4) How is PD linked to social work theory and practice?
- (5) What gaps remain in the current knowledge base?

The review included peer-reviewed, English-language empirical studies with an explicit focus on PD. Searches were conducted in four databases (PsycInfo, Medline, Business Source Ultimate, Scopus) in May–June 2025. The search strategy combined PD-related terms with social work–related terms (e.g., social service, child protection, welfare). Titles and abstracts (n = 4305) were screened independently by two reviewers using Rayyan, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. Eligible full texts (n = 144) were assessed against predefined inclusion criteria, and data were extracted on the PD projects, including their aims, settings, explored outcomes/behaviours, definitions of PD, and the methods used to apply the PD approach at each stage of the process.

Preliminary findings shows that PD holds promise as a cost-effective, participatory, and context-sensitive approach for addressing complex challenges in social work. However, applications remain fragmented and under-researched. Explicit theorization of PD within social work is needed.

## Co-creating liveability in the housing complex: spanning boundaries between professional domains and building alliances with residents

Dr. Saskia Welschen, MSc Pamela Lucas

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Co-creating liveability in the housing complex: spanning boundaries between professional domains and building alliances with residents

Saskia Welschen, Pamela Lucas, Urban Social Work, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

Liveability is increasingly under strain in the Netherlands' urban areas, especially within social housing complexes. These complexes primarily serve low-income groups and individuals with care needs, due to a process known as residualisation (Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2020). The socialisation of care encourages residents with care needs to live independently at home with support. A higher concentration of vulnerable residents often creates housing complexes that lack resilience and experience frequent tensions between neighbours.

Professionals from various disciplines, including healthcare, welfare, housing, and public safety, are involved with these residents. However, they often lack a shared vision of what is needed, a common language, and opportunities to exchange information. While working, they face confusion about mutual roles and responsibilities. In addition, each domain faces staff and resource shortages. Finding good forms of collaboration is a challenge. Signals of residents' problems and concerns are not always addressed, leading to escalation.

While extensive research addresses liveability at the neighbourhood and district levels, few studies focus on residential complexes. Yet, this scale is crucial for understanding and initiating effective interdisciplinary collaborations to improve liveability and resilience. This paper argues that the residential complex presents unique opportunities to develop collaborative approaches among diverse stakeholders. We present findings from two qualitative research projects on experiences and practices within social housing complexes in the Amsterdam metropolitan region.

The first project examines the experiences of neighbours living alongside individuals in vulnerable situations who (occasionally) display behaviour perceived as incomprehensible. Our research among residents and professionals shows that neighbours often feel professionals do not take their concerns seriously when they report their worries or nuisance. Residents frequently struggle to access professionals and articulate a need for more support. Furthermore, there is untapped potential in utilising neighbours' insights into the day-to-day dynamics within the housing complex—a resource crucial for prevention, as evidenced by cases where residents raised early warnings before serious incidents. We are currently exploring ways to strengthen cooperation between professionals and residents. In our presentation, we will share initial findings.

The second project draws on research into the “Living Longer At Home Flats” initiative in Amsterdam. These clustered housing projects support (vulnerable) senior citizens to live independently with easy access to services and care. The aim is to cultivate an active community in which residents organise social activities together and mutually support one another. Interprofessional collaboration between health, housing, and welfare professionals is central. In each flat, a professional ‘boundary spanner’ (Stephens et al., 2024) is tasked with fostering interdisciplinary cooperation and allying with residents. Our analysis examines the maintenance and crossing of professional boundaries, as well as the empowerment of residents as co-creators of their living environments.

Together, these projects demonstrate that targeted interdisciplinary practices and robust alliances with residents at the housing complex level are vital for enhancing liveability and resilience among (vulnerable) populations within their immediate environment.

## International Influence on Street-Level Discretion? A study of Norwegian child protection and the European Court of Human Rights

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Over the past decade, Norwegian child protection has been under intense scrutiny by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Among the 80 complaints filed between 2015 and 2024, Norway has been found to have violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) on the right to private and family life in 23 cases – more than any other country throughout the Court's over 60 years of existence. The Court identified several shortcomings in the decision-making processes of the child protection services and the courts. In response to the critique, Norwegian authorities have made significant efforts to implement the judgments, including legislative changes, national guidelines, and educational schemes. There has also been a shift in domestic case law, spearheaded by the Supreme Court. Although the Supreme Court found no conflict between the ECtHR and the general substantive and procedural principles under the Child Welfare Act, it asserted that Norwegian child protection practice needed to be adjusted to align with the ECtHR's instructions and to avoid future human rights violations. Beyond this, we know less about the developments in the child protection services. Since 2019, there has been a decline in care orders and adoption requests made by child protection services. These changes fall beyond the scope of the ECtHR's instructions and have raised questions about the interpretation of the judgments, their impact on decision-making, and the potential judicialisation of child protection. Have the judgments changed child protection practice at the frontline? If so, how, why, and what are the implications?

In Norway, as in most child protection systems, it is the local child protection authorities that, with considerable discretion, suggest intrusive interventions and prepare cases for the court or court-like decision-making bodies. Despite this, very little scholarly attention has been devoted to the significance of court jurisprudence for this segment of the government, among the street-level bureaucrats. Focusing on the perceived discretion of street-level bureaucrats, I use survey data to examine the views and experiences of 143 Norwegian child protection decision-makers regarding the influence of the ECtHR judgments.

The findings suggest that the ECtHR judgments have had a significant influence on the assessments of child protection decision-makers. Thresholds for care orders, reunification, and adoption are perceived by a majority to have changed, and in some areas, they feel that the judgments curtail their autonomy to exercise professional judgment. As such, some express concern that the legal demands infringe on their ability to protect children's interests. At the same time, the extent to which the judgments are perceived to have changed decision-making thresholds and contribute to limit or shape discretion varies between decision-makers. This raises concerns about varying practices in the wake of the judgments, and that different interpretations of the judgments may lead to disparate outcomes for children and families. The study discusses the findings and their implications in relation to children's rights and the rule of law and makes recommendations for practice.



## Intersecting social work and public libraries - challenges and opportunities

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### Background and Purpose

There are increasing reports of public libraries employing social workers - for instance, in the Scandinavian countries, the UK, and the US. Public libraries play an important role in public space as non-commercial environments, a role that is particularly relevant for marginalised groups who are often directly or indirectly excluded from commercial settings. A key challenge for public libraries is balancing inclusivity with maintaining order - especially as marginalised individuals are frequently perceived as disruptive. Social workers can support librarians in these situations through their communication skills and knowledge of support services. The aim of this paper is to investigate the opportunities and challenges for social workers operating in public library spaces, as well as for libraries as they become more explicitly engaged in addressing social marginalisation.

### Methods

This paper is based on a multidisciplinary, mixed-methods project conducted in Sweden. The study includes a national survey distributed to public libraries, along with semi-structured interviews with social workers based in libraries and library managers. The survey maps various programmes aimed at addressing social marginalisation, focusing on characteristics such as target groups, collaborative partners, and involved professionals. The interviews explore challenges and opportunities for both social work and libraries as their domains intersect.

### Findings

Social work in public libraries enables access to less stigmatised services compared to traditional social services. Furthermore, it challenges the dominance of casework—typically focused on individualisation and people-processing - by taking place in open environments shared with individuals beyond the usual clientele of social services. However, this intersection raises several concerns, including issues related to funding, professional boundaries, and the maintenance of order in library spaces.

### Conclusions and Implications

The integration of social work into public libraries presents both opportunities and challenges. These developments call for a broader scrutiny of social work, particularly regarding the limitations of individualised services and the effects of New Public Management - such as service gaps and short-term approaches. Library-based social work has the potential to revitalise community-oriented practice, an approach increasingly advocated by both the Swedish government and the social work profession.

## **‘You just have to get on with it’: Exploring mental health, suicide risk and ‘good’ help in Gypsy and Traveller communities in England**

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### **Background and purpose**

Gypsy and Traveller people are among the most health disadvantaged groups in the UK, with high levels of mental health inequality even by comparison to other disadvantaged groups and at high risk for almost all suicide predictors. Research evidence for these communities is limited, but does indicate high anxiety and depression and elevated suicide rates above the general population.

Service provision for these communities is similarly limited. They are poorly recognised in suicide prevention planning and experience substantial difficulties in accessing health services. Experiences of discrimination, mistrust of the state and stigma around mental health and suicide also limit opportunities to seek support. Poor overall understanding of this complexity has implications for both public health and service planning.

The research aimed to explore strategies for including Gypsy and Traveller voices in discussions around mental health and suicide need and risk, focusing on how communities understood mental health and suicide, what contributed to their experiences around this and what ‘good’ help might look like

### **Methods**

The research adopted a co-produced qualitative approach, drawing on both academic and community experience. Community members across two UK geographic regions took part in either one to one unstructured interviews, community outreach sessions or formalised activity-focused consultations. Conversation was introduced around three key areas: nature and causes, good help, and solutions, and participants guided the discussion to their priorities. Data were collected through fieldnotes by multiple researchers where possible to allow triangulation, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and workshoped with community members to check relevance.

### **Findings**

150 community members took part in either an interview, a group discussion or both. This engagement required time, patience and perseverance. Involvement was reliant on trusted facilitators both within and external to the communities, but still necessitated substantial work. Outreach was the most effective approach, which met community members in their own spaces, but multiple visits and sessions were needed to create spaces where participants felt comfortable to speak about stigmatised topics.

The relationship between mental health, suicide and social factors was strongly evident. Housing, finances, employment and education came with challenges specific to these

communities which detrimentally impacted on mental health and contributed to suicide risk. Underpinning this were core themes of shame and trust, linked to experiences of prejudice and discrimination and assumptions of self-reliance. Trust in 'outsiders' was conditional, and expectations of prejudice both in general society and in wider service provision were engrained, especially for social work. Assumptions about the strength of community support were more complex in practice; family support was strongly protective against mental health and suicide risks, but could be conditional linked to pressure to conform and fear of judgement within the community.

### **Conclusions and implications**

Mental health and suicide risk for Gypsy and Traveller communities cannot be viewed individualistically, but must be considered within their wider social and historical context. There are spaces for mental health, social work and public health services to contribute to addressing these risks, but this requires rebuilding trust and addressing expectations of discrimination.

## SS-HD: Validation of a Social Assessment Scale for Patients and Caregivers at Admission to Hospital at Home

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### Background

Hospital at Home Units (HAH) are a recent and expanding modality of providing close-knit care in the National Health System in Portugal. HAH, as a model of hospital care practiced in the patient's home, poses challenges to developing its potential as an alternative to conventional hospitalization, implying a protocol for evaluating and monitoring users by a multidisciplinary team that includes social workers. In this context, it is important to analyse the diagnosis and intervention processes of Social Service in HAH Units, at a methodological and instrumental level. In the first phase of the research, one of the main objectives is the construction and validation of an instrument for assessing patients for admission to a Hospital at Home.

### Methods

The research, using mixed methods, consist of the validation of the SS-HD, a social assessment scale to support admission of patients to HAH. The scale presents 5 dimensions and 27 indicators, using a five Likert suitability scale. Its construction is based on a thematic review of the literature, regarding its content, and follows the methodological parameters for a new scale. For the scale validation, the research involves a panel of 36 social workers with experience in HAH, aged between 40 and 49, mostly women, with degrees in Social Work, with more than half holding master's or postgraduate degrees. The panel assessed the construct, the content, and parameterization criteria: usefulness; interpretability; suitability; discrimination; appropriability; responsiveness; economy; accordance; acceptability; difficulty. Methodologically, validity and reliability will be also assessed for the specific population, carried out through peer validation and interdisciplinary discussion.

### Finding/Expected results

The social workers evaluated the internal consistency/reliability of the SS-HD scale whose Cronbach's Alpha was .988 that indicates an excellent internal consistency, meaning that the items are strongly correlated with each other and likely measure the same dimension consistently. Participants attribute high relevance to the proposed criteria (values between 4 and 5). The mean score of the Total Assessment of the instrument was 4.00, indicating very positive evaluations of the scale in terms of usefulness, clarity, applicability, and appropriateness.

### Conclusions and Implications

SS-HD is expect to contribute to the production of knowledge and to the definition of guidelines for social worker intervention in HAH. We also hope to make a scientific contribution by strengthening the connection between research and practice in Social Work, through the innovation of methodologies and instruments of action. The output that will result from the research will be a guiding reference for good practices in multidimensional assessment and intervention of Social Work in HAH Units. The reference is intended to constitute a scientific contribution to the definition of a quality healthcare policy, with gains for users and the Portuguese National Health System.

## **“Engineers of the human soul”: How social workers make sense of the behaviour of children in State care**

Dr Ana Olea Fernandez<sup>1</sup>

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Children in State care often present challenging and distressing behaviours to the adults around them. As the representatives of corporate parenting, children's social workers are ultimately responsible for decisions on how to address these behaviours, including seeking specialist support. These decisions are taken within a landscape of potential competing discourses: how much a child's behaviour can be understood as an adaption to past events (trauma), how much to their biology (psychiatric disorders), amidst a warning to social workers against using the DSM-5, the current psychiatric manual. How children are ultimately understood can have serious implications for how children will come to understand themselves and how their emotional wellbeing will be supported. At the same time, the case of risperidone highlights the risks of Big Pharma's corruption targeting children in State care as consumers.

This presentation discusses and considers the practice implications stemming from the findings of my qualitative PhD study on how social workers make sense of children's behaviour. Semi-structured interviews, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, were conducted with 29 social workers, recruited through professional networks and social media.

The study found disparities in the knowledge of psychiatric diagnoses amongst social workers, within a general predominance of trauma explanations (considered separate from CPTSD). Cases shared by the social workers showed explanations proposed for children's behaviours could respond to at least two sets of adults' interests. First, explanations were dominated by the adults' perspectives, addressing behaviour when it became disruptive or distressing to the adult/s, inadvertently putting at the centre of intervention the adult's emotional wellbeing, rather than the child's. Second, explanations of children's behaviours could not be untangled from the adults' sense of self. In this way, both diagnostic and trauma narratives could serve to displace any responsibility away from the children's present relational context, thus preserving the adult's identity as a good professional and preventing a 'spoiled identity'. Thus, explanations of children's behaviour not only affect out understanding of children's agency, but also the role and responsibility of the adults around them, pointing at potential conflicts of interest.

Following these findings, the presentation proposes three recommendations. First, children's social workers, in exercising corporate parenting, need to proactively engage (and be supported to do so) with developments in psychiatry and critical psychiatry, strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration and discussion. Second, there should be a greater recognition of the child's perspective and experience, and their emotional wellbeing, rather than the presence of disturbing (to the adult) behaviour, should guide any intervention upon them. Third, all adults working with children in State care should be provided with a safe space to support reflexive practice that allows to consider how the child's present relational context

(which would include the adult themselves) might be impacting on the child's presentation and emotional wellbeing. These changes are necessary if social work practice is to uphold article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that requires States to "take all appropriate measures to promote (...) psychological recovery" of children who have suffered abuse and/or neglect.

## Legal Capacity before the Courts: How Social Workers Can Shape Evidence and Outcomes

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### Background and purpose

The recognition of legal capacity is a pressing issue across Europe in the aftermath of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). While many countries have reformed their legislation, practical implementation remains uneven, and paternalistic approaches persist. The Czech Republic offers a pertinent case study: the 2014 Civil Code reform formally moved from deprivation to limitation of legal capacity and acknowledged supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship. Yet juridical practice often continues to rely on substitute decision-making and expert psychiatric opinions, with limited recognition of autonomy. This paper situates the Czech experience within the broader European debate and examines how social work research of juridical practice can support the role of social workers in safeguarding autonomy and strengthening supported decision-making. This study directly engages with the conference theme by showing how empirical legal analysis can inform social work practice and policy development and how research on judicial practice can be translated into methodological tools and advocacy strategies. The study is based in the concept of relational autonomy and in empirical findings from other studies (Lindsey, 2020, Dibbets et al., 2021). By bridging law and social work, the paper highlights opportunities for informed interdisciplinary practice that safeguards autonomy of people with disabilities.

### Methods

The study is based on a qualitative content analysis of 103 anonymised decisions of the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic concerning legal capacity restrictions. We focused on the reasoning that led to the annulment of lower-court judgments, with particular attention to how evidence was used, whether supported decision-making measures were considered, and to what extent social work assessments were incorporated. Cases were thematically coded and analysed against the frameworks of supported decision-making and relational autonomy.

### Findings

The analysis revealed recurring institutional barriers. Lower courts relied heavily on psychiatric expertise, often with minimal engagement of the person concerned and little use of social work reports. Although the Supreme Court frequently emphasized proportionality, individualisation, and the search for less restrictive alternatives, the absence of structured social work input limited the possibility of balanced, evidence-informed judgments. These findings resonate with research from other European contexts, where similar tensions between law, medicine, and social work have been documented.

### Conclusions and implications

The Czech case reflects a broader European challenge: legal reforms inspired by the CRPD are not sufficient without parallel changes in institutional culture, interdisciplinary cooperation, and professional practice. Social workers are well placed to advocate for autonomy by providing structured assessments that bring forward the lived realities, capacities, and support networks of persons with disabilities. To achieve this, they need methodological tools, institutional recognition, and closer interdisciplinary collaboration.

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## The Home Visit in Social Work: a research in Italy

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The home visit is a traditional Social Work tool, used since the origins of the profession. Entering into the space of attachment, identity and territoriality of people provides social workers with an opportunity to observe the environment, family members and their relationships from a situated perspective.

Despite its historical relevance and practical value across a wide range of settings, both international and national literature on the topic remains limited, particularly in the Italian context. Although nearly all Italian social workers list home visits as one of their main professional tools, little is known about how often they are actually used, under what circumstances, and for what specific purposes.

The main research question is: how, how often, and why do social workers use home visits? Sub-questions explore the conditions under which the tool is chosen, how the visit is planned and conducted, what happens during the encounter, and what competencies and training professionals consider essential.

The study adopts a Practice Research framework, which involves a collaborative approach between researchers and practitioners to reduce the gap between research and practice, and to co-produce knowledge.

The first phase of the research involved six focus groups conducted in December 2024, with 36 social workers from a district in Northern Italy, working in various practice areas. The aim was to explore their experiences with home visits.

A thematic content analysis revealed wide variability in how social workers manage the encounter. Some adopt a more informal style, allowing the visit to unfold spontaneously, while others plan it with methodological rigor and follow a structured approach. Managing the overlap between institutional mandates and the private space of the family is not always easy for either professionals or family members.

Home visits also allow social workers to identify needs and resources at individual, family, and community levels, elements that are often invisible in other settings. Additionally, they may strengthen the helping relationship. However, emotional challenges also emerged, including feelings of gratitude, but also vulnerability, discomfort, and emotional fatigue. Participants expressed the need for tools such as cultural mediators, digital technologies, safety measures, and clearer criteria for housing assessment.

The second phase of the project involved a national questionnaire, developed in part from the qualitative findings. The survey investigates frequency, objectives, settings, organisation, required skills, and perceived training needs related to home visits.

From 1 May to 30 September 2025, it was distributed to approximately 47,000 professionals through the Regional Councils of Social Workers (CROAS). As of 16 September, 19% had responded, mainly working in child and family services (26.7%), elder care (22%), and disability support (13.8%).

The data analysis and the discussion of the questionnaire findings will be carried out jointly with a small group of practitioners involved, in line with the Practice Research approach.

The expected outcome is to provide a comprehensive overview of home visit practices across different areas, contributing to the development of professional knowledge and improved practice, ultimately enhancing the support provided to individuals, families, and communities.

## Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Child Welfare Workers in Canada

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### Background

Advances in technology have influenced the provision of child welfare services in a variety of ways creating both new opportunities to improve services and new risks, including the risk of technology-facilitated violence (TFV) against workers.

### Objective

The aims of this multi-method study were to: better understand the nature and impacts of TFV against child welfare workers; identify strategies employed by child welfare workers to minimize risk and manage the impacts of TFV; and explore how organizational responses may mitigate or exacerbate the impact of violence once it occurs.

### Methods

1. An online survey was conducted to compare the experiences and effects of in-person violence and cyberviolence amongst child welfare workers in Canada; and to better understand the influences of organizational factors on levels of distress experienced by workers.
2. Employing the long-interview method of data collection, the researchers adopted a discovery-oriented qualitative design founded on constructivist grounded theory.

### Results

1. Respondents reported high levels of exposure to in-person violence, as well as high levels of abuse and threats through digital means. Among various forms of in-person violence, threats were associated with the highest level of traumatic stress symptoms. Other factors that were associated with traumatic stress were perceptions of organizational support and experiences of burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion, which was the best predictor of traumatic stress scores related to both in-person and cyberviolence.
2. Participants reported using a variety of electronic means to communicate with clients including email, social media platforms, direct messaging, and text messaging. While electronic means of communication provided opportunities for engagement both personally and professionally, it also carried the risk that abusive and threatening comments could be transmitted to workers in a new way. Results revealed an escalating progression of TFV. First, participants were subject to repeated abuse, harassment, and threats conveyed through email, text messages, and work-related social media. Next, abusive clients used information from online sources to contact workers through their personal social media, blurring the boundaries between their personal and professional lives. In addition, images and information about workers were shared on public and communal social media pages, inciting others to join in the

abuse and harassment. Finally, the increased visibility of workers resulted in direct, in-person confrontations in the community not only by clients but also by members of the public. Participants indicated that organizations were insufficiently prepared to deal with TFV and as a result, workers were largely left to deal with TFV on their own.

**Conclusion:**

Given that cyberviolence is a new area of study, further research is necessary to more fully understand the ability of the workplace environment to mitigate harmful aspects of this recent form of workplace violence. Further, as identified by participants in this study, there is an urgent need within child welfare for the development of policies and procedures related to TFV, training for workers on TFV prevention and mitigation strategies, and supports to mitigate the effects of TFV when it occurs.

## Factors influencing social workers' engagement in policy practice: An international quantitative study

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### Background and Purpose

According to the IFSW/IASSW (2014) global definition of social work, social workers have a general commitment to promoting social justice. One potential approach to fulfilling this commitment is engaging in activities that challenge, alter, and form policy. Despite the increasing academic discussion regarding social workers' engagement in policy (e.g., Bečević & Herz, 2023; De Corte & Roose, 2020; Pritzker & Lane, 2018), research in this field is still in its beginning stages. In particular, we still know little about the factors that influence social workers' decision to participate in policy activities (Weiss-Gal, 2016, 2017). Harnessing interdisciplinary concepts from social work and the political, sociological and policy sciences, we used the Policy Engagement Framework (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023) to fill this gap. More precisely, we addressed the following research question: What factors influence social workers' policy practice?

### Methods

We examined the factors influencing policy practice among social workers in Germany (n = 1917) and Switzerland (n = 1770) using a quantitative survey design. IBM SPSS Statistics version 28 was used to analyze the data. To address our research question, we employed a stepwise hierarchical regression analysis and conducted mediation analysis using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2022).

### Results

Our key findings revealed that social workers' policy practice is directly associated with the national political system, organizational support, affiliation with professional and political networks, and policy skills. Although we found no significant direct effect of policy education on policy practice, mediation analysis revealed that policy skills significantly mediate the link between policy education and policy practice.

### Conclusions and Implications

The connection between policy training as part of social work education and social workers' actual engagement in policy practice has so far only received very limited attention (see, e.g., Schwartz-Tayri, 2021; Schwartz-Tayri et al., 2021; Weiss-Gal & Savaya 2012). Our findings therefore contribute novel insights into the mechanisms of policy practice and show how social work education can further stimulate this type of professional activity in preparing future social workers for their role in addressing not only individual, but also structural issues.

## Violence in elder care: Interdisciplinary findings and implications for social work practice

Prof. Dr. Grit Höppner<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anna Wanka, Dr. Vera Gallistl

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### Background and purpose

Demographic change and the restructuring of healthcare systems in Germany and Austria mutually shape a care crisis. Under such circumstances, practices of caring and violence can blend, and boundaries between protection and violence blur. However, violence in elder care is both under-theorized and under-researched. Using findings from the study 'Violence in a Caring Society', we argue that this is because there is no shared understanding among disciplines such as social work, medicine and nursing of what constitutes violence in elder care, and no overarching interdisciplinary debate to come to a common understanding of violence in elder care.

### Methods

In a structured literature review, we examined literature from the fields of geriatrics, nursing science and social work, and selected vignettes describing case studies for violent situations in elder care. We analysed these vignettes sequentially to reconstruct the discipline-specific understanding of violence in elder care (Höppner, Wanka & Gallistl, 2024). Additionally, we conducted a group discussion with six academic experts from the fields of social work, sociology, nursing science, psychology, and medicine. In the mapping analysis of the group discussion, we reconstructed the disciplinary-specific understandings of violence in elder care, as well as overlaps and differences.

### Findings

Analyses of vignettes and group discussions highlight the differences in how disciplines approach recognising, explaining and justifying violence in elder care. In geriatrics, for instance, violence in elder care is defined narrowly, primarily as physical violence diagnosable via bodily injuries. In nursing studies, violence in elder care is defined more broadly and can also include psychological and sexual violence, neglect, humiliation, poor care and measures that restrict freedom. In social work, violence in elder care is additionally understood to be embedded in unfavourable living conditions and an overburdened healthcare system.

### Conclusion and implications

Different disciplines have different understandings on what constitutes violence, how it emerges and how it can be minimised. In social work practice, these findings enable professionals to develop protection concepts that consider disciplinary heterogeneity and to synthesis narrow and broad definitions of violence in elder care. The study's findings show that a disciplinary debate is crucial to identifying, raising awareness of, sanctioning and reducing violence in elder care.

### References

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# Constructing Professionalism in Preventive Social Work: Family Accounts from Swedish Crime Prevention Programs

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## Background and purpose

In social work, professionalism is often framed in terms of neutrality, objectivity, and procedural accountability. Yet, in preventive programs with young people, families frequently describe and evaluate social workers in relational terms, emphasizing care, presence, and continuity. This paper examines how such evaluations are constructed in research interviews, addressing a gap in existing scholarship which has largely focused on professional practices and institutional routines rather than client accounts (Hall, Slembrouck & Sarangi, 2020; Flinkfeldt et al., 2022). By analysing family perspectives as part of evidence-informed practice, the study speaks directly to the conference theme of “Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research” and the subtheme exploring the impact and effectiveness of social work practice.

## Methods

The analysis draws on seven interviews with children and parents, selected from a larger dataset of 35 interviews conducted within municipal crime prevention programs in Sweden. These programs targeted young people aged 11–17 in vulnerable situations where social, familial, or environmental factors heightened delinquency risks. Using Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (Schegloff, 2007; Watson, 1997), the study examines how families categorize and describe social workers, and how expectations, rights, and obligations are made relevant through talk.

## Findings

The analysis identifies three ways in which families construct and negotiate professionalism. First, a father redefines the social worker role by emphasizing care and presence. Second, a young person describes support that goes beyond procedural expectations, reframing professional duty. Third, a mother and son highlight the absence of some professionals and the limited presence of others, making lack of engagement central to their evaluation. Across six excerpts, these accounts show how family perspectives reshape understandings of professionalism, blending personal and institutional dimensions.

## Conclusions and implications

By analysing interview talk as an interactional accomplishment, the study demonstrates how families’ lived accounts make visible the relational work of social services, often reframing what is treated as professionalism in preventive contexts. These findings contribute to the subthemes on challenges and opportunities for social work research in contemporary contexts and linking social work research and practice through the co-creation of knowledge. They underscore the need to recognise client perspectives as evidence in their own right, informing both the design and evaluation of preventive interventions. Methodologically, the study illustrates how CA and MCA can be applied to interview data, contributing to interdisciplinary discussions on evidence-informed practice and policy.



## Beyond Satisfaction: Towards Transformative Participatory Evaluation in an Italian Social Service

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### Background and purpose

Evaluating social services is fundamental to understanding and improving the effectiveness of social interventions. However, this process is often reduced to administrative obligation by managers and policymakers. In many cases, evaluation processes remain anchored in an expert-centred approach (Aldridge, 2015): evaluators select areas they deem relevant, without adequately involving users and carers in the assessment process. Literature highlights the limitations and risks of participatory processes (Arnstein, 1969), which often fail to achieve a transformative dimension and instead become 'customer satisfaction' surveys or formal collections of opinions that have little real impact on decision-making. This emphasises the importance of experimenting with participatory evaluation to significantly improve social services.

### Methods

This paper presents an experimental, participatory evaluation project within a social service in northern Italy. The project involved seven managers, ten social workers, twelve family members and five young people, all of whom were involved in an educational support service (school- and home-based) aimed at children with disabilities or other vulnerabilities. The project aimed to evaluate the service through the participation of those directly involved in order to enhance its effectiveness. Two preliminary focus groups were organised with service managers, practitioners and family members to identify priority issues and define research tools. Subsequently, two additional focus groups were conducted, one with practitioners and one with families not involved in the preliminary phase, along with individual interviews with young service users. Qualitative content analysis was carried out, and the findings were discussed with the people who had contributed to defining the evaluation process. Following Aldridge's (2015) participatory model, participants were 'actors' in the evaluation process.

### Findings

The data highlights several themes for improving the service. Participants consistently expressed frustration over the lack of collaboration between organisations, which resulted in misinformation about children's needs and the work already carried out by other professionals. From the perspective of families, the service appeared poorly structured and disorganised. Another major issue was the lack of recognition of the professional role of social workers for school and home care, where they are often expected to do things that are unrealistic or inappropriate.

Furthermore, families reported limited involvement in defining the support project for their children; often, their participation was restricted to communicating decisions that had already been made rather than co-constructing individual projects.



The findings suggest three main areas for improvement: fostering multidisciplinary teamwork through inter-organisational teams; raising awareness of social workers' professional roles in school and home care; and organising additional opportunities for families and young people to engage in authentic dialogue and contribute actively to decision-making.

### **Conclusions**

The study suggests that involving practitioners, users and carers in evaluations yields three key results: (1) it helps to identify issues that are more closely aligned with real-life experiences, as expressed by those involved; (2) it encourages collaboration and ideas for positive change, shifting the focus away from what does not work; and (3) it initiates a genuinely transformative process that goes beyond the mere listening practices typical of 'customer satisfaction' approaches.

## Buddies with impact? A study on the effectiveness of diverse buddy projects in social work

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### Background and research question

Buddy projects connect individuals with support needs to volunteers who offer informal assistance. In response to growing pressure on formal care systems and the rising importance of civic engagement, these projects are increasingly popular. The assumption is that they lead to positive changes for participants (individuals with support needs), volunteers, and the broader society. However, a knowledge gap exists regarding whether this is truly the case. While some research has shed light on impact for participants, effects on volunteers and the broader societal context have hardly been studied.

In a two-year research project, we aim to answer the central question: What is the impact of buddy projects on participants, volunteers, and society at large, and how can organizations enhance this impact? This question is grounded in the social work practice of eight buddy projects, each focusing on different populations: newcomers learning a new language and culture, individuals facing mental health or financial challenges, people experiencing loneliness, and others. By participating in this research, the projects aim to inform their practice and increase their contribution on both individual and societal levels.

### Approach and methods

To understand the impact of buddy projects thoroughly, we examine it through three analytical lenses:

- 1) effectiveness – assessing whether intended goals are achieved,
- 2) meaning making – exploring which specific (positive or negative, intended or unintended) changes are experienced by participants and volunteers,
- 3) professionalization – identifying how buddy projects can improve their practice to enhance impact.

We employ a mixed-methods approach, combining group sessions (e.g. theory of change workshops and impact calculators), in-depth interviews, and surveys with participants, volunteers, and professional staff. Regular learning sessions enable organizations to discuss their practices, learn from each other's experiences and reflect on the research insights.

### Findings

Initial results reveal both common and project-specific impacts. In multiple cases, buddies report increased self-confidence, improved communication skills, and an expanded social network. They value the opportunity to view life from another's perspective, which fosters mutual understanding. These broadened horizons often lead to enhanced empathy and more nuanced views of 'the other'. Specific impacts vary per project, ranging from improved financial literacy to increased awareness of local sports or neighborhood facilities.

It is important to emphasize that these positive effects depend strongly on organizational efforts, such as careful matching, ongoing support, and structured reflection. Without these, negative experiences like stress and frustration may arise.

**Conclusions and implications**

Buddy projects play a significant role in supplementing formal care systems. Volunteers may help prevent issues from escalating, thereby fulfilling a preventive function. Moreover, participating buddies step outside their social bubble, challenge prejudices, and develop empathy. This can be seen as an essential quality in today's polarized society.

Buddy projects can ripple outward, influencing not only the participating individuals but also their wider social networks - much like circles expanding from a stone dropped in water. In our presentation, we will further reflect on this broader societal impact and its measurement, contributing to a more evidence-based buddy practice.

# Youth Work in Transition: Enhancing Methodological Practice and Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Dutch Practice

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## Background and Purpose

In recent years, Dutch youth work has increasingly focused on strengthening methodological practice and professionalism. This has become important due to societal developments such as budget cuts in youth care and rising expectations for preventive interventions. These changes have placed greater demands on youth workers. Simultaneously, complex questions have emerged. Including: “What constitutes high-quality youth work?”, “How can methodological practice be strengthened?”, “What is youth work’ role in the youth-care-chain?”, “How can collaboration with partners—such as police, schools, municipalities, young people and parents—be improved?” We explored these questions through three practice-based research projects. This presentation shares the overarching findings.

## Methods

### Project 1: Drop-In Youth Work and Crime Prevention

In Twente, we co-created research with youth workers to explore their role in preventing youth crime. Methods included interviews (n=6), observations (n=11), a focusgroup with chain partners (n=9), photovoice with young people (n=21), questionnaire among young people (n=50), and action plan development.

### Project 2: Mapping Methodological Practice

In a small Twente municipality, we studied the methodological practices of youth workers from three organizations. Focus groups were held with all youth workers to explore challenges and successes. The twelve methodological principles of youth work (Sonneveld et al., 2021) formed the framework.

### Project 3: Youth Work in Schools

In Enschede, youth work is embedded in six secondary schools through ‘living rooms’. We examined their impact via interviews with youth workers (n=12), observations (n=12), a focus group with pupils (n=6), a questionnaire among pupils), and a focus group with school staff (n=6).

## Findings

The twelve methodological principles offer a strong foundation for improving youth work quality. In crime prevention, youth workers can help redirect young people, but face challenges balancing general and specialist roles. A 13th principle (ensuring safety) was identified as essential in this context. Findings show youth work faces various challenges in terms of its positioning. Whilst youth workers are increasingly recognized as key partner, youth work is still sometimes viewed by stakeholders as a tool to achieve their own objectives, rather than acknowledging youth works’ own goals. Youth workers often

experience a lack of recognition for their expertise and professional knowledge, as well as limited mandate or decision-making authority within the broader chain of care and support.

### **Conclusions and implications**

Across all projects, youth work's impact on the positive development of young people is evident. However, a clear need emerged for structured reflection and supervision in youth work. Currently, reflective practice are not well embedded in day-to-day work processes. The methodological principles provide a useful framework for this. There is also a need for targeted intervention strategies for specialist youth work, currently being developed with the Drop In project. Finally, strengthening inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration is essential. Doing so can help youth work claim a stronger, more visible role within integrated care and support systems.

### **References**

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## Virtual Streets Can Take You Home – how digital streetwork creates an impact

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### Background and purpose

Social work faces a new challenge today – the challenge of providing service to virtual communities treading new, virtual paths or hiding in pockets of a virtual reality only partially charted. It is tasked with tackling unresolved social difficulties such as social isolation, polarization and radicalization. In the same way that traditional streetwork attempts to provide low-threshold socio-pedagogical support by doing contact work with marginalized individuals, digital streetwork launches itself into virtual social realities to do the very same in unfamiliar environments.

The pilot project „Digital Streetwork“ was scientifically accompanied and evaluated during its start-up phase. This is a first step towards evidence-based practice from the founding stages onwards. A new domain is being charted under the close supervision of and with recurring feedback loops tying scientific and professional expertise into a nascent area of field practice. The following research questions guided the impact evaluation:

- a) How and as a result of what does digital streetwork create an impact?
- b) What kind of outreach work is conducted in this project?
- c) What creates an impact in contact work with youth (impact factors)?
- d) How does this type of online work affect professionals?
- e) What role do framework conditions of the digital setting play?

### Methods

For this formative process evaluation conducted from May 2024 through March 2025, a mixed-methods design was chosen to be able to provide process-related results for the improvement of the service. Mixed-methods approaches are widely used in impact research and are valued for their pragmatic, but multi-perspectival view on complex research questions (Kuckartz, 2014, S. 50ff). The qualitative and quantitative portions of the study were conducted simultaneously, but independently, and then synthesized into a final analysis. Six different methods were employed: recursive group discussions, quantitative analysis of professional documentation, qualitative analysis of chat protocols, qualitative analysis of contact work reflection by counselors, ethnographic observation and a Critical System Heuristics (CSM) Analysis.

### Findings

It was found that digital streetwork works due to several factors: low threshold accessibility, continuity in contact, and an effective balance between closeness to everyday environments and professional settings. Youth experience reliability and orientation in everyday situations that were previously disorienting. Digital social environments allow for innovative and creative communication settings and interaction, making digital streetwork not just a new type of service, but transforming professional practice altogether.

**Conclusion**

The results of the impact evaluation underscore the necessity and widespread acceptance of digital contact work – for social policy makers, for the general public and for the clientele that stands to profit. However, this type of work faces two main challenges. First, it is subject to the same exigencies of cost efficiency as traditional social work, but it has more difficulty aiming precisely for the clientele for whom the money is reserved. Second, it still has to refine its methods, and online counselors need continuous feedback and support as this service is professionalized.

**References**

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## The Impact of War on At-Risk Young adults Displaced from Their Homes: A Qualitative Study

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### Background

Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage marked by identity exploration, increasing independence, and transitions in education, work, and relationships. Because young adults are building their lives and futures, wartime creates prolonged uncertainty and therefore constitutes a general vulnerability factor for this age group. War and forced displacement disrupt stability, interrupt education and careers, and could expose young people to trauma. For at-risk young adults — those with histories of neglect, poverty, public care, or marginalization — the concept of “home” is often fragile; being uprooted again during wartime can further destabilize their lives, exacerbate psychological distress, and threaten fragile pathways toward independence.

### Method

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of 19 at-risk young adults evacuated from conflict zones in southern and northern Israel following the ongoing war that began on October 7th. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted online. Guided by grounded theory methodology, the analysis captured the complex meanings participants attributed to displacement during wartime.

### Findings

The analysis revealed four central themes that capture the complex experiences of at-risk young adults during wartime displacement. First, participants described trauma and a loss of security, characterized by acute fear and the collapse of basic assumptions about safety. A second theme of uncertainty and instability emerged: the disruption of education, employment, and career trajectories left many young adults with the impression that their lives were “on hold.” A third theme reflected feelings of loneliness, alienation, and dependence, as participants reported social isolation, strained family relations, and the erosion of autonomy while relying on temporary housing and financial aid. Yet, amidst these hardships, a fourth theme highlighted positive aspects of displacement. Some participants identified unexpected benefits, such as strengthened relationships, exposure to new environments, and, in certain cases, improved financial or personal circumstances. Together, these themes illustrate the dual reality of profound vulnerability alongside the potential for resilience and adaptation.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the dual reality faced by at-risk young adults during wartime displacement: on the one hand, trauma, instability, and loss of autonomy, and on the other, opportunities for resilience and new beginnings. Consistent with the literature, emerging adulthood represents a sensitive life stage in which identity, independence, and future trajectories are being shaped, making war and displacement especially disruptive.



Yet, the study also shows that within this vulnerability lies potential for growth. These insights underscore the urgent need for tailored psychosocial and practical interventions that not only address the heightened risks and psychological distress of this population, but also foster resilience and enable at-risk young adults to rebuild stability, independence, and belonging both during and after the war.

## Work, Recognition and Coordination: Experiences of Daily Activity Services among People with Intellectual Disabilities and/or Autism in Sweden

Senior Lecturer Lina Palmqvist<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of Borås

### Background and purpose

Work is often framed as a cornerstone of participation, independence, and citizenship, yet many people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism (ID/autism) remain excluded from the labour market. In Sweden, only one in five hold regular employment, while about half participate in Daily Activity (DA), a disability service intended to promote pathways to work but rarely fulfilling this aim. Around 25% of adults with ID/autism have no known occupation at all, leaving them further marginalised. Although DA participants often contribute through meaningful tasks, their efforts lack formal recognition in terms of wages and labour rights. This study examines how people with ID/autism experience and ascribe meaning to work, and how employment-related inter-organisational coordination is shaped—or hindered. The analysis draws on the social relational model of disability (Thomas, 1999) and social reproduction theory (Jaffe, 2022).

### Methods

The study was conducted in two Swedish municipalities through a qualitative design inspired by institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005). Fieldwork combined participant observations and interviews with people with ID/autism, alongside interviews with municipal officials, service providers, and other stakeholders. A reference group of disability rights representatives was involved throughout the project, bringing critical perspectives grounded in lived experience and in the collective knowledge developed through disability rights engagement.

### Findings

The results reveal both positive and negative experiences of DA, where participants described feelings of belonging and meaningfulness alongside experiences of control and lack of recognition. A key finding is that some individuals fell through the gaps between welfare support and the labour market, leaving them without meaningful or recognised occupations. This was linked both to low incentives tied to minimal compensation and to perceptions that DA does not constitute “real work” and therefore lacks meaning. Regarding coordination, the findings point to differences between the larger and smaller municipality. Coordination was often formulated as a goal but proved difficult to realise across organisations guided by different institutional logics and divergent understandings of the target group. At times, ableist assumptions about work capacity were reproduced, while the voices of people with ID/autism were not always heard, creating further barriers to meaningful occupation.

### Conclusions and implications

The study demonstrates the paradox of being included in welfare support but excluded from labour rights and recognition. It highlights the need for rethinking both the organisation of DA and cross-sectoral coordination to strengthen the rights, recognition, and influence of people with ID/autism in working life. The findings contribute to current debates on the challenges and opportunities facing social work in contemporary welfare states and underline the value of co-creating knowledge with disability rights organisations and practitioners — with the aim of developing practice settings, together with research, that genuinely include the people they are intended for.

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## Does Resilience Emerge within Kinship Caregiver Communities?

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<sup>1</sup> University of Latvia

Throughout history and across cultures, there have always been parents who, for various reasons, could not care for their children, which has led to the search for alternative caregivers, usually beginning with the extended family. Although kinship care is regarded as the form of care most consistent with the best interests of the child, a range of risk factors are often identified in families of kinship caregivers. One direction of support could be the development of kinship caregiver communities or organizations representing the interests of kinship caregivers. One direction of support could be the development of kinship caregiver communities or organizations representing the interests of kinship caregivers; however, such practice is not observed in Latvia. Previous research on kinship care families has primarily focused on various risk factors and has compared kinship care with foster care. Relatively little attention has been devoted specifically to kinship care families in the context of community level dynamics.

The aim of the study is to identify the factors that hinder the formation of kinship caregivers' communities in Latvia and to conceptualize the potential benefits that could arise if these communities were to become active. This study is grounded in systems theory and the concept of resilience. A qualitative case study methodology was employed: the study included interviews with kinship caregivers (n=22), interviews with experts (n=6; social workers, representatives of the municipality, Ministry of Welfare and NGO's), and focus group discussion with kinship caregivers (n=6). The recruitment of kinship caregivers was carried out using snowball sampling. In the analysis of the data a qualitative content analysis approach was applied.

The result of the study indicates that kinship caregivers tend to prioritize the preservation of family privacy. At the same time, the development of a community requires mutual communication and a sense of belonging, both of which may be perceived as a potential threat to this privacy. Elements that are typically regarded as resilience enhancing factors by kinship caregivers are perceived as threats. In cases where relatively closer cooperation among kinship caregivers were observed, the predominant form of support involves assistance in times of difficulty ranging from help in meeting basic needs, to support in addressing relationship challenges. Situations in which kinship caregivers might collaborate to achieve change not only at the individual level but also on a broader scale were mentioned exclusively by experts. Collaboration among kinship caregivers at the community level remains a potential resource.

## **Critical reflections on public involvement in social services research - How has a parents' research advisory group improved research quality in this field and what are the challenges of this approach?**

Miss Elaine Speyer<sup>1</sup>, Leanne Cook, Cerys Harris

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This presentation will reflect on the involvement of parents with experience of child protection processes in research. Specifically, it focuses on the work of the Parents' Research Advisory Group at CASCADE, a large children's social care research centre at Cardiff University.

The group brings lived experience and knowledge to multiple stages of social work and interdisciplinary research conducted at the centre and further afield. This helps embed lived experience in evidence informed practice and policy recommendations.

The group is distinctive in two ways. First, it involves parents who are involuntary recipients of social services. Second, it is a standing group - operational since 2021 – which provides regular influence and contributions across multiple research projects. As such, the group brings together members with valuable, seldom-heard perspectives, who have accumulated a range of research experience and expertise.

Parents from the group, alongside a staff representative from the public involvement team, will deliver the presentation. Drawing from a recently published journal article which was co-authored by the CASCADE Parents Group (Holland et al. 2024), they will outline the development of the group and some of the benefits and challenges experienced to date.

Examples of the group's contribution to projects and influence at various stages of the research process will be shared. This includes: supporting research prioritisation; informing the conduct of research with people who have experienced trauma; and contextualising findings.

In addition to the many benefits of the group, practical, emotional and financial challenges will be discussed. The presentation will make connections with wider debates related to power imbalances, diversity and representation, and quality and impact.

The presentation fits most directly with the sub-theme of “linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge”. The presentation will showcase how the involvement of parents has influenced work across the research centre, and policy and practice in children's social care more broadly.

In addition, the presentation links to “methodological development, innovation, technologies and capacity building in social work research”. The presentation will highlight how capacity is built for researchers engaged with the group, as well as group members who report multiple benefits from their involvement.

The presentation will conclude by emphasizing the transformative potential of involving parents with lived experience in research. It will also acknowledge the ethical complexities inherent in such collaborations. At a time when participatory and power-sharing approaches are increasingly expected - but nevertheless remain challenging to implement - the presentation offers practical insights into how to support and sustain meaningful involvement. Reflections from parent participants will underscore the importance of co-creation and lived experience in shaping research, policy, and practice.

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## When clients bring ChatGPT to clinical practice: Weighty matters in mental health services for disordered eating

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Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, such as ChatGPT, are emerging as influential actors in mental health and social work practice (Goldkind et al., 2024). This study explores how clients with histories of disordered eating intra-act with ChatGPT for guidance on healthy eating, weight management, and dieting. These intra-actions are not neutral, as dominant discourses on health, body image, and ideal weight shape them. The advice provided by ChatGPT influences clients' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, which raises critical questions for social work practitioners engaged in counselling on disordered eating.

The central research question guiding this study is: What advice is generated by ChatGPT for clients regarding these weighty matters that practitioners need to consider and navigate in their sessions with clients? To explore this, a qualitative persona-based study was conducted drawing on interdisciplinary methods from human-computer interaction (HCI) research (Bounegru et al., 2022). Three fictional personas, each representing individuals with disordered eating backgrounds, engaged in structured sessions with ChatGPT. These simulated dialogues included inquiries common to their lived experiences, such as meal planning, body image concerns, and managing feelings associated with eating.

Data from the structured sessions were analyzed to assess the degree to which ChatGPT's responses aligned with evidence-based care for disordered eating. Particular attention was paid to the reinforcement of diet culture and normative body ideals. Theoretical analysis was anchored in new materialist perspectives from fat studies (FS) and science and technology studies (STS), highlighting the entanglements between humans and ChatGPT as actors in the co-production of health knowledge (Barad, 2007; Van Amsterdam et al., 2023).

Findings include that ChatGPT offers a mixture of helpful and harmful information to clients. While some responses by ChatGPT reflect supportive recovery-oriented content, many also reproduce dominant medicalized and fatphobic discourses, reinforcing harmful norms around weight, dieting, and health. Also, the tendency to prioritize generalized wellness advice over nuanced personalized care underscores the limitations of ChatGPT in responding to complex mental health needs. These findings have important implications for social work practice in this era of Industry 4.0. Practitioners must remain aware of the AI-generated content their clients may be engaging with, since such content can undermine or conflict with therapeutic goals. While ChatGPT may offer opportunities for accessible support, it is not a substitute for evidence-based counselling. Rather, its widespread use demands that social workers critically engage with how ChatGPT is informing clients' worldviews and behaviours.

This research fits with the conference theme of "Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: Researching and Facilitating Evidence-Informed Practice and Policy". It bridges social work with HCI, FS, and STS, thus providing an interdisciplinary approach. It aligns with

the subthemes on methodological innovation by advancing new materialist research in social work; Industry 4.0 by considering the impacts of AI on social work practice; and challenges and opportunities for social work practice and policy associated with AI. Within the context of Industry 4.0, the digital welfare state, this study emphasizes the importance of safeguarding evidence-based practitioner-client relational approaches while critically questioning neoliberalist techno-solutionism for mental health challenges.



## Community Social Work in an Era of Political and Social Polarization: Between Professional Paralysis and a Potential for Change

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### Background and Purpose

There is no doubt that the Israeli government's decision to promote a judicial reform in January 2023 led to an intensification of social and political polarization in Israel. This polarization manifested in growing public protests, mass demonstrations, and various forms of civil disobedience. These tensions posed professional and ethical challenges for community social workers, who—by virtue of their role—work with diverse communities representing different sectors of the Israeli sociopolitical spectrum. Thus, given that community social work is inherently engaged in political processes of organization, strengthening community capacities, and developing leadership, and that it operates at the intersection of social needs and government policy, questions arise regarding its ability to remain neutral and the ways in which it can act in times of national crisis and heightened polarization. Against this backdrop, the current study aims to explore how community social work is shaped within a polarized sociopolitical reality, and what transformations may be taking place in the identity and role of institutional community practitioners. These questions were examined through the lens of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), with particular focus on the concept of the "disorienting dilemma"—a phase in which existing identity structures and professional assumptions are challenged by a disruptive external event.

### Methods:

This qualitative-phenomenological study employed the Photovoice methodology, with an adapted version of the SHOWeD protocol tailored to the study's questions. A total of 41 community social workers with at least three years of experience participated in the study: 27 in individual in-depth interviews and 14 in focus\dialogical groups. All participants created visual outputs and accompanying narratives, which were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

### Findings:

Three central themes emerged from the data:

1. Tension between Personal and Professional Identity – Participants experienced confusion and inner conflict over boundaries between their citizen roles and professional duties during political upheaval.
2. Silencing, Silence, and In-Between – Participants described avoidance and self-censorship shaped by organizational contexts discouraging political discussions, despite their relevance to community practice.
3. The Potential Impact of Community Work – Participants highlighted community social work's bridging role, fostering shared initiatives across ideological divides during national polarization.

**Conclusions and Implications:**

The findings situate participants' experiences within the first stage of TLT—the “disorienting dilemma”—highlighting professional identity disruption amid a turbulent political climate, and exposing widespread practices of silence and suppression in institutional settings. At the same time, the third theme points to an emerging potential to redefine the professional role of community social work: one that centers on creating dialogical and bridging spaces responsive to political and social complexity. Notably, institutional community workers appeared to recognize their role and potential influence within a polarized society through practices of dialogue and mediation. These practices stand in partial contrast to those typically associated with non-institutional community activism, such as protest and direct challenge to the public order. In this light, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on the boundaries and responsibilities of institutional community practice in polarized societies and offers directions for future professional development and policy engagement.

## Uncertainty in anonymous online social work encounters

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### Background and purpose

Uncertainty has long been discussed in social work as an inherent element of professional practice. The present paper extends this discussion into the realm of digital social work. It reports a study of anonymous text-based online counselling provided by the social services in Sweden. We explore what kind of uncertainty is evoked when social workers respond to anonymous users through online platforms, and how this uncertainty is related to the constraints of Internet- and text-based communication.

### Methods

This is a qualitative interview study conducted in three Swedish municipalities, where the social services provided anonymous online counselling. All the interviewees (N=12) were educated social workers who worked with either an online anonymous enquiry form (N=5), online chat (N=4) or both (N=3), depending on municipality. The interview material was analysed using inductive thematic analysis. For the present study, we performed a sub-analysis of the theme “Uncertainty” to provide its more detailed and nuanced account.

### Findings

Social workers reasoned about uncertainty as a professional challenge and an intrinsic aspect of anonymous online counselling. They experienced uncertainty as a state of not-knowing or being unsure due to contextual conditions (limited access to information about the client). In this respect, the uncertainty appeared to undermine social workers’ professionalism rather than support it, as is the case with the conscious position of un-knowing recommended in professional decision-making. We identified three dimensions of online uncertainty: 1) interactional uncertainty due to the technological constraints of online encounters (limited information about users and the possibility of multiple readings of users’ messages), 2) professional uncertainty due to the reconfigured professional tasks (the limited opportunities to provide practical help to anonymous online users and the ambiguity of the professional role), and 3) relational uncertainty due to the perceived incompleteness of the online encounters (absent or limited feedback from users and abrupt endings to online chat conversations).

### Conclusions and implications

We argue that the use of new technologies creates new conditions for conducting social work, which challenge the traditional professional role. The very features of online counselling that attract users – low threshold and anonymity – evoke uncertainty in social workers and, in some cases, make it impossible to provide the help being sought. Therefore, when working online, social workers need to be trained not only in how to use technology but also in how to communicate with a client under the specific conditions of an anonymous, text-based encounter online.

## **Libraries as Community Anchors: A Social Work–Library Science Partnership to Support People in Crisis in an Age of Public Service Divestment**

Dr Lydia Ogden<sup>1</sup>, Dr Rachel Williams

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Across North America and Europe, where many countries are experiencing reductions in centralized social welfare support and growing public service cuts, public libraries serve as informal support centres for people lacking other options. Public libraries are increasingly at the forefront of encounters with individuals experiencing housing insecurity, mental health challenges, and poverty. Research from the United States (Williams & Ogden, 2020), the Netherlands (Eckerdal et al., 2024), the United Kingdom (Ovendun, 2024), and Portugal (Alvim & Calixto, n.d.), to name a few, documents how libraries are absorbing new social functions as social infrastructure contracts—and may need to absorb yet more soon. Public library workers, while committed to access and inclusion, and to delivering a free and open resource for all, frequently report feeling underprepared for these complex interactions (i.e., Williams & Ogden, 2020).

This presentation describes an interdisciplinary collaboration between social work and library and information science (LIS) designed to address this gap. Through qualitative inquiry with public library staff of a single US city, we documented the emotional labor, secondary trauma, and ethical dilemmas such staff face in responding to patrons in crisis (Williams & Ogden, 2020). Guided by these findings, we co-developed and piloted training programmes integrating social work direct-practice competencies of trauma-informed practice and crisis de-escalation (Williams et al., 2024), as well as evidence-informed wellbeing and burnout prevention, within the professional context of LIS.

In one such training participants reported increased confidence, enhanced coping, and improved responses to patrons (Williams et al., 2024). This work demonstrates how social work knowledge can extend beyond traditional service systems, positioning libraries as community anchors in times of shrinking welfare infrastructure. It further illustrates how interdisciplinary research can generate evidence to inform policy, strengthen workforce development, and reimagine community-based responses to social exclusion and resource loss.

Highlighting the potential for libraries and social workers to collaborate, this project advances the conference theme, offering an example of interdisciplinary research facilitating evidence-informed practice and shaping policy debates on inclusive community care.

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## Navigating the Labyrinth of Concern — Identification Practices and Their Implications for supporting Children and families

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In Sweden, as well as internationally, early interventions are increasingly emphasized as a key strategy in social work policy and practice (e.g., Thoburn 2023). These interventions are viewed as central to the welfare state's ability to support children and families. Reflecting this trend, numerous initiatives are underway in Sweden to promote early and coordinated interventions for children, many of which draw inspiration from the Scottish national child policy *Getting it right for every child* (Anderberg, Forkby & Thelin 2020). While these efforts aim to improve outcomes for children and families, research also highlights potential unintended consequences, such as the risk of negatively affecting children's self-perception or reinforcing stigmatizing labels (e.g., Sorhaindo et al. 2016).

This presentation is based on findings from an ethnographic study that contributes to a growing body of research examining how policies of early interventions are translated into everyday practice. It investigates the identification practices that precede early interventions within a GIRFEC-inspired framework, focusing on how children are recognized as being at risk and how these practices shape the support pathways available to them and their families. Drawing on actor-network theory, the study explores how human and non-human actors, such as children, parents, professionals and artifacts interact to influence welfare work (cf. Latour 1992).

The study follows how children's needs are identified in school settings and travel through various actors and institutions. Data collection spanned 10 months and includes approximately 100 hours of observations of student health team meetings, inter-agency collaborations and meetings between professionals and families. Additionally, interviews were conducted with 18 professionals, 12 parents and 6 children aged 8-12.

This presentation highlights preliminary themes that reveal both challenges and opportunities for social work practice in realizing policy ambitions of early interventions. These themes include difficulties professionals face in initiating early and coordinated interventions, the dynamics of inter-agency collaboration and the relationships between professionals, children and parents. The findings raise important questions about how trust and collaboration can be strengthened across institutional boundaries and how children and families can be more actively involved in shaping the support they receive.

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# Social Work with Unaccompanied Minors in Residential Care in Germany: Professional Attitudes, Interdisciplinary Cooperation, and Challenges in Practice

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## Background and Aims

Unaccompanied minors (UMs) are a specific target group within Germany's residential care system. Due to circumstances such as separation from family, flight experience, and uncertainty regarding asylum status, working with UMs may entail different tasks than working with other users of child and youth welfare services (e.g., children taken into custody due to maltreatment or abuse). This presentation will address the ethical, legal, and professional principles of social work with UMs in residential care in Germany. It will also provide insights into how social workers/pedagogical staff define their professional attitudes, describe their work tasks, and understand their role in cooperating with other stakeholders, such as the child and youth welfare office, legal guardians, and parents abroad. The presentation will highlight and critically discuss challenges in professional practice, considering how professional standards align with the experiences of social workers/pedagogical staff.

## Methods

This presentation is based on a secondary analysis of selected data from a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) study. This study collected and analyzed data from social workers and pedagogical staff (n = 20), (former) UMs (n = 12), and experts (n = 3). For the purpose of this presentation, the focus is on social workers/pedagogical staff working in residential care settings only. Selected categories are presented to provide information on professional attitudes, interdisciplinary cooperation, and challenges in practice.

## Results

The findings highlight the diverse motivations and roles of social workers/pedagogical staff in residential care for UMs. Staff perspectives ranged from identifying as professionals who "ended up" in this field to intentionally choosing to work with this group. Some staff kept their distance, not concerning themselves with their work after ending their shift. Others defined themselves as "mothers" to the UMs and expanded their relationships to include private contact with them. The social workers/pedagogical staff in this sample enjoyed working with UMs, but sometimes felt overwhelmed or confronted with ethical dilemmas. The wide range of tasks involved in working with UMs was also evident. These tasks spanned bureaucratic issues, language assistance, psychosocial support, relational work, and practical help with tasks such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, and arranging appointments. At the same time, the global socio-political context and transnational family structures influenced the daily lives of UMs. This required social workers to address issues they were not prepared for or had not considered before entering the field. Cooperation with different stakeholders was considered important but often presented challenges, particularly regarding the division of responsibilities and practical matters.



**Implications**

Social workers/pedagogical staff require extensive knowledge in various areas, including ethics, law, psychology, and global sociopolitical issues, and must be equipped with professional methods to carry out their tasks appropriately. Against the backdrop of the debate on "deprofessionalization" in residential care settings in Germany (e.g., Birkel-Barmsen & Meiner-Teubner, 2024), particularly with regard to UMs, social work research should focus on the consequences for the professional support of this group, as well as on how to foster interdisciplinary cooperation in practice.

## Mothering in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence. Matricentric Perspective

Ms Jolanta Malažinskienė<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Eglė Kačkutė<sup>2</sup>

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The research on mothering in the context of intimate partner violence tends to focus on children's welfare and frame abused mothers as primary carers who fail to ensure their children's physical and emotional wellbeing and to provide them with safe, nurturing, and economically viable environment for growth and development. As such, welfare services tend to see abused mothers as deficient, failing to protect their children from violence, including from witnessing violence and, by extension, contributing to harming the children. Consequently, mothers who experience intimate partner violence are rarely seen as victims of violence who mother in a specific and adverse set of circumstances.

This shortcoming is partly due to methodological approaches traditionally used in social work research methods that are rooted in dominant motherhood and family ideologies and thus not only does not appreciate the potential gender power imbalance in the family, but actively reinforces it. McDonald-Harker (2020, 261) suggests that "abused mothers are often active subjects who attempt to compensate for the abuse by forging stronger relationships with their children, even in times of crisis." However, little is still known about the impact of domestic violence on the mothering experience since the hegemonic category of woman that dominates social policy discourse (e.g. Stambul Convention, 2011) tends to obscure the needs of mothers who mother in this uniquely complex set of circumstances. How does domestic violence shape the mothers' world view? What decisions do they make as mothers in the face of intimate partner violence? What mothering strategies do they apply? How do they go about protecting their children? How do they build relationships with their children? How did they come to see their role as mothers in such circumstances? This paper draws on contemporary motherhood theory developed in cultural and literary studies and argues that it can be applied in social work, as an area where it is important to eliminate the structural causes of social problems in order to solve them. The matrifocal perspective sees motherhood as a diverse experience and mothers as agents of their own mothering. Matrifocal approach is based on mothering experience as an intellectual, self-reflexive and philosophical practice, and the institution of motherhood as a socio-political power structure (Rich 1976).

The paper focusses on 25 in-depth qualitative interviews with mothers who currently mother or have in the past mothered in the context of intimate partner violence collected between June and August 2025 in Lithuania. At the time of the interview, the participants were mothering children under 18. Some lived with their partners / fathers of their children and some did not. They were asked to tell their mothering stories in any way they saw fit. The transcribed interviews were analysed using the tools of narrative analysis. The data suggests that the experience of intimate partner violence has a profound impact on maternal subjectivity and documents an emergence of a collective voice of mothers who mothering in the context of domestic violence.

## Learning Across Borders: Inter- and Transdisciplinary Care for Families with Young Children

Lieneke Ebbe, Eli Haafkens, Dr. Tamar Shibolet

<sup>1</sup> Saxion

### Background and purpose

The parent-child relationship is vital for children's psychosocial development. Promoting this relationship and providing support when necessary contributes to a promising start in life and helps prevent problems later on (Jeong et al., 2021). Given the involvement of numerous youth healthcare and social work professionals in providing such support, well-coordinated inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration is essential.

We will share findings from a four-year (2021-2025) collaborative project focusing on strengthening parent-child relationships in Deventer (Netherlands). The project aimed to inspire health care practitioners and social work professionals to collaborate more effectively and learn from each other's expertise to be able to offer better care and support to parents of young children (age -9 months to 2 years old) in vulnerable situations. The goal was to collectively invest in prevention and to provide appropriate support as locally as possible.

### Methods

In order to accomplish this the municipality, professionals from various disciplines, experts by experience and research collaborated on research activities and methods including:

1. Mapping professional practices: A comprehensive inventory of existing local and national services (interventions, conversation tools, and identification instruments) and dissemination of this information within the professional network to enhance mutual awareness and accessibility
2. Facilitating professional exchange: Structured networking sessions where professionals present their respective practices were organized. Sessions incorporated opportunities for networking and collaborative case study discussions to foster interprofessional understanding.
3. Collaborative learning: Interdisciplinary training modules aimed at enhancing professionals' competencies in identifying and articulating the dynamics of the parent-child relationship were developed and implemented in co-creation. This training was given by trainers from various fields (mental health psychologists, municipal health service youth nurses) to a range of professionals (childcare workers, maternity care workers, municipal health service youth nurses).

## Findings

Findings highlighted the need for better collaboration between healthcare and social work professionals. A major barrier was the lack of a shared language. Professionals expressed a need for knowledge exchange that could be applied in daily practice. Structured networking sessions were highly valued and proved impactful in addressing these issues. However, sustaining these sessions after the project ends remains a challenge. Professionals who participated in the training for identifying and discussing the parent-child relationship reported to have both increased their knowledge on identifying breakdowns in parent-child relationships as well as improving their skills to address their concerns with parents in a constructive manner.

## Conclusions and implications

Supporting parents of young children in vulnerable situations requires inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration. This is crucial but not self-evident. Professionals must be motivated and supported to collaborate effectively. The ROK Deventer project improved collaboration and highlighted the importance of continued investment in sustainable structures to maintain these gains. The project resulted in the development of a toolkit for professionals to help facilitate this.

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## Relational Practice, At What Cost? Social Workers' Perceptions of Relationship-Based Practice with Care Experienced Young People in Scotland

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### Background

Relationship-based practice, while central to social work, is increasingly constrained by structural, cultural, and sociopolitical factors. Care experienced young people (CEYP) are a highly vulnerable population, who need positive professional relationships to thrive. The intersection of these two areas (relationship-based practice and care experienced young people) has rarely been studied from the perspective of social workers themselves. This presentation explores how social workers and team managers in Scotland experience relationship-based practice with CEYP transitioning out of the care system.

### Methods

The research employed qualitative methods, using in-depth interviews with fourteen participants across seven Scottish local authorities, including nine throughcare/aftercare (TC/AC) social workers and five team managers. Purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling was utilised to recruit participants. Interviews were conducted online, underpinned by a relational and reflexive approach, incorporating positionality and reflective logs. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, adopting a Feminist-Marxist lens of emotional labour as the theoretical framework.

### Findings

The findings highlight a complex interplay of commitment, constraint, and personal cost. Participants described the tension of realising relationship-based practice, with genuine efforts to demonstrate care undermined by bureaucratic, time-limited processes. Being a social worker in a TC/AC team was largely described as being a 'one-man band', struggling to meet the increasingly complex needs of CEYP with limited systemic support and recognition. Fixation on organisational tasks and tangible outcomes eroded opportunities for spontaneous, relational interactions, while deeply imbedded cultures of fear and blame fostered a sense of vulnerability at work. Participants described various forms of self-sacrifice while trying to remain committed to relationship-based practice in this context. From this, a growing sense of disconnect from both CEYP and the profession was reported. Team managers identified relational work as a necessary 'golden thread' in social work. However, they acknowledged relationality is under threat due to resource scarcity, and competing policy demands. Aftercare provision was frequently characterised as an afterthought, with the emotional and relational needs of CEYP often unmet. The findings point to a loss of social work identity and the fundamental humanity underpinning the profession, both essential to relationship-based practice.

### Conclusion and Implications

The study illustrates that relationship-based practice with CEYP is compromised by individualistic neoliberal structures, which increases the emotional labour of social workers. The findings highlight the paradox of a system that demands relational practice, within an uncondusive context of bureaucratisation, de-professionalisation and risk-aversion. Personal harm is incurred by practitioners, whose empathy, wellbeing, and professional identity are exploited and tested in environments of relentless pressure. The research contributes to interdisciplinary debates on the sustainability of relationship-based practice in an unchanging, neoliberal context. It calls for systemic recognition of the emotional labour inherent in relational work with CEYP, structural reform, and a re-centring of social work values that prioritise care, compassion, and human connection. Without structural change, the promise of relationship-based practice risks becoming hollow rhetoric at the expense of both CEYP and practitioners. The research highlights challenges for social work practice, policy and education but also renewed opportunities for re-conceptualisation of the social work role.

# Opportunities, Challenges, and Conspicuous Absences: An Integrative Review the Social Work Literature on Artificial Intelligence

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## Background and Purpose

Although artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly ubiquitous in society, few understand how it works, where it comes from, and the scope of its planetary scale (Crawford, 2021). AI systems require extraordinary amounts of electricity, water, and rare minerals, contributing to environmental distress and human rights abuses. AI models are trained by numerous underpaid data workers, working long hours in substandard conditions. Source codes are often secretly guarded by industry leaders and investors who resist regulation and consumer protections. Given social work's commitment to human rights and social justice it is crucial to seriously engage with these aspects of AI's rapid growth, and see AI through a critical, structural lens.

In the last five years, social work literature on AI proliferated. Many social workers are optimistic about AI's impact on practice, research and education. Some worry about the potential for AI to harm clients (ie: Reamer, 2023). We conducted this review to examine recent social work discourse regarding AI and assess the manner and the extent to which social workers are grappling with AI's structural implications beyond professional practice.

## Methods

An integrative literature review is a form of secondary research, contributing to a topic's knowledge via synthesis and critique. We conducted a critical integrative review of social work literature guided by two research questions: 1) What is the nature of the social work discourse related to AI? 2) To what extent is the discourse addressing structural aspects? We reviewed 52 texts focused on AI and social work practice, education, or research, published between 2020-2025. The literature included peer-reviewed academic articles as well as gray literature, which including podcasts, online journals, and blogs. Each piece of literature was read thoroughly and summarized in detail by at least two researchers. Summaries were then analyzed for themes.

## Findings

The analysis revealed a conspicuous absence of structural critiques of AI. A core theme that we called Proceed (with caution) reflects a prevailing optimism about AI in social work, tempered by some concern. Subthemes include The AI Train has left the station and the need for social work perspective. Concerns about AI, which were often mentioned in passing, primarily focused on ethical dilemmas that may result in downstream effects on social workers and clients. There was almost no acknowledgement of structural aspects of AI such as the environment, labor, and human rights.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

While existing literature touts potential benefits of AI in social work, more research is needed to substantiate claims and identify unintended consequences. Social workers need to engage in more robust discussion of ethical concerns raised, but not explored in-depth, in extant literature. Social work's commitment to social justice cannot be met without engaging with structural critiques of AI, including its environmental, labor, and social impacts.

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## Digital Competence and Digital Inclusion: Social Work Practices with Older Adults in the context of community work

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### Background

Digital transformation has implications for all areas of social work, particularly in gerontological social work. However, the digital transformation process has only been partially completed by older adults in recent years. Political and social stakeholders in Germany have called for older adults to receive support from professionals regarding digital inclusion. It is presumed that social work professionals engaged in ageing-related work must possess digital competences tailored to the specific needs of their service users [1]. This study aims to identify the digital competencies required by social work professionals to support the learning processes of older adults, and to explore the role of social workers in promoting digital inclusion among this age group within the context of community work.

### Methods

Thirteen qualitative expert interviews were conducted between March and July 2025, with 15 people: 13 social workers (3 male/10 female), one social worker in training (female) and one social manager (male). All respondents worked in community work facilities for older adults in Germany. Their work experience ranged between six months and 29 years. The interviews are analysed using content analysis [2].

### Preliminary Findings

Respondents have integrated the topic of 'digital inclusion' into their institutions by providing services such as lectures, courses, and consultation hours. Digital skills are frequently imparted to older adults by volunteers. Respondents with less than five years of professional experience describe themselves as digitally savvy and committed to digital participation. Experienced professionals report uncertainty more often when it comes to supporting digital inclusion. The respondent group of social workers report everyday digital knowledge as an important skill. However, specific digital skills for social workers in community work with older adults are rarely described.

### Conclusions

The results show that digital inclusion is an important topic in gerontological social work. Social workers achieve digital inclusion for older adults by cooperating with third parties such as volunteers, police officers or bank employees. One challenge is to establish professional digital competencies for social workers, in addition to their everyday use of digital technologies. This research contributes to the conference's objectives regarding the challenges facing social work practice, policy and education in contemporary contexts. The results could help decision-makers to expand support services and contribute to the professional development of social workers in terms of their digital competence [3]. Further research is needed to understand the specific expectations that older adults have of social workers regarding digital inclusion in community work.

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## Political Orientations, Attitudes, and Participation of Social Work Students – Initial Findings from a Panel Survey at Two Universities in Germany

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### Background and purpose

The political aspects, attitudes towards social policy, politics, the political mandate of social work, and political engagement (PE)—whether on the job or off the job, on a civic or a professional route—among both professionals and students in the field of social work have been increasingly discussed in recent years (Gal, Weiss-Gal 2023). Relatively stable findings include a strong agreement with the political mandate of social work, greater support for welfare state services, and PE that can be well explained using the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba et al. 1995; Kindler, Kulke 2022).

### Methods

Social work students, as future professionals, represent an interesting target group for research because insights can be gained regarding the teaching of social work politics. To gain a current overview of the political perspectives of social work students, the authors initiated a panel study on these topics at two Bavarian universities during the winter semester of 2024/25. All first-semester students in social work degree programs were surveyed (n=363). These cohorts will be surveyed again as a panel in their third and sixth semesters. Concurrently, we will start the same survey with incoming first-semester students in the winter semester of 2025/26.

The survey covered attitudes towards social policy and politics in general, political orientations, political engagement, and social networks. Descriptively, we present how students perceive their political interest and their internal and external political efficacy. Evaluations of democracy and the welfare state are analyzed, alongside items concerning professional self-conception and personal political participation. We are keen to observe whether changes become apparent during the course of study through the panel survey, or if these determinants remain more rigid.

Further comparisons can be made in two ways: first, with the general population to contextualize the specific situation of the students; and second, through replicating some items from a similar survey conducted nationwide approximately ten years ago (Kulke 2019). This should be particularly interesting given the political developments of recent years.

### Findings

First findings show a conformation of formerly results with esp internal political efficacy and social networks as strong determinants of PE. By April 2026, we will have the opportunity to show the results of comparisons of the first semester with those from the third semester.

### Conclusions and implications

Possible implications could include the following: Are there prerequisites for political engagement and the ability to take action? Are there identifiable determinants that contribute to political understanding, and how can these potentially be supported through the teaching of politics? What conclusions for social work education and practice can be drawn from this?

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## Evidence-Informed Labor Policy: Comparing Working Conditions of Unionized and Non-Unionized Social Workers in the United States

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### Background and purpose

Since the pandemic, union election petitions have doubled, and public support for unions in the United States is 67% (Greenhouse, 2025). Unions have long played a role in protecting employees from exploitative working conditions. Since 1990, unionized professions such as nursing and teaching have either retained or significantly increased their purchasing power in the United States. In contrast, social workers have lost \$10,000 in purchasing power (AIER, 2021; CSWE, 2022; NCSBN, 2021; NCES, 2020). Some social workers in the United States are members of county, state, federal, or host setting unions, but little is known about how union affiliation affects their working conditions. This study applies transdisciplinary theories of labor and professionalism to compare the experiences of unionized and non-unionized social workers on measures of managerialism, professional discretion, management resistance, income, and unpaid overtime.

### Methods

An anonymous 20-minute Qualtrics survey was emailed to all licensed social workers in a Midwest state in the United States. A total of 3,662 completed the survey (23.8% response rate); 91% were white women. The mean years of experience was 13.8. Of the 2,329 direct-line social workers who responded, 318 were union members, 1,743 were not, and 268 left the item blank (n=2,061). Scales for managerialism and professional discretion, as well as items on resistance, were developed through a literature review, existing workforce surveys, practice experience, and expert consultation.

### Findings

Public employees were far more likely to be unionized (38.3%) than employees in private nonprofit (1.4%) or for-profit settings (0.7%).

Managerialism: Four scales measured managerialism. Productivity and Efficiency: There was no significant difference in perceived productivity and efficiency between non-union (Mean=17.04) and union (Mean=16.65) workers ( $t(450.06)=0.96, p=.34$ ). Monitoring: Union members reported significantly more monitoring (Mean=9.61) than non-union members (Mean=8.61) ( $t(252.64)=-2.75, p=.006$ ). Incentives/Sanctions: They also reported significantly fewer incentives and sanctions (Mean=7.34) compared to non-union workers (Mean=8.32) ( $t(512.75)=5.08, p<.001$ ). Standardization: Non-union workers reported significantly more standardized practice decisions (Mean=16.51) than union workers (Mean=14.65) ( $t(446.46)=5.36, p<.001$ ).

Professional Discretion and Resistance: No significant differences were found in reported discretion ( $t(447.13)=0.84, p=.40$ ) or resistance to management directives ( $t(446.85)=-1.19, p=.23$ ).

Unpaid Overtime: Non-unionized full-time workers reported more unpaid overtime (Mean=5.11 hours) than unionized workers (Mean=4.06 hours).

Income: Non-unionized social workers earned less than unionized social workers: below \$40,000-60,000: 46% (Non-Union) to 24% (Union); \$60,001-80,000: 41% (Non-Union) to 51% (Union); above \$80,001: 14% (Non-Union) to 25% (Union). Chi-square analysis showed a significant association between income and unionization ( $\chi^2=55.043$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

### Conclusions

Although unionized social workers experienced less incentive/sanction and standardization pressure, they reported similar productivity demands and higher monitoring than non-unionized social workers. Discretion and resistance levels were not significantly different. However, important distinctions emerged; union workers experienced significantly higher salaries and less unpaid overtime, which might help with retention issues. Yet, data indicate that unions in their current formation may not address core professional aims of social workers, such as autonomy, discretion, or resistance. Social work researchers should explore how professional social work unions might better advance these goals and how unionization effects vary across countries.

## Professional perceptions of the Social Work Role with Adult Vulnerable Witnesses, in Northern Ireland

Dr James Todd<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Southern Health & Social Care Trust

### Background

Adult Safeguarding includes preventative and protective endeavours, from a range of professionals, to support adults who are at risk of harm and in need of protection. Some of these individuals may also be victims of crime as well as abuse and consequently may need to be supported by both social work and policing services. This cross-sectional explorative study, employing qualitative data collection, methods was used to explore the professional perceptions, of social workers and police officers working in Northern Ireland, of the social work role with Adult Vulnerable Witnesses (AVWs) within a protocol for the joint investigation of abuse between the Police and Social Work services.

### Aim of study

The study focused on three questions: -

- What is the role and value of social work Involvement in the joint investigation of criminal abuse within adult protection processes?
- What are the perceptions of social workers and police officers regarding the joint working processes?
- What are the implications for workforce planning, training, and development?

### Methodology

Completion of a scoping review of the literature identified five current themes within Adult Safeguarding research; safeguarding systems, legal powers, outcome measures, learning from serious case reviews and making safeguarding personal. Using the same model, a further review focused, more specifically, on the social work role with Adult Vulnerable Witnesses. Three focus groups and 19 individual interviews were conducted with social workers and police officers who were actively involved in working with AVWs under a protocol for the joint investigation of abuse.

### Analysis

The data were then subjected to a thematic qualitative analysis, primarily using the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The study was informed by three theoretical perspectives: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model; models of vulnerability (Scully, 2014; Virokannas et al., 2020; Mustaniemi-Laakso et al., 2022); and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007).

### Summary

The research highlighted four specific processes within an AJP Investigation where social workers maybe actively involved; the initial referral process, witness assessment, witness interviewing and case progression. The latter of which sees a greater emphasis, from social work, on the recovery and continued protection of the AVW compared to the Policing role of

progressing the criminal case, where possible, to Court for trial. All of which requires social workers to operate within the Micro system, on a one-to-one basis with the AVW as well as across the Exosystem of local social services provisions and the Macrosystem of Health and Social Care Structures while engaging with the Criminal Justice networks. The interactions that social workers have, within and across these systems, are guided by two important documents (the AJP and the APP) which contribute to the effectiveness of the meso-system.

### **Conclusions**

The research study provided 8 recommendations which included the need to develop agreed thresholds for referral into the Adult Joint Protocol, early career L&D opportunities for both SWs and Police officers as well the pressing need to have a clearer understanding of how to measure 'successful' outcomes within adult safeguarding.



## From Paternalism to Rights-Based Practice: Cross-Professional Insights for Social Work on Embedding UNCRPD Principles in Lithuanian Mental-Health Care

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### Background and purpose

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recasts mental-health service users as rights-holders and obliges systems to replace paternalistic models with person-centred, recovery-oriented care. For social work – whose mandate expressly spans advocacy, practice and policy across national and disciplinary borders – the Convention provides both a normative framework and a catalyst for change. Because day-to-day implementation hinges on the knowledge, attitudes and organisational settings of multiple professional groups, mapping those factors is essential for reforms that cut across social, cultural and professional boundaries. Lithuania, which ratified the UNCRPD in 2010, is currently overhauling its mental-health system, yet until now no empirical data existed on how its professionals – including social workers – interpret and apply Convention principles. The study, conducted at the end of 2024, asked: (1) How do Lithuanian mental-health professionals, including social workers, perceive UNCRPD principles, provisions and standards and their application in routine practice? (2) What are their attitudes toward organisational, managerial and clinical reforms intended to bring services into closer alignment with the Convention? (3) How are those attitudes associated with socio-demographic characteristics and with structural features of workplaces that themselves sit at the intersection of social, cultural and professional domains?

### Methods

A convergent mixed-methods design was employed for this study. The quantitative strand comprised a 30-item questionnaire, adapted from UNCRPD and WHO Quality Rights instruments, administered to 390 psychiatrists, medical psychologists, social workers, nurses and nurse assistants via online, telephone and paper formats. Descriptive statistics and multivariable logistic regression tested attitudinal patterns. The qualitative strand consisted of six focus-group discussions (n = 36) and 228 open-ended survey responses; data were analysed inductively using reflexive thematic analysis. Integration occurred during interpretation to highlight inter-professional and cross-sector dynamics relevant to social-work research and practice.

### Findings

Quantitative analysis revealed that profession was the strongest predictor of rights-related attitudes. Social workers tended to occupy a middle position: less supportive of coercive or paternalistic measures than psychiatrists and nurses but more cautious than medical psychologists. Employment context also mattered. Work in large, inpatient public hospitals – organisations that historically embody hierarchical, medically dominated cultures – was associated with greater acceptance of involuntary admission and restraint, whereas staff in community mental-health centres expressed more rights-supportive views. Work experience

length followed a non-linear pattern: those with 6-10 years in practice were least likely to endorse coercion.

Qualitative analysis generated five cross-cutting themes: (1) navigating the shift from control to respect; (2) closing knowledge gaps to enact rights-based practice; (3) expanding community-oriented services; (4) caring for caregivers by addressing workload, safety and remuneration; and (5) confronting mismatches between policy ideals and operational realities.

### **Conclusions**

Attitudes toward human rights in Lithuanian mental-health care are heterogeneous and shaped by professional role and institutional culture – boundaries that social work routinely crosses. Targeted education, inter-professional collaboration and system-level change are required to embed UNCRPD principles and advance rights-based practice in ways that resonate across national, social, cultural and disciplinary divides.

## Restorative Justice in Divided Communities: A Multidisciplinary Intervention with Bedouin Youth Following the May 2021 Protests

Prof. Nuzha Allassad Alhuzail<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sapir Academic College

### Abstract

In response to unprecedented civil unrest that erupted in southern Israel during May 2021, marked by violent clashes and vandalism involving Bedouin youth, an innovative restorative justice program was developed as an alternative to punitive legal measures. This program was a joint initiative of the Ministry of Welfare, the Public Defender's Office, and local municipalities, and was shaped through the collaboration of professionals from social work, law, and criminology. The program aimed to promote accountability, repair harm, and restore intercommunal trust in a region characterized by longstanding ethnic inequality and systemic marginalization.

Rather than serving as an evaluation, the present qualitative research project accompanied the implementation of the program to explore participants' and professional facilitators' subjective experiences, dilemmas, and narratives. The program brought together 22 young adults, including 12 Bedouin youth facing criminal charges and 10 Jewish engineering students, to engage in weekly group sessions, community dialogue, and joint activities in the public sphere. The process was grounded in restorative principles, focusing on reintegration of the youth into society and facilitation of mutual recognition between historically segregated communities.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the youth and the interdisciplinary team of facilitators. Thematic analysis revealed complex layers of power asymmetry, conflicting motivations, and emotional ambivalence. While Bedouin youth often viewed the process as an opportunity for leniency or legal relief, Jewish participants were driven by financial compensation or social obligation. Despite these differences, the program opened a space for meaningful encounters that challenged stereotypes and fostered new understandings of accountability, identity, and belonging.

Key themes that emerged included:

- Disrupted trust in state institutions, particularly among Bedouin youth who had experienced aggressive policing and felt politically excluded.
- The role of narrative exchange as a transformative tool enabling recognition of harm, expressing remorse, and imagining shared futures.
- The fragility of intergroup dialogue, especially under conditions of legal threat and unequal social status.

The presence of a documentary film crew, invited to record the process, introduced an additional layer of visibility and vulnerability, which participants navigated with caution. Professionals expressed both the promise and the limitations of implementing restorative justice in conflictual, ethnically stratified contexts.

**Keywords:** restorative justice, indigenous youth, interdisciplinary intervention, civil unrest, social work in conflict zones, Bedouin society, qualitative research.

## Caught in Between? School Social Work and the Ambivalence of Democratic Participation

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Parental involvement is frequently promoted as a pillar of democratic schooling. However, empirical research shows that participation is often selectively granted, symbolically framed, or structurally obstructed (Gomolla 2012; Kollender 2021). Particularly for parents from marginalized backgrounds, schools remain institutionally inaccessible. In this context, school social workers are expected to act as mediators—trusted by families and relied on by schools. But what happens when mediation becomes a substitute for structural responsibility?

How is school social work discursively positioned in the field of parental participation—and what does this reveal about its transformative potential or structural limitations?

The study applies an extended grounded theory approach combining Adele Clarke's Situational Analysis and Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration. Empirical data stem from a broader research project on participatory inequality in German elementary schools. This presentation focuses on one analytically condensed arena: school social work between support and system integration (Arena 5). Data include 14 qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations.

The arena was analyzed using situational maps, positional maps, and social world/arena maps. A theory-methodology matrix synthesizes the findings across four analytical axes: structures, discourses, agency, and situational complexity.

The analysis reveals an ambivalent positioning of school social work. On one hand, social workers act as relational bridges to families, especially those facing exclusion. On the other hand, their actions remain largely informal, reactive, and dependent on individual commitment rather than institutional mandate.

The positional map identifies dominant discourses such as:

- “School social work as emergency response” – only called upon in crises, with no structural co-responsibility.
- “Invisible support” – trusted relational work that remains outside formal school logic.
- “Translation without voice” – social work mediates between systems but lacks co-decision power.

Missing positions highlight what is absent in the discourse: a recognition of school social work as a legitimate actor in shaping equitable school structures.

The study demonstrates that school social work is discursively and institutionally trapped between support and control. Its professional mandate to promote inclusion is undermined

by its structural marginality. Rather than functioning as an agent of democratization, it is often absorbed into maintaining the status quo.

This calls for a rethinking of school social work's institutional role—not merely as a compensatory service, but as a co-responsible actor in democratic school development. The findings challenge dominant narratives and provide a critical lens on current policy recommendations (e.g. RS 117/2022), which emphasize expansion without addressing structural power asymmetries.

## Coparenting Relationships in Foster Care: Perspectives of Social workers and Foster Carers

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Associate Professor Johanna Moilanen<sup>1</sup>, Senior Researcher Tiina Lehto-Lundén<sup>1</sup>,  
Doctoral Researcher Erikka Levälahti<sup>1</sup>, Associate Professor Anu-Riina Svenlin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Helsinki

### Background and Purpose

This presentation derives from the authors' most recent manuscript of an unpublished research article. The focus of which is the examination of coparenting relationships in the context of foster care. The article focuses on the concept of coparenting in itself, and on the ways in which such relationships are formed, negotiated, and experienced by professionals and foster carers. Coparenting refers to the collaboration between adults who are entrusted with the care, upbringing, and welfare of a child (McHale & Irace, 2011). In the context of foster care, these roles are distributed among birth parents, foster carers, and child protection professionals, often shaped by legal mandates and institutional boundaries (Helavirta, 2016). The purpose of this study is to comprehend how these actors position themselves in relation to one another from the perspective of foster carers and professionals. The research is guided by relational and institutional perspectives on parenting and child welfare and engages with recent scholarship on power, norms, and complexity in coparenting relationships (e.g., Kekkonen et al., 2023; Cannaert & De Wilde, 2024).

### Methods

The study is based on qualitative data collected in 2025 through individual and group interviews of professionals and foster carers. Participants comprised child protection professionals from six Finnish wellbeing services counties, as well as foster carers recruited via the Finnish national Foster Care Association. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was employed to identify patterns in relational dynamics, role negotiation, and collaborative practices.

### Findings

The presentation comprises preliminary findings of the study, the results of which indicate that coparenting relationships in foster care are continuously negotiated and often characterised by structural and relational tensions. The study also underscores the necessity to acknowledge diverse forms of coparenting and to critically examine the norms and values that shape parenting roles within the context child protection/foster care.

### Conclusions and Implications

This research contributes new knowledge to an underexplored area in foster care. It offers practical implications for developing foster care practices. The study invites broader reflection on parenting in foster care settings and the ethical dimensions of cocaring. These insights are relevant for policy development, professional training, and future research on collaborative care models in child protection.

## From Human Rights to Affirmative Politicisation: Crafting Political Subjectivity with Illegalised Migrants

Dr. [Didier Boost](#)<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Pascal Debruyne<sup>2</sup>

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This presentation intersects social work with political philosophy and critical border studies to examine the paradoxes at the heart of human rights as they pertain to undocumented and illegalised migrants. We develop, advance, and empirically substantiate an affirmative and politicising perspective that grounds the emancipatory potential of human rights in a process of political subjectivation and the disruption of exclusionary orders.

### Background and Purpose

Nowhere is the contradiction between the promise of human rights and its selective realisation more salient than in the case of “illegalised” migrants. Around the world, people forcibly displaced by war, disaster, and human rights violations are increasingly criminalised and excluded from rights, policies and services that aim to guarantee a dignified life to those recognised as citizens. Even social work, ostensibly a champion of human rights, is increasingly co-opted into those violent border regimes, potentially reinforcing narratives of illegality and serving as an instrument of migration control. Against this backdrop, we challenge the extant critiques of human rights – oscillating between enlightenment-fundamentalism and biopolitical fatalism – in favour of a more affirmative perspective that politicises the gap between the ‘human’ and ‘citizen’. We will advocate for a political perspective in line with Jacques Rancière to accommodate human rights praxis to those ‘included, but not belonging’.

### Methods

This interpretive study draws on ethnographic and participatory fieldwork conducted in Belgium and the Netherlands, focusing on medical humanitarian NGOs, solidarity networks, and associations of people in poverty that work with undocumented migrants. Our data includes the voices and perspectives of both social workers and undocumented migrants themselves.

### Findings

Based on our fieldwork, we conceptualise and substantiate affirmative politicisation in social work – based on Rancière – as comprising three interrelated processes of: ‘(dis)identification’, ‘redistributing the sensible’, and ‘enacting radical equality’. With undocumented migrants, this entails resisting imposed “illegal” identities and supporting recognition beyond citizenship, amplifying undocumented voices and contesting who is visible/audible in the public sphere, and affirming agency and collective capacity through everyday acts, including community building and mutual expertise sharing. In doing so, we forward social work as an active force in reshaping the contours of the political through concrete, relational engagements that contest the prevailing order and enact transformative possibilities.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The study calls for a renewed commitment to radical equality and a reimagined rights-based social work unbound by state-centric citizenism, foregrounding everyday struggles and collective agency. Practically, it demonstrates the effectiveness of micro-level engagements and solidarity strategies in transforming how rights and belonging are contested and enacted. Finding inspiration in political philosophy and critical border studies, the research interdisciplinarily contributes to critical and emancipatory praxis in social work. The findings strongly support interdisciplinary collaborations and the co-creation of knowledge, with direct implications for evidence-informed practice, policy reform, and the future of social work as a radically inclusive profession.



## The Limits of Rights Discourse: Rethinking Social Work Responses to Problematic Substance Use

Mrs Kathryn Young<sup>1</sup>, Prof Mark Smith<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Dundee

Social work is frequently positioned as a rights-based profession, with rights discourse presented as both self-evidently progressive and inherently valuable. Governments increasingly invoke the language of rights to legitimise and advance particular policy agendas, often framing such discourse as beyond critique. In Scotland, this development has taken on particular urgency in light of the country's ongoing public health crisis: Scotland, and specifically the city of Dundee, records the highest rate of drug-related deaths in Europe. Historically, problematic substance use has been addressed through either a criminal justice lens, emphasising control and punishment, or a public health perspective, stressing disease models and harm reduction. Alongside these approaches, sociological scholarship has consistently drawn attention to the social determinants of health, including poverty, stigma, inequality, and exclusion. More recently, the Scottish Government has sought to consolidate these strands through a human rights framework, positioning rights as the central organising principle of substance use policy. Yet, within this contested and politically charged terrain, articulating a distinctive and critical social work voice has become increasingly difficult.

Rights discourse is typically coupled with concepts such as equality, dignity, and compassion. While these values are undoubtedly laudable, their association with rights can function to stifle necessary critical engagement. Questioning the adequacy of rights as a framework risks being misinterpreted as politically regressive or unsympathetic to those experiencing marginalisation. However, this paper argues that rights claims are not automatically progressive and that their deployment requires careful interrogation. As they are currently articulated, human rights offer limited conceptual clarity and, particularly in an era of austerity and resource scarcity, limited practical utility for improving the lived realities of people who use substances and the practitioners who support them.

To advance this argument, the paper draws on Axel Honneth's (1995; 2014) theory of recognition, which emphasises the centrality of respect, esteem, and love in the constitution of individual and collective wellbeing, as well as Kathleen Lynch and colleagues' (2009) work on affective equality, which highlights the importance of care and relational supports. These theoretical perspectives challenge the assumption that the mere assertion of rights is sufficient to achieve substantive social change. Instead, they point towards the necessity of embedding recognition, relationality, and affective equality within social work responses.

Using data from the first year of a three-year ethnographic study, we demonstrate that without these additional dimensions of recognition, rights discourse risks remaining abstract and inaccessible to those most directly affected by problematic substance use. Our preliminary findings suggest that an interdisciplinary, recognition-based approach offers more promise than rights discourse alone in developing evidence-informed practice and policy. For social work, this perspective opens up possibilities for re-theorising professional responses to substance use, moving beyond narrow rights claims to a richer, more relational understanding of justice and care.

**Keywords:** human rights; social work; substance use; recognition theory; interdisciplinary research

## Serving families facing poverty: A cross-national exploration of challenges and enablers

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### Background and purpose

Poverty is central to many family support cases, yet work on poverty often fades into the “wallpaper of practice,” remaining under-named and under-resourced. Despite a rich conceptual literature, we still lack clear, detailed accounts of what everyday poverty work actually looks like—how practitioners talk about it, fit it into routines, and navigate constraints across systems. To support evidence-informed practice and policy—aligned with Conference’s emphasis on linking research and practice—we set out to (1) describe how frontline practitioners address poverty with families across different welfare contexts, and (2) identify common challenges and enablers that can strengthen everyday practice, education, and system design.

### Methods

We conducted a collaboratively designed, cross-national online survey in nine countries (Australia, China, Germany/Switzerland, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, UK, USA). In total, N=970 professionals completed the survey; the qualitative analysis draws on approximately n=630 open-ended responses. Country teams first coded their datasets deductively against the question set; the consortium then co-developed a shared analytic framework and re-analysed the pooled dataset thematically.

### Findings

Despite different welfare arrangements, practitioners described strikingly similar patterns. Five recurring challenges were: (1) Lack of Tangible Resources to Address Material Need: immediate income, housing, transport, and debt help were often unavailable; (2) Bureaucracy Undermines Relational and Timely Practice: eligibility checks and paperwork displaced direct work and slowed responses; (3) Policy and Structural Constraints Block Systemic Responses to Poverty: macro limits on income adequacy and housing curtailed what services could do; (4) Complex, Intersecting Needs with Fragmented Support: siloed services struggled to coordinate around multiple needs; (5) Building Trust in the Context of Poverty: stigma and surveillance complicated alliance and disclosure.

**Five enablers were:** Relational Practice as a Foundation for Change: consistent, respectful contact anchored safety and planning; (2) Availability of Resources as a Foundation for Action: small flexible funds, rapid referrals, and protected time made help timely and credible; (3) Flexibility and Tailored Support: discretion allowed responses to follow family priorities and pace; (4) Theoretical Frameworks and Commitment to Social Justice: poverty-aware, trauma-informed, and anti-oppressive lenses kept material hardship visible and shifted blame to systems; (5) Interagency Collaboration as a Pathway to Holistic Support: shared plans and warm handovers reduced repeated handoffs and aligned help with lived realities.

**Conclusions and implications**

The cross-national picture is consistent in showing that relational practice and structural provision are inseparable. Organizations that reduce procedural friction, protect time for direct work, and provide reliable routes to income, housing, childcare, transport, and debt support enable practitioners to build trust that translates into tangible gains. Training and supervision that keep poverty visible—and that track material alongside relational indicators—anchor accountability in lived improvements rather than individual deficits. Ultimately, ethical and effective practice depends on policy environments that guarantee adequate income supports and affordable housing; without these, relational work is asked to deliver what only structural change can provide. The presentation supports the conference's focus on linking research and practice, and speaks to sub-themes on cross-national practice, methodological collaboration, and the effectiveness of social work interventions.

# Interdisciplinary Work Experiences of Social Workers in the Health Sector in Turkey

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## Background and purpose

Social workers engage in interdisciplinary work in many fields, including healthcare. This interdisciplinary work and collaboration are most evident in healthcare. In Turkey, although social workers are officially included in healthcare institutions, their roles and contributions within interdisciplinary teams are often not clearly defined or utilised to their full potential. This study examines the interdisciplinary work experiences of social workers in Turkey's healthcare sector, focusing on their role perceptions, the challenges they encounter, and their collaborative practices with other healthcare professionals.

## Methods

This qualitative research is based on semi-structured interviews with 12 social workers employed in various public hospitals in Ankara. The data was collected online using Google Forms. All participants gave their consent to take part in the study. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns and themes in participants' experiences regarding interdisciplinary work.

## Findings

A total of 12 participants participated in the study. Participants' ages range from 23 to 56, with an average age of 38. Their years of experience range from 1 to 31 years, with an average of 14 years. Three participants work in the Ministry of Health, while the others work in medical social work units in hospitals.

The experiences were discussed under four main themes: different points of view, better outcomes for the clients, professional limits and communication skills.

Participants defined interdisciplinary work as "collaboration based on each professional performing their role and responsibilities within their professional boundaries in a given case." They stated that they collaborate most frequently with doctors, nurses and psychologists within the healthcare sector. Some participants said that collaborating with physicians and nurses is easier than collaborating with psychologists. The most common problem they encounter is maintaining client confidentiality and privacy.

## Conclusions and implications

The study highlights the need for clearer role definitions and greater institutional support to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration in healthcare. The findings suggest that improving professional visibility and communication strategies could facilitate more effective, evidence-based practices involving social workers. These insights have implications for policy development and interprofessional education within Turkey's healthcare system. Key words: Social Work, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Healthcare, Professional Practice.

# The Four Windows Model as an Analytical Tool for Cross-Domain Collaboration

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## Background and purpose

Complex societal challenges, such as long-term unemployment combined with debt, or housing for specific target groups, require a multidisciplinary and cross-domain approach. Broadly supported solutions only emerge when professionals, sectors, policy domains, and citizens work together. This presentation introduces the Four Windows Model, an analytical tool used in various empirical research projects in the Netherlands to clarify collaboration within the social domain. The model offers a framework for understanding four perspectives: the professional, the citizen, the organizational structure, and the policymaker or public administrator. Systematic analysis of these perspectives reveals the complexity of social work and facilitates meaningful dialogue.

The model supports professionals in enhancing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, and in delivering citizen-centered services within their organizational and policy contexts. It also helps policymakers, administrators, and managers better understand what social work entails and what citizens actually need. This contributes to more responsive public policy. Our research shows that social work aimed at open, fair, accessible, and transformative societies requires more exchange between stakeholders regarding each other's interests, expertise, and activities. The Four Windows Model facilitates this exchange and contributes to transformative change: through collaboration and listening to other perspectives, beliefs and values evolve.

The purpose of our presentation is to explain both the theoretical foundation and practical application of the model. We also seek to engage with international participants to explore its applicability beyond the Dutch context.

## Main points of the presentation

We begin with the theoretical foundation of the model. A key source of inspiration is Mulvale's Interprofessional Collaboration Model (2016), which emphasizes connecting social work at the team, organizational, and policy levels. The model also draws on the concept of Boundary Crossing (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016), which shows how differences between actors can hinder collaboration, but also offer opportunities when acknowledged and utilized.

Next, we illustrate the model's practical application using examples from domains such as welfare, healthcare, employment, and education. These are drawn from multiple municipalities and (social work) organizations. We show how the model helps to unravel, analyze, and improve the complexity of integrated collaboration.

Finally, we discuss how the model can be used in research, practice, and education, and how it contributes to strengthening social work at all levels.

**Conclusions and implications for practice, policy, or further research**

Connecting different perspectives - from citizen to public administrator - is essential for addressing complex societal challenges. Applying the Four Windows Model in neighborhoods and municipalities can foster greater equality between social workers and policymakers, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive social domain. The presentation offers tools for further application and development of the model, including outside the Dutch context.

**Relevance to conference aims and themes**

Our presentation aligns with several subthemes of the conference. The model offers new opportunities for research within social work (subtheme 1), encourages transcending disciplinary and professional boundaries (subtheme 2), and contributes to breaking down silos in practice and education - a central call within this conference.

## Accessibility Programs Led by Community Activists: Which Factors Contribute to Enhancing Their Effectiveness?

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### Background and purpose

Recent years have seen growing recognition of the need to enhance accessibility for people with disabilities and involve them in decision-making processes (Ginis, 2017). Promoting accessibility is generally undertaken by community social workers working with activists from this population. A central professional value of social work at large, and community social work in particular, is client participation, that is, enabling clients, or, more accurately, the activists who operate on their behalf, to be centrally involved in designing the interventions, their implementation, and all processes of decision-making. Another core value that complements it is representation, that is, verifying that the community activists faithfully represent their communities and their needs. It is argued that ensuring these core values is also essential for the effectiveness of social work interventions, since the clients are the ones who have the full information and understanding regarding the needs of the community and the preferred manner to fulfill them. In spite of these understandings, the literature indicates that when it comes to marginalized populations, such as people with disabilities, community social workers tend to enable client participation at substantially lower levels (if at all) compared to “regular” citizens. Despite the importance of these issues, the effectiveness of accessibility programs led by community activists and the factors that enhance it has yet to be investigated. The present study aimed to identify factors essential for the effectiveness of such programs.

Drawing from the literature, we hypothesized that accessibility-activity-related factors (scope of activity [weekly hours], years of activity, knowledge of accessibility regulations), and community-activity-related factors (level of activist participation as determined by social workers, representation), would contribute to explaining the variance in the dependent variable – the effectiveness of accessibility promotion activities.

### Methods

Anonymous quantitative questionnaires were completed by 212 Israeli activists. Managers of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs distributed the questionnaire among WhatsApp groups of activists. The researchers contacted the Israeli Center for the Blind for instructions on making the survey accessible for people with visual impairment. In addition, the participants were provided with the contact details of research assistants available to help them complete the questionnaire over the phone or via Zoom.

### Findings

Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that scope of activity, knowledge of accessibility regulations, participation and representation predicted remarkably high percentages of the variance in program effectiveness (53.4%).

**Conclusions and implications**

The findings highlight the need train community activists to expand their knowledge of accessibility regulations and to broaden their scope of activity, and the importance of high participation by social workers, which also ensures that they faithfully represent their communities. The findings also highlight the need to educate social workers to ensure that activists meet these requirements. Finally, they stress the need to motivate individuals with disabilities to participate in community activity to promote accessibility.

**Reference**

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## Inclusive pedagogy as interdisciplinary practice in and around schools

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### Background and purpose

This study demonstrates how inclusive pedagogy in Amsterdam's superdiverse schools emerges at the crossroads of social work research, educational practice, and policy, transcending cultural, social, and professional boundaries.

Amsterdam, as a superdiverse city with an increasing cultural and socio-demographic diversity, demands inclusive educational approaches to counter persistent inequality. We advocate the use of "inclusive pedagogy", referring to an approach that recognizes and values the diverse talents, assets, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds of students. This requires interdisciplinary collaboration (between schools, youth workers, social workers and after-school care) to effectively prevent and combat inequality.

### Methods

This is a qualitative, empirical, in-depth case study in Amsterdam Zuid Oost: a suburban neighborhood with a superdiverse demography of citizens. This neighborhood has a history of safety and social disruption. In 2021, the municipality started a "masterplan" to stabilize and empower the neighborhood.

The research is carried out by a diverse research team based on a collaboration between the university, the applied university, the municipality, welfare organizations, parents and youth. Together, we reflected on the formulation of the problem, the research questions and -design, preliminary findings, and made adaptations accordingly.

We selected two schools (one primary, one secondary) with inclusive pedagogy values. We started by mapping their ecosystems: which non-educational professionals are involved? Then, we organized two focus groups to discuss how the different professionals (educators, youth workers, social workers, etc.) use inclusive pedagogy values. After, we conducted interviews with educational (n=8) and non-educational professionals (n=10) to map their practices and actions as well as with youth (14) and their parents (n=12) about their experiences in and around the school with the different professionals; resulting in an analysis of inclusive pedagogical practices and interprofessional collaborations.

In the coming research phase, schools will improve their practices further based on our findings; we will keep monitoring them and their practices.

### Preliminary findings

Inclusive pedagogy manifests differently across ecosystems, shaping both its forms and impacts.

Interprofessional collaboration improves inclusive pedagogy.

Stakeholders, especially parents, value interprofessional collaboration.

Inclusive pedagogy and professional collaborations mitigate the reliance on (care) specialization and student segregation; thereby enabling heterogeneous groups of students to remain and develop within a single school context.

At a broader level, inclusive pedagogical practices contribute to strengthening safety and stability of the neighborhood.

### **Conclusions and implications**

Collaborations between researchers, policy makers, schools, welfare organizations, parents and youth bring a deep understanding of social dilemmas in local neighborhoods, specifically in superdiverse cities. These collaborations form the beginning of a solution for social problems.

Superdiverse urban contexts demand specific skills from practitioners. The capacities to engage constructively with children and parents from varied backgrounds, and collaborate across professional boundaries, are fundamental.

Youth' and parents' perspectives should be included in pedagogical research.

Interdisciplinary collaborations in superdiverse neighborhoods are fundamental for the creation of safe neighborhoods.

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## Cross-National Perspectives on family violence and maltreatment reporting

Dr. Mathea Loen

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Do citizens find violence against children acceptable? When do citizens report suspicions of child abuse or maltreatment to the child protection authorities? Does the type of violence matter for their willingness to report? Or do they need social, moral or consequentialist nudging to be convinced of the necessity of reporting?

This article uses conjoint experimental survey data from respondents in England, Finland, Ireland and Norway to study to what extent citizens accept parental physical or psychological violence or emotional neglect towards children, and whether they believe teachers should report suspicions of these types of violence to the child protection authorities. It also tests how mentioning the social norms, moral obligations or potential positive consequences of reporting matter for the citizens' perceptions of the teacher's reporting duties.

The findings suggest low acceptability of physical and psychological violence, but greater ambiguity when it comes to emotional neglect. Further, respondents clearly prefer the teacher to report physical and psychological violence, and a substantial group also believe emotional neglect should be reported. Country differences are also evident: English and Irish respondents are more inclined to report psychological than physical violence, whilst no substantive differences are seen in the Norwegian and Finnish samples. Motivating reporting by referring to social norms, moral obligations or positive consequences has little to no effect. Norwegians are slightly more likely to believe that the teacher should report if they are reminded of the moral obligation to report child maltreatment to the child protection authorities.

The results support the observed positive trend of low acceptability of psychological and physical violence in societies. However, the article also points to ongoing challenges. First, a non-insignificant share of the respondents believes slapping a child on the back side and on the ear, or threatening and humiliating a child is acceptable. I discuss how this may be interlinked with the practise of corporal punishment. Secondly, there is an aversion to reject emotional neglect among the respondents, which stand in stark contrast to the research showing detrimental effects of emotional neglect on children's development and wellbeing. Efforts to create more awareness around the consequences of emotional neglect must be made. Moreover, increased compliance with reporting is necessary. If motivational nudges do not work, alternative efforts should be discussed. The findings are also relevant for the mandatory-reporting population and social workers, as public opinion and social norms around issues of violence and child protection shape the policy field through feedback mechanisms. Further implications are also discussed.

## Personal Education Plans for Children in Care in England: A Realist Review

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Children in care in England experience persistent inequalities in education, involving lower attainment, disrupted school trajectories, and reduced access to higher education compared with their peers. In response, the Personal Education Plan (PEP) was introduced as a statutory mechanism to ensure multi-agency planning and accountability. Despite being embedded in policy for more than two decades, little is known about how PEPs function in practice, the mechanisms by which they may support or constrain outcomes, and the difference made by contextual conditions.

This paper presents the findings of a realist review that set out to develop an explanatory account of the mechanisms through which PEPs operate. Informed by realist philosophy (Bhaskar 1978; Pawson and Tilley 1997) and conducted in line with RAMESES standards, the review examined academic, policy and grey literature, steered by a Project Advisory Group made up of experts by experience. Given the paucity of research focused directly on PEPs, the scope included conceptually related interventions such as individualised education planning, multi-agency decision making, and participatory approaches in children's services. Evidence was selected for its potential to explain processes rather than by methodological hierarchy, and analysis was carried out through iterative retroductive reasoning. Data were organised using ICAMO (Intervention–Context–Actor–Mechanism–Outcome) frameworks to account for the influence of structural conditions and the reasoning of the adults and children involved in the PEP process.

PEPs are formally described as child-centred meetings intended to promote participation and aspiration; yet they are considered as instruments for assuring professional accountability and monitoring practice. The balance between these purposes varies according to organisational culture, inspection frameworks, and managerial priorities. Professional reasoning was found to be a significant factor, with the PEP process alternatively characterised as an opportunity for collaborative planning and as an onerous administrative requirement, often connected with the allocation of funding. While this links funding to education planning, it risks narrowing the PEP's function, with PEPs becoming an audit trail of expenditure rather than as a means of engaging with children's wider educational needs.

Deficit narratives concerning social workers' engagement with education emerge throughout the literature, attributing the aforementioned gap in attainment to social workers' low prioritisation of education, with the PEP partly conceived as a response to such concerns. This narrative appears to continue to influence the PEP and the ways in which social workers' contributions are judged, often through procedural indicators such as attendance and completion of paperwork with social workers' relational practice or knowledge of the child holding insufficient weight.

The review suggests that outcomes of the PEP depend not on its statutory design alone but on the interaction of organisational context, professional reasoning and the degree to which children are enabled to participate. The resulting Initial Programme Theories seek to explain how PEPs can be experienced as enabling forums for planning and support, or as mechanisms of audit and compliance, which will be tested through future research with attention to their implications for policy, practice and the future development of PEPs.

# Co-Creating Change: A Participatory Study of Trauma-Informed Practice Integration in the Irish Child Welfare Agency

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<sup>1</sup> University College Cork

## Background and Purpose

Trauma-informed practice has emerged as increasingly important in child welfare service delivery, yet implementing these approaches within existing organisational structures remains challenging. This paper examines the TARA Project, a research collaboration between University College Cork (UCC) and the Dublin South Central Area of TUSLA - Child and Family Agency, Ireland. The project aims to systematically integrate trauma-informed practices across the service area, enhancing professionals' capacity to address the complex needs of children and families.

## Methods

The current phase adopts a participatory research approach, co-creating initiatives with frontline professionals that blend trauma-informed practices with existing service delivery. The research design uses the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) (Agosti and Spielfogel, 2025), which is responsive to participants' interests and contexts, allowing them to lead in identifying and creating beneficial practices.

Following an online information session in December 2024, 32 professionals from all levels and disciplines working in the agency joined the research project across four cluster groupings: Practitioner Resilience, Collaborative Practice, Working with Children and Families, and The Child's Journey across Teams, which were built on themes from Phase 1 of the TARA Project (2022-2023) (Lotty et al., 2024).

From January 2025, participants engaged in collaborative development through four workshops: Define and Understand, Explore and Prepare, Develop and Present, and Improve Following Feedback. Seven initiatives were presented at a participation event on October 21, 2025, where feedback was collected to measure acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility.

Two interviews were conducted with cluster members in May and October 2026, employing concept mapping guided by constructivist grounded theory to capture participants' experiences.

## Analysis

The research was guided by Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021), offering a systematic approach to identifying patterns within qualitative data while emphasising researcher subjectivity and reflexive engagement. Data immersion involved reading each transcript twice before coding, with NVivo software used to organise data and track codes.

**Findings**

Participants' final initiatives developed in cluster groupings will be presented, along with survey results testing for acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility. Key findings from interviews illuminate emergent themes around: group and initiative development including group makeup and facilitator support; difficulties arising from unclear expectations, performance pressure, complex caseloads, lack of protected time, limited resources, and organisational barriers; and leadership development through learning, incorporating value-driven work, gaining colleague support, and integrating learning into practice.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The study occurred within a crisis-driven service environment, presenting unique challenges for sustainable practice change. This paper explores obstacles encountered and successes achieved as participants worked collaboratively toward creating a more trauma-informed, resilient, and effective service environment. Findings offer valuable insights for organisations implementing trauma-informed practices within complex, resource-constrained child welfare contexts. The study highlights the importance of participatory approaches in achieving meaningful organisational transformation, with the BSC model's responsive facilitation proving particularly valuable in allowing participants to identify context-specific challenges and co-create beneficial practices tailored to their service realities.

## Homelessness in Rural Areas : The Case of the Acadian Peninsula

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This presentation aims to share preliminary findings from a qualitative study on rural homelessness conducted in partnership with the Acadian Peninsula Regional Service Commission in New Brunswick, Canada. In recent years, this region has seen an increase in individuals experiencing homelessness.

While most Canadian research on homelessness has focused on urban centers such as Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto (Smith & Kopec, 2023), rural homelessness remains underexplored. Urban studies typically highlight visible homelessness in densely populated areas, but rural homelessness often manifests differently—less visible, more dispersed, and shaped by unique regional challenges. This raises concerns about the applicability of urban-based interventions in rural contexts.

Rural are characterized by their vast geography, low population density, limited social services, and lack of public transportation (Schiff et al., 2015; Buck-McFadyen, 2022). These factors complicate both the identification of homelessness and the implementation of effective supports. Our study adopts an interpretive descriptive qualitative design (Gallagher, 2014) to explore under-documented phenomena and generate insights relevant to social work and community development.

To address this gap, our study aims to (1) understand the lived realities of individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity in rural settings, and (2) identify existing support mechanisms and gaps in service provision. Our objectives and methods were developed and validated with our community partner to assist them in envisioning and developing coordinated efforts to prevent and reduce homeless in the Acadian Peninsula. To date, we have conducted interviews with four individuals experiencing homelessness and four community stakeholders (social services providers and government employees of various levels). Data analysis combines qualitative content analysis (Forman & Damschroder, 2008) to build a descriptive portrait of rural homelessness, and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to uncover deeper themes related to lived experience, challenges in services, and social perceptions.

Our preliminary results reveal diverse forms and pathways to homelessness, shaped by individual circumstances and regional factors. In the Acadian Peninsula, seasonal employment—particularly in the fishing industry—emerges as a significant contributor to housing instability and social vulnerability. Service providers emphasize the need for inter-agency collaboration and community engagement to address the issue effectively. A key finding is the importance of increasing public awareness and social acceptability to foster inclusive, community-driven solutions. Our results have the potential to guide local decision-makers in developing services and interventions aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness, tailored specifically to the realities of the Acadian Peninsula.



This project is among the first in Canada to focus on homelessness outside major urban centers, addressing a critical gap in the literature (Buck-McFadyen, 2022). Its empirical contribution lies in advancing knowledge on rural homelessness and informing broader policy, as well as reinforcing social work's role in addressing systemic and structural issues. Moreover, this project highlights the importance of building relationships with community partners to produce meaningful and impactful research.

# Enhancing Emergency Housing Support for People with Complex Problems: An Inter- and Transdisciplinary Approach to Addressing Service Gaps

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## Background and Purpose

People experiencing homelessness often face complex multi-problems including mental health issues, cognitive impairments, addiction disorders, and social difficulties. In Munich's emergency accommodation system (13,577 individuals, December 2024), these overlapping challenges create significant barriers to accessing appropriate support services. The mandatory application requirement for disability support services (SGB IX) presents particular obstacles for these vulnerable groups, who frequently lack the capability to recognize their needs and navigate complex bureaucratic processes.

This presentation reports on an innovative project and its accompanying research that addresses critical service gaps through an inter- and transdisciplinary approach. The project "Low-threshold counselling in emergency accommodation for people with complex multiple problems" employs a psychiatric care specialist within emergency accommodation to provide low-threshold, proactive support aimed at establishing contact with residents, stabilizing them, and facilitating their access to appropriate support services.

## Methods

The accompanying research adopts a participatory evaluation design aligned with transdisciplinary principles, recognizing all stakeholders as co-creators of knowledge. Central to the methodology is participant observation, enabling the researcher to become an integrated part of the setting while minimizing disruption to sensitive intervention processes.

Data collection involves triangulated sources and methods: observation protocols of individual and group interventions; field conversations and interviews with professionals; low-threshold interviews with residents using interactive methods; interviews with social workers, psychiatric care specialist, psychologist, housing administration, facility management; and analysis of institutional documentation. The research employs grounded theory to relate the perspectives of all stakeholder groups.

Following participatory evaluation principles, monthly reflection sessions enable formative evaluation and continuous adaptation of interventions based on emerging insights.

## Findings

Preliminary findings demonstrate the complexity of implementing interdisciplinary approaches within existing service structures. Professionals must navigate between different legal frameworks (social assistance law §§ 67ff SGB XII versus disability support law SGB IX) while developing innovative methodological approaches for low-threshold contact, relationship building, and stabilization work.

Key challenges include establishing trust with residents who have experienced multiple service failures, coordinating across professional boundaries, and developing sustainable financing structures for services that transcend traditional sectoral divisions. Success factors include professionals' interdisciplinary competencies, flexible intervention approaches, and systematic collaboration with existing support structures.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This project demonstrates how inter- and transdisciplinary approaches can address service gaps emerging from rigid sectoral divisions in social welfare systems. The participatory research design not only evaluates effectiveness but actively contributes to intervention development through collaborative knowledge creation with practitioners and service users. The findings have implications for policy development regarding low-threshold support services, professional education emphasizing interdisciplinary competencies, and research methodologies prioritizing stakeholder participation in knowledge production. The approach offers scalable insights for addressing similar service gaps where vulnerable populations face barriers accessing support services.

By bridging social work, psychiatric care, and housing support through both practice innovation and participatory research, this project exemplifies social work's central role in developing critical knowledge, amplifying marginalized voices, and shaping evidence-informed policy responses to complex social challenges.

# Foregrounding Ethics: Co-Creation and Emotional Safety in Participatory Research with Children

Hannah Meason<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Linnaeus University

## Background

This paper presents one strand of a broader Ph.D. project, What do professionals do when they don't know what to do?, which explores how interprofessional collaboration is interpreted, enacted, and resisted by professionals in children's services. Interprofessional collaboration remains aspirational in many contexts, with persistent gaps between policy intent and practice, shaped by structural constraints, conflicting mandates, and relational tensions. Frameworks like GIRFEC offer visions for collaboration, yet implementation is uneven and often hindered by bureaucracy, role ambiguity, and emotional dynamics such as anxiety and mistrust. Existing research predominantly centres on practitioners and systems, leaving children's perspectives underrepresented. This study addresses that gap by generating ethically grounded, practice-relevant knowledge through participatory methodologies with professionals and children in Scotland and Sweden.

In this presentation, I will reflect on the ethical and methodological insights gained from using an innovative methodological approach to participatory, arts-based methods with children to explore their perspectives on interprofessional collaboration.

## Methodology

This sub-study was conducted in Scotland with four children (aged 12–15), a professional theater company, and with support from a youth participation officer. Participants engaged in a two-day workshop to script and direct scenes depicting a fictional child and the professionals involved in his support. Working with actors, the children staged a planning meeting, offering insights into how they interpret and experience professional behaviour. The sub-study introduces an innovative methodological approach that highlights children's perspectives, grounded in ethical and reflexive principles. The approach draws on a combination of applied theater (Boal, 1979, 2019; Grandi, 2022), participatory theory (Lundy, 2007; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Olsen, 2024), narrative inquiry (Moran et al., 2020), and trauma-sensitive research (Alessi & Kahn, 2022).

## Findings

Applied theater enabled the children to explore complex themes - power, trust, emotional safety - in professional encounters. Fictional framing created emotional distance, supporting engagement with sensitive topics and generating rich insights into perceptions of practitioner behaviour. Participants showed nuanced understandings of roles, relational dynamics, and institutional power. However, emotional responses to actor-led scenes highlighted the need for safeguarding, especially when realism triggered personal experiences - underscoring researcher attentiveness to children's presentation and actively supporting their right to opt out. Ethical dilemmas also emerged around payment transparency, adult collaboration, and emotional labour in representing lived experience. While the creative process fostered confidence and skill-building as reported by the children,

it also revealed the emotional burden on participants, reinforcing the need for trauma-sensitive and relationally ethical approaches in research subjects concerning children and young people.

### **Conclusions**

This paper presents an innovative methodological approach to researching children's experiences of inter-professional collaboration, foregrounding the ethical complexities of trauma-sensitive participatory research. Key lessons include the importance of building emotional safety into every stage of the research process, using fictional framing to support engagement with sensitive topics, and maintaining flexibility to respond to children's needs in real time. Researchers should anticipate and plan for emotional labour, and ensure transparency around roles, expectations, and compensation. Co-creation with children requires ongoing reflexivity, relational accountability, and a commitment to balancing protection with meaningful participation.

## Negotiating (in)visible spaces of homelessness in the struggle for social change in Athens

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Homelessness in Greece has intensified amid successive crises, including the economic recession, austerity policies, housing instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. These interrelated disruptions have not only broadened the scope of housing exclusion but have also undermined the capacity of social services to effectively respond. Beyond its socio-economic implications, homelessness is now more widely recognized as a spatial justice issue (Soja, 2010), with urban environments both reflecting and perpetuating structural inequalities. Within this framework, the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) is withheld from individuals whose presence in public space is simultaneously tolerated and marginalized. This paper examines homelessness in Athens through the perspective of emotional geographies, emphasizing how lived experiences can contribute to the development of evidence-informed, anti-oppressive social policy and support broader efforts toward structural transformation.

The research draws on qualitative fieldwork, conducted in central Athens during 2024. It employed walking interviews with individuals experiencing homelessness and frontline social workers, alongside semi-structured interviews with policymakers. Walking interviews allowed participants to articulate their experiences in context, mapping trajectories of exclusion, resilience and belonging onto the urban landscape (Evans & Jones, 2011). Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns within the data, highlighting the intersections between emotional and spatial experiences and the wider policy and governance frameworks that shape them.

Findings indicate that for homeless participants, urban spaces -such as streets and public squares-are not merely sites of deprivation, but also repositories of memory, identity and strategies for survival. These environments are shaped by experiences of loss and exclusion, yet also by moments of solidarity and fragile forms of belonging and identity. For social workers, the city represents a complex emotional landscape of practice, where professional duties intersect with systemic constraints and ethical challenges. Their narratives reveal both resilience and emotional strain as they navigate fragmented service systems and constrained resources. In contrast, policymakers often appear disconnected from these lived realities. While public discourse may emphasize inclusion, the perspectives of both individuals experiencing homelessness and frontline professionals are rarely integrated into housing and social protection policies. This disjuncture perpetuates spatial injustice, resulting in policy responses that remain largely reactive and insufficiently transformative.

The paper argues that recognizing homelessness as a spatial justice issue offers a critical lens for rethinking research and practice. Emotional geographies can serve as valuable evidence for designing policies that are not only technically effective but also socially equitable and contextually responsive. From an anti-oppressive standpoint (Dominelli, 2017), the integration of marginalized voices and practitioner insights into policy processes

is essential for confronting structural inequalities and elevating underrepresented perspectives. In the case of Athens, this requires moving beyond emergency-oriented measures toward long-term strategies that genuinely secure the right to housing and urban inclusion. Such an approach reframes homelessness not merely as a matter of service delivery but as part of a broader pursuit of social justice. One that requires political commitment, interdisciplinary collaboration and the co-production of knowledge among researchers, service users and practitioners.

**Keywords:** Social work, homelessness, spatial justice, social policy, Greece

## Exposure of Children to Domestic Violence: Emerging Practices within the LEPS P.I.P.P.I. Programme

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Children's exposure to domestic violence is increasingly recognised as a distinct form of victimisation, with long-term consequences for child development and family wellbeing. The Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011) explicitly acknowledges children who witness violence in the home as victims in their own right, underlining the urgent need for effective interventions. Exposure to violence in family contexts places children at risk of learning that violence is a normal feature of intimate relationships, while discouraging the safe expression of thoughts, emotions, and needs.

In Italy, a significant innovation in this field has been the inclusion of the P.I.P.P.I. Programme (Programme of Intervention for the Prevention of Institutionalisation) among the LEPS – Essential Levels of Social Services) since 2021 (<https://pippi.unipd.it/>). P.I.P.P.I. is the result of a partnership between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Laboratory of Research and Intervention in Family Education (LabRIEF) at the University of Padua (Milani, 2022). It represents a new paradigm of public action aimed at supporting children and families in conditions of vulnerability and neglect, promoting integrated and community-based responses.

Between 2021 and 2025, more than 12,000 families have been involved in P.I.P.P.I., offering an unprecedented dataset for analysing vulnerabilities related to domestic violence. Preliminary findings indicate that approximately 16% of the families supported through the programme presented situations of children's exposure to violence. This prevalence highlights both the urgency of targeted responses and the strategic role of P.I.P.P.I. as a national framework for innovation.

The programme's distinctive contribution lies in its methodology, which integrates social, educational, and health services through participatory and interdisciplinary approaches. P.I.P.P.I. promotes practices that go beyond emergency protection, aiming to co-construct care and support pathways tailored to the needs of children and parents in their living contexts. These practices are characterised by three key features:

1. Humanisation of interventions, ensuring that children and parents are engaged as active participants rather than passive recipients of support.
2. Co-construction of knowledge and practice, where professionals, families, and researchers collaborate to design and evaluate interventions.
3. Systemic integration, linking individual support to broader community and policy frameworks, thus reinforcing prevention and sustainability.



By connecting research with practice, P.I.P.P.I. illustrates how social work can play a pivotal role in developing evidence-informed, interdisciplinary responses to complex social challenges. Our proposal seeks to present the reflections emerging from the analysis of P.I.P.P.I.'s experiences in addressing children's exposure to violence, and to highlight the good practices that have emerged in this process. We focus on how services, guided by the LEPS framework, have redefined their professional responsibilities, balancing the imperative of immediate protection with the need to accompany families in transformative pathways of care and resilience.

P.I.P.P.I. provides a concrete example of how social work research can inform and reshape practice and policy, linking interdisciplinary collaboration with the co-creation of knowledge. It demonstrates that addressing violence exposure requires not only protective measures but also collective, inclusive and participatory responses that promote children's rights, strengthen families and build more cohesive communities.

## The Research Camp Experience: Co-Creating Knowledge and Promoting Social Justice by Collaborating with Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

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People with intellectual disabilities face marginalization, tokenism, and labelling in research, which makes it less relevant, applicable, or beneficial. Researchers are developing inclusive and participatory action research (IPAR) to center people with intellectual disabilities, making knowledge more meaningful and inclusive. IPAR follows the principle of “nothing about us without us,” a core value of the disability rights movement.

The Participatory Advocacy Research Network (PARN) consists of adults with living experiences of intellectual disabilities, some of whom identify as self-advocates, students, and researchers from diverse backgrounds (e.g., social work, disability studies, occupational therapy, and behaviour analysis). We promote research aimed at understanding and addressing issues affecting the quality of life for the intellectual disability community. Our goal is to establish a network where authentic partnerships can develop, offer members opportunities to build IPAR skills, promote ethical and inclusive practices in academic and community settings, and support collaborative initiatives. Values of disability justice guide our work, and we follow established guidelines to create safe, inclusive spaces.

In October 2024, PARN co-designed a three-day Research Camp at Brock University in Canada, bringing together over 75 self-advocates, students, service providers, and researchers to explore IPAR. The Camp featured 14 workshops, focused on meaningful engagement in research processes, each co-facilitated by self-advocates. Designed to build skills, foster collaboration, and shift power dynamics, the event emphasized the role of people with lived experience as researchers. Departing from traditional academic models, we “cripped” the Camp to challenge conventional approaches to knowledge production. Crippling challenges ableist ideas of normality and reimagines spaces, time, relationships, and information to ensuring authentic engagement.

A Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant allowed us to develop a Planning Committee consisting of ten research assistants (RAs) and academics to oversee the Research Camp. Five self-advocates were hired as RA. They were compensated a fair pay in recognition of their expertise, placing the voices of adults with intellectual disabilities at the forefront of the project. They partnered with student RAs to co-chair various subcommittees central to the development and delivery of the event. To prepare the co-chairs for their roles, we organized a Leadership Retreat. Throughout the process, RAs engaged in reflective interviews and journaling to understand the co-design and facilitation of the Research Camp. In collaboration with self-advocates as researchers, we carried out a reflective thematic analysis of this data.

This presentation highlights the co-creation of knowledge through PARN. Rooted in principles of IPAR and disability rights, the project emphasizes accessibility, mutual learning, and equity in research, serving as a model for others. Insights, challenges, and successes can shape future participatory and collaborative efforts to better serve the needs of those directly impacted. The session will share practical strategies, successes, and challenges, demonstrating how co-designed initiatives can challenge traditional research power dynamics while strengthening links between social work research, practice, and advocacy. Attendees will gain insights into fostering accessible, collaborative research practices that honour the voices of people with intellectual disabilities and enhance the profession's capacity to generate socially just knowledge.

## Mobilising collective user experience for social change in social work: Potentials, Pitfalls and Power

Associate Professor [Maja Müller](#)<sup>1</sup>, Associate Professor Mette Rømer, Associate Professor Andreas Møller Jørgensen

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The interest in and the involvement of the experiences of service users remain essential to social work and especially to social changes and the development of social work. It is reflected by the involvement of service users' lived experiences, peers and 'expert by experience' in co-creation of knowledge of how different social initiatives works and effect the "end-users". While there are only a few examples of user-driven innovative changes in social work and bottom-up initiatives that are transforming social work services (Pihl-Thingvad & Müller, 2020), there has been a surge of citizen-led movements mobilising people in vulnerable positions and devising creative action repertoires for social change (Dodson, 2015; Noble, 2015; Siim, et al., 2018). The collective experience of social inequality and injustice is vital as it fosters community and shapes group identity, understandings of the world and action repertoires to change conditions for marginalised groups. Merging civil society movements and social work, we ask: What is collective experience in social work, what drives collective actions, and how can collective experience become a lever for social change?

Based on empirical examples from the Horizon Europe project "Increasing Responsiveness to Citizen Voice in Social Services across Europe (RESPONSIVE)" (2023–2026), we explore citizen-led actions in Denmark that in different ways challenge unresponsive social systems within the social areas of mental health, disability, child protection, and youth at risk of social exclusion. We draw on empirical data collected in 2024, including interviews with leaders and participants/ citizens of actions to identify the dilemmas and potentials of collectivising individual experiences of injustice and marginalisation in social work as well as the value and public visibility of these actions.

We draw on social movement theory and focus especially on the mobilising structures, political opportunities, framing processes (McAdam et al., 1996), dynamic repertoires of action (Tilly, 2008) and efficiency-democracy trade-offs (Blaug, 2002) to explore how experiences are collectivised. We also critically analyse whether collectivisation may reconfirm and exacerbate experiences of vulnerability and marginalisation or, conversely, increase critical awareness of structural and cultural injustices and empower people in vulnerable or marginalised positions. The findings point to citizens' experiences of challenging the systems and how difficult it is to get through to the political level and create change. The findings emphasise the importance of citizens' different motivations, ways of organising and seeking influence, and relationships with social services. The analysis calls for establishing stronger links between citizen-led actions and social service provision. The research links to practice and contribute to a focus on how we can include the co-creation of knowledge from citizens who participate in collective actions to create social changes and innovate social work practices (Theme 7).

## **“I feel that was almost like a trap”: Women’s experiences of pre-birth assessments in the context of substance use: Emerging findings from the Willow Study.**

Dr Shirley Lewis<sup>1</sup>, Dr Danica Darley<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Sheffield

The Willow Study, funded by the NIHR, is a mixed method study that explores how pregnant women who use substances experience pre-birth assessments, alongside the perspectives of the social workers who carry them out. Rising rates of newborn babies entering care with many of these cases involving parents with substance use, underlines the urgency of understanding this process. However, little is known about how women feel about these assessments, or how well-prepared social workers are to undertake pre-birth assessments where women use or are in treatment for substance use.

The Willow Study aims to find out how women experience pre-birth assessments, what support they get and how they feel about it. We also want to understand the views and experiences of social workers who carry out these assessments, consider how social workers and women communicate, and learn about the support available to women before, during, and after legal proceedings. The study combines the qualitative data collected with data on pre-birth assessments from three local authority areas in England and Wales with quantitative data focussed on the numbers of pre-birth assessments carried out with women who use substances to explore the prevalence of substance use in pre-birth assessments. Once the findings are complete we will co-produce practice recommendations with parents and professionals to improve outcomes for women and babies.

This paper will discuss initial findings from the interviews and focus groups with women, reflecting on their lived experiences of pre-birth assessments. The paper will consider the implications of these for social work practice and how participatory and trauma-aware approaches can shape more effective, humane, and supportive assessments.

By centering lived experience and practical recommendations this paper directly addresses the themes of the conference: considering the impact of social work practice on women and advancing practice that promotes more positive outcomes for women and babies.

## Continuous Researching and Facilitating Evidence Informed Practice and Policy at Manchester Youth Justice Service (England): Realist Evaluation of Big Data to Investigate What Works and For Whom

Dr Mansoor Kazi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Realist Evaluation Inc

### Background and Purpose

This study is a great example of continuous researching and facilitating evidence informed practice and policy, using 100% natural samples successively in each year, followed up in a further one year to investigate what works and for whom in reducing recidivism. The repeated evaluation analysis of big data directly helps the agencies to better target their interventions, promote equity and social justice, and to develop new strategies in the circumstances where the interventions are less successful. This paper demonstrates how partnerships can be built between evaluators, service providers and the service users to develop program and evaluation designs, to enhance the utility of evaluation in practice in a longitudinal study that includes regular analysis of data undertaken with the service providers.

Although factors such as sex, age, race, substance abuse, family structure and past criminal behavior play a significant role in juvenile delinquency, these don't tell the full story, and researchers continue struggling to find effective means of intervening. Studies have shown that some form of early intervention across programs seemed to be the key to lowering recidivism.

### Methods

A 100% naturally occurring sample is selected of all service recipients in every two-year period, and then repeatedly followed through to the following one year, to investigate what proportions do not reoffend, and what factors are predictors of not reoffending following the first episode of the intervention. A quasi-experimental design is used, comparing recidivism amongst those receiving diverse programs. Data analysis methods include the development of binary logistic regression models to investigate the factors that were predictors for reducing recidivism.

### Results

MYJS service recipients ( $n = 2526$ ) from four years were followed into the next one year. It was found that 62.7% of this cohort had not re-offended. When all the significant variables were entered in a binary logistic regression with youth reoffended or not as the dependent variable, it was found that males were four times more likely to reoffend than females. Those that did not complete the intervention program were almost 6 times more likely to reoffend, and those that did not engage with the Youth Justice Service were four times more likely to reoffend. Race and ethnicity were not predictors of offending, demonstrating that MYJS was also effective in promoting equity and social justice.

**Implications: Conclusions and Implications**

There is strong evidence from the study that the youth justice service's intervention helps to divert the youth from crime and to reduce recidivism, but more needs to be done to develop effective programs. The evaluation including entire populations directly helps the agencies to better target their interventions, to promote equity and social justice, and to develop new strategies in the circumstances where the interventions are less successful. This paper demonstrates how partnerships can be built between evaluators and service providers to develop program designs, evaluation designs and information designs to enhance the utility of evaluation in practice in a longitudinal study that includes regular analysis of data undertaken with the service providers.

## The value of risk management for IPV victims' quality of life: two studies of women facing different levels of risk of revictimization

Professor Åsa Källström<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Martina Vikander<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anna-Karin Larsson<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Örebro University

### Background and purpose

IPV profoundly impacts various domains in victimized women's lives. We investigated the impact of risk management on victims' quality of life. The overarching aim was to examine the value of risk management strategies for women facing different levels of risk of revictimization (low-moderate and high respectively). Study 1 aims to analyse the process of protection against post-separation violence as described by women who were assessed with low to moderate risk of revictimization. Study 2 aims to understand how risk management interventions impact the quality of life of women who have experienced victimization and were at high risk of severe post-separation violence.

### Methods

Semi-structured interviews with 17 mothers with low-to-moderate risk (study 1) and 13 at high risk of re-victimization (study 2) were conducted. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically.

### Findings

Study 1: The process of protection for low-to-moderate-risk victims included activating own safety strategies; seeking, utilizing, and bridging gaps in societal protection; and resigning to live unprotected.

Study 2: Risk management strategies for high-risk victims enhanced their security, feelings of safety and freedom. Risk management interventions are generally appreciated, although limited in terms of scope, time and protective potential.

Interventions often come with a cost to the women's physical and psychological quality of life, as well as their autonomy.

### Conclusions and implications

Extensive demands are placed on women subjected to violence, despite the presence of relatively strong legal rights and a well-developed societal system. There is room for improvement in the collaboration between the police and social services to minimize the impact on women at high risk of severe post-separation IPV.



## Evaluating Comprehensive Health Assessment for Children in Out-of-Home Care: A Mixed-Methods Study of Service Needs

Dr Joakim Finne, Professor Åsmund Hermansen, Professor Ira Malmberg Heimonen, Dr Anne Grete Tøge, Professor Dag Ellingsen, Ms Maria Ekre, Mrs Kjersti Stabell Wiggen

### Background and purpose

Children who are placed out of home following care orders often have complex health, care, and support needs that are often not systematically identified. Comprehensive Health Assessment for Children in Out-of-Home Care (CARE) is a specialized second-line service developed to provide child welfare services and new caregivers with sufficient knowledge about a child's strengths and needs delivered by an interprofessional team often consisting of a medical doctor, a clinical psychologist and a child welfare worker. This study examines whether intervention improves the information available to child welfare services, increases the precision of follow-up measures, and contributes to more stable care trajectories with fewer unplanned placement disruptions. This study is a part of a broad study examining the effectiveness of CARE.

### Methods

The study applies a sequential mixed-methods design. Four child welfare offices are recruited: three with experience implementing THK and one with no prior experience. Data sources include (1) qualitative interviews with child welfare staff, unit leaders, and new caregivers (n≈20) focusing on experiences with THK compared to ordinary assessments; (2) a survey of child welfare staff and caregivers developed based on interview findings, assessing perceived utility, precision of information, collaboration, and communication. This study is a part of a broad study examining the effectiveness of CARE.

### Findings

Preliminary findings suggest that the threshold for requiring CARE varies across municipal authorities. The teams implement the intervention in different ways, and the extent to which their recommendations for further care or assessments are followed up also differs between municipalities. Survey findings will be incorporated into the preliminary findings once data collection has ended by November 2025.

### Conclusions and implications

Results will inform whether the intervention strengthens child welfare services' capacity to identify and respond to children's needs following placement, and whether it contributes to greater placement stability. The study will deliver evidence to guide further development, implementation, and policy decisions regarding CARE.

## Parental Attitudes and Digital Parenting in the Early Years: Development and Validation of the PADTS Scale

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This paper reports on the development and validation of the Parental Attitudes to Digital Technology Scale (PADTS), a brief, psychometrically validated measure assessing parents' beliefs, confidence, and concerns about their very young children's use of digital technologies. Developed by a multi-disciplinary team including social work, education, psychology, linguistics and early childhood, and as part of the UK-wide Toddlers, Tech and Talk (TTT) study (Flewitt et al., 2024), PADTS addresses a gap in existing research by focusing on children from birth to three years, a stage often overlooked in digital parenting literature. Co-developed with parents and early years experts, the scale was tested with a nationally balanced UK sample (N = 934). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a four-factor structure: Perceived Risks, Perceived Learning Benefits, Parental Confidence, and Technology-Related Anxiety. The PADTS showed strong model fit and measurement invariance across parent gender, ethnicity, and region, with some variation by child age. Correlational analyses indicated that benefit, perceptions and confidence were associated with supportive digital parenting, while anxiety was more weakly linked. Reflections focus on a) the benefits of the tool (PADTS) for researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers, from different disciplines, b) how the use of the tool can support a nuanced understanding of how parental attitudes shape early digital experiences and c) the use of the tool to help develop an evidence base regarding digital technology, parents and early childhood.

# Invisible Voices: Exploring the Experiences of Siblings of Individuals with Substance Use Disorder in Social Work Contexts

Dr. Jóna Ólafsdóttir<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Substance use disorder is a condition with profound family impact that affects many households. The challenges it creates within families can have profound impacts on the mental, physical, and social health of family members. Increasing scholarly attention to this issue has revealed that the effects often manifest differently across family roles. The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Icelandic men who grew up with a sibling suffering from substance use disorder. The study focused on social and psychological impacts, as well as the broader influence of the sibling's disorder on family relationships. Data were collected through semi-structured, open-ended interviews, and analyzed using a phenomenological approach to identify meaningful patterns in participants' narratives.

The findings revealed five overarching themes: (1) psychological distress and feelings of neglect, (2) strained or disrupted sibling bonds, (3) destabilized family functioning, (4) social isolation and difficulties in peer relationships, and (5) long-term consequences into adulthood. Participants described childhood environments marked by instability and a lack of appropriate support systems. Their accounts clearly indicate that men in this situation are at heightened risk of emotional suffering, weakened family ties, and enduring social challenges.

The study highlights the urgent need for social workers and other professionals to recognize this overlooked group of clients. A deeper understanding of their experiences is essential for developing targeted interventions, providing timely support during childhood, and preventing the long-term harm that results from growing up alongside a sibling with substance use disorder.

**Keywords:** substance use disorder, family, siblings, sibling relationships, impacts, lived experience, social work

## Building a research community in European Social Work: analysis of 15 years of Social Work Research development and exchange through the experience of ECSWR

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### Background and purpose

Committed to knowledge production, Social Work has been taking steps towards the consolidation of a community of knowledge, well-grounded in scientific foundations, as a critical factor to gradually take a stance on worldwide and interdisciplinary debate of social sciences.

In June 2011, the first wide range meeting of social work researchers took place, with a primarily focus on European social work research, but open to social work researchers world-wide. That was the first European Conference for Social Work Research (ECSWR), which success and interest dictated the creation, three years later, of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA), founded with the ambition of promoting a center for the development of research, collaboration, and exchange of Social Work in Europe. Fifteen years later, ECSWR is not only an academic event but also a symbolic expression of the internationalization of Social Work research, and one of the most relevant academic gatherings of social work researchers, socialising the new-comers with the community and hosting networks and research exchange and dissemination.

It has fostered networks that connect researchers, practitioners, and educators, shaping a collective identity that positions Social Work as a discipline increasingly capable of engaging in the political, ethical, and methodological debates of our time.

Given the ESWRA's goal to promote the development, practice, and use of Social Work research to improve knowledge about individual and social problems, we intend to endeavor an overall analysis of the outputs of European social work research during these years.

### Methods

A meta-analysis to the conference abstract books developed in the timeframe 2011-2025 will be conducted in order to typify knowledge production in social work. The analysis pursues three main objectives: (i) to identify the dominant themes of SW research and their articulation with European and global socio-political agendas — from austerity and welfare retrenchment to migration, social inequalities, sustainability, digitalization and artificial intelligence, and the impact of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and ongoing armed conflicts; (ii) to analyse the methodological designs and research strategies employed, noting the relevance given to participatory and collaborative approaches, co-production of knowledge with service users, interdisciplinary research and the tensions between critical/transformational methodologies and dominant positivist or managerial logics; and (iii) to reflect on the institutional consolidation of ESWRA as a hub for European research and international cooperation

**Expected results**

By revisiting the path of ECSWR and ESWRA across their first 15 years, this communication seeks not only to map the trajectories of SW research but also to launch challenges for its renewal. It argues for a European SW research agenda that is simultaneously rigorous, inclusive, and politically engaged, capable of responding to global uncertainties while reaffirming the ethical and humanistic core of the profession.

**Keywords:** Social Work Research; Social Work Knowledge; Research Methodologies; Interdisciplinarity

## Patience as Process Competence in Social Work – Experiencing the Model of Patient Action

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In contexts of complexity, uncertainty, and transformation, social work professionals need competences that allow them to act with resilience and reflection rather than with haste. Patience is one such competence – not understood as passive waiting, but as an active capacity to engage in developmental processes over time.

This workshop introduces and explores the concept of Patient Action (Siebert-Blaesing, 2021), which frames patience as a movement between two poles: the often difficult and sometimes almost unbearable present, and a desired, though frequently undefined, future in which challenges become lighter and more manageable. In this dynamic space, patience functions as a bridge that enables stability, trust, and the co-creation of new possibilities. Participants will become familiar with nine key resources of patience – including patience with oneself and with others, mindfulness, composure, kairos (timing), and orientation towards meaningful goals – and connect them to everyday competences such as observing, waiting, enduring, failing and beginning again.

The workshop design combines short impulses with guided reflection, paired exchange, and small-group activities. Participants will have the opportunity to relate the model of Patient Action directly to their own professional settings in social work, leadership, research, and education.

By the end, they will have gained concrete tools to reflect on patience in their own context, and insights into how patience can strengthen resilience, cooperation, and sustainable change – making it a subtle but powerful resource for peace.

### Reference

Siebert-Blaesing (2021); Kriz & Tschacher (2017)

**Keywords:** Patience, Reflection, Social Work Practice, Resilience, Leadership, Transformation

## The Search for Purpose: Making Meaning in Black Women Survivors of Sexual Violence

Dr. Brittney Autry<sup>1</sup>

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Sexual violence, defined as the intentional infliction of assault on victims' bodies, has a far-reaching physical, psychological, and financial impact on its victims. While sexual violence affects nearly every race, Black women endure adverse consequences with a lack of adequate support at higher rates than other racial or ethnic groups (Jones, 2015). The lack of support that Black women receive can negatively impact their ability to facilitate post-traumatic healing in the aftermath of such an adverse event. Further, there is less known about the process of meaning-making, an important component of post-traumatic growth for Black women (Williams & Lewis, 2021). The current research project was designed to explore one broad question: How do Black women make meaning out of their lived experience of sexual violence in the aftermath of the adverse event? Thirty-nine Black women survivors of sexual violence were recruited from LinkedIn and private mental healthcare clinics in a large midwestern city. Data were collected virtually using individual interviews (n=6) and focus groups (n=3) and analyzed using Nvivo qualitative analytical software (Version 13, March 2020 R1). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Langdrige, 2004) revealed four primary themes pertaining to meaning making: experiencing negative cognitions, shift in self-perception, empowering the self, and increased sense of strength. These findings can inform development of best practices that facilitate growth in the aftermath of trauma caused by sexual violence among Black women. Further research is needed to explore specific mechanisms through which meaning making facilitates post traumatic growth in Black women.

**Keywords:** African American, women, sexual violence, healing, meaning making

## Listening, Acceptance, Tolerance, and Courage: Social Workers in Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Dr. Liesma Ose<sup>1</sup>

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Social workers routinely operate in teams with orphan courts, probation officers, social pedagogues, teachers, family assistants, police, and health professionals. Success depends on collaborative capacities that no single profession can provide alone. Prior studies highlight barriers—status hierarchies, role ambiguity, ethical tensions, data-sharing dilemmas, and conflicting institutional mandates. This study explored how social workers in Latvia experience collaboration, how they protect professional self-worth, and where they locate realistic opportunities for improvement. We asked: (1) How are teamwork structures and roles understood and enacted? (2) What collaboration models are viewed as effective or problematic? (3) How do interpersonal dynamics support or undermine client-centred work? (4) What futures do practitioners envision for interdisciplinary collaboration?

We employed a qualitative design comprising 28 semi-structured interviews with social workers in municipal services and NGOs and one focus group (n=5) with practitioner-lecturers who teach and supervise field placements in a social work bachelor's programme. Participants were recruited through criteria and convenience strategies across specializations — youth, families with children at risk—where multidisciplinary work is legally mandated. The focus group used a Future Workshop format. Analysis followed a phenomenological, heuristic sequence: description and interpretation, reduction, and clustering of meaning units; collaborative coding consolidated themes.

### Findings

Four categories captured the experience. (1) Experiences and roles—client-centred “hub of experts.” Cooperation appeared as a horizontal network with two modes: inter-professional case-management and inter-institutional information exchange. (2) Hardships—conflict of values. Practitioners reported victim-blaming attitudes, bureaucratic objectification, confidentiality breaches, and power-laden practices that constrained rights-based work. (3) Visibility and power—confrontation versus safety. Team climates ranged from supportive solidarity to emotional abuse and disrespect tied to prestige asymmetries. (4) Gains, resources, and skills—professional integrity. Effective collaboration rested on shared goals, active listening, clear role recognition, joint training, supervision or co-vision, and manageable workloads. Essential knowledge comprised psychology, psychotherapy, communication and conflict resolution, and human rights (especially social rights). Valued attributes included respect, tolerance, analytical thinking, empathy, patience, humour, creativity, and courage.

### Conclusions and implications

Balancing a strong professional identity with interprofessional cooperation is demanding. Tensions clustered around three junctures: (1) horizontal networking versus the need for firm role boundaries; (2) person-centred, rights-based narratives versus administrative/policing discourses of control; and (3) aspirations for regular joint work and training



versus workload constraints. Two strengths consistently underpinned success: an ethically anchored professional identity and robust intra-team communication oriented to client benefit. Practical implications include joint, case-grounded training across agencies; timely, purposeful information-sharing; access to supervision and co-vision; and workload management that protects time for both collaborative and individual client work. Enhancing professional integrity among students, early-career workers, and experienced practitioners emerges as central to strengthening boundaries, reflexivity, and the quality of multidisciplinary practice. Policy and research implications: develop standardised interagency protocols for consent and data-sharing; embed cross-sector supervision in municipal budgets; include collaboration indicators in service quality audits; and evaluate team-based training with client-level outcomes. Future research should compare municipal versus NGO settings, trace collaboration across case lifecycles, and examine how student learning translates into practice during early career transitions.

**Keywords:** interdisciplinary collaboration; professional identity; social work

## Beyond Hours and Weeks - the Temporalities of Co-residing with and Caring for an Autistic Adult Child in a NEET position

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In Sweden, autistic people and their families are recognised as a particularly vulnerable group of citizens. They are entitled to support under the Swedish Disability Act (SDA), a responsibility that falls within the domain of social work. The SDA aims to ensure good living conditions, and in addition to assessing eligibility for the SDA, social workers conduct needs assessments. The assessments involve explicit or implicit time evaluations to determine the extent of services. Despite the legal aim of providing good living conditions, parents of autistic adults in a NEET position (not in education, employment, or training) provide extensive and time-consuming care but rarely utilise SDA services (Ljungberg, 2024; Ljungberg et al., 2025).

To explore these parents' experiences of the relationship between time and caregiving, three focus groups were conducted with a purposive sample of eleven parents who have experienced co-residency with autistic adult children in NEET positions. Focus groups facilitate small participant numbers to engage in researcher-led discussions on specific topics, allowing access to multiple perspectives (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998). Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines critical disability studies and research on social problems, the focus groups were analysed through the lens of crip time (Kafer, 2013) using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The results reveal how parents articulated a relational and political understanding of disability. Their perspectives challenge notions of time rooted in linearity and productivity by emphasising alternative temporalities shaped by care. Moreover, they illustrate how the time-consuming need to prepare, prevent, and predict an unpredictable everyday life is difficult to quantify due to its scope and normalisation. Parents described negotiating welfare demands shaped by able-bodied norms of productivity and functionality, often resulting in exhausting and unproductive loops. These experiences eroded trust in the system, heightened fears for their children's future, and challenged norms of time, care, and productivity.

By combining critical disability studies with social work research, this study contributes to challenging the practice of using time as a metric for assessing caregiving, exposing the limitations of capturing the relational and unpredictable complexities of caregiving within linear time. The findings have wider relevance for social workers and researchers in welfare states that rely on time-based assessments. They encourage social workers to re-evaluate time estimates to better reflect parents' lived experiences.

## Identifying Parents with Cognitive Difficulties: How Child Welfare Services Enable Timely and Appropriate Support

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### Background and purpose

Parents with cognitive difficulties are consistently overrepresented in child protection proceedings and face systematic disadvantages. By cognitive difficulties is meant a broad range of functional challenges, not confined to clinical diagnoses but encompassing difficulties with learning, memory, reasoning, and problem-solving that may affect parenting and the ability to benefit from support. While research has documented prevalence, outcomes, and barriers to tailored interventions, less is known about how such difficulties are identified in practice. Identification is critical because it shapes professional judgments of parental capacity and determines whether support is adapted to specific needs. This study addresses this gap and contributes to the conference theme of 'Challenges and opportunities for social work practice in contemporary contexts' by exploring how child welfare professionals identify parents with cognitive difficulties in everyday practice.

### Methods

The study is based on qualitative interviews with 15 professionals employed in the Norwegian Child Welfare Service, recruited to reflect variation in geography, municipality size, and organizational models. All participants had substantial experience with family support, supervision, and counseling. Semi-structured interviews invited participants to describe how they identified and assessed cognitive difficulties in their everyday work. Follow-up questions encouraged elaboration through examples and reasoning. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. The material was analyzed thematically using an inductive approach. Transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarity, codes were generated openly and iteratively, and collaborative coding enhanced reflexivity and consistency. Broader categories were then developed, leading to three main themes.

### Findings

The findings suggest that identification unfolded as an extended interpretive process, in which repeated observations and relational insights gradually turn everyday interactions into evidence of underlying difficulties. The analysis produced three overarching themes:

1. Identification shaped by definitions: professionals described how their understanding of cognitive difficulties had expanded from narrow diagnostic labels to broader functional perspectives, where challenges became visible through parents' management of everyday caregiving.
2. Identification through relational insights: Recognition rarely followed single assessments but unfolded gradually through ongoing relationships, repeated encounters, and collective team discussions.
3. Identification through patterns of response: Difficulties were inferred when repeated guidance and supervision failed to produce change, revealing discrepancies between verbal participation and practical follow-through.

**Conclusions and implications**

The findings indicate that identification of parents with cognitive difficulties in child welfare practice is largely informal, relational, and reactive. While professional discretion enables sensitivity and flexibility, it also creates inconsistencies, as recognition varies with individual judgment, available time, and contextual conditions. Delayed identification limits opportunities for timely adaptation of support and shapes how parental capacity is evaluated within constrained intervention windows. The study underscores the importance of developing more systematic approaches that allow for early and equitable recognition, while also preserving the relational insights that practitioners rely on. Such measures are vital for ensuring both adequate support for parents and timely protection for children.

## Bilingualism as Practice: Negotiating Language in Finnish Child Welfare Social Work

Leo Larjanko<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Tobias Pötzsch<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Helsinki

### Background

The critical role of language in shaping lived experiences and structuring the outcomes of interactions between street-level actors across diverse areas of social work practice has been widely acknowledged. Yet, language usage and language barriers are still approached predominantly as instrumental matters, framed as technical obstacles to be managed rather than as constitutive elements of practice that shape power relations, access, and meaning. This presentation investigates how bilingualism is negotiated and experienced by social work practitioners in child welfare services in Finland. Building on Hall and Valdiviezo's (2019) argument that social work research should foreground language in interactions, we examined how practitioners articulated their views on language—and specifically bilingualism—in their work with clients, in the organization of their local work teams, and within the broader structures of wellbeing service counties. Our guiding research question was; How do social workers describe negotiations of bilingualism in client work practice, multiprofessional teamwork, and on an administrative structural level?

### Methods

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (N=36) with social work practitioners in child protection and child and family service teams in three bilingual Finnish wellbeing service counties between November 2023 and July 2024 as part of the state sponsored, MultiPrax research project (2022-2024). Twenty-nine interviews were carried out in Swedish and seven in Finnish. An abductive thematic analysis was conducted, drawing on Hult and Hornberger's (2016) orientations to language planning as the guiding conceptual framework. Interview transcriptions were pseudonymized and transferred to the University of Helsinki's secure storage space for sensitive data. All material was coded using the software Atlas.ti.

### Findings

The preliminary findings show that social work practitioners experienced and negotiated bilingualism differently in different contexts. Social work practitioners emphasized clients' rights to use their first language in interactions and documentation but reported challenges in providing broader services if this constituted a minority language. Within their local teams, practitioners exercised discretion over organizing work with mixed or separate languages, alternatively viewing language skills either as a potential barrier or as a resource. Language skill requirements were also perceived as exacerbating chronic staffing shortages, framing the lack of bilingual proficiency as a practical hiring problem. Although the wellbeing service counties officially marketed themselves as "bilingual", administrative hierarchies and practices beyond local teams were mostly monolingually Finnish. According to Hult and Hornberger's (2016) heuristic guide, this illustrates a structural, problem-oriented view of bilingualism in contexts beyond individual client interactions at the local level.

**Conclusions and implications**

This article contributes to the growing field of language focused social work research, by investigating views on bilingualism in practice in a context where languages enjoy statutory protections and supportive social policies. These complexities of the findings have implications for social work practice in similar bilingual contexts while also offering insights relevant to the increasing demand for multilingual social work practice.

## The Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales Pilot: Perceptions of deservingness amongst recipients and professionals.

Professor Sally Holland<sup>1</sup>, Dr Vibhor Mathur, Ms Zoe Bezeczeky, Dr Louise Roberts, Mr David Westlake

<sup>1</sup> Cascade Children's Social Care Research Centre, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

This presentation addresses the conference theme of 'Challenges and opportunities for social work research, practice, policy or education in contemporary contexts'. It presents findings from a large, mixed methods realistic evaluation of a radical policy intervention by the Welsh Government within a contemporary political context that includes debates on areas the policy addresses including eligibility for welfare payments and provision for asylum seekers and refugees. This presentation explores challenges and opportunities for policy implementation of a basic income to a cohort of young people leaving care.

The Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot provided two years of unconditional cash transfer based on the living wage to young, care-experienced adults aged 18-20. This presentation considers views about the selection of young adult care leavers as a group to receive a basic income. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 41 professionals (Personal Advisors, social work managers and financial advisors) and 44 basic income recipients in the first year of the scheme (2022/2023).

The findings are analysed within Van Oorshot's 'CARIN' framework that aids analysis of attitudes towards the 'deservingness' of others. The findings indicate that there was an almost unified agreement amongst the interview participants that care leavers deserve additional support but much less agreement on whether they thought that the basic income pilot is the right way to provide this support. The findings are situated in a context where strong views have been expressed by a small number of prominent politicians and media outlets who question the deservingness more overtly, especially when considering former unaccompanied child asylum seekers. Meanwhile, the Welsh Government, which implemented the pilot, emphasises the state's obligations to this population and the opportunities that a basic income might facilitate.

Implications of the findings relate to how future basic income schemes are justified to the public, recipients and those administering the scheme at a local level.

## Effective residential and community support for mothers and young children in the context of parental substance use

Professor John Devaney<sup>1</sup>, Dr Claire Houghton<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Edinburgh

### Background

In the United Kingdom (UK) research suggested that 22–30% of children live with a parent who binge drinks or drinks at a hazardous level, and approximately 8% live with a parent with problem drug use. While there is a significant body of research exploring the impact of problem substance use on parenting capacity and children's well-being, there is much less research on the effectiveness of support for parents, and the benefits of these supports for children.

Given the concerns for children's safety and well-being there is a renewed focus in the UK on the use of residential family assessment centres where social workers and other professionals can assess parents' ability to safeguard and care for their child – often a new born baby – alongside mothers engaging in therapeutic work to address their use of substances.

### Methods

A scoping review was undertaken to understand the body of research surrounding the effectiveness of residential treatment and associated community support services for women with children or pregnant women whose use of substances is of concern.

Four databases were systematically searched for empirical research published in peer-reviewed journals between January 2010 and April 2025.

### Findings

Twenty studies were identified for inclusion in the review. Key themes included: criteria for accessing the service; services for pregnant women; barriers to accessing care; the nature of tailored programmes; multi-agency collaboration and integrated treatment; peer support; staff qualities; family centred care; and trauma informed approaches.

### Conclusions

The review highlights the importance of a continuum of care and support before, during and after residential care and treatment. The role of social workers in supporting women and their children is central to successful outcomes. The research highlights that evaluations of the longer term outcomes for children and their mothers is often lacking, and that as many studies are small scale and qualitative, it is hard to draw inferences about which women and children might benefit most from such support, which is often expensive to provide.



## The construction of young people's epistemic agency through the involvement of experts by experience in child welfare

Ms. Tanja Koskinen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Eveliina Heino

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In Finland, the involvement of experts by experience (EBEs) has become a central element in the development of child welfare and child and family services in the 21st century. EBE involvement represents a form of client participation and an act of democracy within these services. This presentation explores preliminary findings from a qualitative study based on ten individual interviews and four group interviews with young EBEs in the context of child welfare.

The study explored the experiences of young people in EBE involvement, and the forms of epistemic agency embedded within that experience. Two main themes emerged: power relations and labor market relations. The first theme reveals that epistemic agency is constructed through feelings of capability, overcoming past experiences, and making meaningful contributions to child welfare services, while also highlighting the unequal power dynamics with professionals. In the second theme, young EBEs position their experiences as professional capital, yet they face precarious roles and limited recognition in the labor market.

While EBE involvement offers opportunities to support the empowerment of young people, it can also constrain their epistemic agency by pushing them into unstable labor market positions without adequate support structures. EBE training and peer support play a critical role in shaping epistemic agency; however, EBE training is not always available for young EBEs. The findings underscore the ethical challenges associated with EBE involvement and highlight the need for more inclusive and secure frameworks that support the diverse experiences of young people and promote equitable participation in EBE involvement.

These insights reveal both challenges and opportunities for social work in contemporary contexts. On one hand, EBE involvement aligns with current efforts to democratize services, integrate lived experience into practice, and promote co-production. On the other hand, the study exposes structural limitations that risk reproducing exclusion and marginalization. The selective nature of EBE involvement, where participation appears to favor individuals who meet implicit criteria and align with institutional expectations, raises concerns about epistemic justice (Fricker, 2008) and the authenticity of participatory practices.

In the context of social work research, practice and education, these findings call for a more critical and ethically grounded approach to EBE involvement. They urge professionals and institutions to reflect on how epistemic agency is shaped through EBE involvement, whose voices are heard, and under what conditions. Promoting genuine participation requires inclusive intentions and structural support that enable diverse experiences to be meaningfully recognized and valued.

This presentation contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of EBEs in social work and invites dialogue on how to build more equitable and sustainable models of participation for young people.

# Researching and Learning from Crisis Experiences: Empirical Insights into Social Work's Role in Promoting Social Resilience in Local Communities

Dr. Kersti Kriisk<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tallinn University

## Background

Contemporary debates no longer focus on whether the next crisis will occur, but when. Since 2020, concepts such as crisis, crisis management, and resilience have become central to macro-level social work practice. One mega-crisis (the COVID-19 pandemic) was rapidly superseded by another (the war in Ukraine, insecurity, and subsequent refugee influx). This context necessitates critical examination of social work's role. Social workers are recognised as agents of social change and facilitators of community resilience. Their contribution extends beyond supporting vulnerable individuals to empowering communities and all citizens, regardless of socio-demographic position (Das, 2020). Nevertheless, during COVID-19, social work was frequently undervalued as a frontline profession (Cederbaum et al., 2022) and insufficiently recognised as a strategic partner in crisis governance networks (Haug, 2024). At the municipal level, these shortcomings underline the need to strengthen multi-level governance and adaptive arrangements, while promoting resilience across societal, organisational, professional, and individual levels. Systematic research and institutional learning from practice are indispensable for enhancing preparedness for future crises (Harms et al., 2022; Jung & Pyles, 2024).

## Methods and findings

This paper examines social workers' experiences during two recent crises and their expectations for future crisis governance, using Estonia as a case study. The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented crisis requiring far-reaching structural and paradigmatic changes across societies. In contrast, the crisis arising from the war in Ukraine and the large-scale arrival of refugees presented a different set of challenges for Estonia. Until 2020, Estonia and other Baltic states experienced high emigration (Aidukaite, 2009; Ainsaar, 2019) and low immigration, with limited preparedness to host refugees (Jauhiainen & Erbsen, 2023). Both state and local institutions, public and private, were compelled to develop ad hoc solutions for example in legislation, in access to housing, labour market, education, and social services, placing considerable pressure on social work as both a frontline service provider and a profession embedded in broader crisis management/governance structures.

The empirical data consist of focus-group interviews with social workers from a region affected by a triple lockdown during COVID-19 (2020), alongside an online survey of Estonian municipal social workers (2024). The term triple lockdown combined a nationwide lockdown with additional regional restrictions in areas with severe outbreaks, in a geographically isolated island region (Sirotkina, Mitendorf & Kriisk, 2023). Preliminary results indicate that social workers perceive themselves as crucial stakeholders in crisis governance and, based on their experiences, identify several critical dimensions for future preparedness and response.

**Conclusion and implications**

The paper highlights social work's contribution to promoting social resilience under uncertainty and emphasises social learning derived from practice. It identifies key challenges for future of multi-level crisis governance, organisational support, and professional development in social work in time of crises. The findings are relevant for policymakers, practitioners, and the field of social work education and research. By examining the Estonian case, the study broadens the European local welfare states perspective on the role of social work in times of crisis.

## How do social workers contribute to the preparedness of vulnerable urban communities to climate change? A middle-out perspective

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### Background and Purpose

Social workers have a responsibility to address the negative impacts of climate-related conditions on the physical and mental health of vulnerable populations (Hawkins, 2023; Hodges et al., 2024; Nyahunda, 2021). While most literature examines social workers' interventions and responses following climate disasters and emergencies, this study investigates their role in climate preparedness and resilience. We aim to investigate the role of social workers in enhancing climate preparedness in vulnerable urban communities. Prompted by social workers' pioneering involvement in the creation of municipal Climate Adaptation Plans (CAPs), and drawing on a Middle-Out Perspective, this interdisciplinary study examines strategic planning for climate resilience in the Social Service Department of a major Israeli coastal city.

### Method

We employ a qualitative single-case study design to offer contextual insights into broader phenomena (Huzinker & Blankenagel, 2021). Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with professionals (N=10), participant observations of public and professional meetings (N=10), and an analysis of policy documents (N=25) related to strategic climate planning in the chosen city. We performed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interviews, meeting protocols, researchers' notes, and policy documents to code and categorize textual data (Bowen, 2009).

### Results

Vulnerable populations in the coastal city faced increased and imminent risks from extreme heatwaves, rainstorms, and flooding. Findings show that social workers' contributions to strategic preparedness for climate emergencies are manifested at three levels: discourse, processes, and outcomes. We analyze these contributions using a Middle-Out Perspective (MOP) that conceptualizes middle actors as agents who influence change in multiple directions: upstream to policymakers, downstream to clients, and sideways to other middle actors (Janda & Parag, 2013). The MOP approach bridges top-down and bottom-up strategies to provide a more nuanced understanding of policy change (Janda et al., 2019).

Social workers primarily shaped discourse upstream, drawing attention to vulnerable populations living in underserved urban areas and advocating for resources from state and municipal actors. They influenced planning processes sideways by providing other local actors with information about the needs of vulnerable groups and employing expertise in community mapping and project initiation. Downstream, social workers influenced outcomes by raising awareness about climate change preparedness among vulnerable groups, although with limited community participation in the strategic planning process.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Social workers can and should play a vital role in preparing vulnerable populations that are disproportionately affected by climate change. MOP has recently been applied to understand how professional actors influence complex policy transitions (Kranzler et al., 2019; Mindell, 2022). Our analysis suggests that this theoretical framework effectively conceptualizes the role of social workers in climate preparedness. Although often overlooked, the involvement of local social services is crucial to strategic planning due to social workers' professional authority, legal status, and pre-existing communication channels with organizations, community leaders, and service users. Social work education and policy practice must provide local practitioners with tools, resources, and legitimacy to enhance their agency and capacity in promoting climate preparedness for vulnerable communities.

## Early Prevention of Psychosocial Risk Factors in Families - Interprofessional Collaboration Between Nurses from the Child Health Services and Social Workers from Social Services

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### Background and purpose

Many families with children aged 0–5 face challenges in their daily lives that can negatively impact the current and future health, well-being and lives of both parents and children. The Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK) model is a structured, evidence-based approach to identifying and managing psychosocial issues in Child Health Services (CHS), such as financial concerns, parental depression, parenting stress, substance abuse, and intimate partner violence. The SEEK model was originally developed in the United States (Dubowitz, 2014). A Swedish version, BarnSäkert (ChildSafe), has been tested and evaluated in Swedish CHS (Engström et al., 2023). The BarnSäkert model aims to identify psychosocial risk factors in young children's home environments and provide families with early support. To further develop the BarnSäkert model, CHS and social services have initiated a collaboration to support families in need.

The purpose of this study was to investigate interprofessional collaboration between CHS nurses and social services' family support workers in accordance with the BarnSäkert model.

### Methods

A qualitative exploratory design with semi-structured interviews was used to gain a deeper understanding of CHS nurses' and family social workers' experiences of collaboration and early support for families through joint visits in the family's home or at CHS. Fourteen interviews were conducted with 25 family social workers and seven interviews were conducted with 17 CHS nurses, for a total of 42 professionals participating. The same interview questions were used in all interviews. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews.

### Findings, yet preliminary

Three main themes were identified: 1) Planning and coordinating joint home visits. It was important to identify the right families, schedule meetings in advance, and maintain flexibility. The nurse served as a gateway for the social worker. 2) Professional collaboration and shared expertise: The social workers and nurses had different, similar, and complementary skills. They encountered various problems during home visits and discussed practical solutions and strategies to address these challenges. 3) The BarnSäkert model and improvements for the future: The BarnSäkert model was well-accepted, yet it required methodological support and follow-ups. It was considered preventive in the long term. However, more needs to be done to reach families at psychosocial risk.

### Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Collaboration and joint efforts are necessary to reach families with children at an early stage. Families can benefit from the involvement of different professionals and their combined expertise. Families trust CHS, enabling social workers to provide support earlier.

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## Religious literacy as expertise in social work

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The religious and cultural diversification of European societies challenges social work to broaden the professional knowledge base and expertise. In our research project (<https://sites.utu.fi/sowrel/>) and presentation, we combine theoretical frameworks from studies of religion with social research to develop social work theory and practice. We also focus on ethical and methodological considerations in research concerning minorities and sensitive topics.

In social work, diversity has been examined from the perspectives of multiculturalism, anti-racism, decolonisation, and intersectionality, among others. We take the theoretical discussion further by stating that, in addition to these approaches, it is necessary to study and better understand the significance of religion, especially in communities where religion strongly defines lifestyles and values. Since religious and cultural meanings are often intertwined, we examine religion in relation to cultural meanings. We ask, how religiosity and cultural meanings are perceived and recognised in social work, what kind of skilled interpretation of religions and cultural meanings, as well as theoretical, practical, and ethical expertise are needed in social work practice and research with religious and cultural minorities.

In individual and community-based social work, recognising the diverse meanings and values associated with religion and having flexible interaction skills can be seen as essential parts of professional competence. This is important in order that the experiences and participation of individuals and communities classified or identified as minorities are considered, and that social work can be meaningful and effective from the clients' perspective. Religion may serve as an essential marker of identity, and it shouldn't be ignored in social work striving for change, especially concerning complex client cases and community work. The significance of religious communities can be understood as both a resource and potential constraint on individual well-being.

We use theories from religious and cultural studies alongside social science frameworks. Smart's (1998) model of the seven dimensions of religion distinguishes between the ritual, mythical, experiential, institutional, ethical, doctrinal, and symbolic dimensions of religion. Perceptions of the helping process are influenced by cultural meanings, and sometimes linked to religiosity. Thus, religious and cultural meanings may transfer to clients' subjective goals, which are important for the success of client work. (Knitter 2010.) By the concept of religious literacy, we mean an active understanding of the significance and impact of religion or irreligion on people's choices and actions.

The data of our study consists of interviews with social workers and members of the Muslim community, autoethnographic field research, and writings by specialising social workers, in Finland. In addition, we organise workshops involving religious and cultural minorities, such as Muslim, Laestadian, and Roma, to enable a critical and multi-voiced examination of the project's results and implementation.



Our presentation examines how the frameworks of religion studies complement social work theory in facilitating the practical interpretations in social work, using examples from the results of our research.

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## The Relationship Between Professional Ideology, Work Values and Secondary Traumatization and Burnout Among Social Workers: The Mediating Role of Resilience and Social Support

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This study examined the complex factors influencing burnout among social workers, a psychological syndrome that develops as a response to chronic workplace stressors and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). While previous research has explored burnout among social workers, the combined impact of professional ideology and secondary traumatization on burnout, particularly when mediated by resilience and social support variables, remained insufficiently investigated. The current research aimed to address this gap by examining these multifaceted relationships during a period of heightened stress and crisis.

The study involved 434 social workers employed across various public and private organizations in Israel who completed comprehensive online questionnaires. Using correlations and mediation models with path analysis through SPSS software, the research tested several hypotheses regarding the relationships between these variables.

The results demonstrated a strong positive correlation between secondary traumatization and burnout ( $r=0.63$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), confirming that exposure to clients' traumatic experiences significantly contributes to professional burnout. More importantly, path analysis uncovered two distinct mediation pathways that help explain this relationship: one operating through resilience ( $\beta=0.02$ ,  $p=0.013$ ) and another through social support ( $\beta=0.04$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). These findings suggest that while secondary trauma exposure may be inevitable in social work practice, its impact on burnout can be mitigated through these protective factors.

Work values demonstrated negative rather than positive relationships with burnout, with cognitive values showing the strongest protective association ( $r=-0.23$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This finding indicates that social workers who prioritize intrinsic aspects of their work, such as personal growth, achievement, and contributing to society, experience lower levels of burnout. Furthermore, professional ideology, particularly emphasis on social justice principles, was associated with higher levels of social support, which in turn reduced burnout levels. The research also revealed that emotional and cognitive work values operate through both social support and resilience pathways to reduce burnout, suggesting multiple protective mechanisms at work.

These findings carry significant implications for both practice and policy in social work. The research expands understanding of protective mechanisms against burnout under crisis conditions, emphasizing that internal resilience and robust social support systems serve as crucial mediating factors in maintaining professional wellbeing. From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that organizations should prioritize developing resilience enhancement programs, build comprehensive support systems, and foster work environments that emphasize cognitive work values and social justice principles.

The policy implications are equally significant, indicating a need for organizational and national frameworks that systematically integrate resilience-building and social support as essential components of social worker protection and retention strategies. In addition, particular emphasis should be placed on education for professional values, work values, and improving employment conditions. The study provides evidence-based guidance for decision-makers to view investment in support resources not merely as beneficial additions but as preventive strategies essential during periods of crisis and heightened professional demands. The research ultimately demonstrates that maintaining social worker wellbeing requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both individual resilience capacities and systemic support structures, offering valuable insights for sustainable social work practice in challenging professional environments.

## Transcending disciplinary boundaries: Methodological reflections based on the example of an interdisciplinary research project on domestic adoption in Switzerland

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### Purpose and question

This presentation explores the potential and challenges of combining methods from the field of history (particularly historical-critical and historical discourse analysis of archive files) with social science approaches (in particular, the analysis of biographical-narrative interviews using Grounded Theory) within the framework of empirical research in social work. Using the example of an interdisciplinary research project on domestic adoption in Switzerland in the 20th and 21st centuries, it reflects on methodological issues and advocates for stronger interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Study Background

The few existing approaches and methods that examine the life courses of adoptees and their biological parents often rely on problematic methodological shortcuts. These approaches tend to explain outcomes primarily through a lens of deficiency and adverse social conditions. Moreover, they imply a mono-causal and normative understanding of adoption, which is deemed either successful or unsuccessful in a cross-case and pseudo-objective assessment. The aim of our research project was to gain new scientific insights into continuities and changes in Swiss domestic adoption policies and practices in the 20th and 21st centuries. In addition, we examined the effects of adoption policies and practices on the lives of adopted persons and their biological parents. This presentation includes key findings of the empirical research project. The focus, however, is on the critical examination of the methodological challenges and potentials that arise from combining historical-critical and historical discourse analysis of archive files with the analysis of biographical-narrative interviews using Grounded Theory within the field of social work.

### Field access and methods

The research project involved the compilation and analysis of two data sets using two different disciplinary approaches. On the one hand, we analysed 621 official adoption case files in eight archives in Switzerland using descriptive statistics, and the method of historical-critical and historical discourse analysis (Lengwiler 2011) for some additional 100 case files. On the other hand, we conducted 72 biographical-narrative interviews with adopted persons and biological parents of adoptees and analysed them using Grounded Theory Methodology (Strauss/Corbin 1998). To systematically combine these two research approaches, we used multi-level analysis according to Andreas Walther (2017) to not only juxtapose individual courses of life (micro level), institutional practices (meso level) and the legal-political framework (macro level), but also analyse and understand their interactions and interdependencies. In this theoretical framework, the biographical outcomes were analysed in their interplay with social, legal and professional contexts, with a focus on relevant legal transitions.

**Conclusion**

The presentation advocates more methodologically reflected interdisciplinary research in social work and opens new perspectives on the research fields of adoption and child and youth welfare. Taking our research project as an example, we illustrate how challenging, but also – and most importantly – how productive the methodological interweaving of historical approaches and biographical-narrative perspectives is. How, for example, historical contextualisation and classification can be used to critically reflect on subjective contexts of meaning and significance, thereby countering the solipsistic tendencies of Grounded Theory.

## "Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Trauma and Professional Integrity: Lessons from Journalists in Conflict Zones"

Dr. Hagar Binoun Chaki<sup>1</sup>

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Armed conflicts and war zones constitute some of the most demanding environments in which professionals must act while sustaining their professional identities. While social work research has addressed trauma and resilience among practitioners in human-service professions, less is known about how such dynamics are experienced by professionals in parallel fields, such as journalism. This study examined the experiences of journalists reporting from conflict zones and draws lessons relevant for social work research and practice in contexts of crisis and uncertainty.

The study involved in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty-four journalists who reported directly from areas affected by violent conflict. Using Gilligan's Listening Guide, a methodology designed to capture layered and relational narratives, the analysis uncovered how journalists construct and live their professional identity under wartime conditions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model further guided the interpretation of findings, situating journalists' voices within the multiple systems—individual, professional, and societal—that shape their experiences.

The findings highlight three central dimensions. First, journalists described pervasive exposure to traumatic events and the profound emotional burden accompanying their work. Many recounted experiences of fear, helplessness, and secondary trauma, intensified by proximity to violence and suffering. These narratives resonate with challenges faced by social workers in emergency or conflict contexts, underscoring the need for trauma-informed practice across professions.

Second, the interviews revealed recurring moral and ethical dilemmas. Journalists spoke of tensions between professional integrity, the imperative to convey accurate information, and pressures from political actors, media organizations, and their own communities. Such dilemmas mirror those encountered in social work, where practitioners must uphold professional values while navigating institutional constraints, political realities, and limited resources. By highlighting these parallels, the study demonstrates how insights from journalism can enrich social work's engagement with ethics, advocacy, and professional responsibility.

Third, the findings underscore the fragile yet persistent negotiation of professional identity under extreme conditions. Journalists described how war both challenged and strengthened their sense of vocation, shaping the meaning they ascribed to their work. For some, reporting was framed as a moral calling; for others, it produced identity fragmentation and self-questioning. These processes offer valuable comparative perspectives for social work, a profession similarly defined by its ethical mandate and identity struggles in times of crisis. Beyond the substantive findings, the study contributes methodologically by illustrating the value of the Listening Guide for capturing complexity in professional narratives.

This approach offers opportunities for social work research to deepen its analysis of practitioners' experiences, advancing theoretical and practical understandings of resilience and moral distress.

In conclusion, examining the experiences of journalists in conflict zones is significant in its own right and also offers important cross-disciplinary lessons for social work. By engaging with professions beyond its immediate boundaries, social work can broaden its frameworks, enrich its practice responses, and strengthen its capacity to support practitioners under extreme conditions. Such cross-professional learning is vital for developing resilient and ethically grounded approaches to practice in a global landscape marked by conflict and social change.

## Social work recruitment and retention: What can we learn from those who stay?

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The province of New Brunswick in Canada is facing a critical shortage of social workers, reflecting a broader international crisis in social work recruitment and retention. While much research focuses on why social workers leave the profession, no studies to date in the province, or across Canada have drawn on the insights of experienced practitioners to identify factors that sustain them in the profession over the longer term and their views on the need for change. This qualitative study therefore asks the question, ‘what can we learn from those who stay?’

Drawing on a psychosocial lens, the study examines how individual, relational, and structural factors shape the career longevity of social workers who have remained in practice for more than 20 years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 current or retired social workers in New Brunswick resulting in over a millennia of cumulative practice wisdom and experience. Using Cook et al.’s (2024) concept of “critical career episodes,” and novel timeline methodology, the research investigates participants’ “stay or go” moments, professional identity development, and career journey narratives. Data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2020) reflexive thematic analysis.

By focusing on participants unique perspectives of long-term retention the findings identify a dynamic interplay between ‘stayer’ typology and the role of personal, professional and organizational investment that sustains social workers throughout their careers. These findings will have important implications for recruitment and retention strategies and policies in social work and other human services, including opportunities for future interdisciplinary research in New Brunswick, Canada and internationally.

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## Exploring transformation. Interdisciplinary approaches to the reform dynamics in child and youth welfare (1970 to 1990)

Prof. Dr. Gisela Hauss<sup>1</sup>

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The narrative of a fundamental shift from authoritarian obedience-based education to democratic concepts and practices since the 1970s is widespread in the historiography of social work. The year “68” serves as a code for this shift, referring to a transnational youth movement that strongly criticized residential care facilities as part of repressive social structures. Recently, the event “1968” has increasingly become the focus of historical studies. These studies make the event their subject of investigation and conclude that the period of change must be defined more broadly. They speak of the “long 1960s,” a prolonged period of upheaval between 1958 and 1973. This is described as a cultural transformation, linked to growing prosperity, a new significance of the media, changes in gender images and sexual behavior. In the presentation, we ask the follow-up question: must the widely described significance of the code “68” for the historiography of social work be questioned? The underlying research project involved a transnational team (Austria, Germany, Switzerland), of historians and social and educational scientists. They followed a socio-historical approach to the subject of investigation. The aim was to reconstruct the transformation processes over a longer period (1970 to 1990). In the analysis, societal structures were also brought into focus, ambivalences were made visible, and linear, step-by-step narratives of progress were questioned. The focus was on “doing change,” i.e., analyzing those complex, irregular, and contradictory processes from which patterns and structures can only be identified through analysis.

The results of the project contribute to the historicization of the code “68” in the historiography of social work. With the shift away from the previous dominant focus on “68,” the complex interplay of societal dynamics at that time becomes visible: the socio-political upheavals and conflicts, the cultural change of childhood(s) and youth(s), the municipal and regional governance of child and youth welfare systems, the academic and professional production of knowledge, and the not-to-be-underestimated self-will of children and young people, and educators in the everyday life of residential care facilities.

To illustrate this complex interplay, we select child and youth care institutions in the early 1980s in the urban milieus of the city of Zurich. Based on interviews and archival materials, we trace how new (self-)positioning of young people (e.g., demands for autonomy; opposition to mainstream society) and new lifestyle phenomena (e.g., use of psychoactive substances) influenced processes of change in residential child and youth care — especially at the level of pedagogical approaches, concepts, and practices. We examine this development with a critical eye on changing gender images and changes in sexual behavior in an urban context. Against this backdrop, the controversial continuity of traditional control and protection concepts in girls’ residential care facilities is particularly evident.

With our presentation, we would like to show how fruitful it can be to anchor interdisciplinary perspectives and socio-historical analysis in the historiography of social work. The contradictions and ambivalences analyzed in the past can provide valuable knowledge for the beginning phase of critical reflexivity in social work.

# Pride, Ambivalence and Belonging: Exploring Professional Identity Among Experienced and Early Career Social Workers in England

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## Background

Professional identity is central to sustaining confidence, resilience, and commitment in social work. Yet, unlike some other professions with clearly bounded roles, social work has long been described as a “contested profession,” marked by competing expectations, shifting boundaries, and limited public recognition. Previous research highlights tensions between care and control, empowerment and regulation, as well as the impact of managerialism and stigma on practitioners’ sense of self. This study reports findings from a pilot of a draft Social Work Identity Scale conducted in England, part of an international project to examine how social workers understand and experience their professional identity.

## Methods

Data were collected via an online survey distributed to two groups: experienced practitioners recruited through professional networks (n=96) and early-career social workers (qualified since 2020) recruited through three English local authorities (n=110). The survey ran between April and July 2025. Responses were analysed in SPSS using chi-square tests and Fisher’s Exact Test where appropriate, focusing on differences between the two groups across dimensions such as belonging, pride, professional knowledge, and practice orientation.

## Findings

Clear generational differences emerged. Experienced practitioners were more likely to identify strongly as social workers, express pride in belonging, and describe responsibility for protecting the profession’s future. They also reported greater knowledge of social work’s history, philosophy, ethics, and journals, and more confidence in integrating theory and research into practice. Early-career practitioners, by contrast, often reported ambivalence, embarrassment, or concealment of their professional identity, and weaker connections with peers. They were also less confident about using research and integrating theory into practice. Despite these differences, both groups endorsed core ethical principles such as respect for diversity and human rights but agreed that social work remains undervalued and poorly understood by the public. Importantly, early-career practitioners expressed greater uncertainty about remaining in the profession, with weaker professional attachment strongly associated with an intention to leave within one, three, or five years.

## Conclusions

The study suggests that professional identity in social work is anchored in shared values but fragmented by contested boundaries, external stigma, and internal diversity. Experience appears to consolidate professional pride, knowledge, and belonging, whereas early-career practitioners often feel less secure and more ambivalent. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening professional identity early in practice through mentoring, reflective supervision, peer support, and career development opportunities. For workforce policy, they underline that recruitment initiatives alone may be insufficient without parallel strategies to build pride, belonging, and professional confidence. Addressing stigma and improving public recognition of social work also remain critical for sustaining a committed and resilient workforce.

## Examining Awareness and Attitudes Towards Adult Safeguarding Practices in Acute Hospital Contexts in Ireland

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The investigation of, and interventions on, the alleged or suspected abuse of older people and vulnerable adults has become an important feature of professional social work and adult safeguarding and protection practice. The prevalence of abuse in acute hospital settings is poorly understood, and there is an acknowledgement that hospital staff require additional training to understand and manage incidents (Warburton Wynn, 2021). Acute hospitals offer unique opportunities to identify and intervene in abusive situations and to offer support to those at risk; this implies important organisational responsibilities to ensure that adult safeguarding responsibilities are delivered in ways that promote positive outcomes. This study sets out to conduct an online survey of clinical front-line staff to establish baseline understandings of levels of knowledge and skills to adult safeguarding in acute care settings, to gain insights into staff's education and training needs and to improve patient experiences.

A quantitative, descriptive study design was adopted, which utilised a cross-sectional online survey of hospital staff from the 10 participating hospitals. An exploratory study design was adopted, consisting of an online survey questionnaire administered via 'SurveyMonkey'. The survey included a mix of closed, open and multiple-choice questions and two case studies. An interpretive inductionist approach to data analysis was applied (Kuczynski and Daly, 2002). Ethical approval was awarded by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) in University College Dublin.

233 responses were received from a variety of hospital staff, including nurses, social workers, doctors and health and social care professionals. Findings indicate that acute care staff have varying levels of awareness of different categories of abuse. 32% of respondents reported being 'very confident' in recognising suspected harm, abuse or neglect of an adult patient, with 36% of respondents reporting being 'somewhat confident' in reporting abuse. Barriers to identification and reporting included a lack of time, a lack of confidence in skills, and the victim being confused/cognitively impaired. When asked who they would report their concern to, the majority of respondents said they would report their concern to a medical social worker (26%), followed by the local safeguarding and protection team (16%), their line manager (15%), the ward manager (15%) and consultant (8%).

The case studies highlighted inconsistencies in how safeguarding concerns were reported, managed and documented by staff. Case studies also showed that the majority of respondents failed to demonstrate awareness of the need for sensitive, trauma-informed or patient-centred responses to patients when safeguarding concerns arise. The survey also indicated that over one third of staff have lower levels of confidence that their hospital will deal with safeguarding concerns where a staff member is the alleged perpetrator in accordance with the hospital's safeguarding policy.

Many staff in acute care contexts lack confidence and knowledge in detecting and reporting the abuse of adults at risk. This study clearly indicates the critical role that social work plays in adult safeguarding in acute care contexts and the need for the development of trauma-informed education resources and in-person training to promote quality improvement.

## **Multiplicities of Informal Learning Processes in an Urban Context in the Global South: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Social Work and Anthropology**

(Dipl.) Social Work and MA Social Anthropology Rebekka Krauss<sup>1</sup>

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This paper presents insights from an interdisciplinary research project on learning and participation of adults with little or no formal schooling in the city of El Alto, Bolivia. It argues that informal learning is not a marginal phenomenon but constitutes a central mechanism for social participation and community resilience. This perspective challenges deficit-oriented discourses that frame education in the Global South primarily through poverty, vulnerability, and marginalisation.

The research was conducted within a collaboration between social work, anthropology, and psychology and followed a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Twelve months of fieldwork combined in-depth participant observation with different types of interviews. I accompanied 20 adults with little or no formal schooling in their everyday lives. Additional fieldwork included observations in markets, workplaces, NGOs, counselling centres, social organisations, and adult education centres. This rich empirical material provides a nuanced understanding of how learning takes place across relationships, networks, and practices.

I draw on approaches such as situated learning (Rogoff 2014) and communities of practice (Wenger 1998), as well as life-world orientation and a resource-oriented approach (Staub-Bernasconi 2007). These perspectives were not only guiding frameworks but also proved crucial in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Linking them enabled me to situate learning processes within everyday practices, sense-making strategies, and relational contexts, and to identify specific competencies as well as the role of networking strategies. These processes and abilities are often overlooked in deficit-based discourses. Taken together, these lenses allowed me to interpret informal learning as relational, resource-rich, and embedded in community practices.

Findings show that people acquire a broad spectrum of competences through informal learning. Professional skills, language abilities, and social competences are developed through listening, observing, experimenting, reflecting, and analysing. Such learning is not only crucial for individual livelihoods but also for collective practices such as neighbourhood organisations, unions, and associations of people with disabilities or elderly groups. These organisations themselves emerge as significant learning spaces, where knowledge and agency are collectively produced and reproduced.

By making visible these complex and often invisible learning processes, the study advocates for their recognition in debates on educational rights and adult education practice. Rather than reducing education to universalised global standards, it calls for acknowledging the

diversity of learning practices and valuing them as meaningful contributions to sustainable and locally embedded forms of education.

Finally, the paper demonstrates the added value of interdisciplinarity: anthropology provides tools to analyse cultural practices and meanings of learning, while social work offers a framework for linking learning processes to rights and participation. This interplay proves essential for understanding informal learning not only as individual adaptation but as a collective practice enabling participation and agency.

The study shows that an interdisciplinary perspective is vital for making informal learning visible as a collective resource for participation and social change—thereby challenging globalised deficit narratives about education in the Global South.

## Transnational parents - discourses and narratives about transnational parenting concerning unaccompanied children in Swedish social services

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New technology has increased and facilitated transnational relations. Research shows that parents of unaccompanied children are usually involved in their children's everyday lives even when they live in different countries (Herz & Lalander, 2019; Hessle, 2009). However, there is a gap in research on how parents of unaccompanied children practice parenthood. Furthermore, research indicates that Swedish social services acknowledge the role of parents of unaccompanied children to a less extent than parents residing in Sweden (Backlund, Eriksson, Greiff, & Åkerlund, 2012). Yet, there is no research on how these parents are recognized by the Swedish state, nor on how Swedish social workers perceive and engage with their parental role.

The aim of the present study is to explore how transnational parenting is shaped, understood and practiced in contexts where children have migrated to Sweden without accompanying parents. Focus is on how various actors, such as the state, social workers, children and parents, contribute to the construction and maintenance of parenthood across national borders. The empirical data consists of Swedish official documents that guide social work with unaccompanied children, interviews with five unaccompanied children, interviews with four mothers of unaccompanied children and interviews with twelve social workers who meet unaccompanied children in their work. The document analysis was guided by discourse analysis (Howarth, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 2008; Winther Jørgensen, 2000; Fairclough, 1992, 2003), while the interviews were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008).

Preliminary results indicate that, according to parents' and children's narratives, parents of unaccompanied children practice various forms of parenthood. The most common practices include practicing guidance, care, support with belonging and identity, as well as sharing everyday life. It is common to establish family routines regarding when and how communication should take place and how family life is done. However, living at a distance seems to gradually create greater differences in everyday life, often leading to a sense of not fully understanding one another. On the other hand, social workers and the legal documents do not define parents of unaccompanied children as actively engaging in parenthood; rather, they are described as important adults in children's lives. Even though social workers acknowledge that parents perform specific parenting practices, they maintain that parenthood must be replaced. Parental involvement is sometimes perceived as a potential risk to the child's well-being. According to social workers, institutional frameworks and professional mindsets shape the understanding of these parents and the perceived possibilities of involving them in practice.

Nevertheless, many unaccompanied minors seem to be exposed to parenthood both locally and transnationally, although these forms of parenthood seem to be weakly connected. Increasing social workers' knowledge of transnational parenthood could create opportunities to support children in developing a more cohesive experience of childhood and parenthood and would likely contribute to the further development of social work.



# Knowledge and Evidence in Social Innovations: Actor Strategies for Embedding Trans- and Interdisciplinary Insights in Social Work Development

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## Background and purpose

In search for answers to societal challenges and ways of addressing social problems, (trans- and interdisciplinary) research plays an important and still growing role in social work. In particular, it underpins social innovations - a key element in tackling complex issues in the social sector. Although there is a substantial body of social innovation research, little is known about (a) how different actors shape innovation processes in the welfare system, (b) which macro-social conditions enable evidence-based practice and policy, (c) how macro-, meso-, and micro-social levels interact, and (d) the specific role of professional social work in these processes. To address these questions, the project 'Innovation Trajectories in Social Services' (2024–2027) examines innovation processes in two fields of social work – addiction services and services for people with disabilities – that have undergone major changes in recent decades, using a reconstructive and cross-national (Germany, Switzerland) approach in a research team that combines different disciplinary perspectives (social work, history, social sciences, history, diaconal studies).

## Methods

This paper examines how actors embed interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge into social work development processes to foster innovation. We draw on the preliminary findings of the grounded theory-based research and the first eight cases we studied to analyse developments in the two fields of social work in both countries. Data was gathered via guided, problem-centered interviews with key actors and a set of historical documents relevant to the process. Two concepts proven in innovation research serve as sensitising concepts for reconstructive analysis: the Extended Social Grid Model (Nicholls & Ziegler, 2015) and the multi-level perspective (Geels 2011).

## Findings

Preliminary results indicate that actors actively embed knowledge through a bundle of interconnected strategies. These transdisciplinary approaches combine formal expert knowledge from different disciplines with research findings, professional practical knowledge and insights emerging directly and iteratively from the context of practice. This is complemented by a critical body of organizational, political, and systemic know-how. The multifaceted knowledge base is activated and legitimised through proactive public relations, strategic networking, and the creation of collaborative learning spaces where knowledge is not only disseminated but also newly generated. Collectively, and underpinned by an evidence base evolving in response to its context, these strategies support the integration of novel developments into institutional and political structures, turning them into fully anchored innovations.



**Conclusions**

The initial cases demonstrate that social work professionals skillfully draw on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge to develop solutions that provide a solid response to complex challenges when their expertise or legitimation cannot address the full complexity at play in development processes. Specifically, this takes place in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning spaces for creating or communicating new knowledge that leads to robust solutions. The ongoing project will shed light on further knowledge- and actor-related aspects of social innovation processes in line with the abovementioned questions.

## Risky Decision Making: multi-agency working with victims experiencing high risk domestic abuse

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MARACs originated in the UK in 2003 as part of efforts to improve responses to high-risk domestic abuse. Rooted in the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) model, MARACs were established to protect individuals at the highest risk of serious harm or domestic homicide through collaborative planning and interventions. These meetings bring together representatives from police, social work, domestic abuse services and specialists from governmental and non-governmental organisations to share information and develop tailored safety plans (Safelives Scotland, 2021).

Early studies linked MARACs to reduced revictimization and stronger inter-agency coordination, but more recent research highlights escalating referral pressures, limited case-discussion time, under-representation of BAME and LGBTQIA+ victims, and scant evidence of improved safety.

This thesis seeks to understand how risk is constructed and enacted in a multi-agency context for domestic abuse victims, with a focus on the role of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) in Scotland. This study examines:

- (i) How is risk understood and enacted in a multi-agency setting responding to domestic abuse?
- (ii) How is risk discussed during a MARAC?
- (iii) In what ways do constructions of risk preference or exclude some victims from the MARAC?
- (iv) What is the relationship between how risk is assessed by professionals, and the outcomes that are agreed during a MARAC meeting?

This study utilised a mixed method design, involving statistical analysis, interviews with MARAC representatives, and observations of MARAC meetings over the period of one year, to understand how risk in relation to domestic abuse is understood and operationalised in professional contexts.

Findings suggest strong commitment and consistent participation across agencies in the MARAC process, yet notable differences in how risk is defined and assessed. Many practitioners questioned the DASH-RIC tool, and the absence of a shared, cross-disciplinary understanding of risk led to inconsistent decisions. Interventions often focused on victims' behaviour rather than the perpetrator's actions. Victims from BAME and LGBTQIA+ communities were underrepresented, reflecting referral processes shaped by a narrow construction of risk and by Scotland's legal definition of domestic abuse, which prioritises intimate partner violence.

This research highlights the need for a more consistent and inclusive understanding of risk across agencies in MARACs addressing domestic abuse. Challenges reflect broader systemic barriers to effective multi-agency and interdisciplinary collaboration. Strengthening shared frameworks of risk and fostering equal dialogue across disciplines can improve joint decision-making, enhance preventative strategies, and reinforce safeguards to reduce domestic abuse and homicide.

## Interdisciplinary research on how the education system responds to children with delinquent behavior

PhD Jolita Buzaityte-Kasalyniene<sup>1</sup>

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I am part of a research team from social work, education, and criminology examining how society and professional systems respond to children with delinquent behavior in Lithuania. Research indicates that norm-violating behavior is a natural part of adolescent development. Unfortunately, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be punished and face a higher risk of ongoing delinquency.

Delinquent behavior in children often signals unmet needs and underlying developmental trauma that must be identified and addressed appropriately (cf. United Nations, 1990; Loeber & Farrington, 2012). When this behavior arises from complex developmental trauma related to an unsafe family environment (Thompson & Morris, 2016; Farrington, 2017), it is essential that both the education and social work systems collaborate. These children often lack the support they need from their parents, which is why professional intervention is crucial.

In this presentation, I will share partial results from an ongoing study that aims to investigate how the Lithuanian school system responds to children with delinquent behavior and to identify the most effective factors within the school system that can address the specific needs of these children.

### **The objectives:**

- To explore the strategies that Lithuanian schools employ to respond to children's delinquent behavior, identify the underlying reasons for these strategies, and assess their consequences.
- To determine which school strategies best meet the needs of children exhibiting delinquent behavior.
- To identify the resources required to implement the most effective strategies.

We are conducting a qualitative study using Kathy Charmaz's constructionist Grounded Theory. Our data coding involves primary coding, focused coding—identifying categories and their characteristics—and theoretical coding to develop concepts.

We began our analysis with initial interviews and will continue to gather data until saturation is reached. Our interviews involve diverse stakeholders, including teachers, social workers, members of child welfare commissions, parents, and local government decision-makers. Thus far, we have completed 12 interviews.

**Initial Findings**

The Lithuanian education system aims for inclusive schools, but delinquent children are often excluded from discussions about inclusion. Their challenging behavior leads to punitive responses and condemnation. Without a diagnosis of special needs, these students receive little help from school professionals and are often pushed to other institutions. Some schools have a concentration of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds due to local government policies on social housing, creating areas with significant social challenges. While some schools can push out “uncomfortable” students, others can't afford to be selective without risking their survival. It is suggesting the education system leans more towards segregation than integration.

Schools often avoid collaborating with social work specialists to protect their reputation. Instead of providing support for children with delinquent behavior and addressing their developmental trauma, the education system has created an inter-agency cooperation institute that functions like a youth court but can only refer these children to socialization centers.

While it's too early to establish definitive implications for practice and policy, we hope to develop some ideas before the upcoming conference.

## Easier collaboration in practice: Social workers' accounts of interdisciplinary communication during a digital platform rollout in Norwegian healthcare

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### Background and purpose

Digital transformation with the Health Platform is reshaping collaboration in Norwegian health and welfare services. This study explores how social workers describe and conduct interdisciplinary communication with digital messaging and shared records in everyday work, within local teams and across services. Research question: How do social workers use messaging and shared records during the Health Platform rollout, and how does this work shape symbolic and social boundaries within and across services?

### Methods

Sixteen semi structured interviews were conducted in Spring 2023 during early implementation with social workers in municipal and hospital contexts, sampled for variation in role and setting. Participants included clinical service functions, somatic hospital departments, psychiatric care, substance use follow up, and office based health and welfare services. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. Interpretation drew on Hutchby's account of affordances as relational possibilities and constraints, and on Lamont and Molnár's distinction between symbolic and social boundaries.

### Findings (preliminary)

Messaging affordances translated into specific coordination moves that performed boundary work. Asynchronous, persistent messaging lowered contact barriers, reduced telephone tag, and supported targeted queries, for example confirming that treatment had begun elsewhere and agreeing next steps by message. I read these practices as affordances of asynchrony and persistence that help bridge symbolic boundaries in day to day coordination; where access permissions applied, they also enabled work across service boundaries.

Shared visibility of involved actors and notes reduced duplication and clarified responsibilities, often with less paperwork. The same visibility foregrounded accountability: the "break the glass" justification step made some hesitate to open other services' records and shaped how sensitive matters were documented. In some cases, visibility was invoked to decline help elsewhere. I interpret these dynamics as maintenance of social boundaries around responsibility and privacy, alongside a rearticulation of symbolic boundaries in documentation and communication.

Participants noted several built in channels and some uncertainty about which to use, with choices varying by case and recipient preference. Within services, the rollout generated workload and technical frustrations but also closer collegial ties around shared challenges, with secure chat used for quick peer consultation.

Network gaps remained where NAV, some general practitioners, and services in other regions were not on the system.

### **Conclusions and implications**

From a social work standpoint, a shared records and messaging system can serve as a common coordination space that lowers barriers to contact, makes involvement visible, and supports handovers and role clarity within teams and across services. These observations suggest scope for continued team reflection on channel use, access, and documentation as implementation proceeds and local practices stabilise.

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- Primary subtheme: #2. Secondary subtheme: #5

## Parental Contact in Out-of-Home Care: Judicial Reasoning and Professional Discretion in Sweden

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When deciding on contact restrictions between children and parents during out-of-home care, child protection services (CPS) have the important task of ensuring children's safety while at the same time promoting family ties and prospects for family reunification. This involves careful balancing of the rights and interests of children and parents. Moreover, evidence indicates that the issue of parental contact is important for children in out-of-home care (Atwool, 2013; Wilson et al., 2020). Despite the complexity and importance of these decisions, little is known about them in the Swedish context.

The Swedish legal framework emphasizes the importance of maintaining parental contact for children in care, while also permitting extensive restrictions. Yet, the law offers limited guidance on how such restrictions should be assessed – stating only that they are allowed if deemed necessary and in the child's best interests. This leaves considerable discretion to social workers and courts (Yllner, 2024). This ongoing study aims to explore how this discretion is exercised in first-instance administrative courts in Sweden and draws on all first-instance administrative court judgements from 2024 (approximately 200 cases).

In Sweden, the emphasis on voluntariness and cooperation within CPS means that social workers primarily seek parental consent to contact restrictions. Only when this fails do CPS issue a formal decision, which parents (with sufficient social resources) may then appeal to court. Consequently, the study does not capture the general CPS practices regarding contact restrictions, but rather what happens when CPS decisions are tested in court.

The analysis examines how courts balance the competing interests at stake and how their reasoning relates to the professional judgements of CPS social workers. The judgements are analyzed qualitatively using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The overarching research questions are: What arguments do courts use to uphold or overturn CPS decisions on contact restrictions? And, how do courts incorporate the CPS's reasoning in their decisions?

This study is situated at the intersection of law and social work research, highlighting the interaction between professional social work judgements and legal standards. The findings can inform policy and further studies on contact restrictions in Sweden, particularly regarding CPS-level decision-making. The findings also contribute to broader international debates on child protection, children's rights, and professional discretion. This provides insights relevant beyond the Swedish context and enables cross-national comparisons.



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## Understanding the motives of volunteers more accurately than before - An innovative matching-procedure for volunteer management

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### Background and purpose of the presentation and how it will address the conference's aims and themes

The subject of our presentation is an innovative scientifically based matching procedure for volunteer management in social work organisations. We would like to present the procedure and its development and thus highlight and discuss a specific example of the link between social work research and practice. The presentation therefore relates to the seventh subtheme of the conference. Overall, the process can be understood as a contribution to the facilitation of evidence informed social work.

### Summary of the main points of the presentation

Social workers are often supported by volunteers in promoting social participation, and volunteering is itself an expression of social participation. To receive continuous support and enable ongoing participation experiences, it is important for the organisations to know the expectations of volunteers and to agree on appropriate tasks. If volunteers cannot act as they expect or are not treated as they expect, they quit volunteering.

Studies show that volunteers are generally unaware of their expectations regarding their volunteering. They are therefore unable to answer direct questions about this accurately (Rüger/Engel/Haßelbusch 2022). Previous recommendations to ask volunteers directly about their motives and expectations are therefore not effective. This insight prompted Rüger (2023) to develop a new procedure for understanding volunteers' engagement-related expectations as accurately as possible.

Our grounded theory studies, in which autobiographical-narrative interviews with volunteers were analysed, served as the scientific basis for the development. They show that volunteers want to do or experience the same things during their volunteer work that they did during the best phase of their lives before volunteering, or that they want to do or experience the same things that they lacked during a major crisis in their lives before volunteering (Rüger 2023; Rüger/Engel/Haßelbusch 2022). Rüger (2023) then designed a procedure in which volunteers are encouraged to tell autobiographical stories in initial interviews, and volunteer managers then deduce from stories about highlights and major crises what volunteers want to experience during their volunteering. Subsequently, specific tasks can be agreed upon. In order to make the instructions understandable and implementable, professionals and students were continuously involved in its development.

## Conclusions from and implications of our presentation for practice and further research

Our presentation illustrates how important it is to continuously reflect on established procedures and, in cases where their effectiveness is questionable, to further develop and validate them on the basis of knowledge. Furthermore, it raises the question of how practitioners can be encouraged to embrace new scientific findings and procedures based on them. We would like to discuss this with participants.

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## Co-research as a Kaleidoscope

Dr. Anu-Riina Svenlin<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Tiina Lehto-Lundén<sup>2</sup>, Ms. Jemina Juuripuu<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Siiri Vehniäinen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Kaisa Vuolukka<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Johanna Kiili<sup>3</sup>

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### Background

The SUFA research project aimed to explore the experiences of children and young people who are or have been clients in family work services. This presentation focuses on the co-research process used to study these experiences. In Finland, family work is one of the most widely used in-home services in child welfare, designed to support and strengthen everyday family life through professional guidance.

Co-research was implemented by hiring two young adults as co-researchers—experts by experience in family work—who collaborated with academic researchers throughout the project. Our research questions are: What are the possibilities and challenges of co-research in child and family social work, and what elements support a successful co-research process?

### Method

The co-research approach aims to promote democratic research practices and bridge the gap between lived experiences, professional practices, and academic inquiry (e.g., Cullen & Walsh, 2020). It involves participants in key stages of the research process, including formulating research questions, data collection, and analysis (see e.g., Kiili et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2022). Participant-based methodologies emphasize that service users can offer insights that researchers might otherwise overlook (Taylor et al., 2020).

The data for this presentation consists of two joint diaries and chat discussions from our shared Teams channel, maintained by researchers (4) and co-researchers (2) from September 2024 to June 2025. The data captures reflections from the initial stages of the co-research process, including data collection in online and in-person workshops with children and young people, and the subsequent analysis of the collected material. The data was analyzed using content analysis.

### Findings

A kaleidoscope symbolizes the co-research process, and its challenges and possibilities. Just as a kaleidoscope shifts with each turn, co-research embraces alternative and evolving ways of knowing and understanding. In the SUFA project, we collaboratively developed practices that encouraged perspective-shifting and mutual listening—such as painting the data (Balmer 2021), morning walks, diary and poetry writing. The essence of these activities was power-sharing. This enabled us to perceive both the visible and hidden dimensions of children and young people's experiences of family work. The key challenges in the co-research process were learning to cope with the uncertainty of not knowing how the process will unfold, while also recognizing and valuing each participant's strengths.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The reflective journey of our co-research process highlights the importance of creating structures and activities that foster openness, trust, and shared reflection among participants. Co-research is shaped by multiple tensions that must be acknowledged to enable the emergence of new knowledge. When these tensions are navigated thoughtfully, co-research can promote safety and equity—allowing everyone the opportunity to turn the kaleidoscope and look through it to contribute to a new, shared understanding; in our case, of children and young people’s experiences with family work.

## More Than an Observer: The Researcher as a Catalyst for Organizational Development and Practice Improvement.

Dr. Mariël van Pelt<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Remo van Boerdonk<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fontys University of Applied Sciences, <sup>2</sup> Farent Social Work

How can practical research move beyond the role of a passive observer to become an active catalyst for change, especially when a social work organization is navigating a complex, high-stakes transition? This presentation delves into a nine-month intensive collaboration between a university of applied sciences research group and Farent, a social work organization in the Netherlands. We showcase how the researchers embedded themselves, forming an alliance with a manager in a social work organization, to fuel and guide to their fundamental shift towards a more area-based, collective, and community-oriented way of working, grounded in the principles of Evidence-Informed Practice (EIP) and tailored to the obstacles associated with implementing EIP (Van der Zwet, 2018). The goal was to facilitate a dynamic integration of three essential knowledge sources: the available research evidence, the professional expertise of Farent's social workers and organization, and the lived experience and wisdom of the residents in the communities they serve.

The challenge was to inject timely, relevant knowledge into a dynamic environment where daily pressures often overshadow strategic learning. The researchers acted as more than observers and outsiders; they became 'critical friends' and co-creators at every level. The researcher and manager developed joint catalytic interventions such as:

- Shaping strategy by infusing the municipal tender text with research evidence.
- Strengthening professional reasoning by conducting an audit interview with management.
- Co-designing professional development programs to bridge knowledge gaps.
- Facilitating organization-wide knowledge transfer and helping to develop concrete community agendas with residents.

This embedded approach yielded crucial insights for any researcher aiming for real-world impact. Firstly, we discovered that timing is paramount; the art is to 'plug in' knowledge at the precise moment it is needed. Secondly, we had to navigate the powerful influence of the municipal funder, whose policy dictates the focus of the social work discipline and influences the transition process. Lastly, we learned that the mediating role of team leaders and the unwavering support of a director are crucial for landing knowledge on the frontline, and that a differentiated approach is needed to address varying skill levels and resistance of the social workers.

In this presentation we - one of the researchers and the manager - offer an honest account of a partnership in motion. We conclude that for research to truly add value in organizational transitions, it must abandon a traditional observational stance. It must become a bespoke, agile, and catalytic force, willing to dance with the messy reality of practice improvement.

### Reference

Van der Zwet, R., (2018). Implementing evidence-based practice in social work: a shared responsibility. Tilburg University.

## A Cautious Plea. Using guidelines in social work

Prof. Dr. Thomas Kampen<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Margo Trappenburg, Dr. Sebastian Abdallah

<sup>1</sup> University of Humanistic Studies

In medical practice the use of professional guidelines has become common practice since the 1990s. Professional guidelines are usually drawn up by a group of experts in a certain field who chart the state of the art knowledge on a certain problem or disease and subsequently formulate instructions for professionals on how to diagnose and treat a condition. Other professions have followed this example, including social work. However, in social work the question whether guideline development is the right way forward is still open. Our research question is: Why should(n't) social workers develop and use professional guidelines?

We used a variety of methods to answer this question.

1. A literature study into what is known about the development and use of professional guidelines in social work;
2. Three focus group interviews with social workers who deal with problems for which a professional guideline is available: child abuse (n= 5); multiproblem families (n= 6) and transitioning home after a hospital stay (n=3); we asked our respondents how they dealt with difficult issues and doubts in daily practice to find out if and how they used the guidelines. Subsequently we probed their thoughts on the usefulness and usability of guidelines in social work.
3. We held seven interviews with relevant stakeholders in the Netherlands: chair of the professional association, managers of social services organisations, representatives of municipalities, representative of the apex employer organisation in social work.

### Findings

Our literature search showed two long-time traditions of social work thinking differently about the use of professional guidelines. The tradition that started with casework, founding mother Mary Richmond, took a positive view. Social work is applied social science; scientific evidence on problems and interventions should be translated into guidelines for professionals as much as possible. By contrast the tradition starting with founding mother Jane Addams took a much more critical view, fearing that professional guidelines might result in cookbook social work, to the detriment of flexibility and creativity. Moreover, there is a reigning suspicion that the call for guidelines might be tied to the call for austerity in neoliberal times.

Our focus group respondents did not display these strong views. Apart from the child abuse guideline, they did not tend to use the guidelines available. Instead, when in doubt they relied on their own rules of thumb: consult a colleague, discuss the issue with clients involved and use a trial and error approach based on small reversible steps. However, they could imagine using guidelines in the future, if these would be clear and practical and leave enough room to maneuver.

Our stakeholders concurred with the social workers: they also stressed that guidelines should be practical and leave room for flexibility and improvisation. In addition they argued that guideline development is a way to further professionalize, provided that social workers are involved in the process.

We argue that it may indeed be a good way forward provided the guidelines incorporate the sensible rules of thumb developed in daily practice, and leave enough room for flexibility.



# Social services in the digital age: systematic review of the use of digital technologies and tools in social intervention

Doctor Elena Ferri-Fuentevilla<sup>1</sup>, Teresa Gómez-Rasco<sup>1</sup>, Doctor Rocío Muñoz-Moreno<sup>1</sup>, Doctor Octavio Vázquez-Aguado<sup>1</sup>

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## Background and purpose

Technology has profoundly transformed our society in various sectors, including social services. The incorporation of digital and technological tools has driven significant changes in public welfare systems, transforming the practices and work dynamics of social service professionals. Within the framework of social services, unlike other areas of social reality, there is a certain specificity due to their unique characteristics that warrants detailed analysis. In this context, it is essential to delve deeper into the analysis of the digitisation process of social services in order to understand how it is developing, what inequalities are emerging in the access and use of technologies by those involved in the development of social services and, finally, to analyse the degree of autonomy of this protection system in its digitisation process.

## Methods

In order to meet the objectives set, the methodology consisted of conducting a systematic review of the literature following the SALSA framework (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis; Grant & Booth, 2009) and the methodological recommendations of Pascoe et al. (2021). The search was conducted in the Web of Science, Scopus and Social Services Abstracts (ProQuest) databases, applying the following search equation ('social services' OR 'public welfare') AND ("technology" OR 'digital tools' OR 'ICT'). The period analysed covered 2020 to 2024, yielding an initial total of 492 studies. After screening and evaluation, the final sample was synthesised and analysed according to thematic and comparative dimensions.

## Findings

The results point to an acceleration of the digitisation process in social services since 2020, moving from basic tools to more advanced solutions such as process automation and RPA. With regard to inequalities in access, use and development of technologies, the literature highlights that the selection and implementation of technologies must carefully consider the specific context of social services and the needs of different population groups. Finally, with regard to the autonomy of social services, it is clear that governance and policies play a crucial role in shaping the digitisation of social services.

## Conclusions and implications:

The literature review reveals an inherent tension in the digitisation of social services, which can be better understood through the conceptual framework that integrates digital capital and change strategy. Although there are potential benefits in terms of access, efficiency and autonomy, digitisation is not developing equitably, with particular attention being paid to certain groups such as older people, while other groups are not being the focus of technological innovation to the same extent. In this regard, it is essential that digitisation

policies encourage organisational learning and adaptation, addressing implementation and scalability challenges and promoting ethical, informed and user-centred professional practice. Digital transformation depends not only on the availability of technology, but also on organisational, regulatory and cultural changes, as well as clear leadership with strategic objectives and concrete actions to ensure its effective and equitable integration.

**Keywords:** Digitalization; Framework SALSA; ICTs; Social Services; Systematized Review.

## Artificial Intelligence and social services. Challenges and opportunities for social work.

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### Background and purpose

This study explores the challenges and opportunities in the relationship between social services and Artificial Intelligence, learning about the use of services and professionals, and exploring challenges and opportunities in intervention processes, management, and professional decision-making from social work.

The social services system is very broad, complex, and diverse, but they share the growing demand of users, diversity of situations of vulnerability, and scarcity of resources and professionals. It is a project that responds to the current challenges derived from socio-digital transitions, focusing on the generation of scientific knowledge about AI and Social Services and knowing challenges and opportunities from Social Work. It is a project perfectly aligned with the international SDGs and the European Digital Agenda 2020-2030. The study will allow identification of the relationship between SSSS and AI in a more optimal way, increasing the knowledge about the actions that are being carried out, given the rapid advancement of AI in different fields of knowledge and professions. It also investigates the challenges and strengths that incorporate principles of democracy and the application of mixed ethical codes in this binomial, both from professional ethics and standards that promote ethical and effective integration of AI in Social Services.

### Methods

A dual approach was also used. First, an analysis and review of AI experiences and practices in social services was categorized according to criteria and variables. Second, a qualitative methodology of expert consultation was used, with 13 participants with heterogeneous sampling according to socio-demographic and professional criteria (sex, age, years of profession, specialty or services, territory) to obtain the results.

### Results and findings

The study with the analysis of experiences and the discourse of expert consultation has identified the application of AI at the primary level to a greater extent in experiences linked to Chatbox in processes of information and guidance to users, as well as advances in the use of AI in service management, and less in direct interventions and decision-making, although the existing ones provide questions of interest in terms of training in skills, case resolution, etc. Issues of interest are identified that have to do with improving the organization and efficiency of processes in Social Services, the feasibility of incorporating AI in assessment, detection, and prevention, and in improving the decisions of professionals. Key challenges are also identified, especially those related to ethics, digital competences, dehumanization of processes, and perpetuation of exclusion biases, as well as problems of adaptability to certain contexts and possible difficulties in implementing tools.

**Conclusions and implications**

AI has been incorporated into social services and social work to improve services. The adaptation of democratic processes in interventions and policies linked to services will differ in this new scenario in the short term. Knowing and foreseeing the relationship between AI and social services can help to improve management work, decision-making, and coordination, as well as guide in the improvement of professional practice, considering that cross-cutting needs to incorporate ethical standards into the existing e-social work.

# Evaluating LLM Use in Social Work Practice: Initial Findings of a Quasi-Experimental Study

Miroslavas Seniutis<sup>1</sup>

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## Background and purpose

AI technologies, such as LLMs, are increasingly used in social work practice (Green, 2024). Structured prompts have been proposed as a way to guide AI systems toward producing more contextually appropriate and ethical outputs, offering an alternative to approaches described by Goloujeh et al. (2024), Ranade et al. (2024), and Pereira et al. (2023). This study examined whether structured prompts could improve the quality and usefulness of LLM-generated responses compared to spontaneous prompting.

## Methods

Using a quasi-experimental design, two groups of social workers participated over four weeks. During Week 1 (baseline), both groups interacted with the LLM using spontaneous prompts. In Weeks 2–4, one group continued spontaneous prompting (control), while the other group used structured prompts aligned with the five stages of the social work helping process.

Data from 401 verified chat sessions were analyzed using subjective ratings (clarity, accuracy, coverage, helpfulness, ethics) and objective metrics (number of prompts, session length, output length). Difference-in-differences analysis was applied to compare pre- and post-intervention changes between groups, with clustered standard errors to account for repeated interactions by the same users.

## Findings

Ratings of LLM outputs were consistently high (mean 4.3–4.6/5) across both groups. Structured prompts did not significantly improve how participants evaluated the responses or how they engaged with the system, suggesting a ceiling effect where the LLM was already producing useful outputs. The only clear change was an increase in response length, indicating that while structured prompts shaped the model's behavior, more text did not translate into higher quality or usefulness.

## Conclusions and implications

These findings highlight that prompt design alone is insufficient to enhance AI-assisted social work practice. Future efforts should focus on integrating specialized social work knowledge, developing task-specific evaluation metrics, and combining structured prompts with curated datasets to ensure outputs are contextually relevant, ethical, and aligned with professional standards.

## Linguistic accessibility of social welfare rights as an ethical challenge and opportunity for social work

Assoc. Prof. Ana M Sobočan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Senja Pollak, Dr. Špela Arhar Holdt

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Accessibility of social welfare rights is a fundamental issue of social justice and equal opportunities for all people. We often understand accessibility as the legal and formal guarantee of rights, but research and social work practice show that formal regulation alone does not mean actual feasibility. A key obstacle highlighted by users of social work centers is the incomprehensibility of legal provisions, forms, procedures, and official explanations. Language and communication barriers affect whether individuals even recognize their rights, know how to exercise them, and feel included and respected in the procedures. Therefore, the linguistic accessibility of rights is directly related to the ethics of social work: it is a question of justice, empowerment, and respect for the dignity of people who need the support of social welfare systems.

This article presents the interdisciplinary research project Linguistic Accessibility of Rights from Public Funds in Slovenia (ARIS, 2023–2026), which combines legal, linguistic, computer science, and social work approaches. The aim of the project is to identify language barriers in legal and administrative texts defining social rights and to develop proposals for more comprehensible public communication. The main research tool is a specialized collection of texts related to social assistance: it includes laws and regulations, forms, online texts from government agencies, explanatory materials, and frequently asked questions and answers. To analyze linguistic complexity, we use natural language processing methods to measure terminological density, readability, and other indicators of complexity and compare them with other genres of the Slovenian language from reference corpora. We supplement the quantitative findings with an in-depth qualitative linguistic analysis and the creation of simplified versions of selected texts, which we test together with social rights users. Simultaneously, we conduct qualitative research at social work centers, where we study the experiences of users in understanding and exercising their rights. Participants often report that they “do not understand what they are entitled to,” that the forms and explanations are “too complicated,” or that they are “afraid to ask questions.” Such experiences show that linguistic (in)accessibility—both in terms of technical terminology and the explanation of legal provisions and procedures—is a key factor influencing the sense of justice, personal proactivity, and trust in institutions.

The presentation thus opens up a discussion on the role of social workers in mediating between legal and technical language and everyday communication. Social workers are not merely conveyors of information, but through their work they “translate” official discourse into understandable, person-centered language, thereby enabling people to participate more fully in the social security system. Such work is also an expression of social work’s ethical commitment to respecting dignity and empowering individuals and communities. In conclusion, this presentation draws attention to the epistemological relationships between knowledge, language, and power and advocates the development of more accessible, collaborative, and equitable communication practices. We propose that interdisciplinary approaches to language accessibility be understood as a key element for a more equitable realization of social rights and as an opportunity for the further development of ethical standards and tools in social work.

## Changing practice in non-compulsory care: Ripples across the pond

Dr Robert Porter<sup>1</sup>, Dr Brandi Lee Lough Dennell

<sup>1</sup> Celcis, University of Strathclyde

### Background and purpose

A large, and growing, proportion of children and young people are being looked after under non-compulsory care arrangements. Our research identified that these arrangements are used in varying ways and to varying degrees across different social work teams and areas. Working from a position of significant buy-in from across the sector, we have been working alongside partners in social work, government, and 3rd sector, to identify and develop improvements to practice in this area.

### Methods

Through a series of facilitated workshops with representatives from relevant stakeholders, the researchers supported the identification of 'action plans' to develop improved practice, based on the findings from their initial research into the use of non-compulsory care in Scotland (Porter et al, 2024).

### Findings

These workshops highlighted the complexity and challenge of creating change in relation to such a central part of social work practice. Changes to practice have a significant 'ripple effect' implications throughout the system, impacting on courts, the Children's Hearings System, individual social workers, and local authorities. Identifying and bearing in mind all of the (potential) ripple effects is impossible, but presents a significant barrier to implementing change.

### Conclusions and implications

Creating change in social work systems is complex, and can result in significant impacts on systems within, and allied to, social work practice. Creating effective change in this context requires significant buy-in and commitment from all key agencies, and the development of a shared vision for what the improvements will bring. Resourcing and staffing constraints can also serve to limit the scope and scale of change that is considered possible within services. Working in this complexity creates a level of uncertainty within participants that can hinder the creation and adoption of (potential) solutions.

# Balancing Autonomy and Support Needs in Special Guardianship: A Recognition Model for Developing Meaningful Parental Connection

Mrs Michelle Hall<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leeds Trinity University

## Background

The UK government has increasingly prioritised kinship care, with Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) providing a legal framework for family and friends to raise children outside local authority care, thereby reducing state intervention. While SGOs value the child's stability and family ties, including connections with birth parents, the move away from local authority oversight often leads to diminished support for special guardians in managing these often-complex relationships, creating challenges in emotional, legal, and social areas.

## Objectives

Grounded in Axel Honneth's recognition theory and the interaction between individual and collective recognition, listening to lived experiences of special guardians supporting parental connections in this study led to the development of a model to address these challenges, aligning with contemporary social work research, policy, and practice.

## Methods

Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study explored the lived experiences of five special guardians (four grandparents, one uncle) in England and Wales regarding contact with birth parents. An in-depth, interpretative analysis of the interviews was shared with the special guardians to ensure that themes were co-created with them, rather than imposed upon them. The study identified key dyadic narratives of autonomy and support needs, contributing to methodological innovation in qualitative social work research.

## Findings

The Recognition Model delineates three spheres—Private (Love), Legal (Rights), and Public (Solidarity)—centred on the lived experiences of special guardians. It emphasises balancing autonomy and needs through recognition of identity qualities such as self-respect (e.g., recognition of unique knowledge and access to trauma-informed therapy), social esteem (e.g., valuing family, training, and peer support), and self-confidence (e.g., parental responsibility and access to legal advice and supervised contact). Guardians valued SGO autonomy but stressed the unmet support needs resulting from diminished local authority involvement.

## Implications

This model links social work research and practice through co-created knowledge, theorising recognition to inform policy and education. It addresses the impact and effectiveness of interventions by supporting guardian autonomy while advocating for enhanced support systems, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration across national and professional boundaries.



## Twice Invisible: The Role and Interventions of Social Workers With People With Disabilities in Wartime

Dr. Limor Gadot<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Yael Hochman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sapir Academic College

This qualitative study contributes to evidence-informed social work practice by examining the roles and interventions of social workers supporting people with disabilities (PWD) during the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The research addresses a critical gap in emergency social work policy and practice, where both social workers as frontline emergency service providers and PWD remain "twice invisible" in formal emergency response frameworks. Background: Despite social workers' crucial role in disaster management, there is no formal definition of their responsibilities in emergencies, particularly relating to PWD. This dual invisibility highlights the need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate social work, disability studies, emergency management, and trauma-informed care to develop evidence-based interventions and policies for vulnerable populations during crises. The research draws upon the social model of disability (Oliver, 2013) and intersectionality theory to understand compound marginalization during emergencies, while employing evidence-based practice frameworks to translate findings into actionable interventions for policy and practice improvement.

### Design and Methods

Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, two online focus groups were conducted with ten social workers from social services organizations and non-governmental organizations providing disability support services in the Gaza border region. The focus groups were guided by open-ended questions designed to facilitate discussions and allow participants to reflect on their wartime experiences and interventions with PWD. For example, "What were some of the professional challenges and difficulties you encountered during this period in supporting PWD?" and "What solutions or professional adjustments were implemented to address these challenges during the war?"

Participants represented diverse professional backgrounds, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of emergency social work practice. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in professional experiences and interventions during both routine periods and emergencies.

### Findings

Data analysis revealed four key themes informing evidence-based practice: (1) Heightened needs combined with inadequate services - demonstrating how emergencies intensify existing social inequalities and service gaps for PWD; (2) Improvised solutions - revealing how social workers develop innovative, interdisciplinary approaches including case management, advocacy, and interorganizational coordination under resource-constrained conditions; (3) Disability rights advocacy - illustrating the integration of human rights frameworks and social justice principles within emergency social work practice; (4) Managing both personal and professional challenges - highlighting the impact of role ambiguity and expanded responsibilities on social workers wellbeing.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This research provides empirical evidence for developing comprehensive emergency protocols that integrate disability-inclusive approaches within social work practice. The findings demonstrate how collaboration between social work PWD and the welfare system can create better emergency management. The study contributes to the evidence base needed for creating formal guidelines that recognize social workers' multifaceted roles in emergency disability services across micro, mezzo, and macro intervention levels. This study exemplifies how social work research can generate critical evidence to inform immediate practice innovations, professional development, and long-term policy advancement for inclusive emergency response systems serving PWD, contributing to the broader goal of facilitating evidence-informed practice and policy in social work.

## Between reform and reflexivity: Communities of Practice in Tuscan multidisciplinary teams as transformative devices

Prof. Andrea Bilotti<sup>1</sup>, Mrs. Elisabetta Sciotto<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Cecilia de Baggis<sup>3</sup>, Laura Rignanese<sup>4</sup>, Ms. Caterina Degli'Innocenti<sup>5</sup>

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Across Europe, disability policies are putting more and more attention on autonomy and participation, which are now seen as fundamental rights. But recognising rights does not automatically mean making them real, because turning them into practice is still a complex task.

In Italy, Legislative Decree 62/2024 is an important step in this direction. It introduces a new system for multidimensional assessment and the development of the Life Project, giving great importance to the direct involvement of the person. For this innovation to become reality, however, professional, organisational and cultural conditions are required, and these often struggle to keep up. The risk is to increase the gap between what the law asks for and what local contexts can actually support. For this reason, professionals have expressed the need for spaces of dialogue to support them during the experimental phase required by Article 33 of the decree.

Our research question, then, is: how can Communities of Practice help professionals to really bring the reform to life, making the work more participatory and interdisciplinary?

Tuscany, with its integrated social and health system, offers a privileged context to explore this question and, at the same time, to reflect on a wider challenge across Europe: how to make laws, policies and everyday practice work together.

Within the research project A Good Life 2, Roma Tre University set up a process of support for the Tuscan UVMD through Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2000; 2006). These were online spaces, organised as monthly meetings. Their design followed the methodology of Practice Action Research (Barnes, 2003; Wadsworth, 2011; Bradbury, 2015). This approach values experiential knowledge as a resource and peer exchange as a generative practice. The Communities of Practice became not only a tool for support, but also a place for reflection and collaboration, where professionals could better interpret the reform, test its application and deal with practical challenges.

Three main issues came out: managing “atypical” provisions; balancing relational work with organisational limits (time and resources); and building a shared and accessible language among professionals, institutions and families.

A key issue was how to involve people who do not express themselves verbally. Too often their needs were voiced by caregivers. The reform instead asks to build the Life Project with the person, using AAC as a right so they can express themselves directly.

The Tuscan experience shows that reforms risk remaining only on paper if they are not brought into daily practice. Communities of Practice proved to be a bridge between rules and lived experiences, turning the law into concrete action and creating new ways of working together that are more open and creative. This is a message that speaks to the whole of Europe: making evidence-based policies work in practice means strengthening social justice, professional development and more inclusive welfare systems. The findings show that CoPs are not just a help for professionals, but real spaces that are needed if disability reforms want to become more than rules on paper and bring real changes.

## Online emotional support group for mothers raising children with severe disabilities: "you have become closer to me than my own relatives".

Gedas Malinauskas<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Social Science, Department of Social Work

The presentation examines the participatory action research (PAR) of the specific area of social work practice - an online emotional support group for five mothers caring for children with severe disabilities. PAR revealed that intensive nursing undoubtedly affected the quality of life of mothers as informal caregivers: emotional and psychological, financial and social aspects are affected, and mothers experience various forms of discrimination. Due to the fragmented health and social support system, mothers experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome and live in a state of constant burnout. An analysis of the support process for this group revealed the coping strategies used by mothers: the ability to use positive resources, finding meaning in suffering, and reconstructing an understanding of the social belonging. Facing the challenges of online group meetings, still the benefits of the emotional support group were revealed: legitimization of negative experiences, a sense of community, mutual assistance, and encouragement for mothers to search professional help. The PAR examines that even group focuses into interpersonal support it is essential to include the socio-political context, which strengthens parents' sense of control and active involvement in the outside world. Mothers who saw the connection between their situation and fragmented services took social action—they wrote official letters to meso-level institutions, urging them to create and initiate comprehensive home-based services, such as nighttime assistance or respite services at home. Social activism sometimes amounted to a struggle, as municipalities did not understand the mothers' cry for help and defended themselves by writing long, formal, and rigid letters without offering any real help. This struggle testifies the conflict between social and medical discourses, as mothers received responses from institutions that they were unable to combine social and medical services. As the mothers became more socially active and the struggle intensified, the importance of the online emotional support group became apparent—the prevailing solidarity created a sense of backing.

## Negotiating Care: Precarity, Perceived Agency, and the Foster Parent–Child Protection Relationship

Dr Eva Dögg Sigurðardóttir<sup>1</sup>, Dr Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Iceland

The number of children in foster care in Iceland has increased in recent years, while the availability of foster parents has not kept pace. Despite this growing demand, foster care remains a vastly understudied field in the Icelandic context. Thus, questions surrounding foster parent retention, available support, and placement disruptions have become increasingly urgent. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by gaining insight into the perspectives and experiences of those who choose to become foster parents where the aim is to identify how best to support foster carers and reduce the risk of placement breakdowns.

Based on interviews with 20 foster parents across Iceland, this paper presents preliminary findings from the qualitative component of a larger mixed-methods study. Participants were recruited through self-selection, following an open call that was distributed via the Foster Parents Association in Iceland, The Governmental Agency of Children and Families and various social media platforms. The current paper asks how foster parents perceive and negotiate their caregiving role in relation to child protection services, particularly with regards to the support they receive and the conditions under which placements are agreed upon.

Findings suggest that foster parents often perceive themselves to be in a position of negotiation, ranging from being able to stipulate parts of the agreement, to feeling that they have limited influence over it. The foster parents' sense of agency is closely tied to perceived security in their caregiving role, whether they are feeling irreplaceable and of value to the child protection services, or find themselves in a vulnerable position and fear that the child could be taken out of their care. Moreover, participants expressed a strong need for more transparent and coherent processes, with greater clarity and consistency regardless of which child protective service oversees the case.

Overall, the findings highlight the fragile and often precarious nature of foster parents' roles, and how perceived (in)security, trust, and systemic communication shape their ability to navigate care and advocate within the foster care system. These insights point to the need for more transparent and consistent support structures and improved communication between foster parents and child protection services and should be considered in both policy and practice development.

## Involving People with Learning Disabilities in Safeguarding Enquiries: Findings from a Pilot Study

Dr Megan Robb<sup>1</sup>, Ms Alankrita Singh<sup>1</sup>, Dr Jeremy Dixon<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Bath, <sup>2</sup> Cardiff University

### Background and purpose

People with learning disabilities (PWLD) (also known as intellectual disabilities) are at a higher risk of experiencing abuse or neglect than the general adult population. In England, under section 42 of the Care Act 2014, local authorities have a statutory safeguarding duty to make enquiries where an adult who has care and support needs is experiencing abuse or neglect and is unable to protect themselves due to their support needs. The guidance to the Care Act 2014 advises that professionals undertaking safeguarding work "should work with the adult to establish what being safe means to them and how that can be best achieved". Yet very little is known about how professionals carry out this work, and how people with learning disabilities experience the safeguarding process. This presentation will report the findings from a pilot study which sought to explore how people with learning disabilities are consulted and involved in the statutory safeguarding adult process by answering the following research questions: To what extent are people with learning disabilities and their carers engaged and supported to participate in the safeguarding process?; How do people with learning disabilities, who have experienced abuse or neglect, understand and consider issues of risk and safety during the safeguarding process?; How do social workers involved in statutory safeguarding work gain people with learning disabilities' views on the desired outcomes from the safeguarding process? And how are these views implemented?

### Methods

To answer the research questions, the researchers conducted a series of online focus groups with social workers and professional advocates who were recruited through participating gatekeeping organisations and social media. They also conducted in-person interviews with people with learning disabilities who had been through a safeguarding enquiry, who were recruited through gatekeeping local authorities. Finally, researchers interviewed carers who had supported the person they care for through a safeguarding process, who were recruited through a gatekeeping local authority and carers' centres. The data were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis.

### Findings

The findings from this study indicate, firstly, that the accessibility of the safeguarding process is impacted by resource constraints, an increased reliance on online and digital platforms and the safeguarding professional's understanding and experience of working with PWLD. Secondly, the findings reveal that there are complexities in interprofessional working, collaboration and information sharing when conducting and resolving safeguarding enquiries. Thirdly, the findings suggest that the purpose of safeguarding enquiries, and what they can achieve, is not always understood by those subject to enquiries. The researchers will also reflect on the recruitment complexity of the project, which may indicate a wider lack of understanding about what adult safeguarding is and to whom it would apply.

**Conclusions and implications**

As this was a small pilot study, the researchers will conclude by presenting their plans for a larger grant bid. The proposed project will seek to co-create accessible resources for explaining the safeguarding process and gaining the views of people undergoing safeguarding enquiries about what being safe means to them.



## A meta-synthesis of the impact of structured group supervision on child welfare workers' professional development

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### Background and purpose

There is an abundance of theoretical literature on and approaches to supervision in social work. At its core, social work supervision should address the inextricably linked functions of administration, education, and support, and its primary focus should shift with sensitivity to the needs of the supervisee (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). However, social work supervision has often been criticised for its tendency to lean heavily towards the administrative function, thereby hijacking supervision for managerial needs in expense of social work processes. This tendency may be even more apparent within child welfare, where high stakes and far-reaching authority meets risk-management ideologies. The need to split the focus between different sessions, supervisors and supervision forms (e.g. groups) to ensure all functions are addressed, has therefore been voiced in recent years. Evidence is established for the support function of supervision in the tough working environment of child welfare services. As for the educational function, the evidence is slowly building on the impact of structured clinical supervision on children and family outcomes. Evidence has however not been synthesised for the impact structured group supervision can have on professional outcomes of continued learning and reflection. Thus, the research question for this systematic meta-synthesis is: What is the impact of structured group supervision on child welfare workers' professional development?

### Methods

Using meta-ethnography as a methodological approach, this study aims to identify and synthesize qualitative research on the impact of structured clinical group supervision aimed at child welfare workers' professional development. Meta-ethnography is a detailed and systematic strategy for translating the meaning of findings across qualitative studies where the aim is to develop new conceptual understandings of their studied phenomenon (Malterud, 2017). Inclusion criteria for this meta-synthesis will be articles that contain descriptions of structured supervision approaches as well as descriptions of how supervisees experience its impact on their professional development.

### Findings

Our findings will outline the key elements from the structured approaches that are perceived as most effective for professional development.

### Conclusions and implications

This paper relates to the conference theme by presenting research that facilitates evidence about social work supervision, aiming to inform social work practice and enable change at both individual and organisational levels in child welfare services. The systematic review will deepen our understanding of how supervision can impact continued professional development, i.e. continued learning and reflection. This serves to inform further research and may have implications for child welfare decision makers as well as professional supervisors in their evidence-informed practice.

## What Constitutes Evidence in Evidence-based Substance Use Treatment? Lived Experience, Social Work, and the Politics of Knowledge

Associate Professor Gabriela Novotna<sup>1</sup>

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What constitutes evidence in substance use treatment services remains a contested issue. Research-based hierarchies of evidence, which are often presented as improved results, accountability, professionalization, and efficiency, prefer randomized trials and standardized outcomes, often giving less credibility to experiential and practice-based knowledge. Nevertheless, lived and living experience of substance use and different forms of recovery have long been central to treatment, workforce development, and organizational decision-making. This research presentation summarizes the findings of multiple qualitative studies in Canada, involving 83 participants across counselling, program management, and leadership/administration in substance use services, to examine how lived experience is valued, contested, and utilized as evidence.

Findings highlight both opportunities and tensions in the discussion on evidence in substance use interventions. Counsellors described how professional maturation led to more selective disclosure of recovery status, while small community recovery networks heightened risks of burnout, stigma, and relapse. Relying on lived experience becomes less critical in advanced stages of one's professional career. Administrators drew on their recovery experience in making clinical decisions, supervising staff, planning programs, and engaging in policy development. Substance use counsellors in women's substance use services revealed deep epistemological divides: some refused to recognize research as evidence, positioning lived experience as more credible. In contrast, others pointed to intra-organizational conflict when one form of proof was privileged over another. A Delphi study with administrators highlighted the need for tailored knowledge translation, such as knowledge brokering, targeted training, and the inclusion of service providers in recovery research.

To conclude, these findings demonstrate that lived experience constitutes a widely used, though under-recognized, form of evidence. Its legitimacy is shaped by trends and solutions in health care systems, as well as neoliberal managerial reforms that privilege particular performance metrics and universalized standards of expertise. Across contexts, participants conceptualized recovery as a continuum and described evidence as relational, embodied, and evolving.

This research program advances a pluralist conception of evidence for social work research, practice, policy, and education. It calls for methodologies that treat experiential knowledge as data rather than bias; practice frameworks that legitimize recovery-informed expertise; policies that mitigate stigma and burnout; KT strategies responsive to providers in recovery; and education that prepares future professionals to navigate diverse sources of evidence.

## Second-Class' Professionals? Social Workers navigating Poverty Policies in Italy

Federica Vezzoli<sup>1</sup>

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In recent years, Italy has implemented a series of national anti-poverty measures aligning with European Union directives on social inclusion. Among these, the *Reddito di Cittadinanza* (Citizenship Income - RdC), introduced in 2019, represents the most comprehensive and controversial income support policy in the country's recent history (Gori, 2023). In addition to providing monthly financial assistance, RdC requires beneficiaries to engage in personalized social and occupational inclusion projects managed by local social services (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2019).

This presentation draws on findings from a mixed-methods study conducted in the Lombardy region, which aimed to explore the everyday professional practices, ethical challenges, and identity negotiations of social workers implementing RdC. The study involved a preliminary mapping of 83 RdC Services, a quantitative survey of 71 service coordinators, and 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with front-line social workers selected through stratified random sampling (Corbetta, 2014). Interview data were analysed thematically using MAXQDA, with an inductive coding process (Ritchie et al., 2003). The findings reveal a highly complex and unstable work context. Frequent policy changes, technical malfunctions, and weak inter-agency collaboration (World Bank Group, 2023; Polis Lombardia, 2021) exacerbated the professional burden experienced by social workers, often forced to adopt time-saving practices detrimental to intervention quality (Salmieri, 2021; Lodigiani & Maino, 2022). Participants reported ethical dilemmas in managing conditionality—sanctions for non-compliance with activation duties—as prescribed by law (D.L. 4/2019), which often conflicted with professional values of care, autonomy, and social justice (Banks, 1999; Allegri et al., 2022).

A central theme emerging from the interviews was the courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1963) experienced by social workers themselves. Working within RdC services was frequently associated with a “lower status” among colleagues in other sectors such as child protection or hospital settings. Many respondents described feeling like “second-class” or even “third-class” professionals, echoing the broader societal stigma attached to poverty and welfare recipients (Caritas, 2021; Anselmo et al., 2020; Cacciapaglia, 2023). This symbolic devaluation contributed to professional disillusionment, turnover, and burnout risks (Rutledge et al., 2011; Parks & Smallwood, 2021).

Despite these challenges, social workers displayed notable discretionary capacity (Lipsky, 1980; Van Berkel et al., 2017), often reinterpreting rules to foster trust and relational engagement. Many chose to bypass punitive measures in favour of continued support, illustrating forms of *extra legem* and *contra legem* discretion (Kazepov & Barberis, 2012; Barberis et al., 2019). These practices not only mitigated institutional rigidity but also reframed bureaucratic procedures as opportunities for meaningful intervention (Leonardi, 2019).

In the context of Italy's ongoing implementation of the new Inclusion Allowance, introduced in 2024, this study offers insights into the impact of welfare reform on front-line social work practice. It underscores the urgent need for institutional stability, inter-professional cooperation, and investment in reflective spaces such as supervision (Sanfelici, 2024). Furthermore, the findings stress the importance of countering stigmatizing narratives about poverty and poverty-related social work—both to protect the dignity of service users and to sustain the professional identity and wellbeing of practitioners.

## Justice and eco-social work: a critical analysis

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The literature on ecosocial work calls for transformative practices that contribute to a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric worldview. This presentation explores how such a shift reconfigures thinking about justice in social work. Using Nancy Fraser's multidimensional framework—recognition, distribution, and participation—we analyze the transformative potential of three types of ecosocial practices: community-based ecosocial work, nature interventions, and ecosocial innovations.

The analysis is based on a thematic review of 232 publications, selected from a broader search of over 700 sources. We focused on literature that describes concrete practices and their relation to justice. For each category, we examined to what extent the practices aim for justice, succeed in doing so, and contribute to transformative justice—defined as structural change rather than merely correcting unjust outcomes. Fraser's distinction between affirmative and transformative strategies was used to assess whether practices challenge the systems that produce injustice or merely mitigate their effects.

Our findings show that ecosocial practices are not inherently just or transformative. Community-based ecosocial work can contribute to all three justice dimensions, especially when it is co-created with residents and rooted in local knowledge. However, its transformative potential is often limited by institutional dependencies and the risk of green gentrification. Nature interventions can enhance well-being and ecological awareness, and some initiatives foster reciprocal human–nature relationships. Yet many remain instrumental and anthropocentric, focusing primarily on individual therapeutic outcomes. Ecosocial innovations—such as food hubs, circular economy projects, and community gardens—offer promising alternatives for a more inclusive and sustainable society. Still, they often struggle with exclusion, limited accessibility, and the dampening effects of institutional embedding.

We conclude that ecosocial work has the potential to promote transformative justice, but only when it actively centers professional autonomy, reciprocal human–nature relationships, and radical inclusion in sustainability initiatives. This requires a shift in both practice: from individualised, problem-solving approaches to collective, relational, and ecocentric forms of engagement. The justice framework by Fraser offers a valuable lens to critically assess these practices, by asking: who benefits, whose knowledge is recognized, and who has decision-making power?

This presentation invites dialogue on how ecosocial work can move beyond adaptation toward structural change, and how social workers can act as mediators between ecological urgency and social justice. It also calls for more empirical research into strategies that enable ecosocial workers to overcome institutional constraints and contribute to a just and sustainable future.

## The more than “medical” effects of long-acting buprenorphine treatment in relation to health and well-being for people with opioid use disorder – the question of change and the mechanisms generating it for social work research

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### Background

Opioid addiction is a growing problem in many countries. This paper reports on the experiences of treatment for a group of people struggling with the consequences of opioid use disorder, i.e. physical ill-being, increased mortality, lack of mattering (Bahl et al., 2023) receiving long-acting buprenorphine treatment given as monthly injections as an alternative to often lifelong treatment with Methadone. The burgeoning international qualitative research documenting effects of long-acting buprenorphine point to reduced cravings, increased sense of freedom, normality and stability and increased physical well-being (e.g. Johnson et al., 2022). Moreover, that professional approaches to human beings receiving treatment are important (Barnett et al., 2024; Nordgren et al., 2024). The central hypothesis of the study presented is that the combination of health and social work efforts in the substitution treatment with depot buprenorphine can contribute to better health and personal and social well-being.

### Leading to the research question

How can we understand the more than medical effects of long-acting buprenorphine treatment on health and wellbeing and what are the mechanisms of change?

### Methods

The study is a qualitative longitudinal study from 2023-2026 at an opioid agonist treatment clinic in Aalborg, Denmark. 8 professionals (doctor, nurses and drug therapists) were interviewed twice combining individual and group interviews. 40 patients in long-acting buprenorphine treatment representing varied length of treatment, gender and background have been interviewed about their experiences with the medical treatment, and the social and health related interventions, their daily life and views on well-being. The same group of patients were interviewed a year later, leaving the total number of patient interviews at 70 as not all were able or willing to participate in the second round.

### Findings

Increased physical, mental and social well-being for the group of patients receiving long-acting buprenorphine treatment and greater exit from opioid use disorder than in other forms of substitution treatment. However, variations in how patients experience the more than medical effects of long-acting buprenorphine treatment are related, not to simplified social demarcations, but to the capacities of patients translating the theoretical possibilities into practical changes. Thus, on their (and often flexibly professionally supported) ability to “broadening” and “reaching” out to horizons of possibility. Our findings point to that

everyday practice organized around fairness, and the support and possibilities for (re) establishing relationships to significant others are central mechanisms driving change and outcomes of long-acting buprenorphine treatment.

**Implications for policy and future research**

Making the experiences of treatment from people with opioid use disorder visible can push national and international debates on opioid addiction. Understanding the varied experiences of the more than medical effects of long-acting buprenorphine can influence practical and policy guidelines on treatment from opioid use disorder. An operationalized collective approach to well-being (Prilleltensky et al, 2025) can highlight the conditions for and complexities of nonlinear recovery processes and move forward the conceptualization of change in social work research.



## Open-ended questions in social work: Interactional challenges and possibilities

Dr Madeleine Wirzén<sup>1</sup>

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### Background and Purpose

Questioning is central to social work practice, essential for gathering information, building understanding, and conducting assessments. Open-ended questions are widely recommended for encouraging elaboration and minimizing leading responses (Geldard & Foo, 2024). However, questioning is not neutral—it reflects institutional agendas and is shaped by professional expectations and clients' capacities to respond in expected ways (Heritage, 2002). In high-stakes contexts like adoption assessments and child welfare investigations, open-ended questions can place significant demands on clients, complicating their ability to align with institutional norms (Ekström et al., 2019). Despite their prominence, open-ended questions remain under-researched in social work. This study addresses this gap by asking: How are open-ended questions posed and responded to in high-stakes interviews, and what interactional challenges and opportunities do they generate?

### Method

Using Conversation Analysis (Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), the study examines how questioning unfolds turn by turn in two Swedish contexts: adoption assessments and child welfare interviews. Transcripts were analyzed to explore how open-ended questions were formulated, how clients responded, and how social workers oriented to those responses.

### Findings

Open-ended questions are not uniformly facilitative. While they can invite clients to elaborate, they may also constrain responses when expectations are unclear (cf. Ekström et al., 2019). Some questions generated minimal or ambiguous responses, prompting reformulation; others led clients to resist or reframe embedded presuppositions. These dynamics show that open-ended questions can both support and limit client participation, depending on how they are managed in interaction.

### Conclusions and Implications

This study offers a nuanced view of open-ended questioning in social work, emphasizing the need for critical reflection on communicative practices and their institutional framing (Caswell & Dall, 2022). For practice, it highlights the importance of training social workers to tailor questioning strategies to clients' communicative capacities and institutional contexts. For policy, it underscores the value of interactional research in shaping assessment guidelines. More broadly, it affirms that communication in social work is never neutral but shaped by professional and institutional expectations—recognizing this can foster more reflective approaches to practice and policy.



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## The motivations, goals and tactics of strategic litigation for social- and human rights in Flanders.

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Recently, several high-profile cases in Flanders have illustrated how coalitions of civil society organizations are increasingly turning to the judiciary to challenge government policies. Public campaigns such as ‘Woonzaak’ (Housing case), ‘Kinderopvangzaak’ (Childcare case), and ‘Iedereen Beschermd’ (Everyone protected) accompanied their respective legal proceedings, aiming to inform the broader public and mobilize support. These and similar cases share a common objective: to annul government policies on the grounds of discrimination and/or the erosion of fundamental and human rights. The plaintiffs are typically coalitions of civil society organizations, many of which receive public funding.

This type of legal strategy appears to be gaining traction in a context where the traditional neo-corporatist consultation model is under pressure and increasingly being dismantled. As the space for influence through dialogue is shrinking, civil society organizations seem to be exploring legal avenues as an alternative. Drawing on 16 semi-structured interviews with representatives of civil society organizations involved in five different lawsuits, this study analyzes their goals, motivations, and tactics (Mosley et al., 2023) in pursuing strategic litigation as part of their political role and commitment to the protection of fundamental and human rights. Additionally, we conducted interviews with lawyers and government officials involved in two of these cases to gain insight into the perspectives these actors.

Our research focuses on cases brought before the Constitutional Court, as this institution holds the authority to (partially) annul government policies and its rulings are binding—unlike quasi-judicial bodies such as the European Committee of Social Rights.

Our research shows that respondents regard strategic litigation as an undesirable last resort and often choose to file a lawsuit in coalition to pool resources and reduce the change of facing repercussions in terms of losing subsidies. Following a presentation of the key findings, we will first reflect on the interdisciplinary coalitions that are needed for strategic litigation as a strategy to influence public policy and the possible role of social work researchers in such coalitions. Secondly we reflect about distinctive nature of strategic litigation as a politicizing strategy and its transformative potential or lack thereof. At least in the Belgian context, this approach is inherently conservative, aiming to repeal new legislation in order to prevent regression. It lacks constructive power in the sense that it cannot directly contribute to the development of ‘better’ policies. Moreover, our analysis reveals that a successful lawsuit may sometimes amount to a Pyrrhic victory if the government subsequently reintroduces its policy in a legally compliant form.

Nevertheless, legal action—especially when undertaken by broad coalitions and accompanied by public campaigns—can exert significant influence on both policy and public discourse. Legal and other confrontational strategies are thus becoming an integral part of the repertoire of civil society organizations seeking to shape policy, alongside more conventional advocacy strategies.

## Towards Interdisciplinary Evidence-Based Practice in Child and Family Social Work in Finland

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In social work, evidence-based practice (EBP) refers to the integration of professional expertise, client experiences, contextual factors, and the best available research evidence in assessment and decision-making (Soydan & Palinkas, 2014). Within the field, critical discussions have emerged regarding the compatibility of EBP with relationship-based practice. At the same time, arguments emphasizing the importance of effectiveness and consistency have gained ground, and there is a growing demand for more systematic and high-quality use of research evidence in social work practice.

While EBP has been widely adopted in healthcare, its implementation in Finnish social work remains limited. In Finland, EBP has been implemented through guideline-based approaches in both medicine and nursing science. Some of these guidelines are targeted at all professionals working in social and healthcare services. However, guidelines developed within other disciplines are not typically utilized as part of social work practice.

One of the aims of the ongoing "Promoting evidence-based practice in social work" research project is to train social workers to make use of existing research evidence, for example by applying evidence-based guidelines developed in the field of nursing science. Interdisciplinary practice between nursing and social work, when implemented in this way, has the potential to improve the quality of client work.

This research project is carried out as a collaboration between two wellbeing services counties and a university, integrating practice, education, and research. Prior to offering a continuing education on EBP for social workers including in this research project, we conducted an interview study to establish a situational overview. The study involved interviews with 17 senior social workers. Understanding how senior social workers perceive EBP is crucial, as they play a key role in implementing the principles of EBP into practice.

This presentation explores the current state of EBP in child and family social work based on the qualitative interview study conducted in spring 2025. We investigated how EBP and research evidence are understood, how research is utilized in practice, and what kinds of attitudes, facilitators, and barriers are associated with EBP. We conducted semi-structured thematic interviews with 17 senior social workers from two wellbeing services counties. The data were analysed using a theory-informed content analysis based on the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Preliminary findings suggest that definitions of EBP vary among participants, and the use of research evidence in practice is inconsistent. While attitudes toward EBP are positive, time constraints, lack of tools, and structural limitations hinder the integration of research into social work practice. Senior social workers expressed a willingness to incorporate knowledge from other disciplines into social work practice and showed a positive attitude toward evidence-based guidelines. This provides a solid foundation for the next phase of our research, which involves training social workers in evidence-based social work and the use of interdisciplinary evidence-based guidelines.

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## When Helpers and Older Adults Face War Together: Shared Trauma, Coping, and Protective Resources

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### Background & Purpose

War poses severe threats to people's security and well-being, with disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations. Older adults face heightened risks due to limited mobility, reduced access to healthcare, medications, food, and water, and restricted financial resources. These factors significantly impair their physical and functional abilities while increasing fears of violence, neglect, and discrimination. Despite this, research on older adults affected by war-related violence and displacement has often overlooked the cultural dimensions of coping and the unique challenges faced by professionals working alongside them, particularly when both groups are simultaneously exposed to the same conflict and danger. This underscores the urgent need for social work research and practice to adapt to the contemporary challenges posed by war, displacement, and collective trauma.

### Methods

The study was conducted in two stages using a qualitative design. Stage one included three focus groups with 12 professionals—social workers, caregivers, and trauma specialists—who provided direct support to older adults during the war. Stage two involved semi-structured interviews with 14 older adults (aged 66-84) from a Bedouin-Arab minority community directly affected by military attacks: six who stayed during the evacuation and eight who returned home while the war was ongoing. Data were analyzed inductively using content analysis, with attention to relational and emotional themes, coping strategies, and cultural contexts.

### Findings

The study revealed a shared emotional landscape between professionals and older adults. Both groups experienced profound fears, moral distress, and emotional struggles as they navigated personal danger and loss. For older adults, the decision to stay or return home was strongly connected to cultural and spiritual values, viewing home as central to identity, comfort, and religious practice—especially during Ramadan. Professionals faced the dual burden of managing their own trauma while supporting others, often with limited resources, mismatched expectations, and high workloads. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated resilience through a strong commitment to providing culturally sensitive care and emotional support.

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings highlight the shared trauma experienced by both older adults and professionals during wartime evacuations, emphasizing the urgent need for policies and interventions that consider this dual reality. For older adults, cultural and spiritual dimensions must be integrated into evacuation and resettlement strategies. Importantly, older adults must be active participants in decisions related to displacement and other major aspects of their lives, recognizing their agency and fundamental human rights. For professionals, organizational support, trauma-informed supervision, and resilience-building programs are essential to prevent burnout and secondary trauma. This study offers critical insights for developing trauma-informed, culturally responsive social work practices and systems that are better prepared for contemporary crises shaped by war and mass displacement.

## Illusions or delusions of neutrality: Bodily autonomy and social workers' moral standpoints

Professor [Liz Beddoe](#)<sup>1</sup>, Dr Laura A Chubb, Dr Eileen Joy, Ms Georgina Guild

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The current rise of right-wing populism poses challenges for social work, especially in relation to contentious topics of bodily autonomy. Three highly politicised topics of interest are abortion rights, transgender and nonbinary people's rights, and the right to utilise medically assisted dying. These contentious subjects can require social workers to engage with people and situations that may clash with their personal values and beliefs, regardless of their field of practice. Discussion of these topics may invoke perspectives on conscientious objection, religiosity and assumptions of professional neutrality.

This presentation reports on a qualitative study that explored New Zealand social workers' views on abortion, transgender rights, and assisted dying following recent legislative changes. From 122 respondents to an anonymous online qualitative survey, 21 horizontal cases (each representing a single participant's detailed responses on all three topics) were purposefully selected because of their clarity, articulation of positions, and representation of distinct thematic ideas. Composite narrative vignettes were then constructed from these selected cases to capture themes across participant perspectives.

Participants' views ranged from a strongly affirmative stance supporting client autonomy and rights to make decisions about their own bodies, to cautiously supportive attitudes reflecting ethical complexity, to conditional acceptance through explicit personal opposition balanced by assertions of professional neutrality. Some social workers expressed critical concerns about recent societal trends and legislative changes, underscoring tensions between personal beliefs, professional roles, and cultural expectations. Across these positions, participants consistently shared the need for careful negotiation between personal values and professional obligations, alongside recognising significant gaps in professional training, reflective supervision, and opportunities for critical dialogue. The findings demonstrate the necessity of fostering open, accountable spaces within the profession, promoting genuine dialogue, and supporting culturally responsive and inclusive practice. The study raises questions about the engagement of social work in challenging discussions of clashes between religious beliefs and commitments to client empowerment. Practical recommendations include structured reflective supervision and culturally informed professional development to strengthen social workers' capacity to engage ethically and effectively with these sensitive contemporary issues.

## Accessibility Programs Led by Community Activists: Which Factors Contribute to Enhancing Their Effectiveness?

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### Background and purpose

Recent years have seen growing recognition of the need to enhance accessibility for people with disabilities and involve them in decision-making processes (Ginis, 2017). Promoting accessibility is generally undertaken by community social workers working with activists from this population. A central professional value of social work at large, and community social work in particular, is client participation, that is, enabling clients, or, more accurately, the activists who operate on their behalf, to be centrally involved in designing the interventions, their implementation, and all processes of decision-making. Another core value that complements it is representation, that is, verifying that the community activists faithfully represent their communities and their needs. It is argued that ensuring these core values is also essential for the effectiveness of social work interventions, since the clients are the ones who have the full information and understanding regarding the needs of the community and the preferred manner to fulfill them. In spite of these understandings, the literature indicates that when it comes to marginalized populations, such as people with disabilities, community social workers tend to enable client participation at substantially lower levels (if at all) compared to “regular” citizens. Despite the importance of these issues, the effectiveness of accessibility programs led by community activists and the factors that enhance it has yet to be investigated. The present study aimed to identify factors essential for the effectiveness of such programs.

Drawing from the literature, we hypothesized that accessibility-activity-related factors (scope of activity [weekly hours], years of activity, knowledge of accessibility regulations), and community-activity-related factors (level of activist participation as determined by social workers, representation), would contribute to explaining the variance in the dependent variable – the effectiveness of accessibility promotion activities.

### Methods

Anonymous quantitative questionnaires were completed by 212 Israeli activists. Managers of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs distributed the questionnaire among WhatsApp groups of activists. The researchers contacted the Israeli Center for the Blind for instructions on making the survey accessible for people with visual impairment. In addition, the participants were provided with the contact details of research assistants available to help them complete the questionnaire over the phone or via Zoom.

### Findings

Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that scope of activity, knowledge of accessibility regulations, participation and representation predicted remarkably high percentages of the variance in program effectiveness (53.4%).

**Conclusions and implications**

The findings highlight the need train community activists to expand their knowledge of accessibility regulations and to broaden their scope of activity, and the importance of high participation by social workers, which also ensures that they faithfully represent their communities. The findings also highlight the need to educate social workers to ensure that activists meet these requirements. Finally, they stress the need to motivate individuals with disabilities to participate in community activity to promote accessibility.

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## From imagination to practice. How ecosocial visions take shape in social work

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### Background and purpose

Ecosocial approaches in social work expand ecological perspectives by including the natural environment and highlighting the profession's potential contribution to ecosocial transformation and sustainable development (Matthies et al., 2016; Närhi et al., 2016; Boetto, 2017). However, a broader understanding of social work as ecosocial work raises conceptual and empirical challenges, requiring, among other aspects, more evidence of how “the ecosocial” is understood and enacted in practice. This is still largely underexplored in the debate which has so far privileged rather normative approaches while neglecting the factors and processes shaping ecosocial imaginaries and perspectives. While recent studies have begun to investigate how the “ecosocial” is imagined on a conceptual level within social work; Thyssel e Cuadra, 2023) there is still limited knowledge of how ecosocial visions evolve and are shaped in practice, based on the interplay of different conceptions, attitudes and contextual conditions.

### Methods

The presentation is based on exploratory, multi-sited case study research involving the analysis of 18 cases to provide concrete and contextual in-depth knowledge about ecosocial work practices in Italy. Data were collected by means of 102 semi-structured interviews with key actors combined with field observations and the collection of document sources. Data analysis adopted a data driven thematic approach to within-case and cross-case analysis combining predefined analytical focuses, inductive coding and categorisation as well as abductive reasoning.

### Findings

The findings show how ecosocial visions are shaped by the interplay of different factors such as understandings of the natural environment and its relevance to social work practices, social workers personal and professional attitudes and development and contextual factors relating to the main drivers and opportunities to develop ecosocial practices. Looking at the interplay of these different factors the findings highlight the importance of a processual and contextual understanding of how different ecosocial visions are formed and translate into practice.

### Conclusion and implications

The study shows that ecosocial visions are contextually shaped and dynamically constructed. This underscores the limits of abstract conceptualizations and ethical appeals, highlighting the importance of grounding ecosocial visions in lived experience, personal and biographical attitudes, and concrete opportunities in order for them to become tangible and action-guiding reference points.

## Illusions or delusions of neutrality: Bodily autonomy and social workers' moral standpoints

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The current rise of right-wing populism poses challenges for social work, especially in relation to contentious topics of bodily autonomy. Three highly politicised topics of interest are abortion rights, transgender and nonbinary people's rights, and the right to utilise medically assisted dying. These contentious subjects can require social workers to engage with people and situations that may clash with their personal values and beliefs, regardless of their field of practice. Discussion of these topics may invoke perspectives on conscientious objection, religiosity and assumptions of professional neutrality.

This presentation reports on a qualitative study that explored New Zealand social workers' views on abortion, transgender rights, and assisted dying following recent legislative changes. From 122 respondents to an anonymous online qualitative survey, 21 horizontal cases (each representing a single participant's detailed responses on all three topics) were purposefully selected because of their clarity, articulation of positions, and representation of distinct thematic ideas. Composite narrative vignettes were then constructed from these selected cases to capture themes across participant perspectives.

Participants' views ranged from a strongly affirmative stance supporting client autonomy and rights to make decisions about their own bodies, to cautiously supportive attitudes reflecting ethical complexity, to conditional acceptance through explicit personal opposition balanced by assertions of professional neutrality. Some social workers expressed critical concerns about recent societal trends and legislative changes, underscoring tensions between personal beliefs, professional roles, and cultural expectations. Across these positions, participants consistently shared the need for careful negotiation between personal values and professional obligations, alongside recognising significant gaps in professional training, reflective supervision, and opportunities for critical dialogue. The findings demonstrate the necessity of fostering open, accountable spaces within the profession, promoting genuine dialogue, and supporting culturally responsive and inclusive practice. The study raises questions about the engagement of social work in challenging discussions of clashes between religious beliefs and commitments to client empowerment. Practical recommendations include structured reflective supervision and culturally informed professional development to strengthen social workers' capacity to engage ethically and effectively with these sensitive contemporary issues.

# The comfortable relationship between social prescribing, social pedagogy and social work

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## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the limitations of traditional biomedical and deficit-based approaches in supporting children and young people (CYP) facing adversity (Davies, 2013). This shift is now becoming recognised at a governmental level with a recent discourse recognising the need for support ‘beyond pills’ with an all-party parliamentary group calling for a shift in balance towards more social interventions (APPG, 2024). One of these emerging social interventions can be found within social prescribing. Social prescribing is a relational and community-oriented model that connects individuals with non-clinical interventions, fostering resilience, well-being, and social cohesion (Henry, 2025). In developing this paper, we are suggesting that social prescribing is aligned to the principles of social pedagogy and social work as an approach, because of its role in bridging personal development and learning with community-based support.

## Methods

Drawing on a recent qualitative ethnographic research project, we explore how social prescribers act as both the ‘first and last link’ in a connected chain of support, accompanying young people through key transitions in their lives (Hill & Laredo, 2023). Qualitative research was and evidence was gathered through the use of participant observation, interviews, focus groups and surveys. The data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke (2022)

## Findings

Social prescribing, sometimes known as community referral, enables clinicians to connect people to non-medical sources of support, such as community groups and activities, that help to address the social determinants of health and promote overall well-being. The findings underscore the necessity of a holistic, relational model that integrates social work and social pedagogy, reinforcing the transformative potential of social prescribing in addressing complex social and mental health challenges. The evidence from this piece of research presents a compelling case for social prescribing as a viable intervention to address wider social determinants of health, particularly for young people facing challenges such as school refusal, social anxiety, and bullying. Social prescribing represents a useful intervention for addressing complex social needs in a person-centred and preventative manner. It enhances practice by bridging the gap between statutory services and community-based support. The benefits are that it leads to more sustainable and effective interventions for individuals, families, and communities. Social prescribing offers a transformative approach to supporting children, young people, and families. Its emphasis on relationships, participation, and community engagement ensures that young people feel heard, valued, and empowered to take an active role in shaping their own futures.

## "About Us, Still Without Us": Structural and Attitudinal Barriers to Policy Participation for People with Intellectual Disabilities in the Czech Regions

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This paper addresses the critical question: "Why is it difficult for people with intellectual disabilities in the Czech Republic to participate in policy-making at the regional level and how these difficulties could be overcome?"

Although the Czech Republic has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and its Optional Protocol, this has not resolved the fundamental issue of equal rights for people with disabilities in the country. The "Nothing About Us Without Us" principle remains aspirational rather than a practical reality, particularly in regional policy development.

Drawing on findings from the research project Civic Participation of People with Intellectual Disabilities, we will present the significant challenges this target group faces in achieving meaningful engagement in the process of community planning for social services. In the Czech Republic, there is a legal requirement that the community planning process of social services must be done at the local and regional levels. This process should be based on a tripartite dialogue between representatives of local government, social service providers, and representatives of target groups, including people with intellectual disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities tend to be excluded from this process.

Our research adopted an interdisciplinary approach, combining:

1. Qualitative research (e.g., semi-structured interviews with regional policy-makers, self-advocates, and support professionals).
2. Analysis of legal and policy documents at the national and regional levels

Our findings suggest that the limited opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to participate in policy-making stem from a complex interaction of factors, which we will analyze in detail:

1. Lack of Systemic Support: This includes the absence of dedicated, accessible, and adequately funded mechanisms for consultation, insufficient capacity building for public administration officials, and a deficit in models for supported decision-making.
2. Prevailing Attitudinal Barriers: Participation is often hampered by deeply ingrained societal and institutional stereotypes and paternalistic assumptions regarding the capabilities and autonomy of this target group.

The paper provides evidence-informed recommendations relevant to both social work practice (e.g., developing effective, rights-based self-advocacy and empowerment models) and policy development, offering specific strategies for people with intellectual disabilities, social work practitioners, and regional government members to dismantle the structural and attitudinal barriers that prevent full implementation of the rights to participation based on UN CRPD principles.

## Vulnerability caused by technology-facilitated gender-based violence

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Digitalization has enabled new forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) whose severity is often downplayed, even though research shows that its consequences seriously undermine victims' safety and well-being. We analyze these consequences through the lens of vulnerability, understood both as an individual condition and as a structurally produced life situation.

This study examines how TFGBV generates and reinforces such vulnerability and explores how victim-survivors describe the harms of TFGBV and how these vulnerabilities shape their ability to access services, seek help, and pursue justice.

Data consist of open-ended responses from three online surveys of women in Finland who had experienced TFGBV (2018 n = 224; 2021 n = 80; 2023 n = 51), together with focus-group interviews with Finnish victim-support professionals (n = 15).

Thematic content analysis revealed four interlinked dimensions of vulnerability: (1) temporal and spatial boundary-crossing which illustrates the unpredictability of the acts and the experience of violence as continuously present; (2) emotional strain marked by fear, anxiety, and eroded trust in relationships and institutions; (3) constrained action and agency, including withdrawal from public and professional spheres; and (4) structural barriers in service systems where minimization and victim-blaming impede access to justice and care.

Overall, TFGBV is temporally and spatially unbounded, generating profound vulnerability—a persistent sense that the violence is inescapable, while structural and institutional gaps intensify victims' exposure and limit their capacity to protect themselves. Addressing this multilayered vulnerability requires systematic identification and documentation, effective protective measures (e.g., restraining orders), and continuous, up-to-date training across police, social and health care, and the justice sector, aligned with technological developments.

## Collaborative practices of community workers working with migrants in Amsterdam

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In this paper, we will present our research on the professional and interdisciplinary collaborative practices of community workers when working with recently arrived migrants in Amsterdam. We analyse which practices and collaborations contribute to community workers successfully reaching out to and supporting migrants in their well-being and social inclusion, as well as the challenges and obstacles they encounter.

Many migrants arrive in Amsterdam daily, with various motives, but all in search of better lives for themselves and their families. This study focuses on a range of newcomers, including status holders, asylum seekers, undocumented individuals, Eastern European labour migrants, and Ukrainian displaced persons.

The support infrastructure for newcomers is broad and fragmented, ranging from specialist organisations that constitute the 'arrival infrastructure' (Schrooten and Meeus 2019) to the organisations that are part of the city's general social infrastructure. It includes both formal organisations with a public mandate and a rich field of informal actors. We focus on how community workers employed by formal welfare organisations are positioned within this broad landscape and how they collaborate with a range of actors across disciplinary lines in their work with migrants.

Data collection consisted of focus groups with community workers from across the city, as well as in-depth case studies. The case studies were conducted through interviews and participant observation of community workers' daily practices over four months.

We find that interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial for providing adequate support to newcomers. Different actors and institutions in the social domain can provide newcomers with varying types of social capital -bonding, bridging, and linking- (Claridge 2018) and thereby fulfil various support needs. Moreover, through active collaboration within the broader support infrastructure, community workers can benefit from different kinds of expertise (including cultural knowledge), connections and access to (specific groups of) newcomers. For example, working with migrant self-organisations allows the community worker to engage with hard-to-reach migrants who have a relationship of trust with the self-organisation.

We find that many such collaborations are dependent on individuals, which is problematic due to the high turnover of employees at social work organisations. Therefore, more structurally embedded collaborations are necessary. We will illustrate some interesting best practices in our presentation.

In addition to the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, we found that there is much variety in the way individual community workers give meaning to and fulfil their roles toward newcomers. Some community workers see it as their primary role to facilitate

neighbourhood initiatives of active residents. In contrast, others consider it their task to actively reach out to more vulnerable groups, including newcomers. This distinction represents a more general dilemma within professional perspectives on community work. In the second part of our presentation, we will examine the implications of this variation for service delivery to migrants throughout the city.

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## Social Participation and Elderly Care in Catalonia, Andorra, and French Occitania: A Comparative Analysis from a Rights-Based Perspective

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Population aging is a defining social phenomenon of the 21st century, making the social participation of older adults a critical determinant of well-being, quality of life, and the full exercise of human rights. Despite its recognized importance, participation is often hindered by structural barriers and conceptualized differently across contexts. This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the normative, organizational, and territorial frameworks that shape elderly care in Catalonia (Spain), Andorra, and French Occitania. The primary objective is to examine how social participation is conceptualized and operationalized in each territory, the role of professionals in facilitating it, and the structural tensions that limit its effectiveness. The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) What are the similarities and differences in how social participation is understood and implemented? (2) How do legal frameworks, institutional structures, and working conditions impact its effectiveness? (3) What are the key barriers and facilitators to meaningful participation in each context?

This study employed a qualitative, collaborative research design based on data collected for the Co-ParticiPA project. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a diverse sample of 141 participants, including 37 older adults receiving services, 31 activists, 40 professionals, and 33 management officials. Participants were distributed across the three territories: 86 in Catalonia, 24 in Andorra, and 31 in French Occitania. The methodology also included a systematic literature review of 40 key academic studies to build a robust theoretical framework. Data analysis was conducted using thematic coding and triangulation across different actor groups and geographical contexts to ensure interpretative richness and contextual validity.

The analysis reveals that while all three territories recognize social participation as fundamental to well-being, its implementation varies significantly: it is highly institutionalized in Catalonia, fragmented across parishes in Andorra, and intentionally inclusive yet homogenizing in France. A key, shared structural barrier is the absence or underdevelopment of the “reference professional” role, which is deemed essential for providing holistic, person-centered accompaniment. Common challenges across all contexts include poor inter-service coordination (particularly between health and social care), chronic workforce shortages, excessive professional workloads, and pervasive double discrimination based on age and gender. Older adults frequently reported being excluded from decision-making processes regarding their own care, leading to power imbalances in their relationships with professionals.



The study concludes that effective elderly care models must be adapted to the specific cultural and institutional particularities of each territory; a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. To move beyond rhetorical commitments to participation, systemic reforms are needed. Key recommendations include: strengthening inter-institutional coordination; formally establishing and supporting the role of the reference professional; and enacting normative frameworks that actively promote the empowerment of older adults. Furthermore, policies must address intersectional inequalities and combat ageism to ensure that participation is not merely symbolic but a genuine, rights-based practice that enhances the dignity and agency of older people. This research underscores the urgent need to dignify professional labour and create structures that facilitate the active, meaningful inclusion of older adults in all decisions that affect their lives.

## A community of practice: Integrated learning in social work training for students, academics, service users and front-line practitioners

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<sup>1</sup> Queen's University Belfast

Like other countries in Europe, social work within Northern Ireland faces challenges with respect to the retention and sickness levels of front-line staff (Doh, 2022) especially within family and childcare directorates (Jones, 2023). This paper reports on the findings from a project carried out by Queen's University Belfast and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET) who co-delivered a 'community of practice' approach to students within a first-year, foundational introductory social work module. This approach was developed around the creation of a living curriculum (Wenger, 1998) delivered through a collaborative and interdisciplinary programme of teaching. The aims were to help strengthen students' developing comprehension of the complexities and challenges inherent in social work practice, in preparation for their practice learning opportunity (PLO) the following semester. During the 12 week module on Introduction to Social Work, core curriculum was co-delivered by an academic followed by planned inputs from front-line practitioners and managers incorporating real world experiences and practice -based case studies to expand on the theory and approaches used in front-line practice. The voice and experience of the service user were represented by our Citizen Educator group and the WAVE Trauma Centre which itself emerged from the socio-political troubles in Northern Ireland.

### Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach. Participants received both a paper-based post-curriculum survey and a follow-up focus group discussion during their PLO within the SET. This measured outcomes related to role understanding, professional self-confidence and efficacy, reflective practice plus acceptance and perceived value of the inter-disciplinary teaching method.

The study involved 19 participants, aged between 19 and 50 years who were all first-year undergraduate social work students and on practice learning within the SET. Participants had received the same curriculum teaching at university but had been assigned to different placement teams within the Trust via the practice learning allocation programme. This allowed for cross-exploration of learning within a broad spectrum of social work front-line practice.

### Results

The qualitative data was analysed thematically. Findings included that inter-disciplinary teaching strengthened theory to practice, increased understanding of social services and delivery of care, professional expectations and standards on placement and inter-connecting classroom teaching with 'real-world' practice learning. Participants noted increased levels of role understanding alongside professional self-confidence and skills development.

**Conclusion**

In line with conference themes this paper is situated within social work practice, education and inter-disciplinary working. Reflecting on the findings, these showed clear pedagogical strengths including; a) continuity of 'learning through relationships' as students followed their peers, practitioners and service users into placement settings; b) increased understanding of applied theory; c) realistic student appreciation of the role and expectations of practice learning; d) practitioner knowledge and skills development; future leadership potential; e) service user empowerment.

In 2026/7 this pilot programme is being replicated across the main university sites in the region to further explore its potential for wider integration within social work education and practice.

## Interdisciplinary education to combat ageism: collaboration between occupational therapy and social work

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### Background

The ageing population in Europe presents both challenges and opportunities for social work (SW) and allied health care professionals. More than one-fifth of Europeans are now over 65, and the proportion of people over 80 will continue to rise. This demographic shift demands more than individualised support; it requires a structural and socially critical approach that recognises older adults (OA) as full citizens and active members of society. Despite their crucial role in supporting OA, social workers are increasingly confined to executive tasks by neoliberal policies that emphasise efficiency and measurable outcomes. This obscures the structural causes of inequality and reinforces the perception of OA primarily as vulnerable recipients of care or economic burdens. Addressing professional ageism in healthcare is essential to ensure equitable, respectful, and person-centered care for OA, while fostering inclusive clinical practices and evidence-based decision-making.

Problem statement

At Artevelde University of Applied Sciences (AUAS), only 3% of SW students consciously choose to specialise in ageing, although nearly 20% encounter OA during their internships. Students, like society at large, often hold negative views on ageing, which contribute to ageist practices. Meanwhile, occupational therapy (OT) students face similar challenges since working in elder care appears to be perceived as increasingly unattractive. Both professions, however, share a strong orientation toward inclusion, participation, and quality of life-creating fertile ground for interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Objectives

This presentation will demonstrate how SW and OT programmes at AUAS collaborate to combat ageism. By embedding gerontological knowledge into curricula and engaging OA as partners in education, students learn to reflect on their own biases, gain knowledge of ageing processes, and prepare for complex issues such as dementia.

### Methods

Best practices are illustrated through several initiatives:

- **Experiential learning:** A pool of OA participate as experts- by-experience in both programmes, engaging with students through shared classes and collaborative activities.
- **Intergenerational projects:** At “De Rits,” students and OA co-create activities. Observations, conversations, and reflections capture the impact on well-being and connectedness.
- **Community partnerships:** Collaboration with the city of Ghent, an age-friendly city, strengthens intergenerational contact and combats age discrimination in the broader community.

**Results**

Observations indicate that these initiatives foster:

- Increased student motivation to work with OA,
- Greater awareness of implicit (professional) ageist attitudes and how to counter them,
- Enhanced intergenerational connectedness, mutual understanding and decreased loneliness
- Positive contributions to the well-being, meaningful activities and participation of OA.

**Conclusion**

Embedding interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education, where SW and OT join forces, proves to be an effective strategy for combating (professional) ageism. Engaging OA as active partners in education not only enriches student learning but also repositions ageing as a dynamic, meaningful life stage.

**Implications**

To prepare future professionals as allies and advocates for OA, educational programmes must structurally integrate gerontological knowledge, systemic thinking in an intergenerational context, and interprofessional collaboration. By doing so, higher education can contribute to a cultural shift towards greater inclusion and the defence of OA rights, in line with international definitions of SW and ongoing UN initiatives.

## Social-justice-informed public management: Pragmatism as a way to bridge resistance and hybridity in social service management

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<sup>1</sup> Bar Ilan University

### Abstract

This interdisciplinary presentation combines social work scholarship, management and organizational studies, and sociology of professions frameworks to address the current gap in the possible construction of social-justice-informed management of social services.

### Background and Purpose

The current affinity of public social service management toward neoliberal and market-based approaches is considered an impediment to the possible implementation of critical approaches promoting social justice. Addressing this issue, the social work field mainly presents critical calls for "resistance" and opposition to neoliberal approaches. Alternatively, a compromising frame developed in the sociology of professions field calls for a hybrid integration of critical and neoliberal approaches for social service operation. While scholars such as Noordegraaf (2015) offer conceptual models that outline different levels of such hybridity, most empirical explorations of this concept focus on identity work, highlighting how professional managers navigate and balance their professional identity narratives. In this way, the actual meanings and operations of integrative hybridity remain unclear and require further development to better conceptualize social-justice-informed professional frameworks that can sustainably operate within the neoliberal public sphere. In this presentation, I will address these gaps by exploring the experiences and practices of social services managers who maintain and promote social-justice-informed objectives in public welfare services in Israel to illustrate their nuanced approaches to integrating critical perspectives within the market-based managerial field.

### Method

This presentation is based on qualitative research with 32 welfare services managers in Israel involved in poverty-aware programs. The Poverty-Aware Paradigm is a critical framework for direct social work practice with people living in poverty that has been implemented in the Israeli welfare system since 2015, involving more than two thousand social workers and forty thousand families in approximately 170 municipalities. This relatively wide scale of implementation enables the exploration of social-justice-informed managerial practice in public social services. Interviews focused on the managers' experiences, perceptions, and practical examples of social-justice-informed managerialism and were analyzed using thematic coding.

### Findings

The findings illustrate two main modes of pragmatism related to the construction of hybrid social-justice-informed managerialism. First, at the level of direct managerial operation, the managers use their familiarity with social policies and marginalized people to communicate their social-justice-informed perspectives to municipal or state stakeholders. These efforts

are engaging and connective, preferring dialogue over resistance and opposition. Second, in a more fundamental manner, the managers reframe critical perspectives as pragmatic, moving away from theoretical deconstruction of power relations toward direct commitment to their citizens, focusing on "whatever works" in promoting inclusive and accountable civil service.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The discussion analyzes these cases of pragmatic managerialism using the organizational framework of paradox theory (Smith & Lewis, 2011) to offer a preliminary understanding of social-justice-informed managerial practice for social services.

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## Building trust in multiprofessional relationships: the views of Finnish child protection social workers

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This research explores social workers' descriptions of trust and the actions they take to build trust in multiprofessional relations in Finnish child protection. In the study, we aimed to address the following research questions: 1) How do social workers describe meanings of trust in multiprofessional work? 2) What are the concrete actions they use to build trust in the context of multiprofessional relationships?

Trust between professionals and clients has been shown to facilitate structured and effective multiprofessional encounters, ultimately enhancing client well-being (Widmark et al., 2013). Conceptually, trust involves expectations of benevolence, reliability, and fairness (e.g. Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017). In Finnish child protection practice, multiprofessional cooperation often appears as self-evident. However, the goals and responsibilities in multiprofessional cooperation vary, and the collaboration can be minimal, such as information exchange, but it can also become a close way of working together. Child protection services in Finland increasingly rely on multiprofessional collaboration, which was further strengthened by the 2023 establishment of well-being services counties integrating health, social, and rescue services. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2025). Although multiprofessional collaboration in child protection has been widely studied, the crucial role of trust within these partnerships remains largely overlooked—our research emphasizes this gap across various child protection contexts.

The study was based on a qualitative survey conducted in 2024 with 29 social workers, complemented by three themed group interviews with the same participants in 2025. The total dataset comprised 69 pages of text from the survey and 39 pages from the interviews. The group interviews served as a complementary and in-depth source of data in relation to the survey. All the respondents worked in child protection services or child and family social work. The data were analysed using category analysis.

According to our analysis, concrete actions to build multiprofessional trust were divided into three main categories and six subcategories. The main categories were: the meaning of multiprofessional trust, importance of multiprofessional trust, and concrete actions to build multiprofessional trust. The subcategories divided meaning, importance, and concrete actions into personal, professional, organizational, and institutional levels. The findings highlight that the actions of social workers to build multiprofessional relationships are essential at all levels, even though the personal level is emphasized.

Trust-building in multiprofessional collaboration required active engagement at personal, professional, organizational, and institutional levels: effective child protection work depends on the permeability and interconnectedness of these levels. Social workers' orientations, skills, and expectations were crucial in fostering trust and collaboration among professionals within child protection services. Openness, honesty, and transparency emerged as key factors in building trust.



Our findings have practical implications. When social workers aim to build trust in collaborative relationships with other professionals, they need to find ways to demonstrate their professional competence—something that requires time, continuity, and strong communication skills. This means that social workers must be provided with sufficient resources and time to build and maintain trust-based relationships at the personal, professional, organizational and institutional levels.

## Social preparedness - an interdisciplinary approach to crises

Professor Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås<sup>1</sup>, Professor Janne I Breimo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nord Universitet

The COVID- 19 pandemic revealed that Norway's health and preparedness was relatively strong. With 25,489 cases and 40 deaths per 100 000 population, Norway fared significantly better than the WHO European average of 20,560 cases and 205 deaths per 100 000 (WHO, n.d). In 2020 Norway recorded 477 COVID deaths, compared to 9,734 in Sweden – largely due to Norway implementing Europe's strictest lockdown (Zahl et al., 2023). However, this came at a cost: children and young people in vulnerable life situations were disproportionately affected. Studies show a marked rise in depressive symptoms among 11-13-year-olds during the second lockdown, underscoring the vital role of social arenas. This highlights the need to broaden our understanding of preparedness to include social preparedness.

"The social" refers to the net of connections and relations between people and society, including socio-material practices, serving as a precondition for humanity and personal well-being. "Preparedness" is a term borrowed from the growing civil protection literature, in which the concept refers to the prevention of and readiness for undesirable events that may threaten life, health, the environment or important societal values during or outside of peacetime (Andreassen et al, 2021). It is a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, learning collaboratively and taking corrective action. The concept is well developed and used in public security and health but appears to be more unclear connecting to the idea of social preparedness.

We build upon assumptions that developing social preparedness could respond to 1) problems related to the increasing individualisation in society, 2) failures of crisis management surrounding social needs, 3) the need for social innovation and transformation towards social sustainability, mobilizing both public and civil society (including children), and 4) the need to respond to complexity through interdisciplinarity training and approaches.

This presentation aims to advance the theoretical foundation of 'social preparedness'. We will examine how the concept has been framed in international literature and, in response to pressing societal needs affecting vulnerable children and youth, propose a sustainable framework.

Reviewing the literature and policy documents reveal that the social preparedness a) addresses different types of crises, b) varies in stakeholders involved, c) holds different practical meaning, like access to shelter and food in natural disasters; social resilience and psychosocial support; resource mobilisation and community building, and d) builds upon different theoretical foundations.

Drawing on social work values and a re- theorized understanding of 'the social', we reposition preparedness beyond crises response to emphasize social communal structures and dynamics.

Aligned with the conference- theme, we will explore both the potential and challenges of developing social preparedness across disciplinary and professional boundaries.

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## Producing the evidence base for a curricular guide on service user involvement in social work education for the United States.

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This Paper charts the genesis of the first ever Curricular Guide on Service User Involvement in Social Work Education in the United States (U.S.). Commissioned by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the national association representing more than 900 social work education programs in the United States, this project responds to a significant gap in US-based curricula regarding the integration of service user voices in social work education.

Led by a cross disciplinary team of service users, educators, and CSWE representatives, this collaborative initiative builds on a US-UK Fulbright scholarship by the first author and draws inspiration from global efforts to centre lived experience in social work pedagogy. The project exemplifies a “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998), co-producing both a research-informed foundation and practice-oriented strategies for implementation across diverse learning environments. While the UK and parts of Europe have long institutionalized service user involvement in social work education (Stanley & Webber, 2022), in the U.S. such engagement remains underdeveloped and often described as “elusive” (Austin & Isokuortti, 2016; Duffy, Sullenberger, & Hunt, 2024). Associated contributing factors include the lack of national mandates, power asymmetries, and limited resources (Goossen & Austin, 2017; Adamson et al., 2022).

This paper details the iterative, reflexive stages of developing the Curricular Guide including stakeholder engagement, thematic analysis, consensus-building, and evidence gathering, and highlights challenges and insights from a co-production model. We reflect on the epistemological tensions of integrating service user knowledge within a historically professionalized educational space, and consider implications for advancing equity, anti-oppressive practice, and epistemic justice in social work classrooms.

By documenting this unique and timely initiative, the paper contributes to global dialogue on inclusive pedagogy and the systemic shifts required to truly center the voices of those with lived experience in the education of future practitioners. Our paper aligns with the theme: Social work research, policy, practice or education across national, social, cultural, disciplinary and professional boundaries.

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## An Examination of Social Work Academics' Levels of Individual Innovativeness, Self-Efficacy Perceptions Regarding the Teaching of Computational Thinking, and Digital Literacy in Turkey

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### Literature

In today's context, where digitalization is increasing at an exponential rate, the advancement of fields such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and computational social sciences is transforming both social work practice and social work education. Recent literature highlights that this transformation has had a direct impact on the profession and pedagogy of social work. This transformation is not merely a technical shift but also an interdisciplinary restructuring process. As the field of computational social sciences continues to rise, it is expected that social work will also take part in this development by generating discipline-specific tools and theoretical frameworks.

In this regard, academics who conduct scholarly research and train future practitioners play a pivotal role. In the new era, social work academics are expected to instill the capacity to analyze complex social work practices using computational techniques. However, in Turkey, it is known that computational methods have not yet been incorporated into any social work curricula. The core problem lies in the lack of knowledge regarding the extent to which academics are familiar with computational methods and their ability to transfer such knowledge, as well as the absence of initiatives to enhance these capacities. Thus, examining the knowledge levels of faculty members is a pressing need. Computational thinking is believed to be associated with digital literacy levels and tendencies toward individual innovativeness. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to examine the individual innovativeness levels, self-efficacy perceptions regarding the teaching of computational thinking, and digital literacy competencies of academics working in the field of social work in Turkey.

### Method

The study adopts a quantitative research design. Data are being collected through an online survey from academics employed in social work departments across various universities in Turkey. As of September 2025, there are 524 social work academics in Turkey. Based on a .05 sampling error with  $p = .05$  and  $q = .05$ , the sample size has been determined as 217. Three measurement instruments are used in the study: (1) the Individual Innovativeness Scale, (2) the Self-Efficacy Scale for Teaching Computational Thinking, and (3) the Digital Literacy Scale. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and structural equation modeling with the aid of SPSS and AMOS software.

### Findings

To date, 17 participants have taken part in the study, and data collection is ongoing. Preliminary findings show that no computational courses are included in current curricula. The average professional experience of participants is 7 years (min = 1 year, max = 25 years). Among them, 15 reported being unfamiliar with computational methods, and 16 stated that

they had never received any training in this area. Self-efficacy levels related to teaching computational thinking were found to be low (mean = 58). Digital literacy levels (mean = 82.3) were higher compared to individual innovativeness levels (mean = 75).

**Conclusion**

It is expected that the findings of this study will shed light on initiatives to enhance faculty members' knowledge and contribute to the strengthening of curriculum design in social work education.

## Interdisciplinary Innovation in Social Work Research: Sandbox Experiments as a Method for Studying Predictive Risk Modelling

PhD fellow [Liesanth Yde Nirmalarajan](#)<sup>1</sup>, Associate Professor Line Svolgaard Berg

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This presentation examines how individual and collective sensemaking in child and family welfare services can be fostered through a sandbox experiment involving predictive risk modelling (PRM). Originating from a collaborative research project that developed a PRM to identify child maltreatment (Rosholm et al., 2024), the study adopted a participatory and interdisciplinary approach to establish a methodological framework for exploring this emerging technology.

Using qualitative methods and research artifacts, we established a sandbox environment that simulated social workers' sensemaking across past, present, and future decision-making. This methodological innovation created a low-stakes space for experimentation, offering valuable insights into the complexities of PRM in social work, the situated nature of practice, and the entanglements of technology and professional judgment.

Conducted in Denmark, where PRM projects in child welfare have been paused or significantly revised due to ethical and legal concerns, the study illustrates how sandbox experiments can enhance methodological development in social work research. By transforming high-stakes, real-world decisions into simulated, low-stakes scenarios, sandbox experiments make new technologies, such as PRM, more accessible for critical inquiry while safeguarding ethical and practical considerations (Nirmalarajan & Berg, 2025).

In doing so, the study enhances capacity building in social work research by offering potential inspiration for others and an innovative methodological approach that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration, improves practice, and strengthens the profession's role in developing critical knowledge, co-creation, and policy engagement.

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## Fathers in the Eyes of Social Workers in Germany and Israel: Feminist Ideals, Cultural Expectations, and the Boundaries of Welfare Practice

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### Background and purpose

Despite broad international recognition of the importance of father involvement in child and family welfare, empirical studies consistently reveal that fathers—particularly those from marginalized or non-hegemonic backgrounds—remain peripheral in social work practice. This study addresses this gap through a cross-national qualitative comparison of social workers' perceptions and practices with fathers in Israel and Germany. The research investigates how cultural norms, gender ideologies, and feminist perspectives shape professional attitudes, and how these intersect with national welfare policies and practices. By placing two national contexts side by side, the study aims to deepen our understanding of how professional boundaries are maintained or challenged across cultural and institutional lines.

### Methods

The study is based on 14 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with social workers from family welfare services—seven in Israel and seven in Germany—conducted between 2020 and 2021. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The interviews explored daily routines, perceptions of fatherhood, and intervention practices. Using narrative and qualitative content analysis (Shkedi, 2004; Graneheim et al., 2017), including second-order interpretation, the study uncovers how national, gendered, and professional ideologies intersect in shaping practice.

### Findings

Social workers in both countries constructed clear images of an “ideal father,” which often diverged starkly from the realities of father clients. In Germany, ideal fathers are described as egalitarian and emotionally expressive—attributes often lacking in clients, especially those from immigrant backgrounds. In Israel, the dominant image is that of the strong financial provider, with little space for emotional expression. While both groups of social workers expressed commitment to feminist ideals, their approaches reinforced exclusionary practices through culturally and socioeconomically specific expectations of masculinity and fatherhood. These patterns highlight how cross-cultural professional practices are shaped not only by policy but also by deep-seated gender ideologies and cultural scripts.

### Conclusions and implications

This study contributes to the conference theme by offering a nuanced cross-national analysis that bridges national, social, cultural, and professional boundaries in social work. It demonstrates that even within Western welfare systems, professional ideologies and practices vary in accordance with cultural expectations, feminist narratives, and institutional norms. The findings call for greater reflexivity in social work education and practice regarding how feminist and cultural ideologies are enacted. By comparing two distinct

professional contexts, the study encourages transnational dialogue and critical reflection on the global circulation of social work knowledge and practice. It also suggests that without such reflection, efforts to promote inclusive and gender-sensitive social work risk reinforcing the very exclusions they aim to overcome.

**Theoretical references**

This analysis is informed by intersectional feminist theory (Doucet & Lee, 2014) and research on non-hegemonic fatherhoods and their representation in welfare systems (Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021), offering a critical lens for evaluating professional practices across national boundaries.

## Emotion work in out-of-home care: How supervisors help parents regulate emotions before a contact visit

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<sup>1</sup> University College South Denmark/University of Copenhagen

### Background and purpose

Maintaining meaningful contact between children in out-of-home care and their parents is widely recognised as important for children's well-being. In Denmark, around one fifth of such contacts take place as supervised or supported visits. A well-established practice is for supervisors to meet with parents before and after the meeting to prepare for the upcoming meeting and evaluate after. While existing research documents the significance of high-quality contact, little is known about the interactional practices through which professionals support parents before and after supervised visits. This paper addresses this gap by exploring how supervisors help parents regulate their emotions when preparing to meet their children.

### Methods

The study is part of the ViSAM project (Knowledge about Supervised and Supported Contact), which investigates practices and dilemmas in supervised family contact in Denmark. The data consists of 25 video-recorded pre- and post-visit conversations between supervisors and parents. Using discursive psychology and conversation analysis, the analysis focuses on the practices through which supervisors respond to parents' emotional displays, including sadness, anger, or nervousness, and how they work to recalibrate these emotions in ways that re-orient them toward the upcoming contact.

### Preliminary findings

Pre- and post-visit conversations with parents are often emotionally charged: parents may display grief, anger, nervousness, or exhaustion related both to the visit itself and to broader life circumstances. Supporting parents' emotional regulation in these moments is a key institutional task. Our analysis shows that supervisors use a range of conversational resources to acknowledge parents' affective states while simultaneously redirecting their focus towards the child's perspective and the anticipated visit. These resources include affiliative formulations that validate parents' feelings, but also practices such as normalisation, perspective-shifting, and future-oriented framing. These practices can be understood as a form of "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1983) embedded within the institutional task of safeguarding the child's well-being during contact with biological parents.

### Conclusions and implications

The study demonstrates that emotion regulation in supervised contact is not only an individual but also an interactional accomplishment. It makes visible the subtle communicative labour performed by supervisors in preparing parents for highly sensitive encounters with their children. These insights are of relevance to both researchers and practitioners concerned with supporting children's relationships with their families in contexts of care. By grounding the analysis in naturally occurring interaction, the study also speaks to the subtheme of Methodological development and innovation in social work research.

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## Implementing Multidisciplinary Collaboration in a Child Protection Medical Setting: Consolidation of Social Work within the Interdisciplinary Team

Prof. Shir Daphna-Tekoah<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Uri Balla<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ashkelon Academic College, <sup>2</sup> Clalit Health Service

### Background and Purpose

Despite the presence of multidisciplinary models in healthcare, child maltreatment often remains undetected. Assessment is frequently hindered by restrictive policies, systemic inefficiencies, and individual fears—such as misjudging cases or harming relationships with families. This study investigates how a social work–led, interagency model can improve the recognition and response to suspected maltreatment in pediatric care settings. Social workers—serving as advocates, emotional anchors, and system navigators—are uniquely positioned to guide coordinated, ethical, and child-centered responses.

The research explores three key areas:

1. How interdisciplinary interventions improve staff confidence and child protection awareness.
2. The emotional, relational, and institutional barriers within healthcare teams.
3. The role of social workers in linking pediatric care to broader welfare systems.

### Methods

This two-year Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was launched by Goshen, a nonprofit focused on child well-being, in partnership with Clalit Health Services, Israel's largest healthcare provider. It involved pediatricians, nurses, social workers, administrators, and allied staff across pediatric primary care clinics.

Each clinic co-developed and implemented four intervention components:

- Case-based training workshops on child protection.
- Structured peer-reflection groups for shared learning.
- Clinic-specific child protection protocols.
- Interdisciplinary leadership teams to oversee implementation.

Social workers served as facilitators and coordinators, leading ethical discussions, creating reflective spaces, providing emotional containment, and linking medical teams with external child welfare services.

Data collection included pre-intervention survey measuring knowledge, confidence, and team functioning; 20 semi-structured interviews; and longitudinal focus group. Analysis (ongoing) draws from The Listening Guide, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry to capture relational and institutional change.

### **Preliminary Findings**

Initial results highlight widespread uncertainty, emotional overload, and fear among healthcare professionals when responding to suspected abuse. Common challenges include:

- Lack of clarity in cultural and legal norms.
- Poor coordination with welfare systems.
- Emotional fatigue and hesitation to act.

However, the introduction of social work leadership is associated with clear improvements. Social workers supported:

- Emotional containment and psychological safety.
- Role clarity and open team communication.
- Faster and clearer implementation of protection protocols.
- Stronger connections to community-based support systems.

These factors helped reduce fear, build trust, and strengthen ethical decision-making, contributing to greater team cohesion and child-centered care.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Though still in progress, the study underscores the central role of social workers in advancing child protection within healthcare. Their ability to manage emotional complexity, foster collaboration, and coordinate with external services positions them as key agents in multidisciplinary interventions. The findings contribute to evidence-informed social work and highlight how values-based, participatory approaches can lead to sustainable improvements in pediatric child protection.

## Arts-based social work as means for participation and democracy

Dr Petra Malin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> University of Tampere

This presentation discusses the results of an ethnographic doctoral dissertation that analyses how arts-based practices can be used as means of participation and democracy in the context of social work. The study was conducted across two group processes that utilized arts-based practices (playback theatre and social circus) in a social service context, in municipal adult social work in a city in Southern Finland. The groups consisted of service users and social workers that co-developed social services and arranged dialogical meetings with stakeholders. The research follows a sensorially attuned ethnographic methodology (Pink, 2015) and utilizes arts-based research tools, particularly metaphors and narratives (see Foster, 2016).

The presentation discusses the following research questions:

- 1) What kind of participation and democracy are created within social work service user participation groups using arts-based practices?
- 2) What kind of participation and democracy are created in dialogical encounters between decision-makers and social work groups that use arts-based practices?

The study reveals that arts-based practices can provide structures for more equal interaction, create trust and offer opportunities for taking on roles that one is not accustomed to. In social work service user participation groups, underlying social structures can influence participants' abilities to have their voices heard, especially when there are no interaction structures facilitating equal participation. Arts-based practices can offer social workers a possibility to participate in a different, less controlling role. The study also indicates that there are important differences in how time is experienced between differently positioned people and this affects participation. In the service system and in participatory practices, social workers' time and service users' time is not valued in the same way. Participatory initiatives take time and are impacted by perceptions of time scarcity.

The social circus process created changes among the participants in this group and enhanced their possibilities to influence their own lives. The use of playback theatre in the other group in turn strengthened participants' view of themselves as people who could take part in democratic discussions. The playback performances rendered the experiences of the service users and the consequences of political decisions visible.

Arts-based practices make the sensoriality and embodiedness of social work, and service user participation, more explicit. This research proposes adding the concept of democratic touch to the democratic sensorium, that is, touching or moving the other in a democratic encounter through engaging them on an embodied and sensory level. The results indicate that arts-based practices can be utilized in democratic and participatory social work to create understanding and make communication more inclusive.

## The rhetorical construction of poverty in gerontological social work case files

Doctoral researcher [Viivi Niemelä](#)<sup>1</sup>, Associate Professor Minna Zechner<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Helsinki

Clients of gerontological social work are often precariously placed, living at the edge, or in poverty. Furthermore, clients often experience deprivation not only in material terms but also in other domains of everyday life, such as social relationships and services (Tiilikainen et al., 2025; Kinni et al., 2023; Rossi et al., 2025). However, little is known about how poverty is understood and responded to in gerontological social work. Understanding how professionals describe and define life situations of clients is essential, because professional interpretations influence the ways in which the problems are addressed. Our study utilizes gerontological social work documentation, i.e. client case files, to examine how complex life situations of clients are described and defined in situations where poverty is one of the essential problems in their lives. Despite their significance, case files are rarely utilized for research purposes (Kuorikoski, 2022). Case files not only offer a view into the lives of individuals who would otherwise be difficult for researchers to reach, they also serve as the basis for professional interpretations and decisions about clients (Niemi & Pietilä, 2023). Case files are also interdisciplinary by nature, as they bring together information produced by different professionals, such as social workers, social counsellors and health care staff (Askeland & Payne, 1999). Furthermore, case files are linked the surrounding society and its legislation (Kääriäinen, 2022) and thus, reflect the ways in which social policies, institutional activities and rules of the welfare state are implemented in social work practice at different times.

Our data consists of Finnish gerontological social work client documents of 15 clients written throughout their client histories. We approach the case files from a discursive perspective, paying attention to the rhetorical means used in these texts when documenting poverty and professional interventions associated with it. Here, the documents that make up the case files are understood as argumentative texts that seek to define, persuade, and justify, as well as conceal or reveal something about the phenomenon at hand, as they are serving as tools for internal communication and multidisciplinary cooperation (Kääriäinen, 2003). While professionals serve as producers and writers, they are not, however, the only authors of these texts (Askeland & Payne, 1999). Case files also include the voices of clients. Thus, they represent knowledge that is to some extent co-created between social work clients and professionals and open a specific, institutionally steered but polyphonic view to poverty in old age.

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## From Protection to Control: Rethinking Locked Units in Residential Social Care Institutions in Slovenia

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Despite ongoing criticism, the practice of involuntary admissions in mental health facilities remains widespread globally. In Slovenia, involuntary admissions to locked units of long-term residential social care institutions have been of emerging concern in the field of social work, both due to their overcrowding and pressing issues related to human rights violations, especially according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

In this presentation, we focus on findings of the mixed methods research project “Transformation of Secure Units into Community Services for Adults and Children with Disabilities”. This was the first national-level study focused on these units. All 13 secure units within six social care institutions were included in the study. A questionnaire included data on all residents in 2023 (n=250), while a total of 30 members of institutional management, 31 secure unit staff members (including social workers), 10 heads of secure unit and 30 residents in secure units participated in individual and group semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, whereas quantitative data were examined through descriptive univariate analysis.

First, we present key data on users, the characteristics of admission, placement and discharge of residents in secure units. The results highlight high rates of involuntary admissions, prolonged stays, and limited transitions to community care. Second, we contextualise numeric data with qualitative insights, aiming to highlight the gap between the officially declared role of secure units, as defined in legislation, and their lived reality as experienced by residents and staff. The findings reveal that the spatial congregation of residents within secure units tends to exacerbate, rather than reduce, risk; ineffectiveness of addressing concrete risks by generalized restrictions in secure units; and that the institutional structure significantly limits the provision of individualized care and constrains both staff and resident agency.

Although secure units are formally defined as protective environments, the study suggests that they primarily function as institutional containers. As such, they are not only in violation of human rights, but also ineffective in fulfilling their intended purpose due to inherent institutional limitations.

These findings present significant challenges to both social work theory and practice, suggesting a need for social workers to critically reflect on their involvement in coercive practices and to reassess their commitment to upholding human rights (Maylea, 2016; Davidson, Brophy & Campbell, 2016). We argue that secure units should be abolished and replaced by community-based services. This means social workers must proactively seek to create human rights-based alternatives to coercive institutionalisation.

The findings furthermore highlight the need for policy and practice to focus on long-term institutionalised individuals and younger service users. Community-based care must avoid institutional features, provide integrated housing and support, eliminate general restrictions, and deliver person-centred, flexible services that promote inclusion, meaningful activity, and freedom of movement.

## Impact of Staff Communication Training on Dementia Patient Rehabilitation in an Orthopedic Ward

Dr Yifat Faran<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Sagit Lev, Dr. Lea Zanbar

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### Background and purpose

A substantial body of research indicates that individuals with dementia are at increased risk of falls, with more severe consequences for morbidity and mortality than in individuals without dementia. Despite this, rehabilitation staff often struggle to communicate effectively with people with dementia. Common failures include impatience or inability to interpret expressions and needs, and the use of elderspeak (e.g., oversimplified sentences, exaggerated intonation, or infantilizing terms such as “sweetie”). Patients often perceive this as condescending, which can harm self-esteem and increase resistance to care. Staff, in turn, may fail to gather adequate information about patients’ needs, thereby limiting the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation.

Although communication is central to dementia care, little research has examined whether improving staff communication skills enhances rehabilitation outcomes. To address this gap, the current study evaluated a multi-component intervention in a geriatric hospital rehabilitation ward in Israel, where 20–30% of patients had cognitive impairments. The program combined education on dementia’s medical, functional, and behavioral aspects with interactive workshops on communication skills based on the validation method (Feil, 1992, 2014). Following the intervention, weekly support meetings were held to help staff implement and sustain changes and to provide guidance on challenges they encountered

### Methods

Communication was assessed through structured observations of staff’s elderspeak and patient’s cooperation at three time points: before the intervention, immediately after, and three months later. Overall, 860 staff-patient interactions were observed. Functional independence—as a measure of rehabilitation—was tested using 13 physical-function items from the Functional Independence Measure (FIM) at admission and discharge at two time points: 49 subjects before and 51 subjects after the intervention. Analyses tested the intervention’s effects on communication and rehabilitation outcomes.

### Findings

Elderspeak was most frequent before the intervention, decreased immediately after, and was lowest three months later. Bonferroni post-hoc analysis confirmed significant differences between pre-intervention and immediately after ( $p < .01$ ), and between before the intervention and three months later ( $p < .001$ ). Patient cooperation increased significantly from before to immediately after the intervention ( $Z = 9.302$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and remained higher three months later, though the small decrease was not significant ( $Z = 1.424$ ,  $p = .154$ ). FIM scores improved from admission to discharge in both periods, but the improvement was significantly greater after the intervention ( $M[\text{release} - \text{hospitalization}] = 12.07$ ,  $STD = 1.47$ ,  $CI [9.153 - 14.988]$ ) than before the intervention ( $M[\text{release} - \text{hospitalization}] = 8.83$ ,  $STD = 1.50$ ,  $CI [2.848 - 8.801]$ ),  $F(1,96) = 8.849$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 p = .084$ .

**Conclusions and implications**

The findings demonstrate that interventions combining dementia education with validation-based communication training reduce elderspeak, increase cooperation, and importantly, improve rehabilitation outcomes for patients with dementia. While prior studies have shown benefits of staff training on communication, this is the first to show measurable improvement in physical rehabilitation dimensions. In light of extensive literature documenting barriers to effective rehabilitation for people with dementia, the results highlight the crucial role of staff communication quality in maximizing rehabilitation potential and support the integration of targeted communication training into dementia care practice.

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## Social Work in VUCA Systems: Toward a Theory of Ecological Moral Injury

Prof. Shir Daphna-Tekoah<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Hagar Binoun-Chaki<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Paula Feder-Bubis<sup>2</sup>,  
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### Background and Purpose

Social workers are integral members of interdisciplinary healthcare teams, often tasked with addressing ethical dilemmas, emotional crises, and systemic gaps within care delivery. Their professional roles position them in ethically vulnerable situations, especially in environments marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). While existing research has explored moral injury among military personnel and clinical staff, the experiences of social workers in VUCA healthcare settings remain under-examined. This study aims to address this gap by developing a new theoretical framework—Ecological Moral Injury (EMI)—that captures how external systems and organizational dynamics contribute to moral distress and injury among social workers.

### Research Questions:

1. How do social workers experience and interpret moral injury within complex healthcare environments?
2. What ecological and systemic factors intensify or mitigate the impact of moral injury among social workers?

### Methods

This is a qualitative study employing critical grounded theory methodology. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 21 licensed social workers working in public hospitals and long-term care facilities across Israel. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure variation in seniority, department, and exposure to high-stress clinical situations (e.g., palliative care, emergency units, psychiatric wards). Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Listening Guide Methodology. The analysis emphasized the interaction between individual moral values and institutional structures, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to identify multi-level influences.

### Findings

Preliminary findings reveal that social workers frequently encounter moral conflicts related to patient care decisions, bureaucratic limitations, and interprofessional dynamics. Many reported feelings of guilt, helplessness, and internal dissonance, especially when institutional policies clashed with their professional ethics. The exosystem—including organizational culture, managerial expectations, and external policy pressures—emerged as a key factor in intensifying these experiences. Participants described a pattern of cumulative stress, moral disorientation, and emotional fatigue that extended beyond individual cases and reflected systemic dysfunction.

Notably, participants articulated four thematic “zones” of tension: (1) loyalty to patients vs. loyalty to system; (2) witnessing systemic injustice; (3) emotional isolation within teams; and (4) silenced ethical voices. These findings informed the construction of the EMI framework, which maps the layered interplay between personal, organizational, and societal factors in the evolution of moral injury among social workers.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This study offers a new conceptual model—Ecological Moral Injury—that broadens the understanding of moral distress in healthcare by explicitly integrating social workers’ perspectives. The framework highlights the need for organizational strategies that validate and address moral suffering, such as ethical supervision, interprofessional dialogue platforms, and trauma-informed policy design. Future research may apply EMI across other high-stress professions. For practice and policy, this research underscores the importance of recognizing moral injury as a collective and systemic issue, not just an individual psychological response, and ensuring that social workers are supported not only as helpers but also as ethically engaged professionals.

## Using Participatory Photo Interviews to Study Digitalization in Eldercare

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### Background and Purpose

In social sciences, there is a long-standing tradition of exploring how technology shapes and is shaped by society, organizations, and individuals. Technology studies have evolved from constructivist approaches like social construction of technology (SCOT) (Pinch & Bijker, 1984) and Langdon Winner's (1978) seminal works on autonomous technology, to recent computational and data-driven methods (e.g., Berente et al., 2019). However, while computational methods offer novel scale and pattern recognition, they often fall short in capturing the context-specific, situated, and meaning-making practices of everyday technology use, particularly among groups who leave few digital traces.

This paper uses a participatory visual methodology, participatory photo interview (Kolb, 2008), to study how professionals in eldercare experience and make sense of digital technology in their work. The aim is to develop context-sensitive methodological tools that make visible the everyday infrastructures, frictions, and practical knowledge (phronesis) embedded in technology use. This paper addresses the themes of methodological development, innovation, technologies and capacity building in social work research.

### Methods

Participants were invited to take photographs representing their experiences of digitalization in everyday work. These images then formed the basis of focus group interviews, enabling deeper reflections on their situated practices in relation to digital technology. The method allows participants to frame the topics themselves, opening space for metaphors, affective dimensions, and tacit knowledge often absent in conventional interviews.

Inspired by prior work on visual methods (Kolb, 2008) and infrastructural studies (Bowker & Star, 1999), our analysis focused on the interplay between “visible” (tools, screens, documents) and the “invisible” (infrastructures, breakdowns, ethical tensions) technologies (see, e.g., Bowker & Star, 1999). We paid special attention to “technological frames”, i.e., participants’ assumptions, expectations, and interpretations of digital tools, and how these shape and are shaped by their professional practice (Pinch & Bijker, 1994; Orlikowski & Gash, 1994).

### Preliminary findings

Findings show how participants use images to express their everyday relationships with technology: from metaphors of support (e.g., view from a mountain) to constraints (e.g., system error message), but also non-technological illustrations of what constitutes good care (e.g., ant hills).

Thus, participatory photo interviews can show how digitalization is experienced not as a set of tools, but as a double-edged sword that can both support and hinder the enactment of professional practices. The method also unveiled the mechanisms through which infrastructures are rendered visible – for example in moments of breakdowns and misalignment.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Our contribution is both empirical and methodological: we demonstrate how participatory photo interviewing can generate insights into the lived experience of professionals' relation to digital technology. By doing so, we contribute to a broader repertoire of methods in (digital) technology research, that include, rather than exclude, those at the margins of traceable data. This has implications not only for methodology, but also for policy and design practices aiming to support equitable, context-aware digital transformation.

## An innovative approach to assessing referrals on children at risk

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### Objective

Drawing on the findings from the first phase of a project, Using Validated Screening Tools for Assessing Referrals in child protection, this presentation contributes empirical insights to a pivotal debate in social work practice: whether the use of screening tools and the establishment of relationships with clients are mutually supportive or contradictory, and whether social workers can employ risk-focused screening tools without undermining efforts to adopt a resource-oriented approach that emphasizes positive narratives.

### Methods

Using the Plan-Do-Study-Act model (PDSA) we investigated through workshops with practitioners in two municipalities and interviews with young persons and parents whether the use of screening tools in screening referrals complies with users' everyday needs and routines.

### Findings

Results from the workshops in the two municipalities varied greatly. Practitioners in municipality A were largely opposed to using a risk-oriented tool for screening. Concerns related particularly to the negative wording, which they felt hindered establishing a rapport with the subjects of a referral. Social workers in municipality B were more positive towards such a screening tool. Their biggest concern related to timing, as they most often only meet the family once in the screening phase.

Interviews with young persons indicated that their main concern was to feel comfortable with the social worker when they had to answer a questionnaire, and that it had to be done at the municipality, as they would likely not get it done before the meeting. The parents were also generally positive towards a risk-oriented tool. Their main concern was that prior trust in the social worker, or the system must be established.

### Conclusions/implications

Overall, these findings indicate that while young persons and their parents are generally less apprehensive about the use of risk-focused screening tools, practitioners highlight a significant dilemma. This dilemma involves balancing a strong emphasis on risk, which can hinder their efforts to build positive relationships with citizens. In social work, the conflict between relationship building and standardized procedures is a persistent challenge. Relationship building emphasizes empathy, trust, and personalized interactions, fostering a supportive environment for clients. Conversely, standardized procedures aim for consistency, efficiency, and accountability, often relying on structured assessments and protocols. Balancing these approaches requires social workers to navigate the tension between adhering to guidelines and nurturing meaningful relationships with clients. This tension is valuable in the ongoing debate about whether prioritizing risk assessment undermines the development of a sensitive and supportive relationship, or whether it instead demonstrates a serious commitment to assessing citizens' needs, thereby legitimizing the municipality's role in providing necessary support.

In this session we will discuss implications this may have for the development of social work going forward.



## Between Burden and Relief: Digitalisation as a Double-Edged Sword in Contemporary Social Work

Nadine van der Meulen<sup>1</sup>

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Digitalisation is transforming the landscape of social work, presenting both significant opportunities and complex challenges for practitioners, clients, and institutions. This presentation examines the ambivalent role of digital technologies in contemporary social work settings, with a particular focus on the tension between digital empowerment and digital exclusion. Drawing on findings from a qualitative study involving social workers and service users in Germany, this paper explores how digitalisation simultaneously acts as a burden and a relief within professional social work practice.

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Participants included 20 social workers from various fields (e.g. youth welfare, street work, disability services) and 10 clients with lived experiences of poverty, housing insecurity, or disability. The analysis identified a complex interplay of digital stressors—such as resource scarcity, low digital literacy among clients, institutional pressure for efficiency, and increased documentation requirements—and digital relief factors, including improved access to low-threshold counselling services, remote support options, and digital peer networks.

Theoretically, the paper is informed by concepts of digital divide (van Dijk, 2020), capability theory (Sen, 1999), and critical technology studies (Eubanks, 2018), highlighting how power, inequality, and infrastructure shape digital participation. Importantly, the research also addresses the normative and ethical tensions arising from digital social work, such as concerns about surveillance, data protection, and professional relationality in virtual environments.

The findings have clear implications for social work practice, policy, and education. First, digitalisation must not be seen as a purely technical solution, but rather as a socio-political process that requires critical reflection and inclusive design. Second, professional development and institutional frameworks must address digital competencies not only as a skillset, but as a structural dimension of equity. Third, co-designed, accessible digital tools are needed to empower both practitioners and service users, especially those at the margins of society.

This presentation contributes to ongoing debates on the digital welfare state and social work's identity in a rapidly transforming world. It calls for a balanced approach that recognises both the empowering and excluding effects of digitalisation and places the lived experiences of vulnerable populations at the centre of digital innovation in social services.

**Keywords:** Digitalisation, Social Work, Digital Divide, Empowerment, Structural Exclusion, Critical Technology Studies, Participation, Professional Practice

# A Useful Servant or a Dangerous Master? A Study on the Ethical Evaluation of AI-Supported Social Work Practice by Final-Year Students

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## Background and purpose

Generative AI is entering social services rapidly, promising administrative relief while raising ethical questions about consent, interpretation, power and accountability in relationship-based practice. This paper examines how final-year social work students ethically evaluate AI-supported tools and identifies governance and educational needs for evidence-informed practice. By situating student judgements within current service pressures and emerging digital infrastructures discussions, the study speaks to contemporary opportunities and risks, contributes to conceptual debates about social work's role in technologically mediated welfare, and models a practice-proximal research approach that strengthens methodological innovation and capacity building in the field.

## Methods

Conducted within a sixth-semester bachelor course in Austria, the study engaged two seminar cohorts in a practice-proximal design. Students first encountered a scripted initial child-protection assessment where the use of ChatGPT for documentation and summary was provided, and then participated in facilitated semi-structured group discussions to articulate ethical considerations. The material was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify patterned meanings in students' reasoning about consent, interpretation, accountability, and professional judgement.

## Findings

The analysis identified five interlocking themes that structured students' ethical appraisals. First, process concerns emphasised that consent must be practicable and ongoing and that record-keeping should not drift into surveillance. Second, power considerations recognised that AI may reduce selective note-taking through fuller transcripts while at the same time redirect influence in technical systems and toward third-party AI service providers. Third, questions of control underscored the need for clarity about what the model attends to, how data are governed across their lifecycle, and where human decision authority sits. Fourth, uncertainty focused on limits with dialect, irony and nonverbal cues, alongside third-party providers and unclear standards. Fifth, professional conduct mattered, with openness to AI aligning with reflexive self-critique, whereas categorical scepticism aligned with uncritical confidence in existing practice. Taken together, students voiced principled ambivalence: they appreciated administrative relief and traceability yet resisted efficiency-led adoption that side-lines consent, interpretation and accountability.

**Conclusions and implications**

To translate the student-derived criteria into evidence-informed practice and policy, we set out a concrete package of safeguards. Consent-by-design should be embedded in routine workflows, AI-generated content should be clearly marked, and practitioners should document their reasons for following or overriding automated outputs. Clients should have timely access to records, as well as routes for correction and contestation, while data practices should use proportionate retention, role-based access, and auditable logs. Decision authority should remain explicitly human-controlled. In education, capacity building should integrate digital ethics, bias awareness, and reflexive judgment so that new practitioners can scrutinise AI without relinquishing professional values. In research and policy, these safeguards should be tested in live services and adoption pathways compared across European contexts to inform proportionate regulation and procurement. By linking classroom inquiry with methodological innovation and governance design, this work positions social work within interdisciplinary debates on the digital welfare state and offers actionable routes for ethically robust, evidence-informed AI use.

## Resonance and Responsibility: The Real-World Laboratory as a Method of Social Work, Civic Engagement and Interdisciplinary Practice

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In the face of growing societal challenges – from educational inequality and democratic fatigue to digital alienation – rural areas are under increasing pressure to find new forms of social cohesion and community-based problem solving. This paper presents a newly established interdisciplinary education network in a structurally weak rural region in Eastern Germany, designed and implemented as a Real-World Laboratory. It is explored here as a method of participatory, transdisciplinary social work research and practice.

At its core, the project seeks to create spaces of resonance – a term drawn from German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, who defines successful social relations and democratic engagement as responsive, reciprocal, and transformative relationships with the world. According to Rosa, these resonant relations are increasingly undermined by modern society's drive for control and predictability, which he calls the logic of “availability”. This network challenges such conditions by constructing shared, co-creative spaces for engagement, in which unpredictability and dialogue are seen as assets, not deficits.

The paper draws from three interrelated theoretical perspectives:

1. Real-World Laboratory research, an emerging methodology for transdisciplinary cooperation between academia and society;
2. Networking as a method of social work, especially in rural and structurally disadvantaged areas;
3. Resonance theory, used here as a normative framework to evaluate the social quality of participatory processes and educational structures.

Empirically, the paper is based on qualitative data gathered during the founding and initial implementation phase of the network – including participant observation, focus groups, and process documentation. First findings suggest that the Real-World Laboratory format enables multiple forms of resonance: between theory and practice, between professionals and citizens, and between different levels of the education system – from early childhood education to local governance and academia.

At the same time, tensions arise: Real-World Laboratories demand that universities take on a public role beyond classical research and teaching. For social work, they offer a way to reclaim and expand its function as a civic actor capable of not only reacting to problems but actively shaping social conditions.

This paper argues that Real-World Laboratories should not only be understood as instruments of sustainability and innovation policy, but as a specific form of professional social work practice – grounded in systems thinking, relationship orientation, and collective responsibility. In doing so, they offer practical pathways to re-establish resonant relations in communities, education, and democracy.

# Co-Creating Digital, Trauma-Informed Mental Health Supports: The Be Well Program as a Model for Interdisciplinary Social Work Research and Practice

Associate Professor Brittany Schuler<sup>1</sup>

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## Background

Adolescents exposed to trauma face persistent barriers to timely, culturally relevant, and accessible mental health care. Social work is often at the frontline of these challenges in schools, hospitals, foster care, and community organizations, tasked with supporting youth resilience in overstretched systems. This project illustrates how social work research, in collaboration with interdisciplinary partners, can inform the design of scalable, evidence-informed digital interventions that promote equity and well-being.

Unaddressed trauma during adolescence contributes to heightened risks of depression, anxiety, school disengagement, and long-term health inequities. Service gaps are particularly stark for youth without a diagnosis or crisis, as insurance and eligibility barriers often restrict access to care. Digital innovations present new possibilities for accessible, low-barrier mental health support, but their success depends on contextual fit, cultural fluency, and meaningful involvement of young people and communities.

## Aim

The Be Well program was developed to generate evidence on how social work research can facilitate evidence-informed practice and policy. Specifically, the study aimed to co-create a universally accessible, trauma-informed, modular digital intervention for adolescents aged 12–17, while identifying strategies for embedding such innovations into service systems and informing policy on youth mental health access.

## Methods

Using a structured, three-phase design process, we integrated implementation science with social work research methods: (1) Context review (site visits, focus groups, and literature scans) to identify service barriers, cultural considerations, and values guiding evidence-informed practice; (2) Adopt/adapt/assemble design in which youth, caregivers, social workers, and interdisciplinary partners determined which evidence-based elements should be adopted, adapted, or newly assembled to ensure feasibility and policy relevance. (3) Collaborative prototyping through iterative workshops with youth and providers to test, refine, and align modules with both practice needs and system policy requirements.

The sample included 56 stakeholders across youth, caregivers, practitioners, and community leaders. Findings were translated into design specifications, values and preferences statements, and decision tables distinguishing fixed versus flexible intervention components.

**Findings**

Stakeholders emphasized the need for: non-stigmatizing and culturally fluent tools; gender-relevant content; peer mentorship to promote trust and engagement; compatibility with safety protocols; delivery models that allow both specialist and non-specialist facilitation.

The resulting Be Well protocol supports evidence-informed practice by enabling flexible implementation across schools, child welfare, and hospital trauma units. It also offers policy-relevant strategies by removing diagnostic gatekeeping, demonstrating how preventive resources can complement existing systems, and providing a model for scaling youth-centered mental health care.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This project shows how social work research can drive interdisciplinary innovation that strengthens both practice and policy. By co-creating digital, trauma-informed resources with youth and providers, the Be Well program provides actionable evidence for frontline practice while shaping policy debates on access, equity, and prevention. The findings illustrate social work's central role in researching and facilitating evidence-informed practice and policy, offering a model for how interdisciplinary collaboration can address urgent mental health challenges facing adolescents and communities around the globe.

## Tearing up the Book: Reimagining Kinship Care Life Story Work into an Interdisciplinary Approach, Grounded in What Matters to Children.

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### Introduction

Life Story Work (LSW) is widely recognised as a therapeutic process supporting children in care to make sense of their past, present, and future. However, its application for children in kinship care—the fastest-growing alternative care arrangement globally—remains underexplored. These children often navigate complex, layered family narratives distinct from those in foster or adoptive contexts. This paper addresses this gap by positioning LSW within an interdisciplinary, evidence-informed framework that prioritises children's agency and relational dynamics.

### Objectives

This research aimed to co-create an innovative, child-led “what matters” approach to LSW for kinship care, integrating insights from social work, psychology, and participatory research. Synergising and drawing from both the authors' research and the ongoing insights from the Department for Education-funded Kinship Life Story Work project in England, the study seeks to shape further LSW practice and policy development for children in kinship care, providing valuable guidance for further training initiatives for child welfare professionals.

### Methods

The initial child participatory research involved 19 children and employed an innovative ‘what matters’ approach that integrated critical realism with dialogical participation. This method included iterative and reiterative retroductive analysis alongside creative methods to identify mechanisms central to a child's sense of identity and narrative(s). The second study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis of five special guardians' experiences of contact with birth parents, was drawn upon to develop a deeper understanding of the complex family histories that are a unique feature of kinship care. At the time of writing, the kinship carer LSW workshops included ten in-person sites and ten online sessions, engaging over 300 kinship carer participants. Insights from these workshops were thematically analysed and synthesised with the authors' previous findings.

### Findings

Children's perspectives revealed that effective LSW must:

- Be child-led, dialogical, value-based, interdisciplinary, and collaborative
- Add to narratives, not replace them
- Accommodate flexible truths and ambivalent relationships
- Be embedded in everyday life, not time-limited

Workshop participants endorsed these principles as empowering and practical, highlighting the need for professional training to ensure shared responsibility and cohesive collaboration.

**Conclusions**

Transforming LSW for kinship care requires moving beyond traditional adoption/fostering models toward a new interdisciplinary, co-created 'what matters' approach that values children as active agents. The research contributes to evidence-informed practice and policy, offering a framework for training and systemic change that aligns with a commitment to amplifying child voice and collaborative knowledge production to enable LSW more aligned with children's carers experiences and needs



# An Interdisciplinary Co-Produced Support Group for Spousal Dementia Carers in Transition

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## Background

There are currently over 64,000 people living with dementia (PLwD) in Ireland (HSE, 2025), of which an estimated 32% are about to transition to long-term care (LTC)<sup>1</sup>. The transition to LTC has been found to be the most difficult and emotionally charged time in the dementia caring journey for spousal dementia carers, punctuated by changes in their relationship, identity, and role; ambiguous and anticipatory loss; and conflict regarding a new life ahead. The Carers Transition Group (CTG) of an Older Persons Mental Health Service is an interdisciplinary psychosocial and psychoeducational support group for spousal dementia carers whose partner is currently in/on the cusp of entering nursing home care,<sup>2</sup> co-facilitated by social workers and a community mental health nurse. The aim of the CTG is: to support spousal carers in processing grief; educate about dementia and what to expect as their caring role evolves; signpost to resources; and support improvement of overall well-being. Over the past three years, the CTG has integrated new evidence-based narrative therapy techniques designed for use with this cohort, as well as psychoeducational resources, and enhanced group evaluation tools to improve content and functioning. Co-facilitation and co-creation with a former member, and referral of cases of complicated grief to psychology colleagues have also been introduced.

## Method

Group member feedback was obtained via an assessment tool based on the Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool (CSNAT) administered pre-and-post, to ensure both the sessions and associated tools accurately reflected members identified needs, and questionnaires completed at the end of the program to obtain overall feedback to assess the effectiveness of the group intervention for this cohort of spousal family carers.

## Results

Findings indicate an overall positive experience, with respondents expressing that sharing emotions and experiences, feeling understood and the validation experienced by sharing with others in similar situations, as the most beneficial elements. The use of a co-facilitator with lived experience has proven to not only enhance the group dynamic and process but also improve the group's structure and communication between facilitators and members between sessions. The co-facilitator contributed feedback on session timing, psychoeducational resources and pre-session communication, ensuring an evidenced improvement of group content and process, based on group evaluations.

## Conclusion

Flexibility and adaptability have become hallmarks of the CTG methodology; where the interprofessional facilitators and facilitator with lived experience shape session contents and the group's thematic structure to members' unique needs. Interest expressed from fellow professionals within Ireland and abroad underscores the potential replicability of the CTG model.

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## Embracing a New Paradigm among Chinese: From Special Education to Neurodiversity through the Lens of Multiple Family Narrative Therapy

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### Background and purpose

Chinese families of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (CFCA) face more strained relationships, behavioral challenges, higher parental stress, and reduced marital satisfaction than Western families. However, less than 2% seek medical help, elevating the risk of long-term consequences such as problems with the criminal justice system. Common coping strategies among Hong Kong parents include self-reliance, belief in the supernatural, social support, and avoidance. Social workers are crucial in enhancing resilience and family bonds, with Multiple Family Narrative Therapy (MFNT) offering a collaborative approach, shifting away from the deficit-oriented medical model to strength-based neuroaffirming care. This study aims to answer the question, “What processes characterize the evolution of parent-child reciprocal relationships among families participating in MFNT?” The collaborative and narrative-focused approach of MFNT is theoretically positioned to facilitate positive transformation in parent-child relationships through co-construction of preferred family stories and enhanced mutual agency.

### Methods

A total of 61 eligible CFCAs were recruited to the program via school referrals and the project website. The families were randomized by group to the treatment group (n = 35) or the waitlist control group (n = 26). They were recruited to the program via school social worker referrals and the project website who meet the criteria of child with ADHD diagnosis in Primary 3-6; sufficient Cantonese proficiency for group participation; and commitment from at least one parent-child dyad to attend all sessions. Twelve families (3 per treatment group) volunteered for post-intervention interviews until data saturation, comprising 30 participants: 18 parents (7 complete parental dyads) and 12 children. Semi structured family and individual interviews were recorded to explore participants' overall impressions of the group, changes in ADHD-related attitudes, behaviors, and parent-child interactions, observed changes in self and family dynamics, and reflections on helpful elements and areas for improvement. Narrative analysis was conducted through repeated, holistic readings of verbatim transcripts, followed by open coding to identify and contrast narrative fragments. Employing an inductive, iterative process, emergent categories were continuously refined, interrelated, and organized into core categories and subcategories.

### Findings

Our findings revealed a dynamic, multi-level change process culminating in enhanced parent-child harmony. It begins with interfamilial connectedness, fostering a supportive foundation. This yields individual socio-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive shifts in parents and in children, which drive intrafamilial repositioning and initiate positive interaction cycles that extend to the wider family.

**Conclusions and implications**

MFNT offers the cultivation of trust and disclosure among multiple families, which exposes concealed issues and facilitates culturally sensitive structural change. The dynamic process of change—from building social alliances to individual transformation and systemic family repositioning—illustrates a gradual, relational pathway to sustainable family harmony relevant beyond the local context. For social work practice, MFNT integrates individual narratives with broader social and structural factors, thereby extending beyond symptom-focused interventions. We propose policy to support family-centered, narrative-based programs that prioritize shared meaning-making and strength-based perspectives to address diverse cultural needs. Future research might examine MFNT's long-term efficacy, as well as its adaptability to other populations and service settings.

## How social work works. Towards a systematic approach to research on effectiveness

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The observation in the background of our research project was that we still lack the necessary disciplinary systematics to be able to fully integrate the diverse (interdisciplinary) research findings, structure future disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, and, in the long run, consolidate a body of knowledge that can be taught and used for further development of the professional practice. Therefore, we argue, that further fundamental research is needed.

Based on a systems theory approach and our previous research, the work to be presented here focuses on the ambitious question of how social work works. The main goal was to better understand the complex and dynamic pathways leading to effects in the lifeworld of users and how social workers shape these pathways with their interventions. Inspired by realist evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 1997) and the CALmeR Theory (Blom and Morén 2019), we structured our research according to the dimensions of Actors, Lifeworld, Interventions and their context, Mechanisms, and Development (giving the acronym ALIMeDe) looking for such ALIMeDE configurations to explain how effects occur.

Methodologically, the project is situated in the tradition of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). It presents a multi-centre case study looking at three organisations in different fields of social work: addiction, neurological rehabilitation, and psychiatry. Each of these cases, representing the social system level, further includes eight individual cases (users) that were accompanied for a period of six months. In relation to the conference's theme, the two latter organisations are particularly interesting as social work operates as a sub-unit of medical care in these fields, structurally situating its interventions within an inherently interdisciplinary context. The presentation will prominently feature the case of a national paraplegia centre, as its interdisciplinary framework in principle provides a favourable environment for social work to flourish.

We used different research instruments such as interviews with clients and social workers, group interviews with interdisciplinary teams, observation of the practices, document analyses, and questionnaires on subjective quality of life (SEIQoL, O'Boyle et.al 1993) and capabilities (OxCAP-MH, Vergunst et.al 2017). The analyses were conducted with qualitative and quantitative methods.

The result is a grounded theory of the functioning of social work. Its central elements include – in line with the work of Strauss and his co-workers – “trajectories”, “arc of work”, and “core activities”. Beyond Strauss and with reference to systems theory we develop “core activities” as social mechanisms that structure the emergence of a certain form of social work, the specific “state space” that it constitutes and its specific functioning. The reconstruction of the related pathways of effectiveness generate a fascinating picture of the complexities social workers are handling – successfully at times, but not having this picture available to themselves and in the interprofessional communication often causes problems.

We conclude that our results have the potential to structure future research on effectiveness of social work in a systematic way. This may provide practitioners with decisive information on the functioning of their interventions, promising significant advancements in relation to interprofessional communication and negotiation.

## The role of foster carers in meeting children's identity needs in England, Portugal, and Spain – Young people's perceptions

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### Introduction

Young people who are in foster care often face challenges in their identity development, influenced by separation from birth families, instability in placements, and stigma linked to their care identity. These difficulties are further compounded for young people from minoritised groups (e.g., ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and abilities), who are overrepresented in foster care (Fish et al., 2019; Fuentes-Peláez, 2022; Middel et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that they experience additional risks, such as being misunderstood or misrepresented by professionals and foster carers, and higher rates of placement breakdowns (López López et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, there is limited evidence on the specific needs of these diverse groups of young people who are in foster care, more specifically regarding their complex social identity development through the lens of intersectionality.

### Objectives

This study explores how young people who have foster care experience in England, Portugal, or Spain describe their identity development, with specific attention to their social identity (ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and abilities) and multifamily membership (birth and foster families). It also examines their perceptions of foster carers' contributions to their identity development. The study applies an intersectionality framework (Phoenix, 2006, 2017) to capture overlapping and dynamic dimensions of identity.

### Methods

Two focus groups were conducted in each country, involving a total of 21 young people aged 16–21 with foster care experience. Recruitment prioritised diversity in participants' social identities and care histories. Focus group discussions explored three areas: (1) the most important elements of identity, (2) who had supported their identity development and in what ways, and (3) how foster carers could provide quality support. Data were analysed thematically using an inductive approach.

### Findings

The analysis highlights that identity development for young people in foster care is inherently intersectional and dynamic, shaped by multiple overlapping factors. Young people emphasised that foster carers can act as critical facilitators of positive identity development by offering acceptance, encouragement, and recognition of their identities. However, identity support extended beyond foster carers. Young people described broader relational networks as key sources of affirmation, continuity, and a sense of belonging. These networks often represented long-term, stable relationships that promoted resilience and contributed to the development of their identity across time and contexts.

**Conclusions/Implications**

Findings underscore the importance of adopting an intersectionality approach to understand the complex and layered identity development of young people in foster care. Foster carers occupy a pivotal role, but they are only one part of a wider network that supports identity growth. Enhancing foster carers' cultural competence, alongside recognising and strengthening other supportive relationships, could significantly improve young people's experiences of care. By integrating young people's perspectives across three national contexts, this study contributes novel evidence with practical and policy implications. Specifically, it can inform training for foster carers and social workers, highlight the importance of lifelong relational networks, and support discussions on making child protection systems more child-centred and culturally responsive.

## Interdisciplinary Histories and Futures: Reproduction, Contestation, and Renewal in 21st-Century Social Work

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Social work has always been an interdisciplinary endeavour, though the disciplines it draws upon shift across time, place, and areas of practice. This paper emphasizes the political and historically situated nature of knowledge in social work, and argues for a more nuanced, self-critical, and expansive approach to how the discipline integrates, generates, and applies knowledge. Such an approach is increasingly necessary in light of three pressing challenges facing social work research today: (1) the use of research and evidence-based practice to frame policy decisions as if they were apolitical; (2) growing populist critiques of expert knowledge and leadership for being detached from everyday realities; and (3) the anthropocentric orientation of established social science methodologies in the context of an escalating climate crisis.

This paper draws on research conducted in Canadian social work to illustrate linkages between social work's interdisciplinary histories and futures. This research includes a content analysis of widely used undergraduate textbooks, a national survey of current educators, oral history interviews with retired academics, and a historical analysis of the national Code of Ethics since its initial publication in 1938. Findings indicate that the knowledge reproduced in undergraduate textbooks has remained remarkably stable since the mid-20th century, when psychological and sociological frameworks became dominant, later supplemented by critical approaches that emerged in the late 20th century. By contrast, much of the scholarship identified by current educators as pivotal to understanding the social justice foundations of social work originates outside the discipline—most notably in philosophy, sociology, and feminist and other critical identity knowledges. Interviews with retired faculty further reveal how academics have sought to reshape the discipline by engaging with fields and problematics once considered beyond the traditional scope of social work, including feminist, anti-racist, and environmental problematics. These interdisciplinary engagements are also reflected in the evolving language, concepts, and priorities found across successive editions of the national Code of Ethics. Taken together, these findings illustrate an intergenerational and interdisciplinary process of reproduction, contestation, and renewal in social work.

In engaging with the conference themes of interdisciplinarity, contemporary challenges, and theorizing the work ahead, the paper argues that social work's vitality depends on engaging this geopolitically and historically situated hybridity explicitly. Doing so requires attentiveness to how ideas are taken up, implemented, and transformed over time. This work is necessary if social work is to resist current efforts to depoliticize the creation and use of evidence, engage critiques of expert knowledge and leadership, and move beyond anthropocentric frameworks to address the ecological crisis.



## The effect of mindfulness and neurofeedback practices on the resilience of social workers. Results from an interdisciplinary study

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The COVID-19 pandemic, the near the boarder war after the Russian attack on Ukraine, local austerity pressures and other national/local problems brought new challenges to social workers since 2020. Considering the context, an interdisciplinary team of social workers and psychologists implemented WellMind project with the aim to identify strategies to decrease perceived stress and burnout and increase resilience and well-being within the social work profession. In this presentation, we explore the effects of the project's interventions on the resilience of the 77 Romanian social workers who self-rated their perceived wellbeing at four moments in time (T0, T1, T2, T3). While 14 of the respondents were part of the control group, the other 63 respondents participated in individual or group interventions and filled-in a survey before (T0) and after the intervention (T1), and also after three (T2), and six months (T3), respectively. The interventions provided were: in-person mindfulness (n=8), online mindfulness (n=26), neurofeedback (n=6) and a combination of mindfulness and neurofeedback (n=23).

The research question we address is whether mindfulness online (n=26) or neurofeedback and mindfulness online (n=23) had any effect on improving social workers resilience. To measure the level of self-perceived resilience we applied the Resilience Scale for Adults. When comparing the resilience before and after the intervention, there are statistically significant results on the group which participated in mindfulness online; the results show improved scores for Personal strength - Perception of future and for Structured style. The group which participated in neurofeedback and mindfulness online interventions show improved scores on the Structured style, Family cohesion and Social Resources.

Comparing the intervention groups with the control group, however, we found no significant difference between the group which participated in neurofeedback and mindfulness online and the control group. Between the control group and the mindfulness online group there is a difference on Personal strength, Perception of future. The data highlight that mindfulness online (average=17.3 intervention group compared with 15.6, the average of the control group;  $t(38)=2.186$ ;  $p=0.037$ ) helped the participants improve their outlook on their short term plans and objectives.

The results show that the intervention had rather limited effect on resilience. At the same time, women and social workers from the private sector report higher scores on resilience, which indicate that other factors could have more influence on resilience. Future studies should investigate whether other individual interventions are more successful or whether resilience can be increased through organisational or institutional support.

## An Evaluation of an Interdisciplinary Working Simulation Exercise with Social Work and Education Students in Scotland.

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Effective interdisciplinary working is a core requirement of professional practice and is underpinned by Scottish legislation and policy (Guthrie, 2018; Scottish Government, 2022). Social work and education students are required to evidence their ability to work with others, including other professionals, to proficiently meet the needs of those they support (SSSC, 2019; GTCS, 2021).

Findings from research and significant case reviews highlight considerable barriers to effective collaborative working in practice (Care Inspectorate, 2021; White & Featherstone, 2005; Abbot and Taylor, 2013). When different agencies come together, professional pedagogic differences and interpretations of expertise can cause tensions, particularly from an education perspective (Tett, 2005). Research indicates the benefits of shared learning across professional boundaries (Brooks and Thistlewaite, 2012), though opportunities for this within higher education are limited (Tett, 2005). Many students are therefore unlikely to encounter the benefits and challenges of working in collaboration with partner agencies until they are confronted with real-life practice situations on placement or in employment.

Chernikova et al. (2020) note that a lack of prior experience when engaging with real life practice scenarios raises ethical complexities and assert that preparation through the pedagogy of simulation is an effective means to support student learning of complex skills. Evidence from international research further highlights the benefit of using multi-agency approaches through simulated case studies with medical and social work students (Acquavita et al., 2023). We therefore aimed to understand whether a simulated inter-university, interdisciplinary working exercise would increase knowledge, confidence and support students to understand the role of interdisciplinary working in professional practice.

Online breakout rooms were used to partner student social workers with student primary teachers. Through a shared case study, students from both disciplines explored their perspectives, with the aim of fostering interdisciplinary understanding and collaboration. They held only the information that they would have as their respective profession and were asked to discuss the case. Opportunities for shared and professional reflection were offered following the learning activity.

A mixed method study was considered appropriate (Creswell, 2015). Data was gathered using an MS Teams poll to statistically capture the shift in student perceptions of knowledge and confidence about interdisciplinary working before, and after, the exercise. Qualitative feedback was also sought using a shared Padlet to explore participants' subjective experience. Qualitative data was analysed by adopting a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Given the interdisciplinary nature of the learning exercise and evaluation,

thematic analysis offers 'theoretical freedom', which can be utilised across a range of epistemologies (Nowell et al., 2017: 2).

Findings demonstrated that the students valued the experiential qualities of the session, gained confidence in their own practice skills and developed an enhanced understanding of the role of interdisciplinary working in professional practice. Students also reported greater preparedness for practice placement. The study also highlighted strengths, uncertainties and anxieties about information sharing. It is argued that the exercise provided a practice authentic experience, which allowed for meaningful exploration of these uncertainties and anxieties of interdisciplinary practice prior to practice placement across professional boundaries.

## Faces of Disclosure: Significance, Challenges, and Coping Strategies in LGBTQ+ Identity Disclosure in Mental Health Services

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### Background and purpose

LGBTQ+ individuals often underutilize health services due to discrimination, prejudice, and gaps in healthcare providers' knowledge. Although challenges faced by LGBTQ+ clients are well documented, little is known about how they perceive the self-disclosure of LGBTQ+ professionals in clinical settings. This study, guided by intersectionality theory, examines LGBTQ+ clients' experiences with LGBTQ+ professionals' self-disclosure, with the aim of clarifying client needs, informing inclusive practices, and providing relevant insights for social work, psychiatry, psychology, nursing, and other health professions. The findings are intended to improve understanding of the recovery-oriented approach for LGBTQ+ clients, clarify their specific needs, and explore how the mental health system can better support them and encourage greater use of services. The research questions are: (a) What are the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with psychiatric diagnoses with LGBTQ+ professionals? (b) What challenges are associated with openly LGBTQ+ staff in mental health clinical settings?

### Methods

The study employed a phenomenological approach. Twenty-nine in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with LGBTQ+ individuals with psychiatric diagnoses who currently use rehabilitation services in the mental health system. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 63 ( $M = 29.46$ ). Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed. Data were analyzed thematically, with peer debriefing used to enhance trustworthiness and rigor.

### Findings

The findings revealed that LGBTQ+ clients perceive the self-disclosure of LGBTQ+ professionals' identities as a double-edged sword. On one hand, LGBTQ+ visibility fostered trust, belonging, safety, and a deeper therapeutic alliance due to mutual understanding, reducing the need for constant explanation of LGBTQ+ experiences. On the other hand, disclosure sometimes introduced challenges, such as blurred boundaries in small communities, concerns regarding professional ethics, confidentiality and judgmentalism, and the risk of professionals framing clients' identities through a "single lens" of sexuality or gender. The clients emphasized that when disclosure was handled with professionalism, sensitivity, and clear boundaries, often supported by clinical supervision for the professional, it became a powerful therapeutic resource. Conversely, when disclosure was avoided or mishandled, it could undermine the alliance and convey harmful messages of concealment and shame.

**Conclusions and implications**

This study highlights the challenges and opportunities of LGBTQ+ visibility in contemporary social work practice, providing practical implications for training, supervision, and policy development. Self-disclosure should be context-sensitive, carefully timed, and guided by supervision, structured dialogue, and attention to boundaries. Promoting visibility and inclusion of LGBTQ+ professionals from various disciplines enhances the representation and modeling for LGBTQ+ clients. Furthermore, having LGBTQ+ professionals in mental health services could increase accessibility for LGBTQ+ clients and, at the same time, improve training for other professionals, making these services more supportive and effective for this population.

# Gun violence as a social problem – the role and voices of social work

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## Background and purpose

Gun violence in Sweden has received increased attention since the mid-2010s. In addition to extensive media coverage of so-called “shootings”, one of the key election questions in the fall of 2022 focused on so-called “gang crime”. This type of crime is often presented as closely linked to shootings and deadly gun violence. As minors are reported to have become increasingly involved in gang crime and shootings (Tollin et al. 2023), the problem has gained relevance for social work. Previous research in the Swedish context, has primarily focused on the prevalence of firearm use and firearm-related injuries and deaths (Sturup et al. 2019). However, there is a lack of research on how gun violence is constructed as a social problem and on the role social work plays in addressing it. The aim of the study is to contribute to an expanded theoretical understanding of how social work as a scientific discipline, engages in the construction of social problems. At the same time, the study seeks to provide empirical insight into how social work perceives its own role and position in relation to new social problems.

## Methods

The empirical material consists of 275 articles published between 2010 and 2024 in professional journals and debate articles published in Swedish newspapers. The material was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis in combination with discourse analysis.

## Findings

The findings suggest that the debate emphasizes social work as preventive in nature and carried out through collaboration between different actors. How such collaboration should be realized is discussed from various perspectives. Academics at higher education institutions often argue that the solutions lie outside social work, primarily at a political level, for example by reducing social inequalities in society. When the solutions from within social work are put forward, the focus is instead on, changing personal identities, particularly within the framework of exit programs for gang members.

## Conclusions and implications for practice

The findings contribute to the critical debate on how social work participates in the construction of new social problems. The findings highlight tensions between structural and individual approaches and point to both challenges and opportunities for social work addressing gun violence. The presentation will discuss these dynamics and their implications for how social work perceives and asserts its role in contemporary society in relation to new social problems.

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## Unveiling the Role of Residential Care in Care Leavers' Personal Development and Life Outcomes

Prof. Anat Zeira, Prof. Yafit Sulimani-Aidan, [Dr. Netta Achdut](#), Prof. Rami Benbenishty

### Background

Residential care is often perceived as a “last resort” intervention for at-risk children and adolescents. Over the years, skepticism was raised about the contribution of residential care to care leavers’ resilience and life outcomes. While some scholars, professionals, and international organizations emphasized the potential negative and harmful effects of residential placements, others argued that residential placement can foster positive development for certain youth, support recovery and address social, emotional, and behavioral challenges often experienced by older children in particular. Against the backdrop of this ongoing debate, the present study quantitatively examines: (1) the perceived contribution of residential care (PCRC) across multiple life domains, from the perspective of young adults who grew up in residential care during adolescence; and (2) the associations between pre-care context, in-care and post-care experiences and achievements with PCRC.

### Methods

The sample was randomly drawn from the entire population of eight cohorts of alumni from educational and therapeutic residential care in Israel and comprised 2,295 individuals aged 24–31. The dataset integrates an extensive set of longitudinal administrative records with information obtained through structured phone interviews. Based on care leavers’ retrospective reports, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis, which yielded two constructs capturing the participants’ PCRC. The first reflected contributions to personal development and the second reflected contribution to the attainment of both tangible and intangible life outcomes. Bi-variate analyses and multiple regression models were employed to assess associations between pre-care context, in-care and post-care experiences and the two PCRC constructs.

### Results

Israeli young adults who were in their adolescence in education residential care hold positive views regarding the impact of their care experiences on their personal development and various life outcomes. OLS regressions results indicated that in-care experiences of peer and staff support were strong predictors of both perceived personal development and life outcomes. Only a few pre-care factors and none of the post-care factors were predictive of PCRC. Specifically, PCRC was lower among men compared with women; compared to Israeli-born participants, PCRC to personal development was lower among Ethiopian immigrants, but higher in the life outcomes domain. PCRC was also higher in both domains among participants whose parents had a criminal conviction.

**Conclusions and implications**

Care leavers perceive their time in residential care as having contributed substantially to their personal development as well as to their tangible and intangible life outcomes. In-care experiences of peer and staff support were strongly associated with higher PCRC, underscoring the central role of relationships formed during care. These findings highlight the potential of a positive and supportive care environment to mitigate pre-care adversities. Importantly, positive in-care experiences emerged as more influential than post-care factors, suggesting that they serve as a crucial protective resource as care leavers transition into adulthood. Overall, the findings support a more nuanced understanding of the impact of residential care, indicating that such settings may serve as a viable out-of-home placement option that promotes young people's well-being in adulthood.



## Articulated Concern: Social Workers' Emotional Expressions in Child Protection Investigations of Honour-Based Violence

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Honour-based violence (HBV) directed at young people constitutes a complex and pressing challenge for contemporary Child Welfare Services (CWS). Assessing risk and need in such cases requires rapid and highly delicate judgments, where the ways in which social workers formulate their documentation can significantly influence both the course of the investigation and legal decisions concerning compulsory care. Although decision-making in child protection has been widely studied, limited attention has been paid to the role of emotions in shaping professional assessments, particularly in cases involving HBV. This study addresses this gap by examining how emotional expressions are articulated in child protection investigations and how they may affect decisions about compulsory care. Theoretically, the study is inspired by the sociology of emotions, which highlights how feelings are socially produced, regulated, and expressed in institutional settings. From this perspective, emotions are understood not only as individual states but as relational phenomena that both reflect and reinforce social and organizational structures. In child protection and welfare contexts, emotional expressions in written documentation can thus be seen as discursive strategies that help construct professional authority, legitimate risk assessments, and influence the perceived credibility of clients. At the same time, such formulations raise questions of accountability and legal certainty, particularly in high-stakes cases where the potential consequences for the young person are profound.

Empirically, the study draws on material collected during a one-year period in a Swedish municipality. The dataset consists of all child welfare cases officially defined as involving HBV during this time. Within the material, we distinguish between cases where CWS applied for compulsory care under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act and those where no application was made. This comparison allows us to examine whether and how emotional expressions differ between these two groups of cases, and to consider the role such expressions may play in justifying more intrusive interventions.

Methodologically, the study combines systematic text analysis with a discursive reading of case files. The systematic approach identifies recurring categories and patterns of emotional expression, while the discursive analysis interprets how these expressions are embedded within professional narratives and institutional logics. Together, these methods shed light on how emotions are articulated, legitimized, and mobilized in child protection investigations concerning honour-based violence.

By foregrounding the emotional dimensions of documentation, the study contributes to broader debates on professional judgment, accountability, and legal safeguards in child protection. The findings are expected to show how emotional language can serve as both a resource and a risk: a resource in conveying urgency, empathy, and professional engagement, but a risk in potentially blurring the line between subjective perception and objective assessment. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of critically examining how emotions are expressed in social workers' documentation, particularly in cases of HBV where risks are acute and decisions may have life-altering consequences.

## Participation frameworks and sense-making in juvenile home meetings. A talk-in -interaction approach

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This oral presentation is placed in the small but growing field of studies of talk in interaction in social work. Talk is at the heart of the practice of social work, but has yet not received its full research attention. The presentation builds on two larger research projects, both who were also approved by the local ethics board, focusing on social interaction taking place at specially approved homes for youth (Swe: Särskilda ungdomshem). The recorded materials consist of both everyday conversations, school lessons and more formal meetings. For the presentation at hand we are especially focusing on meetings talk. The examples are drawn from a material of 18 multiparty network meetings and 7 handover meetings from four different institutions. All meetings were audio recorded, indexed and focus episodes were transcribed in detail. The meetings lasted between 20-120 minutes and consist of about 23 hours of recorded material. Participation in the projects was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. They are also approved by the local research ethics board. One of the authors was present at all meetings, and careful field notes were taken together with the recordings. In the network meetings the young person, her/himself, would participate together with family members, but also with two different interprofessional teams; (i) social workers from the municipal social services and (ii) staff from the specially approved home. The handover meetings consisted of professional participants only and featured an interprofessional group from the specially approved home. The analysis features how meeting norms surface in interaction but also how non-expected deviations result in extended negotiations, including elaborate accounting practices. Previous studies of institutional interaction have often stressed formality and its following discursive constraints. The study at hand similarly highlights several formalizing devices which attune the interaction towards organizational goals. But more important, it also identifies a systematic production of informalizing interactional devices. The findings are discussed in terms of participant sense-making but also in terms of collegiality, especially when turns are received as expected versus non-expected by the fellow participants. The results have implications for the organization of multi-party meetings in social work that go beyond these particular settings, especially for the tensions between a goal oriented formal meeting and its ability to adapt to unexpected passes from participants, especially non-professional ones.

## Beyond Deficits: Focusing on Roma Dreams, Hopes, and Aspirations as a Challenge for Social Work

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Research shows that many members of Roma communities in the Czech Republic face persistent social exclusion and discrimination (FRA, 2022). They often live in insecure housing conditions, paying excessive rents for substandard flats, while lacking access to stable and affordable accommodation. Roma children and youngsters are disproportionately channelled into underperforming or special schools, reinforcing educational disadvantage. Adults frequently encounter discrimination and marginalisation on the labour market. These structural barriers are further compounded by mistrust between Roma and professionals, which obstruct access to services and hinder meaningful participation in their provision. These conditions of life are further individualised, as structural disadvantages are reframed as personal failings of Roma themselves (Powell, 2011), obscuring systemic barriers and reinforcing stereotypes about helpless excluded individuals and whole families who have no dreams, hopes, and aspirations.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of their visions of a dignified and secure life (Suckert, 2022). Without such knowledge, social work interventions risk reproducing stereotypes or addressing only surface-level needs; with it, however, social workers can intervene in ways that respect agency, build trust, and respond to the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of Roma individuals and families. In this context, we ask, “What are the life aspirations and future orientations of socially excluded Roma individuals and families?”

The study employed a qualitative research strategy rooted in cultural sociology (Jaworsky et al, 2023), which understands aspirations not simply as individual preferences but as socially embedded projects shaped by shared meanings and symbolic boundaries. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews (n= 20) that combined narrative techniques with in-depth questioning: while narratives enabled participants to situate their dreams, hopes, and aspirations within personal and family trajectories, in-depth questioning revealed how broader cultural scripts and structural constraints informed their accounts. During thematic analysis of data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018), a cultural-sociological sensitivity to meaning-making was deployed, attending to recurring patterns, metaphors, silences, and contradictions in order to capture not only what dreams, hopes, and aspirations were expressed but also how they were framed and communicated in the context of participants’ life.

Preliminary findings indicate that Roma participants often described their life aspirations as secure housing and stable employment as foundations for a dignified life. Visions of the ideal future frequently centred on family stability and children’s education, reflecting firm intergenerational hopes. At the same time, these aspirations were tempered by structural barriers, such as discrimination and mistrust of institutions. Since the research is still early, these insights are tentative, and a deeper understanding will emerge as the analysis progresses.

The findings suggest that Roma life aspirations and future orientations are persistently constrained by discrimination and mistrust of institutions. For social work, this highlights the need to recognise dreams, hopes, and aspirations as legitimate starting points for intervention rather than focusing on deficits. Building trust and supporting intergenerational Roma projects are crucial for transforming fragile hopes into achievable opportunities. Aligning practice with Roma families' visions of dignity can foster more sustainable inclusion.

## Interventions to improve social worker retention

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### Background and Purpose

The burdens of social workers' work life are complex and many. Social workers may experience case complexity, large caseloads, role stress, decision uncertainty, and ethics stress; additionally, social workers may experience trauma as well as secondary trauma through exposure to client trauma. Studies have found that social workers report high stress levels relative to workers in other fields, and that they have a high degree of depressive symptoms and symptoms of anxiety. These burdens can lead to social worker turnover; turnover not only negatively affects social workers and workplaces but also impacts client-facing work. However, supporting retention is a complex endeavor, and the literature on interventions targeting social workers is fragmented. Method: Therefore, we conduct a scoping review aiming to: a) bolster knowledge on interventions targeting the retention of social workers by including the most recent 15 years of peer-reviewed literature on interventions targeting retention of social workers, and b) investigate potential gaps in research. Following the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, we conducted a systematic literature search using three databases; Findings and Implications: This yielded n=1,903 studies, and, after screening, resulted in the inclusion of n=22 studies comprising n=20 distinct interventions. We categorize included studies aimed at different levels (individual, organizational, administrative, or client-facing), and that the complex nature of the interventions enables categorizations within one or two of these categories. We identified a gap within the field of research in the dearth of studies employing interventions at the client-level to improve social worker retention, such as research on the application of evidence-based practice in social work with clients as interventions to increase social worker retention. Although most of the included interventions are aimed at social workers, many interventions are based on general components, e.g., supervision, with fewer employing components focusing on the unique work challenges of social workers. These results buoy and expand upon findings from previous review studies, as well as highlight the need for further research on interventions targeting social workers by supporting their work with clients, e.g., by implementing evidence-based practice interventions.

## From Authority to Empathy: Tackling Elder Abuse in Estonia

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<sup>1</sup> Tallinn University

Elder abuse is a hidden and under-researched issue (WHO, 2002). Local municipality social workers play a key role in preventing, identifying, and addressing such cases in Estonia. These situations are often complex, different from routine social work practice, and require high level of awareness and professionalism. They also challenge social workers to reflect on their own role and professional boundaries. This study combines a practical exploration of working methods dealing with elder abuse cases with a discussion of the challenges social workers face in defining their responsibilities.

The study aims to analyse the perspectives of local government social workers on handling elder abuse cases. It focuses on the research question like (1) how they perceive the boundaries of their professional role, and (2) how they deal with the ethical and self-reflective aspects that arise when working with such complex cases.

A qualitative research design was used. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine social workers whose tasks included working with older people. Case vignettes based on real-life practice were used to explore ethics, values, and professional decision-making (Wilks, 2004). Subsequent interview questions focused on the vignette each participant considered most serious. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and coding.

The findings revealed that social workers often felt an immediate obligation to “solve” the case themselves, sometimes setting unrealistic expectations for their own role—for example, assuming that a solution should be achieved within a day or taking on the responsibility of visiting the older victim daily. From a theoretical perspective, however, effective responses to elder abuse require strong interprofessional networks and regular discussions among network members (Brandl et al., 2003). While participants identified different partners in such networks, they tended to expect concrete actions or information from them rather than meaningful professional dialogue or support. The study also showed that responses to elder abuse cases were primarily service-oriented. Such referrals were often made from a position of authority, whereas theoretical approaches highlight the importance of building trust-based relationships with clients as a more effective approach (Ferguson, et al., 2022).

Professional skills such as ethical reasoning, self-reflection, and the ability to discuss one's emotions were crucial. Yet social workers felt less confident in these areas, providing shorter and less detailed responses, revealing professional insecurity.

In conclusion, local municipality social workers are aware of elder abuse but handling cases remains challenging and linked to professional insecurity. They assume significant responsibility and rely on familiar methods such as referrals through authority. It is essential to increase awareness of elder abuse, broaden knowledge of intervention strategies, and strengthen self-reflection skills to reduce insecurity and clarify professional roles and boundaries.

## Separating families: a case for family support?

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Family support has been typified by supporting families with parenting, lifestyle choices, or when members are vulnerable or at risk, for example who have experienced domestic violence, or in support of statutory social work interventions. It is conceptualised as promoting the resilience of children through providing four 'types' of support to the family system: emotional, concrete, advice and esteem (Cutrona, 2000).

However, although it has long been recognised that children are affected when their parents go through separation, this has tended to be addressed by the legal system, through solicitors and, when necessary, the family courts.

This presentation frames family separation as a family support issue. It draws from a qualitative study of 42 mothers, fathers and children who have experienced family separation and explores the types of support that they received through the process. We map these on to the types of family support from other models and consider the implications for developing a family support system around families going through separation.



## Working with Young People in Social Work: Insights from Latvia

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The purpose of study is to find out how quotative data could be useful in social work with youth. This study is based on both quantitative data regarding youth value priorities and qualitative insights from social workers' experiences in engaging with young people. According to the Latvian Youth Law, youth are individuals aged 13 to 25. However, in various EU programs, such as the Youth Guarantee, the age limit is extended to 30 years. How quantitative survey data about youth values could be applied in social work? The Latvian Youth Law emphasizes the importance of supporting initiatives that promote the creative development of young people—particularly those under the care of social services. Quantitative findings from a representative youth survey conducted in Latvia (Youth Study Baltic Countries, 2022) indicate a shift in value orientation among young people (ages 14–29). There is a growing emphasis on personal success and individual achievement, while values such as family bonding and community involvement are receiving less attention. One in ten young people report problematic relationships with their parents, characterized by frequent arguments or even highly conflictual dynamics.

When asked about their values, young people ranked the following as most important: being independent, having a successful career, taking responsibility, maintaining a good appearance, healthy eating, engaging in sports, and graduating from university. In contrast, values considered less important include: having children, getting married, being politically active, wearing branded clothing, and participating in civic actions or initiatives.

The survey also revealed the persistence of social prejudices. Respondents expressed negative attitudes toward drug users, Roma people, Muslims, homosexuals, and Jews. However, younger respondents and females demonstrated greater tolerance.

Insights from five semi-structured interviews with social workers highlight the socio-economic risks faced by young people over the past five years, including challenges related to societal prejudice. These risks have been exacerbated in the post-COVID-19 period and further intensified by global crises, such as the war in Ukraine, which has heightened societal insecurity.

Social workers primarily engage with young individuals who face difficulties in their family lives, education, employment, or personal development. These challenges often involve substance abuse, difficulties integrating into school environments, or prior involvement with the criminal justice system.

A key theme emphasized by social workers is the importance of establishing genuine contact and fostering equal, respectful interaction with young people. The experience of a community center in Riga demonstrates the effectiveness of creative approaches in working with youth who have come to the attention of social services. Successful examples include the co-creation of social campaigns, joint event organization (e.g., exhibitions, awareness



initiatives, and community gatherings), which align with young people's desire for self-expression and independence.

Supporting individual self-expression among youth can also foster greater social cohesion and promote active community involvement.

### **Conclusions**

Quantitative research provides valuable insights into the value orientations and preferences of young people.

Creative and participatory approaches in social work can help bridge generational and social divides, fostering better engagement with youth.

**Keywords:** youth values, social work with youth, creative methods, social prejudices

# The “Infiltration” of Social Work into the Realm of Education for Children with Delinquent Behaviour

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## Background

Across Lithuania, children with persistent delinquent behaviour face systemic neglect, often falling through the cracks of professional support. While schools are expected to include and support all learners, many children experience only pseudo-help - the proclamation of assistance without meaningful implementation (Švedaitė-Sakalauskė et al., 2025). This neglect exacerbates achievement gaps, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged children, and increases absenteeism and the risk of criminal involvement (Loeber & Farrington, 2012). Addressing these gaps is both a pressing societal challenge and a critical research question. This presentation draws on an ongoing national research project. Our specific focus is titled “Children with Delinquent Behavior: Seeking the Most Appropriate School Response.” The aim is to identify strategies that support children in overcoming complex developmental trauma - a concept describing cumulative psychological injuries (Kinniburgh et al., 2005) - which, alongside social vulnerability and exclusion (Farrington, 2017), often underlie delinquent behavior.

## Methodology

A grounded theory approach was employed to collect and analyse data from 20 interviews with school social workers, teachers, school leaders and other education professionals. Data were coded, conceptualised, and interpreted by an interdisciplinary research team of eight members from the fields of social work, criminology, and education, enabling a multidimensional interpretation of results.

Preliminary findings indicate differing understandings of delinquent behavior across professional groups. Educators largely regard it as a significant obstacle to the educational process. While they acknowledge links to the family context, they tend not to engage in sustained behavioral analysis or continuous support. By contrast, social workers not only focus on the child’s developmental and family environment, but take more time to address the deeper causes of behavior, and are less constrained by the requirements of the school curriculum. Accordingly, professionals diverge in their definitions of “success,” raising questions central to the conference theme: What constitutes evidence for different professionals? What criteria do they apply in evaluating success? And how do these divergent perspectives challenge interdisciplinary research?

## Conclusions

Although the research is still ongoing, several critical questions emerge from the preliminary analysis. Does the lack of a shared understanding of evidence hinder the crossing of professional boundaries and the pursuit of truly interdisciplinary research that prioritizes the needs of the child - so often lost among competing wordings, aims, and perspectives? Moreover, the use of the term delinquency in the title reflects the influence of criminology on attitudes toward children in schools and further obscures the actual

object of interdisciplinary inquiry. Since schools remain primarily oriented toward academic achievement, with so-called delinquent children framed as threats to this process, social work - with its broader focus on well-being - encounters the institutional logic of education and struggles to “infiltrate” this realm, crossing the boundaries of the prevailing educational paradigm.

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# Bridging Boundaries: A Novel Supervision Model for Global Social Work

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## Background and Purpose

Supervision in social work is positioned as a cornerstone for practice in England, embedded within professional standards and a regulatory framework. Although its implementation and impact remain contested, there is agreement that it aims to facilitate some core functions and professional development, including career progression is one of those functions. This study explores how South Asian female social workers in adult services experience supervision as a tool for professional development and career progression, across local authority settings in England. Amid the declining global commitment to diversity, inclusion, anti-oppressive action, it reveals how colonial legacies and intersectional oppression hinder career progression in supervision practices. Using standpoint and transnational feminism, it centres participant voices, proposing a supervision framework that upholds social work's core values of social justice and anti-oppressive practice.

## Methods

Semi-structured interviews with eight South Asian women were conducted, who self-identified as either Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi. All participants were employed within an English local authority Adult social care department at the time of interviewing. Ethical approval for the study was gained via the universities' ethics boards and the interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis methodology.

## Findings

Findings reveal that values of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice are not extended within contemporary supervision and career aspirations as part of the development function of supervision is not emphasised. The interviews revealed that the conventional supervision frameworks perpetuate power hierarchies, reducing practitioners' agency. Participants identified supervision as a site of administrative compliance rather than a space which supports their career progression. Intersectional disadvantages, including sexism and racism and the imprint of colonial legacies exacerbated self-doubt and internalised oppression.

## Conclusion

The study proposes a decolonial feminist anti-oppressive supervision framework, rejecting "one-size-fits-all" models. This framework centres lived experiences of race, gender, history of coloniality, validating marginalised identities. It embeds intersectional analysis to dismantle power imbalances in supervisory relationships, fosters critical consciousness through mentorship / coaching offered through "third spaces" that rebuild agency eroded by oppressive structures, and prioritises relational accountability to counter dehumanising policy climates. The framework acts as both resistance tool and liberatory practice, enabling authentic anti-oppressive engagement despite political hostility. It reimagines supervision as

a continuum incorporating more than one space, essential for equitable career advancement for South Asian women, but also other marginalised groups.

**Implications**

Social work education, policy and practice must integrate this framework into supervision training, field education, and leadership development. It offers a concrete pathway to uphold social work values, mandates, empower minoritised practitioners, and rehumanise practice amid any legislative backlash. While social work is the profession under exploration in this thesis, the findings and analysis are of much wider value internationally and for comparator professions.

**Keywords:** Supervision, Social Work, Anti-oppressive, Feminism, Decoloniality

## When Friends Become Family: Rethinking Friendship Loss and Grief in Migration

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The purpose of this presentation is to examine how the loss of friends in immigrant contexts challenges dominant grief hierarchies and to highlight the implications for social work research, practice, policy, and education. In doing so, it seeks to advance grief literacy (Bensoussan, 2024) and broaden prevailing definitions of family and loss. International migrants now make up an estimated 3.6% of the world's population - about one in thirty people (World Migration Report, 2022). In the absence of nearby relatives, friendships among immigrants often become lifelines, providing belonging and a sense of family in a new country. These bonds, frequently regarded as chosen family, render the death of a friend a loss that stands alongside the profound bereavements experienced within families. Rarely acknowledged, this grief often leaves immigrants unable to honour their loss, access professional supports and participate in meaningful rituals of mourning.

Through a critical lens, this presentation explores the social construction of grief in contemporary society, shaped by internalized values of capitalism and productivity. These forces dictate how bereaved individuals are perceived, set expectations for how mourning should unfold, and define which forms of grief are deemed legitimate (Harris, 2010). Within this hierarchy, the death of a friend is often relegated to a lesser status, considered less significant than the loss of a relative (Liu et al., 2019). By situating friendship loss within migration, the analysis shows how systemic norms and policies reinforce disenfranchisement and operate as mechanisms of compliance, upholding dominant interests while silencing diverse experiences of grief.

This presentation highlights how systemic hierarchies of grief perpetuate inequities in policy and practice, while also identifying opportunities for social work and interdisciplinary research, practice, policy, and education. Social work professionals in immigration and settlement contexts are encouraged to adopt community-based approaches that acknowledge layered grief experiences, where personal loss is compounded by migratory bereavement and entrenched hierarchies of grief. Key opportunities include rethinking bereavement and compassionate leave policies that disregard non-kinship losses, and expanding inclusive, culturally-responsive supports in counselling, palliative care, healthcare, employment, social services, and beyond. Academic institutions are likewise called to invest in research that foregrounds disenfranchised grief in the context of relocation and broadens prevailing definitions of familial and social bonds. As Poole and Galvan (2021) observe, grief research has too often centred the experiences of white, cisgender, heterosexual individuals as if they were universally representative.

Advancing local and global understanding of the intersection of immigration, friendship, and grief, this work will be the first study to examine this nexus. It offers a firsthand perspective that raises both societal and academic awareness of these overlooked human realities, acknowledging grief over a friend's death and recognizing the profound role friends play in people's lives, particularly for immigrants (Mezhibovsky, 2025). Valuing non-kinship relationships, embracing broader notions of family, and honouring grief in its diverse expressions challenge dominant worldviews that prioritize economic productivity over human connection and sustain the belief that "friendship must always sit in second place, behind other kinds of love" (Yankovich, 2024, p. 40).

## Coping Strategies Amid Sociopolitical and Sociocultural Challenges Among At-Risk Young Adults Arabs in Israel

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### Background

Emerging adulthood is often marked by complexity and psychological strain, particularly within challenging sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts. This is especially true for young adults from ethnic minority groups, who must navigate additional layers of marginalization and social exclusion. At-risk young Arab adults in Israel are part of an ethnic minority group that endures discrimination, resource scarcity, and deprivation across multiple domains, including employment, education, and access to social and health services. To adapt and thrive, vulnerable young adults from ethnic minorities often employ a range of coping strategies aimed at fostering resilience and achieving positive outcomes.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, defines coping as “cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. The model highlights the transactional relationship between stress, stress appraisal, and coping processes. Accordingly, this exploratory study had two aims: First, to gain deeper insight into the challenges and barriers faced by at-risk Arab young adults, particularly in the context of their minority status within Israeli society; and second, to examine the coping strategies they employ in response to the challenges they encountered.

### Method

This study employed a qualitative epistemological approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 35 at-risk young adults aged 18–29 who currently receiving formal support from social service agencies. The analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three-stage approach, comprising open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding, and involved both inductive and deductive reasoning.

### Results

The findings revealed two main themes: (1) challenges faced by at-risk young Arab adults, including socio-familial, cultural, and educational difficulties stemming from their ethnic minority status; and (2) coping strategies reflecting how young Arab adults manage and address stressors during emerging adulthood, categorized into two subthemes: (A) outward-facing strategies characterized by active engagement and proactive efforts to address familial, cultural, educational, and structural stressors; and (B) inward-facing strategies involving personal resources such as positive mindset, goal-oriented thinking, self-efficacy, and religious coping to enhance cognitive processing and emotional regulation.

### Conclusion

The findings underscore the critical influence of socio-political, sociocultural, and interpersonal contexts on the challenges faced by at-risk young adult Arabs. Furthermore, the study highlights the coping strategies adopted by this population, reflecting their inner strength and resilience. Practical implications include the need for strength-based interventions that foster coping capacities, the creation of mentorship opportunities with role models from the same ethnic background, and the development of context-sensitive programs aimed at enhancing resilience.

**Keywords:** resilience, coping strategies, challenges, young adults, Arab minority

# The Dynamics of Filial Coercive Control: A Conceptual Framework for Social Work Practice

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## Background and Purpose

Safeguarding social workers lack a clear, empirically verified theoretical framework for filial coercive control, an insidious form of abuse perpetrated by adult children against older parents. This qualitative study addresses a significant knowledge gap by broadening the conceptualisation of coercive control beyond intimate partner relationships. The purpose was to verify the theoretical construct of filial coercive control proposed in a recent concept analysis (Quinlan et al., 2024), thereby establishing a much-needed conceptual framework to inform social work practice. The research specifically examined how social workers identify, understand, and respond to this abuse in their practice with older adults.

## Methods

This study utilised a qualitative research design, employing a critical realism approach. Data was collected through 20 semi-structured interviews with social workers from Adult Safeguarding and Protection Teams across the Republic of Ireland. Participants were purposively selected via a voluntary request issued by the National Safeguarding Office, the strategic arm of the Irish Health Service Executive. To prepare participants for the interviews, they were provided with vignettes of 'model' and 'contrary' cases, which were derived from the concept analysis phase of the study. A critical realist thematic analysis (Fryer, 2022) was used to identify core concepts and themes within the interview transcripts. The research was conducted with ethical approval from University College Dublin.

## Findings

The research revealed that filial coercive control is distinguishable from intimate partner violence because of the life-long bond of kinship that parent's express towards their children. Practitioners consistently reported that abusers act knowingly, with the intention of exercising power and control. A key finding is how this behaviour is frequently concealed within caregiving, with abusive adult children masking their tactics through the language of advocacy and surface-level cooperation. The study also found that social isolation is regularly employed as a deliberate tactic, challenging assumptions that isolation emerges as a passive consequence of aging. This control is actively established during periods of increased vulnerability for the older adult, such as the onset of illness, cognitive decline, or bereavement. In these moments, abusers can prey on fears of institutionalisation or abandonment, utilising them as tools of entrapment. This abuse escalates incrementally and is maintained by a pervasive climate of fear and intimidation, which exploits the parent's guilt and concern for their adult child.



**Conclusions and Implications**

The study concludes that filial coercive control is a dynamic process where an adult child's assertion of power creates a cycle of isolation and dependency, sustained by fear and ageist assumptions. The findings underscore the critical challenge of detection, as family dynamics often serve as a protective barrier for the abuser. This necessitates a shift in safeguarding practice toward sensitive outreach and interventions that rebuild social connections and relational autonomy. The research provides a nuanced, evidence-based framework for social workers, emphasising the need for vigilance during life transitions and a longitudinal, relational perspective in assessment. These findings have significant implications for practice, policy, and future research on the safeguarding of older adults.

## How does youth work in schools work? First evidence from the Netherlands

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This study explores how social work and education cross disciplinary and professional boundaries by embedding youth workers in schools, thereby addressing both social and educational challenges.

### Background and purpose

Schools want to be able to focus on their core task: providing good education. However, in practice, schools often find themselves dealing with various social issues that may affect pupils or influence their home situation and hinder their development opportunities. Addressing these needs puts a lot of pressure on schools and increases the workload of teachers, while the workload is already perceived as very high. That is why many schools choose to enlist the support of youth workers.

Initial experiences with youth work in schools have been mainly positive (Rijnders et al., 2021). There is therefore a need for joint research into the effective elements to strengthen this promising approach and determine its impact.

### Methods

In this large-scale study, researchers, the municipality, 15 secondary educational institutes, and seven welfare organisations collaborate to learn and study the practice of youth work at school together. The study has a longitudinal design. First, we developed an intervention theory based on a document analysis and two focus groups with teachers, support staff, and youth workers (n=14). Using 30 observations at 15 schools, we enriched the intervention theory. Next, we conducted a process evaluation with multiple measuring moments (one every 6 months). Each moment, we distributed questionnaires and conducted interviews with educational and youth work staff. Pupils (n=132) were interviewed about their experiences with youth work at school. In parallel, we conduct sessions with schools and welfare organisations to explore how the insights from this study can be translated into practice.

### Findings

- Youth work in schools takes many forms, depending on the needs of the schools and the familiarity of staff with youth work.
- Coordination and a clear division of roles are crucial prerequisites for the success of youth work in schools.
- Youth work in schools strengthens school safety and promotes school careers and social resilience in and around schools.
- It also supports educational staff by equipping them with knowledge, know-how and know-who. It considerably lowers their workload.

- Pupils experience a meaningful relationship with youth workers; they respond to their needs and empower them.
- Youth workers value the ability to form relationships early on and connect different spheres (i.e., school, online, neighbourhood), enabling them to support youth more effectively.

### **Conclusions and implications**

This ongoing study provides insight into the added value of youth work in schools and how the collaboration between schools and youth work can be strengthened. It helps schools, welfare organisations, and municipalities to make informed choices on a more sustainable multi-disciplinary collaboration to support our youth.

### **References**

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## Perceptions of Help Services and Their Interdisciplinary Interplay: Perspectives from Mothers with Borderline Personality Disorder and Professionals in Child and Youth Welfare and Health Care

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<sup>1</sup> Freie Universität Berlin

### Background and purpose

Families in which a parent has a mental illness often receive support from multiple systems – typically psychotherapy for the parent via the health care system (HCS) and upbringing assistance via the child and youth welfare system (CYWS). Since the mandates of these systems may conflict, the professional discourse calls for closer collaboration (Afzelius et al. 2018). Yet little is known about how those involved perceive these processes. The project “Mothers and Children Between the Help Systems”, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research as part of the ProChild research network (2019-2024), therefore asks: How do mothers with a borderline personality disorder, and professionals from the HCS and the CYWS, experience the help processes and their interplay? The aim is to identify challenges for mothers and children and to explore potentials for strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Methods

The project employs a qualitative, multi-perspective case study design. 85 ‘problem-centred’ interviews (60-90 min., online) were conducted with mothers as well as their psychotherapists, youth welfare officers, and family social workers. 45 were examined in depth, beginning with reconstructions of each individual’s key help experiences, followed by thematic comparisons within and across the groups.

### Findings

The interviews highlight subjective dilemmas across all groups.

- The mothers’ perceptions of the help processes and the professional collaborations are shaped by their ambivalence between the need for autonomy and the need for support.
- The psychotherapists largely view parenting issues as central therapeutic concerns of the mothers, but in some cases as colliding with their own conceptions of psychotherapeutic work.
- The youth welfare officers focus strongly on family preservation and the mothers’ development – with the risk of overlooking case-specific goals and the children’s perspectives.
- The family social workers navigate between building a trusting relationship with the mothers and promoting change, sometimes challenged by mothers unable to implement their advice.
- Regarding exchange between their professionals, there is a wish among the mothers to play an active role, while the professionals express concerns about potential conflicts, limited resources, and uncertain benefits, along with reservations towards other professions and doubts about their own competencies in interprofessional communication.

### Conclusions and implications

The findings highlight the need to:

- provide mothers with spaces to address their ambivalence towards using help services;
- enable psychotherapists to systematically incorporate parenting issues into their therapeutic work;
- support professionals in the CYWS in systematically reflecting on children's situations and perspectives, even when work with the mothers absorbs much attention;
- clarify the conditions under which collaboration should be pursued, how mothers can be integrated into these processes, and how professionals can develop a better understanding of the procedures and logics of the other system;
- strengthen interdisciplinary research between social work and psychology, as the mothers' perspectives can only be adequately understood in relation to both their mental illness and their role as service users.

### References

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## Childhood adversity and long-term offending outcomes in individuals with out-of-home care experiences: Does risk accumulate or reach a saturation point?

Ms Glena Hossein<sup>1</sup>

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### Background and purpose

Prior research has established a strong association between childhood experiences of out-of-home care (OHC) and adult criminal offending, as well as linked experienced childhood adversity to a higher likelihood of future criminal careers. Still, it is uncertain how these dynamics unfold among children in OHC, who are already a highly disadvantaged group. While cumulative disadvantage theory would suggest that each additional adversity compounds the risk of offending, the disadvantage-saturation perspective argues that beyond a certain threshold, further adversities contribute little to no additional effect. This study therefore investigates the associations between cumulative childhood adversity and offending across the life-course among individuals with OHC experiences. The aim is to give insight into whether the association between OHC placement and offending can be explained by the cumulative exposure to childhood adversity, or if the accumulation of adversities is less consequential in this disadvantaged group.

### Methods

Data from the Stockholm Birth Cohort Multigen cohort ( $n \approx 14,000$ ), a matching of survey and register data comprising individuals born in 1953 in Sweden, was utilized to identify OHC-placement between birth and 19 years of age, as well as offending between 20 and 64 years of age. Analyses were conducted through generalized structural equation modeling, which allowed for both the analyses of the prevalence of offending, as well as persistent offending over time. The analyses also examine offending in three dimensions with the intent of capturing different offending characteristics; conviction, incarceration, and violent crime. To account for selection processes into care, a comparison group comprising individuals who were investigated by the Child Welfare Services (CWS) but never placed in OHC was included.

### Findings

Cumulative childhood adversity is associated with conviction, incarceration and violent crime across all groups, but the associations are significantly weaker among those with OHC or CWS experiences compared to the majority population. Among OHC-placed and CWS-investigated individuals, the associations are consistently weak across offenses of varying severity. In contrast, within the majority population, cumulative adversity more strongly predicts incarceration and violent crime than conviction. Across all groups, adversity is more closely related to the prevalence of offending than to its persistence.

**Conclusions and implications**

The results lend support to the disadvantage-saturation perspective. While cumulative adversity increases the likelihood of offending, its impact is less pronounced among already highly disadvantaged groups such as OHC individuals. The similar associations observed among those placed in OHC and investigated by the CWS suggest that differences relative to the majority population stem less from the placement itself and more from the adversities preceding child welfare involvement, or from shared trajectories following CWS decisions. Policy efforts should therefore consider differences in lived experiences when targeting crime reduction, particularly in relation to severe offending. Moreover, the limited role of cumulative adversity in explaining persistent offending indicates that alternative measures are needed at later stages of intervention.

## Evidence as a Process: Practical Models for Co-Produced Social Work

PhD Sanna Hallgren<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Martin Kvist<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Linneaus University

Since the early 2000s, adopting the idea of evidence-based practice has become a dominant feature of national policy recommendations for Swedish social work, while approaches grounded in professional experience have gradually lost credibility. In July 2025, a new Social Services Act came into force, emphasizing a knowledge-based approach and consolidating the role of evidence within the profession. While critical voices can be heard from practitioners and researchers towards standardized methods, measurability, and the very notion of evidence, local authorities generally align with national policy. However, turning evidence into practice demands local interpretations where professional social workers occupy a central role. These interpretations require analyses of the interface between context, chosen interventions and intended changes. Approaches embracing these processes of critical assessment and reflective work could be understood within the framework of evidence-informed practice, translated as a bridging between research and practice, and the dependence on active participants in co-creating knowledge together with academics, colleagues, and service users.

Aligned with the vision of knowledge-based social work, a national research school—FYS (the Research School for Practitioners in Social Work)—was formed 2018 with the explicit aim of fostering arenas where practitioners and academics jointly produce knowledge. FYS, which I am part of, enables practitioners to combine part-time doctoral studies with professional roles in organizational development within social services. My research project has employed participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork to explore outreach and relationship-building in youth work. However, the role has also meant lessons learned from occupying the position of a bridge between practice and research. Participation in the research school has reshaped my understanding of evidence-informed practice and how research can be mobilized as an ongoing process within practice.

Drawing on two practical examples, I will illustrate how evidence-informed practice can be conceptualized as a process, how links between research and practice may operate, and what new opportunities emerge in fostering learning organizations. Both examples place strong emphasis on co-production and user participation. The first concerns efforts to increase the engagement of children and young people from a disadvantaged area in leisure activities. This initiative may be seen as a model for co-production, where practitioners, young people, and local stakeholders jointly mapped needs and generated knowledge to guide interventions. The second project involves co-creating a training initiative between a university and social services to strengthen staff competence in the disability sector.

Across both projects, evidence-informed practice has been approached as a way of asking questions and systematizing information, providing the basis for reflective practice. Different tools and approaches were used: citizen dialogues and surveys in the first project, and workshops and needs assessments in the second. Both mapping processes were carried out before organizational change or project implementation. While such preparatory processes may appear natural in research contexts, they are often absent in practice settings, where short-term funding and demands for rapid results dominate. These examples illustrate how evidence-informed practice can evolve into concrete models for the co-production of knowledge, contributing to the development of social services as learning organizations.



## Parallels in participation: bridging research and practice to amplify the voices of looked after children with learning disabilities

Dr Leeanne Olivant<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Huddersfield

The participation of looked after children in decisions about their care is a core principle of social work, embedded in national legislation, professional standards, and international frameworks such as the UNCRC (1989). Yet children with learning disabilities remain significantly underrepresented in participatory processes and within the research evidence base, with their voices often mediated or overlooked. Byrne (2012) highlights how they are frequently positioned as justifiable exceptions to participation, based on assumptions that they have no views to express, that adults are best placed to speak on their behalf, or that inclusion is too difficult. Participation is also undermined by protectionism- actions taken in the name of safeguarding that inadvertently silence children and restrict their rights (Vis et al., 2012). These dynamics operate in both participatory practice and research.

This study explored how looked after children with learning disabilities experience participation and the influences that shape it, to inform more inclusive practice and policy. A qualitative, critical realist design was employed, informed by disability studies, a rights-based perspective and the social relational model of disability (Thomas, 1999). Nine looked after children with learning disabilities participated in creative, child-centred interviews, while thirty-one social workers contributed to six focus groups. Thematic analysis explored how children understood, experienced, and desired involvement in decisions about their care, and the factors influencing their participation.

Findings reveal that children's participation is shaped by intersecting individual, professional, and systemic influences. Communication needs, prior experiences of being listened to, professional confidence and expertise, the appropriateness of participatory tools, and wider organisational constraints all impacted opportunities. Despite barriers, children demonstrated both willingness and ability to contribute meaningfully- in both the research and decisions about their care- when appropriate support was provided.

An important learning that emerged concerned the role of creative, adaptable, and familiar tools in enabling participation. Data was generated using methods drawn from social work practice such as life maps, ecomaps, emoji boards, and scaling activities. As many children were already familiar with these tools, their use reduced the unfamiliarity that can generate anxiety or self-limiting beliefs, helping to counteract 'barriers to being' and forms of psycho-emotional disablism. Children and carers also gave positive feedback about these tools, which was relayed to practitioners for future participatory activities. This highlights important parallels between research and practice.

The implications are threefold. For practice, creative and familiar participatory methods should be embedded in everyday decision-making, enabling children to gain confidence through repeated use while developing practitioners' competence. For policy, findings

underline the need for systemic recognition of the participatory rights of children with learning disabilities, supported by organisational cultures and resources that make participation routine rather than exceptional. These cultures must also be open to children as participants in research, thereby strengthening research capacity and further reducing the divide between research and practice. For research, the study demonstrates the value of methodological reflection and innovation: approaches that mirror inclusive practice both produce richer evidence and enhance practice capacity, showing how research design itself can contribute to bridging this longstanding divide.

## Leadership Matters: Reflections from a service user's journey through research in social work.

Mrs Lisa Morrison, Ms Anne McGlade, Mrs Carole Kirk, Mr Ian Burnside

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Morrison Training and Consultancy, <sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland Social Care Council, <sup>3</sup> Northern Health and Social Care Trust, <sup>4</sup> Northern Health and Social Care Trust

### Background and purpose of the presentation

In this presentation we will share our reflections and learning about how we facilitated evidence informed practice and policy through creative thinking and collaboration between a person with lived experience and agencies in Northern Ireland including, academia and a health and social care trust. We will outline a number of personal, professional and organisational benefits for all involved. The service user is a student on a social work post qualifying academic research programme who undertook an evaluation study within one Trust.

The empirical evaluation study explored the emotional health and well-being of Approved Social Workers'. This presentation does not cover the findings but rather explores how getting evidence into practice requires a whole systems theory, especially given the barriers to meaningfully involving service users in research

From our learning success included:

- Building mutually trusting and respectful relationships,
- Honouring shared personal and professional values,
- Strong leadership and collaborative partnerships,
- Organisational buy-in, and
- Addressing practical issues.

### Key points that will be covered in the presentation

- We will outline our co-produced approach exploring perspectives of all involved.
- We will discuss how in the empirical study the power balance was shifted with the service user taking on the lead independent researcher role.
- We will highlight specific elements aligned to social work values that built trust and good relationships.
- We will outline the strategic vision, leadership and the steps taken to prioritise research, which laid the foundation for the inclusion of service users in research.
- We will argue that opportunities to develop research and mentoring skills and are essential in building capacity with wide reaching benefits key to enabling good outcomes for everybody

**Linking to the theme of the conference**

The initiative links to the conference theme of interagency and disciplinary working facilitating evidence informed practice and policy and sub theme 7 linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge

**Conclusions and implications of presentation for practice, policy, or further research**

In this presentation we will demonstrate that the approach we adopted is at the heart of improving the quality of services for staff and service user well-being. The research findings have already led to real change within the Trust and at a regional policy level. We recognise that the team involved are all white with financial and social resources to render us systemically privileged. Our conclusion however is that multiple systems must collaborate to ensure positive, equal inclusion and access for service users undertaking research within organisations. We will re-assert that relationships built on trust with shared values are cornerstones for such endeavours and encourage organisations and educational institutions to show leadership in prioritising and facilitating the involvement of service users in research.

At a European level we are interested in mutual learning from others and look forward to opportunities to discussing approaches adopted by others and learning from their experiences.

## Bridging Leadership and Participation: A Co-Constructive Perspective in Social Service NGOs

Rita Luís<sup>1</sup>

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Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the social service sector play a critical role in addressing inequality, vulnerability, and social change. Understanding how leadership is enacted in these organizations is crucial, particularly in relation to participatory management and meaningful service-user involvement.

This research explores how a co-constructive leadership approach can be effectively applied in NGOs within the social service sector, bridging leadership and participation across individual, collective, and systemic levels. Leadership in NGOs is often characterized by diverse decision-making processes, the coexistence of hierarchical and participatory structures, and the influence of contextual factors such as organizational history, staff composition, and external funding models. By analyzing these dynamics, the study examines the extent to which co-construction—based on shared awareness, mutual understanding, and collective engagement—can foster more inclusive and participatory organizational practices.

The research examines three key groups: service users, organizational staff, and management/leadership bodies. It explores how power and participation are distributed among these actors, whether decision-making spaces allow for meaningful input, and how unresolved issues at the organizational level are elevated to broader systemic arenas, such as policy advocacy and funding negotiations. Attention is also given to the training needs and capacity-building strategies that may support leaders and staff in adopting co-constructive practices.

Methodologically, the study employs a mixed-methods design with a strong ethnographic orientation. Data collection includes participant observation of daily organizational activities, in-depth interviews with NGO leaders, and semi-structured interviews with staff and service users. Document analysis and field notes complement these methods, providing a rich and contextualized understanding of leadership practices and organizational culture. The longitudinal design—capturing leaders' experiences at the beginning and end of the research—further enables reflection on change over time.

The expected contribution of this research is twofold. First, it advances theoretical knowledge by linking leadership studies in NGOs to debates on co-construction and participatory governance in social work. Second, it offers a practical output in the form of a training program on co-constructive leadership, co-designed with participating organizations. This program will provide tools to enhance leadership skills, promote participatory management, and strengthen service-user involvement, ensuring its relevance and sustainability within the sector.

## Systems change: a collaborative project improving early identification and support for support for child-to-parent violence

Dr Nikki Rutter

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Child-to-parent violence encompasses a wide variety of harms including financial, physical, emotional, and controlling behaviours, and is frequently referred to as a 'hidden' form of harm; with many families not receiving support until they are in crisis; at risk of child criminalisation or child removal (Condry & Miles, 2021). Child-to-parent violence is considered a pattern of harm instigated by children, and impacting parents, nevertheless, the harm is much broader than unidirectional, with research highlighting child-to-parent violence is developmentally inappropriate and developmentally harmful to the children instigating the harm itself (Condry & Miles, 2021; Rutter, 2025; Rutter et al, 2025).

Within the UK, child-to-parent violence straddles child safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and criminal justice systems with no clear referral pathways, and no transparency regarding responsibility for providing support. This presentation outlines a body of work which used participatory research methods (co-design interviews, workshops, diaries; Delphi questionnaires) across three projects to explore how parents, children, and practitioners envisaged timely responses to supporting families where there was child-to-parent violence.

Parents and children highlight how they seek support from services well before harm escalates to child-to-parent violence; from health services, the community, and education, before the problem escalate to significant harm, child welfare and policing. Responses from early services are often laden with judgemental attitudes or a 'wait and see' approach. Practitioners highlight how parents often do not trust social care services or police to respond in a non-judgemental way, which leads them to being viewed as a harmful path to support mechanisms.

Practitioners and parents outline clear recommendations for how to increase awareness for child-to-parent violence, and empower parents to enact systems change.

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## “Beyond recipients: Young people as co-creators of financial education and policy”

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Young people between 16 and 27 face significant financial challenges, yet existing education and policy often fail to reflect their realities and needs. Many experience shame, judgment, or the sense that they are the only one struggling, which discourages open dialogue prevents them from seeking timely support. This study explores how young people can be actively engaged as co-creators of financial education and policy, alongside policymakers, educators, researchers, social workers, and social designers in the Dutch context. The central research question is: What are the working mechanisms and challenges in co-creating financial education and policy between youngsters and professionals?

The study consists of three interconnected parts: (1) dialogues about money, (2) designing financial education, and (3) designing financial policy. The research combines participatory design, youth–adult partnership principles, and youth participatory action research to center the voices of young people. A key methodological feature is the creation of safe, playful, and non-judgmental environments to foster dialogue—for example, a “ball pit” was used as a space that reframes money conversations away from problem-orientation toward openness and play.

Preliminary results draw on design sessions with students involving practical activities, co-reflections, and co-creation, as well as a collaborative policy design research process with Social Work students. Findings suggest that young people are resourceful and inventive, with valuable insights to share and learn from one another. Yet, they are often unaware of the systemic and structural factors underlying individual financial behavior. The study therefore underscores the importance of safe spaces that mitigate stigma, encourage authentic engagement, and enable dialogue. It also highlights the responsibility of adults to be mindful of power imbalances. Rather than blaming young people for individual financial choices, professionals must acknowledge the broader structural conditions – such as unaffordable housing, rising healthcare and study costs, low youth incomes, permissive gambling legislation, and high-risk income strategies like crypto trading or dropshipping – that are largely adult-created and significantly contribute to financial vulnerability of young people. Recognizing these dynamics is essential to avoid individualizing systemic problems.

This research study directly contributes to the conference theme by demonstrating how social work research amplifies youth voices, co-creates knowledge, and informs policy across individual, community, and societal levels. The study demonstrates how interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborations across social work, education, design, research, and policymaking can generate more relevant and transformative financial education and policy. In doing so, it highlights the contribution of social work research to building open, fair, and accessible societies through participatory, justice-oriented approaches. By engaging young people not as passive recipients but as partners, this study contributes to the development of critical knowledge that supports professional practice and enables change across multiple levels. Ultimately, it illustrates the potential of participatory, interdisciplinary research to challenge dominant narratives of individual responsibility and reveal the structural conditions shaping financial precarity, thereby advancing the broader goals of social justice and societal transformation.



## How can facilitators in IPE (Interprofessional Workplace Learning) help strengthen learning outcomes for students?

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### Background/objectives

Centre for Interprofessional Workplace Learning (TVEPS) includes approximately 900 final year health and social care students from 18 different study programs at UiB and HVL each year. Students carry with them professional competencies when they attend TVEPS.

TVEPS teaches the students interprofessional collaboration through real life workplace practice in interprofessional groups of 4-6 students. The goal is to strengthen interprofessional competence and develop abilities for cooperation which is imperative to be able to offer good health and social care services. Examples of practice areas are nursing homes, home services and daycare centres. The collaborative tasks for the interprofessional student groups is to either develop an evidence based care plan for patients or to develop pedagogical plans for children in kindergartens or students in secondary school.

The facilitators' role in TVEPS is important for the execution of IPE practice and can be used to strengthen the learning outcome for students. The facilitator role is to facilitate dialogue and give insight to other professions, which contributes to good practice and learning for both the students and the practice sites.

A facilitator from TVEPS facilitate the dialogue meeting, and secure good communication between students and health and social care professionals in an interprofessional environment.

### Method

This qualitative study is based on interviews with three TVEPS-facilitators. The semi-structured interviews examine how the facilitator can help strengthening the learning outcomes for students participating in TVEPS. The data was collected in the autumn of 2025. Data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, and the theory of students learning outcome and students evaluations is used as an analytical framework.

### Findings

Through analysis, three main themes have been identified: 1) identification of the importance of facilitator creating a safe space for student learning, and 2) facilitators competence on facilitating the students reflections on their profession and how it can contribute in an interprofessional collaboration, and 3) the importance of facilitator developing personal guidance skills.

### Conclusions and implications

Our findings concludes that IPE facilitators can have an important role in helping students increase learning outcomes by helping them to put into words what they have learned participating in TVEPS, and then the students become more aware of their own knowledge, and that process helps to improve the students learning outcomes. The study emphasizes the importance of competence in how to perform the facilitator role, and addresses the implications for IPE-facilitators competence and the importance of developing personal guidance skills. It is important to create a safe learning arena for the students in order to ensure good learning outcomes for the students participating in IPE.



## Research on adult social care inequalities using linked administrative data at a national level

Professor Jonathan Scourfield<sup>1</sup>

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### Objectives

To describe adult care and support patterns across the Welsh population, examining variations by socio-demographic characteristics, impairments and health conditions, and deprivation. This study aims to identify disparities in care provision across individuals and areas to inform equitable service delivery and improve outcomes for adults receiving local authority (LA) care and support.

### Methods

The Adults Receiving Care and Support (ARCS) census became a mandatory data return to the Welsh Government in April 2023. The Social Care Linked Data Lab (CARE Lab) is a data partnership between Administrative Data Research Wales, the Welsh Government, Swansea University (SAIL Databank), and Cardiff University. It is funded by the NIHR Research Programme for Social Care to integrate administrative data from adult social care (ARCS), children's social care, primary and secondary health care, and the 2021 population census, as well as providing additional insights from associated qualitative interviews. CARE Lab aims to advance understanding of adults receiving LA care and support, enabling detailed analysis of socio-demographic factors and inequalities. An associated PhD project will explore inequalities in adult safeguarding. The findings will support service planning, policy evaluation, and strategies to reduce disparities in care provision across Wales.

### Results

Initial analysis is taking place between September 2025 and March 2026 of the 2023/24 ARCS data collection as a standalone data set, ahead of linkage to other data, to provide a detailed profile of adults with care and support plans. Analysis will include demographic breakdowns, intersections of socio-demographic factors, and variations in care durations. Insights will reveal patterns of care provision and identify areas of potential inequality or unmet need. These findings will serve as a baseline for future comparisons and analyses, supporting targeted interventions to address disparities in adult social care services. They also enable planning for future research for CARE Lab and other researchers interested in the ARCS data, as well as suggestions for future primary collection of the ARCS data. In addition to the results of initial analysis, the presentation will focus on methodological aspects, such as data quality and coverage, and the value of associated qualitative research to help interpret quantitative results.

### Conclusion

This will be the first UK study to explore adult social care at a national level using individual-level population-scale linked to primary and secondary health care, children's social care, and the population census. Findings will inform future data collection improvements, provide actionable insights for policy and practice, and offer an early snapshot of the population receiving LA care and support. The argument will be made that social workers, social work researchers, and people with lived experience of social care need to engage with linked administrative data research rather than leaving this to data scientists, as these methodological experts will need help with asking the right questions of the data and with interpretation of results based on sector knowledge.

## Building Integrated Community-Centered Networks: Methodological Innovations for Social Work in Vulnerable Areas of Romania

Doctoral School of Social Work Nicoleta Filip<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Bucharest

Vulnerable communities in Romania continue to face systemic barriers in accessing health and social services. Despite significant investments in social policies, fragmentation between medical, social, and community-based interventions undermines efficiency and equity, leaving marginalized groups-particularly Roma populations-at the periphery of welfare provision. Building on Amartya Sen's capability approach and Dimitrie Gusti's systemic vision of social networks, this study aims to design and test an innovative framework of community-centered network nodes. The purpose is to explore how interdisciplinary research and methodological innovation can contribute to building integrated socio-medical services that respond more effectively to local needs.

The study employs a mixed-methods design with three interrelated components:

1. Quantitative survey with approximately 200 professionals (community nurses, social workers, and health mediators) in Giurgiu County, focusing on collaboration, service access, and professional development.
2. Qualitative fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participatory observation, to capture the lived experiences of practitioners and beneficiaries.
3. Policy and data analysis of local and national welfare strategies, budgets, and institutional frameworks.

Early insights indicate three major issues: (1) the limited institutional recognition of certain community-based roles reduces sustainability and coordination capacity; (2) collaboration between social and health services remains weak, despite overlapping responsibilities and objectives; and (3) there is an urgent need for systematic professional training to strengthen the interdisciplinary capacity of frontline workers. Early pilot evidence suggests that community-centered 'network nodes' can enhance coordination, reduce duplication, and build trust among vulnerable groups.

This research advances methodological development in social work by linking empirical data with practice-oriented and policy-relevant outcomes. It proposes a replicable model of community-centered socio-medical networks designed to reduce inequality and enhance resilience in vulnerable communities. The findings have broader European significance by contributing to debates on interdisciplinary research, digital welfare, and methodological innovation in social work. The project also explores the role of digital tools and artificial intelligence in strengthening prevention and optimizing resources, aligning with the theme of evidence-informed policy and practice.

## Intersecting art and research - innovative methods to support collective action in social work practice and policy

PhD Katarina Hollertz<sup>1</sup>, PhD Magdalena Elmersjö<sup>1</sup>, PhD Sara Hultqvist<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gothenburg University

### Background:

The demographic shifts of an aging population, high prevalence of sick leave among eldercare personnel, and financial constraints imposed on municipal budgets have a negative impact on the quality of eldercare. Substandard working conditions within the sector has been extensively documented through research over the past three decades. This documentation has provided a substantial foundation of knowledge, highlighting necessary actions to be taken. However, neither research evidence nor professional knowledge have affected policy and/or practice. With the intention to mobilize for improved working conditions, a research-based dramatized short-movie was produced by a professional screen writer. The film draws on research stories in a PAR-project; interviews with eldercare personnel describing situations of moral stress. The film was co-created by the artist and the researchers.

### Research questions:

- How can a dramatized research-based film be used as tool for collective meaning-making in the field of elder care?
- What kind of emotions and ways of reasoning follow from seeing and reflecting together on a research based dramatized film?
- How can emotions and shared reflection support change in social work practice?

### Method

Data was collected in sessions where film screenings was followed by deepened film talks. Field notes from 22 sessions constitute data. The audiences varied from 4 to 150 persons. 843 persons watched and reflected. All sessions were introduced by the research team giving a background to the research project, including a state-of-the-art-lecture on Swedish elder care and the process of turning research data into a dramatized short film.

### Findings

Overall, the film was discussed as a novel and promising way to communicate research. One of the benefits stressed was that dramatized film made it possible to evoke emotions. In one session, it was argued that the film manifested "layers of meaning making"; the music in combination with a professional production made it possible to expose rich empirical data in short and condensed scenes. Artistic expression was put in relation to the more mainstream way of communicating research through academic articles.

The deepened film talks provided discussions on values and feelings connected to the complex work in the care sector, and the importance of the relational aspects. Issues of own experiences of ageing and dependency where other themes that occurred repeatedly. Above all, solidarity with the assistant nurse was expressed, and at times even led to action to improve working conditions locally.

**Conclusion**

Intersecting art and research in social work seems to be a fruitful way to evoke emotions and spur collective action. Since emotional reactions are useful tools for motivating people to act morally, research stories turned into film scenes seems to be a promising way of developing social work research methodology. It not only paves the way for collective action, but ties together research and mutual learning as this kind research communication provides different modes of meaning-making in every unique session (film screening and deepened film talk).

# From Traditional Tools to Intelligent Algorithms: How AI is Reshaping the Future of Social Work Research

Dr Ahmed Thabet Helal Ibrahim<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University

## Background and Purpose

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming academic research across disciplines, including social work. Traditionally, social work research has relied on qualitative and quantitative approaches shaped by human interpretation and conventional statistical tools. AI introduces new opportunities such as advanced data analysis, predictive modeling, and interdisciplinary collaboration, but it also raises concerns regarding ethics, equity, and overreliance on technology. This study aims to explore the perceptions of social work faculty members in Gulf universities about how AI is reshaping the future of social work research. The main research questions focus on: (1) What opportunities do social work academics see in adopting AI in research? (2) What challenges and risks do they identify? (3) How do they envision AI influencing the future of evidence-informed practice and policy in the region? Methods: A descriptive-analytical design was employed. The study surveyed a purposive sample of 80 social work faculty members from five Gulf universities: Sultan Qaboos University (Oman), Qatar University (Qatar), Dhofar University (Oman), United Arab Emirates University (UAE), and Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (Saudi Arabia). Data were collected through an online semi-structured questionnaire that combined Likert-scale items with open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically to capture deeper insights.

## Findings

Preliminary results reveal a strong acknowledgment of AI's potential to enrich social work research. Respondents highlighted benefits such as improved methodological innovation, enhanced accuracy in data analysis, and broader interdisciplinary engagement. However, notable concerns emerged around ethical dilemmas, including data privacy, transparency, and fairness. Participants also expressed apprehension about the risk of diminishing human judgment, the possibility of academic overreliance on algorithms, and the lack of preparedness in current curricula to address AI literacy among students.

## Conclusions and Implications

The study underscores the dual nature of AI in social work research: a powerful enabler of innovation and a source of ethical and professional challenges. It recommends integrating AI ethics and applications into social work education, building research capacity for responsible AI use, and promoting interdisciplinary collaborations between social work and computer science. Furthermore, it calls for developing regional regulatory frameworks to safeguard equity and justice in AI-assisted research. By foregrounding the perspectives of Gulf-based academics, the study contributes to international discussions on the responsible integration of AI in social work and provides a roadmap for guiding future practice, policy, and research.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence (AI)- Social Work Research- Methodological Innovation- Gulf Universities

**“Now that I have kids myself, it’s like the channel opened up to talk with my mom about these kinds of things too”**

## **Care Leavers’ Reflections on their Parents and Family Ideals in Light of their Own Parenthood**

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### **Background and Purpose**

In social work discourse and research, parenthood among care leavers is often framed as a risk factor. The risks typically highlighted include early parenthood and the potential transgenerational transmission of child maltreatment (Courtney et al., 2010; Dworsky, 2015; Jäggi et al., 2022; Purtell et al., 2021; Roberts 2021). However, little research in German-speaking countries has explored how care leavers shape their parenthood in light of their biographical experiences.

### **Methods**

This presentation is based on an ongoing research project investigating care leavers parenthood and parenting practices in Switzerland, combining biographical-narrative interviews with care leavers, and participant observations in institutional contexts of social work.

### **Findings**

Preliminary results suggest that becoming and being a parent is a significant turning point for care leavers, allowing them to re-engage with their own parents and work through past experiences. In this process, ideas of family and parenting are reflected upon, raising questions about boundaries with one’s own parents and the ability to allow grandparenting despite one’s own difficult childhood experiences. Furthermore, the findings indicate that care leavers, in confronting contrasting discourses of the “ideal” family and their lived experiences, engage in a negotiated pursuit of alternative pathways to foster supportive and healthy environments for their children.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

These insights suggest that viewing care leavers’ parenthood solely as a risk overlooks the potential for growth, healing, and the development of new (grand)parent–(adult)child relationships. This calls for a broader perspective in social work, recognizing both the challenges and potentials of parenthood for care leavers.

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## “In-Sight” of Recovery: Evaluating the Impact of Trauma-Informed Social Work Practice in Substance Rehabilitation

Dr. Student. Tonimarie Benaton<sup>1</sup>, Dr Adam Barnard, Dr Richard Machin, Dr Francis Shantey

<sup>1</sup> University of Derby

### Sub-theme:

3 – Exploring the impact and effectiveness of social work practice

### Background and Purpose

Substance misuse continues to present a critical challenge for social work practice and policy across the UK and Europe. Rising rates of addiction, co-occurring trauma, and limited access to support create a complex environment in which social workers are increasingly required to respond with flexible, evidence-informed interventions. This study explores the impact and effectiveness of BAC O'Connor, a trauma-informed residential rehabilitation service in Staffordshire. Grounded in social work values, the service aims to provide holistic care across detoxification, rehabilitation, and aftercare. The evaluation was designed to address three core questions: How do service users experience the rehabilitation process? What is the impact of the service on mental health, quality of life, and social stability? And what lessons can be drawn for improving social work practice and policy?

### Methods

The study used a mixed-methods approach, including baseline organisational data analysis, follow-up questionnaires, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 participants. The sample represented diverse service users across gender, age, and substance histories. Reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's model, was employed to explore the lived experience narratives. Interviews were conducted by researchers trained in trauma-informed ethics, and analysis was co-developed with the academic team to ensure consistency, rigour, and sensitivity. The methodology prioritised inclusivity, co-production, and relational care principles to ethically engage participants.

### Findings

Analysis identified four major themes: (1) traumatic journeys to substance misuse and recovery; (2) circumstances that prompt rehabilitation entry; (3) improvements in mental and physical wellbeing; and (4) enhanced quality of life. Participants described the centre as life-changing, citing improved family relationships, emotional resilience, and re-engagement with education, employment, or volunteering. The importance of staff consistency, non-judgmental support, and continuity of care were emphasised. Respondents also discussed ongoing barriers such as housing instability, stigma, and the effects of COVID-19. Cost-of-living pressures were cited as potential relapse triggers, highlighting the need for structural and policy reform.



### **Conclusions and Implications**

This evaluation underscores the critical value of trauma-informed, relationship-based rehabilitation models. Findings demonstrate how holistic recovery programmes not only promote individual transformation but also deliver broader social value—reducing harm, supporting families, and easing pressure on criminal justice and health systems. The study offers key recommendations: embed aftercare and housing stability into rehabilitation planning; invest in relational training for staff; and recognise service users as knowledge-holders in research, commissioning, and practice design. This paper contributes to the evidence base for impactful social work interventions and supports the continued integration of lived experience in service evaluation and innovation.

## Early Motherhood in Romania: Interdisciplinary Insights for Social Work Practice and Policy

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Early motherhood in Romania continues to be a complex social issue at the intersection of poverty, limited educational opportunities, and social exclusion. Although adolescent birth rates have slightly declined, vulnerable groups, particularly those in rural areas and marginalized communities, remain disproportionately affected. The phenomenon generates long-term consequences for young mothers, their children, and society, including interrupted education, limited socio-economic mobility, and exposure to stigma and trauma. This study explores early motherhood through an interdisciplinary framework, with a focus on social work's role in facilitating evidence-informed practice and shaping inclusive policies. The ongoing research combines qualitative approaches, focusing on participants' lived experiences, with institutional approaches that examine policies, practices, and organizational structures of relevant agencies. Forty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescent mothers and adult women who gave birth during adolescence, capturing narratives on vulnerability, resilience, and lived experiences of stigma and exclusion. To enrich this perspective, interviews were also carried out with professionals from social work, healthcare, education, and local administration, highlighting interdisciplinary practices and institutional challenges. In addition, official responses were collected from institutions such as DGASPC and related public bodies to evaluate how support mechanisms are designed and implemented. The analysis integrates theoretical perspectives from psychology, sociology, and feminist frameworks, providing a multidimensional understanding of how structural factors, professional practices, and personal trajectories intersect.

Preliminary results highlight the central role of poverty as both a cause and consequence of early motherhood, compounded by lack of access to reproductive health services and limited family or institutional support. Interviews reveal that young mothers frequently face stigma in schools, communities, and even service-providing institutions, which hinders their social reintegration. At the same time, many adolescents demonstrate resilience strategies, ranging from reliance on peer networks to engagement with supportive professionals, indicating the transformative potential of targeted interventions. Institutional feedback reveals gaps in coordination, insufficient resources, and bureaucratic barriers that often prevent effective support.

The findings underscore the need for interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral approaches in addressing adolescent motherhood. Social work plays a pivotal role in connecting young mothers to integrated health, education, and community-based resources. Strengthening evidence-informed practice requires not only preventive measures such as comprehensive sexuality education and accessible reproductive health services, but also systemic reforms to reduce stigma, support resilience, and ensure continuity of care. This research contributes to the broader European debates on social work's identity, its interdisciplinary collaborations, and its capacity to shape policies for more inclusive societies.

## Religion-based solidarity initiatives and transnational social work in Brussels: Supporting undocumented migrants in superdiverse urban contexts

Dr. Sylvie Van Dam<sup>1</sup>, [Dr. Mieke Schrooten<sup>1</sup>](#)

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Social work practice in contemporary superdiverse cities involves a wide range of actors, extending beyond formally institutionalized organizations to include hybrid forms and informal initiatives. These informal actors often play a crucial role in supporting individuals who fall through the cracks of formal welfare systems – among whom undocumented migrants – by providing services that formal institutions may be unable or unwilling to offer (Van Dam & Schrooten, 2024). Many of these initiatives operate outside traditional boundaries of social work, with their primary focus on cultural, religious, or recreational activities. Yet, through their engagement with vulnerable populations, they perform what is termed “social shadow work” (Schrooten et al., 2019).

Among these informal actors are religion-based solidarity initiatives (RSIs), which remain underexplored in social work research. Despite their informal status, RSIs often serve as key support structures for undocumented people, as suggested by earlier studies and social workers’ experiences (Boujebbar et al., 2014; Vanderslycke & Vrints, 2019). This paper presents findings from a qualitative study on the role of RSIs in Brussels, focusing on how they provide social support to undocumented individuals and how their practices reflect forms of transnational social work.

Our research draws on rich and diverse data: 19 in-depth interviews with RSI members, volunteers, visitors, social workers, and city staff; three focus groups with RSI members and social workers; participant observation in various RSIs; and document analysis of social media, organizational websites, registration documents, and press coverage. These methods allowed us to capture both the formal and informal dimensions of RSI activities and their embeddedness in transnational networks.

We argue that many RSIs inherently engage in transnational social work, shaped by the transnational lives of their members and beneficiaries. While formal social work organizations often struggle with the concept and operationalization of transnational social work, RSIs navigate it organically, drawing on transnational solidarities, diasporic connections, and culturally embedded practices. Their work is often not labelled as social work, yet it fulfils many of its core functions, providing care, support, advocacy, and community-building.

By shedding light on these informal and often invisible practices, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of social work in superdiverse urban contexts. It challenges the boundaries of what counts as social work and calls for greater recognition of informal actors, particularly RSIs, in shaping inclusive support systems. We suggest that formal social work organizations can learn from these initiatives to better respond to the complexities of transnational lives and the needs of undocumented populations.

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## Power, Voice, and Change: Embedding Advocacy with Care-Experienced Youth

Mrs Samantha Fitz-Symonds<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cardiff University

### Background and Purpose

Care-experienced young people are often invited into decision-making processes, yet their voices remain marginal in shaping outcomes that directly affect their lives. Policy frameworks across the UK emphasise children's rights and participation, but the gap between aspiration and reality is persistent. This study investigates how independent advocacy can bridge that gap—supporting young people not only to express their views, but to have those views carry weight in decisions about their care and wider life trajectory. The central aim was to explore advocacy's potential as both an individual resource and a lever for systemic change, providing evidence to inform practice and policy.

### Methods

The study adopted a realist-informed approach, recognising the need to unpack how and why advocacy generates impact in specific contexts. Fieldwork took place within a large English local authority, where advocacy was a central but contested part of children's services. Data collection combined semi-structured interviews with care-experienced young people, independent advocates, and professionals; focus groups that encouraged dialogue between stakeholder groups; and collaborative workshops co-designed with young people to shape both interpretation and outputs. Realist analysis focused on identifying mechanisms (e.g., trust, continuity, independence) and contextual conditions that enable or constrain advocacy's effectiveness.

### Findings

Findings highlight that advocacy is most impactful when it fosters trusted, sustained relationships and when advocates are able to respond flexibly to individual needs and circumstances. Young people reported that meaningful advocacy supported them not only in care planning but in broader life domains such as housing, education, and health. At the same time, tensions emerged around the independence of advocacy services, particularly when commissioned or hosted by local authorities, which could undermine young people's trust in the process. The research also revealed how young people themselves define advocacy's effectiveness: not simply in terms of being heard, but in influencing outcomes, challenging unfairness, and shifting adult behaviours.

### Conclusions and Implications

The project produced a good practice framework, co-developed with young people, that identifies key principles for embedding advocacy across practice and policy. For social work, the framework highlights advocacy as a tool to reconfigure relationships of power and to enable participation as genuine power-sharing rather than procedural compliance. For policy, findings emphasise the need to safeguard advocacy's independence, resource it sustainably, and recognise it as integral to upholding children's rights. More broadly, the study illustrates how interdisciplinary, collaborative approaches can generate evidence that informs both individual-level practice and system-wide reform.

## Joy as a Professional Resource: Mindfulness and Reflective Practice in Social Work

PhD Prof. Alessandro Sicora<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of Trento

### Background and Purpose

Research on social work has traditionally focused on stress, burnout, and emotional strain, with little attention given to the role of joy as a professional resource (Pooler, Wolfer, & Freeman, 2014a, 2014b). This study explores how joy, when combined with mindfulness and reflective practice, can enhance resilience and well-being in social workers. It asks: How do social workers experience joy in practice, and how can structured reflection on these experiences support resilience and growth?

### Methods

The study is based on nearly 400 reflective narratives, each limited to 160 characters, gathered during 40 international workshops held between 2019 and 2024 in Italy, the UK, South Africa, and the US. Guided by Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, participants reflected on professional experiences of joy. The narratives were then analysed using a grounded theory approach to identify recurring themes and patterns.

### Findings

Analysis revealed six primary sources of joy: building trust with service users, receiving gratitude, witnessing positive change, shared joy, collaborative teamwork, and meaningful interventions in challenging contexts (e.g., child protection, disability, end-of-life care). Many stories displayed elements of mindfulness—awareness, presence, and embodied emotion—emerging spontaneously within reflective practice. Joy was found to act as a counterbalance to stress and burnout, fostering professional resilience and strengthening relational engagement.

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings highlight joy as an underexplored yet vital resource in social work. Reflective practices that focus on joyful experiences, especially when integrated with mindfulness, can support well-being, resilience, and professional identity. Implications include fostering organisational spaces for joy-oriented reflection, integrating these practices in training and supervision, and developing comparative international perspectives on joy in social work. Furthermore, the connection between joy and mindfulness suggests that cultivating present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance can help social workers recognise and anchor positive emotional states even in highly stressful contexts. Mindfulness-based approaches strengthen emotion regulation, reduce compassion fatigue, and enhance practitioner–client relationships (Maddock, 2024). The integration of mindfulness and reflective writing offers social workers a means to cultivate heightened emotional awareness, enabling the transformation of transient experiences of joy into durable resources for professional resilience. This conceptual alignment further suggests implications for the development of training curricula, supervisory frameworks,

and organisational practices, thereby positioning joy and mindfulness as foundational dimensions in advancing sustainable models of clinical social work practice.

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# | Symposium Presentations |



## Today has a Past and a Place: Boundaries between Social Work and other Disciplines through a Historical and International Lens

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This symposium explores professional and physical boundaries of European, American, and Canadian social work in the 20th century. To understand our social work identities, we start by asking – who we are not – by examining our intersections and tensions with medicine and psychiatry. Three papers, by seven scholars from seven countries, start with present-day social work in mental health, social welfare, and childcare, using comparative historical research to unpick what shaped the practice of social work in these settings. Collectively, these papers open a discussion around the boundaries between social work and other disciplines: how do we work with other professions to shape health, morality, and care in diverse institutional and national contexts?

We argue that to critically engage with contemporary practices and research – and to foster sustainable, just and equal change – it is essential to maintain awareness of past paradigms. Theodor W. Adorno's (1999) notion of 'working through the past' is central not only to personal well-being and self-awareness but also to the formation of a reflective professional identity. This involves interrogating both dominant and repressed concepts, ideas and blind spots within professional practices and policies of the past. By critically reflecting on 'who we are not' – as a profession and discipline, at specific moments in time and within particular sociopolitical contexts – this symposium seeks to establish a historically grounded basis for evidence-informed practice and policy to create more equal, just, inclusive and emancipatory futures for social work research.

The symposium brings together papers with interdisciplinary perspectives and will be presented in an international collaboration of researchers. 'Power, Practice, and Partnership: Social Workers and Multidisciplinary Mental Health Care in Canada, the USA, and Italy (1915–Today)' traces the shifting boundaries between psychiatry and social work in the transition from institutional to community-based mental health care. 'Social Hygiene and the Policing of Women in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia: Local and Transnational Glimpses into the Early Professionalization of Social Work' explores the interface between social work and the policing of social hygiene through migration, refugee displacement, and human trafficking. 'Who Cared? Professional Care in Infant Homes in Switzerland and Germany during the 20th Century' unpacks social workers' engagement in hospitalism – the detrimental effects of institutional life on children – as they navigated complex relationships between care and the state. Finally, a senior scholar will bring all of the papers together to reflect on social work's struggles for authority over morality in health and welfare institutions.

Together, the papers address how dominant medical and psychiatric frameworks have shaped normative understandings of bodies, minds, illness, health, and well-being also in the histories of social work. Within this symposium we aim to: (1) illuminate the normative influence of medical and psychiatric concepts within specific historical and geographical settings, (2) amplify marginalized voices stemming from the field of social work and (3) advance critical, historically informed knowledge about interdisciplinary co-creation, linking past insights to current debates on transformative social work and its evolving professional identity.

## Symposium on Digital competencies for social work

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This symposium explores the development and integration of digital competencies in social work, a field where technological change is reshaping professional roles, care provision and service delivery, methods, and ethical responsibilities. e-Social work is becoming a new area of specialisation and digitalisation affects all our activities transversally (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018). Despite the fact that social workers are increasingly using digital technologies and online platforms in service delivery (Doe & Smith, 2023), many social workers feel unprepared to integrate digital technologies into their practice. One of the key barriers are the limited digital skills of social workers (Pazer, 2024). Scholarly debate continues to highlight the lack of clear consensus regarding which digital competencies are essential for social workers, how these should be effectively integrated into education, and under what conditions they may strengthen professional practice rather than introduce new risks (Huss & Salomon, 2024; Samuelsson & Holmström, 2021).

This symposium brings together interdisciplinary perspectives to address three key questions:

- Which digital competencies are essential for social work practice? Beyond general digital literacy, social workers need skills related to data ethics, online communication with vulnerable groups, and critical evaluation of digital platforms and AI systems (IFWS 2018).
- How can these competencies be effectively taught and sustained? Universities and professional organizations face the challenge of embedding digital training into curricula and lifelong learning in ways that are both accessible and relevant to practice (López Peláez & Kirwan, 2023).
- What are the broader implications for the profession and service clients? Digital competencies must ultimately support the quality of care, empowerment of clients, and the safeguarding of social work's core values.

The digitalization of social work raises both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, digital tools can facilitate communication, expand access to knowledge, and increase efficiency. On the other hand, they bring risks related to privacy, inequality, and professional responsibility. Without a clear framework of competencies and ethical guidelines (Banks 2020), there is a danger of uneven adoption, professional insecurity, and unintended harm to vulnerable groups.

Interdisciplinary perspectives are crucial in shaping these discussions. The complexity of digitalization requires contributions from information technology, education, and ethics, in order to build frameworks that are technically robust, ethically grounded, and socially just. By drawing on these perspectives, the symposium will identify strategies to strengthen digital capacity in social work while ensuring alignment with the profession's ethical foundations. Through a set of coordinated papers, the symposium will:

- Show and analyse diverse social work digital frameworks
- Present research on how these competencies are being integrated into education and professional development.

The symposium is designed not only as a venue for presenting evidence and insights, but also as an opportunity to stimulate ongoing dialogue and to inspire future collaborations that can strengthen the integration of digital competencies into social work.

## Making Brain Injury Visible: Interdisciplinary Social Work Research Across Justice, Gender, Education and Practice in England, Scotland and Ireland

Dr Caroline Bald<sup>1</sup>, Ms Emma McCullagh, Professor Tom McMillan, Dr Phil Butler, Dr Philippa Birch, Dr Esther Matupi, Dr Hope Kent

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Acquired brain injury (ABI) has been described as a “silent epidemic,” affecting an estimated 1.4 million people in the UK account for a £20 billion NHS and social care spend per year. Yet ABI remains marginalised within professional education, research, and practice, particularly in social work. The invisibility of ABI’s cognitive, behavioural, and relational consequences creates barriers to recognition, timely support, and justice for survivors and their families. Increasingly, interdisciplinary scholarship demonstrates that ABI intersects with criminal justice, domestic abuse, parenting, and education, demanding new approaches to social work research and practice.

This symposium brings together four papers that examine ABI through diverse but interconnected lenses, each foregrounding the value of interdisciplinary collaboration. Professor Tom McMillan (University of Glasgow) synthesises a programme of Scottish research on ABI in the criminal justice system. He highlights prevalence, support needs at different justice stages, and the implications for social work training, arguing for systemic change and workforce development.

Dr Esther Matupi, Dr Philippa Birch (Brainkind) and Dr Hope Kent (University of Exeter) address the under-explored link between domestic abuse and ABI. Their paper introduces Brainkind Adapt, a new interdisciplinary screening tool designed to support professionals in identifying ABI caused by blows to the head and non-fatal strangulation. They report pilot findings from community-based services and reflect on the tool’s potential to transform practice.

Dr Phil Butler (National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dublin) draws on Feminist Participatory Action Research to centre the voices of mothers with ABI. Her work develops a conceptual model for supporting disenfranchised groups and offers broader insights into emancipatory methodologies that reposition service users as knowledge producers.

Finally, Dr Caroline Bald (University of Essex) and Emma McCullagh (Headway Essex) report on Making Headway, a co-produced theatre-based learning initiative embedded within NIHR’s Heads Together project. Delivered across four UK universities, this creative pedagogy engaged students from social work, nursing, psychology, and speech and language therapy. Findings highlight the power of creative coproduction in bridging disciplinary silos and embedding ABI in curricula.

Together, these four presentations illuminate ABI’s relevance across multiple domains of social work research and practice. They demonstrate how creative, participatory, and

interdisciplinary approaches can disrupt ABI's invisibility, inform professional training, and amplify the voices of those most affected.

This symposium directly aligns with the conference theme of Envisioning Future Social Work Research for Collective Good, and sub-themes of interdisciplinary research, social justice and inclusion, and innovative methodologies. By connecting work from Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales, the panel highlights ABI as a critical, transnational issue for social work research, education, and practice. It argues that to realise neuroinclusive social work, ABI must be recognised as both a public health and social justice priority.

## Young Caregivers through Social work research: findings from a national project

Elena Cabiati<sup>1</sup>, Beatrice Cacopardo<sup>1</sup>, Valentina Calcaterra<sup>1</sup>, Paola Enrica Limongelli<sup>1</sup>, Barbara Segatto<sup>2</sup>, Anna Dal Ben<sup>2</sup>, Anna Zenarolla<sup>3</sup>, Luigi Gui<sup>3</sup>, Marianna Ginocchietti<sup>3</sup>

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Social work research has already shown that Young caregivers are children or young people who provide relevant and continuous informal care for a relative in their home or for a significant person in their life due to chronic illness, disability, mental health problems, or other vulnerabilities (Becker, 2007). The caregiving provided by these young people may have negative consequences on their physical and psychological well-being, thereby influencing the transition to adulthood (Lacey et al., 2022). However, studies also highlight positive outcomes, such as the development of problem-solving skills and greater maturity (Lewis et al., 2023).

Recent international studies estimate that between 2% and 8% of children and adolescents are caregivers (Leu et al., 2021). In Italy, it is estimated that around 6.6% of young people aged 15 to 24 are caregivers (Me-We Project, 2019). According to these studies, although widespread, there is a lack of awareness on this phenomenon at the social, cultural, and legal levels. For this reason, this group often remains invisible even to social services and doesn't receive the necessary support to meet their own needs; furthermore, parents are not fully aware of the role that their children play within the family.

The aim of the symposium is to present findings from a 3-year national research project (2022-2025) financed by the European Union through NextGenerationEU fund. The research project, the first large-scale project carried out in Italy on this topic, involved 3 Italian universities and aimed at investigating the phenomenon to understand how social service can, first and foremost, recognize young caregivers and consequently define appropriate interventions to support them. Through quantitative and qualitative research, the 3 research units focused on 3 different targets: young people, parents, and social workers. The first research unit, through a survey involving more than 6,000 students aged between 11 and 19, developed strategies to identify young caregivers and investigated what they do in terms of caring and how they are doing. The second research unit examined the perspectives of families and the role of parents in recognizing, legitimizing, and supporting—or not—the caregiving activities of their children, through another survey involving over 1,500 adults. Finally, the third research unit conducted focus groups and a survey with social workers to investigate their awareness of the phenomenon, their role in these situations, and the interventions eventually implemented.

Project findings provide unreleased insights into the phenomenon of young caregivers in Italy. The topic of the symposium is firmly situated within the theme of the conference, as it proposes a research-based reflection on young caregiving with the aim to share through European lens fruitful discussion to inform both professional practices and social welfare policies in several countries.

## Social Work Systems: Politics, policy and practice

Hannah Jobling<sup>1</sup>, Tony Evans<sup>2</sup>, Neil Quinn<sup>3</sup>, Gary Spolander<sup>4</sup>, Maria Lucia Teixeira Garcia<sup>5</sup>, Stefan Sjostrom<sup>6</sup>, Katrin Bain<sup>7</sup>, Prospera Tadam<sup>8</sup>, Beverley Wagner<sup>9</sup>, Vivienne Mitchell<sup>9</sup>

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### Background

Social work shares an international statement of values, yet it has emerged in different places, in different ways, and with different aims. Analyses of social work have often either assumed a universal model that can be applied anywhere or focused on localized forms, emphasizing particular parochial characteristics. In this symposium, we argue for a different approach: rather than adopting either of these positions, we explore the productive tension between them to better understand social work in both local and international contexts. We propose that focusing on the interaction between local and international dimensions of social work enables a more nuanced analysis of social work as a system—that considers the iterations of social work within matrices of political, social, and historical networks.

### Main Points of Symposium

The symposium conceptualizes social work as a set of local practices, shaped by the organization and goals of the society in which it operates. This relationship is neither static nor sealed off; it is reflexive. Social work extends beyond the local understanding of itself in relation to other forms of social work, drawing on international experiences to interpret local issues and responses, and to critique more local practices.

This practical-analytic approach asks: How is social work engineered within different social problem/solution matrices? It aims to illuminate both the potential and constraints on social work in specific settings. The factors shaping a social work system do not determine practice; they both influence and challenge it. Social work's response to these influences can be compliant or critical. This dynamic can also be explored historically, tracing how social work systems have evolved within broader welfare, political and social domains and identifying continuities, reactions, and fractures.

The presentations illustrate this approach by examining different social work systems as local frameworks. These frameworks reflect historically developed ways of formulating social problems and responding to them, while also drawing on ideas and practices from elsewhere. The first three presentations focus on the development of dimensions of social work within distinct milieus, whilst the final presentation takes a global view on the evolution of social work systems via critical shifts in knowledge production.

### How It Addresses Conference Themes

This symposium directly engages with several conference sub-themes:

The challenges of understanding social work across boundaries (2)

Integrating historical perspectives into the dynamics of social work development (4)

Developing analytic approaches to support the theorization of social work (6)



Exploring the iterative relationship between research and practice in creating knowledge that informs critical practice and policy action (7)

**Implications for Practice, Policy, and Further Research**

Our approach brings together distinct traditions of social work analysis to explore the dynamic between local, regional, and global influences on practice. It poses critical questions about the relationship between practice and context, and demonstrates how policy and practice interact iteratively in social work settings. We argue that combining local, international, and historical research enriches our understanding of social work in its various iterations—and reveals both the connections and fissures that make up different social work systems.

## Navigating Digital Transformation in Social Work: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Practice, Ethics, and Evidence

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The accelerating digital transformation of society is reshaping social work practice, research, and policy in profound ways. As digital technologies increasingly mediate relationships, communication, and service delivery, social work faces both new opportunities and pressing challenges. From artificial intelligence in social services to digital platforms for supervision, mediation, and inclusion, these innovations hold the potential to expand access, foster autonomy, and enhance participation. Yet, they simultaneously raise complex ethical questions about empathy, privacy, data security, and the preservation of meaningful human connection. This symposium critically explores how social work can engage with digitalisation in ways that remain aligned with its core values as defined by the IFSW and IASSW, while contributing to evidence-informed practice and policymaking.

This digital turn not only demands critical scrutiny of the tools and systems implemented but also invites reflection on the ethical and political dimensions of social work. The tension between efficiency-driven data logics and the profession's commitment to human rights, social justice, and empowerment is increasingly pronounced. As such, the contributions address how social workers navigate, contest, or adapt to the constraints and affordances of digital technologies within their practice environments. These dynamics call for approaches that bridge social work with other disciplines such as sociology, political science, and technology studies, generating critical insights that can inform policy and foster socially responsive innovations.

Bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives, the symposium situates digitalisation within broader debates on the future of welfare states and the societal implications of Industry 4.0. It examines how social work can act not only as a responder to technological change but also as an active agent in shaping digital futures that are inclusive, equitable, and contextually sensitive. The discussions will address the multi-layered dimensions of digital practice, ranging from virtual counseling and digital empathy to the use of AI-driven decision support systems and augmented reality tools to support people with diverse needs. In doing so, the symposium considers how to balance innovation with professional values, safeguard vulnerable populations, and ensure that digital solutions enhance rather than erode social justice and trust.

Moreover, the digital transformation of social protection and service systems has significant implications for education and professional development. Social workers are increasingly required to develop digital literacies, collaborate across new disciplinary boundaries, and critically assess the socio-technical systems shaping their work. The symposium engages with these demands, considering how social work education can equip practitioners with the

competencies necessary to operate within complex digital landscapes while advocating for just and inclusive policies.

Through theoretical, empirical, and practice-oriented contributions, this symposium will deepen understanding of how digitalisation transforms social work's professional identity and methodologies. It will explore how evidence on the impact and effectiveness of digital tools can inform future practice and policy, while also addressing the emotional and relational dimensions of working in increasingly technologized environments. Ultimately, the symposium aims to generate dialogue on how social work can contribute to creating fair, accessible, and transformative digital societies through interdisciplinary research, innovative methodologies, and ethically grounded practice.

## Bridging and Overcoming Disciplinary Boundaries for Ethical AI Integration in Social Work

Dr. Samuel Salovaara<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Marjo Outila<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Sanna Hautala<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Ville Heilala<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Marta Choroszewicz<sup>3</sup>, Mr. Tim Vanhove<sup>4</sup>, Assoc. Prof. Miroslavas Seniutis<sup>5</sup>, Mr. Artūras Sas<sup>5</sup>, Assoc. Prof. Valentas Gružasuskas<sup>5</sup>

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The implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in social work is not merely a technical innovation but part of a broader transformation involving social, professional, organizational, and ethical dimensions. AI-driven systems are introduced within dynamic environments shaped by rapidly evolving technologies, changing institutional structures, and wider societal developments. Consequently, practitioners and organizations must acquire new technological competences and steer their use across diverse practices and contexts.

These developments raise critical ethical questions concerning transparency, accountability, professional judgment, and the protection of clients' rights. AI in social work interacts with and sometimes disrupts established roles and values. Practitioners often navigate tensions between efficiency and care, data-driven models and professional judgment, or innovation and ethical safeguards. These tensions underscore the need for nuanced and critical analysis of AI integration in social work. As "Artificial Intelligence Enhanced Social Work" (Garkisch & Goldkind, 2025) envisions, AI has the potential to strengthen professional knowledge practices and client services. Yet for this vision to materialize, careful attention must be paid to the ethical dimensions of AI use within the specific operational contexts of social work.

This symposium examines the ethical implications of AI as both a professional tool and a client-facing interface in social work. We stress that adopting AI ethically in this field requires sustained interdisciplinary collaboration, connecting social work scholarship with insights from science and technology studies, law, computer science, organizational studies, sociology, and economics. Since addressing complex challenges calls for integrating knowledge from multiple scientific domains as well as non-academic sources, we also underscore the importance of involving stakeholders beyond academia (Giroux, 2014). This entails combining technical expertise with the lived experiences of practitioners and clients to ensure that digital tools are both ethically sound and responsive to real-world needs. By drawing on these diverse traditions, the symposium aims to advance a holistic understanding of AI within a sociotechnical system where social and technological dimensions are deeply interdependent (e.g., Pasmore 1995).

Through contributions from multiple disciplines and national contexts, the symposium will illuminate how AI is both shaping and being shaped by social work practices. It provides a platform to identify risks and challenges, such as issues of transparency, accountability, the burden of vigilance placed on practitioners, and client rights, while also exploring constructive pathways for responsible innovation. This symposium underlines that the future of AI in social work is not determined by technological capabilities alone but by the choices,

collaborations, skills, and values of those who design, implement, and critically engage with it. By fostering dialogue across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries, the symposium aims to contribute to responsible and ethically grounded ways of harnessing AI for the benefit of social work practice, research, and society at large.

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## Care Ethics and Caring Democracies: Care workers at the intersection of social, spatial, and professional im/mobilities

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This symposium applies care ethics as a transformative framework for understanding migrant care workers caring for older people across Europe. Care ethics understands the world as a series of interconnected relationships, and care as an ethical concept infused with moral and power relations. Through this lens, we present a comparative analysis spanning three European contexts, integrating perspectives from sociology, gerontology, social work, education, and social policy.

Migrant care workers occupy a paradoxical position within contemporary welfare states, being simultaneously viewed as essential solutions to the 'care deficit' but also problematised within negative migration narratives. This positioning reveals fundamental contradictions in how European societies conceptualise care, citizenship, and belonging across diverse operationalisations of welfare and migration systems.

As a normative framework, care ethics positions care as a fundamental human activity essential for maintaining and perpetuating life. Through its emphasis on relationality, interdependence, and moral responsibility as central to human existence, care ethics challenges the individualistic neoliberal frameworks that render migrant care workers as both essential and expendable. In this vein, the symposium examines the intersection between care work and social, professional, and spatial mobility. It shows how movements of (un)paid caregivers across national contexts, social hierarchies, and professionals' spheres (potentially) shape care relationships.

This symposium presents three interconnected papers that apply care ethics across different European contexts. Each paper uses theoretical vignettes and distinct qualitative methodologies to explore how care ethics can inform social work practice and policy at macro (policy frameworks), meso (community organisations), and micro (individual experience) levels. Together, the papers build towards a 'caring democracies' framework that expands democratic participation to include care relationships and recognises the political agency of migrant care workers.

The comparative analysis reveals how structural contradictions manifest differently yet follow a similar pattern - essential care workers face legal precarity, community-based solutions emerge from grassroots organisations, and policy frameworks struggle to reconcile care needs with migration control. Together, the three papers strengthen theoretical and practice frameworks by recognising migrant care workers not solely as vulnerable subjects but as active agents who navigate, resist, and transform systems despite structural constraints.

Finally, a synthesis of findings proposes a caring democracies framework extending democratic participation to encompass care relationships while recognising migrant care workers' political agency. This approach demonstrates how care ethics provides robust foundations for transforming social work practice with migrant care workers and social policy frameworks, advancing towards rights-based, participatory models that recognise both structural precarity and inherent agency.

The symposium ultimately argues that integrating care ethics into research, policy, and practice offers pathways toward more just and sustainable care systems that honour the expertise, rights, and contributions of migrant care workers.

## The Challenges of Complex Systems Change: Using Applied Social Work Research and Multidisciplinary Partnerships to Support the Establishment of Barnahus in Scotland.

Dr Carol Duncan, Dr Mary Mitchell, Dr Camille Warrington, Dr Christina McMellon, Ms Eilidh Lamb, Mr Andrew Dick, Mr Graeme Simpson, Ms Iona Mitchell, Ms Lindsay Jessiman, Ms Emma Cowieson, Ms Mary Glasgow

<sup>1</sup> University Of Edinburgh

‘Bairns’ Hoose’ (the Scottish iteration of the European Barnahus model) represents a new and highly significant example of systems change within Scotland, with social work at its heart. It responds to longstanding criticisms of responses to children in Scotland after an abuse disclosure – including the potential for re-traumatisation and poorly coordinated systems which fail to uphold children’s rights (SCTS, 2016; Health Improvement Scotland, 2023).

This symposium draws on research and evaluation in four Bairns’ Hoose sites. These include Scotland’s first Barnahus, led by a national children’s charity and opened in August 2023, alongside three other pilot sites led by local authority-headed (municipality) multidisciplinary partnerships and funded by Scottish Government as part of a national Bairns’ Hoose rollout. The symposium provides a unique opportunity to learn about social work research embedded in Barnahus implementation from its national inception, illustrating the formative contribution of social work research in multidisciplinary systems change.

The symposium contains four papers spanning social work theory, research methodology and key findings. It starts with the contribution of theory to this area of research in child-centred and rights-based thinking through the application of recognition theory (Honneth, 1998). It then explores the contribution of realist evaluation - and specifically realist programme theory - to co-creating knowledge within an interdisciplinary formative learning culture. It shares how this approach supports evidence-based practice and policy development for complex systems change.

The third paper considers the role of children and young people (including those with lived experiences of services) in Bairns’ Hoose research. This highlights how the rights-based values of an intervention can be mirrored and amplified through creative and participatory research practices. The symposium concludes with a focus on the impact of Bairns’ Hoose for addressing children’s recovery and mental health needs – conceptualised as one of the four ‘rooms’ that all Barnahus models seek to include when bringing multidisciplinary partners under ‘one roof’. This provides specific examples of how the model creates change for children and how programme theory surfaces gaps associated with those changes.

Throughout this symposium, the value of embedding social research and evaluation from the very beginnings of local and national systems change programmes will be foregrounded. In particular, this symposium will offer a unique opportunity to hear from strategic and operational leads at the heart of research and systems change in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, where this year’s ESWRA conference is taking place.



The symposium aligns with and contributes to key ESWRA conference themes through highlighting:

- the contribution of social work research to service development spanning disciplinary and professional boundaries;
- opportunities for social work research in contemporary and fast change service and policy contexts; and
- the co-creation of knowledge between researchers and multidisciplinary partners including social work practitioners, children and families.

The symposium group may also be able to facilitate Bairns' Hoose visits in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire for a small number of conference attendees.

**Keywords:** Barnahus, child maltreatment, children's voice, empowerment, multidisciplinary working, participatory research, programme theory, recognition, recovery, systems change, theorising practice

## Social Work in the Migration Policy Cycle: Evidence, Absence and Pathways for Policy Practice

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Although migration is one of the most pressing social and political issues in Europe today, social work in Portugal remains largely absent from policymaking arenas, with its role confined to implementing measures designed elsewhere. This symposium critically examines how the profession can strengthen its role within the migration policy cycle, drawing on empirical research and conceptual frameworks of policy practice (Wyvers, 1991; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013, 2024) and social policy analysis (Banks, 1999; Klammer, Leiber & Leitner, 2021). It highlights both the risks of professional invisibility and the opportunities for proactive engagement in shaping migration policies.

At the local level, diagnostic and planning projects reveal the potential of social work to contribute through participatory methodologies, policy advocacy and knowledge co-production, positioning the profession as a bridge between migrant communities, local organisations and decision-makers. By combining evidence, conceptual reflection and pedagogical perspectives, the symposium aims to foster an interdisciplinary debate on how social work can advance its policy voice in the field of migration.

The first paper analyses municipal diagnoses of migrant integration, showing how participatory research processes and mobilisation of local knowledge can open concrete opportunities for policy practice. The second paper addresses the structural barriers that explain the absence of social work in the migration policy cycle, discussing strategies for strengthening the profession's visibility and influence in policy arenas. The third paper focuses on undergraduate education and field placements, exploring how students' engagement with migrant organisations prepares them to confront exclusion and to contribute to evidence-informed policymaking.

Together, these three contributions illustrate the multiple dimensions—research, professional practice, and education—through which social work can intervene in migration policy. They highlight both challenges and possibilities: from the persistence of institutional hierarchies that limit professional influence, to the emergence of participatory and community-based methodologies that reinforce the role of social workers as policy actors. The symposium underscores the need to move beyond a narrow service-delivery role towards proactive forms of policy engagement. It demonstrates that social workers, through their proximity to communities and their expertise in advocacy and rights-based practice, are uniquely positioned to mediate between citizens and policymakers. By strengthening the profession's policy voice, social work can contribute to more inclusive, democratic and evidence-informed migration policies, advancing social justice and responding to contemporary migration challenges.

**Keywords:** Migration policies; Social Work; Policy practice; Education; Social justice.

## Sense and Sensibility in Social Work with Children and Families. European Perspectives on Developments in Child Protection and Welfare

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This symposium will explore the innovative “Sense and Sensibility” approach in social work, inspired by the recent book *Sense and Sensibility in Social Work: Families and Children: European Perspectives on Developments in Child Protection and Welfare*.

Bringing together leading experts from across Europe, it will explore theories and practical applications of this perspective on child protection and family well-being in Europe. We will examine how ‘sense’ - applying knowledge and reason within cultural and socio-political contexts - combines with ‘sensibility’ - focusing on relationships, cocreation, and trust-building - to transform social interventions.

The contributions to this symposium represent the ongoing search for more sensible and sustainable scientifically based ways of understanding and supporting the challenges faced by users of welfare services and social work as a profession.

The symposium is structured around four central themes, each addressed by two or three authors, fostering a rich, multi-perspective dialogue.

Firstly, focusing on ‘sensibility’ requires an examination of how actions become ‘sensible’ within facilitating organizational contexts. This approach necessitates two key elements: firstly, supporting decision-makers in adopting an intersectional understanding of reality; and secondly, promoting the widespread ability to manage reflective contexts at policy levels, both locally and nationally.

Giving down from the macro to the micro level, the symposium will discuss the role of social science in developing better social work. A focus will be dedicated to co-research, exploring the use of better assessments engaging with the life worlds of families and children. The experiences considered will demonstrate that knowledge building will always involve an encounter with the unknown which requires further inquiry. Social workers and researchers are obliged to develop the virtues of curiosity and the will to explore multiple worlds further. The need to build sustainable and participatory practices also includes respect for evaluative data, in the single case as well as in larger projects, that involve community settings. The need for sensitive and relevant measures to monitor and report is the arena

where the social work scientist meets the practitioner and the people they work with. New public management influenced approaches seldom include the measures needed to reveal the workings of human encounters over time and place – and promote measures that are too generic and not always necessary or tailored to specific situations. A blessing of good social science is that we only need the data necessary to reveal what is really happening, not all the same data all the time.

The symposium is an example of the possibilities that can emerge from a sustained commitment to networking. It offers just some glimpses into what our network offers today, but we know for sure that there are other interesting and innovative developments that may challenge as well as expand the knowledge we will present.

Our aim is to offer some inspiring input in a field where there is so much bad news often. We hope it offers encouragement to all committed to understanding how social work practices may help people survive and thrive in difficult times.

## Navigating Boundaries in Return Migration: Challenges and Opportunities for Transnational Social Work

Prof. Dr. Claudia Olivier-Mensah<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Luzia Jurt<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Dr. Kaltrina Kusari<sup>3</sup>, Prof. Dr. Christine A. Walsh<sup>4</sup>, Prof. Dr. Lisa Marie Borrelli<sup>5</sup>, Martina Ambruso<sup>5</sup>, Francesca Morra<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Gjakova, <sup>4</sup> Faculty of Social Work University of Calgary,

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This symposium is submitted by the SIG „Transnational Social Work“ (TRANSOW). It focuses on return migration as one of the most complex and underexplored dimensions of global mobility, posing significant challenges for transnational social work theory and practice.

Return migration represents one of the most complex and underexplored dimensions of contemporary global mobility, presenting unique challenges for transnational social work practice. As individuals and families navigate returning to their countries of origin—whether voluntarily or involuntarily—they encounter multifaceted boundaries spanning cultural, social, economic, legal, and psychological domains. This symposium addresses the critical need to examine how social work can effectively respond to these complexities within an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world.

Within transnational social work frameworks, practitioners must develop innovative approaches that transcend geographical boundaries while remaining sensitive to local contexts and the voluntary or involuntary nature of each return trajectory. This requires reconceptualization of practice methods, ethical frameworks, and collaborative strategies that effectively bridge origin and destination countries while adapting interventions based on whether individuals return with agency and choice or through coercive processes beyond their control. The symposium explores how social workers can develop culturally responsive interventions that acknowledge the transnational nature of returnees' experiences.

As European countries grapple with shifting migration patterns—including voluntary return programs, forced deportations, and spontaneous returns driven by economic or political changes—social workers find themselves at the forefront of supporting individuals and communities navigating these transitions. The symposium addresses critical gaps in current research and practice, exploring how return migration challenges existing theoretical frameworks in social work, particularly regarding concepts of empowerment, self-determination, and cultural competence in transnational contexts.

The symposium exists of three presentations and demonstrate the multidimensional nature of return migration and its implications for social work practice, education, and policy development. In detail:

1. Navigating Transnational Boundaries in Social Work: A Case Study of Return and Reintegration from Germany to Senegal Prof. Dr. Luzia Jurt
2. Professional and Cultural Boundaries in Return Migration Counselling: Challenges for Social Work Practice in Germany Prof. Dr. Claudia Olivier-Mensah

3. Legal Practices of Exclusion and Deportation through the Perspective of Social Workers – Obligations to Report and Expanded Policing in Everyday Social Work Practice Prof. Dr. Lisa Marie Borrelli, Martina Ambruso and Francesca Morra

These contributions examine experiences across three reception countries (Sweden, Switzerland, and Germany) and different countries of origin including Kosovo and West African nations. By bringing together diverse perspectives from researchers and practitioners working in different European contexts, the symposium fosters dialogue about innovative practice models, collaborative frameworks, and policy recommendations that can enhance support provided to return migrants.

This symposium contributes to advancing transnational social work by providing evidence-based insights into effective intervention strategies based on inter- and transdisciplinary research projects, highlighting the importance of cross-border professional collaboration, and identifying areas for future research and practice development.

The outcomes will be valuable for practitioners, academics, and policymakers seeking to develop more comprehensive and effective approaches to supporting return migrants in their reintegration processes.

## Reclaiming the Social in Social Work: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Individualisation, Relationality, and Solidarity

Professor Mark Smith<sup>4</sup>, Dr Tiina Sotkasiira<sup>3</sup>, Mr Sebastian Monteux<sup>1</sup>, Dr Mie Engen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abertay University, <sup>2</sup> Aalborg University, <sup>3</sup> University of Eastern Finland, <sup>4</sup> University of Dundee

The relational and social dimensions of social work and social pedagogy have been central since the emergence of the “social professions” in the late nineteenth century (Lorenz, 2004; Parton, 2008; Philp, 1979). Historically, these professions sought to foster cohesion, inclusion, and solidarity in the face of complex social, political, and economic challenges. Yet in an age of rapid technological change, economic precarity, and shifting institutional norms, there is growing concern that the very concept of the “social” is being eroded from both discourse and practice. This symposium explores the implications of this erosion for social work research, practice, policy, and education, and considers how a social pedagogical orientation (Lorenz, 2008) might help reclaim and reimagine the social foundations of the profession.

Across diverse fields, social work practice has become increasingly individualised, pathologised, and decontextualised. Frameworks such as attachment, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and Trauma-Informed Care (TIC), while often well-intentioned, foreground psychological or clinical paradigms at the expense of community-based, relational, and socially transformative approaches (Smith, Monteux & Cameron, 2021). These developments risk narrowing professional identity and obscuring social work’s mandate to sustain solidarity and support social cohesion under radically changing social, political, and economic conditions (Lorenz, 2004).

The four papers in this symposium critically examine these dynamics. The first situates the rise of TIC within broader shifts in evidence-informed practice, arguing that its psy-centric orientation risks reducing suffering to a technical problem of regulation while displacing relational and political perspectives. The second explores immigrant integration in Finland, highlighting how dominant approaches construct agency in highly individualised terms and proposing sociality as a relational and structurally conditioned alternative. The third investigates the contested principle of the “best interests of the child” in Danish child protection, analysing how decisions around permanent placement and adoption are shaped by professional practices that insufficiently attend to structural inequality and relational solidarity. The fourth traces the cultural dominance of the modern “self,” examining how therapeutic and psychological discourses elevate autonomy and emotion while diminishing social context, common purpose, and the collective foundations of social welfare, and argues for alternatives grounded in the Aristotelian and Thomist idea of the common good.

Taken together, these contributions foreground how the “social” is being marginalised across different areas of practice and theory, while also pointing towards constructive alternatives. They demonstrate the potential of social pedagogy as an interdisciplinary approach that re-centres relationality, community, and solidarity in practice, policy, and education. By foregrounding the social dimensions of care, integration, protection, and welfare, the symposium contributes to debates on the identity of social work as a profession,

the interdisciplinary co-creation of evidence-informed knowledge, and the renewal of an idea of practice in an age of austerity, complexity, and technocratic governance.

This symposium therefore, invites critical reflection on what is lost when the social is overlooked, and how integrating social pedagogy as a theoretical and practical resource can strengthen social work's interdisciplinary engagement with research, policy, and education, revitalise its evidence base, and reassert its capacity for socially transformative practice.



## Emerging Transdisciplinarity: Co-Creative Social Work Research and Education with Experts by Experience

Prof. Dr. Marlene-Anne Dettmann<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Katrin Bain<sup>2</sup>, M.A. Katharina Scholz<sup>1</sup>, Gisela Meier<sup>3</sup>, Prof. Dr. Monika Götzö, Izr. Prof. Dr. Petra Videmšek

<sup>1</sup> Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, <sup>2</sup> London Metropolitan University, <sup>3</sup> ZHAW School of Social Work

In social work practice, research, and education, the integration of voices from people with lived experience (Pwle) is gaining momentum. Their involvement is reshaping how knowledge is produced, shared, and taught. Across Europe, this has led to innovative and collaborative projects (Driessens & Lyssens-Danneboom, 2023). This symposium builds on these developments and fosters cross-national exchange and learning.

Traditionally, Pwle perspectives were collected through interviews or surveys and presented by academics, often as case studies. In contrast, the projects presented in this symposium position Pwle as co-creators of knowledge. This shift challenges conventional expert roles and expands the epistemological foundations of social work.

To ensure coherence across the three contributions, all papers will be discussed using a shared framework: levels of participation in Citizen Science (Göbel et al., 2020). This model allows us to analyse and compare the degree of involvement of Pwle—from contributory roles to full co-production—and to reflect on the implications for research and education.

The symposium emphasizes transdisciplinary collaboration, which goes beyond interdisciplinary approaches by integrating diverse knowledge systems. Drawing on the concept of “intersecting knowledges” (ATD Fourth World), we recognise experienced expertise, institutional knowledge, academic insight, and professional practice as equally valuable. This plurality influences research design, educational settings, and outcomes. Sustainability in this context refers not only to long-term impact but also to inclusive and just knowledge production.

The first contribution explores the integration of Pwle in higher education in England, analysing how service users contribute to curriculum development and teaching, and discussing the transferability of these practices to other countries. The second paper presents findings from a participatory evaluation of social services in Zurich, Switzerland, where service users are actively involved in assessing service quality and relevance. Methodological challenges and opportunities are reflected upon using the participation model. The third paper focuses on knowledge production in Slovenia through the involvement of people with lived experience of mental health crises, highlighting how co-research with Pwle can transform both the research process and its outcomes, and considering how participation levels evolve over time.

The symposium provides ample space for dialogue between presenters and participants. By applying a common analytical lens, we aim to deepen understanding of participatory approaches and their potential for sustainable, transdisciplinary social work research and education.

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## Ecosocial Work in Practice: Findings from Multi-Sited Exploratory Case Study Research in Italy

Prof. Dr. Urban Nothdurfter<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Elena Allegri<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Dr. Luca Fazzi<sup>3</sup>,  
Prof. Dr. Andrea Bilotti<sup>4</sup>, Prof. Dr. Alessandro Sicora<sup>3</sup>, Prof. Dr. Marco Accorinti<sup>4</sup>,  
Prof. Dr. Davide Galesi<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Maria Chiara Pedroni<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Deborah Fraccaro<sup>3</sup>,  
PhD cand. Luca Pavani<sup>2</sup>, PhD cand. Riccardo Bavastro

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Ecosocial work has emerged as an important and thought-provoking field that invites social work research to explore how social work can engage in broader processes of ecosocial transformation and contribute to promoting wellbeing, resilience, and change in contemporary contexts marked by profound social and ecological injustices. However, despite growing attention to this topic, the debate on ecosocial work remains largely normative, often invoking the ethical and professional responsibility of social work in addressing ecosocial challenges, while lacking deeper conceptual, methodological, and contextual elaborations that would allow for a more robust understanding of how ecosocial practices develop and unfold their transformative potential. Research contributions in the field often remain analytically weak, providing more descriptive accounts of diverse practices without sufficiently advancing evidence-informed analysis and conceptual refinement.

The proposed symposium aims to contribute to a better understanding of ecosocial work in practice, building on a national research project funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research and involving researchers from four Italian universities. While ecosocial approaches have so far played only a marginal role in Italian social work debates, diverse practices can be identified as ecosocial work, emerging mostly from grassroots initiatives or integrated efforts of local welfare actors and institutions. Characterised by fragmented welfare policies, the pivotal role of third sector organisations in providing innovative services, and a strong tradition of grassroots experimentation, the Italian case can indeed offer valuable insights into the emergence of ecosocial work practices as well as the enabling and constraining conditions for their consolidation and upscaling within local welfare contexts. The project identified key aspects and questions for better understanding whether, how, and under what conditions ecosocial approaches can take root in social work practice and realise their transformative potential at a systemic level. Using an exploratory, multi-sited case study design, the project examined motivations and opportunities for developing ecosocial practices within community settings and local welfare contexts, highlighting implications on ecosocial imaginaries and professional identities as well as enabling and limiting factors of ecosocial transformation and sustainable local welfare development. Empirical material was collected through site visits, different types of documents, and – as the most comprehensive source – 102 semi-structured interviews with ecosocial workers and related professionals, service users, local administrators and other stakeholders. Collected data were analysed applying data driven thematic analysis allowing for the combination of predefined analytical focuses, inductive coding and categorisation as well as abductive reasoning.

After a brief introduction to the aims and methodology of the project, four symposium contributions will present and discuss the project's findings relating to its main thematic focuses. The symposium contributes to the further development of a research agenda in the field of ecosocial work by exploring and highlighting aspects that have so far received little attention, while emphasising stronger empirical grounding and the inclusion of diverse and interdisciplinary approaches.

## Mothering in War: Bearing the Burden, Carrying the Future

Professor Cindy Sousa<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Nataliia Gusak, Prof. Bree Akesson,  
Prof. Ashley Stewart-Tufescu

<sup>1</sup> University Of Washington, Tacoma, <sup>2</sup> University of Alaska Anchorage School of Social Work,

<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Laurier University, <sup>4</sup> University of Manitoba

There has been considerable attention in social work paid to the ways parenting - particularly mothering - ensures children's healthy development within adversity. Yet, in part because of a siloed approach to understanding the intersections of political violence, childhood/ motherhood, and well-being, most of the research and practice within social work still tends to center children apart from their families and societies, rather than the subjective social-political experiences and personhood of mothers. Social work centered on families is therefore still largely characterized by a narrowly conceptualized, myopic focus on the child, eclipsing mothers's practices of survival and resistance. Through mobilizing a deliberately inter- and cross- disciplinary practice that integrates social work research with lessons and theories from traditions within peace and conflict studies, feminist theory, sociology, and psychology, here we attend to mothers in settings of war and protracted conflict, exploring how navigate misery and oppression for and with their children - as well as the costs of this motherwork to mother's well-being. In so doing, we move beyond white, Western conceptions of motherhood that take for granted security and privilege not afforded to most women around the world. Following the need to take seriously the subjecthood and intersectional positionality of women who mother within hostile and dangerous environments, in the work presented here, we explore motherhood across the fraught social-political environments of the most burdened women and families within wars and political violence. We begin with our framing, exploring mothering across time and place with a particular focus on mothering within violent and oppressive contexts, thereby detailing what Scheper-Hughes (1993) termed "the pragmatics of motherhood". We then move to our case studies: mothers in Palestine, who have endured terror and repression across multiple generations; Rohingya mothers fleeing violence and living in refugee camps impacted by climate change in Bangladesh; and mothers who have fled assaults on Ukraine. Using evidence from qualitative research conducted by the presenters, this roundtable will illustrate the ways that motherhood is both threatened and amplified within these settings. The first presenter will lead the symposium off by sharing findings from a comprehensive and systematic global scoping review of literature about parenting within political violence, followed by findings from more than two decades of qualitative investigation among mothers in Palestine. The second presenters will report findings from a longitudinal study on the perinatal experiences of Rohingya mothers in Bangladesh. The last presenter will present findings from a qualitative project focused on Ukrainian mothers recently resettled in the United States and Canada. Presenters will close with a discussion drawing together the themes and implications for interdisciplinary social work practice, policy, and research with women and families.

## Using Multidisciplinary Arts-Based Research to Amplify Voices and to Shape Policy:

Prof. Ephrat Huss, Dr Offer Edelstein, Dr Ephrat Huss, Dr Nesrien Abu Ghazaleh, Dr Birgit Forner

### Rationale and Alignment with Conference Themes

Arts-based research has become a recognized participatory methodology within social work in recent years. Its capacity to embody and amplify marginalized voices (as a research method); to articulate community and cultural values (as a research subject); to influence powerholders (as a research outcome); and to empower participants (as a process) has been well documented in both research and practice. ( In this sense, arts-based research not only aligns with the fundamental aims of social work practice but also provides an innovative evaluative method. This directly reflects the conference theme of using social work research to inform practice, amplify voices, demand social justice, and shape policy.

On the micro level, the dual processes of excavating and creatively depicting lived experience, followed by interpreting and sharing it with others, significantly strengthen the voice of the research participant as expert. On the macro level, in our times of social unrest and political uncertainty, community arts have demonstrated their potential to empower marginalized communities, challenge political structures, and enhance both individual and civic resilience (Harrington, 2004; Huss & Boss, 2017; Padilla et al., 2024; Williams, 1995). Interdisciplinary Social Arts (SA) projects—where artists or art therapists collaborate with social and community workers in urban spaces—foster encounters between embodied self-expression, community building, place attachment, and civic discourse. In doing so, they generate direct communal and social impact beyond traditional research settings (Mkwanzani & Cin, 2021; Shefi et al., 2022).

The aim of this symposium is to present three studies that demonstrate the impact of arts-based methods across diverse social work contexts: (1) with the elderly, (2) with youth, and (3) with social work students. Together, these cases highlight how arts-based methods function as interdisciplinary research approaches that not only evaluate and communicate impact but also simultaneously foster empowerment and social change.

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## The Role of Social Work Research in Advocating for Transnational Families

Ozan Selcuk<sup>1</sup>, Mieke Schrooten<sup>2</sup>, Bekir Guzel<sup>1</sup>, Aleksandar Bozic<sup>3</sup>, Anne Ramos<sup>4</sup>, Ute Karl<sup>5</sup>, Nadine Kuklau<sup>6</sup>, Simon Moses Schleimer<sup>6</sup>, Katharina Maria Lex<sup>7</sup>

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Transnational families, where core members live across national borders yet maintain deep-seated family ties, represent a significant and growing population in Europe. This symposium directly addresses the profound personal and systemic challenges these families face, which are often exacerbated by social policies and services that fail to recognize their unique circumstances. Organized on behalf of the COST Action “Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe” (TraFaDy), this session brings together an interdisciplinary group of European researchers to explore how social work research can be a powerful catalyst for advocacy, humane policy reform, and meaningful social justice. Our central argument is that understanding the lived realities of transnational families through rigorous research is fundamental to developing effective, compassionate, and rights-based social work practices that respond to one of contemporary Europe’s most pressing human and social dynamics. The four papers in this symposium are carefully selected to provide a multi-faceted yet cohesive exploration of the central theme, moving from broad evidence synthesis to deeply human, critical case studies. The two scoping reviews (Selcuk & Guzel; Bozic & Ramos) systematically map the existing landscape of social work interventions, advocacy strategies, and psychosocial services for transnational families and their children. This provides a vital, evidence-informed foundation for practice and policy. Building on this, subsequent papers delve into two acutely vulnerable contexts. Karl’s research examines the precarious realities of live-in migrant carers in Germany, exposing how legal and policy frameworks create dilemmas, impacting their ability to care for their own family members who remained behind. Kuklau et al. focus on the profoundly emotional and logistically daunting issue of end-of-life care, a critical life-course moment where transnational families face heightened risks of social injustice at a time of immense grief. Together, these papers create a powerful narrative that illuminates the human consequences at the intersection of migration, care, policy, and social work across the lifespan. Each presentation makes a unique contribution while reinforcing the symposium’s core message: that research must serve advocacy. The reviews by Selcuk & Guzel and Bozic & Ramos offer a much-needed synthesis of intervention models across Europe, identifying critical gaps in services for adults and children alike. These reviews set the stage for Karl’s paper, which provides a tangible, ground-level example of the urgent need for advocacy and policy development. Finally, Kuklau et al.’s paper highlights the profound human challenges at the end of life, demanding compassionate, interdisciplinary solutions and policy changes to support families during their most vulnerable times. This symposium offers a timely and critical contribution to the European social work research community. By bridging systematic reviews with in-depth analyses of specific vulnerable groups, it will foster a crucial and compassionate dialogue on the future of social work in an increasingly mobile Europe. We will not only present new research but also challenge the audience to consider their role in advocating for policies that recognize and support the full humanity and complex realities of transnational family life, resonating strongly with the conference’s core focus on advancing social justice and evidence-informed practice.

# | Workshops |



## Writing for publication workshop

Dr Elizabeth Frost, Professor Elaine Sharland, Professor Lars Uggerhoj, Dr Ana Sobocan

<sup>1</sup> UWE Bristol, <sup>2</sup> Professor Emerita of Social Work Research, University of Sussex, <sup>3</sup> Professor of Social Work, Aalborg University, <sup>4</sup> Dr and Associate Professor of Social Work University of Ljubljana

This workshop is intended to make a practical contribution for all researchers interested in writing for publication in academic social work and interdisciplinary journals. All members of the presentation team have experience as editors of European journals in these fields.

The session aims to introduce challenges, opportunities and some core principles of writing for publication to doctoral students and early career researchers – who may be beginning their journey from research to the processes of knowledge dissemination – and as a refresher for those who have already published and are keen to continue further. The session will also offer specific information and support in relation to publishing in ESWRA's journal, *European Social Work Research*, and a chance to explore the complex issues relating to the uses and abuses of AI in writing for publication.

Drawing on the experience of the editors, and encouraging participants to draw on their own experience of being, or seeking to be, published, we will engage in a dialogue with prospective authors to encourage and support this sometimes daunting pursuit. We anticipate the workshop will make a practical contribution to the ESWRA research community, and to the overall conference theme and subthemes 1 and 7.

Firstly the workshop will consider the core skills needed to successfully construct a paper for academic publication, including how to plan, structure and present such articles. Having given participants the opportunity to pose questions and reflect on their own experience, we will offer some ideas that may support this endeavour, from the perspective of what reviewers and editors are likely to expect. The second section of the workshop will consider the general ethos of, and some specific requirements in relation to, *European Social Work Research*. It will highlight the core aims of the Journal: to advance European social work research scholarship and debate, and to publish wide ranging empirical research and methodological and theoretical studies that may inform and be informed by social work policy and practice. It will also present the Journal's peer review processes and criteria for publication. The final section will introduce a discussion on issues relating to the use of AI in contemporary academic publishing. It will address challenges and opportunities associated with AI's potential benefits, risks and impact on research integrity, and will offer practical advice to help researchers uphold ethical standards and good practice in their research writing for publication. Each section of the workshop will include space for questions and discussion.

# Group Policy Reflection - researching discretion and policy practice

[Professor Tony Evans<sup>1</sup>](#), [Dr Hannah Jobling<sup>2</sup>](#)

<sup>1</sup> Royal Holloway University of London, <sup>2</sup> University of York

## 1. Overview

Discretion and policy practice have emerged as important areas of research in professional practice. This workshop introduces Group Policy Reflection—an approach that helps practitioners to scope and analyze their discretion and consider its uses strategically in policy practice—and considers its potential as a method for researching discretion and as a tool in critical action research.

## 2. Workshop Structure

- Introduction

The workshop will start with a brief introduction to Group Policy Reflection (GPR), focusing on its role in understanding discretion in action: describing the factors creating, promoting and limiting discretion, identifying practitioners' perceptions of their discretionary agency, and considering practical responses to policy issues. The presentation will include time for discussion to clarify and explore the process, including the culture of group reflection and the values of democratic knowledge generation.

- Exploring discretion in context

The second section will examine how researchers can use GPR to identify opportunities and limitations for policy discretion within a given context. It will also explore how the approach can generate data on how practitioners perceive their policy agency. Group discussions will allow participants to engage with the approach and identify critical issues in its use as a research strategy. A plenary session will gather feedback and consider how this method could align with focus group approaches.

- Responding to policy in context

The third section will explore how the strategic policy response aspect of Group Policy Reflection could contribute to action-oriented research. It will consider its possible roles in activating practitioners' policy practice and in drawing on their insights to co-produce practical policy responses. Group discussions and plenary feedback will be used to collect key learning points.

- Conclusion and networking

The final section will summarize the workshop's key points and explore networking opportunities to develop the approach in research contexts.

### 3. Relevance to Conference Themes

This workshop aligns with the overall theme of the conference by focusing on the development of evidence-informed practice and policy. It addresses specific subthemes, including:

- Developing methods in social work research (8)
- Theorizing policy and practice as fundamentally interconnected (6)
- Linking research and practice through the co-creation of policy knowledge (7)
- Crossing boundaries between social work and policy research (2)

### 4. Contribution to Research and Practice

Group Policy Reflection offers a novel approach to researching social work discretion. It enables the collection of rich, complex data on the nature of policy discretion within practice contexts and helps identify local understandings of discretion and how it should be used—what might be called the “culture of discretion.” Its active problem-solving component makes it well-suited to action-oriented research, empowering practitioners to define opportunities and limitations for change and to co-create both analysis and responses.

## Decoloniality as Radical Social Work Education and Practice

Prof Marcin Boryczko<sup>1</sup>, Prof Linda Harms Smith<sup>2</sup>, Prof Melinda Madew<sup>3</sup>, Wendy Derynck<sup>4</sup>

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While it is true to claim that geopolitical colonisation has ended, the impact of colonisation and the power of ongoing coloniality extends far beyond the borders of past colonial contexts. And social work finds itself situated within these embedded structures and power matrices of racist dehumanisation, inferiorisation and alienation; hegemonic Western Eurocentrism; and aggressive capitalist exploitation (de Souza Santos 2014; Fanon 1967; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Lugones, 2020). The multiple and entangled crises that emerge within this context of ongoing coloniality and that call forth a social work response include extreme inequality and poverty; the climate and ecological crisis; relentless war and genocides; and the forced displacement of peoples. This paper will argue that a critical and radical social work is required to resist and disrupt the embedded structures of coloniality that shape these crises of our age (Quijano 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2017). This workshop will engage on questions around the meaning and impact of ongoing coloniality, interrogating social work's ideological positioning from a critical and radical perspective. Resisting hegemonic white Western knowledges (Almeida and Khumalo, 2018), it will propose a pluriversal position (Miettinen et al. 2023; Mbembe 2016) which encourages transformative, traditional knowledges and practices, and offer examples of how these may be utilised. Despite social work's claim that it is a social justice profession, it seems that it is only such dissenting social work knowledge and practice that offers hope for contributing to a better world beyond coloniality, characterised by solidarity, equality, and interconnectedness.

## How to do it! Modalities and conditions for interdisciplinary research collaboration involving social work

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The objective of this interactive workshop is to compile collaboration experiences from workshop participants and make emerge interdisciplinary working conditions, collaboration modalities and to scope the strengths of social work in terms of skills, foundational concepts, and methods to engage in and benefit from interdisciplinary research collaboration. This compilation will lead to a participatory toolkit for social work researchers and their partners that will be launched during the workshop on a digital platform and intends to be curated further in a participatory manner.

The workshop will be based on an initial presentation by the workshop conveners who are currently involved in three interdisciplinary research projects involving field partners and the disciplines of engineering, management and architecture funded by their university to foster interdisciplinary academic activities. These inputs allow for operationalizing interdisciplinarity in concrete practices within the projects:

- Spatial and organizational transformation of a socio-professional integration center
- Development of environmental, social and governance criteria for SMEs
- Development of a steering instrument for municipalities towards a more sustainable future

The workshop facilitators have developed diverse working modalities, ranging from multi- to inter-, and even trans-disciplinarity, within their research activities. The practices adopted largely depend on the specific conditions of each project, such as research objectives, composition of the team, domains involved and the intentions guiding the team's choice of approach.

This impulse comes at a time when disciplinary and research training in general do not yet involve capacity building for interdisciplinary collaboration. Yet, social work is inherently interdisciplinary in its approach to research and practice, especially in relation to social and health sciences and is equipped with skills to facilitate collaborative processes. Indeed, social work brings relational and contextual perspectives that are often lacking in more technical disciplines. Nevertheless, there is scope for social work to position itself more confidently and to collaborate beyond the mentioned sciences to tackle complex and wicked problems to promote sustainability and well-being. Furthermore, interdisciplinary engagements offer social work an opening or deepening of new fields of work (ex. sustainability, urban governance etc).

The workshop interaction will be moderated in a fishbowl conversation format to keep the interaction dynamic and lively, while allowing for participants to change roles as contributors and observers. The contributions will be made visible through live note-taking regarding;

- (1) How to work together concretely (tools, space, tips and tricks etc.)
- (2) Facilitating or hindering conditions (ex. different temporalities, creating semantic fields of understanding, implicit hierarchies, etc.)
- (3) Strengths of social work to engage in and/or facilitate collaboration.

The workshop will contribute to the conference sub-themes 1, 2, 7 and 8 in mapping challenges and opportunities for social work research and practice by delineating experiences of engaging across disciplinary boundaries through co-creation of knowledge and promoting methodological development, innovative partnerships and research outputs.

The compilation of the experiences from the workshop conveners and participants will allow to conceive a toolkit for the benefit of social work researchers and their partners to inspire “how to collaborate” in settings of crossing, adding or merging disciplinary boundaries.

## Navigating AI: A Roadmap for a responsible AI Integration in Social Work and Social Economy Organizations

MMag. Maria-Clarissa Canete<sup>1</sup>, DI Ursula Muellner<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hochschule Campus Wien University of Applied Sciences

To ensure professional and sustainable social work and a resilient social economy, it is essential that organizations recognize the technological and transformational developments of AI and to address them with appropriate and timely measures. But what is necessary to consider in order to positively link Industry 4.0 and digital welfare state?

In the context of a research project in 2024, recommendations for the implementation and use of AI in organization of the Social Economy were being identified. For this purpose, about 100 students of the Master's programme in Social Economy and Social Work were interviewed and their expertise, opinions and experiences collected after a 3-day conference on the topic of "AI in the Social Economy" with international Key-Note-Speakers, workshops, panel discussion etc. The work experience from the students range from young professionals to experts, managers, CEOs with many years of experience in Social Organizations; hence are very insightful when it comes to AI and its practical use. The collected data was analysed based on a qualitative content analysis.

Identified recommendations for the use of AI include for example:

- creating courage for change,
- preserving the human elements,
- understanding and demanding the role of leadership/management in relation to AI,
- interdisciplinary participation,
- establishing ethical guidelines,
- advocating for ecological sustainability,
- using AI in compliance with legal and data protection regulations.

These findings provide crucial principles and form an important foundation for implementing/working with AI and fulfilling fundamental ethical values of social work regarding social justice, inclusion and participation. It is essential to understand the importance of active participation, driving innovation rather than passively reacting to external changes.

The workshop design includes different pedagogical methods:

- Introduction and presentation on the research project and the recommendations on the use of AI in the Social Economy
- Group work: Participants split into groups of 4-5 and form topic tables on the recommendations. These will be discussed, explored in greater depth (challenges, tools), experiences and „good practices“ will be shared. Insights, further recommendations are collected and visualized on flip charts
- Group presentations and Gallery-Walk

- Open discussion and joint reflection
- An online-poll will be used to summarize/prioritize the key insights

The aim of the workshop and relevance to the ECSWR 2026 is to raise awareness among professionals in the Social Work and Economy on the topic of AI, to promote and strengthen AI literacy by developing new critical knowledge, to exchange, critically discuss important aspects of the practical and suitable use of AI. The interactive format encourages networking and potential future collaborations.

Canete Maria-Clarissa, Muellner Ursula

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## The AI tsunami: Exploring generative artificial intelligence in the academic publishing pipeline, a journal editor dialog

Professor [Lauri Goldkind](#)<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Bryan Victor, Dr. Gloria Kirwan, Dr. Gary Spolander, Dr. Richard Ingram

<sup>1</sup> Fordham

### Background and purpose

Editors of interdisciplinary and social work journals have observed how generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is reshaping scholarly communication, noting promising applications that enhance research accessibility as well as concerning uses raising questions about authorship and scholarly integrity. Editors have had limited opportunity to share these experiences collectively with researchers about responsible GAI use. This workshop allows social work journal editors to share insights and explore GAI's appropriate role in scholarly communication. We will examine GAI use in knowledge production and its ethics. This workshop is intended for anyone interested in academic publishing including students, faculty, researchers, editors and publishers.

### Main points:

The workshop will include four main elements:

1. **Welcome and Orientation:**

Brief introductions and overview of the workshop's interactive format. Participants will be encouraged to be active participants through the session, as the goal is creating an environment of collective intelligence rather than one-way information sharing about GAI's role in social work scholarship.

2. **Participant Experiences:**

Next we will have facilitated small group discussions where participants share their observations of GAI use in social work scholarship—both helpful applications and concerning uses they've encountered in the key stakeholder groups of the publication process: editorial, author, reviewer, and mentor. Groups will identify key themes and questions to bring forward for editorial perspective.

3. **Editorial Responses and Guidance:**

The editors will synthesize and summarize the themes and questions raised by participants, sharing their observations of GAI patterns in submissions and offering practical advice about disclosure practices, appropriate use cases, quality indicators, and common pitfalls. The goal is to foster a dialogue grounded in participant experiences and editorial insights.

#### 4. **Collective Reflection:**

Lastly, the editors will host a facilitated discussion exploring fundamental questions about GAI's place in scholarly communication. The key questions to be interrogated include: When does GAI enhance versus diminish research value? How do we balance efficiency gains with authenticity concerns? What principles should guide GAI use decisions across different research and writing aspects? When should GAI be explicitly prohibited within the research and dissemination process?

#### **Alignment with Conference Aims**

This workshop addresses the conference theme through its focus on the practical impact of GAI on social work research quality and credibility. Methodological rigor affects whether social work contributions inform interdisciplinary work. We'll explore how GAI enhances knowledge translation, helping social work researchers communicate through clearer abstracts, executive summaries, or audience-specific adaptations. Our moderator is the editor of the *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, providing interdisciplinary editorial perspective.

#### **Conclusion**

Generative AI transforms social work scholarship, raising questions about publication ethics and author accountability. Based on participant reflection, we'll develop principles for journal guidelines regarding GAI (non)use. We'll identify questions for investigation: GAI's effects on research rigor and critical thinking development. The goal of the workshop is to harness the collective wisdom of attendees to consider whether and how GAI adoption can preserve scholarly communication integrity and maintain social work's role in generating credible evidence for interdisciplinary practice and policy.

## Empowerment by co-creation: researching vulnerable groups with LEGO® Serious Play®

Dr. Agnes Kriszan<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Alexandra Engel<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HAWK University of Applied Sciences Hildesheim-Holzminde-Göttingen

### Workshop

LEGO® Serious Play® (LSP) is a co-creative approach to develop joint ideas, visions, and scenarios and to reflect on them. In recent debates on its applicability in practice and research, the specific potential of LSP is seen in its ability to unveil ideas, experiences and views in a way that cannot be caught by verbal and conventional participation methods (Kriszan/Nienaber 2024: 2).

For Social Work Research, LSP is especially valuable as

1. it offers a methodological framework to integrate different disciplinary and also professional perspectives and merges them into shared understandings of research agendas, strategies, visions etc.;
2. it can be used for case-related work as well as for group or community work to visualize and discuss diverging interests;
3. it is a co-creative and highly participative approach, dissolving hierarchies and power structures.

By building three-dimensional models with LEGO® bricks and a subsequent storytelling, participants are driven to transform abstract or intangible concepts which are inherent in their minds into concrete and generally comprehensible ideas and artifacts.

The results co-created within LSP processes have strong transformative power as they build upon individual knowledge on the one side, and on group consent on the other. Individual LSP experiences enhance self-efficacy and empower especially vulnerable people who suffer from being overlooked, ignored, or marginalized. This makes it, from practical perspective, especially valuable for community work in different spatial and also cultural contexts.

Furthermore, LSP is also a suitable approach to lay ground for social innovations as it intends to achieve results that go beyond the status quo. The guiding question in LSP processes is not “What has to be changed?”, but rather “How can we change?”. This idea is congruent to the mandate of Social Work to act as an enabler of social change. In connection with a thorough documentation, ideally by videography, LSP can also be used as qualitative research method that appears low-threshold to certain groups (e.g. youth), but anyhow delivering deep insights into individual thinking and also group dynamics.

The interactive workshop will consist of three parts:

1. oral introduction into LSP and its methodological framework (15 min.);
2. a practical LSP session (60 min.)

### 3. a methodological reflection (15 min.).

The workshop is limited to a maximum of 15 participants.

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## Doing Real-Life Change in Children's Social Care: Embedded Research in Practice

[Dr Jenny Lloyd](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Dr Rachael Owens](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Durham University

This workshop will engage participants in institutional ethnography methods and how they can be successfully used to change social care systems. Relating directly to the sub-theme of 'linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge', the session is aimed at researchers, scholars, practitioners and students interested in embedded research methods for system change. We will explore how the theoretical framework 'Contextual Safeguarding' - a child protection approach to creating safety for youth experiencing harm in community settings - has moved from an idea to an international programme of interdisciplinary research through close collaboration between children's social care professionals and researchers.

The workshop is aimed at two groups, namely those interested in:

- Learning about applied research methods such as embedded research, institutional ethnography and relational evaluation.
- Developing systems change approaches in social care for addressing youth-harm including adolescent violence, trafficking, gender-based violence and other forms of extra-familial youth harm.

Through presentation, small-group discussion and interactive activities, attendees will learn about the 'hows' and 'whats' of social care system change, including the joy, loss, and sometimes despair: a 'real life' look at taking theory into practice. Drawing on our recently published book, we will support participants to engage with robust methodological tools, provide space for reflection on the complexity of relationships within system change research and consider ways to approach ethical challenges.

The workshop will expand on our three-stage approach to social care systems (scoping, piloting and embedding), enlivened with examples. Participants will leave with an understanding of the importance of reflexivity, emotional intelligence, relationality and the role of theories within this work, including feminist ethnography, psychosocial and sociological theories.

The workshop will be divided into five parts:

**Part one** will outline our embedded 'real life' ethnographic approach with an overview of our methods and activities.

**Part two** will provide a brief overview of the research and theory we investigated, including the system change we co-developed.

**Part three** will include interactive methods training. Participants will participate in an immersive imaginative learning activity using a narrative scene from a social care meeting drawn from data. Invited to take a role as within the meeting, delegates will learn about organisational observation methods through participation.

**Part four** will be about the relational aspects of the methodology, focusing on how we use feelings, relationships and culture to research system change. Prompted by example scenarios foregrounding ethically challenging situations, participants will be invited into small discussion and creative activity (e.g. poetry writing), learning how to successfully engage with the complexity of the relational context of this work.

**Part five** will end the session with an overview of a toolkit that attendees can use after the session.

Learning objectives for participants include:

- Understanding the stages of our approach
- Feeling equipped and hopeful about creating change
- Appreciating the emotional and relational impact of system change
- Experiencing solidarity and support from others involved in this complex work

## Softening the Gaze: Collage as a Solidarity Practice in Social Work Research

[Dr Lynne Cairns<sup>1</sup>](#), [Dr Catrin Noone<sup>1</sup>](#), [Dr Sui Ting Kong<sup>1</sup>](#), [Dr Jane Shears<sup>2</sup>](#)

<sup>1</sup> Durham University, <sup>2</sup> British Association of Social Workers

This workshop explores collage as an innovative method of inquiry, reflection and solidarity for interdisciplinary, evidence-informed practice in social work research. Drawing on our evaluation of BASW's Professional Support Service, and the positioning of coaching as a social process of value realignment, we mobilise collage to theorise transformative ways of seeing, knowing and connecting across disciplinary and professional boundaries.

Collage serves as both a practice of solidarity and a metaphor for interdisciplinary collaboration: actively resisting institutional systems that flatten complexity while deliberately embracing multiplicity, contradiction and imperfection. By inviting participants to layer, juxtapose and reassemble diverse materials, collage mirrors the essential work of social work itself- navigating intersecting complexities, holding tensions, honouring diverse lived experience and translating evidence into ethical, dialogical practice.

The workshop integrates hands-on collage-making with critical reflection, offering participants methodological and conceptual tools to support practice innovation. It opens space for thinking differently about how social work engages with knowledge, reframes practice dilemmas and builds solidarities across professions and communities. Through exploring the central prompt "What does solidarity in social work look like to you?" and consider how visual, participatory methods can:

- Challenge reductionism: Move beyond systems that compress complex, multifaceted lives into static, one-dimensional categories.
- Reframe the research gaze: Guide a shift from extractive looking at to looking with.
- Prioritise process over product: Position collage as a dynamic inquiry space rather than fixed conclusion or outcome
- Foster solidarity: Create shared visual languages that can inform supervision, coaching and meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Workshop structure (90 minutes)

1. Welcome and framing: softening the gaze (15 mins) - Introduce key metaphors and concepts, including Flat Stanley, to explore how systems compress complex lives into one-dimensional narratives.
2. Reflections on how we see and represent ourselves and others within social work contexts, challenging dominant professional gazes and power dynamics.
3. Collage creation (45 mins) – Participants invited to engage in creative exploration, developing both physical collages using a range of provided materials and digital collages through mobile photography and digital tools, with works integrated through ArcGIS StoryMaps for collective viewing and future collaboration.

4. Sharing and reflections (20 mins) – Participants invited to present and share their collages and reflect critically on how the creative process shifted their understanding of solidarity, professional identity and/or collaborative practice.
5. Closing (10 mins) – Collaborative discussion of practical implications for coaching, supervision, direct practice and interdisciplinary collaboration, including exploring possibilities for ongoing shared zines or community exhibitions.

By situating collage within interdisciplinary inquiry, this workshop demonstrates how creative, participatory methods can significantly enrich evidence-informed practice, strengthen authentic practitioner-researcher partnerships and fundamentally reimagine solidarity both within social work and across related professional communities.

Dr Roma Thomas has published widely across social work, childhood and youth, sociology of education and young masculinities. Former Associate Dean, Education and Student Experience at the University of Bedfordshire, Roma is an independent scholar and Higher Education Consultant with specialisms in creative pedagogies and relational approaches. Her inter-disciplinary research interests include lived experience and creative methods. She is a member of the British Journal of Social Work Editorial Board.



## Trust Without Conditions: Exploring Human-Centred Social Work through the New Leaf Czechia Project

Dr. Melanie Zajacová<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Social Work

This workshop directly contributes to the central theme of ECSWR 2026 by exploring how trust-based, unconditional approaches can reshape social work research, practice, and policy in post-socialist contexts.

The New Leaf Czechia project combines exclusive, trust-based social work with an unconditional cash transfer for people recently experiencing homelessness. By removing conditionality, the project challenges the dominant welfare logic of surveillance and administrative control, opening space for dialogue on empowerment, dignity, and human-centred practice.

### Background and Purpose

The workshop introduces the project's design and rationale. Czechia provides a unique context of residual welfare, strong conditionality, and contested professional identity of social work. The project aims to examine whether unconditional support reduces housing instability and strengthens self-determination, and how the removal of conditions reshapes the role of social workers.

### Methods

The project uses a randomized controlled trial (RCT) with 100 participants from Prague. Participants are randomized into intervention and control groups. Data are collected over one year through surveys and interviews.

### Findings

Preliminary verification of the tool after the first six months shows measurable effects. The food security index improved, indicating better access to food. Housing stability increased. No increase in income or expenditures was detected, including for alcohol, tobacco, or drugs; in fact, consumption of alcohol and drugs decreased. Working hours remained stable. Subjective well-being did not change significantly, while the mental health index worsened slightly.

Qualitative data reveal that participants reported reduced financial stress, improved access to food, housing, and healthcare, and most frequently used the transfer for stabilising accommodation, clothing, and food. Social workers valued the opportunity to focus on building relationships with clients rather than administrative tasks.

### Content and Pedagogical Methods

The 90-minute workshop will combine short presentations, lived perspectives, and interactive methods.

**Opening story:** Short video segments.

**Mini-lecture:** Brief outline of the project design and context.

Scenario exercise: Participants, working in groups.

**Final circle:** Facilitated collective reflection.

### **Expected Outcomes - Participants will**

- Understand the New Leaf Czechia project and its methodological innovations.
- Critically engage with the implications of unconditional support for professional identity, practice, and policy.
- Contribute to the sub-themes of linking social work research and practice, including co-creation of knowledge and methodological development and innovation in social work research by generating transnational dialogue and ideas for future collaboration.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

By combining research insights, lived perspectives, and interactive exercises, this workshop bridges research, practice, and policy. It offers not only knowledge but also an embodied experience of what “trust without conditions” means for social work. It aligns with the ECSWR 2026 theme by demonstrating how interdisciplinary, evidence-informed approaches can support innovation in practice and policy.

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## (Re)imagining resistance through provocation, experimentation, and play

Professor Kristine Langhoff<sup>1</sup>, Dr Camille Warrington

<sup>1</sup> University of Sussex

For the last five years, a multi-disciplinary team composed of two social scientists and a visual artist used a range of arts-based methods (photography, film, movement, poetry, and textiles) to study resistance, as both an abstract theoretical concept and a meaningful, tangible lived and felt experience among young people affected by sexual and interpersonal violence.

The initial 'Imagining Resistance' project involving young people (n=20) revealed how resistance offers a novel conceptual framing for young people to understand their own behaviours, to feel connected to others via collective resistance, and to celebrate their strength, defiance, intelligence and grit. It also offered a way to understand and communicate how it feels to be overwhelmed by other people's expectations- and to develop creative and diverse strategies for self-preservation. Together, the research team and young people made a series of zines, a protest quilt and a film. The team has spent the final year of the project engaging an additional 50 youth work and creative arts practitioners and 18 young people to help develop the findings from the project into a practical resource to use with young people. They recruited two additional artist facilitators (a poet and actor) to inform the resource: an interactive deck of cards.

The card deck was then sent to 75 practitioners (to use with young people) who were invited to a one-day conference, organised in collaboration with the initial project partners, young people and artists. The purpose of that event was both to measure impact and to further develop our understanding of resistance- as a means of reframing hopeful defiance, productive energy, and safety in the context of institutional and interpersonal harm.

Drawing upon learning from the Imagining Resistance project, this conference workshop aims to 1) draw participants into a wider discussion about the substantive relevance of 'resistance' as a conceptual frame connecting marginalised individuals (and their unique self-preservation strategies) to collective resistance movements and 2) consider how more radical interdisciplinary collaboration can turn complex research findings into changed social work practice.

We will use the resource deck of cards to structure workshop activities, enabling participants to reflect upon the synergies in their own work, related to resistance, to Recognition Theory (as a guiding theoretical framework), and to the iterative, playful, and slow learning that comes from ethical participatory research practice. Participants will experiment with the activity prompts provided by the cards, will develop their understanding of a somatic 'felt' sense of resistance, and will be given space to consider the role of provocation and play in their own research.

# From Interdisciplinary to Transdisciplinary: Co-creating Knowledge in Societal Challenges

PhD Feija Schaap<sup>1</sup>, Msc Marjolanda Hendriksen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NHL Stenden University Of Applied Sciences

## Background

Many of today's societal challenges in social work – such as poverty, health inequalities, and social cohesion – are inherently complex. They cannot be solved by a single professional group, discipline, or policy domain. Interdisciplinary collaboration is an important step, yet it often remains limited to the perspectives of researchers, professionals and policymakers. To truly address societal issues, transdisciplinary approaches are required: processes in which municipalities, diverse professionals, residents, researchers, and educational institutions jointly formulate questions, develop knowledge, and design interventions. Students can bring a fresh and critical perspective that can unsettle routines, open up new lines of inquiry, and bridge research with practice and policy.

## Aim

This workshop aims to explore and demonstrate how transdisciplinary learning can be facilitated in social work research and practice. We will do so by engaging participants with the Dimensions Radar Chart, a practical instrument developed to make transdisciplinary learning explicit and to stimulate reflection on design principles for collaboration. The workshop will highlight the most important design principles and give a first impression of the practical value related to your own experiences.

## Format

The workshop consists of three parts. First, participants are introduced to the conceptual background of the Radar Chart and design principles developed for addressing complex social issues. This brief introduction situates the tool in a practical context. We will share our own experience of working with students in various communities in the north of the Netherlands.

Second, participants will actively work with the Radar Chart. In small groups, they will be invited to explore their own inter- or transdisciplinary (learning) environment. Building on this, each group will select and discuss design principles that could guide a transdisciplinary process.

Third, the workshop will close with a collective reflection in which we connect the exercise to participants' own professional and research contexts. We will focus specifically on the role of education: how can students' perspectives contribute to co-creation processes, and what does their involvement add to the complexity, richness, and legitimacy of transdisciplinary learning?

**Expected Outcomes**

By participating, attendees will:

- Gain insight into the dynamics of transdisciplinary learning in the context of complex social work issues;
- Deepen their understanding of the underlying complexity of societal challenges and the need to give voice to all relevant actors; policy makers, professionals, residents, researchers, and students;
- Experience how a concrete tool (the Radar Chart) can facilitate the structuring of perspectives and the selection of design principles for collaboration;
- Reflect on the added value of integrating education into transdisciplinary research and practice, recognizing students as catalysts for innovation and knowledge co-creation.

**Conclusion**

This workshop links social work research and practice in a co-creative way. It not only demonstrates a practical method for working with complexity, but also foregrounds the transformative potential of education in moving from interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary collaboration.

## Coproduction isn't just for Christmas - Collaborative Approaches in Social Work Research

Emeritus Professor Aidan Worsley<sup>1</sup>, Mrs Katy Cleece, Ms Parisa Quaynor

<sup>1</sup> Social Work England And University of Lancashire

Research engagement activities seeking to connect with under-represented groups often falter on fundamental gaps between researchers and researched. But a seldom explored space is where those gaps close and friendships emerge. Drawing on findings and experiences from fourteen, fully funded, researcher development and engagement projects over the last two years, this workshop engages delegates with activities aimed at sharing ideas about the development of practitioner researchers and co-production, before moving into joint work engaging with 'hidden voices' – these include, but are not limited to, parents who use substances, Deaf people, BAME women, asylum seekers, young adults with autism, prison leavers, kinship carers & food poverty groups. The workshop concludes with activities addressing the complex realities of this activity. The workshop is constructively designed – offering real examples, opportunities to share – and real solutions to typical problems.

This informal (but serious!) workshop will be jointly facilitated by an academic researcher, a practitioner researcher and a researcher with lived experience of services. The workshop will have three separate sections with typically a 5-minute input outlining the issues and literature informing aspects of research engagement, before three group activities (each with a different pedagogical base) aimed at raising awareness of the issues and an opportunity for sharing learning from all:

### 1. **Research engagement in practice/ communities**

- a. **Input:** an introduction to co-production and its evidence base - with examples of constructing research engagement with hard-to-reach communities.
- b. **Groupwork with a comparative method approach** - what are the core techniques and structures of traditional research and how are these challenged in participatory approaches?

### 2. **Research relationships in practice**

- a. **Input:** Moving from 'what it looks like' to how it can work in practice - with examples of working practices between academic, practitioner and service user involvement in research engagement
- b. **Groupwork with a conversational method approach** – short exercises encouraging discussion between delegates examining how personal qualities and values interact and overlap to make co-production happen

### 3. **Research in reality**

- a. **Input:** Sharing headlines from our latest article concerning the challenges of these approaches.
- b. **Groupwork with a role-play approach** – brief role play scenarios aimed at using others to check what we can do to meet these challenges and the boundaries at which 'uncomfortable reflective practices' might occur.

This workshop challenges traditional approaches to research that prioritize a search for objectivity over empathy, trust and a shared understanding within personal relationships. But how can we all manage the personal and the professional? We argue that researchers must continually ask themselves where they are 'at' in any given moment in relation to what they study and what are the potential ramifications of this position on their research (Berger, 2015). We also observe the dangers for some researchers residing in what might be a comfortable, thoughtful space. We therefore promote 'uncomfortable reflexive practices' that remain highly suspicious of familiar reflexivity (Pillow, 2003). These techniques offer an opportunity to consider the sustainability of research relationships – coproduction isn't just for Christmas.

## Shaping the Architectures of Knowledge: Theoretical Paradigms and their Relevance for Social Work Research – an Interactive Workshop

Prof. Dr. Christian Spatscheck<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Claudia Steckelberg<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hochschule Bremen, City University of Applied Sciences / Chair DGSA, <sup>2</sup> University of Applied Sciences Neubrandenburg / Chair DGSA

### Background and purpose of the presentation

This interactive workshop follows a two-step model. The first part aims to identify and collect relevant theoretical approaches and paradigms from the theory debates in social work and the different contexts of the participants. A brief systematisation of the models will follow. In a second part, we will then discuss and reflect the connection of the identified theories to the research process as well the relation between the chosen theories and empirical research in general. We will start with a short thematic introduction and close the event with a summary. The main aim is to involve the participants to gain and enlarge a common knowledge base, to enhance the understanding about different theoretical paradigms, and to discuss their relevance for empirical research processes in a comparative perspective.

### A summary of the main points of the presentation

Theories of social work are of key relevance for the scientific foundation and reflection of social work (e.g. anonymized 2025; 2021; Brekke/Anastas 2019). Theories and the empirical research process have often been conceptualized as a dialectical relation (e.g. Shaw 2018; Wright et al. 2022; Flynn/McDermot 2024). Over the last decades, several theoretical models of social work have been developed and discussed. They have helped to organize and reflect social work as a profession and a discipline but also are rarely systematically compared (anonymized 2025; 2021). One of the main reasons for this situation lies in the different theoretical references that make direct comparability difficult and sometimes impossible. For a systematic reflection and a comparison of theories and an understanding of their architectures of knowledge, reflections from philosophy of science provide helpful approaches. Especially the role of the epistemological goals of theories provide well-grounded categories for a comparison. To connect theories to the methods and methodologies of empirical research, the criteria of philosophy of science need to be understood and applied in reflected forms and ways.

### How the presentation will address one or more of the conference's aims and themes

We will introduce these references at the beginning as a foundation for further discussions. For the reflection on the relevance of theories for empirical research, we will use different theoretical models on certain tasks and aspects of social work as well as on the research process and knowledge development itself. This will enable an exchange about different experiences and approaches for research and theory development.



**Conclusions from and implications of your presentation for practice, policy, or further research**

We plan an introduction of 15 minutes, a collection and systematisation of theories for 30 minutes, a collection and systematisation of their relation to empirical research and the research process for 30 minutes and a final systematising comment of 15 minutes. We welcome all colleagues that are interested in the theory debates on social work and the processes and key elements of social work research and want to enlarge, systematise and share their understanding and knowledge the workshop and further situations of research, teaching, or practice in social work.

## Imagining Futures, Shaping Society: 4FutureLabs as an Interdisciplinary Approach to Evidence-Informed Political Education in Social Work

Nils Kampschulte, Eva Weides

<sup>1</sup> HF GG

Political education has been recognised as a core mandate of social work (DGSA, 2020), yet it remains underrepresented in research, education, and practice. In the context of growing societal polarisation, rising authoritarian tendencies, and what has been called a collective “future vacuum”, there is an urgent need for evidence-informed and innovative approaches that strengthen citizens’ capacities for democratic participation, policy engagement, and social-ecological transformation.

This workshop introduces the 4FutureLabs (4FLs), a transdisciplinary educational format developed at the Hochschule für Gesellschaftsgestaltung (HfGG) under the direction of Prof. Dr. Silja Graupe. 4FLs create collective, experiential learning spaces in which participants critically explore, imagine, and reflect upon desirable societal futures. By integrating methods from UNESCO Futures Literacy, transformative education, and futures studies, 4FLs link political literacy with embodied learning, systemic reflection, and evidence-informed practice.

Grounded in a critically emancipatory understanding of crisis, the 4FL framework unfolds in three phases: Reveal – Reframe – Rethink. Participants uncover their implicit anticipatory assumptions about the future, reframe dominant narratives, and collaboratively develop new perspectives, stories, and practices that strengthen political agency and policy engagement. Within the workshop, participants will actively engage with central 4FL methods, including “The Thing from the Future” for creative scenario-building, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) for analysing deep structures shaping social realities, the XYZ-method for exploring systemic interdependencies, and writing a “Letter from the Future” to develop new narratives for collective agency.

By working with these methods, participants will explore how 4FLs can enhance political literacy and democratic participation within social work education and practice. They will reflect on how professionals and communities can co-create evidence-informed, future-oriented strategies and how such approaches may strengthen collaboration between social work research, policy, and practice across disciplinary and professional boundaries. Rather than presenting a predefined solution, the workshop invites participants to co-create an open, process-oriented educational space that connects the normative aspirations of the social work profession with innovative didactic methods and practical application.

By addressing the challenges of social work research, practice, policy, and education in contemporary contexts, while introducing an innovative methodological framework for participatory and interdisciplinary research, this workshop contributes directly to the aims of ECSWR 2026 and fosters the co-creation of knowledge between researchers, practitioners, and policy actors.

**References**

DGSA (2020). Positionspapier: Politische Bildung in der Sozialen Arbeit.

Inayatullah, S. (1998). Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as Method. *Futures*, 30(8), 815–829.

UNESCO (2021). *Futures Literacy: A Key Competency for the 21st Century*.

Type: Workshop (90 minutes)

## **Book Launch & Dialogical Reflective Workshop:**

### **Listening to Children about Kinship Care, Child Welfare and Permanence: A ‘What Matters’ Approach to Navigating Relational Spaces**

Dr Paul Shuttleworth<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kingston University

#### **Introduction**

Across child welfare systems, decisions about kinship care and permanence are still too often taken about children rather than with them. This interactive workshop launches the new Open Access Policy Press book ‘Listening to Children about Kinship Care, Child Welfare, and Permanence: Navigating Relational Spaces’ and invites participants to explore its practical applications. The book introduces a critical realist ‘what matters’ approach, combined with dialogical participation, as a values-led alternative to “what works” orthodoxies. It mobilises creative, person-centred methods—such as child-led walking tours, photovoice, Kitbag, and words and pictures dialogues—to illuminate children’s inner conversations and valuations: what truly matters for safety, belonging, and everyday family life.

From this dialogue with children, three generative mechanisms emerge that help practitioners and researchers navigate the tensions structuring kinship care:

1. Connection/Separation – balancing closeness and distance across fluid family boundaries.
2. Care and Protection/Independence and Risk – negotiating safety alongside autonomy and age-appropriate risk-taking.
3. Recognition/(Mis)recognition – striving for dignity, fairness, and being seen in everyday interactions.

These mechanisms reframe permanence as relational navigation rather than a fixed legal endpoint, offering a framework for ethically reflexive practice and policy.

#### **Learning outcomes**

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Apply a ‘what matters’ lens to elicit children’s values and translate them into assessment, planning and review for kinship care and other child welfare practices.
2. Use the three mechanisms (connection/separation; care and protection/independence and risk; recognition/(mis)recognition) to reframe permanence as relational navigation rather than a fixed endpoint.
3. Integrate dialogical participation techniques into everyday practice and research designs that are ethically robust, feasible, and evidence-informed across disciplines.

#### **Content and Pedagogical Methods**

The 90-minute session combines short presentations, structured dialogue, and hands-on activities to create an engaging, practice-oriented learning experience:

- **Welcome & Framing (5 mins):**  
Mindfulness/presence exercise and overview of the session's aims.
- **Mini presentation (5 mins):**  
Introduction to the book's aims and findings.
- **Reflection Task (10 mins):**  
Small group discussions on the benefits and challenges of kinship care. First discuss in groups and then use Mentimeter.
- **Mini-presentation (10 mins):**  
Chapters 2 & 3: Valuing kinship care support and permanence.
- **Reflection Task (10 mins):**  
Small group discussions on benefits and challenges of participation (power, tokenism, ethics) and strategies for creating spaces of voice, audience, and influence. Use Mentimeter.
- **Reflection task/presentation (10 mins):**  
Chapters 4 & 5: What matters & dialogical participation
- **Interactive Task – Photo Elicitation (15 mins):**  
Participants take or select an image representing “what matters” in family life, write a short description, and cluster themes collaboratively.
- **Mini-presentation (10 mins):**  
Chapters 7, 8,& 9: Findings from children's views about kinship care and participation.
- **Realist Dialogical Reflection Task - Policy & Practice Translation (10 mins):**  
Identify underlying values and approaches for research and practice.
- **Wrap Up & Q&A (5 mins):**  
Key takeaways, resource sharing (QR code for free book download), and open discussion.

## Practicing Abolition Through Participatory Action Research: A Photovoice Workshop

Dr. Jason Ostrander<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Elizabeth Allen<sup>2</sup>, Mrs. Kate Kelly<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anna Maria College, <sup>2</sup> University of the District of Columbia, <sup>3</sup> Sacred Heart University

### Background and Purpose

Social work as a profession faces a critical challenge: how to respond to the profound harms caused by mass incarceration while also reimagining practices and policies that do not perpetuate carceral logics. In the United States, over six million children have experienced a parent's incarceration, with Black families disproportionately affected. The ripple effects, such as family disruption, stigma, poverty, and over-policing, are intensified by intergenerational trauma. Social work's historical ties to both advocacy and social control demand a reflection on the profession's role in either maintaining or dismantling these systems.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) offers one way forward. By centering directly impacted families as co-researchers, PAR challenges extractive research practices and promotes empowerment, critical awareness, and systemic critique. Photovoice, as a PAR methodology, allows participants to visually and narratively document their lived experiences, producing evidence that speaks to both personal realities and structural inequalities. This workshop draws on a recent Photovoice study with Black youth and mothers of incarcerated fathers and husbands, where participants highlighted themes of "interruption of the whole," "lack of protection," and "duality" as they navigated the criminal legal system's effects on their families. Their voices emphasize the urgent need for abolitionist approaches in social work, shifting beyond incremental reform toward collective, community-led alternatives.

This workshop aims to share lessons from this study while engaging participants in hands-on exploration of Photovoice and its potential as an abolitionist practice. By combining conceptual grounding with experiential learning, the session will provide practical tools to help participants incorporate PAR into their own teaching, practice, and research, while also fostering connections among those dedicated to abolitionist social work.

### Content and Format

The 90-minute session is designed to maximize engagement through experiential learning, small-group collaboration, and collective dialogue.

1. Framing Abolitionist PAR (20 minutes): Facilitators will introduce key concepts of abolitionist social work, double consciousness, and Photovoice. Selected photographs and narratives from the study will be shared, illustrating how youth and mothers made visible systemic injustice and resilience.
2. Mini-Photovoice Activity (40 minutes): In small groups, participants will engage in a guided Photovoice exercise using non-identifiable images. Groups will apply the SHOWeD technique ("What do you see here? What's really happening here? How does this relate to our lives? Why does this situation exist? What can we do about it?") to practice moving from reflection to analysis and action.

3. **Collective Reflection and Networking (30 minutes):** Participants will reconvene to share insights, consider applications in their contexts, and explore possibilities for collaborative work. Facilitators will encourage participants to generate ideas for an ongoing interest group or network focused on abolitionist PAR.

### **Delivery and Participation**

The workshop will employ interactive methods to foster participation, including visual prompts, small-group analysis, plenary dialogue, and collaborative action planning.

### **Participants will leave with:**

- (1) a practical introduction to Photovoice as an abolitionist methodology,
  - (2) a set of tools for integrating PAR into their own work,
- and**
- (3) new connections with colleagues engaged in justice-oriented, interdisciplinary research.

## Far right influence on social work services and institutions in Hungary and Germany – international comparative perspectives on deprofessionalisation trends

Prof. Dr. Júlia Wéber<sup>1</sup>, Ass. Prof. Dr. Katalin Szoboszlai<sup>2</sup>, Ass. Prof. Dr. Anikó Vida<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany, <sup>2</sup> University of Debrecen, <sup>3</sup> University of Szeged

Since February 2025, the tri-national research project 'Social Work and the Far Right in European Democracies' (SoFRiED) has been investigating the influence of anti-democratic and far-right tendencies on social work and its welfare state context, coordinated by the Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences. Using a mixed-methods research approach, the project aims to conduct a tri-national comparison on far right influences on social work in Germany, Austria and Hungary and to institutionalise responses and countermeasures for dealing with those at EU level. The two-year research project is funded by the German Hans-Böckler Foundation.

The workshop focuses on the following questions, drawing on initial empirical findings from Hungary and Germany, based on case studies from rural regions: How equitable is access to social work services and support for recipients and users? To what extent can social work provide safe spaces for all users and professionals in line with its own, internationally recognised standards, and where are the gateways for exclusion, discrimination and othering? In the planned workshop, together with the audience, the potential for institutionalising countermeasures at local, country and EU level and the transnational challenges of upholding of international professional standards in social work be explored.



## Abolition, Social Work, and the Welfare State: Advances in Theory and Implications for Practice in Perilous Times

[cwrasmussen@hawaii.edu](mailto:cwrasmussen@hawaii.edu) Cameron W. Rasmussen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mimi E. Kim<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Hawai'i At Mānoa, <sup>2</sup> California State University, Long Beach

Prison abolitionists first gained prominence within the field of social work in the context of U.S. and global protests in response to the police killing of George Floyd. The summer of 2020 ushered in widespread demand for a divestment from the institutions of crime control – advocating instead for a reinvestment in various forms of social welfare. In the United States, this included calls for “social workers, not the police,” elevating social workers as a solution to police violence while also prompting critiques from those who argued that social work was not an alternative to the law enforcement, but was deeply embedded within the criminal legal system. As long-time abolitionists and co-editors of the 2024 book, *Abolition and Social Work: Possibilities, Paradoxes, and the Practice of Community Care* (Haymarket Press), the presenters navigate the potentials and possibilities of abolition and social work, reflecting upon the dramatic changes in the U.S. context over the past several years. While creating not only theoretical frameworks but also social work practices aligned with abolition – severed from the punitive state – they also explore the implications for continued investments in the welfare state. The presenters will share their respective work in transformative justice and restorative justice in response to gender-based violence in the United States to reflect upon the implications for the provision of social welfare today and in the future – whether in state form, community-based mutual aid, or in alternative formations. Interactive dialogue across national and regional contexts will generate comparative assessments of carceral social work, the limitations and opportunities for abolitionist informed strategies across welfare state formations, and local and global pathways for more just, sustainable, and liberatory systems of social welfare and provision of the social good.

## Jumping across ditches: learning from interdisciplinary co-creation

DRS marielle Hobbelen<sup>1</sup>, MSc Hafida El Gharbaoui, Dr. Susan Hupkens

<sup>1</sup> Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences

Working and researching across interdisciplinary boundaries is not easy. This workshop provides you, in a playful interactive way, with experiences to overcome the challenges. In European countries the population of seniors is growing. Much attention is paid to the claim this includes for healthcare due to a medicalisation of supposed vulnerability of older persons. However, many underlying factors are based in social or cultural domains, for instance loneliness and lack of purpose. In the Netherlands 300.000 persons were yearly admitted to hospitals, while social problems lie at the roots. Costs: 1.4 billion euros (Actiz, 2018). Older persons themselves desire to be regarded as persons with capabilities instead of vulnerability. During recent years many initiatives were initiated by citizens themselves to provide in reciprocal support. This contemporary context challenges (social and other) professionals and science to create new practice across disciplinary and professional borders, it is like jumping across ditches.

In our project we supported the co-creation in three settings that aim to bridge the traditional gaps between the silos of healthcare, social work and civil society. In these initiatives of interprofessional work we recognised the centrality of social work in order to facilitate the (social) capabilities of older persons and prevent unnecessary medicalisation.

In our project we linked implementation science to the work floor in order to facilitate the process: Value mapping (Bocken, Rana & Short, 2015), Inter Professional Teams-model (Goossens & Van Dongen, 2024), Community building (Van Pelt, Rensen & Spierts, 2024) and the archetypes of the Institute of Brilliant failures (Iske, 2018). These theoretical models helped the participants to understand the other perspectives and also to reflect on the process. The approach also provided them with useful insights to initiate next steps. As researchers in this project we gradually understood the complexity of interdisciplinary co-creation. In our research we evaluated the facilitating factors of successful interdisciplinary work together with citizens. In order to make our findings accessible to others we developed a playful tool, because we realise that research and informed practice are key to shape the future.

In this workshop we work together with the participants with this tool. The participants are invited to contribute to the method and share their experiences in interdisciplinary projects. Finally we discuss the applicability of our tool in contemporary contexts.

### References

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- Goossens, W., en van Dongen, J. (2024) Interprofessionele teams in hun Kracht! (Empowering Interprofessional Teams!) Ontwikkelen, begeleiden & coachen Neer, Uitgeverij Kloosterhof
- Iske, P.L. (2018) Instituut voor briljante mislukkingen (Institute of Brilliant Failures) Uitgeverij: Business Contact
- Van Pelt, M., Rensen, P. & Spierts, M. (2024) Wat werkt bij samenlevingsopbouw. (What works for community building.) Movisie

# Decriminalizing Mental Health Crises in the US and Scotland: Saving Lives, Dignity, and Resources

Jordan Margolis<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> City University of New York - Graduate Center

## Background and purpose

In the US and in Scotland over the past decade there has been growing recognition of the risks of harm and fatality to persons experiencing mental health crises when police are the first or only responders. The purpose of this interactive workshop is to offer a public health and harm-reduction frame for evaluating police-oriented and social work-oriented mental health crisis response. Through discussion of the literature and small group exercises, attendees will engage the question: “What are the human and fiscal costs of deploying police rather than clinicians and peers as first responders to mental health crises, particularly for situations in which the person in crisis is not engaging in criminal behavior?”

## Relevance to ECSWR 2026 theme

Social workers around the world help to implement public health policy by providing mental health crisis response services. Typically, we do this collaboratively with other disciplines (law enforcement, public safety, medicine, education, child welfare, etc.). This workshop supports this year’s conference theme by applying systematic inquiry to evaluate the role of police in mental health crisis response and to assess the challenges of planning and delivering multi-disciplinary social work-oriented mental health crisis response.

## US context

At the annual conference of the Alternative Mobile Services Association in June 2025, Barry Friedman of NYU Law School’s Policing Project discussed how “Cost-benefit analysis research is needed on how mental health crises are policed and the case dispositions that show the impact of alternative response,” while Mimi E. Kim, co-editor-in-chief of *Affilia*, and cofounder of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence urged, “Don’t forget people’s movements as the roots of our work.”

## Scotland context

A 2024 report from the Systems Science in Public Health and Health Economics Research Consortium found that “the absence of lived experience is particularly notable in the development of solutions to health inequalities and there are calls for greater dialogue between policymakers, professional stakeholders and local communities.”

## Methods

This workshop is based on an unfinished study, the first phase of which utilizes a scoping review of the grey literature on public mental health policy and innovations in alternative crisis response, and a review of the publicly available data on expenditures for police-centered mental health crisis response in New York and Edinburgh. The second phase of the study will engage youth with lived mental health crisis experience as co-designers of community-based participatory action research on police-oriented and peer-oriented crisis response.

**Conclusions and implications**

As Bolin and Sorbring noted at ECSWR 2023, “Frequently, police actions created a tangible sense of fear. Many participants perceived the intervention as reflective of society’s reaction to criminality...While the results point to the value of a swift response, they also warn of the dangers attached to early labelling.” Further research will enhance social workers’ ability to evaluate efforts to shift away from law enforcement as the presumptive first response to persons experiencing mental health crises.

## **Social Work and Policy Engagement SIG PhD Workshop**

[John Gal](#)

# | Dialogue Sessions |

## ESWRA Supported Dialogue

*What challenges are facing social work in the world today?*

*How does what is happening in the world affect our work as social workers and social work researchers?*

The supported dialogue spaces are an opportunity to dive deeper and explore important, perhaps even fundamental, questions that sit underneath the surface of our working lives. It can feel challenging to prioritise these conversations and they might feel risky but in a structured and facilitated space they can also be an opportunity to connect and have rich and surprising encounters with others.

Rather than focusing on outcomes or finding solutions, you are invited into an exploratory space of listening and sharing where differences and diversity of views are valued. You will come away with a deeper appreciation of your own experience and a greater understanding of your colleagues.

There will be three ninety-minute dialogue sessions during the conference, held by two expert facilitators, Jassy Denison and Katharine Yates (bios [here](#)) who bring a wealth of experience in working with conflict and holding challenging conversations.

On signing up, you will be invited to identify current issues and questions that are important to you, and that you would like to explore with others. The participants in each 90min dialogue session will then collectively choose a focus from the list of suggestions made.

Last year participants said, *'I think it's necessary to talk with each other about different difficult issues, but ...it's also demanding; sometimes difficult and therefore maybe people want to solve conflicts in another way because it's not so easy to go deeper in things like we did.'*

*'I brought a difficult experience to the democratic dialogue space and together with people who brought other issues we spent two hours talking, laughing and crying and came out in a much better space where I could forfeit responsibility for others' reactions and felt heard and understood.'*

# | Poster Presentations |



## Young People in NEET Situation in Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region: Identification, Analysis, and Implementation of Regional Policies

Dr. Filip Bambúch

<sup>1</sup> Matej Bel University

### Background and Purpose

This regional analysis thoroughly addresses the issue of young people in a NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) situation, and those at risk of becoming NEET, within the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (BBSK). In BBSK, young people in a NEET situation constituted almost 24% of the youth population, with 15% being inactive NEETs, making it the third most affected region in Slovakia. The analysis was prepared as part of the project “Regional Analyses and Partnerships for Youth in BBSK,” co-financed by the European Union under the Slovakia Programme. It is informed by the understanding that “the NEET situation is a complex phenomenon requiring a multidisciplinary approach and a deep understanding of regional specificities to effectively address the needs of this vulnerable group of young people” (Androvičová, 2025, p. 1; Rahmani, Groot, 2023). The objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of this group and to contribute to the formulation of effective, regionally-tailored policies and interventions.

### Methods

The analysis uses a sequential mixed-methods approach, integrating statistical data from official regional and national sources with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups involving key stakeholders and affected young people. This combination enables a comprehensive understanding of the demographic, socioeconomic, and experiential factors contributing to the NEET situation in BBSK.

### Findings

This analysis identified the key demographic, social, and economic characteristics of young people in a NEET situation in BBSK, as well as the main contributing factors. Typical findings include: low educational attainment, often incomplete secondary education, which limits their labour market opportunities; lack of relevant work experience and soft skills crucial for employment; social isolation and limited access to social networks, hindering their search for support and opportunities; health issues, including mental health problems, which often remain undiagnosed and untreated; and an unfavourable family background with insufficient support from family or institutions. The analysis also highlighted significant regional disparities within BBSK, where certain areas are disproportionately affected by the NEET problem, necessitating specifically targeted interventions.

### Conclusions and Implications

The analysis unequivocally affirms the urgency of addressing the NEET issue in BBSK, underscoring its complexity and multifaceted impact on individuals, regional development, and social cohesion. These conclusions directly inform concrete recommendations for regional authorities, educational institutions, employers, and civil society organisations. Key areas for intervention include the development of targeted programmes for skill

enhancement (such as digital and financial literacy), improving access to information on opportunities, strengthening career counselling and psychological support, and promoting dual education and internships. Crucially, fostering flexible employment and social entrepreneurship is vital, alongside systematic collaboration among regional actors to establish a sustainable support network. The ultimate implication is the creation of a comprehensive regional strategy to prevent and reduce NEET numbers, facilitating their integration into society and the labour market, and contributing to BBSK's socio-economic development.

### References

Affiliation: Funded by the EU NextGenerationEU through the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia under the project No. 09I03-03-V05-00009.

**Keywords:** NEET, Young people, Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (BBSK), Regional analysis, Sequential research

## Social Integration Among Older Migrants of Latin American Origin in Spain: How Does Loneliness Affect Them in Later Life?

Dr, Lorena Patricia Gallardo Peralta<sup>2</sup>, [Esteban Sánchez Moreno](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Complutense de Madrid, <sup>2</sup> Departamento de Trabajo Social y Servicios Sociales. Universidad Complutense de Madrid

### Background

While not exclusive to older individuals (Dykstra, 2009), loneliness is recognized as a public health concern among this demographic (Chawla et al., 2021). Certain profiles, including older adults with a migrant background, are particularly susceptible to experiencing loneliness in later life (Wu & Penning, 2015; Joshi et al., 2024).

Loneliness in populations with a migrant background is enhanced by the increase in international migration rates and by the ageing process of people who migrated at a young age (Lu et al., 2023). Consequently, in Europe there is a special concern to analyse the particularities of loneliness and other social needs of older migrants (Albert, 2021; Fokkema & Ciobanu, 2021; Torres, 2012), however, in Spain few studies address the particularities of migrants over 60 years of age. This study presents preliminary findings on the feelings of loneliness and social support networks of older migrants of Latin American origin.

### Methods

Quantitative and cross-sectional study, conducted in 2025, with a sample of 400 older people. The De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (DJGLS-6) and The Perceived Social Support Questionnaire (PSSQ), were administered through a structured interview. Descriptive, bivariate and correlational analyses were conducted.

### Findings

The results show differences in the perception of social support and feelings of loneliness according to the migration process (age at migration and family migration) and according to socio-demographic variables (age, gender, educational level and household structure).

### Conclusions

We discuss the practical implications of these results and how this can inform interventions with an ageing migrant population in order to prevent feelings of loneliness.

## Parental Burnout Among Israeli Fathers of Young Children During Wartime Reserve Duty: The Roles of Emotion Regulation and Social Support

Dr. Ofir Ben-Yaakov<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Miriam Chasson<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruppin Academic Center

### Background and purpose

Although parenting under stress has been widely studied, little is known about the unique experiences of fathers who serve in military reserve duty during wartime, particularly in relation to parental burnout (PB). This study examined whether emotion regulation strategies and perceived support from family and fellow reservists are associated with PB levels among Israeli fathers of young children (up to age six) who were called to serve during the “Iron Swords” war.

### Method

A sample of 110 Israeli fathers who served in the military reserves during the 2023-2025 “Iron Swords” war completed self-report questionnaires assessing PB, emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression), perceived support from family and fellow reservists, and demographic variables.

### Findings

Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that higher PB was associated with younger age, lower education, poorer mental health, and greater use of expressive suppression. Conversely, greater perceived support from fellow reservists was significantly linked to lower PB.

### Conclusions and implications

Support from fellow reservists may play a critical role in mitigating PB among fathers serving in wartime. The findings point to the importance of peer connections within reserve units and identify additional demographic and emotional regulation factors that may inform targeted interventions to support fathers during and after military service.

## Lateral Entry as Opportunity? On the Role of Structured Entry Management in Safeguarding Professionalism in Social Work

Prof. Dr. phil. André Heinz<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IU International University of Applied Sciences

The increasing shortage of qualified professionals across the social sector has intensified efforts to open access to social work through alternative entry routes. Among these, lateral entry—professional transitions into social work from other fields—has emerged as a practical strategy to address workforce gaps. However, this development raises critical questions regarding the maintenance of professional standards and identity within the discipline. While the inclusion of lateral entrants may be seen as a pragmatic response to structural labor market pressures, it simultaneously challenges long-standing assumptions about the academic formation of social work professionals and the sources of legitimate professional knowledge.

This presentation argues for the necessity of a differentiated and regulated approach to lateral entry, conceptualized as “lateral entry management.” Such an approach views professionalism not solely as a product of formal education, but as a dynamic, lifelong process grounded in self-reflection, ethical commitment, biographical awareness, and situational judgment. Professionalism in social work extends beyond technical expertise; it requires the ability to form authentic working alliances, navigate ethical complexities, and continuously relate one’s own practice to broader societal conditions and client realities. Lateral entrants may bring valuable interdisciplinary perspectives, personal experience, and motivation, but without structured guidance, they risk entering a field with unclear expectations, limited reflective grounding, or insufficient understanding of core professional values.

Lateral entry management seeks to address this gap. It includes structured onboarding procedures, individualized learning pathways, recognition of prior learning, competency-based training, biographical reflection, and regular supervision. Importantly, it frames professionalism as a co-produced and relational quality—one that emerges within teams and organizational cultures that foster openness, transparency, and shared responsibility. In such contexts, diversity of background is not a deficit to be corrected, but a potential to be cultivated. However, this requires a cultural and structural shift in how professional identity is understood and developed in social work institutions.

This contribution addresses key themes of the ECSWR 2026 conference: the challenges and opportunities for social work in contemporary contexts and the link between research and practice. It calls for a paradigmatic shift in how we conceptualize professional legitimacy, critical reflexivity, and ethical orientation may be as decisive for competent social work practice as disciplinary training. Policy frameworks and professional bodies play a crucial role in regulating and supporting such transitions, for instance through certification systems, transitional qualification schemes, and institutional quality monitoring.

Rather than positioning lateral entry as a threat to professional integrity, this paper repositions it as a transformative moment—both for individuals entering the profession and for the profession itself. If adequately managed, lateral entry can become an avenue for renewing professional identity, broadening the knowledge base, and reinforcing the core ethical mission of social work in complex, pluralistic societies. The development and implementation of comprehensive lateral entry frameworks is thus an urgent task for practitioners, educators, policymakers, and professional associations alike.

## References

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## Examining protective mechanisms among at-risk youth in the community and in residential care settings

Dr Eran Melkman, [Prof. Yafit Sulimani-Aidan](#)

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### Background

Resilience perspective offers a useful theoretical framework for exploring why and how some youth develop into healthy adults despite exposure to risks (Masten, 2011). In this study we focused on a group of at-risk youth in out-of-home residential care and a comparison group of at-risk youth in the community, examining the factors that promote resilience among the two groups. Specifically, drawing on the ecological perspective that defines resilience as a process that is co-facilitated by individuals and their physical and social ecologies and suggests that risk and protective factors in the child's environments dynamically alter capacities and allocate assets and resources that support resilience processes (Ungar & Theron, 2020), we focused on three protective factors: mentoring relationships with significant adults, hope (agency and pathways), and the youths' life skills. In addition, we explored the mechanism by which mentoring relationships contribute to youths' levels of hope via life skills among the two groups.

### Methods

The study included 373 at-risk adolescents ( $M = 17.59$ ;  $SD = 0.75$ ), including 174 adolescents (46.6%) living in out-of-home care settings and 199 adolescents (53.4%) living in the community with their biological families. The instruments tapped the youths' hope, mentoring relationships (e.g., longevity, frequency of contact and mentor support), life skills, and individual characteristics.

### Results

The results revealed that at-risk youth in residential care demonstrated significantly lower levels of life skills ( $M = 3.40$ ;  $SD = 0.46$  vs.  $M = 3.49$ ;  $SD = 0.37$  vs., respectively) compared to their counterparts. Multi-group structural equation modeling (SEM), revealed that a unified model for both groups fit the results best, showing good fit to the data:  $\chi^2(32, N = 373) = 54.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $TLI = 0.981$ ,  $CFI = 0.986$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.044$  (90% CI = 0.023- 0.063). As hypothesized, an indirect association was found between youths' hope and their mentor support, mediated by their life skills. The mediating model accounted for 38% of the variance in hope. More specifically, mentor support predicted higher levels of life skills ( $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In turn, higher life skills positively contributed to hope ( $\beta = 0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), fully mediating its relationship with mentor support ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

### Conclusions and Implications

The study's findings highlight the significant impact that mentors can have on at-risk youths' life skills and hope. As such, interventions that seek to strengthen the resilience of at-risk youth both in care and in the community should include connections with their mentors and a higher priority given to working with them on their life skills. In addition, the study's findings shed light on the differences in life skills and mentoring relationships between youth in care and at-risk youth in the community, highlighting the need to seek strategies that will strengthen these youths' readiness for independent living and foster their relationships with meaningful current or new adult mentoring figures in order to support their successful transition to adulthood.



## Polyvagal Theory in Social Work Research: A Neurobiological Approach to Trauma and Relational Safety

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### Background and purpose of the presentation

Polyvagal Theory (PT), developed by Stephen Porges (1994), offers a neurobiologically grounded understanding of how individuals respond to stress, trauma, and social cues through the autonomic nervous system. PT has emerged as a powerful framework for understanding complex and chronic psychosocial challenges such as neglect, abuse, attachment disorders, trauma victimization, and Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD). Despite its growing significance in clinical contexts, the theoretical and practical integration of PT into social work research remains limited. This study aims to evaluate the potential of PT's multidimensional framework—encompassing bodily sensation, lived experience, neurophysiology, and social engagement—for incorporation into qualitative and mixed-methods social work research.

### Summary of the main points of the presentation

The presentation will examine how PT complements the biopsychosocial perspective in social work by addressing bodily sensations, autonomic responses, relational safety, trauma, and emotional regulation from a neurobiological standpoint. Incorporating PT into research with trauma survivors and other vulnerable populations provides a robust theoretical and methodological basis for revealing the multilayered nature of human experience. Given its emphasis on emotional-autonomic states such as safety, threat, mobilization, and social connection, PT aligns well with phenomenological designs frequently employed in social work studies involving trauma, institutional care experiences, and survivors of domestic violence and abuse. Trauma-informed, polyvagal-informed data collection methods can facilitate participants' sense of safety, support autonomic regulation, and enable openness to social engagement. Methodological possibilities will include integrating qualitative data (e.g., interviews, narrative analysis) with neurophysiological measures such as heart rate variability (HRV), as well as body-centered qualitative approaches like body mapping, movement-based therapy, and arts-based methods.

### How the presentation will address one or more of the conference's aims and theme

This presentation directly contributes to the conference's various subthemes by linking Polyvagal Theory (PT) to innovative and ethical research methods. By integrating qualitative and mixed-methods approaches with neurophysiological measurements, it addresses methodological development, innovation, and capacity building, enabling the examination of experiences difficult to verbalize. By situating the neurobiological insights of PT within the biopsychosocial framework of social work, it provides theoretical underpinnings for social work research. The presentation also strengthens the connection between social work research and practice through trauma-informed, polyvagal-informed data collection methods. Furthermore, it fosters opportunities for polyvagal-informed practice and policy development by promoting approaches that create ethical, body-based, culturally sensitive, safe, and co-regulatory research environments for working with trauma-affected and vulnerable populations.



**Conclusions from and implications of the presentation for practice, policy, or further research**

The polyvagal framework offers significant value for advancing social work research, particularly in trauma-related contexts. Its integration can enhance methodological innovation, ethical sensitivity, and theoretical depth. In practice, PT-informed approaches can improve participant well-being, enrich data quality, and inform interventions that address both relational and physiological dimensions of recovery. Future research should expand the use of mixed-methods designs incorporating PT, and policy initiatives should recognize its potential for shaping trauma-sensitive and attachment-based social work practices.

## **“And then I was back home again...” Lived Experiences of young people returning to their families from residential care**

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**Keywords:** Young People's Experiences, Return to the Family, Reunification, Residential care

### **Background and Purpose**

Returning to the family from out-of-home care is a critical life event with profound implications for young people's social and personal development. While research on risk and protective factors for stable family reunifications (Tucker et al., 2025) provides valuable insights, there are only a few studies that specifically capture the perspectives of the young people themselves (James et al., 2017; Mateos et al., 2017). Particularly in German-speaking countries, research on family reunification is still emerging. This study explores how young people from Swiss residential care experience their return, employing a qualitative approach. It aims to generate in-depth insights that can inform practice and policy to better support young people during their return process.

### **Methods**

Participants were recruited from the StePLife panel study (2022–2024). A purposive sample was selected based on age, gender, type of residential care, willingness to return, and perceived transition difficulty. Between November 2023 and March 2024, 18 young people aged 14–18 participated in autobiographical-narrative interviews. Data analysis employed Reconstructive Grounded Theory (Somm & Hajart, 2019), integrating narrative analysis with grounded theory strategies to develop a nuanced understanding of return experiences.

### **Findings**

A typology with six return experience types was developed, reflecting a broad spectrum from straightforward transitions to crises following return. This typology emphasizes the diversity of the young people's lived experiences and highlights key challenges faced during the return process, illustrating the importance of contextually sensitive support tailored to individual needs.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Return experiences among young people are highly diverse, influenced by care history, perceptions of the family environment, and personal agency in the return decision. The typology provides empirical insights to inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at supporting successful returns from residential care. These findings contribute to a growing body of research emphasizing the voice of young people within child welfare systems.

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# Reframing Disinformation through Social and Affective Epistemology: Theorizing Social Work in Disadvantaged Contexts

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## Background and purpose

Disinformation is increasingly recognised as a pressing societal challenge, yet social work has only recently begun to engage with its theoretical implications. Much of the existing literature conceptualises disinformation in deficit terms—linking it to individual failures of rationality, digital literacy, or susceptibility to manipulation. Such perspectives risk pathologising clients while ignoring the structural and relational conditions under which knowledge circulates. This paper advances a theoretical reconceptualisation by drawing on social and affective epistemology to frame disinformation as a socially embedded and emotionally mediated phenomenon. The study asks: How do people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods encounter, interpret, and respond to disinformation in everyday life? How might these insights contribute to theorising social work as an epistemic practice?

## Methods

The research was conducted in a socially excluded neighbourhood in the Czech Republic, marked by high unemployment, low educational attainment, and entrenched institutional distrust. A participatory qualitative design was adopted, engaging a local action group of seven women (aged 26–70) in three iterative focus groups. Data collection followed a cyclical co-production approach: initial exploration of information sources and trust, thematic categorisation and participant validation, and collaborative reflection on emerging findings. Data were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), with attention to relational, affective, and structural dimensions of knowledge-making.

## Findings

The analysis revealed several interrelated dynamics. Trust in information was grounded less in institutional authority than in lived experience and relational proximity. Family members, peers, and local leaders were considered reliable, while professionals and media sources were often treated with scepticism when their claims contradicted direct experience. Participants described pragmatic verification practices that relied on “lay triangulation”: comparing accounts across Facebook groups, neighbours, and even digital tools such as ChatGPT, yet ultimately privileging what they could “see with their own eyes.” Epistemic authority was fluid and contested, shaped by generational divides and digital exclusion, while respected community members often acted as local epistemic hubs. Despite structural disadvantage, participants demonstrated resilience by engaging in collective sense-making, mutual aid initiatives such as sewing masks, and adaptive trust-building strategies. Together, these findings show that disinformation is not simply accepted or rejected but is lived, negotiated, and contested within relational, affective, and socio-material contexts. Rather than being a marker of irrationality, responses to disinformation reflect situated strategies of knowledge-making shaped by inequality, distrust, and emotion.

**Conclusions and implications**

The study contributes to theorising social work as an epistemic practice. It foregrounds clients as credible knowers who mobilise resilience under conditions of exclusion and uncertainty. By integrating concepts of epistemic justice, situated knowledge, and affective epistemology, the research expands anti-oppressive social work and challenges correctional approaches that seek only to “debunk” false beliefs. Theoretically, it positions social work as uniquely capable of engaging with contested knowledge environments, where questions of trust, recognition, and relationality are central.

By advancing a relational and affective epistemology of disinformation, the paper enhances social work’s conceptual capacity to respond to contemporary challenges. It links practice to broader debates on epistemic injustice and digital inequality.

# Systematic Narrative Review of Factors that support social work retention across adult and children's services

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## Background and purpose

Social work is facing significant challenges in workforce retention, with research identifying this as a persistent and widespread global issue (Cook et al, 2024). Strengthening the professionalism of social work and ensuring consistent, high-quality service delivery depends on the ability to retain skilled and committed social workers. An exploration of the literature is critical to understand and inform strategies that promote retention and support a sustainable social work workforce. This presentation presents findings from a systematic narrative review (SNR) of 123 peer reviewed articles which explored this topic through a rigorous, evidence-based approach. This review is unique in that it includes both children's and adults' services and explores the complex and multilevel factors that contribute to social work retention across diverse practice settings and stages of professional career.

## Summary of main points

Three overarching themes were identified; (i) personal, incorporating mission and personal characteristics; (ii) organisational encompassing leadership, management and working conditions; and (iii) structural; including professional training and development and the public image of social work. These themes reflect the multilevel factors supporting workforce retention, highlighting the need for an understanding of how personal motivations, organisational contexts, and broader structural factors interact to support retention. In a context of increasing service demand and workforce turnover and attrition, the findings emphasise the importance of addressing retention as a priority for social work policy and practice.

How will this address one or more of conferences aims and themes

This SNR highlights how the impact and effectiveness of social work practice are deeply shaped by the multi-level factors that influence social work retention. Sustaining a stable workforce is essential to enabling social workers to deliver high quality, effective interventions that uphold social justice, and promote the rights, safety and wellbeing of those they support. Without this stability, the capacity of social workers to make a meaningful impact is diminished, and the effectiveness of social work practice cannot be fully realised or maintained.

## Conclusions and implications for practice, policy or further research

This review confirms that social work retention is a complex, multi-layered issue shaped by personal, organisational, and structural factors. It goes beyond headcount or tenure, requiring conditions that enable social workers to deliver rights-based, therapeutic, and effective services. Neoliberal policies have had a deleterious impact on the profession, undermining public services, increasing workloads, and restricting the ability of practitioners to uphold social work values. Reversing the influence of neoliberalism is essential to rebuilding a supportive infrastructure that values care, equity, and professional

integrity. While individual factors matter, sustainable retention depends on systemic and organisational reform. Governments must commit to investment, legislative protection, and policy change to reverse the decline in public services and ensure that both social workers and the communities they serve receive the recognition, support, and resources they deserve.

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## Evaluating the effects of community-based social work: Co-creating the next iteration of the “Effectenplein”

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A persistent challenge in social work: how to evaluate the effects of collective, community-based interventions in a way that is inclusive, accessible, and meaningful. In the context of pressing social challenges related to neighborhood livability and cohesion, poverty, polarization, social exclusion and loneliness, social workers are increasingly engaging in community development (IFSW, n.d.; Canon Social Work, 2025). Social workers play a vital role in fostering social cohesion and evoking citizen participation, yet their impact is difficult to capture using traditional evaluation tools (Payne, 2014; De Waele et al., 2022).

This project builds upon an existing instrument – the Effectenplein (HAN University of Applied Sciences, n.d.) – a Dutch evaluation tool designed to make collective outcomes visible in social work. While existing tools often rely on linear, expert-driven logic models and standardized outcome metrics, the Effectenplein provides a collaborative format that enables professionals and residents to reflect on collective efforts, surface local knowledge, and co-define meaningful effects. However, recent meta-evaluations have revealed limitations in its accessibility, particularly for groups with limited literacy, cognitive diversity, or different cultural backgrounds and different power positions, raising questions about whose voices are truly heard in collective evaluation practices (e.g. Lundy, 2007).

Using an interdisciplinary, design-based research approach, the project brings together social work researchers, creative professionals, community workers, and residents. It uses co-design sessions, iterative prototyping, and visual translation tools to reshape and refine the Effectenplein. Special attention is given to the use of visual metaphors and other low-threshold modes of engagement, such as drawing or storytelling. This enables participants with diverse communicative repertoires to express themselves and co-produce meaning. Hence the design process not only yields a better tool but also shows how design can enhance the inclusive and transformative potential of evaluation itself.

The study is embedded within the broader transition toward more community-led, evidence-informed social work, aligning with national calls for the recruitment of 2,000 additional community workers to address the complex beforementioned societal challenges (Luttik, 2024). Grounded in local practice, this project contributes to theory and policy on participatory and inclusive evaluation and the democratic potential of social work.

This transdisciplinary project combines insights from social work, design research, and community practice as it involves academic researchers, local welfare organizations, a social research SME and a social designer. It builds on insights from empowerment theory, participatory evaluation, and co-creative design (Rappaport, 1987; Noordink, 2025; Razzouk & Shute, 2012) to reimagine the politics of knowing in social work: who defines what counts as evidence, and how can we collectively transform the very tools through which knowledge, voice, and accountability are constructed? This project embodies the



transformative ambition of evidence-informed practice by showing how participatory design can shift evaluation from measurement to meaning, and from static indicators to shared understanding.

The presentation will share early findings and design outputs, reflect on methodological challenges of conducting participatory design research in social work, and invite dialogue on how evaluation itself can become a vehicle – not only for accountability, but for empowerment and social justice.

## Cultivating Critical Self-Reflection Across Disciplines: Lessons from Social Work for Enhancing Engineering Education

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Critical self-reflection is an essential skill for professional practice in both social work and engineering. In social work, critical self-reflection is introduced early in tertiary education as a tool to manage the inherent complexity, emotions, and ethical challenges of working with people without judgment. Although engineering is also a client-centric profession, engineering students typically do not expect critical self-reflection to be part of their professional role. A perception that technical skills dominate in engineering practice makes it hard for engineering students to appreciate the importance of examining “self” in a professional context. Despite its importance, teaching and learning critical self-reflection remains a challenge for educators and students in both disciplines. Using (co)meta-reflection, this presentation outlines the findings from a qualitative study between Australian social work and engineering academics. We explored how critical self-reflection can be taught and assessed in higher education to promote self-awareness and transformed thinking.

In this presentation we will discuss similarities and differences regarding professional identity and values amongst our students, drivers of student choices and behaviours, and educators’ perspectives on critical self-reflection. We will also discuss how social work and engineering can learn from each other to optimise critical self-reflection pedagogy. Further, we explore challenges that are common to both disciplines, as well as identifying some that are unique to engineering. This presentation addresses the conference theme by demonstrating how social work pedagogical approaches can inform and enhance critical self-reflection teaching in other disciplines, specifically engineering. We explore learning opportunities related to scaffolding critical self-reflection across courses, engaging students’ emotional responses, and diverse assessment methods where both disciplines can benefit from exploring creative alternatives to writing-heavy assessments.

For social work education, we highlight that the acceptance and integration of critical self-reflection across social work programs provides a model for other disciplines to foster robust professional identity and values. Our investigation also implies that both fields could benefit from re-evaluating assessment methods to move beyond traditional writing. Our ideas include developing authentic assessment methods, such as professional supervision sessions that incorporate critical self-reflection. However, further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of these alternative assessment methods and to understand how to overcome student resistance to confronting emotional aspects of reflection. This cross-disciplinary dialogue is crucial for advancing effective pedagogical practices for critical self-reflection.

## The Social Work Role in Alternatives to Restrictive Interventions: Emerging Insights

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### Background and Purpose

Restrictive interventions in mental health care pose significant threats to human rights, prompting global efforts to reduce and eliminate their use. Social workers, grounded in a human rights-based practice framework, are often key players in crisis settings; yet their role in using or avoiding restrictive interventions remains underexplored. This research aimed to identify social work perspectives within the broader cohort of mental health clinicians, as a foundation for future research into their unique contributions to non-restrictive crisis intervention. It also highlights key challenges and opportunities for social workers practicing and researching in psychiatric/medical contexts.

### Methods

A scoping review was conducted examining the perspectives of mental health professionals in crisis care across various settings, including inpatient units, emergency departments and crisis teams. The review focused on literature specific to restrictive interventions and reflections on their elimination. An additional reflexive analysis stage was included, by experienced multidisciplinary mental health clinicians (including social workers); involving team-based reflection to enrich findings and enhance methodological rigor.

### Findings

Thirty-five studies met inclusion criteria. Of these, only four mentioned social workers, and none specified their numbers among participants, with no papers including social workers as clinical staff. Most papers centred on nursing and medical perspectives within inpatient contexts. Only one study included the views of psychiatric nurses in emergency departments. This highlighted a significant gap in social work representation across crisis care literature, as well as representation of crisis mental health teams in general.

### Conclusions and Implications

Aligned with the conference's focus on linking research and practice through knowledge co-creation, these findings highlight the need for increased social work representation in this field. This conference presentation will not only present on these initial findings, but also be a core part of a recruitment strategy to build knowledge in this area. The authors are actively seeking collaboration and participant engagement for future studies aimed at highlighting the critical human rights-focused role social workers play in providing alternatives to restrictive interventions during episodes of mental health crisis.

## **Living with endometriosis – insights into (everyday) challenges. A social science analysis with a particular focus on the perspectives of those affected for improved social and psychosocial support services.**

Veronika Ernst<sup>1</sup>

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The disease endometriosis is receiving increasing attention through discussions in the medical community (e.g., Reifferscheid 2024), self-advocacy (e.g., Endometriosis Association 2024), and individuals (e.g., Crone & Schenke 2024; Wilken 2019). Nevertheless, treatment options remain inadequate and diagnosis is often delayed (e.g., Mechsner 2022). In this study, endometriosis serves as an example of a gendered disease (Kourabas 2024) in which social components are significant. In a social work and patriarchy-critical analysis, the collective experiential knowledge of those affected is to be taken into account in particular. Therefore reconstructive social research with participatory elements is carried out. The research topic dictates qualitative research methods and data generation, as the primary aim is to reconstruct subjective perspectives and meaning (e.g., Helfferich 2011: 21ff; Rosenthal 2015: 13ff). With its characteristics of health inequality, marginalization, and work with vulnerable groups, the research topic also suggests a participatory approach (e.g., von Unger 2012, 2014: 69ff; DGSA 2020; Hartung et al. 2020; Wihofsky et al. 2020; Bär et al. 2020; Schaefer et al. 2022; Boger & Krontheuer 2024; PartNet 2024). Thus this research brings together the scientifically motivated desire to understand and the political-normative goal of desire to change, who's relationship to each other needs to be reflected upon throughout the process (Hempel & Otten 2021: 215)

Based on a triangulation of methods (Flick 2019; Bohnsack 2021: 89f; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr 2021: 351), the participatory method Photo-Voice (Layh et al. 2020: 233ff; von Köppen et al. 2020: 23, 25f) in combination with group discussions (e.g., Bohnsack et al. 2013) and individual interviews (e.g., Froschauer & Lueger 2024) is currently being evaluated as a sufficient data collection method for addressing the research topic. After data collection, participatory elements are integrated into the analysis and dissemination process as well as practical transfers in the form of an advisory board of co-researchers (Green & Mercer 2001: 1935f). This is intended to increase the diversity of perspectives once again by incorporating subjective forms of knowledge from everyday life into the interpretation of the data, in addition to a scientific analytical approach (Hempel & Otten 2021: 218f). With its associated metatheoretical analytical framework, the documentary method focuses primarily on the formation of experience in its evaluation (Bohnsack 2021: 89f; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr 2021: 37f; 348f) and is therefore particularly suitable for the research project. Reconstructive social research and participatory research, with their seemingly contradictory logics, can be a fruitful combination—albeit can be a process with friction. Thus the academic researchers are given the responsibility of making transparent the conflicting location-based nature of research (gaining knowledge) and those affected (interpretive authority over their own realities of life). (Hempel & Otten 2021: 221ff) The research design includes a completed participatory preliminary study with a needs analysis, initial stakeholder analysis, and method piloting. At the time of the conference, initial results from the data collection to date as well as methodological and ethical reflections on data evaluation and work with the advisory board can be presented.

# Time, Structures and Professional Agency in Child Protection

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## Background

This presentation draws on my first sub-study, examining how time, urgency, and task reconciliation influence social workers' agency in child protection. In neoliberal social policy, time is regarded as a measurable and optimizable resource. Social workers negotiate time between administrative demands and clients' needs. Time also has an ethical dimension as a prerequisite for care of those in vulnerable positions. (Jørgensen 2022.) Agency is situated at the intersection of the individual and social structures, referring to the ability to act consciously and reflectively in relation to the surrounding reality. Agency is context-dependent and shaped by power relations and structural conditions. (Giddens 1991; Archer 2003.)

In 2023, Finland's new wellbeing services counties assumed responsibility for organizing social and health care as well rescue services, marking a major reform. Public debate has focused on the ability of child protection to ensure adequate care in an already overburdened system and with reduced resources. In child protection, efforts have been made to ensure the adequacy of social worker resources by limiting caseload.

## Data and Methods

Qualitative data were collected in 2023, using the method of empathy-based stories from child protection social workers in a wellbeing services county in Southern Finland (n=29). The participants worked integrated in open welfare, foster care and underage after-care. The material (39 frame stories) varied in urgency, which enabled the examination of the meanings of time and guided respondents to reflect on their agency in relation to their work tasks and time. The epistemological starting point of the study is critical realism, which also guided the analysis. The data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis complemented by discourse-analytic approach, enabling agency to be structured as relative, contextual, and temporally structured phenomenon.

## Results

Urgency, as an umbrella term for temporal strain, is not merely individual or organizational but a structural phenomenon shaped by legislation, practices, and resource scarcity. Time pressures and temporal tensions concretely shape both work implementation and social worker agency. Two forms structured:

1. Reflective and Negotiating Agency emerges when time allows ethically sustainable, needs-based practice, fostering presence, trust, and relationship-based work, while anticipation and planning strengthen autonomy and professional development.
2. Restricted and Reactive Agency emerges when time scarcity, unpredictability, administrative demands, and ethical strain limit alignment with professional ideals. Tension between quality, ethics, and structures reduces genuine interaction, undermining trust, children's participation, and reinforcing adult-centered practices. A fatalistic dimension emerged as loss of control and influence over time, content, or practice.

**Conclusions**

The study shows how social workers balance obligations, efficiency pressures, and trustful client relationships. Agency is shaped through the interplay of temporal and structural conditions. Supporting reflective and negotiating agency requires organizational and structural solutions ensuring sufficient time. Structures require critical review, and sustainable time-related solutions are needed, which enable planned approach, primacy of the child's best interests, and interaction. The findings call for viewing time as qualitative, ethical, and structural issue, opening new ways to understand it as integral to social services and evidence-based practice.

## Peer Work in a Municipal Labor Market Context

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In Sweden, as in many other European countries, unemployment is often framed as an individual issue to be addressed through activation policies (Crespo & Serrano Pascual, 2004). Consequently, social work related to unemployment is shaped more by labor market policy demands than by professional knowledge and proven experience. While there is a growing need for professionalization in this field, there is also increasing pressure to involve service users in welfare organizations.

One approach that has gained traction in Sweden is peer work, primarily used in psychiatric services to support individuals with mental health challenges. Although peer work is well-documented internationally, there are fewer studies in Nordic countries, and even fewer exploring its application outside of mental health contexts (Watson, 2019). Our study investigates how peer work can be implemented within a labor market context—an area that has not been extensively researched. This shift involves engaging in an activation discourse rather than a medical one.

The study was conducted in a mid-sized Swedish municipality as part of a local labor market initiative targeting unemployed youth aged 16–29. The project employed 15 young unemployed individuals as peer workers. Their role, alongside regular staff, was to conduct outreach, develop new working methods, and engage with other unemployed youth. The project was followed ethnographically over two years through observations and interviews. The research questions focused on the challenges and opportunities that the introduction of peer work posed at various organizational levels. Theoretically, we drew on Goffman's (1974) framework to analyze how new roles and framings emerged, were negotiated, and how the peer workers developed strategies to navigate their work. A qualitative analysis was conducted.

This presentation primarily highlights the strategies peer workers used to approach their tasks, although the project also significantly challenged the organization, which was unaccustomed to working with youth in this way. The results show that peer workers developed four main strategies:

1. Aligning with the competence of regular staff by mimicking their behavior.
2. Representing other young unemployed individuals and creating new methods based on their needs.
3. Introducing alternative perspectives and practices not directly tied to either the organization or the target group.
4. Resisting unclear roles and poor working conditions.

The activation discourse was evident in how peer workers responded to their pressures by creating what we term protected relational spaces within the organization. These spaces—activities or moments within regular operations—allowed young unemployed individuals

temporary relief from activation demands and conversations about their future and personal development.

Beyond introducing peer work to a new area of social work, the study also critiques the demand for evidence-based practices in politicized fields. Evidence is often equated with success and measurable outcomes, but in labor market interventions, the lack of available jobs shifts responsibility for failure onto individuals. To ensure evidence, external factors must be controlled, which becomes problematic when addressing societal issues. Peer workers, through the creation of protected relational spaces, offer an alternative that also serves as a critique of the evidence paradigm.



## Towards a Sustainable Model of Physical Activity Inclusion for People with Disabilities in Lithuania

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Regular participation in physical activity (PA) and leisure pursuits is a key determinant of health, psychological wellbeing and social inclusion. Yet people with disabilities remain significantly less active than the general population and face multiple systemic barriers, from inaccessible environments to negative attitudes. Recognizing the right to participate in leisure, tourism and sport emphasized by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, our research project—conducted by Kaunas University of Applied Sciences in partnership with the Lithuanian Association for Physical Activity of People with Disabilities—seeks to develop a scientifically grounded model for sustainable inclusion in PA and leisure activities.

The aim of this presentation is to identify needs, participation patterns and barriers to PA among adults with disabilities in order to co-create an evidence-based model that empowers non-governmental organizations and local authorities to promote active, inclusive lifestyles.

This presentation reports quantitative survey results from the project. An anonymous nationwide questionnaire was distributed to adults with various types and levels of disability (mobility, sensory, intellectual, psychosocial). The instrument captured demographic characteristics, current PA habits (frequency, context, companions), perceived benefits and barriers. Items were rated on Likert scales covering accessibility, transport, personal assistance, information, specialist competence, health status, stigma and financial constraints. Descriptive analysis was used to map participation patterns and the prevalence of each barrier.

Preliminary analysis reveals that only a minority of respondents engage in PA regularly ( $\geq 2$  times per week), with most reporting occasional or no participation. Walking, home-based exercise and aquatic activities dominate, while organised group or community-based programmes are rare. Activities frequently take place in private rather than public or communal spaces, signalling structural barriers rather than personal preference. The main obstacles identified include: (1) physical inaccessibility of facilities; (2) lack of suitable transport, especially in rural regions; (3) limited availability of personal assistants or companions; (4) insufficient information about adapted opportunities; (5) inadequate specialist training for inclusive practice; (6) financial limitations; and (7) psychosocial barriers such as low confidence and fear of negative social reactions. These factors interact to produce “isolated participation” that does not foster social connectedness or long-term adherence.

Our findings underscore that improving inclusion in PA for people with disabilities requires more than information campaigns—it calls for integrated, multi-level solutions. Potential strategies include mobile or community-based PA services, small-group or sensory-adapted

activities, “community coach” or volunteer support models, staff training in inclusive practice and subsidised access to adapted facilities. The evidence gathered will inform a sustainable model that shifts PA from a narrowly medicalised approach toward a holistic framework combining health promotion, empowerment and social participation.

This project is one of the first in Lithuania to map participation patterns and systemic barriers to PA among adults with disabilities and translate the findings into a practical, evidence-based model for NGOs and municipalities. By emphasising abilities, autonomy and community engagement, the model seeks to improve health, reduce social isolation and ensure people with disabilities are recognised as equal, active members of society.

Key words: Physical activity; Disability; Social inclusion; Empowerment; Model; Lithuania.

## The role of social work in digital inclusion

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### Background

In the Netherlands, the government primarily provides services through digital channels. Financial allowances, for example health or rent, must be requested online. For this purpose, residents have been issued a digital identification (digital ID). This digital ID also enables access to healthcare providers, housing services, and financial institutions. However, approximately 20% of the Dutch population experiences difficulties in engaging with digital systems. Many struggle with logging in, navigating websites, or uploading required documents. As a consequence, they risk missing out on the financial benefits to which they are legally entitled, encounter challenges in securing appropriate health insurance, and face obstacles in accessing housing or employment. These barriers not only result in digital exclusion but also exacerbate broader forms of social inequality. The inability to participate online complicates participation and may hinder individuals from improving their socio-economic status.

Despite these barriers, a large proportion of low-educated people in the Netherlands report not needing help accessing the Internet. When seeking support, they turn to informal settings, such as family and friends. The quality of this informal type of support is questionable and differs according to socio-economic position. Formal support contributes to better access and use of the internet. The most accessible formal support structures are community centres located near homes and social workers assigned to specific individuals. Although this formal support may foster equal digital inclusion, it remains unclear to what extent social workers assume this role and what forms of support they offer. The aim of this research was to survey the existing studies on how social workers support digital inclusion.

### Method

We conducted a systematic review following the PRISMA protocol. A total of 1110 unique articles were screened with search terms related to social work and digital inclusion, 36 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility and ultimately ten articles were extracted. The 'Resources and appropriation theory', which describes motivation, access, skills and usage as complementary phases of internet appropriation, was used as a base to analyse the extracted articles. Therefore we could identify in each phase, the types of internet-related barriers that clients of social workers experience and gain insight into how these barriers are observed and addressed by social workers.

### Conclusions and implications

Although it is evident that for effective internet accessibility, it is important to simultaneously address all four phases of Van Dijk's (2005) theory, this review shows that social workers provided formal support in only some of these phases. They offer support directly to clients by helping them online and also by organizing peer support, training or by activating their organization to facilitate. Future research should investigate how social workers can address all phases.

In addition to this direct support, the review shows that social workers play an important role in identifying systemic barriers, ethical dilemmas and addressing digital exclusion due to social inequality. Future research should emphasize the key role that social workers play in identifying the structural barriers that contribute to digital exclusion and therefore have an impact on policy.

## Proxy voice, traps, and boycotts: Client responses to increased post-COVID hybrid social work challenges in Sweden

Israa Ahmad<sup>1</sup>

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This article examines how social assistance clients in Sweden respond to the increased challenges of post-COVID hybrid social work. Drawing on 12 interviews with Swedish clients at two social services, the study identifies three challenges: increased digitalisation, reduced support, and dehumanised relationships. The responses to these challenges are analysed through Hirschman's (1970) Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect (EVLN) framework, further enriched by the concept of dependency within human service organisations. The findings demonstrate three response patterns: (1) 'proxy voice', where clients depend on others to amplify their voices, confront issues, and complaint due to digital barriers; (2) 'trapped loyalty', where clients remain compliant and actively entrap themselves in the system as a response to diminishing support; and (3) 'boycott-exit', where clients disengage from social services by neglecting or avoiding interactions following to reduced empathy. These responses are interpreted as win–lose, lose–win, or lose–lose scenarios, highlighting the absence of mutually beneficial (win–win) outcomes. Accordingly, the article discusses the 'hybrid limbo' concept to describe how post-pandemic hybrid practices can increase client detachment and disempowerment. The findings underscore the importance of aligning organisational adaptations with clients' needs, relationship-based practices, and proactive outreach to strengthen participation and reduce exclusion.

## Adapted Interview Method in Social Work Research: Description and Practical Uses

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### Background and purpose

Social work research needs methods that can flexibly capture diverse and sensitive personal experiences. Research may focus on clients' lives at a vulnerable stage, where the significance of the interview method becomes particularly evident. (Padgett, 2016; Liamputtong, 2007.) It is essential to create a safe, respectful space for meaningful narration. In my doctoral research, I used an interview approach combining elements from different methods to fit the context and sensitively explore participants' experiences, and in this presentation, I describe that approach.

### Methods

In my doctoral dissertation, the focus is on out-of-home care in child protection, especially regarding stability and change. I examine young adults' experiences of out-of-home care, how they perceive stability and change during placement, how these shape their overall experience of out-of-home care, and what meanings they attach to them in adulthood. When young adults share personal and often sensitive memories, the interview process requires a sensitive and ethically sound approach. Such experiences may be traumatic and evoke a wide range of emotions, yet narrators may also wish to recount their stories in as much detail as they remember.

This presentation introduces and evaluates an adapted interview method that combines elements of in-depth interviewing and open-ended interviewing within a serial interview format. The rationale for combining these approaches was the need to collect rich, experiential data from a target group whose voices are easily marginalized in knowledge production. Key features of the method include careful planning and preparation, as well as meeting young adults in a trusting manner and build a meaningful conversational connection. Implemented as a serial interview, the model included two sessions, allowing for a deeper exploration of past experiences and for memories to come back over time. (Read, 2018).

### Findings and Conclusions

Based on practical observations, the method enables a flexible progression of the interview and supports participants' autonomous narration of their own experiences. At the same time, it provides the researcher with better opportunities to deepen the understanding of both individual life stories and the structural factors that frame them. The flexibility of the method also helps to adapt to new themes and perspectives that emerge during the interview, thereby enriching the research data and enhancing its analytical value.

This adapted interview method can enrich the methodological repertoire of social work research by providing a practical and flexible tool, particularly for studying complex and sensitive phenomena. Combining different methods into a single approach enables in-depth data collection that respects participants' experiences and allows the researcher to respond

to new perspectives that emerge during the data-gathering process. This adapted interview method is suitable for research that aims to explore sensitive personal experiences within people's life stories.

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## Long-Term Effects of Childhood Abandonment Trauma: Mental Health, Resilience and Social Work Implications

Diana Narcisa Danau<sup>1</sup>

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Childhood abandonment is a deeply traumatic experience with profound implications for emotional, psychological, and social development. This study investigates the long-term effects of abandonment trauma on individuals who spent part of their childhood in institutional care in Romania. Through a mixed-methods approach involving semi-structured interviews and psychometric assessments of attachment styles and trauma types, the research aims to explore the complex relationship between early relational trauma and adult wellbeing.

Preliminary findings indicate that individuals who experienced abandonment often develop insecure attachment styles, suffer from persistent anxiety, depressive symptoms, low self-worth, and face difficulties in establishing trust-based interpersonal relationships. These outcomes are strongly connected to the emotional deprivation encountered in early life, especially within institutional settings where continuity of care and emotional safety were often lacking. Many participants also reported struggles with substance use, impulsive behaviors, and emotional detachment, symptoms commonly associated with unresolved childhood trauma.

However, the study also highlights the presence of resilience in some individuals, revealing the protective role of positive relationships later in life, access to therapeutic interventions, and personal coping strategies. This resilience can serve as a foundation for targeted social work practices and support systems that promote healing and social reintegration.



## Interdisciplinarity as a Driver of Digitalization and Physical Activity in Older Adults: Findings from the Evaluation of an Innovative Active Ageing Project

Dr Anna Zenarolla<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Trieste

### Background

Despite the growing diffusion of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICT) among the general population, only a small proportion of older adults actively use them, despite their significant potential to enhance physical, psychological, and social well-being. This presentation describes the results of an innovative project carried out in a mountainous area of one of Italy's most aged regions, aimed at fostering healthy and active ageing among older adults through the integrated promotion of health, social engagement, and digital learning—three interdependent components, each essential to well-being but insufficient on their own.

### Methods

The presentation draws on an evaluation study conducted at the end of the project to assess whether the project had achieved its objectives from the perspectives of both participants and organizers. The study addressed two main questions: What impact did participation have on older adults' ICT use, physical activity, and social interactions? What social dynamics emerged during the activities, and how did these influence participants' interactions and community engagement? An online questionnaire was developed specifically for this study. All 151 participants were invited to complete the questionnaire anonymously and received the link via email and WhatsApp. Bivariate analyses were conducted on the collected data. The organizers' perspectives were explored through a semi-structured interview guide addressing participant engagement, satisfaction with content and methods, observed relational dynamics, learning difficulties, and the project's strengths and limitations. Interviews were conducted with the project manager, coordinator, and one trainer involved in the digital literacy workshops. Transcripts were analyzed through content analysis.

### Findings

Sixty-one participants, representing 40% of the total, completed the questionnaire. Given that approximately half of the participants attended more than four activities, the survey response rate can be considered satisfactory, notwithstanding the relatively high proportion of non-respondents. Alongside a strong need for socialization and a high awareness of the importance of maintaining an active lifestyle that includes structured PA, the results reveal limited awareness among older adults of the opportunities offered by ICT. The findings confirm the high heterogeneity within the older adult population, as reflected in the varied levels of access to, familiarity with, and use of ICT. They further support the effectiveness of integrated approaches that combine ICT training, physical activity, and community participation, in order to address the diverse interests and motivations of older adults. Moreover, they show that older adults are more likely to engage in digital training and

physical activity when supported by family members, friends, acquaintances, and healthcare and ICT professionals, and when the activities are enjoyable.

**Conclusions and implications**

The study highlights social work's strategic role in supporting the diffusion of inclusive, community-oriented, and empowering interventions that promote active ageing and digital inclusion. It can act on multiple levels: through advocacy efforts aimed at raising policymakers' awareness of the value of such initiatives and securing adequate funding; by encouraging adult education providers to adopt co-design processes that directly involve older adults in planning educational programmes; and by challenging ageist stereotypes while promoting a more nuanced and realistic image of older adult.

## An Exploratory Study of the Utility of Self-Determination Theory on Organizational Impact in Reporting Elder Abuse by Home Health Aides in New York City

Dr. Agnieszka Halarewicz<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hunter College

Elder abuse remains a pervasive yet underreported issue in home care settings, where home health aides (HHAs) often serve as the first line of observation and protection for vulnerable older adults. Understanding the organizational and motivational factors that influence aides' willingness and ability to report suspected abuse is therefore essential. This exploratory study applies Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that shape reporting behaviors among HHAs in New York City, with a focus on the organizational practices that may enhance or inhibit these motivations.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017) posits that three basic psychological need: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, must be fulfilled to sustain human motivation and well-being. When applied to organizational contexts, SDT highlights how supervisory support, collaborative decision-making, and alignment of individual and institutional values can enhance intrinsic motivation and support the internalization of organizational goals (Ng et al., 2012). Conversely, environments that frustrate these needs can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and lower quality of job performance.

In the case of HHAs, reporting suspected elder abuse is motivated intrinsically by a moral imperative to prevent harm and ensure client safety, and extrinsically by adherence to agency policies, legal mandates, and supervisory expectations. Findings from this study indicate that aides who experience strong supervisory support, skill development opportunities, and open collaboration with administrative staff report higher levels of job satisfaction and stronger intentions to act when confronted with possible abuse. In turn, aides who report frustration of autonomy and relatedness, such as lack of follow-up after reporting or exclusion from collaborative processes, describe diminished motivation and greater fatigue, factors that may ultimately hinder consistent reporting practices. Notably, aides emphasized the importance of organizational collaboration in fostering trust and sustaining motivation. Many expressed a desire for ongoing communication and transparency after reporting a case of suspected abuse, particularly when they had developed meaningful relationships with clients but were no longer assigned to their care. This suggests that beyond initial reporting, organizational structures that keep HHAs informed and engaged play a vital role in maintaining motivation and reinforcing their professional commitment to client well-being.

This exploratory study underscores the importance of applying SDT as a framework to better understand and address barriers to reporting elder abuse. By supporting HHAs' psychological needs through clear rationales for tasks, recognition of their professional insights, and opportunities for collaborative engagement, agencies can more effectively align organizational values with aides' intrinsic motivations. Such alignment not only

strengthens reporting behaviors but also enhances overall job satisfaction, reduces burnout, and promotes client safety.

In conclusion, the study highlights that elder abuse reporting is a complex behavior influenced by both individual motivations and organizational contexts. Applying SDT provides valuable insights into how agencies can design supportive environments that empower HHAs, integrate their voices into decision-making processes, and ultimately contribute to the protection of vulnerable older adults. Future research is needed to expand these findings and explore specific organizational interventions that may further enhance reporting behaviors in home care settings.

# Differentiating the Role of Professional and Non-Professional Social Workers in Dealing with Flood Disasters in Pakistan.

Dr Sonia Omer<sup>1</sup>

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## Background and purpose

Climate change is a significant element behind disasters in forms of floods and global warming in Pakistan. The recent disastrous floods of 2025 have added deep troubles to the lives of millions of people in Pakistan who have not yet come out of the destructions of floods of 2022 and 2023. The current study aims to see the approach of professional social workers in flood affected areas while working within an organization. The study has investigated the differences between professional social workers and non-professional social workers while adopting flood relief strategies and approaches within these organizations.

## Methods

The study has employed a qualitative approach while adopting focus group discussion (FGD) as a tool of data collection. Three FGDs were conducted with representatives from government agencies, non-government organizations, civil societies that have actively taken part in flood relief activities. Participants were grouped in FGDs into organizations working with professional social workers (degree holders in social work discipline) and non-professional social workers. Each FGD was comprised of 8 participants. The findings of the study were obtained through thematic analysis using a six-step framework by Braun and Clarke. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and participants provided informed consent.

## Findings

The study findings revealed that social workers employed in organizations performed in a different and inclusive manner in modeling activities for flood relief and disaster response in Pakistan. The greater majority of the respondents revealed that a policy or plan made other than professional social workers lacked sustainability. The professional social worker approach was mostly emphasizing activities which added an element of self-help and self-determination among the people. Indeed, besides, the issues of women, children, disabled and older population were addressed with great sensitivity. The study also found that psycho-social support and economic independence of the people in need after initial relief activities has been the main target of professional social workers. One significant finding was the capacity building of people in need while finding and utilizing best available resources of the community which was seen as an important facilitation in bridging field realities and working in long-term recovery approaches. On the contrary, a narrow approach of professionals other than social workers primarily relied on instant relief and temporary recovery of flood-affected areas. The participants, however, were of the view that bureaucratic hurdles, corruption in available funds, lack of support from government agencies and ignorance from disaster-specific policies and planning has complicated Pakistan's response to flood-related disasters.

**Conclusions and Implications:**

The study concluded that the role of professional social workers in rendering services at the time of disasters have been novel and different from non-professional social worker in organizations. The findings highlighted a need of advancing social work knowledge, practice and skills in Pakistan while widening its scope across country. There is a dire need to integrate the role of qualified social worker in disaster response mechanism in Pakistan.

## Holding Back Promises - a Video-based Study of Youth Participation in Child Protection Meetings

PhD student [Signe Steensbæk](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roskilde University/ University College of Copenhagen

### Promises on Hold – a Video-based Study of Youth Participation in Child Protection Meetings

By Signe Steensbæk, PhD student at Roskilde University/ University College of Copenhagen

#### Background and purpose

A new law called the Child's Act is being implemented in Denmark to strengthen children's rights and participation in decision-making within child protection. However, little is known about how these legal ideals are put into practice during everyday interactions between social workers and young people. This study explores the conditions under which youth participation occurs in child protection meetings, with the research question: How is youth participation shaped in the daily practice of child protection meetings? The study directly relates to the conference subthemes of current challenges in social work practice, policy, and education, as well as the impact and effectiveness of social work.

#### Methods

A video-elicitation approach was utilized. Child protection meetings between social workers and young people were video-recorded, followed by qualitative interviews with both participants reflecting on the interactions. The data set included 17 recorded meetings and a total of 30 interviews. Using a combination of Critical Childhood Studies and Positioning Theory, the data were analyzed to examine how youth participation is interactionally shaped within a statutory framework.

#### Findings

The analysis reveals that social workers encounter significant administrative and managerial pressures, including limited time, inadequate meeting facilities, and stringent eligibility criteria for services. Since they lack the decision-making authority to approve most interventions, social workers often avoid making transparent professional judgments and concrete promises when communicating with youth. Consequently, the positions offered to young participants are limited and conditional, starkly contrasting with the legislative goal of giving them more voice and influence.

#### Conclusions and implications

The findings reveal a conflict between the ideals of child participation in the Child's Act and the actual practice, which is hindered by systemic and organizational barriers. This highlights broader challenges in current social work policy and practice, and raises essential questions about the effectiveness of existing approaches to youth participation. Unless social workers' decision-making authority and resources are aligned with these expectations, the law risks becoming merely symbolic rather than genuinely meaningful. Implications include the need for policy reforms, increased professional autonomy, and a reevaluation of how youth participation is implemented and taught.

**Inspired by:**

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## **Social Geo-Design: How much do we innovate in social work? The Traveling Center for the Recovery of Children with Disabilities – Case Study**

Phd Adrian Cristian Titorencu<sup>1</sup>

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In recent years social work has gone from a mere alley to a highway full of ideas. So we ask: How much do we need to innovate in social work to meet the biggest challenges and improve the quality of life?

The Danube Delta is a natural reserve in Romania that presents geographical particularities regarding its inhabitants. Children with disabilities are not only born in the city, but also in hard-to-reach areas such as the Danube Delta. A national NGO analyzed this situation of the marginalized population and proposed the creation of an Itinerant Center for the Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities (ICRCD), which is a floating pontoon transformed into a social service.

This can be the birth of Social Geo-Design – as a solution of the social work system and not of humanitarian aid (Social Geo Model).

The research analyzed the activity of a unique social service over a period of 2 years (2023-2025) providing support to approximately 100 children with disabilities and their families in difficult-to-access areas of the Danube Delta.

This case study follows and evaluates the activity of the day center that travels throughout 5 stations on the Danube - Tulcea, Mahmudia, Isaccea, Macin and Turcoaia - in a year, to provide recovery services to children with disabilities directly in the communities where they live, without them having to make long and tiring trips.

The day center aims to provide assessment and information activities, speech therapy, play therapy, psychological counseling, socialization activities, development of independent living skills for children with disabilities, as well as providing support, counseling, and education activities for parents, legal representatives or other persons who care for children with disabilities.

The social services offered are provided free of charge to children with disabilities from Tulcea County, especially from the Danube Delta, that are in risk of family separation, aged between 0 and 18, as well as to their parents or legal representatives, aiming to involve them in the recovery process and ensure progress through continued therapy. The social service supports children with disabilities, families and disadvantaged communities, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, type of disability or social status of the beneficiaries.

The research highlights the progress made by children benefiting from this type of unique center and the increase in the quality of life of families in their communities; also highlights

the solution to an acute problem in the field of social services, namely the lack of specialized personnel.

In conclusion if the concept of Geo-Design directly refers to the involvement of all stakeholders in identifying the best solutions in the design of the next constructions according to geographical challenges, Social Geo-Design emphasizes the social component, namely the person and the social problems they have, such as a disability, living in a geographical area with a particular peculiarity.

The definition of Social Geo-Design is the involvement of all stakeholders, state or private social work agencies, in the design of social services for people with everyday problems, taking into account geographical particularities.

## Child Welfare Service Pathways in Finland: A Register-Based Study

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<sup>4</sup> University of Tampere

### Background and purpose

This study investigates the trajectories of child welfare services within the Finnish context. The guiding premise of the research is the notion that timely and needs-based open care services reduce the necessity for more severe interventions, such as foster care placements. However, empirical evidence of this is limited and our prior preliminary findings suggest that families of children who end up being taken into custody have received open care services more than children in welfare services receive on average. In this study, we address the following research question: “Do the service pathways of children and families assisted through open care support measures differ from those of children and families whose involvement with child welfare has resulted in the child being taken into custody?”. This study is part of the ACElife project, which investigates the long-term consequences of adverse childhood experiences and effective institutional responses.

### Methods

The research utilises registry data collected from the child welfare client register of a large municipality in southern Finland, spanning the years 2013 to 2019. The dataset comprises 1 453 children and their parents. This data is supplemented with information from Statistics Finland, the National Institute for Health and Welfare, and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland. We employ sequence analysis as analytical method, as it is suitable for examining longitudinal data. For analysis purposes, child welfare cases are categorised into four groups based on the type of services they received during the review period: 1) taken into care, 2) emergency placement in open care, 3) open care placement as a support measure, and 4) other open care clients.

### Findings

Preliminary findings presented at the conference will highlight differences in service pathways between children and families supported by open care measures and those whose cases resulted in foster care placements. We will also explore individual and family level characteristics to understand how these are associated with service pathways.

### Conclusions and implications

Empirical research on child welfare service pathways in Finland remains limited. Existing register-based analyses on child welfare focus mainly on out-of-home care, and studies on preventive in-home services are mainly qualitative and based on small samples. Consequently, there is little systematic evidence on service trajectories within child welfare system. By employing sequence analysis of comprehensive register data, this study provides novel insights into the dynamics of child welfare interventions, offering unprecedented evidence on service pathways in the context of Finnish child welfare services.

## Mapping Lives, Supporting Practice: Innovative use of Life Calendars in Social Work Research and Practice

Miss Jessica Wagner<sup>2</sup>

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Although life calendars as a data collection tool are not new in social research, only recently have they been adapted for use in qualitative inquiry (Nelson, 2010). This presentation draws on a UK based doctoral study which employed a retrospective qualitative approach and made innovative use of life calendars alongside semi structured interviews. The study explored resilience and coping in men exposed to parental domestic abuse as children, who are in nonviolent relationships with women as adults

The use of calendars highlighted a number of benefits for research approaches, such as rapport building and engaging participants in sensitive conversations safely, balancing power and offering empowerment as well as supporting memory recall. However, unintended positive outcomes were observed throughout the use of life calendars that demonstrated other advantages to participants that may be useful for social work practice. They offered a tool for reflection and meaning making of past experiences and a tool for conversations and talking about strengths and trauma in a whole life approach. In that context a life calendar approach could be adapted for use in practice and enable detailed assessments and trauma informed ways of working. The presentation aligns with conference subtheme 8, Methodological development, innovation, technologies and capacity building in social work research and subtheme 7, Linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge.

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## Digital Exclusion among Older Workers from England and China in Industry 4.0: Lived Experiences, Perceptions, and Challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Industry 4.0 has precipitated a profound transformation of the work environments and methods, characterized by pervasive digitalization and intelligent automation. Workers are increasingly requested to adapt the transformation to enhance productivity and organizational efficiency. However, this transformation simultaneously marginalizes those who cannot effectively utilize digital resources. Older workers are particularly vulnerable due to the age barriers and resistance to digital technology, which may limit their adaptability in rapidly evolving digital environments. This exclusion not only undermines their employability but also restricts their access to digital welfare. However, limited research has devoted attention to older workers, particularly in comparative perspectives of Chinese and Western cultures, leaving research gaps in understanding how cultural contexts shape older workers' digital exclusion. Based on the above-mentioned review, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the subjective lived experience of digital exclusion among older workers and understand their perceptions of digital exclusion, as well as explore the influence of digital exclusion on them across England and China. The research questions are proposed as listed. Q1: What are the lived experiences of older workers from England and China regarding digital inequalities? Q2: How do they perceive digital inequalities and their role in their work environments? Q3: In what ways do digital inequalities influence the consequences of their work? Q4: Is there any difference in digital inequalities across different cultures? This phenomenological study employs Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine older workers' lived experiences of digital exclusion across English and Chinese contexts. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 20 workers aged 50+ from each country, purposively sampled across varied industries. Data collection will focus on participants' personal narratives regarding digital barriers, workplace experiences, and adaptive strategies. Analysis will follow IPA's iterative process of coding, theme development, and cross-case comparison, with a particular focus on cultural nuances. Member checking and researcher reflexivity will enhance trustworthiness. This design enables deep exploration of subjective experiences while facilitating cross-cultural comparison of digital exclusion phenomena among older workers. The findings may demonstrate that older workers face systemic barriers beyond skill deficits, affecting their professional identities and access to essential digital welfare provisions. Furthermore, the complex interplay between digitalization and older workers' experiences across English and Chinese contexts may also be observed, highlighting how cultural contexts may influence how digital marginalization is experienced, with collectivist versus individualist values shaping support networks and coping strategies. Practically, the digital welfare state should attach more attention to older workers to promote their digital inclusion and prevent the stratification of digital welfare. Social workers should develop targeted interventions that recognize the valuable expertise of older workers while creating pathways for meaningful digital participation that enhance their overall well-being. Future research may examine how welfare digitalization specifically impacts older workers' employment security and explore cross-cultural mentoring programs that bridge generational digital divides. In summary, the study calls for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to digital inclusion, ensuring that the needs of older workers are recognized and addressed in efforts to bridge the digital divide.

## Tackling Wicked Problems through Inter- and Transdisciplinary Co-creation: The Núcleo Model and Chile's Programa Familias

Taly Reininger<sup>1</sup>, Gianinna Muñoz<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad De Chile

This presentation reflects on the experience of the Núcleo Model, developed at the Department of Social Work at the Universidad de Chile, as a space for engaging with the complex problems that social policies and programs seek to confront. These problems—poverty, territorial inequalities, and fragile welfare institutions—are not amenable to linear solutions. They demand inter- and transdisciplinary approaches that bring together different forms of knowledge and experience.

Since 2019, the Núcleo de Estudios Interdisciplinarios en Trabajo Social (NEITS) has collaborated with Chile's Social and Solidarity Investment Fund (FOSIS) around the Programa Familias, the country's main proximity-based welfare program. This collaboration has evolved over time, addressing different research questions and employing a range of methodologies—always under the principle of co-producing knowledge. Across these years, the Núcleo has created participatory spaces where researchers, students, municipal frontline teams, regional staff, national authorities, and families themselves meet to reflect on the challenges and possibilities of welfare implementation.

The Programa Familias illustrates the dilemmas of implementation in contexts of scarcity and institutional weakness. While designed to accompany families through psychosocial and socioproductive support, it faces persistent obstacles: fragile inter-institutional coordination, limited resources, and the stigmatization of territories where it operates. Through structured encounters facilitated by the Núcleo Model, different actors have been able to share and confront perspectives: the theoretical insights of academics, the practical know-how of professionals, and the lived experiences of families.

These exchanges have highlighted the relational and territorial dimensions of welfare delivery, showing both the creativity of frontline workers and the ways in which policy can reproduce inequality. At the same time, they have demonstrated the importance of participatory approaches that position universities not as distant observers but as active mediators between research, practice, and policy.

The presentation will discuss lessons from this sustained collaboration: the potential of inter- and transdisciplinary engagement to grapple with wicked problems; the methodological and ethical challenges of sustaining co-production across divergent institutional logics; and the formative role of student participation in processes of collaborative inquiry.

In contexts of fragile institutions and persistent inequalities, the Núcleo Model offers an innovative framework for linking social work research and practice. Rooted in participation and co-production, it advances evidence-informed practice, informs policy, and amplifies frontline and community voices. This Chilean experience contributes to international debates on how social work can act as a hub of interdisciplinary innovation to face the wicked problems of our time.

## Cultural Competence Across Boundaries: Arab Clients' Perceptions of Social Workers in Israel

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### Background and Purpose

Cultural competence is the ability to respectfully and effectively engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds while protecting their dignity and values. Traditionally, research on this topic has focused on the perspectives of social workers and other professionals. This study shifts the focus to clients, exploring cultural competence within Arab social services in Israel and illustrating how professional practice must navigate national, social, cultural, disciplinary, and professional boundaries.

In Israel, most Arab social workers serving Arab communities are trained in Israeli universities, where social work education is primarily rooted in Western, individualistic, and secular frameworks, alongside liberal and critical theories. Through this process of professional socialization, these practitioners acquire skills and values that may conflict with the collective, traditional, and religious values of the communities they return to serve. Although Arab society is undergoing gradual social transitions influenced by wider Israeli society, the shift toward individualism remains incomplete. This tension challenges the assumption that shared ethnicity or group membership guarantees shared values, perspectives, or culturally competent practice. Arab social workers must therefore navigate complex and sometimes contradictory cultural frameworks when providing services.

### Methods

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 14 family members (11 women and 3 men, aged 26–55) from Arab society who accessed social services during health crises (e.g., cancer, multiple sclerosis, kidney failure). All participants were married, most identified as traditional or religious, and all lived in Muslim towns. The study explored their experiences and perceptions of social workers' cultural competence within welfare services during times of extreme vulnerability.

The findings revealed three key challenges: highlights the various challenges faced by participants in their interactions with social workers, emphasizing the cultural gaps between the two parties; Unaddressed issues of relationships and sexuality in the context of health crises; and Power dynamics between social workers and clients, highlighting the influence of professional authority on interventions and decision-making.

### Conclusions and implications

This study explores cultural competence in social work from the perspective of clients in Arab welfare offices, addressing a gap in previous research that focused mainly on social workers' views. The findings highlight gaps in sensitivity to cultural aspects such as sexuality, body image, and emotional expression. Some interventions were perceived as overly technical, causing feelings of alienation among clients. Despite Arab social workers' cultural



familiarity, significant challenges remain in bridging cultural gaps, raising concerns about the connection between academic training and real-world practice. The research reveals the pressing need for a reevaluation of social work trainings, emphasizing the need for cultural competence trainings that will includes active listening and a deeper understanding of the specific cultural needs of applicants.

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## Social Workers with Minimum Income: a comparative approach between obligations and rights in two regions

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This paper presents two regional cases in Spain relating to social inclusion. On the one hand, the Community of Navarre (CFN) is characterized by dual entitlement or the separation between financial aid and social inclusion by social workers (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018; OFredi, 2025; Taylor, 2014). On the other hand, La Rioja (CAR) is distinguished by the link between the right to financial assistance and the obligation to perform a service in return. In both territories, the management of financial assistance and support for inclusion pathways falls within the remit of Social Services and the role of Social Worker.

The following objectives are established:

- 1) To explore the role of social worker in the two regional models.
- 2) To understand the differences and similarities between the models through the perceptions of social workers and recipients of minimum income benefits.

The first objective was achieved through a documentary study, which compared the role assigned to social work. It also investigated the changes in the models resulting from the Minimum Living Income Act, which aims to create a minimum income at the national level in order to standardize the amount and criteria for accessing benefits.

The second objective is achieved through a mixed study. On the one hand, we study similarities and differences through a survey of social workers in both regions. Through non-probabilistic sampling, 163 surveys (81 and 82) were conducted, and statistical tests were performed to identify the existence of significant differences. On the other hand, 26 in-depth interviews (18 and 8) were conducted in order to explore the protective capacity of the benefit, the differences and challenges in both cases.

The documentary analysis highlight the differences between compensation and dual entitlement. These differences are accentuated in five stages linked to the origin and expansion of income and social inclusion programmes.

The opinion results refer to a similar assessment of inclusion resources, with a more positive view of those aspects of the CFN linked to employment stimulus measures and protected social employment. Likewise, interviews with recipients of economic benefits provide insight into the shared and specific challenges of the two protection models. In this regard, the deficits in the capacity for protection and the difficulty of identifying obligations in rights on the part of public administrations are highlighted. The interviews point to specificities in each of the two regional models, linked to the articulation of the double right and the barriers to compensation in the case of the CAR.

The conclusions reveal two different approaches to income support and assistance, highlighting specific similarities and differences in the assessments of professionals and recipients. Recommendations are made for both territories, reflecting the need to strengthen the aspects that received the lowest ratings, such as financial protection and professional monitoring. On the other hand, specific recommendations are made for the CAR, mainly concerning the separation of income and support programmes. Likewise, the challenges linked to the CFN refer to issues relating to the role of support within the framework of dual rights.

## **“To Explore Sustainability?” Coordinators’ Contributions Through World Café to Building a Sustainable Inclusion Framework for People with Disabilities**

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Designing a sustainable inclusion framework for people with disabilities requires integrating empirical data on their participation with the lived knowledge of local actors who implement policy. In Lithuania, municipal coordinators are key brokers between people with disabilities, service providers and decision-makers. Their perspectives on what actually works are essential for translating “sustainability” from a policy principle into practice. The aim of this study is to capture and synthesise coordinators’ proposals for a sustainable model of inclusion in physical activity, leisure and recreational participation for people with disabilities, using a participatory World Café approach. Fifteen coordinators from 14 municipalities participated in a World Café (Walker, 2023) session (with four guiding questions: What activities should be included in the model to meet needs for physical activity as well as social and emotional well-being? How can information accessibility problems be addressed? What human resources (volunteers, specialists, psychologists, trainers) are required? How can we ensure that the model becomes operational within municipalities? Participants rotated among tables, documenting ideas on flip-charts; notes were photographed and thematically analysed. Based on the results of the study, the coordinators proposed a multidimensional model: Integrated activities: combining adapted physical activity with creative, cultural and peer-support components (e.g., small-group swimming, Nordic walking with social cafés, art-based exercise sessions) to enhance both physical and emotional well-being; Accessible information: creation of a centralised, multi-format platform (web, print, easy-read, audio) and proactive outreach via health professionals, NGOs and social media to inform people with disabilities and their families about available opportunities; Human resources: mixed teams of trained professionals and community volunteers. Coordinators stressed the need for cross-training leisure/PA providers in disability inclusion, and for municipal funding to sustain personal assistants, psychologists and “community coach” roles; Implementation mechanisms: embedding the model into municipal strategic plans and budgets; establishing intersectoral steering groups with NGOs, health, education and transport sectors; piloting in one district and scaling up with monitoring indicators co-defined with people with disabilities. Participants highlighted that sustainability depends on shifting from project-based, short-term funding to integrated, long-term municipal responsibility and co-ownership with community stakeholders. The World Café results show that coordinators envision a holistic, rights-based approach linking physical activity and leisure to empowerment, social participation and well-being. Their contributions outline concrete steps—activities, information systems, human resources and governance measures—that can transform an abstract “model” into an operational municipal framework. This study demonstrates how the World Café method can mobilise coordinators’ practical knowledge to co-design a sustainable inclusion framework.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; People with disabilities; Coordinators; World Café; Physical activity; Leisure; Municipal implementation.

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## Experiences of People with Disabilities in Leisure and Recreational Activities: Pathways to Social Inclusion

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Leisure and recreational activities are increasingly recognised as fundamental dimensions of wellbeing, empowerment, and citizenship. For people with disabilities, participation in meaningful leisure constitutes not only a right enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but also a critical indicator of social inclusion and quality of life. Nevertheless, access to leisure opportunities remains constrained by structural, informational, and attitudinal barriers. Paper presents empirical findings from a Lithuanian research project aimed at developing a scientifically grounded and sustainable model for the inclusion of people with disabilities in leisure and recreational activities.

### Aim

The study sought to examine participation patterns, perceived benefits, and key barriers experienced by adults with disabilities in Lithuania, and to translate the empirical evidence into actionable recommendations for municipalities, non-governmental organisations, and service providers to foster inclusive leisure practices.

### Methods

A mixed-method approach was applied, combining a nationwide anonymous survey ( $n \approx 300$ ) with stakeholder consultations. The survey collected demographic information (age, gender, location, disability type, severity) and data on leisure participation (frequency, settings, social context), perceived significance of leisure, and barriers encountered. A series of Likert-type items assessed constraints related to physical accessibility, transport, personal assistance, information availability, social attitudes, health conditions, psychological factors, specialist competence, and financial affordability. Complementary analysis of international policy frameworks and examples of good practice informed the conceptual development of the sustainable inclusion model.

### Findings

Results indicate that while respondents ascribe high personal and social value to leisure, regular engagement in organised or community-based activities remains limited. Predominant forms of participation include walking, home-based exercise, swimming, and informal cultural events, with relatively few individuals involved in structured group programmes. Leisure activities frequently occur in private rather than public environments, reflecting constrained opportunities rather than autonomous choice. Across the sample, multiple barriers were consistently reported: inaccessible venues and equipment; lack of affordable or suitable transport, particularly in rural regions; limited availability of personal assistance; insufficient or non-accessible information on adapted activities; negative societal attitudes; health-related and psychological barriers such as fear or discomfort; insufficiently trained professionals; and financial constraints. Notably, over 40% of

respondents identified lack of information as a major impediment, with similar proportions citing transport, financial, and support-related limitations.

### **Conclusion**

The findings underscore that leisure participation among people with disabilities in Lithuania is predominantly shaped by systemic and environmental factors rather than individual motivation. Advancing inclusion thus requires integrated, multi-level interventions. Policy and practice recommendations include decentralising leisure services through mobile or community-based programmes, introducing small-group and sensory-adapted activities, establishing volunteer or “community coach” support schemes, enhancing professional competence in inclusive leisure provision, subsidising costs, and creating centralised accessible information platforms.

**Originality and value.** This study constitutes one of the first comprehensive national analyses of leisure participation among adults with disabilities in Lithuania. By co-designing a sustainable inclusion model with key stakeholders, it contributes novel insights into the interplay between leisure, empowerment, and social inclusion, offering an evidence-based foundation for future policy and practice.

**Keywords:** People with disabilities; Leisure; Recreation; Social inclusion; Empowerment; Sustainable model

## Enablers, barriers and diverse approaches: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work Education

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Globally, there is a growing need to engage social workers in evidence-based practice (EBP). To successfully integrate EBP into social work, a shared understanding of EBP terminology is required. We refer to EBP as a process that integrates the best research evidence, contextual circumstances, professional expertise, as well as clients' values and preferences.

We aim to explore empirical literature related to EBP learning in the social work discipline. The primary research question is: What is known from the literature about the teaching of EBP in social work education among social work students and social workers? Secondary research questions are: What kind of factors enable or prevent the learning of EBP? What learning outcomes have been found in the studies?

The scoping review was performed following the JBI methodology and the PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines. We established the inclusion criteria and search terms on the Population (P), Concept (C) and Context (C) framework. Studies that included social work students and social workers (P) and explored EBP (C) on social work education globally (C) were considered. Peer-reviewed empirical studies written in English, Finnish or Swedish were included. In February 2025, we conducted a search in 12 databases.

We screened 3137 individual abstracts using Covidence systematic review software. 285 full-text studies were assessed for eligibility. In total, 37 research articles were included in our scoping review. Studies were published between 2008 and 2024, and most of them were from the United States.

Our preliminary findings reveal a diverse range of EBP educational approaches used in the social work discipline. However, studies emphasize hands-on learning, field work and problem-based learning. Individual, organizational and educational factors are recognized to enable and prevent EBP learning. Studies present both positive and contradictory learning results. The concept of EBP varies remarkably across studies, yet most of the studies conceptualize EBP as a process.

Our study emphasizes the need to address the individual, organizational and educational learning factors. Integrating EBP into social work practice via continuous as well as undergraduate and graduate social work curricula requires collaboration between social work education and agencies. In addition, social work education should remain consistent with the EBP concepts to avoid fragmentation and misunderstandings on the topic. With this abstract, we open the discourse to promote EBP through social work education. The research is part of the ongoing NÄPSÄ (Promoting evidence-based practice in social work) research project, funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland under Grant VN/10936/2024.

**Keywords:** Evidence-based practice, social work education, scoping review

## Partner violence against older persons: a survey study of exposure and help-seeking

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Partner violence is a widespread social problem of concern across professional and disciplinary boundaries. Although older persons may be particularly vulnerable to this type of violence, knowledge is limited, as research on partner violence rarely focuses on older populations and studies on elder abuse seldom look specifically at partner violence. In addition, help-seeking rates after exposure to violence are low within this group. In Sweden, where the current research project is conducted, research indicates that violence against older persons is relatively common (e.g. Lindert et al., 2013). This is while elderly care has decreased in recent decades, in a process characterized by rationalisation, marketisation and privatisation (e.g. Hoppania et al., 2024). As a larger share of the population lives at home during older age, those next of kin face stronger pressures to meet their care needs. Care burdens – such as stress and dependency within caregiving relationships – may in turn increase the risk of partner violence, as well as escalate ongoing violence.

This interdisciplinary project examines exposure to partner violence and help-seeking after such violence, among older women and men in Sweden. Particular attention is given to what hinders and facilitates help-seeking in this group. The project thereby aims to contribute knowledge of relevance for support measures across disciplines and professions. It is based on a survey in the general population of Sweden (60–84 years), alongside interviews with and texts written by women and men (60+ years) living at home and exposed to partner violence. The survey was distributed via a web panel, nationally representative of those with regular access to internet, and completed by around 5000 persons. The responses are analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analyses. This presentation will discuss preliminary results of the survey, focusing on help-seeking after exposure to violence and analysing any differences in help-seeking behaviour related to gender, class and migration background. We will discuss implications of our findings for future research and social work practice, in furthering support for those exposed or at risk and developing interventions aimed at preventing partner violence in this age group.



## Ethnocultural disparities in participation in higher education among care leavers from therapeutic youth villages and their matched peers: A quasi-experimental design

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### Background

While disparities in higher education (HE) participation between care leavers and their peers are well documented, ethnocultural differences within these groups remain underexplored and inconclusive. The intersection of care experience with other inequalities—such as ethnicity, immigration status, and educational history—can further compound barriers to academic progression. Although immigrant and ethnic minority youth often share disadvantages such as lower living conditions and parental resources, they differ in significant ways, with distinct histories and trajectories that shape educational outcomes. This study compares and predicts participation in HE and completion of HE (i.e., earning a HE degree) among care leavers from three ethnocultural groups in Israel- young people born in Israel, immigrants from the Former Soviet Union [FSU], and immigrants from Ethiopia- and their same-ethnic matched peers without OHC experience.

### Methods

Using administrative data, this study employed a longitudinal quasi-experimental design tracking 16 birth cohorts (1982–1997) of alumni from therapeutic youth villages ( $n = 3,765$ ) and matched peers ( $n = 7,530$ ). We used bivariate analyses to compare HE participation (never enrolled; enrolled but dropped out; completed with a degree; currently enrolled [as of 2021]) by study group (care leavers vs. peers), ethnicity (Israeli-born, FSU immigrants, Ethiopian immigrants), and study groups within ethnicity (care leavers vs. same-ethnic peers). Multinomial logistic regression predicted HE participation. Results: Care leavers had significantly lower enrollment and completion rate compared to their matched peers (16.7% vs. 28.9 and 47.3% vs. 57.2%, respectively). Enrollment rates were similar for FSU and Ethiopian immigrants, and slightly higher for Israeli-born care leavers; dropout rates were highest for Ethiopian immigrants. FSU care leavers exhibit the largest gap from their same-ethnic matched peers in both enrollment and completion rate, followed by Israeli-born care leavers who also show relatively large gap. Ethiopian immigrants care leavers show the poorest academic performance from all groups examined, but they exhibit the smallest disparities from their same-ethnic matched peers. Yet, our predictive models showed no significant interaction between study group and ethnicity, suggesting that therapeutic facilities are not more successful in promoting the academic progress of youth with immigrants' background.

### Conclusions and implications

All groups in this study showed low rates of HE participation, with particularly acute vulnerabilities among care leavers and Ethiopian youth. Ethiopian care leavers had the poorest outcomes, reflecting the intersection of multiple disadvantages. We urge the adoption of a multi-tiered policy approach, both during care and after aging out, to promote academic success in HE. Social workers and educators in out-of-home care should

implement early interventions to foster academic skills, self-concept, and aspirations, with special attention to Ethiopian immigrant youth in Israel, who often face concentrated poverty and adverse living conditions. Educational support should be recognized as an essential element of care, acknowledging academic success as a vital protective factor in youths' development. Finally, widening participation initiatives should explicitly prioritize care leavers, recognizing care experience as a structural disadvantage.

## Social work and social innovation: challenges and barriers to implementing policy practice in local welfare contexts

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<sup>1</sup> INAPP - National Institute for Public Policy Analysis

Social workers operate in local contexts characterised by complex needs and an increasing demand for integrated interventions. In Italy, for instance, the National Plan for Social Interventions and Services 2024–2026 strongly emphasises the need to integrate social and labour policies, supporting municipalities and territorial areas through multilevel governance. The strategic value of community welfare is formally acknowledged — namely, the active role of the non-profit sector, civic engagement, and social enterprises in fostering social cohesion and responding to emerging needs through inclusive and collaborative networks.

This contribution analyses the practices and interventions of social innovation that, in recent years, have contributed to shaping the provision of social and employment services at the local level. The integration of social services, labour policies, the Third Sector, and communities is seen as a mechanism capable of triggering social innovation processes — such as the development of inclusion projects, shared administration, co-programming, and co-design — through a participatory, multilevel, and empowerment-based approach (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Kaletka et al., 2017; Pel et al., 2020; Terstriep et al., 2020; European Commission, 2017; Moulaert, 2010; Moulaert et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2015).

The paper presents the initial findings of a national survey involving social and employment services, aimed at mapping and analysing innovative projects and interventions developed locally through collaborations between public institutions and Third Sector organisations. The survey, with a census-based design and enriched with qualitative insights, seeks to reconstruct policy strategies, the engagement of territorial networks, and the role of social work in the design and implementation of so-called “social innovation” projects (Wilken et al., 2024). This latter aspect is particularly relevant to the current debate on social work policy practice (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2024), as it examines the characteristics of social innovation attributable to organisational, institutional, and policy practices, as well as those more directly linked to social work — particularly regarding project design, implementation, and results. Special attention is given to how social innovation projects and interventions are perceived in terms of their effects, and to the specific contribution of social work, both in its territorial dimension and its policy practice perspective.

The underlying hypothesis is that, where local welfare systems move beyond a sectoral policy approach by adopting place-based and evidence-based strategies, there is greater potential for the evolution of social work — particularly in terms of its contribution to policy practice, social innovation, and the related impacts on individuals, communities, and organisations.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining desk analysis of institutional sources, survey data, and qualitative interviews with regional and local stakeholders.

Findings will be discussed in selected local contexts, involving institutional representatives and social workers.

Aligned with the theme of the conference, the contribution reinforces the connection between research and practice, emphasising the role of empirical evidence in enhancing social work policy practice.

# Strategies to Cultivate Meaningful Change in Sexual Violence Response and Prevention in Higher Education

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## Background/Purpose

Sexual violence is a persistent social problem throughout the world (Dworkin et al., 2021). Research has found that college students experience high rates of sexual victimization (Cantor et al., 2020), which impacts their mental-health and academic success (Molstad et al., 2023). In the United States (U.S) many universities have hired victim advocates to lead prevention and response efforts in this area. This study investigated the strategies implemented on college campuses to create meaningful change for students in the context of sexual violence, from the perspective of victim advocates.

## Methods

A database of 547 U.S based universities that employed victim advocates was created. Advocates were e-mailed information about the study and invited to take a screening survey to determine their eligibility, which yielded twenty-one participants. All participants had experienced meaningful change on their campus related to response or prevention. Approximately 52% (n = 11) of participants worked at public institutions across all four regions of the U.S. 81% (n = 17) of participants had earned at least a master's degree and on average participants had worked for 11 years as a victim advocate. Participants completed a one-hour unstructured interview with the lead researcher, focused on their experience with meaningful change in the college context. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted through an iterative co-coding process by two researchers.

## Findings

Analysis of the interview data revealed several themes. Throughout the process of creating meaningful change, advocates intentionally framed their efforts in ways that addressed the attitudes of diverse campus populations. They also invested in building cross-campus relationships, leading to sustained and productive collaborations. Effective use of data emerged as another critical strategy, with advocates leveraging it to guide programming and justify the need for resources and institutional support. Centering student voices in the change process was consistently identified as essential to change. Finally, advocates emphasized the support from leadership at the highest levels of the university to maintain change and undergird other strategies.

## Conclusions and Implications

Findings are relevant to university administrators, advocates, student-activists and social workers across the world who are invested in improving response and prevention to campus sexual violence. The work of victim advocates in nurturing positive change is relational, data-driven, and embedded in complex political hierarchies. This study reinforces how social work research can inform the practice of advocates in the field, providing practical strategies and pathways in work that is both challenging and often deeply siloed.

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## Transformative mixed methods and child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA)

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Child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA) is increasingly recognised as a complex and global social phenomenon that has significant consequences for parents, carers, children, and wider families. Harms include fear, stress, poor mental health, financial and work-related difficulties, and social isolation. Despite this, CAPVA remains hidden, and insufficiently addressed within current child protection frameworks. Prevalence studies suggest that between 5% and 21% of families may be affected, but stigma, shame, and fear of family separation frequently prevent parents from disclosing their experiences and seeking help.

This PhD research project is funded by the UK's National Institute of Health and Care Research via a practitioner-academic research fellowship. The aim of the fellowship scheme is to encourage practitioner-academic career development and support local governments to build research capacity in-house. This PhD project was influenced by challenges facing social workers when responding to CAPVA within child protection systems that are predominantly organised around protecting children from harm within the family, rather than acknowledging harms directed towards parents and carers.

In addition to practice challenges, the existing CAPVA research base is fragmented, under theorised, and there is a paucity of social care research about CAPVA, with most existing research based in youth justice, mental health, or education settings. Yet these challenges also present opportunities. Social work is uniquely placed to develop interdisciplinary, evidence-informed responses that foreground social justice, amplify family voices, and shape more equitable policies and practices.

This research adopts a transformative mixed methods design to address these gaps. Quantitative analysis social care records will establish local number of referrals, co-occurring factors, and outcomes of local authority interventions. This is combined with qualitative semi-structured interviews and creative group methods with parents, carers, children, and young people, enabling lived experiences to enrich the statistical data. A Project Advisory Group, comprised of parents and young people with lived experience of CAPVA has provided guidance on researching sensitive topics, ethical engagement, and plans for meaningful dissemination of research findings. The study is theoretically framed by the social model of child protection, which emphasises structural inequalities, poverty, and social determinants as key drivers of family experiences and outcomes.

Preliminary findings of this project contribute to advancing knowledge in an underdeveloped field without consistent practice approaches or local and national government policy. By integrating statistical analysis with lived experience, the study aims to produce practical, evidence-informed recommendations for practitioners, local authorities, and policymakers.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates how practitioner-academic social work research can critically engage with contemporary practice challenges, while offering transformative opportunities to communities to shape practice and policy. CAPVA highlights the need to re-imagine child protection beyond traditional frameworks, recognising and addressing harms experienced by whole families.



## Assigning responsibility of child protection on one of the parents – an informal practice within Swedish social welfare services.

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In Sweden, social services have a responsibility to protect children who are suspected of being at risk. At the same time, parents are also assigned a clear responsibility under the Parental Code (SFS 1949:381) for ensuring the child's safety and security. The protection of children in such situations is therefore shared between social services and parents, yet there is a notable lack of knowledge about how this division of responsibilities is articulated and experienced in practical social work. The purpose of this study is to examine how social workers and parents manage this situation, particularly in cases where one parent is considered to pose a risk to the child.

Previous research has shown that in acute situations where children require protection, social workers may contribute to “private solutions” in which one parent ensures the child's safety without any formal decision by the authorities (Storhaug et al., 2023). Recently published research from Sweden further demonstrates that social workers place strong emphasis on the responsibility of one parent to protect the child from the other, who is considered a risk (Alner Knutsson & Lindahl, 2025).

The study is based on group interviews with professionals within the Swedish child protection system, as well as individual interviews with parents involved in child welfare investigations. The interviews have been analysed thematically and interpreted through the lens of responsibility theory at the macro level and cognitive dissonance theory at the micro level.

Findings indicate that significant emphasis is placed on individual responsibility for child protection, rather than on social services. Social workers' expectations and reliance on parents as protectors within the Swedish child protection system may create a problematic grey area. The absence of legislation in these cases contributes to situations where children may be informally separated from their parents without formal decisions from relevant authorities. Furthermore, this informal expectation placed on the safe parent imposes a burden, and the protective action may be difficult to justify to the other parent, often resulting in parental conflict due to the unclear distribution of responsibility.

The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the boundaries of parental responsibility and the point at which social services are expected to intervene. Through its findings, the study offers insights that may inform both practice and policy development. Drawing on the results, a joint construction of knowledge between social workers and parents may be facilitated. This highlights the need to review the legal framework governing social services to strengthen legal certainty for both safe and at-risk parents.

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## WALK IN MY SHOES: Co-producing counter-narratives through Photovoice with people navigating Income Support in Italy

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### Background and literature

Photovoice is a participatory action research (PAR) methodology that combines photography and narrative to enable individuals—particularly those excluded from decision-making processes—to document and communicate their lived experiences. Rooted in feminist and critical pedagogy traditions (Wang & Burris, 1997), Photovoice has been increasingly adopted in social work research for its potential to democratize knowledge production, to foster empowerment, critical consciousness, and social justice, particularly in marginalized contexts (Kessi et al., 2019; Sackett et al., 2023; Lindow et al., 2021). By integrating visual and narrative methods, photovoice challenges dominant discourses, amplifies silenced voices, and informs policy (Anderson et al., 2023; Dedotsi & Cabiati, 2023).

The present study was implemented in Gallarate, a city in the North of Italy, during the final months of the national minimum-income scheme *Reddito di Cittadinanza* (Citizenship Income-RdC), a period marked by beneficiaries' uncertainty, administrative complexity and pervasive public stigma (Vezzoli & Calcaterra, 2024). In this context, local practitioners and service users expressed a shared desire to counter deficit-based public narratives and make lived experience visible through a co-produced project.

### Aims

The aims were to:

- (1) investigate the subjective experiences of active income-support recipients;
- (2) foreground their voices in a public discourse dominated by deficit-based representations;
- (3) stimulate dialogue with stakeholders to promote more inclusive narratives.

### Methods

Seven participants were engaged in a co-designed process beginning with an introductory workshop on Photovoice principles, ethics, and photographic practice.

Together with facilitators, they identified three guiding research questions:

- What challenges and difficulties do we encounter daily as individuals who are beneficiaries of income-support measures
- What factors enable us to keep moving forward?
- What actions can we undertake to improve our situation?

Participants produced images—via personal photography, online sources, or AI-generated tools—responding to these questions.

Two focus groups were then conducted to elicit narratives, interpret the images, and discuss shared meanings.

Thematic analysis (Ritchie et al. 2003) identified recurrent structural challenges such as healthcare access delays, housing insecurity, and social isolation. A pervasive sense of stigma was reported, alongside resilience factors including supportive relationships, pets, faith, and personal passions.

The process culminated in a co-produced photo-manifesto, aimed at engaging local stakeholders and amplifying the voices of service users in reclaiming their identities beyond dominant and oppressive stereotypes.

### **Conclusions**

Findings contribute to the growing evidence base on Photovoice in Social Work research by eliciting marginalized perspectives, strengthening participant agency, and producing knowledge with potential policy relevance (Kessi et al., 2019; Lindow et al., 2021; Sackett et al., 2023). Beyond research outcomes, the process fostered recognition and belonging, further substantiating evidence that Photovoice can cultivate empowerment, critical consciousness, and social capital (Folgheraiter, 2022).

## Mixed-method evaluation of day activity services targeted at older home care clients in Finland

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### Background and purpose

In Finland, the day activity service (DAS) is targeted at older home care clients who are not able to participate in other activities produced by municipalities, private sector or third sector, and who are capable of attending group activities. The primary aim of the DAS is to support home care clients living at home by promoting their health and wellbeing, maintaining their physical, psychological, and social functional ability and enhancing social inclusion. This mixed method study examines the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and process of the DAS as is part of the Old-age Social Exclusion – prevalence, meanings & intervention (SOLDEX) -project conducted between 2022–2025. The study was registered before data collection, and the protocol has been published.

### Methods

The target sample size of the quasi-experimental trial was 200 participants. The intervention group (n=100) is composed of home care clients aged 65 years or older who have begun participation in the day activity service. The comparison group (n=100) consists of home care clients aged 65 years or older who do not participate in the day activity service but would like to participate. The primary outcome is social inclusion (ESIS-scale). Secondary outcomes are loneliness (single item and De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale) and social care related quality of life (ASCOT). Baseline, three-month and six-month follow-up surveys were gathered from intervention and comparison group participants. Register data on service use and the costs of the intervention are utilized in examining the cost-effectiveness of the intervention compared to services as usual. Qualitative process data were collected by interviewing the intervention participants (n=10) and professionals working at the day activity centres and older people's services (5 focus groups, n=25). The process evaluation aims to examine facilitators and barriers related to successful delivery of the DAS, and to explore understandings of the intervention theory.

### Findings

The presentation will discuss the preliminary findings of the process evaluation and some preliminary observations from the effectiveness trial. The preliminary process evaluation findings indicate that barriers and facilitators are connected to five categories: registration, local environment, group and participants, group tutoring, and organizational factors. For example, in terms of local environment, the participation of local stakeholders and volunteers was identified as a significant factor supporting the continuity and diversity of activities. Organizational factors, on the other hand, show that the provision of transport encourages participation in group activities, but the participation fee limits participation.

### Conclusions and implications

The study produces understanding on the important factors supporting older adults living at home through day activities. Findings are useful for the development of the DAS to better meet the needs of older home care recipients. Overall, the study produces a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and process of the DAS.

# From Social Work Values to AI Practice: Fine-Tuning Large Language Models for Trauma-Informed Homelessness Support

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## Background and purpose

In youth homelessness services, staff need to recognise trauma not only as a past event but as something that shapes how young people experience safety, relationships, and care (Williams, 2022). This awareness has prompted growing interest in, and attempts to implement, trauma-informed approaches from research (Edelman, 2023) to service delivery (Rock Trust, 2024). The implementation of trauma-informed approaches faces structural barriers, including fragmented funding, workforce shortages with poor conditions, and constraints from service models and housing systems (McCarthy, 2022). By contrast, fine-tuning large language models for chatbot-based training offers a low-cost, scalable way to build trauma-informed awareness and provide daily support for frontline workers (Yu & McGuinness, 2024). This study addresses this challenge by developing and piloting a prototype LLM-based chatbot tailored to homelessness services. The research project pursues four concrete outcomes:

- a. the construction of a preliminary domain-specific dataset;
- b. development of a functional prototype chatbot;
- c. initial alignment experiments using reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) and direct preference optimization (DPO); and
- d. transparent documentation of data, methods, and ethical considerations.

## Methods

A multi-stage design is adopted, covering data, model, alignment, and evaluation. Homelessness cases are cleaned and structured into prompts with responses and expert annotations. Diverse responses and preference labels are added through collaboration with social workers, and human feedback signals for alignment are thereby constructed. Mistral-7B as my baseline model because it combines relatively modest size with strong performance and open accessibility (Jiang et al., 2023). Supervised fine-tuning (SFT) produces an initial prototype capable of generating responses in the style of social work practice. Alignment experiments then test RLHF and DPO approaches, drawing on preference data to either train a reward model or directly optimize generation behaviour (Xu et al., 2025).

## Findings and conclusions

So far, around one hundred homelessness cases have been collected, cleaned, and structured into prompts, responses, and expert notes, forming the basis of a domain-specific dataset. A public GitHub repository to document the data workflow, annotation protocol, and training scripts, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. Early analysis shows the wide diversity of trauma and exclusion experiences, underscoring that chatbot design must go beyond generic statements to tailor responses to acknowledgement, practical guidance, or complex vulnerabilities.

**Keywords:** social work; homelessness services; artificial intelligence (AI); service delivery; large language models (LLMs); fine-tuning

## Being an outsider on the team: experienced and observed workplace ostracism in social care

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### Background and purpose

There is a global concern in social work about how the workforce will cope and be sufficient in the future, as the number of people requiring social services is increasing. To support retention, barriers to inclusion and well-being must be addressed.

Workplace ostracism (WOS) is a phenomenon in which someone is excluded from social interactions within the work community. The phenomenon is limitedly studied in social work to date, despite its well-known harmful consequences. Given the nature of social work, no one must be left out within the work community. A thriving work community and effective teamwork are essential to maintaining sustainable well-being at work. Therefore, we examined how this phenomenon affects teamwork in the social work field.

Hypotheses are as follows:

- 1) a) Experienced and b) observed WOS decreases teamwork.
- 2) Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between a) experienced and b) observed WOS and teamwork.
- 3) Loneliness mediates the relationship between a) experienced and b) observed WOS and teamwork.

### Methods

The data were collected in October 2024 through a semi-structured, web-based questionnaire distributed to social care workers and managers in Finland. The open call for research was published in the Journal of the Professional Association of Social Work Graduates, on LinkedIn, and on X, as well as in a targeted manner in three well-being service counties. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained at the beginning of the questionnaire. The study participants (N = 244) comprised employees with diverse educational backgrounds and working areas.

The questionnaire consisted of background questions, two open-ended questions, and measures of teamwork (Kivimäki & Elovainio, 1999), workplace ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008), job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), and loneliness. The data were analyzed with regression analysis and mediator models.

### Findings

Even 83.2% of respondents had experienced, and 85.7% observed WOS at least occasionally during the past year. Experiencing ostracism is positively associated with loneliness and negatively associated with job satisfaction and teamwork. Observed ostracism was negatively associated with loneliness and teamwork, but had no significant impact on job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was a strong positive predictor of teamwork, while loneliness was not.

**Conclusion and implications**

The number of ostracisms is worrying. The different effects of experienced and observed WOS highlight the complexity of social dynamics and suggest that organizations should address not only the immediate experiences of ostracism but also the social climate across hierarchical boundaries. Strengthening social interactions and fostering a sense of community in the workplace enhances the ability to withstand and recover from disruptions, ultimately thriving in the face of challenges. Addressing ostracism, therefore, is not just about improving interpersonal relations; it is crucial for maintaining cooperative networks, equitable participation, and shared responsibility – elements vital for a socially sustainable work environment.

To enhance social interaction and teamwork, targeted interventions are necessary to identify the factors in social work that contribute to this phenomenon. A qualitative study could also offer valuable insights into how WOS is experienced and understood.



## **Strengths, resources, social participation, self-determination, and a good life – connecting theoretical approaches between positive psychology and social work**

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This contribution presents findings from a recent survey conducted as part of a teaching-learning-research project in social work studies. The question addressed concerns what constitutes a good, fulfilling life for people and who/what contributes to this (short-term interviews, three survey periods, cross-sectional study, quantitative content analysis, n=315).

The results are used to compare them with the PERMA model from positive psychology (Seligmann 2015) and the capabilities approach (according to Nussbaum 2019), which offers links to both positive psychology and social work. The results show that the bottom-up approach of the survey design allows differentiated considerations regarding the weighting of theory-relevant parameters of both models (e.g., the predominant relevance of social relationships). This leads to target group-specific implications for social work, which are presented in the contribution.

Theoretical approaches and empirical findings from positive psychology and transdisciplinary approaches still find little recognition in social work theory development despite overlapping guiding principles (e.g., resource and strength orientation, social participation, and self-determination) (Lübeck 2023, 2024).



## Belonging of social work students during their studies - Results of a quantitative longitudinal study at four universities for social work

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The concept of belonging describes the fundamental feeling of belonging to a university. Numerous studies show that a strong sense of belonging correlates positively with academic success: students with high belonging values show greater stress resistance, achieve better academic results and are generally more satisfied with their studies (e.g. Berryman, Eley 2019).

Belonging can be divided into three dimensions:

1. Spatial belonging – the feeling of being physically comfortable at the university.
2. Academic belonging – the perception of being part of the academic community in terms of subject matter and intellect.
3. Social belonging – social integration into the student body and university life.

Particularly disadvantaged groups – such as students with a migrant background, disabilities, chronic illnesses or parental responsibilities – often have lower belonging scores. These differences can exacerbate existing disadvantages in the course of their studies, as they lack compensatory resources.

In our presentation, we will focus on academic belonging during the course of study. We will analyse the following questions using a longitudinal approach:

- How does academic belonging change over the course of study?
- What differences can be observed between different student groups?
- To what extent do support services offered by universities – such as writing centres or mentoring programmes – contribute to promoting academic belonging?

### Methods

The research design is based on a longitudinal quantitative questionnaire study involving over 600 social work students. The questionnaire included questions on sociodemographic characteristics, living situation, and a specifically developed scale on belonging, based on Davis et al (2019) the Revised Sense of Belonging Scale and the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow 1993). Data were collected from four universities offering different Bachelor's degree programmes in social work, including dual and practice-integrated programmes. The first survey wave of all first-year students took place in autumn 2024; the second will be conducted in autumn 2025. Data analysis will compare different student groups, and explain with multivariate analyses the belonging and changes in belonging between 2024 and 2025.

The findings from our first wave show that financial pressure and disability play a particularly significant role. In contrast, gender and parental responsibilities appear to be less relevant for be-longing. But there are also some significant differences between universities.

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## Social Work & Digital Activism for Social Justice

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The digital welfare state presents a myriad of high hopes and deep problems. Online self-services can reduce administrative costs and expand social divides in digital cloaks, expert systems can align and qualify work processes and alienate social workers, online video conferencing can facilitate long distance support and extend state control and surveillance far into private homes. In this presentation, I focus on datafication in social work, the problems associated with datafication, and potential counteraction in social work.

Datafication in social work designates the widespread and incessant collection, creation, curation, and analysis of data in social work for profiling and predicting human preferences, attributes, and behaviors and detecting social problems (Redden, 2018). Social work datafication is gaining momentum in most European countries. Evidence of feasibility and viability is wanting and scholars have suggested that datafication is driven forth by sociotechnological imaginaries and beliefs in the power and utility of data (Beer, 2019; Jasanoff, 2004). Notwithstanding real or imaginary claims of superiority and successes, research emphasises a series of problematic consequences: Social work datafication conflates social problems to risks and social work to risk aversion, leads to increased surveillance as private and state actors harvest data from online transactions and activities, disempowers social workers and client, and perpetuates social harms and injustices. Advancing data justice is a significant social work issue because datafication creates harms that impact disproportionately on historically marginalised social groups (Ballantyne, 2023).

Aiming at harnessing social work research in a progressively datafied society, the presentation engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue between radical and critical social work (Lavelette, 2011, Mullaly, 2007), data justice studies and data activism (Dencik et al., 2022; Milan, 2017). Data justice studies couples datafication to questions about social justice and marginality and can attune social work research to datafied dimensions of unjust systemic and political structures and discourses. Data activism is concerned with practices of dissent and possibilities for counteracting data harms and injustices and provide guidance for collective action and mobilisation for social change. Radical and critical social work literature can attune data activism to the dilemmas of mobilising people in marginal or vulnerable positions and raise a critique of how social work is complicit in data harms.

The interdisciplinary dialogue touches upon and is relevant to several conference subthemes including challenges and opportunities for social work in contemporary contexts, social work disciplinary and professional boundaries, radical social work's history and potential reinvigoration, the digital and datafied welfare state.

## Crossing Borders: What Hospitality Studies Teach Social Work about Accessibility and Trust

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**Keywords:** Hospitality, Social Work, Accessibility, Trust-building, Municipalities

This interdisciplinary research project brings together insights from hospitality studies and social work to address a pressing challenge in the public domain: how can municipalities provide accessible and trust-building support to citizens, particularly those in vulnerable or complex situations?

Across the Netherlands, access to social services has become increasingly fraught. Citizens often report experiences of bureaucratic distance, long procedures, and a sense of institutional mistrust. Access professionals, mainly social workers who act as gatekeepers to social support, work under immense pressure: they face high caseloads, rigid organisational frameworks, and limited room to respond to the complex realities presented by citizens. As a result, many people hesitate to seek help at all. These concerns are not isolated but have been consistently echoed in national studies (SCP, 2023), policy reports, and recent Parliamentary inquiries (2024).

This presentation draws on an ongoing Professional Doctorate research project that explores the central question: How can hospitality add value to the social services of municipalities, considering the complex challenges faced by access providers, so that they can give guest-friendly support that is accessible for citizens?

The study addresses this overarching question through three sub-questions:

Place: How can the reception areas where access professionals work be designed as guest-friendly, accessible, and inviting spaces for citizens?

Process: What organisational conditions are needed within municipalities to enable professionals to provide hospitable support?

People: How can the attitudes, language, cultural assumptions, and skills of access professionals evolve to strengthen their ability to act hospitably toward citizens?

The research takes inspiration from hospitality practices in the commercial sector (Samal et al., 2017), but does not use hospitality merely as a metaphor. Instead, it explores hospitality as a practice-based, interdisciplinary lens that has the potential to rehumanise social service provision.

Methodologically, the project combines qualitative interviews with access professionals, narratives from citizens, and policy document analysis, to examine both the structural barriers that constrain hospitable encounters and the transformative possibilities that emerge when hospitality is foregrounded.

Preliminary findings suggest that both citizens and professionals feel constrained by system logic, bureaucratic language, and a pervasive culture of risk aversion. A hospitality-informed approach appears to create new opportunities for professionals to engage relationally, with presence, attention, openness, and care, and, in doing so, to bridge the disconnect between citizens' lived experiences and institutional practice. At the same time, tensions arise when hospitality is brought into dialogue with the core mandate of social work. Social work emphasises emancipation and positions citizens as political actors, whereas hospitality can risk being interpreted in more service-oriented or even monetarily driven ways.

These differences highlight that hospitality principles cannot be simply transferred into the social domain. Instead, they require critical reflection, contextual translation, and adaptation to align with social work's normative foundations.

Rather than a ready-made solution, hospitality becomes transformative when critically adapted to social work's emancipatory mandate. It offers not a blueprint but a lens that opens space for more ethical, accessible, and trust-building interactions between the state and its citizens.

## Safeguarding in adult social care and coercive control: Perspectives from victims/survivors and adult social care practitioners

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### Background and Purpose

This study explores how female victims of coercive control in domestic abuse relationships experience the adult safeguarding process delivered by local authority social services. Under Section 42 of the Care Act 2014, local authorities must make enquiries when adults with care and support needs are at risk of abuse and unable to protect themselves. Coercive control, criminalised in the UK in 2015, refers to patterns of psychological manipulation, isolation, intimidation, and entrapment that diminish autonomy and entrench dependency.

The study aims to:

- Understand how women with care needs experience safeguarding while subject to coercive control.
- Examine how Adult Social Care (ASC) practitioners interpret legal frameworks and respond to coercive control.
- Explore multi-agency collaboration in safeguarding.
- Inform policy and practice guidance to better support victims/survivors.

Research Questions:

- How do local authorities conduct safeguarding enquiries in cases of domestic abuse?
- What are the lived impacts of coercive control on women with care needs?
- How do survivors perceive the support received, and does it meet their needs?
- How do practitioners recognise and respond to coercive control?
- What gaps exist between survivor needs and service provision?
- What examples of good practice can inform future safeguarding models?

### Methodology

This hermeneutic phenomenological study, grounded in feminist scholarship, uses a triangulated, three-phase design to capture survivor and practitioner perspectives.

#### Phase One: Survivor Narratives

Life/relationship history interviews with 10–12 victim-survivors to gather rich, biographical data. This will be analysed using narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

#### Phase Two: Casefile Analysis

Participants' safeguarding case files will be examined thematically to identify alignment or dissonance with their lived accounts. Survivors will be supported in requesting records by means of a Subject Access Request where needed.

### Phase Three: Practitioner Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with 12 ASC practitioners from London boroughs will explore safeguarding decision-making, recognition of coercive control, and responses to anonymised vignettes derived from earlier phases. Data will be analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2022) reflective thematic analysis.

A Project Advisory Group (PAG) comprising individuals with lived experience of safeguarding or domestic abuse will guide each phase. Methodological hybridisation enhances credibility and allows for cross-validation of findings.

### Implications for Practice, Policy, or Further Research

This NIHR-funded doctoral fellowship responds directly to contemporary challenges in social work by bridging research and practice. It exemplifies how embedded research can generate actionable insights to improve safeguarding outcomes for adults with care needs and contribute to evolving policy and practice frameworks by amplifying lived experience and practitioner expertise.

By centring survivor narratives and practitioner insights, the study will:

- Illuminate how coercive control intersects with gender, culture, race, class, and care needs.
- Identify barriers and enablers in safeguarding responses.
- Highlight examples of good practice and areas for improvement.
- Inform trauma-informed, client-focused safeguarding models and multi-agency protocols.

Ultimately, the research seeks to bridge the gap between victim-survivor needs and service delivery, ensuring safeguarding processes are responsive, inclusive, and grounded in lived experience.

## The ACCUMI Approach: Impact Evaluation as Reflexive Practice in Social Work. Lessons from a Community of Practice in Social Work.

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### Background and purpose

As pressure to “show results” mounts, our understanding of how social work generates impact lags behind. Current social work research criticises traditional evidence-based practice approaches due to their overreliance on standardised measurement models (Marwell & Mosley, 2025). This critical research emphasises the need for complex, relational, and context-dependent approaches. Yet, we still lack robust models and methods to assess impact in line with the tailored approach these critiques call for. Drawing on an action-research project and in dialogue with prior work on realist evaluation (Pawson, 2024), we introduce the ACCUMI approach in response to this gap in social work research. Situated in evidence-informed practice, ACCUMI articulates six empirically grounded principles that shift impact evaluation from attribution to contribution, move from narrow outcome monitoring to mechanisms-in-context, from technocratic measurement to participatory knowledge co-production, and from static logic models to program theory as a reflexive, practice-guiding tool.

### Methods

We facilitated a structured Community of Practice (CoP) with practitioners from five social work organisations and academic partners. Across multiple sessions (2021–2022), we used dialogical activities, collaborative mapping, and reflective exercises. Transcripts and materials were analysed thematically within a Framework Approach to co-articulate practice-based principles for impact evaluation. Additionally, we conducted an extensive international literature review to situate the cases; insights from this review informed data interpretation and the articulation of the six principles.

### Findings

ACCUMI comprises six mutually reinforcing principles: (1) Adapt and Adjust – embrace complexity and tailor designs to contexts. (2) Clarify and Claim – focus on transparent contribution (rather than exclusive attribution) and make assumptions explicit. (3) Cultivate Impact-Oriented Action – embed evaluation in day-to-day learning and organisational development. (4) Uncover and Understand – go beyond counting outcomes to surface mechanisms and conditions under which change occurs. (5) Map the Path – (re)construct program theory as a shared roadmap for practice and inquiry that makes assumptions and pathways explicit, creating a shared language, and triggering Impact-Oriented Action within teams. (6) Interweave Perspectives – integrate experiential, professional, and academic knowledge through meaningful stakeholder participation, including service users. Grounded



in these principles, we consequently define impact in social work as social changes—positive/negative, intended/unintended—developing in and through practice in interaction with context, encompassing not only observable outcomes but also underlying processes, mechanisms, and relational dynamics that enable change, foregrounding contribution over attribution.

### **Conclusions**

ACCUMI offers a theory-driven and participatory framework for impact evaluation in social work. It supports contribution claims about how and why change happens, strengthening impact-oriented practice. Its vocabulary and routines enable co-produced, evidence-informed evaluation. Together, these principles provide a language and routine for co-producing evidence, sharpening contribution reasoning, guiding practice, and aligning evaluation with social work's values and mechanisms-in-context. Future research should test boundary conditions for participation and track effects on learning, contribution claims, and outcomes across low-resource and high-resource settings using program-theory-guided routines.

### **Implications**

ACCUMI provides actionable guidance to develop program theories collaboratively to steer learning and accountability; combine qualitative and quantitative evidence; and institutionalise reflective learning within organisations and partnerships (Depauw et al., 2025).

## Parents' everyday life after child removal: Implications for child welfare practice

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### Background and purpose

Child welfare interventions such as involuntary child removal profoundly reshape the lives of both children and parents. While practice and policy traditionally focus on children's safety and development, far less attention has been given to how parents' life situation is affected and how this may shape their opportunities for change and collaboration with child welfare services. Drawing on this, this study explores how involuntary child removal impacts parents' everyday lives and what implications this may have for practice and policy. In doing so, it contributes to the conference theme of challenges and opportunities for social work practice in contemporary contexts by bringing forward parents' perspectives.

### Method

The study is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews with ten parents who had children in public care at the time of data collection, representing varied geographic and social contexts. The interviews invited open narratives about life after removal, supplemented by follow-up questions. A thematic, inductive analysis allowed shared patterns to emerge while remaining grounded in parents' accounts, through repeated readings, open coding, and iterative comparison before codes were refined into broader categories and two overarching themes. Collaborative coding, team discussions, and attention to variation strengthened the robustness of the analysis. Theoretical perspectives from Antonovsky's sense of coherence and Honneth's recognition theory guided the interpretation.

### Findings

The analysis made visible how involuntary child removal affected parents' life situation through two themes:

- 1) **Weakened trust and collaboration with child welfare services:** Parents' life situation was shaped by both the absence of contact and the strain of contact when it occurred. The lack of information created disorientation, while ongoing contact was characterized by mistrust, exclusion, and negative interpretations of their reactions. Meetings were often confrontational, leaving parents misrepresented and unsupported. Many felt caught in a dilemma: avoiding contact meant losing access to their child, while attending exposed them to further strain, increasing stress, and draining resources.
- 2) **Emotional distress and everyday burdens:** Parents' lives were marked by grief, shame, guilt, and anxiety, often accompanied by sleeplessness and social withdrawal. Fear of stigma and rejection deepened isolation and led some to hide their situation, even in close relationships, shaping major life choices such as entering new partnerships or starting a family. Practical instability in work, housing, finances, and networks added to this strain, forcing several to rebuild their lives under constrained conditions. For some, the loss extended to their parental identity, leaving lasting insecurity and a profound impact on health and belonging.

**Conclusion and implications**

The study highlights child removal as a prolonged life crisis that extends beyond the legal intervention itself, shaping parents' ability to function in daily life and to remain engaged in processes concerning their children. Recognition of parents' losses and burdens appears crucial for reducing stress and easing conflict in collaboration, while neglect of these dimensions risks reinforcing marginalisation. These findings point to the importance of coordinated and supportive approaches that address parents' need for coherence and recognition as integral to the conditions for constructive change.

## Rethinking Vulnerability in the Context of Climate Change: Results from a Discourse Analysis of Global Policy and Implications for Social Work Research

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### Background and purpose

Climate-related changes are affecting health and well-being of people worldwide – especially in the Global South, where people are often the first and hardest confronted with natural disasters. “Sustainability” as a political strategy is often seen as a constructive concept but has also been criticized in terms of reproducing global power relations or neglecting participation and sustainable practices of people in the Global South (Chakrabarty, 2009; Povinelli, 2016; Spivak, 1988). In view of complex socio-ecological and economic transformation new approaches in social work research, education and practice across national, social, cultural, disciplinary and professional boundaries are required to contribute to a climate resilient society between the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009, 2023) and capabilities of so-called vulnerable persons (Nussbaum, 2006). In our research we apply this critical lens on “sustainability” to the political discourse on “vulnerability” and vulnerable persons for climate related health effects. In doing so, we ask the following research questions: Which groups of people are identified and how are they described in key policy documents as being vulnerable? Which indicators are used, and who is called for action?

### Methods

This contribution is based on a discourse analysis of key international policy documents on health and climate change (N=8, papers from WHO, UN, IPCC, World Bank, period 2015–2025) inspired by Michel Foucault (1974). We assume that these documents, in their symbolic power, configure certain “truths” not only as linguistic phenomena, but as bundles of practices.

### Findings

Our empirical findings indicate that the concept of vulnerability due to climate change is often homogenised and universalised. Vulnerable groups include children, women, older people, people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and people in low-income countries. Some documents also mention indigenous communities or certain occupational groups. Overall, we have identified predominantly passive narratives of vulnerable groups in the discourse sample, consistently constructing them without sufficient consideration of the local context, agency and strategies or historical vulnerabilities. In addition, closer examination reveals that concrete instructions for action that address local and cultural specifics or involve affected groups as co-creators through inclusive collective agency are rare.

### Conclusion and implications

The prevailing passive portrayal of vulnerable groups as mere victims of climate impacts reinforces the impression of a Western-dominated perspective that marginalises local and cultural knowledge systems and the possibility of active participation by the affected

groups. This discussion underscores the need to question the conceptual boundaries of vulnerability and further development of a political agenda that focuses on participation, local practices, indigenous knowledge systems and dialogue with groups of people and communities. Further research could therefore address the question of how vulnerability is discursively constructed in the Global South, how do vulnerable groups in the Global South perceive their own “vulnerability” and how can existing local agency be incorporated into global climate policies? Social work in research and practice could thus pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable, climate-resilient society that challenges and deconstructs the historically grown power structures behind vulnerability.

## Strengthening Ties Between Academia and Social Services: Insights from Collaborative Social Work PhD Students

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### Background

In Sweden, it is still quite unusual for social work researchers to be employed in organizations where practical social work is carried out. Rather, they tend to be employed as faculty members in universities. It is also unusual for social workers, aside from their role as respondents, to be engaged in research projects linked to academic environments. Several state-funded initiatives have been launched to support collaborative structures between social services (where most social workers are employed) and academia throughout the years. One initiative implements programs where social workers enroll in PhD programs while continuing part-time social services work. The ambition is to strengthen links between academia and social services, and to produce research that supports evidence-based practice, with collaborative PhD students acting as “cultural translators” (Raj, 2016). Their dual organizational belonging gives them a unique insight into both academia and social services. This paper explores and analyses collaborative PhD students’ understanding of core elements essential for a successful collaboration between social services and academia in developing research and practical knowledge.

### Methods

Fifteen collaborative social work PhD students participated in an extended focus group interview. The interview lasted for almost two hours and was led by two social work researchers. In the focus group interview the experiences of collaboration between academia and social services was in focus. The discussion was transcribed promptly, with emphasis on the key points raised by the PhD students. The material was analysed jointly by the authors, comprising two social work researchers and one collaborative social work PhD student. All authors have extensive experience with collaborative structures between academia and social services (two as senior lecturers involved in collaborative research projects and one as a collaborative PhD student) which allowed their practical experience to inform and enrich the discussion.

### Findings

The PhD students identified three core elements essential for a successful collaboration between academia and social services. One was communication and translation. Academia needs to develop ways to translate and communicate research in a way that makes knowledge easier to digest. This also refers to the need to find a common language between researchers and practitioners in social work. The second core element was inspiration concerning work methods. Academia and social services can inspire each other in work methods; for instance, using the seminar as a method for critical examination in social services and using collegial reflection in academia. Finally, continuity in staff was seen as a core element for successful and intensified collaboration.

## Conclusions

The identified core elements were seen as essential to support collaboration between social services and academia. The core elements are understood as in the light of different instructional logics (Perez Vico, 2018) permeating social services and academia.

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## (Shared) Biographical experiences in Social Work: Inter- and transdisciplinary understandings of a Neglected Knowledge Base

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### Background and Purpose

Contemporary social work discourse emphasizes the importance of professionals drawing upon interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge bases in their practice. However, experiential knowledge derived from personal biography remains significantly underexplored and undervalued within the field. Unlike conventional forms of professional knowledge, experiential knowledge emerges mostly from lived biographical experiences and is therefore not primarily acquired through cognitive processes. Given that embodied and emotional dimensions of experiential knowledge play a crucial role in shaping how scientific knowledge is acquired, interpreted, and applied in practice, they constitute essential components of professional action.

Against this background, this contribution focuses on shared biographical experiences of professionals and service users, especially on their impact on the development of professional relationships, the expansion of professional agency and their potential to co-create social services. We focus on experiences such as migration, racism, disability, poverty, addiction, and parenthood, which may generate structurally similar experiential knowledge between practitioners and service users. Our central research question is: How do shared biographical experiences influence professional relationships and practice in social work?

### Methods

The study employs Adele Clarke's Situational Analysis as its methodological framework. Using theoretical sampling, we conducted narrative-based interviews with social work practitioners who share biographical experiences with their respective service user groups. Participants were selected based on their lived experience in areas relevant to their professional practice. Data collection focused on capturing tacit and explicit forms of experiential knowledge and its influence on relational dynamics. The data were analysed through grounded theory to identify patterns and mechanisms by which shared experiences shape professional interactions, service engagement, and the empowerment of service users. The analysis reconstructs the experiences and positionings of professionals, relates them to dominant professional discourses, and develops insights into the above-mentioned gaps in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge in social work.

### Findings

Preliminary findings suggest that experiential knowledge rooted in shared lived experiences constitutes a difference that makes a difference and significantly affects the quality and depth of professional relationships. Practitioners reported that such knowledge facilitates faster trust-building and more authentic relational engagement. The interplay between disciplinary expertise, emotional resonance, and embodied experience creates relational spaces that enable service users to access support in ways that feel more inclusive and



empowering. These dynamics appear to foster greater openness, reduce barriers to service utilisation, and enhance the perceived legitimacy of professional interventions.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Our findings highlight the need for social work practice, education, and research to integrate emotional and experiential knowledge alongside academic and disciplinary expertise. Recognising the value of embodied knowledge can contribute to a more inclusive and socially just profession by amplifying marginalised voices and supporting co-creative approaches to service delivery. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of developing multi-perspective and transdisciplinary research strategies to adequately explore the intersections of lived experience and professional knowledge. Such integration has the potential to reshape professional identity, enhance relational practice, and inform policy aimed at equity and inclusion in social services.

## Prospects for remote forensic social work: remote hearings with vulnerable adults in the experience of social workers in northern Italy

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### Background and purpose

This research stems from a secondary analysis of part of a broader qualitative and quantitative study on the use of digital technologies in social and health services in Italy, which adopts a relational perspective on technology (Suchman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2000). One of the overall objectives is to understand how social workers can contribute to tackling social exclusion and promoting democratic participation of citizens. More specifically, this study focuses on remote forensic social work (Maschi, Leibowitz, 2023; Lattas, Rock, Davis, 2025; Creamer, Harvey, 2025). This field is becoming increasingly central to the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly in judicial contexts where remote presence through digital tools presents both new opportunities and significant challenges. International literature on remote hearings with guardianship judges emphasizes that such proceedings can enhance the participation of frail adults, and people with disabilities, provided that specific measures are taken to overcome digital barriers, ensure privacy, and safeguard the right to direct hearing before the judge (Byrom, 2020; Sanders, 2021).

### Methods

A qualitative approach was adopted. The study was conducted through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) of 21 interviews with social workers in the health and social care sector, specifically with professionals working in mental health, elderly people who are no longer self-sufficient, and their protected discharge from hospitals. Textual analysis of the narrative data was performed using MAXQDA24 software.

### Findings

This research contributes to the literature examining the impact of adopting telematic methods for court hearings, particularly following the pandemic, by identifying opportunities as well as specific risks for the protection of vulnerable populations. In Italy, during the health emergency, guardianship judges were allowed to conduct hearings involving vulnerable adults via videoconference. However, concerns have been raised about the actual participation of beneficiaries and the protection of their privacy and dignity (Sanders, 2021). The findings highlight the need to adopt specific precautions in remote hearings with guardianship judges to protect vulnerable individuals: the use of clear language, involvement of facilitators, attention to technological accessibility, and safeguarding users' dignity. Digital tools and remote hearings can ensure protection and efficiency if accompanied by standards tailored to the needs of vulnerable individuals.

### Conclusions and Implications

The integration of remote forensic social work and virtual hearings represents both an ethical and operational challenge that requires updated standards and continuous training, with the aim of promoting fairness and effective protection in legal proceedings involving vulnerable groups (Lattas et al., 2025; Byrom, 2020). Social workers engaged in daily practice are actively reflecting on these changes and are proposing strategies to improve assistance in the field of remote forensic social work, addressing both practical and ethical concerns (Lattas, Rock, Davis, 2025; Creamer, Harvey, 2025).

## Bridging Theory and Practice through Film: Evidence from International Social Work Education

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Teaching social work theories presents ongoing challenges due to the abstract nature of concepts and the difficulty of linking them to real-life practice. Films have emerged as a valuable educational tool to bridge this gap, offering students vivid illustrations of theoretical principles and encouraging critical reflection. This study investigates the experiences of students in the European Joint Master in Social Work with Children and Youth (ESWOCHY) programme, focusing on the benefits and limitations of using films to learn social work theories, as well as recommendations for improving their integration into the curriculum.

The research employed a qualitative design with 26 participants from the second and third ESWOCHY cohorts and graduates of the first cohort. Data were collected through open-ended survey questions and analysed using qualitative content analysis. The findings highlight three main dimensions: advantages, challenges, and recommendations.

### Advantages

Students reported that films enhanced their understanding of abstract theories by providing visual examples and concrete illustrations of complex social phenomena. Films aided memory retention and helped them connect academic concepts to practice. They also promoted analytical and critical thinking, as learners interpreted characters, situations, and interventions through theoretical lenses. In addition, films fostered self-reflection and intercultural awareness by exposing students to diverse social contexts and ethical dilemmas, aligning closely with the humanistic and intercultural goals of the ESWOCHY programme.

### Challenges

Alongside these benefits, students noted several limitations. Films often simplify or idealize reality, leaving out the nuances and unpredictability of social work practice. At times, theoretical concepts did not align well with the chosen film, creating frustration or superficial connections. Participants observed that films may reinforce stereotypes, compress timelines, and fail to capture the complexity of client situations. Some struggled to apply multiple theories to one film or to identify the most relevant perspective. Practical barriers such as accessibility, language, and length also emerged as concerns.

### Recommendations

Students suggested several ways to strengthen film integration. First, films should be carefully selected to represent diverse populations, cultural contexts, and contemporary social issues, while ensuring alignment with learning objectives. Second, accessibility should be ensured by sharing links or copies of films in advance, accompanied by clear guidance on how to analyse them. Third, structured activities—such as group discussions, debates, quizzes, or student-led film projects—were viewed as essential for transforming viewing

into deeper learning. Fourth, film-based assignments should be systematically included in the curriculum, with opportunities for critical reflection, lecturer feedback, and intercultural contributions from students.

### **Conclusion**

Film-based learning offers notable pedagogical benefits by making theories more comprehensible, memorable, and applicable to practice, while also nurturing empathy and intercultural competence. Yet these advantages are balanced by challenges of simplification, alignment, and practical barriers. The study shows that the value of films is maximized when they are integrated thoughtfully—through diverse selection, structured analysis, and interactive learning. Combined with other pedagogical strategies, films can create a more engaging and inclusive learning environment that better prepares students for the complexities of social work practice.

## Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Education. A literature review.

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### Background and purpose of the presentation

Religion and spirituality (R/S) are often marginalised in social work education, despite their centrality to many service users' identities and lived experiences. Students and practitioners frequently report feeling underprepared, uncertain, or unwilling to address R/S issues in practice. This presentation shares findings from a constructionist literature review that explored how R/S can be more effectively integrated into social work education, with a focus on enhancing cultural humility, student-led socially constructed learning, maximising interdisciplinary links in practice, and creating safe spaces for debate from the position of multiple truths. It proposes new ways of teaching and support to improve preparedness and readiness for contemporary professional contexts where R/S is an emergent factor.

### A summary of the main points of the presentation:

This poster presentation is based upon my constructionist literature, the review highlights several key points:

- R/S should be clearly defined and utilised within a personalised, strengths-based framework.
- Students must critically reflect on their own beliefs and biases, exploring R/S through intersectional and postmodern lenses.
- Practitioners should acknowledge the limits of their role in providing spiritual support and be aware of referral pathways.
- There is no consensus on how best to teach R/S, but embedding student-led, experiential, and socially constructed learning shows promise.
- Linking R/S explicitly with professional frameworks (PCF, SWE, BASW Code of Ethics) enhances its relevance to practice.

### How the presentation will address one or more of the conference's aims and themes

The poster connects directly with ECSWR themes around theorising social work and social work education, addressing working across cultural and disciplinary boundaries. It demonstrates how integrating R/S into curricula responds to diversity, supports cultural humility, and prepares students to navigate complex practice situations in line with current social work debates.

### Conclusions and implications

The study concludes that R/S should not remain peripheral in social work education. Embedding it requires adaption into pre existing and specifically defined curriculum content, exploration of religious meaning and diversity, interdisciplinary collaboration with theology, chaplaincy, and suggests that social work education should foster personal reflection development and spiritual growth.

This approach strengthens cultural humility and confidence in engaging with faith-related issues. The presentation supports alignment with professional standards and ethical frameworks. For research, it opens space to examine how emerging ideas such as a metamodern pedagogy can help educators develop training approaches to R/S in social work.

## Drug use, homelessness, and no health insurance – opportunities and barriers to healthcare

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### Background and purpose

Many people living in Berlin are not covered by the health insurance system. They for instance have no health insurance due their residence status and therefore cannot receive adequate medical care. This problem is exacerbated if they have no place to live and use illegal substances. The Wi:Nu:K project (June to December 2025) examined the challenges faced by opiate users with unclear health insurance status and no secure housing to access the help system in Berlin. Both recipients and professionals were asked about opportunities and obstacles.

### Methods

As part of an ethnographic approach 14 interviews were conducted with service users to identify challenges in their everyday lives. The interviews were evaluated using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke). In addition, professionals in various areas of support were asked about their experiences with the target group and with other support institutions. Finally, focus groups with professionals were used to develop an impact model that focuses on possible cooperation.

### Results

From both perspectives, it became clear that poverty, residence status, drug use, homelessness and crime are complexly interlinked and interdependent. Key issues such as communication, belonging and geographical location, as well as bureaucratic logic, were identified as challenges. In particular, cooperation between social services, health care, doctors and the judiciary was identified as difficult. Different approaches within the various disciplines make support challenging. Social work research in this area is necessarily interdisciplinary and at the same time enables an approach that combines the perspectives of users with different disciplines within the support system. At the same time, the research project shows that health promotion is inconceivable without reliable residence and immigration status.

### Conclusion

The presentation presents the multi-perspective research design and the most important findings from the perspective of service users and professionals. The research has built bridges between different disciplines, revealing both the logic and the limits of cooperation. Social work appears here as the profession that must fill the gaps in order to enable access. The focuses will be on the perspective of users and how the interweaving of migration policy, healthcare and the justice system manifests itself in their lives. The (traditionally dominant) medical perspective on drug use falls short here. Especially to get in contact with service users in difficult situations living in absolute poverty social work research provides methods and experiences. From their perspective exclusion mechanisms due to the interlinked systems can be highlighted.

## Empowering Families – the role of law and order in out- of -home placements

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Dutch child welfare services operate under intense pressure, striving to protect families yet often producing suboptimal outcomes. The so called “drangtraject” a nominally voluntary intervention—frequently feels coercive, leaving many parents powerless. Formally, parents have a role to play, and the process is voluntary. Research shows that drang can mean dwang “coercion” We are talking about thousands of families in compulsory procedures. Legally, a “drangtraject” does not exist. Social workers sometimes decide to remove a child from their home without court intervention. Overburdened social workers respond reactively to crises, narrowing the gap between voluntary and involuntary aid. The Dutch system of youth assistance is protocol-based and reactive rather than preventive. By the time help is at hand, a family has already run into problems. The step from voluntary to compulsory care is therefore small. An out-of-home placement is seen internationally as an extreme measure. Although a collaborative, empowerment-focused system is advocated concrete strategies to involve parents and safeguard children’s best interests remain under-researched.

The research question is “What forms of appropriate support can be provided to parents involved in coercive care trajectories, with an emphasis on empowerment, to enable them to raise their child in a healthy family environment?” Its aims are twofold: to identify critical elements and mechanisms that optimize parental support, and to develop a practice-based intervention enabling professionals to tailor assistance and ideally prevent an out- of – home placement. Employing participatory action research, stakeholders serve as co-researchers throughout design, data collection, and analysis.

Purposive sampling, combining snowball and aspect methods, ensured representation of experts, parents, professionals, and peer specialists from multiple Dutch provinces. Interviews were conducted with six parents—three fathers and three mothers. Additionally, interviews were held with four professionals and experts by experience: two professionals working in different roles within the same youth care organization, and two experts by experience. All data is analysed in ATLAS-ti (Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltags-Sprache – Textinterpretation).

To ensure consistency, inter-rater reliability was incorporated during the data analysis process.

The findings of this study advocate for a system that emphasizes collaboration and the strengthening of the entire family unit, with empowerment as a guiding approach. While empowerment as an approach is not necessarily a definitive solution, it does offer a framework. The attitude of the care professional and their ability to build trust are crucial in this context. Care professionals should communicate clearly with parents, offering explanations and justifications for their actions and the decision-making process. It is essential that professionals empathize with the difficult position parents are in, refraining from judgment or acting based on personal assumptions. Furthermore, involving experts by experience in the support process provides emotional reassurance, helping parents feel better understood.



## Exploring students' experiences of human rights education in social work: A cross-continental comparative exploration of universities in Africa, Europe, and Australia

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Human rights education (HRE) is a critical component of social work education, preparing students to uphold human dignity, social justice, and well-being in their practice. Despite its importance, little is known about the effectiveness of HRE or how students experience and perceive it across different international contexts. Variations in the integration and teaching of HRE often arise from socio-political contexts and educators' personal perspectives, leading to inconsistent approaches. This interdisciplinary study seeks to explore how undergraduate social work students perceive and experience HRE in their academic programs across different continents. The universities included in the study will be from Africa (University of Pretoria, South Africa; Hope Africa University, Burundi; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana; Hargeisa University, Somalia; University of Lagos, Nigeria) Europe (FH Münster, Germany; Gdansk University, Poland; Instituut Sociale Opleidingen, Netherlands) and Australia (Deakin University).

The oral paper presentation is linked to the sub-themes 1 and 2 of the conference. The primary research question of the project is: What are undergraduate social work students' perceptions and experiences of human rights education in universities across Africa, Europe, and Australia? Sub-questions address similarities and differences in experiences, challenges in applying human rights to practice, and recommendations for improving HRE. This research aims to enhance understanding of HRE globally to improve its application in curricula and better prepare students for human rights-based social work practice.

The study employs an exploratory, comparative design using "photovoice" as the primary data collection method. Participants will be recruited purposively based on their exposure to HRE through courses or modules in their programs. Students will take photographs representing their experiences of human rights education, which will then serve as prompts for discussions in focus groups. These discussions will offer rich qualitative data, providing insights into the students' perceptions and reflections on the pedagogy they have experienced. The data collection phase will start in October 2025. Data analysis will include thematic analysis of qualitative discussions and visual content analysis of the photographs. The oral paper presentation will delineate first results from the empirical research in Germany, combining it with preliminary findings from other countries and universities involved in the cross-national research project.

This study will contribute to the literature by providing a comparative analysis of students' HRE experiences in different contexts. The findings will inform the development of human rights education within social work programs, focusing on improving pedagogical approaches and better preparing students for future practice. Additionally, it aims to contribute to the broader discourse on human rights education and its integration into



social work practice globally, ultimately strengthening the ability of social work graduates to advance social justice and human dignity.

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## Guided by the streets: an evidence-informed educational practice to promote positive attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness

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People experiencing homelessness often represent an “outgroup” for many social work students - individuals with whom they have little or no direct contact. In fact, a significant portion of first-year social work students had never spoken to someone who was homeless (41% in 2024, 29% in 2025). While social workers are committed to supporting marginalized groups, they are not immune to holding biases. To foster more positive attitudes toward people experiencing homelessness, we developed an educational practice in which students learned directly from (formerly) homeless individuals. Grounded in the principles of Community Engaged Learning (CEL), this practice connects social work education with lived experience and professional practice, creating mutual benefits for both students and community participants.

In practice, this meant that first-year social work students ventured into the city in small groups, guided by individuals with lived experience of homelessness. Using locations in the city center as a backdrop, the guides shared their life stories and answered students' questions. A week later, students participated in a reflective group session with a social worker and someone with lived experience of homelessness, where they were encouraged to reflect on their initial preconceptions. This educational practice was studied qualitatively through observations during five reflective group sessions and quantitatively through a pre-test measuring students' attitudes toward homelessness and their personal values using Schwartz (2001) Portrait Values Questionnaire (n=150), followed by a post-test to assess changes in attitudes (cognitive, affective, behavioral) after the educational intervention (n=70).

The pre-test showed that students who valued universalism - understanding, appreciating, and protecting the well-being of others - held more positive attitudes. In contrast, valuing security correlated negatively. Homelessness may be perceived as a threat to this value. Post-intervention results showed a shift in perception: “I learned that not all homeless people are dangerous. Also, not everyone is addicted. At home, I was taught to ignore them, but this proves the opposite. This inhumane image of homeless people is far too widespread.” The personal stories left a strong impression and offered insight into the harsh living conditions faced by homeless people. Students developed a deeper understanding of the daily challenges and basic needs required to survive on the streets, such as access to dry, warm, and safe shelter.

Post-test results also indicated a significant increase in self-reported empathy and a significant decrease in self-reported uneasiness toward individuals experiencing homelessness. Students began to see them as “ordinary people” with their own stories, recognizing their humanity. They also reported a significant increase in the belief that society, government, and social workers should take greater responsibility in addressing

the root causes of homelessness. This highlights the potential of contact with outgroups in recognizing and actively challenging marginalization in practice and policy - especially when such marginalization is invisible or normalized in society.

This study demonstrates how students developed more positive attitudes toward people experiencing homelessness in a co-produced educational practice. By engaging with outgroups and reflecting on personal values, students are better equipped to recognize and address systemic injustice.

## Family structure patterns of rural children in China and their differentiated emotional, behavioral, and academic adaptation in the context of massive rural-urban migration: A latent class analysis

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The family composition hypothesis suggests that children cared for by both biological parents perform better than those without such care. Originating from studies on Western nuclear families, this hypothesis has been implicitly and widely applied to rural children in China. Children with migrant parents were considered experiencing family structure deficiency, often being categorized into mother-migrated, father-migrated, or both-parents-migrated groups and compared with rural children with non-migrant parents. However, unlike western families, family structure in China is much more complex, with grandparents often being regarded as part of the family and play a significant role in taking care of children, especially in rural areas. Besides, in the context of massive rural-urban labor migration, parental migration serves as a common household strategy to diversify family income, leading to two family branches that physically separated yet economically and psychologically connected. Unfortunately, these characteristics were largely overlooked in existing studies, contributing to intense debates and inconsistent findings on whether parental migration benefits or harms left-behind children's adaptation.

This study addresses these gaps by revising the family composition hypothesis within the Chinese rural context. Using latent class analysis on 914 rural primary school children, the current study identified six distinct family structure patterns based on their parental migration types and living arrangements. Logistic regression analysis further revealed how these patterns are associated with children's emotional, behavioral, and academic adaptation. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of family dynamics and adaptation in the context of rural-urban migration.

This research makes theoretical contributions by expanding the family composition hypothesis to better align with the unique characteristics of rural families in China. Practically, the findings provide evidence-based insights for policymakers and practitioners such as social workers designing targeted interventions to improve the well-being of left-behind children, emphasizing the need to address family-level diversity rather than relying on simplified categorizations.

## Remoralising Social Work: Coaching as a social process of resistance and value realignment

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Social work is a profession underpinned by core values of social justice, care and advocacy, but is practiced in contexts increasingly shaped by austerity, managerialism and risk-aversion. These environments have produced sustained processes of demoralisation in the workforce, manifesting not only in professional disillusionment but also in embodied exhaustion and ethical dissonance. While related disciplines have turned to the concept of moral injury to explain the harms of working against one's ethical compass, social work's realities are better captured through a continuum of demoralisation processes, including fluctuating policies, increasingly risk-focused systems and managerial pressure, that erode both moral agency and wellbeing.

Based on a mixed methods evaluative study of BASW's Professional Support Service (43 survey responses and 6 focus groups: 4 with coachees across each UK nation and 2 with cross-national coaches), this paper explores coaching as an interdisciplinary, evidence-informed practice that can remoralise social workers by creating much needed reflective, dialogical spaces. These spaces enable practitioners to reconnect with their values, embodied practice and ultimately their moral selves. Importantly, 'remoralisation' is not positioned as a workforce retention strategy, but as a social process of value realignment wherein practitioners, both coaches and coachees, restore their moral agency. As a result, some social workers may choose to remain in the profession to continue their service, resist oppressive practices from within or even transition into alternative roles.

Our analysis illustrates that social work coaching can cultivate professional resistance and foster value realignment. In contrast to business-oriented coaching models, which emphasise efficiency and performance, 'coaching by social work for social work' presents a model that can enhance empathy, enable catharsis and rejuvenate demoralised professional selves. Narratives from coaches and coachees help further identify how reflection in the coaching relationship enables social workers to identify and name the structural forces that demoralise them, creating the conditions for moral resistance and allowing practitioners to situate their challenges not as individual failings but as systemic harm needing to be addressed. Therefore, 'remoralisation' through coaching does not claim to transform the wider system directly. Instead, it sustains practitioners' capacity to resist within it, whether by practicing in ways aligned with their values, advocating for change or moving into alternative pathways such as coaching itself. Each represents an act of reclaiming moral agency.

The paper argues for a process-approach to ethics in social work that extends debates beyond a focus on moral injury which is an outcome of the distinct but interrelated processes of demoralisation and remoralisation. It highlights the multiple structural-social processes that constitute social workers' experiences of burnout, compassion fatigue and the erosion of core values. In positioning coaching as an evidence-informed service that bridges professional practice and learning, we explore the emancipatory possibilities of coaching for remoralising social work which would be crucial for ensuring the moral bearing of the profession.

## Positive Deviance as a Strategy for Service Innovation in Youth Welfare: Insights from the POSTUT Project

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Youth marginalisation is a persistent challenge in Norway, particularly among young people aged 16–25 with experience from child welfare services. The project Positive Deviance: An Innovative Approach to Youth Marginalisation (POSTUT) explores how the Positive Deviance (PD) approach can strengthen public services through locally driven innovation. PD identifies individuals or groups who succeed against the odds, despite facing similar constraints as their peers, and seeks to learn from their practices to improve broader systems (Pascale et al., 2010; Singhal & Bjurström, 2023).

Led by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) Innlandet, in collaboration with child welfare services (CWS), municipal mental health services (MMHS), young people, researchers, and other stakeholders, POSTUT builds on insights from the “Youth Inclusion in the Kongsvinger Region” initiative (2021–2023). The project is structured around two research components:

- 1. Mapping Positive Deviance in Practice:**

Three municipalities in Innlandet were identified as positively deviant in preventing youth exclusion. These are studied to understand how they succeed in holistic follow-up of youth in NAV and CWS, and how organisational practices and leadership contribute to better outcomes.

- 2. Establishing Shared Learning and Innovation Platforms (FLIP):**

In the Solør region, cross-sectoral resource groups have been established to identify, test, and evaluate new practices. These platforms bring together professionals, youth, and researchers in co-creation processes that challenge traditional service boundaries and foster collaborative learning.

The project highlights how social work practice and research can transcend professional and institutional silos. Social workers act as boundary-spanners—linking welfare services, mental health care, and youth perspectives across sectors. Their role is central in identifying positively deviant practices, facilitating youth participation, and translating insights into new service models. The interdisciplinary nature of the project, involving actors from public, voluntary, and academic sectors, exemplifies how social work can operate across cultural, disciplinary, and professional boundaries.

Methodologically, POSTUT contributes to innovation in social work research by combining register data analysis, participatory design, and practice-based inquiry. The PD approach aligns with co-creation principles and supports capacity building by empowering practitioners and service users to shape solutions together. It also challenges conventional top-down models of service development, offering a bottom-up alternative that is both cost-effective and context-sensitive (Albanna & Heeks, 2019; Dearing & Singhal, 2020; Mertens et al., 2016).

This poster presents key findings from the project and invites reflection on how PD can be used to strengthen the identity and impact of social work in cross-boundary contexts.

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## Exploring the Role of new Physical Environment in Youth Residential Care from the Staff Perspective

PhD Mira Välimaa<sup>1</sup>

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The aim of this presentation is to share insights from an ongoing study on how newly designed environments influence staff practices, safety perceptions, and relational dynamics in youth residential care. It seeks to spark discussion on the role of space and offer perspectives for future facility design.

Our study explores how purposefully designed physical environments shape everyday practices, safety perceptions, and relational dynamics in residential youth care. The relocation of a reform school and housing unit to new facilities in April 2025 provided a unique opportunity to explore how space influences care and education from the staff's perspective.

The new unit includes a variety of spatial configurations—open, semi-secure, and secure units—as well as a flexible school area and two units for intensive care. These features reflect a deliberate architectural response to the needs of youth and professionals, making the site ideal for studying the interplay between space and practice. The research focuses on how staff experience and adapt to this new setting, how they perceive safety and functionality, and how space facilitates or constrains relationships with youth and among colleagues.

While previous studies have often centered on young people's experiences in residential care, this research addresses a gap by focusing on staff perspectives. It seeks to understand which spaces become meaningful in daily work, how spatial arrangements shape safety, and how the environment supports wellbeing and relational work. These insights are particularly relevant for informing future design and renovation of residential care facilities.

The theoretical framework is grounded in the concept of socio-spatial professional orientation, which views place not as a passive backdrop but as an active agent in shaping social, pedagogical, and relational dynamics. Drawing on spatial theory and social work, the study examines how physical, social, and symbolic aspects of space shape professional practices and relationships. The environment is understood as co-constitutive with human action—shaping and being shaped by the people who inhabit it.

Data collection involves walking interviews with staff from various professional groups, including educators, care workers, night staff, administrators, and support personnel. This method lets participants reflect on their environment while moving through it, generating rich, place-based narratives. Interviews are conducted in pairs or small groups during autumn 2025. The study employs qualitative content analysis to examine how staff describe their interactions with space, their perceptions of safety, and the relational dynamics that emerge in different settings. It also explores how the environment supports or challenges collaboration and wellbeing.



By highlighting the role of physical space in shaping care practices, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how environments influence social work in institutional settings. It offers practical implications for policy and design, emphasizing the importance of staff perspectives in creating supportive, safe, and relationally rich care environments. It offers implications for policy and design, emphasizing staff perspectives in creating supportive and relationally rich environments. The findings support evidence-based development and promote dialogue between architecture, social work, and education.

## Developing participatory, trauma-aware methods: carrying out qualitative research with mothers who have undergone pre-birth assessments.

Dr Danica Darley<sup>1</sup>, Dr Shirley Lewis

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Pre-birth assessments for women who use substances in pregnancy are a critical but under-researched area of social work practice. In England and Wales, statutory guidance highlights the risks to unborn babies where maternal substance use is a concern, yet there are no clear guidelines on best practice in undertaking these assessments. Research suggests that while pregnancy can represent a turning point for women who use substances, the pre-birth assessment process itself can leave women feeling stigmatised, mistrustful of services, and overwhelmed by professional requirements. Experiences during this period can profoundly shape both maternal engagement with services and outcomes for women and their babies. Against this backdrop, the Willow Study, funded by the NIHR, was established to explore women's and social workers' experiences of pre-birth assessments where substance use is a factor, and to develop co-produced practice recommendations to improve outcomes. From the outset, the study has been rooted in a participatory approach. The research team worked closely with parent advocacy groups and practitioners during the bid development phase to ensure the study design reflected lived realities. This collaborative approach continued throughout, with parents with lived experience shaping key decisions about research priorities, ethical safeguards, and methods of dissemination. A critical reference group of academics, practitioners, and experts by experience, together with a parent advisory group, guided the study design and analysis. This commitment to shared power and valuing all forms of knowledge was central to ensuring the research is not only academically rigorous but also meaningful to those most affected.

Drawing on these participatory foundations, the Willow Study adopted trauma-aware and participatory strategies to shape interview design and delivery. Interview schedules were developed collaboratively with parent advisory groups to ensure relevance and sensitivity. Data collection practices prioritised participant choice and safety: interviews began with less sensitive topics, women could choose pacing and mode of participation, and there was flexibility to pause or stop at any point. These design choices were intended to minimise harm and reduce re-traumatisation while also enabling richer, more authentic accounts of women's and practitioners' experiences.

The contribution of this work speaks directly to the themes of the conference, particularly around innovation in research with marginalised groups, advancing participatory and trauma-informed methodologies, and bridging the gap between research and practice. By foregrounding participatory practices and lived experience, the Willow Study challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge in social care research. It demonstrates how collaborative approaches can generate findings that not only improve professional practice but also hold the potential to transform the experiences of women navigating pre-birth assessment processes.

## From likes to lifeworlds: The contributions of youth work practice in the online lifeworld to young people's development

Dejan Todorovic<sup>1</sup>

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As youth work increasingly takes place in digital environments, questions arise about its impact on the (online) lives of young people and how it contributes to their development. This paper examines the contributions of online youth work practice and its role in supporting young people's developmental needs. Drawing on two earlier studies — a Scottish survey of digital activities and youth work outcomes (YouthLink Scotland, 2023) and a Dutch study on young people's developmental needs in the online lifeworld (Todorovic et al., 2023) — this study employed a qualitative design. Data were collected through digital diaries from youth workers and semi-structured interviews with young people (N = 37) and youth workers (N = 25).

Findings demonstrate that youth work plays a role in helping young people navigate social media; develop skills, talents, and social connections; and increase their awareness of online risks. Youth workers also provide support in coping with negative online experiences, including loneliness and mental health challenges. However, youth work's contribution is less visible in certain developmental areas, such as online safety and privacy, self-image, and critical assessment of online information. Importantly, the research highlights that online contact, presence, and availability of youth workers are central to supporting young people across both online and offline contexts.

These insights contribute to evidence-informed youth work practice by clarifying its impact in the digital sphere. The results can inform practice development, support professional reflection, and strengthen the legitimacy of online youth work in dialogue with young people, partner organisations, and funders.

## On the Fence: Social Worker Responses to Assisted Dying in Aotearoa New Zealand

Associate Professor [Laura Ann Chubb](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of Auckland

**Background and Purpose:** The End of Life Choice Act 2019 legalised assisted dying (AD) in Aotearoa New Zealand for terminally ill adults under tightly prescribed conditions. While medical practitioners hold formal responsibility for AD processes, social workers may be drawn into these situations as clients and families seek guidance, referral, or emotional support. This creates an ethically complex space where professional roles intersect with personal beliefs, cultural values, and systemic constraints. To date, little research has explored how social workers themselves view AD and how these perspectives might influence their readiness to engage with clients in end-of-life contexts. This study aimed to explore the personal and professional beliefs of social workers in Aotearoa about AD and the implications for education, practice, and policy.

**Methods:** An anonymous online qualitative survey was completed by 120 registered social workers across Aotearoa between September and December 2023. Five overarching questions were asked; this analysis focuses on one: “How would you describe/explain your personal views on assisted dying?” Demographic data were collected, showing broad alignment with the national workforce but underrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika participants. Responses were analysed using the Aggregate I-poem Analysis, an adaptation of the Listening Guide method (Gilligan & Brown, 1992). This creative approach aggregated first-person statements into narrative ‘I-poems,’ making visible the recurring beliefs, points of agreement, and tensions that cut across participants’ responses.

**Findings:** Eight I-poems were developed, reflecting diverse positions on AD. These ranged from strong advocacy for autonomy and dignity (“A Choice to Die with Dignity”), to cautious conditional support (“It Works, But Needs Watching”). A number opposed AD on cultural, spiritual, or ethical grounds, citing concerns about coercion, systemic inequities, or the gradual widening of eligibility (“The Thin Edge of the Wedge”). Some respondents expressed ambivalence or neutrality, while others highlighted systemic inequities (e.g., inadequate palliative care or limited consultation with Māori) as undermining informed choice. Across responses, tensions emerged between personal belief and professional duty, as well as between safeguarding vulnerable populations and supporting client autonomy.

**Conclusions and Implications:** The findings reveal that social workers hold complex, often conflicting positions that reflect both personal conviction and professional responsibility. The study highlights the importance of preparing social workers for the potential ethically charged nature of encounters about AD through reflective spaces, interdisciplinary learning, and cultural training. Capturing collective practitioner voices also demonstrates the value of creative qualitative methods for understanding contested practice issues. More broadly, the findings suggest further dialogue between health, social work, and policy practitioners to support end-of-life choices in ways that safeguard dignity, autonomy, and equity.

## Strengthening child perspective in social work with low-income families: Between top-down and bottom up

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### Background and purpose

The Norwegian labor and welfare services (Nav) have a central mandate ensuring inclusion in working and social life and to prevent and reduce poverty and social problems. However, Nav have been criticized for being insensitive to the family context and children's conditions and fundamental rights when assessing and follow-up of service users. Research identify service barriers for addressing children and young people in critical transitions (Lundberg and Danielsen 2024; Tysnes and Kiik 2019), risking that they first come into Nav's attention as young adults without a job or education. There is an ongoing policy focus to strengthen child perspectives and family poverty prevention measures in Norwegian services. What promote and inhibit a child perspective in this social work and service context?

### Methods

Through an ongoing (2024-27) comparative case study consisting of 8 selected Nav offices, located in two regions, we produce knowledge on variations in when assessments of children's needs come into play, what practices such assessments lead to, and how child professional understandings, assessments and practices vary with organization, office size and/or geographical and demographic conditions. Qualitative group and individual interviews with management and social workers are carried out (2-4 focus groups with 3-6 social workers at each office), as well as a small sample of parents and children. A thematic analysis is conducted.

### Findings

The study identifies the current strategy for strengthening child perspective in Nav as a top-down-strategy, anchored in Convention on the Rights of the Child, and implemented by the national directorate of labor and welfare, in collaboration with e.g. the children's ombudsman. The strategy has resulted in developing official guidelines implemented in Nav offices, and standardized forms for including questions on children. Nav office management see themselves as taking crucial roles in implementing this strategy.

Frontline social workers address the need and importance of a child and family perspective, but they see barriers in available resources, organizational limitations and accountability concerns for cooperation, lack of competence in talking with children and their parents, and technological hindrances for documenting child-professional assessments in Nav's case management systems.

However, we also identify a bottom-up approach, anchored in context sensitive social work, located within small and rural Nav office contexts, as well as in tailored measures and development of new child expert roles (in larger offices), and constructive learning from county governor supervision.

### Conclusions and implications

Findings draw attention to the need of strengthening context-sensitive social work practice, and to systematizing promising practices in local contexts for large-scale organizational learning.

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# Homelessness in Greece: Stories of Survival, Stigma, and Welfare Support

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## Background and Purpose

Homelessness in Greece has intensified during the last decade, shaped by concurrent crises (financial, migration, pandemic, climate). While national programmes such as Housing and Employment have been introduced to provide support, little is known about how homeless people themselves perceive the causes of their homelessness, their everyday reality, their experiences of stigma, and their interactions with social services. This study seeks to fill this gap by amplifying the voices of people experiencing homelessness, contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as well as service engagement.

## Methods

This was a mixed methods study in Athens, using both quantitative and qualitative methods with homeless individuals at the beginning and the end of their registration in one of the Greek Ministry's Housing and Employment programmes delivered by the NGO IASIS between 2022-2024. The poster will present part of the qualitative data, based on 21 semi-structured interviews with homeless people at the beginning of the programme. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically, using an inductive approach to identify recurring patterns and meanings while remaining attentive to contextual and structural influences.

## Findings

Analysis revealed four overarching themes.

1. Pathways into homelessness: Participants described job loss, financial insecurity, lack of supportive environment, health problems, and debt as key intersecting triggers, experienced in complex ways.
2. Everyday needs and challenges: Participants described their everyday struggle of meeting their basic needs, such as accessing food and water, as well as issues of security and access to services.
3. Experiences of stigma and exclusion: Homelessness was accompanied by profound feelings of invisibility, shame, and discrimination. Participants reported being treated as 'undeserving' with everyday examples of social stigma and exclusion.
4. Encounters with social services: Most participants reported to encounter with social services on a daily basis for their basic needs, such as soup kitchens and dormitories. Positive experiences related to social workers were expressed regarding the empathy and support they have received. However, many participants felt services were fragmented, under-resourced, and insufficiently tailored to complex needs.

## Conclusions and Implications

The findings highlight the impact of homelessness in people's lived experiences as well as systemic failures intensified by economic and policy shifts. Stigma continues to marginalise

people experiencing homelessness, hindering their reintegration and access to services. The study suggests that welfare programmes and interventions need to respond not only to immediate needs but to have a strong long-term orientation, reduced bureaucratic barriers, and closer attention to psychosocial needs. It is crucial that 'bottom-up' knowledge such as the voices and experiences of people experiencing homelessness are included in the planning and implementation of such policies. For social work practice, the study underlines the importance of relational engagement and advocacy for inclusive and empowering policies and services.



## The therapeutic orientation and professional self-conception of Finnish psychiatric social workers

Dr. Leena Leinonen<sup>1</sup>

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This study examines the therapeutic orientation and professional self-conception of social work in psychiatric health care in Finland. Various therapeutic frameworks based on psychological knowledge often affect the professional self-conception of specialized occupational groups, such as social workers, both at conscious and unconscious level. A part of psychiatric social workers has schooled themselves as licensed therapists and work in a dual position as social workers and therapists. The purpose of the study is to analyse the significance of the therapeutic orientation in the professional self-conception of social work.

The data consists of a) survey data (n = 249) of psychiatric social workers and b) interviews of eight therapy-trained psychiatric social workers. The quantitative data was analysed statistically by using percentages, cross tabs, explorative factor analysis, independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA. The qualitative data was analyzed by content analysis with the hermeneutical interpretation.

The results of the study have been reflected on the theoretical conceptualizations of the social systems and ecological communication by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. The results indicate that social workers see the significance of the therapeutic work in various ways. Both the professional self-conception of social work and the role social work has in multiprofessional work are affected by these distinct perspectives. Psychiatric social work can be seen merely as therapeutic work or as social security guidance work, which ignores the questions of the psychological condition of the client.

Applying Luhmann's systemic social theory, social work forms its own professional subsystem in the multi-professional context of psychiatric health care. Psychiatric social work creates its self-conception based on it by seeking to differentiate itself from the therapeutic framework of psychiatric health care. However, at the same time, it also relies on the psychiatric organization through a therapeutic approach by expanding the boundaries of its own subsystem.

When the self-conception of social work is fully therapeutic, the profession immerses itself in the healthcare system and takes the therapeutic framework as its starting point. In this case, the function of structural social change disappears from psychiatric social work. At the other extreme, the self-conception of social work can be purely based on the concrete interventions of social work, e.g., safeguarding housing and social security benefits of the client. In this case social work is almost separate from the therapeutic context of psychiatric health care. With professional self-conception located between the two extremes, social work is constantly positioning itself between the structural and therapeutic as required by each client case. In the ideal situation of maximum utilization of expertise in social work, both structural and therapeutic orientation are integrated. The therapeutic orientation binds social work to the therapeutic framework of psychiatric health care, and by doing this, it also draws somewhat paradoxically the structural aspect of social work into psychiatric settings.

## The role of ethno-cultural initiatives in supporting youth mental health in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Dr. Rebecca Thys<sup>1</sup>

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### **Context: interdisciplinary research on youth mental health**

The study outlined in this abstract examines the role of initiatives emerging from ethno-cultural communities in promoting youth mental health within socially vulnerable neighborhoods in Flanders and Brussels. It is conducted within the framework of the Academy of Primary Care (<https://www.academievoordeeerstelijjn.be/>) and forms part of the broader PROMENT research program (2024–2029). This interdisciplinary research program brings together researchers from psychology, sociology, social health sciences, medical sciences, and nursing, affiliated with Karel de Grote Hogeschool (KdG), the University of Antwerp (UA), and Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB). The overarching aim of the research agenda is to contribute to a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of mental health support systems for young people growing up in disadvantaged urban environments. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to mental health challenges due to developmental transitions, limited coping mechanisms, and peer pressure. These vulnerabilities are compounded for youth living in disadvantaged urban areas, facing socioeconomic hardship, belonging to ethnic minorities, or lacking emotional and material support.

While Belgium and Flanders have made progress in developing multisectoral, youth-oriented mental health strategies, significant gaps remain in understanding the contributions of informal, community-rooted actors—particularly those emerging from ethno-cultural communities.

The initiatives under study encompass a wide spectrum of activities, including youth movements, sports clubs, artistic projects, socio-cultural youth work, grassroots organizations, informal associations, and even individual key figures. Despite varying degrees of formalization, they share a common feature: they are founded and led by individuals embedded within or affiliated with ethno-cultural communities. These actors often reach youth who perceive mainstream services as inaccessible or culturally distant, and they offer contextually sensitive responses to issues such as racism, exclusion, and identity struggles. By examining these dynamics, the study seeks to strengthen “vital coalitions” between formal services and informal community actors.

### **Methodology: qualitative interviews with key figures**

The study focuses on two neighborhoods selected for their demographic and socio-economic profiles: Historical Molenbeek (Brussels) and Stuyvenberg (Antwerp). In the first year (2024–2025), exploratory fieldwork using snowball sampling was conducted to map a diverse range of ethno-cultural initiatives. This mapping continues into the second year, alongside semi-structured interviews with people working or volunteering in these initiatives—addressing perceptions of youth mental health, protective and risk factors, and expectations regarding collaboration, policy support, and early detection.

**Preliminary results**

Initial findings from Molenbeek highlight the significance of ethno-cultural initiatives such as 'Kuumba vzw' and 'Samen voor Morgen', which serve as safe and brave spaces for youth navigating discrimination and identity challenges. These organizations foster recognition, resilience, and dialogue, empowering youth to engage critically with their social environments. In the months that follow we will continue to interview and thereby add nuance to these preliminary analyses.

**Conclusions & implications**

Ultimately, this (sub-)study aims to inform more inclusive mental health practices by integrating the voices of community actors and youth into policy and care frameworks. It seeks to address systemic gaps, improve continuity of care, and guide future research and policy agendas toward more equitable and context-sensitive approaches to youth mental well-being.

## Internal and external challenges: the path of foster children to self-discovery, harmonious communication and cooperation

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### Introduction

A key goal of preparing children in care for fostering their successful integration into society. The presentation aim is to reveal the internal and external challenges that children living in family based homes face on their path to self-discovery, harmonious communication, and cooperation

**Keywords:** foster children, family based homes; self-discovery; harmonious communication and cooperation

Qualitative research was conducted for the study using the focus group interview method. The collected data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, following an inductive category formation process derived from the study data. In total, three focus group interviews were conducted, involving 22 children from the family-based home.

The analysis of the data showed that children living in family based homes, as they embark on the path of self-discovery, communication, and cooperation, they experience both challenges and opportunities for growth. Communicating with others often causes them internal tension—making initial contact can be intimidating, and they may feel insecure about whether they will be accepted and understood. Children notice that communication experiences resemble the model of family relationships – there are conflicts and disagreements, but also moments of reconciliation. Negative experiences, such as bullying or other children's outbursts, remain a significant obstacle, but at the same time they emphasize the importance of positive communication, especially the ability to listen to others.

In the context of cooperation, children emphasize the need to find their role in the group. They consider the most important aspect to be the opportunity to understand why they are needed, what they can do specifically, and what contribution they can make to the overall activity.

In the area of self-awareness, children's active reflectiveness is revealed. They set themselves new challenges and strive to achieve them, using various activities to get to know themselves and observing their reactions to different situations. Children also learn by listening to others, which shows that the process of self-awareness is closely intertwined with social experience.

Thus, children living in family based homes face internal and external difficulties in the processes of self-discovery, communication, and cooperation, but at the same time, they demonstrate the ability to reflect, find their place, and seek positive relationships. This shows that a properly organized educational and social environment can significantly contribute to their personal maturity and social integration.

The study is a part of a project funded by the State Budget titled “Establishment of Centers of Excellence at Mykolas Romeris University,” which is implemented under the initiative “Centers of Excellence Initiative” initiated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania.

## Cross-Sector Partnerships: An Opportunity for Social Work to Advance Systemic Change for Health Equity

Dr. Jordyn Hagar<sup>1</sup>

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### Background

Cross sector partnerships (CSPs) are collaborations between a variety of entities, including social services, healthcare organizations, businesses, corporations, philanthropic organizations, government agencies, and/or communities, and they have been identified as critical when working toward systemic change to address disparities in health and the social determinants of health. While research indicates many potential benefits to using CSPs, it also demonstrates frequent inequities in the implementation of these partnerships. Sector differences in perspectives, priorities, structures, and cultures can lead to power differentials that can minimize the role of client and change-oriented voices, influence group goals and direction, and limit the work's scope of change. Social workers, with their direct practice, community organizing, and social change-oriented skills, as well as their commitment to social justice, can serve an important role in addressing the inefficiencies and inequities in CSPs.

### Main Points

The presentation will first orient participants to CSPs, their purpose and goals, and current interdisciplinary implementation challenges. Logic models will be introduced to demonstrate both ideal implementation and common challenge points. Then, four critical pathways will be presented by which social workers can inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of CSPs and help improve efficacy and equality in their processes. Social workers can: 1) help fill inter-professional knowledge gaps regarding health inequities, the social determinants of health, and coordinated systemic change efforts, 2) help develop the practical and relational skills needed to engage in effective CSPs, 3) institutionalize programs to support CSPs, and 4) engage in evaluation and translation of CSP research into practice. Detailed and tangible examples will be provided for each of the four pathways, and logic models will again be used to illustrate intervention points and potential outcomes for both the CSP and for clients.

### Conference Themes

The presentation directly relates to the primary conference theme as CSPs are, by definition, interdisciplinary in nature, and the presentation directly applies extant evidence regarding CSPs to produce practice and policy recommendations for social workers to pursue through interdisciplinary work. The presentation also directly relates to the first subtheme; it presents detailed and tangible opportunities for social workers to engage in educational and policy practice, as well as research, to inform equity-oriented outcomes in interdisciplinary work.

### Conclusions/Implications

The presentation offers a roadmap for social workers to engage in interdisciplinary practice through CSPs while seeking to level power dynamics, increase skill and capacity,

and produce more equitable outcomes in both service delivery and client experiences. Participants will gain tangible practices they can pursue, as well as a research agenda regarding social work's role in CSPs.

**Informed by:**

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## The employment experiences of South Asian women in western countries, and the links to the employment of social workers in the UK: a systematic scoping review

Kirsty Shires<sup>1</sup>, Professor Martin Webber<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bradford Metropolitan District Council, <sup>2</sup> University of York

### Background

Studies have documented that disparities exist in social work education and practice, with minority ethnic students and social workers being disproportionately represented in placement fails, assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) and fitness to practice procedures. As a practitioner in a local authority adult services department in the UK, the researcher observed that disparities in the ASYE exist for South Asian female newly qualified social workers (NQSW). Limited research has been undertaken about the ASYE programme and South Asian female social workers to help understand this situation, as such data needed to be found elsewhere.

### Objective

This study undertook a systematic scoping review following the PRISMA ScR checklist to understand the employment experiences of South Asian women in western countries. The data was analysed against wider social work data to inform social work employment practice, support South Asian female social workers and address disparities.

### Design

Searches were completed across 9 databases to identify peer reviewed papers of studies exploring South Asian women's experiences across a range of employment fields. Using Covidence data extraction software, 19 publications from UK, US, Australia and Canada containing direct quotes from South Asian participants were screened, and data extracted and analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

### Results

The publications all used qualitative methods, the majority of which were from the UK (n=11). The women participating in the studies were from Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds and were a range of ages, professions and levels of employment. The women shared experiences of bicultural stress, intersectional discrimination in the workplace, identity-based peer mentorship, community and ambition.

### Recommendations

All leaders should gain an understanding of dominant organisational cultures and intersectional discrimination within social work and how these are experienced in the context of individual NQSWs lives. Relationship and person centred, anti-racist supervision should be provided to ensure support is tailored to NQSWs unique individual needs. The vital role of identity-based peer mentorship should be appreciated and facilitated. Future research should be coproduced with female social workers of South Asian origin to ensure robust, accurate and meaningful outcomes that can lead to genuine change and a more equitable cultures within organisations.



## Social Work In The Context Of Assisted Return and Reintegration

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This poster presentation sheds light on the conflicting role of social work in the context of return policies. Therefore, the return and reintegration situations of Nigerian asylum seekers who have returned from Germany to Nigeria in the context of assisted voluntary return and reintegration will be highlighted. Research results from a transnational qualitative interview research, which were collected as part of a master's thesis from the Department of Social Work by Kerstin Reith, are used for this purpose. In addition to four Nigerian returnees, the research participants included two return counsellors from Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg as well as a Nigerian reintegration assistant from an international non-governmental organization. The results highlight the impact of the scope of action and agency based on an early division into immigration groups with so called poor or good perspective of staying and the associated opportunities of social participation in Germany. The research findings further show the frequent lack of information about the legal framework, process and the German migration and asylum system. Likewise, awareness about return counseling and the repatriation grant seems to be patchy among the Nigerian asylum seekers. The findings stress that transnational family networks have a significant impact on return situations and play a crucial role in the decision-making process. This presentation will analyze and discuss the role of social workers as low-threshold actors who not only have direct access to the living environment of refugees but are also often involved in negotiations regarding an individual's decision to stay or return. In order to be able to speak with authority in this relevant policy area from a partisan perspective, the profession should focus more closely on this topic. Furthermore, the candidate will present her own doctoral project, which examines the perspectives of repatriated Nigerians based on the findings of her master's thesis. The research will be conducted in spring 2026.

## HiStory Writing: Empowerment as a co-creative writing process

Nora Kassan<sup>1</sup>

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HiStory Writing is a co-productive empowerment approach that combines systemic counseling and creative writing. It was developed to counteract the excommunication of social work recipients and other marginalized groups. By developing and appreciating their own narratives in the co-productive process of writing, participants can experience recognition, strengthen their self-esteem, and experience self-efficacy. They are fully responsible for the content. The setting can be tailored to individual, group, or family education. The process takes 30-90 minutes per story and is guided and structured in the spirit of process-oriented counseling.

The project aims to promote empowerment and agency. People are encouraged to strengthen their agency by addressing their life situation. Addressing this issue also offers a way out of the loneliness caused by the experience of not being heard. The experience of bearing witness through the writing process can thus be used, for example, in contexts of discrimination to cope with injustice, or in aging or change processes to cope with transience.

Strengths-based orientation and the handling of narratives are particularly important here. Recipients emerge as authors whose stories are worthy of being told, heard, published, and printed. As authors, they are not only experts on their own lives, writing their own stories, but also people who can touch, enrich, and support others with their life experiences and coping skills, their narratives, their creativity, and their individual style.

In addition to a brief description of the methodological approach and the context in which it was developed, the poster will present 56 stories from social work recipients, written between 2021 and 2023 by participants aged between 5 and 90 years. Contexts of development include senior citizen work, participation management, anti-discrimination work, systemic counseling, family education, youth welfare, holiday programs, and mobile youth work services.

The stories are arranged on the poster as a colorful square mosaic of QR codes, each of which leads to a flipbook. All authors have agreed in writing to an anonymous publication for non-commercial purposes, sharing their perspectives. The mosaic represents the diversity of perspectives and symbolizes a level of equality among all members of a society that unites equally worthy authors, independent of hierarchy and interpretive power.

### Examples:

On Education <https://online.flipbuilder.com/mvojt/nvgc/>

The Monkey and the Tree <https://online.flipbuilder.com/mvojt/kgot/>

Modern Monk <https://online.flipbuilder.com/mvojt/ncex/>

## Buddies with impact? A study on the effectiveness of diverse buddy projects in social work

Drs. Simone Koster<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Barbara van der Ent<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Inholland University of Applied Sciences

### Background and research question

Buddy projects connect individuals with support needs to volunteers who offer informal assistance. In response to growing pressure on formal care systems and the rising importance of civic engagement, these projects are increasingly popular. The assumption is that they lead to positive changes for participants (individuals with support needs), volunteers, and the broader society. However, a knowledge gap exists regarding whether this is truly the case. While some research has shed light on impact for participants, effects on volunteers and the broader societal context have hardly been studied.

In a two-year research project, we aim to answer the central question: What is the impact of buddy projects on participants, volunteers, and society at large, and how can organizations enhance this impact? This question is grounded in the social work practice of eight buddy projects, each focusing on different populations: newcomers learning a new language and culture, individuals facing mental health or financial challenges, people experiencing loneliness, and others. By participating in this research, the projects aim to inform their practice and increase their contribution on both individual and societal levels

### Approach and methods

To understand the impact of buddy projects thoroughly, we examine it through three analytical lenses: 1) effectiveness – assessing whether intended goals are achieved, 2) meaning making – exploring which specific (positive or negative, intended or unintended) changes are experienced by participants and volunteers, 3) professionalization – identifying how buddy projects can improve their practice to enhance impact.

We employ a mixed-methods approach, combining group sessions (e.g. theory of change workshops and impact calculators), in-depth interviews, and surveys with participants, volunteers, and professional staff. Regular learning sessions enable organizations to discuss their practices, learn from each other's experiences and reflect on the research insights.

### Findings

Initial results reveal both common and project-specific impacts. In multiple cases, buddies report increased self-confidence, improved communication skills, and an expanded social network. They value the opportunity to view life from another's perspective, which fosters mutual understanding. These broadened horizons often lead to enhanced empathy and more nuanced views of 'the other'. Specific impacts vary per project, ranging from improved financial literacy to increased awareness of local sports or neighborhood facilities.

It is important to emphasize that these positive effects depend strongly on organizational efforts, such as careful matching, ongoing support, and structured reflection. Without these, negative experiences like stress and frustration may arise.

**Conclusions and implications**

Buddy projects play a significant role in supplementing formal care systems. Volunteers may help prevent issues from escalating, thereby fulfilling a preventive function. Moreover, participating buddies step outside their social bubble, challenge prejudices, and develop empathy. This can be seen as an essential quality in today's polarized society.

Buddy projects can ripple outward, influencing not only the participating individuals but also their wider social networks—much like circles expanding from a stone dropped in water. In our poster presentation, we will further reflect on this broader societal impact and its measurement, contributing to a more evidence-based buddy practice.

## Professional learning ecosystems for social work: interdisciplinary insights for career-long development

Dr Gillian Ferguson<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Open University

Social work professional education draws from interdisciplinary fields of knowledge about learning and practice however the profession also generates its own theory. The presentation draws on empirical, phenomenological research that explored the nature of social workers' lived experiences of learning in the workplace (Ferguson, 2021). Drawing on rich interdisciplinary theoretical ideas, a web model of workplace learning for social work is introduced that acknowledges individual experiences and the complex practice context. The discussion will show the nature and complexity of individual social workers' experiences and how understanding these can help design more effective workplace continuing professional learning opportunities. This qualitative study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2022) and individual semi-structured interviews. The study was designed to get at the structure, texture and meaning of social workers' lived experiences which were described using sensory details and striking metaphors. The study found that learning in the workplace is a complex, intricate web which encapsulates seven themes: journey of the self; navigating landscape and place; navigating tasks; learning through others; learning through the body; practices and conceptions of learning; and learning by chance. The threads and relationships between these themes form uniquely individual webs deeply connected to social workers' embodied experiences of learning and the work opportunities that they undertake. The study found that social workers' most significant and valuable learning experiences were often entirely down to chance. For a profession with such a critical role, clearer strategic alignment between the learning opportunities the workplace offers and what social workers need to learn is crucial. The study findings sit at the intersection of interdisciplinary knowledge and theory about workplace learning and professional education, drawing together new ways to conceptualise learning. The research offers a distinctive contribution to the knowledge about social workers' experience through a workplace learning lens. Workplace learning theory, from the discipline of Human Resources and Organisational Development, offers significant evidence to help us develop what we do but to understand workplace learning for social workers we have to understand both the work and the places that this happens, and for social work neither of these are simple. The findings of the study were used to bridge theoretical ideas between conceptions of workplace learning and the nature of the lifeworld for social workers, using the work of Illeris (2011) and van Manen (2014). This provides a way to reconceptualise workplace learning for social work that reveals and explains the complexity of what is involved. Understanding what learning in the workplace involves for social workers is important for strategic planning, effective workplace cultures, plans and procedures. Although learning is acknowledged to be a broad spectrum of activity in rhetoric, standards and policy, plans quickly default to provision or expectations of training as the primary source of continuing professional development (Ferguson, 2023; McCulloch et al. 2024). All modes of learning are important, however, workplace learning opportunities should be recognised as an essential component of professional education.

## Conversational Spaces for Data collection and Dissemination

Prof Christa Fouche<sup>1</sup>, [Dr Laura Ann Chubb](#)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Auckland, <sup>2</sup> University of Auckland

Conversational spaces, such as baraza in East Africa, indaba in South Africa, or hui in New Zealand, have long served as social forums for dialogue, consensus-building, and knowledge transfer. Alongside these, contemporary spaces such as world cafés and digital Jamboards have formalised conversation as a mode of data collection. Yet across both traditional and contemporary forms, the potential of conversational spaces as simultaneous sites of data collection and co-dissemination remains underexplored. In social work research, where linking research and practice through the co-creation of knowledge is increasingly encouraged, reimagining the use of conversational spaces can enable innovative and responsive pathways for not only generating, but also sharing knowledge. In this presentation we introduce conversational spaces as tools for social work researchers to gather data but also return findings to communities.

A conversational space can be any physical or conceptual environment designed to foster communication, connection, and shared understanding between people. It may be a physical layout that encourages interaction, a social setting that promotes discussion, a virtual platform where individuals engage in dialogue, or cultural platforms for discussion, sharing information, or addressing shared concerns. The key characteristic is that the space supports and enables meaningful interaction and the pursuit of common goals.

Dissemination is concerned with translating research findings into accessible formats to inform practice, policy development, research and societal understanding of a particular issue. It is the necessary step we must take to bridge the infamous research-to-practice gap. While dissemination means different things to different people, translating results to practice seems important to almost everyone, as it serves the purpose of research and practice—to make a difference. Conversational spaces can be used by researchers and communities to co-create but also co-disseminate knowledge in ways that are culturally resonant, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented.

Drawing on practice–research partnership experiences, we explore how traditional baraza, digital Jamboards, and world cafés were used to:

- co-create knowledge,
- co-disseminate knowledge,
- deepen engagement with diverse participants, and
- link research more directly to practice and policy change.

We will highlight how embracing conversational spaces can expand the methodological repertoire of social work research, facilitate evidence-informed practice, strengthen community capacity, and advance more equitable knowledge production.

## Idle time or the accelerating wheel? Navigating temporal complexity in social work during the pandemic collapse

Professor Timo Harrikari<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Helsinki

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption that reshaped temporal and spatial conditions for social work. As services closed and digital platforms became the default mode of interaction, the crisis exposed hidden temporal structures of practice. While pandemic-related research in social work has grown, little attention has been given to temporality as a constitutive dimension.

This paper is based on an article published in *European Journal of Social work* 2025 and examines, how Finnish social workers navigated temporal complexity during the first wave of the pandemic. The paper asks: (1) what conceptions and functions of time emerged in everyday reflections, and (2) how did temporal rhythms and structures of social work transform in spring 2020? The study connects to the conference theme by analysing adaptive capacity through the interdisciplinary concept of temporal complexity, organisational studies, and disaster social work agenda.

The data consist of diaries written by Finnish social workers ( $n = 33$ ) between March and May 2020. Participants were recruited through an online professional forum during the emergency. Guided by the framework of temporal complexity, the study focused on continuities and ruptures in sequential structures, rhythms, pace, synchrony, and asynchrony across individual, organisational, and societal levels. NVivo was used for coding, with interpretations informed by theories of social acceleration as well as temporal structuring and complexity.

The results show that the pandemic disrupted established temporal orders and generated multiple, overlapping and often conflicting temporalities. Organisational slowdown produced silence, boredom and feelings of uselessness, while the digital leap accelerated rhythms, leading to fatigue and 'telework apathy'. The collapse of spatial boundaries between home and workplace blurred temporal distinctions between social workers' professional and private life. At the client interface, hybrid encounters challenged established timeframes and raised questions of whose time counts. Social work teams and organisations experienced asynchronies, while societal countermeasures imposed nonlinear 'viral rhythms' that reshaped practice. The diaries illustrated how temporal complexity permeated all spheres of work, from calendars and scheduling to emotional wellbeing.

The study demonstrates that temporality is not a neutral backdrop but a fundamental dimension of social work. The pandemic did not create temporal complexity but made it visible. Understanding how temporalities are negotiated and reassembled under pressure is vital for developing resilient and just practice. Three implications follow: (1) organisations must strengthen their ability to govern time in crises, (2) institutional time structures should be better aligned with clients' lived temporalities, and (3) temporality should be recognised as a key analytic category in theorising social work. These insights advance debates on crisis governance, resilience, and the ethical foundations of time in welfare systems, linking directly to the conference sub-themes on theorising social work, methodological innovation, and contemporary challenges.



## The role of Self-care as a burnout prevention in Social Work Education

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Associate Professor Michaela Skyba<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Natália Vranková<sup>1</sup>

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There is an incessant societal demand to adapt social work education to the current social work practice needs, reflecting professional requirements in changing global and local sociopolitical context. As a part of social work education response, field practice as a part of social work curriculum is extending, in its importance as well as extend, creating increasing risk of social work students burnout during their study. Current findings suggest that not only social workers, but also social work students are at an increased risk for compassion fatigue and burnout (Powel & Mayfield 2024) and undoubtedly, self-care is vital to the practitioner's wellbeing and coping with their professional stress. Research has shown that self-care can mitigate workplace stress (Pope et al. 2017), burnout, and vicarious trauma, among other problematic phenomena, empirical works examine social work students' self-care in the context of burnout risk are scarce. The purpose of this study is to present preliminary research findings, targeting the role of Self-care as a burnout prevention tool during social work students field practice as a part of social work education. Research was carried out among university social work students (N=90). Data were collected using the Self-Care Practice Scale (Lee et al. 2016), Maslach Burnout Inventory (1997) and open questions focused on the specifics of their self-care practice and eventual burnout experience, before and after their field practice. Data are analysed via SPSS 24. Findings suggest broad implications for mitigating a burnout risk during field practice in social work education, for professional practice as well as future research implications.

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## Youth homelessness and social work: A scoping review to guide research and practice

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### Background and purpose

In principle, social work should play a critical role in prevention, early intervention, and support for young people experiencing homelessness, given its commitments to addressing social inequalities and promoting wellbeing. However, existing studies provide only a partial picture of the ways in which social work has engaged with youth homelessness. Given these limitations, there was need for a scoping review to identify and categorise the different types of interventions, programmes, and services that have been reported in the literature, whilst also highlighting key gaps in evidence (Gupta et al., 2023). The purpose of the current scoping review is to provide a comprehensive overview of how social work has been involved in preventing and responding to youth homelessness to inform future research and practice development.

### Methods

This study adopted a scoping review design. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to ensure the review focussed on both peer-reviewed studies and grey literatures targeting young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, while excluding studies without a clear social work component. Data collection and analysis followed an iterative process: relevant databases were searched using a set of predefined keywords. Retrieved studies underwent a two-stage data screening and extraction process, with titles and abstracts reviewed first, followed by full-text assessment. Extracted data are synthesised using a thematic synthesis approach, which allows the identification of patterns, types of interventions, and evidence gaps. In addition, a quality assessment is conducted using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists, and methodological strengths and limitations are appraised to contextualise the findings.

### Findings and conclusions

The scoping review found that homeless youth have complex needs requiring both immediate support and long-term opportunities, yet inconsistent definitions and age ranges (often 16–24) hinder comparability and point to the need for a unified framework. Programme evaluations are dominated by stakeholder feedback and outcome-based approaches, with success linked to supportive design, strong relationships, and partnerships, while barriers include limited resources, rigid policies, and systemic discrimination. Engagement remains a critical gap, with challenges such as trust issues, accessibility, and institutional neglect; future research should clarify mechanisms of change, employ longitudinal data, and develop tailored, age-sensitive interventions, with promising strategies including arts-based projects, mentorship, and life-skills training to foster belonging, stability, and self-sufficiency.

**Limitations**

This review focused on services for homeless youth. Due to limited studies on explicit social work involvement, the search was broadened to include wider services, reflecting social work's limited visibility in this field. Evidence was also restricted to five welfare contexts, excluding insights from other regions. In addition, as this review was conducted by a single author, risks of selection bias and subjective interpretation cannot be excluded.

**Keywords:** social work; homelessness services; young people; service delivery; scoping review

## Training Foster Carers in Sweden: Balancing Pre-service Training with In-service Needs

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When children are deemed to be in need of out-of-home care, foster homes serve as an essential part of the child welfare system in Sweden, as in many other countries. Given the responsibilities associated with the care assignment, foster carer training has been identified in literature as an important factor for retaining foster carers and, in policy, as significant for enhancing care quality and placement stability. Training for foster carers is typically divided into pre-service and in-service formats, each with distinct aims. Pre-service training provides knowledge about the fostering role and prepares foster carers to meet the often-unknown needs of a child, while in-service training often seeks to enhance participants' knowledge and skills based on fostering experience. Despite the importance of pre-service training in preparing foster carers for the multiple demands of fostering, Sweden stands out internationally because basic training is neither mandated nor integrated into the assessment process of prospective foster carers. Instead, the timing of delivery of the basic training developed and promoted by National Board of Health and Welfare can vary between providers. This variability means that the experiences and needs of participants may differ depending on when and under what circumstances training is received. This study therefore aims to explore the practice of delivering basic training to foster carers, with a particular focus on how course leaders respond to participants' experiences of becoming and being foster carers in the context of training delivery.

Ethnographic methods, including interviews and participant observations, were used across four settings involving course leaders (n=12) and foster carers (n=49). The observations amounted to approximately 80 hours of fieldwork. Combining interviews and observations enabled an in-depth exploration of course leaders' own understandings and responses to foster carers' experiences, particularly through their use of training in interaction with participants. The analysis focused on meaning and action and was guided by the ethnographic questions: "What is happening here, and why?"

Preliminary findings reveal that basic training is predominantly delivered to foster carers who already have placement experience. The timing of training prompts course leaders to respond in ways that better align training with participants' lived fostering experiences and the support they receive from local authorities. These responses include adapting course material to provide greater depth and to facilitate empowerment, peer support, and sharing of experiences during training sessions. The findings also suggest that such responses serve to address foster carers' expressed needs for more practical knowledge, support, and individual supervision.

In conclusion, these early results demonstrate that course leaders shape the practical delivery of training based on their evolving understanding of foster carers' needs in relation to the course material. The implications for policy and practice are a need to acknowledge the impact of training timing. Training should support foster carers' initial preparation and ongoing development, and be delivered alongside professional support throughout their caregiving assignment.

## Psychological Distress and Social Work Responses for Women Married to Military Personnel

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### Background and Purpose

Women married to career military personnel live at the intersection of private and institutional worlds. Their lives are shaped by family responsibilities as well as the structural demands of military institutions. Extended separations, unpredictable schedules, and reintegration challenges resulting from their husbands' military service may create role overload, loneliness, and marital tension, which can be associated with psychological distress (Segal, Lane, & Fisher, 2015). Despite their central role in sustaining families and communities, women in this position remain under-researched and often overlooked. This study examined how background, psychosocial, and marital variables relate to psychological distress in this population, with the aim of generating knowledge that can support the development of interdisciplinary approaches to social work practice and policy.

### Methods

A cross-sectional online survey was conducted with 595 women married to career military personnel, recruited through social media. Standardized self-report measures assessed psychological distress, background characteristics, psychosocial conditions, and marital dynamics.

### Findings

Hierarchical regression showed that psychosocial and marital variables explained a significant proportion of psychological distress. Role overload, loneliness, and reintegration stress were positively associated with distress, whereas social support and marital satisfaction were negatively associated. This pattern aligns with prior evidence on the protective and diminishing roles of psychosocial and marital factors in military spouse populations (Ross et al., 2020), while background variables showed no significant association with psychological distress.

### Conclusions and Implications

Women married to career military personnel represent an under-researched population with elevated mental health risks. Findings clarify the roles of background, psychosocial, and marital variables in shaping psychological distress and demonstrate how the broader life contexts of these women — including their husbands' service obligations and the demands of military institutions — may contribute to elevated distress.

Implications arise at several levels: at the individual level, tailored interventions can address overload, loneliness, and reintegration stress; at the dyadic level, couple-focused approaches can strengthen marital relationships and shared coping; and at the community level, programs can expand networks and resources for military families. Beyond practice, the findings highlight the need for policy change and broader recognition within social and military systems. Interdisciplinary collaboration across social work, psychology, health care,

and military institutions is essential for comprehensive and sustainable responses, while greater awareness from women's immediate environments, such as family networks and workplaces, can further support their needs and constraints.

By situating women's experiences within individual, dyadic, and community levels, the study demonstrates how crossing social, cultural, and professional boundaries can advance research, practice, and policy.

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## The Impact of Group Work on Knowledge and Skills in Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work

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### Background and Purpose

Evidence-based practice (EBP) has become increasingly important in the field of social work, as it enhances decision-making processes and improves service quality (Gambrill, 2006). Group work methods have been shown to effectively develop students' knowledge and skills related to EBP (Mullen, Bellamy, & Bledsoe, 2005). Group work helps students bridge the gap between theory and practice, fostering collaboration and professional competence (Thyer & Myers, 2011). Although courses on EBP are limited in Turkey, Ankara University's Department of Social Work has long offered a course on evidence-based practice that uses group work. While student feedback has been positive, the effectiveness of this group-based method has yet to be scientifically measured. This study aims to assess the impact of group work on students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards EBP.

### Methods

This quasi-experimental study used a pre-test/post-test control group design to evaluate the effect of group work on students' EBP knowledge and skills. Participants included 50 fourth-year social work students from Ankara University enrolled in the elective course SHB441 (Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work). The experimental group comprised students who participated in group-based EBP activities, while the control group consisted of 50 students not enrolled in the course. Data collection included a socio-demographic questionnaire and the Evidence-Based Practice Scale. Pre-tests were administered to both groups at the start of the semester, followed by a 14-week intervention for the experimental group, during which students engaged in EBP training and group work. Post-tests were administered at the end of the semester. Data were analysed using SPSS, employing paired t-tests, ANCOVA, and Mann-Whitney U tests to evaluate differences between pre- and post-test scores.

### Findings

The study found that students in the experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in their knowledge and skills related to EBP compared to the control group. Pre-test scores were similar for both groups, but post-test scores for the experimental group showed a statistically significant increase in both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. In particular, students' ability to critically evaluate evidence and apply it to real-world social work problems improved. Additionally, students' attitudes towards EBP became more positive, and they expressed greater confidence in using EBP in future professional practice. Group work was also found to enhance collaboration and peer learning.

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings indicate that group work is an effective method for teaching EBP in social work education. Students who participated in group work showed marked improvements in their understanding and application of EBP, as well as more positive attitudes towards evidence-

based interventions. These results suggest that integrating group-based methods into social work curricula can enhance both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, preparing students for evidence-based professional practice. The study highlights the importance of interactive and collaborative learning environments in developing essential competencies for social work students. Future research should explore long-term impacts of group work on EBP skills in professional settings and investigate ways to further improve teaching methods in social work education.

## Voicing empathy: understanding voice quality as a communicative resource in social work

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Across social work settings, professionals talk with persons in vulnerable situations. Through this talk, they pursue social work goals like assessing rights to social benefits or managing risk for domestic violence (Flinkfeldt et al. 2022). This work often involves a tension between pursuing value-driven ideals such as empathy and task-focused ideals like neutrality and fairness. It is a well-known yet undocumented fact that social workers often accomplish this balance via their voice quality: responding minimally with words while communicating empathy with tone of voice. Aiming to unpack this tacit knowledge, this study asks : how do social workers across settings use their voice as a resource to communicate empathy?

The study uses conversation analysis to study recorded interactions between professionals and clients in three settings with different institutional goals: a) services focused on eligibility for financial benefits, b) specialized services focused on risk assessment in child protection, and c) third sector social work in suicide preventive helplines. Conversation analysis is an established method for analysing how even minimal responses affect the ongoing relationship between the participants and what sort of knowledge is co-created in the conversation (Jol and Stommel 2021). Using conversation analysis across these social work settings will therefore help us unpack subtle differences in social workers' institutional practices and ideals for expressing empathy and support while providing social work services. .

Our findings show that the social worker's voice quality constitutes a consequential interactional resource. In particular, we show that the ambiguity of "soft voice" enables the social workers to convey warmth and empathy without taking an explicit stance on what the speaker is talking about. Integrating empirical and theoretical perspectives from psychology, social work, and sociology, the analysis shows how this detailed attention to voice quality can help us understand how social workers handle challenges in communications with vulnerable clients. The findings thus speak to key practical concerns such as the co-creation of knowledge, institutional roles, and the client-social worker relationship. The focus on interactions in real-life social work is suitable for developing social workers' reflexive and practical skills (Stokoe 2014; Kirkwood et al. 2018) , strengthening efforts to develop evidence-based social work practice.

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## Displaced in Place: Structural Legacies of Engagement in Social Work in a Post-Soviet Landscape

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This paper examines how historical, structural, and spatial conditions shape social work and the engagement of older people in a post-Soviet context, focusing on the northeastern Estonian town of Sillamäe. Located in Ida-Viru County—where approximately 80% of the population is Russian-speaking—Sillamäe represents a particularly complex case of regional inequality, shaped by industrial decline, population loss, and cultural marginalization. Drawing on qualitative interviews with six social workers and five regional policymakers, the study explores how ideas of engagement are constructed and enacted in practice, highlighting the influence of Sillamäe's unique historical and socio-spatial context. The findings reveal sharp contradictions between national policies, which emphasize co-creation and active participation, and the realities of everyday practice, where engagement is largely confined to individualized service provision and crisis response by tokenistic forms of consultation and information-sharing. Collective or political forms of participation are almost entirely absent, despite evidence that older adults in Sillamäe are open to contributing if meaningful opportunities and support are provided. The study shows how the town's historical legacies and socio-spatial dynamics actively reproduce these inequalities, shaping how both practitioners and policymakers frame engagement and participation. Social workers are tasked with implementing participatory policies but often lack the resources, mandate, and institutional backing to bring them to life. They occupy a liminal position: constrained by bureaucratic demands yet positioned as potential mediators and bridge-builders between state institutions and local communities. This tension underscores the need to move beyond individualized responses and to reimagine social workers as cultural translators and place-based advocates who can address structural barriers, facilitate dialogue, and open pathways for inclusive engagement. At the same time, meaningful individual work remains essential, requiring greater resources and support to ensure that personal needs are not overshadowed by broader structural goals. By illuminating how regional inequalities, historical legacies, and socio-spatial conditions intersect to shape practices of engagement, the study contributes to broader debates on aging, engagement, participation, and critical social work in marginalized contexts. This paper demonstrates that meaningful engagement of older adults requires more than policy directives: it demands sustained investment, recognition of local histories, and the creation of participatory structures that enable older residents to act not as passive recipients of services but as active contributors—at the individual level through personal agency, at the community level through collective participation, and at the societal level through being recognized and included as full members of society.

## Preparing Social Work Students to Address Poverty in Practice: A Scoping Review of Teaching Methods, Learning Outcomes, and Student Perspectives

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Poverty persists as a multifaceted challenge in social work, shaping service users' lived realities and the everyday practice of social workers (Backwith, 2015; Davis & Wainwright, 2005; Pierson, 2024; Waldegrave, 2004). Despite the profession's ethical mandate to promote economic justice and alleviate poverty (IFSW, 2018), numerous researchers have raised concerns that poverty-focused content may not be adequately integrated into social work education (Davis & Wainwright, 2005; Gillen & Loeffler, 2012; Harding, Ferguson & Radey, 2005; Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal & Monnickendam, 2009; Stoeffler & Joseph, 2020). This raises important questions about how social work students are prepared for addressing poverty in contemporary practice: are they sufficiently equipped with the skills, knowledge, and values needed to support service users experiencing economic disadvantage?

This poster presentation introduces a scoping review that maps the nature and extent of existing empirical research on how social work education engages students with poverty. Peer-reviewed studies conducted in English and published between 2010 and 2024 that meet the inclusion criteria have been included in the review. Our research questions are: (1) What teaching methods have been described in research for engaging social work students to address poverty in practice?, (2) What learning outcomes and student perspectives related to poverty have been reported in previous research?, and (3) What gaps or limitations have been identified in previous research on addressing poverty in social work education?

The review uses professional socialization as a guiding concept to combine two strands of research: (1) studies exploring teaching methods and reported learning outcomes, and (2) studies examining social work students' perspectives, such as attitudes, opinions and perceptions, towards poverty. While professional socialization is a multidimensional and lifelong process (Miller, 2013), these domains represent important aspects of how students are socialized into the profession's understanding of poverty during their formal education.

The review follows JBI methodological guidance for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020) and is reported according to PRISMA-ScR standards (Tricco et al., 2018). Basic qualitative content analysis is used to categorize the results (Pollock et al., 2023). The presentation will outline the background, rationale, research questions, methodological approach, results, and conclusions of the review. Moreover, the presentation connects to broader debates on the role of social work education in preparing students for complex client service needs in contemporary practice.

The review contributes to the conference subtheme of contemporary challenges and opportunities for social work education and research. It addresses the challenge of integrating poverty-focused content into social work curricula in a context where neoliberal,

individualizing discourses often dominate (Beddoe & Keddel, 2016), while pointing to opportunities for strengthening professional preparation by providing a comprehensive overview of existing research.

As a scoping review, the study will not evaluate the effectiveness of individual interventions (Pollock et al., 2023) but will offer a structured overview of how poverty is addressed in social work education, what student perspectives are reported, and where research gaps remain. This mapping may be useful for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to reflect on current approaches and identify areas for further development.

## Co-creating capabilities: applying the capability approach for local social change

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### Introduction

Because of its abstract and theoretical nature the capability approach (CA) is notoriously difficult to operationalize. In 2023 a promising narrative tool - Capability Cards (Brummel, Hendriks, Joosten & Jansen, 2023) - based on Nussbaum's central capabilities (2011) was launched to (1) collect qualitative data, and (2) facilitate social work practitioners to bring capability thinking into practice. Based on their experiences in working with the Cards for individual narratives community social workers inspired the development of an adapted version, the Neighborhood Capability Cards, to spur collection of community-based narratives. Both versions are now widely used among various disciplines in the Netherlands, and in other countries interest is also growing.

### Contribution for social change

Both tools center on a person's experienced wellbeing, fostering ethical individualism, and invite respondents to lead the conversation. By choosing several cards respondents indicate which capabilities they prioritize over others and what hinders or facilitates pursuing them in their daily lives, signifying experienced conversion factors. This yields a co-creatively and narratively founded mapping of capabilities, functionings and conversion factors, providing concrete handles for individual and collective social change.

The tools support citizens in voicing their perspectives on living valuable and dignified lives in their daily environment. For instance, in one neighbourhood social workers interviewed over 100 seniors with the Cards. Jointly deliberating the results changed both practitioners' and seniors' views, from a problem-focus towards a resilience and values focus. In various neighbourhoods across the Netherlands the yields from Neighbourhood Capability Cards shows potential for capability-based collaborative re-design of local social policies. The collaborative nature of working with the latter tool supports social work practitioners to stimulate empowerment, social inclusion and social cohesion of neighbourhood communities.

### Conclusion

The Capability Card tools have several merits: 1) They connect CA concepts with concrete methods and actions in local contexts, thereby bridging theory and practice and enhancing practice development. 2) The tools stimulate more widespread interdisciplinary systemic change in local practices, fostering collaborations among different local stakeholders. 3) (Neighborhood) Capability Cards allow people to get involved in local processes of social change that concern them.

In this presentation we delve in the method of operationalizing core capability concepts in the tools, share experiences with their application for local social change and reflect critically on lessons learned.

# Between speed and sustainability: Accounts of dilemmas and conflicting pressures in social work with low literate adult refugees

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## Background and purpose

This paper presents findings from the ongoing interdisciplinary research project Integration and Active Citizenship for Low-Literate Adult Refugees (INTERACT), which seeks to improve our understanding of how adult refugees with little or no education experience and navigate their lives in Norway, as well as the perspectives of employees in the various public services that encounter them. While Norwegian integration policies are designed to facilitate rapid entry into employment, they often clash with the realities encountered by refugees and frontline practitioners (Ylvisaker and Rugkåsa, 2021).

## Methods

The paper draws on qualitative interviews with 27 service employees in welfare services, refugee services and adult education, to explore the constraints, dilemmas, and opportunities that they face in their work. It also draws on insights from research circles with service employees, organized as part of the project.

The paper explores the following questions:

- How do frontline service employees navigate tensions between policy goals and professional practice in their daily work?
- What are the implications of policy-driven constraints on professional and ethical practice in social work?

## Findings

The research highlights how evidence-informed practice is undermined by a system that prioritizes quantifiable outcomes, such as employment, over qualitative indicators like self-esteem and social participation. Consequently, service employees may observe meaningful progress for the individuals they work with —such as increased confidence and engagement—yet find that such developments do not count as a reportable ‘result’. Moreover, employees report a loss of professional autonomy and ethical dilemmas related to the ‘policies of speed’ which are increasingly emphasized by authorities (Sætermo and Dyrli, 2024). Interviewees describe the ever-shorter policy timelines as unrealistic and counterproductive, particularly for individuals in this vulnerable group. The research also reveals that employees, particularly educators, are increasingly performing roles extending into social work, and that refugees also come to rely on help from third parties. This invisible and informal ‘social work’ reflects broader structural challenges in the welfare system.

## Conclusions and implications

By foregrounding the perspectives of service employees, the research presented here contributes to ongoing debates about the role of social work in shaping inclusive, realistic,

and humane integration. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of studying social work with refugees in a broader context of temporal impositions and with attention to the role of third-party actors.

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## Children's participation in the process of matching them with foster families. The professionals' view

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### Background and purpose

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. However, research shows significant shortcomings in the social services' work to ensure children's participation. This includes the process of matching children with foster families before they are placed in care (Bergman et al., 2025). Matching is a process whereby a specific foster family is selected to suit an individual child. This ongoing research project is based on the findings from two completed projects on matching. This project intends to collaborate with professionals and young people with placement experience to develop guidelines for children's participation in the matching process. The premise is that children are experts on their own situation and life and have the right to be involved. The aim of the project is to develop guidelines that promote children's participation, working closely with social services staff and young people. The guidelines can be used in social work practice when matching children with foster families during the placement process.

### Methods

The development of guidelines will be informed by research on child participation and involve participatory workshops with professionals. Close collaboration is fundamental to ensure that the guidelines will be relevant to professionals and can be used effectively. In a first step, we have conducted workshops with 33 professionals from the social services in six municipalities, having experience of placement in out-of-home care (3-9 participants in each workshop). Participants were recruited from various parts of Sweden. During these workshops, participants had the opportunity to reflect individually and in groups on positive experiences where children were involved in the process, as well as ideas for strengthening children's participation in the future work. In the analyses of the workshop data, we have been inspired by Lundy's (2007) perspective on participation. In the next steps, we will meet a reference group so that users with experience of foster care can provide feedback during the process. The intention is to continue developing the guidelines in close collaboration with professionals and young people.

### Findings and implications

The project's outcome will be the development of guidelines to support professionals in including important aspects of children's right to participation. The project is expected to benefit both professional practice and children in foster care. One finding is that matching should be viewed as an ongoing process in which children should be involved at various stages. These stages include initial placement decisions, searching for a suitable foster family, planning the move to a foster home, and providing follow-up support during the initial period in a new home.

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## **“Connecting barriers and theories to tangible action plans”: Social work students and social justice work**

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In this presentation we will describe findings from a research project assessing social work students' commitment to, and readiness for, social justice aspects of their professional practice. Addressing conference sub-theme 2, the presentation is based on the notion that key components to distinguish the identity of social work from other professions, and social work education from other disciplines, are their intrinsic emphasis on both the person and (all aspects of) environment with a stated commitment to social justice (Chu et. al, 2009). Indeed, international, national and provincial social work ethical guidelines all include social justice work, while national social work degree accreditation requires teaching about social justice for (multiple) marginalized populations.

Yet, how deeply do students see social justice work, and the knowledge of policy and politics required for this work, as a critical component of their education? Research outside of Canada (Hylton, 2015) has suggested a disconnect for students between theory and (policy) practice. Related to conference sub-theme 3, what does this mean for the effectiveness of future social work? This presentation draws on survey responses (n=62) and interview data (n=4) collected from third-year Bachelor of Social Work students, to explore students' knowledge of policy and politics, level of political engagement and commitment to social justice.

Findings show higher levels of engagement in lower-effort activities such as signing a petition, with much lower levels of participation in formal, structured efforts (other than voting) and few (<20%) students devoting extensive time to political activities. While most students feel confident in their ability to talk about social barriers, they are much less confident in their knowledge of formal political structures and ability to develop strategies for political action. Finally, while students were in strong agreement with the statement that advocating for individual clients is an essential task for social workers, broader advocacy was seen as less of an essential component of their future work.

We relate these findings on students to extant literature from Canada and internationally (e.g. Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2022) on the state of social justice in the profession of social work. Bringing in conference sub-theme 1, we reflect on competing interests in social work education that include, on the one hand, an ever-increasing emphasis on managerialism and education to develop specific (clinical) skills, and on the other, the stated commitment to social justice practice that distinguishes social work from other professions. We conclude with thoughts about what graduating students with a limited commitment to working towards social justice means for the service users we work with.

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## Beyond economics: Ethics of adopting a universal basic income program under a neoliberal regime in Canada from a social work values perspective

Ms. Emily Paquette-Leahy<sup>1</sup>

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This presentation critically examines universal basic income (UBI) proposals in Canada through the lens of social work ethics and values, challenging the progressive claims surrounding UBI implementation. Despite growing political support for UBI at federal, provincial, and municipal levels—exemplified by the success of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and legislative proposals like Bills C-223 and S-233—this analysis argues that UBI fails to deliver on its transformative promise and instead functions as what Milton Friedman termed a “Trojan Horse” for neoliberal policy objectives.

Drawing on social work’s commitment to social justice and structural approaches to inequality, the presentation contends that UBI, rather than reducing systemic inequalities, risks entrenching them further by commodifying basic needs, while also appearing to provide progressive reform. The analysis reveals how UBI proposals may inadvertently subsidize low-wage employers, benefit landlords through rent increases, and potentially dismantle existing social services that social workers often provide. By examining recent advocacy for UBI by professional social work organizations in Canada and the United States, the presentation questions whether social workers should support a policy framework that may ultimately serve neoliberal interests rather than advancing genuine social justice. The presentation argues for a deontological approach rooted in the Canadian Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics (2024), specifically examining how UBI aligns with social work’s mandate to promote “social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources.” Through critical analysis of current legislative proposals and philosophical arguments by UBI proponents like Philippe Van Parijs, the study demonstrates that UBI’s apparent de-commodification of labor may actually commodify all other basic needs, leaving vulnerable populations more dependent on market forces rather than less.

The analysis concludes that social workers should reject UBI advocacy in favor of more comprehensive welfare state approaches that provide robust in-kind services and genuine de-commodification of basic needs. Rather than accepting UBI as a pragmatic solution to inequality, the presentation calls for social workers to reimagine more radical alternatives that truly address systemic inequalities without reinforcing neoliberal market dependence. This research contributes to several key conference themes by examining social work practice and policy across national boundaries through comparative analysis of Canadian and American professional associations’ positions on UBI. The study explores the effectiveness of social work advocacy by critically assessing how professional endorsement of UBI may inadvertently undermine the profession’s social justice mandate. The theoretical analysis bridges social work research and practice by examining how deontological approaches to professional ethics can inform policy advocacy, while the critical examination of professional association publications demonstrates the co-creation of knowledge between academic scholarship and practice-based advocacy. This critical examination challenges the profession to move beyond incremental reforms that maintain existing power structures toward more transformative approaches to social justice.

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## Towards a knowledge-based social services: knowledge discourses in policy and practice

PhD Student Chrystal Kunosson<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Petra Ahnlund<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Elisabet Höög<sup>1</sup>

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### Background and purpose

On July 1, 2025, a new Social Services Act (SoL) came into force in Sweden, which includes a requirement that social service's activities must be conducted in accordance with science and proven experience. Thus, the government is currently taking decisive action to support the social services' transition to become "knowledge-based" – a process commonly referred to as knowledge governance.

Knowledge governance has been described as a poor support to social workers in cases involving reluctant or unmotivated clients, or where there are conflicting interests between clients – for example, in situations involving intimate partner violence (IPV). In such cases, the social worker must consider the complex social circumstances and has limited use of evidence-based methods (Rexvid, D. (2016). *Professionsutövning och kunskapsstyrning : en jämförelse av socialarbetares och allmänläkares klientarbete*. Umeå universitet). This requires the social worker to draw upon multiple forms of knowledge (e.g Trevithick, P. (2008). *Revisiting the Knowledge Base of Social Work: A Framework for Practice*. The British journal of social work. 38(6), pp.1212–1237.).

This study aims to examine what has led to the decision to introduce requirements of science and proven experience in SoL. How are these provisions justified in the preparatory works of SoL? What is the problem represented to be? What concepts are used to describe knowledge? How are the subjects expected to implement the knowledge-based approach? If the social services ought to become more knowledge-based, there are reasons to further define what type of knowledge is needed in social work and if the so-called knowledge governance system meets these needs. This study aims to contribute to such discussions. It is part of a dissertation with the overall aim of investigating the social service's practical knowledge, focusing specifically on their work with IPV. It relates to the conference subtheme "Linking social work research and practice, including the co-creation of knowledge".

### Methods

Preparatory work for the new SoL has been analyzed thematically and with guidance of Carol Bacchi's critical policy analysis model What's the Problem Represented to Be (WPR). The analyzed material also includes consultation comments from municipalities, authorities, non-profit organizations, trade unions and universities.

### Preliminary findings

Knowledge is in the preparatory work primarily presented as a means for enhancing quality in social services. However, knowledge is described solely in terms of science and proven experience, with a focus on knowledge of the effectiveness of interventions. This leaves room for interpretation – is this the only type of knowledge needed to achieve quality in social services? If not, how are other forms of knowledge incorporated?

Among the consultation bodies, other knowledge discourses are visible, encompassing broader understandings of knowledge than those found at the policy level. Several specifically highlight IPV as an example of when science and proven experience risk being too narrow as forms of knowledge. These types of discourses do not appear to have gained traction in the final legislation, where the concepts of science and proven experience remain unchanged.

## Supporting resilience in mothers in vulnerable neighborhoods: evaluation of an intervention during the first 1000 days

PhD Martine Jeukens-Visser<sup>1</sup>, Floor Popken<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Uitman<sup>1</sup>

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### Background and purpose

Growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods has impact on the development of infants. The first 1000 days, from conception to the second birthday, is the most important period in which the foundation for a healthy life is established (Indrio, 2022). This sensitive period is therefore more susceptible to problems but offers also an opportunity for effective intervention. Therefore, in a disadvantaged neighborhood in Zaandam support for mothers during the first 1000 days is provided, aiming to increase maternal self-efficacy and improve the developmental outcomes of their infants. Obtaining insight into the impact of the intervention for the mothers and their infants is necessary to further improve the program. However, reaching these mothers from a low socio-economic position (SEP) for research is challenging. Participatory action research may offer an opportunity to increase their participation. The aim of this study was to evaluate the perceived impact of this maternal support during the three years, using a participatory action research approach.

### Methods

The intervention is provided by students in pedagogy and social work, supervised by experienced social workers. The photo-voice method will be conducted (Q4 of 2025) with the participation of 20 mothers. Mothers who participated in the intervention program for at least a year and provide consent to the study are included. The photo voice method enables more vulnerable participants to discuss relevant topics. Mothers will be asked to take photos that represent the perceived changes in their lives due to the support they received. During an interview, mothers are asked to reflect on these photos. A thematic analysis will be conducted, focusing on the perceived impact of the intervention program as well as maternal wellbeing. Furthermore, a process evaluation of will be performed regarding the use of the photo voice methodology in this group.

### Findings

Different themes will be identified that describe the perceived impact of the support for the mothers, but also the perceived barriers and facilitators. In addition, insight will be obtained in using the photo-voice method to reach this group of mothers for research and include their voice in the evaluation.

### Conclusions and implications

This study will enhance understanding of the perceived impact of maternal support during the first 1000 days. Recommendations will be made to adapt the intervention, when necessary, to further improve the impact of the support program for mothers. Insights will be used to further develop the training for professionals. In addition, recommendations for the use of the photo voice methodology in this group will be provided.

## Co-creating Purpose: A Participatory Approach to Revising a Doctoral Program Mission Statement

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### Background and Purpose

Outdated mission statements can present challenges by misaligning with a program's current goals and values. A self-study identified that the mission statement of the CUNY Graduate Center PhD program in Social Welfare no longer accurately reflected the program's evolving identity. In response, a self-selected task force of five PhD students and one MSW intern collaborated for 18 months to critically examine, interrogate, and revise the mission statement.

Mission statements are often the first form of contact for prospective students and faculty. Inclusive mission statements avoid neoliberal and ableist language, instead validating students' lived experiences and encouraging collaborative interdependence (Bennett, 2021). Mission statements provide educational and social service institutions the opportunity to define their identity, values, and guiding principles (Alegre et al., 2018). This paper highlights how collaborative and interdisciplinary practices among students and faculty can produce meaningful change in contemporary social work education.

### Methods

The task force conducted six formal focus groups with 21 doctoral students, two formal faculty focus groups, with one faculty member per session, and two informal faculty discussions. Participants were recruited via email sent to Social Welfare students and faculty. One hour sessions were held via Zoom. Participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of the doctoral program, consider the existing mission statement, and share ideas about language, goals, and values that should be reflected in a revised statement. Thematic analysis was utilized, and emergent themes were identified from the data.

### Findings

Participants emphasized a desire for the mission statement to reflect its unique interdisciplinary, social justice-oriented, and community-engaged nature. There was strong consensus that the mission and vision statements should move beyond traditional academic language to center social justice, systemic change, and public scholarship, while redefining "scientific research" as inclusive of action-based, participatory methods. Attendees interrogated terms from the mission statement like "leaders," "sectors," and "expertise," advocating instead for language that highlights collaboration, care, diversity, and collective impact. The program was described as a unique space where scholars from diverse backgrounds co-create knowledge, build collective power, address systemic inequities and contribute meaningfully to policy and practice across local and global contexts. Critiques of the existing mission statement included that it was generic, uninspiring, and disconnected from the program's values. Participants urged for a concise, powerful statement that reflects the program's NYC roots, interdisciplinary identity, and commitment to challenging oppression and building a better world.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Based on these findings, the task force co-created an evidence-informed draft mission statement that better aligns with the values and lived experiences of the program's constituents. This revised statement reflects a collective vision of scholarship that is action-oriented, community-centered, and driven by a commitment to social welfare and social justice. The process itself exemplifies the importance of participatory reflection within academic programs and the value of co-creating mission statements with its community.

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## “Inclusionary Exclusion” in Social Surveys: Interdisciplinary Evidence from Japan

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### Background and purpose

Social surveys are indispensable for identifying citizens' needs and informing evidence-based social policies. However, many countries have experienced a persistent decline in response rates (Galea S, et al. 2007)—raising concerns about representativeness and whose voices are being heard. While prior studies in Japan have examined demographic factors such as age or gender, there remains limited understanding of how socioeconomic conditions affect participation in surveys globally.

This study introduces the concept of “Inclusionary Exclusion”, which refers to the paradoxical situation in which individuals who are formally included in welfare institutions remain symbolically excluded from the sphere of public knowledge production. Although they are beneficiaries of institutional inclusion, their voices are effectively silenced in collective data-gathering processes. This concept extends Fricker's (2007) framework of epistemic injustice by emphasizing the tension between institutional incorporation and epistemic invisibility. The objective of this study was twofold: first, to empirically examine socioeconomic inequalities in survey participation using linked administrative data in a Japanese municipality; second, to introduce and illustrate the concept of Inclusionary Exclusion as a theoretical contribution originating in Japan—a context often perceived as fairness-oriented in its welfare system.

### Methods

A cross-sectional study design was applied using data from the 2019 Daily Life Area Needs Survey conducted by City A, which targeted 6,150 older residents. Administrative records on long-term care insurance premium categories (reflecting income and taxation status) were linked with welfare office data identifying public assistance recipients. Survey response status (yes/no) was the dependent variable. Independent variables included public assistance receipt, income brackets, and taxation categories (twelve levels in total). Descriptive analysis and logistic regression were used to assess the associations between socioeconomic status and survey participation. Ethical approval was obtained from Osaka Medical and Pharmaceutical University (2022-089) and Kyoto University (R3356).

### Findings

The overall response rate was 54.1%. Public assistance recipients had the lowest participation rates (47.8%), followed by other low-income non-taxable groups who are not on public assistance (48.9%). These differences were statistically significant and confirmed that socioeconomic disadvantage was systematically associated with higher nonresponse. Contrary to the assumption that welfare beneficiaries might be more easily reachable, public assistance recipients were the least likely to participate. This demonstrates the empirical reality of Inclusionary Exclusion: individuals institutionally incorporated into welfare systems remain absent from processes of collective knowledge creation.

**Conclusions and implications**

This study highlights a profound methodological and ethical issue: institutional inclusion does not guarantee epistemic participation. The proposed concept of Inclusionary Exclusion captures this paradox and provides a Japan-originated theoretical lens to understand how formal welfare incorporation can coexist with symbolic exclusion from knowledge production. Ensuring equitable opportunities to contribute to public knowledge is not only a methodological refinement but also an ethical imperative for advancing social justice. By situating this concept in Japan's fairness-oriented welfare context, the study contributes a distinctive international perspective to ongoing debates in social work research.

## Being on probation - A qualitative approach to people's life in enforcement context

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Carried out at the doctoral college “deviance and social cohesion” at the university of Vechta (Germany), this PhD project examines the (everyday) lives of individuals who have come into contact with the criminal justice system and, as a consequence, are under probation supervision. Building on various studies that document particularly precarious and existential problems (Cornel/Kawamura-Reindl 2021: 19f.) as well as diverse mental and physical health conditions (Hösl 2025) within this population, the research question seeks to understand how adults under probation manage and navigate their lives under these circumstances, and, how social work matters in this context.

The “institutionally generated addressee status” (Bitzan/Bolay 2013: 43; translation: M.H.), as a result of the enforcement context of probation services, can constrain individual leeway and possibly influence self-reconstruction (ibid.). This critical addressee perspective fosters “findings on subjective coping strategies and biographical processing of social-pedagogical offerings, while also reflecting them as a result of institutional regulations” (Bitzan/Bolay 2018: 42; translation: M.H.). From this angle it may be possible to derive indications about effects or consequences of the institution of probation services.

Data collection involves autobiographical-narrative interviews (Schütze 1983) with people on parole to explore, from the addressee's point of view, the “process structures of the individual life course” (ibid.: 384; translation: M.H.) and to embed these as “types of life fates of societal relevance” (ibid.; translation: M.H.) into underlying structures and orders. The methodological approach can be found in the guidelines of Grounded Theory Methodology (Strauss/Corbin 1990).

First findings show people on parole living in precarious circumstances, e.g. managing with early childhood traumatizations and substance use, resulting in multiple layers of problem situations. This indicates an overtaxing of individual resources and the helping system as well.

As the PhD-project is „in progress“, other findings will be carved out by April 26.

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## Forging New Paths Together: Interdisciplinary Co-Design of a Novel Intervention for Community Mental Health Settings

Dr Amy Blank Wilson, Dr. Robert Morgan, Dr. Natalie Bonfine, Ms. Caroline Ginley, Dr. Jon Phillips, Dr. Anna Parisi, Dr Faith Scanlon, Ms Jamie Swaine

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### Background

Up to 50% of individuals with serious mental illness (SMI) receiving community-based mental health services have had some involvement with the criminal legal system. Despite this substantial overlap, no interventions in community mental health settings in the U.S. directly target the strongest individual-level risk factors for criminal legal involvement among people with SMI. This study describes the development of Forging New Paths (FNP), a novel intervention designed specifically to reduce these risk factors in community mental health settings. The presentation will provide an overview of both the deployment-focused research methods used to develop FNP and the resulting intervention.

### Methods

An interdisciplinary design team—including social workers, forensic psychologists, and community mental health clinicians—engaged user-centered design principles across three iterative phases: (1) the Discovery Phase, which mapped the intervention's initial structure and content; (2) the Design and Build Phase, which developed and refined a functional version of FNP; and (3) the Test Phase, which finalized FNP's structure, content, and supporting materials. Throughout the process, rapid iteration cycles integrated feedback from key stakeholders; including providers, service recipients, and agency administrators, to ensure the intervention was feasible, acceptable, and contextually responsive. At the same time, the collective expertise of the design team grounded all aspects of FNP in the well-established evidence base of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model.

### Results

Guided by the RNR model, FNP uses cognitive-behavioral techniques in a group-based format to address three evidence-based treatment targets associated with reduced criminal legal involvement: (1) impulsivity, (2) interpersonal problem solving, and (3) thinking patterns and relationships supportive of criminal actions. Consistent with the RNR model, FNP incorporates active learning strategies, such as role plays and group discussions, to enhance social learning and skill development.

Stakeholder feedback shaped multiple aspects of the intervention to optimize usability in community mental health settings. FNP was designed with a modular format, including five modules: three focused on the primary risk factors, one on enhancing motivation and engagement, and one on integrating skills into participants' broader treatment plans. The intervention includes 14 weekly, 60-minute sessions delivered in a hybrid format, allowing participants to attend in person, virtually, or both. Stakeholder input also informed the use of non-stigmatizing language and contextually relevant examples to support participant engagement and skill application.

**Implications**

This research demonstrates how integrating evidence from the RNR model with stakeholder feedback can produce an intervention that is both evidence-informed and feasible for real-world implementation. It also shows how deployment-focused intervention research provides a practical framework for balancing decisions about “what works” with “what will work in practice” early in the design process. Together, these strategies support the scalability, sustainability, and effectiveness of interventions like FNP and help close the long-standing gap between research and practice in mental health services.

## Ageism in the age of digital technologies

Helena Vusić<sup>1</sup>

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Understanding ageism in the context of digital technologies is becoming an increasingly important topic for social work, particularly in light of rapid technological advancements and demographic change. Older people are not only among the fastest growing segments of the population, but also increasingly present in the digital sphere. At the same time, they face significant barriers, including stereotypes, discrimination, and unequal access to resources. This presentation explores the phenomenon of digital ageism and its implications for social work theory, practice, and policy.

The presentation will provide an overview of how ageism manifests in relation to digital technologies, with special emphasis on the impact of artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias on older people's opportunities for participation and inclusion. It will consider the dual nature of digital innovation: on the one hand, offering tools for connection, independence, and empowerment, and on the other, reinforcing inequalities and exclusion if not designed and implemented inclusively. The analysis will highlight the importance of equal access to technological resources, training, and support for older adults, situating these issues within the broader social justice framework that underpins social work. Finally, the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between social workers, technology developers, and policymakers will be emphasised as essential for creating inclusive digital environments. The topic directly relates to the conference's focus on social justice, inclusion, and human rights in contemporary practice. By addressing digital ageism, the presentation contributes to discussions about how social workers can critically engage with new technologies, advocate for marginalised groups, and shape policy responses that protect and empower older populations. It also speaks to the importance of developing practice models that respond to emerging global challenges and integrate cross-sectoral knowledge.

The presentation will conclude by identifying the risks of neglecting digital ageism in policy and practice, and by outlining opportunities for social workers to promote ethical, inclusive, and fair use of digital technologies. Recommendations will include: raising awareness of age-related digital discrimination among professionals and the wider public, supporting the development of accessible training and resources for older technology users, advocating for inclusive AI and digital systems and strengthening partnerships between social work, technology, and policy sectors. Taken together, these steps can contribute to enhancing social inclusion, protecting rights, and improving the quality of life for older people in the digital age.

## Exploring good support for trans people with a learning disability

Lorne Power<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Research suggests that people with a learning disability's ability to identify with and express gender diversity is heavily constrained and regulated due to paternalistic and cis-normative assumptions of their staff. This can be associated with people with a learning disability experiencing discriminatory abuse, poor mental health and social isolation.

This presentation will discuss my ongoing doctoral research which explores what support trans people with a learning disability want in relation to their gender identity and expression. I am an experienced Social Worker and this research has been conducted as part of a National Institute for Health and Social Care Research fellowship which promotes social work practitioner research.

### Methods

Based in an approach of inclusive, trauma-informed research and queer theory, this research aims to explore what good support means to 6 trans and/or gender nonconforming people with a learning disability receiving support in England, Wales or Scotland. Data has been co-created through ethnographic participant observation and creative methods. Data is being analysed in partnership with the project's lived experience steering group.

### Findings

Emerging research findings will be discussed including: the importance of LGBT+ culture and community, support to manage complex family relationships, and supported decision making regarding balancing safety and recognition within a transphobic society.

I will also explore how this research has impacted my own identity, both personally and professionally, and explore how positionality, personal disclosure and culture may impact relationship based practice.

### Discussion

This research seeks to centre the voices and experiences of people with a learning disability in the context of a media and political environment that promotes 'gender critical' views that neurodivergent people are unable to understand and make decisions regarding gender. I encourage social workers to consider the implications that these stances have for disability rights more widely and call for our profession to stand in allyship with trans communities.

Implication(s) for Practice

I aim to develop and deliver staff training in partnership with my lived experience steering group, co-produce an Easyread journal article based on research findings and develop an accessible workbook based on the methods so people with a learning disability can tell staff what support they want in relation to their gender identity and expression.



## Homelessness as an Everyday Practice - A Co-creative Study on Navigating Between Life on the Street and Housing-Related Support Systems Over Time

Ms Lina Wallberg<sup>1</sup>

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### Background and purpose

Homelessness and precarious housing conditions are pressing societal issues in Sweden. More than 27,000 individuals are currently living in different forms of homelessness—ranging from rough sleeping to temporary accommodation provided by social services. This figure represents almost 0.3% of the Swedish population, significantly higher than in neighbouring countries. For those living unsheltered, everyday life is characterized by insecurity and unpredictability (Fahnøe, 2018). However, there is still limited research in a Swedish context on how everyday life is experienced and navigated by persons in homelessness and precarious housing. The aim of this paper is to deepen the understanding of how homelessness is experienced and managed in daily life, and how encounters with social support systems shape the pathways through homelessness.

### Research questions

- How do participants describe everyday life in homelessness, and what strategies do they develop to manage it?
- How do participants experience their encounters with social support systems, and what role do these encounters and interventions play in their pathways through homelessness?

### Methods

Nine individuals experiencing homelessness was followed over a 6–8-month period, through sequential in-depth interviews and informal contact in between. Participants were recruited by the researcher through outreach in low-threshold services. The project is designed with a co-creative approach: its methodology, aims, and parts of the analysis have been developed in collaboration with a reference group of 3 people with lived experience of homelessness.

### Findings

- Unsheltered homelessness is described as a life in constant movement between urban spaces, with time structured around both passing time and adhering to strict schedules tied to support services. Spatial and temporal rhythms are shaped by institutional opening hours, regulations, and the surveillance of public space.
- Participants' trajectories through homelessness are strongly influenced by their relationship to the support systems, and by the degree to which they are willing or able to conform to the expectations of these systems. Individuals display agency in different ways—sometimes enabling exits from homelessness, and at other times resulting in continued life on the street.



**Conclusions and implications**

This study contributes new insights into the lived experiences of homelessness and the dynamics of navigating social support systems over time. It underscores the importance of understanding how everyday life in homelessness is governed both by systems of control and by individual strategies. The findings have implications for homelessness policy, as well as for social service practices aiming to support people in vulnerable housing situations.

**Reference**

Fahnøe (2018). "Emotional Geographies of Urban Homeless People's Avoidance of Places Providing Social Services". *European Journal of Homelessness*, 12(2), 15.

## Mapping Research on Client Documentation in Social Work: Findings from a Scoping Review

Anna Olaison<sup>1</sup>, Dr Maricel Knechtel, Prof. Sandra Torres

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Client documentation fulfills a variety of purposes in social work. As research on this topic has steadily increased, so has the need to take stock of what characterizes the literature in this area. This presentation reports the results of a scoping review of 490 peer-reviewed articles published in English in this field, with a specific analysis of the subsample (n = 95) that explicitly focuses on documentation as a research theme and relies on client documentation as a source of data. The array of analyses performed shows, among other things, that documentation research is unevenly distributed across social work domains, and that Child Welfare and Protective Services (CWPS) is the domain that has thus far contributed most to research in this area. The findings also show that few social work domains outside of CWPS empirically exploit client documentation as a source of information about documentation practices within social work. This presentation will offer an overview of what characterizes this research, the types of research questions that this scholarship has addressed, and the key areas of inquiry in studies that uses documentation as data and focuses on documentation as a research theme. It will also uncover a range of underexplored topics. In doing so, the analysis exposes some of the knowledge gaps that characterize social work research on client documentation, and argues that investing in delineating a future research agenda for this topic would benefit not only scholarship but also social work practice (albeit at a later stage).

## Critical Pedagogy in Youth Workers' Support for Development of Sexuality

Mai Groenevelt<sup>1</sup>

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Youth and social street workers in Amsterdam play a crucial role in supporting the development of sexuality of adolescents and young adults. Yet, compared to child and youth social care in the Netherlands, this field lacks a legal or professional framework for providing education and guidance on sexuality and relationships, as their work is primarily preventive.

To understand how youth and social street work practices support youths' development of sexuality, we conducted research with eight youth and social street work organizations in the urban area of Amsterdam between 2022 and 2024. Preliminary findings were presented at the ECSWR conference in Milan in 2023. We employed a mixed-methods design, including surveys with youth (aged 16 to 25) and professionals, interviews with directors, and group interviews with professionals working directly with youth aged 12 to 25.

Findings suggest that youth engaged in youth or social street work perceive the sexuality education they receive in schools as insufficient. Moreover, these adolescents and young adults view youth professionals as potential sexuality educators, provided they proactively address topics such as intimacy, relationships, and sexuality (Wiersma et al., 2024).

Although various competency frameworks exist for sexuality educators and child and youth social care professionals to support the development of sexuality (Van der Gaag et al., 2024; WHO, 2017b), these frameworks often overlook the practical application of such competencies. They fail to address potential conflicts between the personal norms and values of professionals and those of other stakeholders within their operating contexts. Such omissions are significant, as educating about sexuality is inherently a "declaration of values" (Elia & Eliason, 2009, p. 195), and neglecting this dimension may limit the frameworks' ability to capture the complexities of practice.

In my current PhD research, I further examine two of the eight organizations and their professionals, where differing sexual values are most evident. I use interviews, participant observations of everyday practices, evaluative discussions, and a concluding group interview, each conducted over six months. I employ critical pedagogy both as a research method and an analytical framework, combining these findings with those from our initial study.

In my oral presentation, I explore the core principles of critical pedagogy as they relate to sexuality education delivered by youth workers. This approach is defined as a relational process centered on dialogue and sexual subjectivity, enabling young people to have meaningful experiences, co-create new ways of thinking and alternative modes of behavior, and develop an understanding of the social norms that influence power imbalances, such as those related to gender and sexual orientation (Lavie-Ajayi, 2020; Sanjakdar & Yip, 2018).

Sexuality is a significant factor in social difference, inequality, oppression, and dominance (Galarza & Anthony, 2015). Applying critical pedagogy to analyze my preliminary findings enables me to demonstrate how these informal learning practices foster youths' ethical agency and potentially dismantle barriers of exclusion and oppression (Sercombe, 2012).

## (No) case for protection? Processes, Practices, and Tensions in Case Constitution at the Intersection of Work with Older Adults and Adult Protection

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The Adult Protection Law in Switzerland, which came into force in 2013, mandates regionally organised multidisciplinary Adult Protection Authorities (APA) with the task of investigating any situation in which an adult is reported to be at risk. The investigation is usually carried out by social workers who, among other things make home visits to assess the reported endangerment. Since there are no generally clear criteria for assessing a situation as (non-)dangerous, these must always be specified on a case-by-case basis during an assessment. An additional challenge is that interpretations of problems and goals of those involved diverge due to different personal, professional and organisational logics. Case constitution is considered a core process of professional practice and is therefore of great importance for social work. The number of older adults (>65) affected by APA measures is disproportionately high in Switzerland. Empirically, it is largely unclear how the interface between 'voluntary' work with older adults and 'involuntary' adult protection is handled in practice. Against this background we are interested in the ongoing research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation in the processes, practices and areas of tension that shape the determination of vulnerability in older people (> 65) in the context of adult protection: (1) which actors are involved in interpreting problems and processing cases, and with which practices, (2) who problematises what and how, and which definitions of problems ultimately prevail, and (3) which logics and areas of tension characterise case processing and how these are dealt with.

The methodological approach is exploratory-reconstructive: in four regions, we accompany a total of around 20 adult protection cases ethnographically from the time an endangerment report is received by the APA up to its formal decision. We collect non-standardised data both from reporting organisations and from APA (audio recordings and observations of intervention practices, documents, interviews with professionals and affected individuals). All data is analysed using the grounded theory research method (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The results contribute to the little-researched field of Swiss adult protection in general and to the interface between care for older adults and adult protection in particular.

One preliminary finding is that there are different and at times contradicting organisational logics between assessing social workers and the APA. While assessors invest heavily in the management of the intrusiveness of their work, for example by building a professional relationship or focusing on self-determination of their client, the authority may require more persuasion work, emphasising the need for protection over self-determination. Another finding is that professionals tend to interpret a lack of acceptance of help or a lack of willingness to cooperate on the part of their clients as a manifestation of their need for protection. These preliminary findings suggest that there are areas of tension in the (coercive) context of adult protection at the moment of case constitution which must be captured empirically to discuss evidence informed professional practice, especially in multiprofessional and multiorganisational settings.

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## Behind the screen: rethinking relationships in digital social work

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### Background and Purpose

The expansion of digital technologies has reshaped social work, altering how professionals build and sustain helping relationships. Digital encounters modify traditional modes of engagement, redefining proximity, trust, and professional boundaries. While digital tools enhance accessibility, flexibility, and continuity of care, they also raise concerns about relational depth due to the loss of non-verbal cues and shared physical space. Ethical dilemmas emerge around confidentiality, boundary management, and professionalism in online contexts. Furthermore, unequal access to devices and digital skills risks excluding vulnerable populations. This study investigates how social workers experience and adapt to digital environments, focusing on relational dynamics, ethical challenges, and boundary management.

### Methods

A qualitative design captured the lived experiences of social workers. Data were collected through interviews (29) and focus groups (2) with professionals from child protection, mental health, addiction services, poverty reduction services. Participants represented both public institutions and private welfare organizations. Discussions explored perceptions of digitalization, adaptive strategies, and ethical dilemmas analyzed through thematic analysis.

### Findings

The analysis shows that digitalization produces both challenges and opportunities for the helping relationship. Many professionals described relational disruptions, noting difficulties in sustaining empathy and trust without non-verbal cues or physical presence. Initial assessments and work with children were considered particularly unsuitable for digital formats. At the same time, digital tools improved accessibility for clients with mobility constraints, limited availability, or geographical distance, and proved effective for follow-ups and monitoring.

Practitioners reported a constant negotiation of proximity. Digital interactions sometimes generated detachment and superficiality, but in other cases unexpectedly supported intimacy and openness. Professionals adopted strategies such as humor, personalized language, and references to clients' environments to sustain engagement. Ethical dilemmas emerged around blurred professional boundaries, confidentiality, and the use of informal tools like messaging applications. Another reported concern was digital exclusion: clients with limited literacy, inadequate devices, or fragile living conditions often struggled to participate, raising issues of equity and inclusion.

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings highlight the ambivalent nature of digitalization in social work. On one hand, digital tools enable accessibility, flexibility, and continuity of care; on the other, they risk weakening relational depth and ethical clarity. Social workers responded with creativity,

developing “situated digital strategies” to preserve empathy and trust. However, these practices were largely improvised, reflecting the absence of systematic training and institutional guidance.

The study suggests that digitalization is context-dependent rather than inherently beneficial or harmful. For practice, the results underscore the importance of training, reflective supervision, and clear guidelines to ensure that technology supports the relational core of social work. For policy, they point to the urgency of addressing digital exclusion through user support and equitable access. For research, future work should examine the long-term integration of hybrid practices, the competencies needed to sustain digital presence, and the organizational models capable of supporting ethically grounded and inclusive digital engagement.

## “Dancing around the fire”: rethinking autonomy and participation in home-based educational practice

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### Background

This study was initiated following a request from directors of social services and third-sector organizations in a Northern Italian region for academic insights into family outreach services. In line with global trends toward family-centered and deinstitutionalized practices, home-based educational support is understood as a way to sustain families in everyday contexts and preserve family unity (Petrella & Milani, 2024). A recurring concern, however, is that families often remain dependent on these services across generations, with limited development of autonomy despite this being an explicit professional goal. This preliminary study—designed as an entry point to a larger project—aims to explore which objectives are prioritized in practice by professionals, questioning whether autonomy is indeed the central and shared goal, and examining how it is operationalized alongside relational and contextual dimensions in interventions.

### Methods

An exploratory mixed-methods design was adopted in 2025. A survey was distributed to all 24 social districts, collecting data on service organization, family profiles, and intervention objectives, ensuring full regional coverage. Complementarily, six open interviews (Rosenthal, 2018) were conducted with professionals directly involved in interventions, selected to maximize heterogeneity of roles (social workers, educators, coordinators, family-engaged practitioners) and contexts (urban and mountain areas). The interviews elicited reflective accounts of decision-making, challenges, and strategies in practice.

### Findings

Home-based educational interventions currently reach approximately 200 families and over 300 minors (0.3% of the child population). Despite the small scale, considerable heterogeneity emerged in service organization and delivery: some districts manage interventions directly, others outsource to third-sector providers; some employ formal procedures for setting goals with families, others do not. Around 40% of interventions are court-mandated, typically involving families with serious child welfare concerns. Key challenges identified in interviews include the risk of treating home-based support as a stand-alone solution, the complexity of working alone in families' homes—especially with adolescents or in high-conflict situations—and the danger of reducing interventions to monitoring rather than goal-oriented practice. Practitioners emphasized the centrality of relationship-building, metaphorically described as “dancing around the fire,” which requires intuition and precise timing to foster trust and participation. These challenges are compounded by structural constraints such as limited staffing, difficulties in collaboration with courts, and scarce opportunities for interprofessional reflection.

## Conclusions

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the potential and limits of home-based educational support. It highlights the need for genuinely goal-oriented and participatory approaches, grounded in interdisciplinary collaboration, that connect the voices of all stakeholders and co-create knowledge to inform more effective practice and policy. It also invites critical reflection on the concept of autonomy, which, if not contextualized within specific relationships and practices, risks losing its meaning—or shifting toward a neoliberal interpretation that leaves families and professionals isolated in managing complex challenges. In doing so, it aligns with the conference's objectives of advancing social work research as a tool to amplify voices, inform practice, and shape more just and transformative societies.

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## How Do Social Workers Conceptualize Community Social Work? Insights from a Survey in Italy

Paola Enrica Limongelli<sup>1</sup>, Dr Camilla Landi<sup>1</sup>, Dr Valentina Calcaterra<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Università Cattolica Del Sacro Cuore

### Background

This poster presents a study on community work as a social work approach and its practical implementation. The literature highlights a general consensus that community work is a common area of professional intervention, involving social workers who support people within their communities (Payne, 1995). However, the meaning of community social work (CSW) can vary depending on the emphasis of the definition: it may focus on the beneficiaries of social interventions (people who share a locality or a specific interest — Mayo, 2002); on the role of social workers in supporting citizens' actions (Twelvetrees, 2002; Folgheraiter, 2018); or on the type of relationship between community members and welfare services (neutral/traditional or radical/transformational - Dominelli, 1990). In Italy, CSW is often presented in training as a third area of intervention, distinct from case work and group work, aiming to address social problems affecting communities. However, Italian social workers do not uniformly understand or apply CSW in their practices across various services and territorial contexts.

### Methods

This study explores and analyses the views of social workers employed in public and non-profit organisations in Italy on CSW. A survey was conducted to address the following research question: How do social workers conceptualise community social work? The questionnaire, mainly composed of open-ended questions, was designed to collect participants' definitions of CSW based on their professional experience, the perceived relevance of this field within social work practices, and the roles professionals should play when working with communities. A total of 126 social workers participated, all interested in receiving training in CSW. The survey was administered prior to the training programme. This poster presents data on participants' definitions of CSW, gathered through open-ended questions. Responses were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

### Findings

The data show that respondents defined CSW based on the beneficiaries of interventions, the role of practitioners, and the purpose of working with communities. Almost all definitions consider the beneficiaries of CSW interventions in relation to their shared geographical area. However, respondents do not consider that interventions can be collective because people share similar social problems or interests. Some definitions focus on the role of social workers in CSW, emphasising functions such as promoting citizen participation, developing partnerships, and activating empowerment and self-determination processes. Other respondents define CSW by discussing why it is important to activate such planning processes. Recurring themes include community development for community care, prevention of social issues, facing community problems, and supporting public services. In this group, the connection between CSW and case work interventions is more clearly established as a means of supporting welfare services.

**Conclusions**

The research emphasises the necessity of reflecting on CSW as a specific field within the profession, as well as training social workers in their role to define community interventions. It also highlights the urgent need for critical reflection on the relationship between welfare services and communities. When designing collective interventions, social workers must build relationships with community members that enhance the resources of those involved while respecting the community's wishes and motivations.

## Reflection and imagination: using textual vignettes in mental health social work research to uncover sociologically imaginative understandings of practice

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The poster presentation, using images, text and verbatim quotes, explores the use of textual vignettes as a research method and element of semi-structured interviews; perhaps the most common and accessible qualitative method (Roulston 2022). The breadth of research methods available to qualitative researchers is extensive (Gray 2021) and researchers must decide which ones align with their research aims. As one element of semi-structured interviews, textual vignettes can be used to elicit data from participants and stimulate discussion (Queiroz de Macedo et al. 2015).

The poster presentation explains how vignettes, written to create believable characters and stories, can prompt research participants to discuss their understanding of the circumstances of others. Specifically, the integration of specific pointers or elements within textual vignette character stories can help researchers to analyse participants' understandings of specific aspects of service users' experiences. Practical considerations that researchers must reflect on when writing vignettes are highlighted in the poster presentation.

The presentation takes as its cue, the use of this method in research that drew on semi-structured interviews with twenty-one mental health social workers (Lomax 2024). The research study took place in an English NHS mental health trust where social workers worked in multi-disciplinary team environments. Some of the social workers were employed directly by the trust, and some worked there through partnership arrangements with their employing local authority.

One of the study's aims was to understand how social workers understood and articulated the impact of the social determinants of mental health, and mental health inequalities, on the experiences of service users. Interviews began with participants discussing their responses to three vignettes about fictitious characters experiencing mental health difficulties. The vignettes were used to prompt consideration of the social determinants of mental health (Marmot 2010) and of Mills' (1959) public issues and private troubles, as aspects of the sociological imagination. The vignettes were written with specific pointers to enable the researcher to identify if participants' responses appeared to align with this anticipated focus.

The research sought to capture the 'snapshot' of participant experience, highlighted by Flick (2018) as the hallmark of qualitative cross-sectional design, from social workers in different teams, roles, and employment contexts. Textual vignettes are an effective method of elicitation if careful consideration is given to how the short scenarios are written.

The poster presentation demonstrates how textual vignettes provide a valuable additional method, embedded with semi-structured interviews, to support qualitative research in social work. The implications of using this method for social work research and our understandings of practice are highlighted.

## Child Welfare Work with Parents with Cognitive Disabilities: A Scoping Review

Ms. Iris Helgesen<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Marianne Hedlund, Dr. Lena Ulfseth

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### Background and Purpose

Today parents with cognitive impairments are disproportionately represented in child welfare cases, with research indicating that 30–50% eventually lose custody of their children. Although child welfare services are mandated to ensure safe developmental conditions and provide support to families, concerns persist regarding discriminatory practices and insufficient accommodation for this population. Article 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) affirms the right of individuals with cognitive impairments to establish a family and raise children on equal terms with others. When support is needed, they are entitled to tailored assistance. Despite this, empirical studies reveal systemic challenges, including marginalization, rights violations, and a lack of professional competence among child welfare workers. Historically, this group has received limited attention in research. This project aims to identify and synthesize existing literature on social workers' approaches and practices when engaging with families where one or both parents have cognitive impairments.

### Methods

A scoping review was conducted to map current knowledge on child welfare practices involving cognitively impaired parents. Systematic searches were performed across international databases including Medline, ERIC, Sociological Abstracts, Social Science Abstracts, Web of Science, Idunn, Oria, and Google Scholar. The search yielded 6,720 publications, of which 5,510 were screened using Rayyan. The review included both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources, limited to publications in English, Norwegian, Swedish, or Danish, and published between 2014 and 2024. Studies were included if they addressed social workers' experiences, approaches, or understandings. A total of 34 peer-reviewed articles were selected for full review, analysis, and synthesis.

### Results

Relevant studies were identified from Sweden, Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom, Australia, Belgium, Iceland, Norway, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United States. Most studies employed qualitative designs, including interviews and case studies, but we also found studies using other designs.

Preliminary findings reveal the presence of discriminatory and ableist practices, often rooted in negative attitudes toward parents with cognitive impairments. These attitudes appear to be linked to limited knowledge and competence among social workers. The literature also highlights significant challenges in interagency collaboration, particularly between child welfare services and habilitation professionals, factors that undermine effective and equitable practice.

**Preliminary Conclusions and Implications**

The review provides a foundational overview of existing research on social work related to disability and child welfare practices involving parents with cognitive impairments in child welfare contexts, highlighting challenges in a time of growing emphasis on inclusive practices and human rights in welfare services. The preliminary findings underscore the need for further research on how professional practice can better support these families.

Key themes include the persistence of ableist attitudes, the need for enhanced professional competence, and the importance of improved collaboration between child welfare and habilitation services. It seems that a shift toward a more family-oriented approach—rather than a solely child-focused model—is necessary to prevent unjustified family separations and to uphold the rights of both children and parents.

## Ensuring Reliable Information for Social Services Management: Lessons from a Census-Based Survey in Finland

Dr. Sirpa Kannasoja<sup>1</sup>, Mrs. Janissa Miettinen<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Riitta Vornanen<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Kati Närhi<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Johanna Lammintakanen<sup>2</sup>

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### Background and purpose

Reliable and generalisable data are essential for evidence-informed practice, management and leadership, and policy in social work and social welfare. While reliable and generalisable research data are typically produced within research organisations, social services managers often act as research partners, decision-makers in research permit processes, and users of the knowledge generated. Therefore, managers play an important role in both producing reliable data and assessing its reliability.

In Finland, the 2023 welfare reform transferred the responsibility for organising social welfare and healthcare services from approximately 200 municipalities and joint authorities to 22 newly established wellbeing services counties. This structural integration of health and social services created new demands for knowledge-based management and cross-sectoral collaboration. This study explores the methodological challenges and solutions encountered in conducting a census-based survey targeting all social services managers across the counties in spring 2024.

### Methods

The survey achieved a response rate of 36.9% (n=358). Using both statistical and process-based approaches, the study assessed the research process and representativeness through comparisons of early and late respondents, demographic and organisational characteristics, and external data sources such as county budget size.

### Findings

The reliability of the data was critically dependent on accurately identifying the target population, constructing a precise sampling frame, and ensuring a representative participation. The study reveals five key methodological aspects that influenced data reliability: (1) variations in research permit processes across counties, (2) collaboration with internal contact persons within organisations, (3) accuracy in constructing the sampling frame to reflect the actual population at the time of data collection, (4) clear communication of the survey's purpose to enhance participation, and (5) a multi-stage non-response bias analysis. The findings demonstrate that, despite organisational changes and challenges in identifying the target population, careful methodological planning and collaboration between researchers and service organisations can yield reliable and representative data. These results are relevant for both census-based and sample-based surveys and can inform the design of future research in social work and social welfare.

### Conclusions and implications

The study underscores the need for investment in national research infrastructure to support high-quality, generalisable research. Strengthening collaboration between research organisations and public service organisations is essential for producing reliable data that informs management, policy, and practice in complex welfare systems. This requires not only shared commitment but also the development of registries that enable the construction of accurate sampling frames and target populations – such as those representing specific segments of the public service system, including social services managers.

## Strengthening Social Work Education through Interdisciplinary SDG-Focused Project Learning: Insights from the Social Europe Days 2025

Professor Dr. Katrin Reich<sup>1</sup>, Professor Maria Luisa Gomez Jimenez<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Kersti Kriisk<sup>3</sup>, Associate Professor Radu Ioan Popa<sup>4</sup>, Professor Dr. Pia Popal<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Reeli Sirotkina<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Damian Spiteri<sup>5</sup>, Prof. Dr. Christiane Trüe<sup>6</sup>

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### Background and Purpose

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for sustainability, social justice, and welfare. For Social Work, they are vital for addressing complex societal challenges. Yet in the German-speaking context, the SDGs remain underrepresented in curricula (Fleischlin, 2020), although international debates emphasize sustainability and eco-social transformation (Schmitt, 2023). Social Work education must also prepare students for interdisciplinary and international contexts, as many practice fields require cross-boundary collaboration (Alcantar et al., 2023; Zerden et al., 2021). The Social Europe Days, a joint initiative of ten European universities, combine SDG-related content with interdisciplinary, project-based, international learning. This abstract presents evaluation results from the 2025 cohort, focusing on the added value for Social Work education. The research question was how an interdisciplinary, SDG-focused format can strengthen students' sustainability competences and collaborative skills.

### Methods

Students from Social Work, Social Policy, Business & Public Administration, Human Resources, Psychology, and European Studies joined a one-week program. Activities included online preparation, lectures, field visits, and teamwork in international, multidisciplinary groups. Each group developed a project linking a chosen SDG to their disciplines. The evaluation (N=48) used an online questionnaire with quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) items. Quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics in SPSS, qualitative responses through content analysis.

### Findings

The evaluation shows the format substantially contributed to the targeted competences. Students reported significant gains in sustainability competences, with 92% rating SDG-related learning outcomes as good or very good. Collaborative skills were also strengthened: 85% assessed their learning regarding international collaboration positively, 75% rated teamwork, and 89% their team results as good or very good. For Social Work students, SDG learning gains were considerable—many engaged with the goals in depth for the first time—yet their teamwork ratings were somewhat more neutral than those of other disciplines. Nonetheless, most valued collaboration and emphasized the benefits of working across cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Qualitative responses highlighted that co-creating

projects with peers from diverse fields was inspiring, practice-relevant, and an important complement to Social Work curricula.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The Social Europe Days 2025 illustrate how Social Work education benefits from interdisciplinary, SDG-focused, project-based learning. By enabling students to co-create projects integrating multiple perspectives, the format strengthens sustainability competences, intercultural communication, and collaborative skills. Embedding such approaches more systematically in curricula could enhance Social Work's contribution to addressing global and European challenges (Schmitt, 2023; Alcantar et al., 2023). Implications are that higher education institutions should explore how such formats can be scaled and adapted to different contexts. Future research should examine long-term impacts on professional identity and practice and include evaluations with larger cohorts or multiple program iterations to allow more robust analysis, particularly regarding Social Work students' experiences in interdisciplinary environments.



## **“I Don’t Know How to Word This”: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Mental Health, Social Care and Social Work Practitioners’ Experiences of Working with Sexually Abused Children**

Dr Alberto Poletti<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Of Bedfordshire

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) remains one of the most emotionally demanding and ethically complex challenges faced by professionals working in social work, social care, and mental health settings. While the long-term impact of CSA on victims has received growing attention (Paul et al., 2024; MacIntosh & Ménard, 2021), the emotional toll on practitioners working directly with sexually abused children (SAC) is only recently beginning to be acknowledged (Mendez-Fernandez et al., 2022; Middleton et al., 2022). This paper presents findings from a small-scale qualitative study that explored the experiences of practitioners across social work, psychology, psychotherapy, and social care, each with direct experience supporting children affected by CSA.

Drawing on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2008), the study analysed six semi-structured interviews with experienced practitioners recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Participants included social workers, support workers, psychotherapists, and psychologists working across varied organisational contexts. Interviews were transcribed and analysed idiographically, allowing for the emergence of Experiential Themes. Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed throughout, including the use of distress protocols and post-interview debriefing.

The paper will begin by examining the emotional complexity practitioners encounter when working with sexually abused children. It will explore how disclosures of abuse often evoke deeply affective and ambivalent responses—such as shock, helplessness, and grief—which may be accompanied by a sense of professional inadequacy and personal vulnerability (Ireland & Huxley, 2017). The discussion will consider how these reactions can mirror the psychological states of the children themselves (Benatar, 2000; Quayle et al., 2023), and how practitioners navigate the tension between empathy, scepticism, and the limits of their professional roles.

The paper will then consider how practitioners can better respond to the emotional demands of working with SAC by establishing clear psychological and physical boundaries. It will explore how such boundaries function as mechanisms for emotional containment, professional objectivity, and personal protection (Kelly & Mathe, 2024). The discussion will consider on how such boundaries not only safeguard practitioners and children but also can support their wellbeing in the face of repeated exposure to trauma.

Finally, the discussion will consider the role of organisational support in fostering vicarious resilience. Supervision, peer reflection, and an emotionally safe environment were identified as critical resources that enabled practitioners to process emotional challenges and remain empathetically engaged in their work (Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018; Knight, 2018).

The paper will conclude by highlighting the extent to which these findings can offer a valuable insight into how practitioners can be better supported through emotionally literate training, trauma-informed organisational cultures, and inter-professional support systems that prioritise practitioner wellbeing as a cornerstone of effective safeguarding practice.

# The Transition of Young People from the Child Protection System to Independent Living: Theoretical Perspectives and Implications for Evidence-Based Policies

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## Abstract

The transition to independent living for young people leaving the child protection system represents one of the most vulnerable and challenging stages in their pathway to adulthood. These young people frequently face housing instability, difficulties in accessing the labor market, limited levels of personal autonomy, and the absence of stable support networks. At the same time, there are factors that can facilitate their adaptation, such as community support, mentoring programs, transitional housing, and coherent public policies. The aim of this presentation is to explore this issue from an interdisciplinary perspective and to highlight the implications for developing social work policies and practices grounded in evidence.

The presentation will address four main areas. First, it will analyze the social context and the relevance of the topic, in correlation with contemporary transformations of the welfare state and the challenges facing social services. Second, it will provide a critical review of the international literature, emphasizing both prior research findings on the barriers and facilitators of post-institutional transitions and the knowledge gaps in the Romanian and Eastern European contexts. Third, it will examine the current legislative framework and social work practices supporting care leavers, identifying strengths as well as limitations. Finally, it will discuss opportunities for developing data-driven policies and practices, with a particular focus on interdisciplinary collaboration and co-creation of knowledge together with practitioners and beneficiaries.

The conclusions underline the importance of integrated interventions that combine material support with the development of independent living skills and the strengthening of social support networks. The value of international comparative approaches and the transfer of best practices to the Romanian context is also emphasized. This presentation is part of an ongoing doctoral project and has an exploratory character, addressing the theoretical foundations and methodological directions that will guide future empirical investigations. In this way, the paper contributes to the debate on current challenges and opportunities for innovation in social work, as well as to the development of evidence-based policies and practices.

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# Navigating AI in Social Work: Practice Recommendations

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To ensure professional and sustainable social work and a resilient social economy, it is essential that organizations recognize the technological and transformational developments of AI and to address them with appropriate and timely measures. But what is necessary to consider in order to positively link Industry 4.0 and digital welfare state?

In the context of a research project in 2024, recommendations for the implementation and use of AI in organization of the Social Economy were being identified. For this purpose, about 100 students of the Master's programme in Social Economy and Social Work were interviewed and their opinions, experiences collected after a 3-day conference on the topic of "AI in the Social Economy" with international Key-Note-Speakers, workshops, panel discussion etc. The work experience from the students range from young professionals to experts, managers, CEOs with many years of experience in Social Organizations; hence are very insightful when it comes to AI and its practical use. The collected data was analysed based on a qualitative content analysis. Identified recommendations for the use of AI include for example:

- creating courage for change,
- preserving the human elements,
- understanding and demanding the role of leadership/management in relation to AI,
- interdisciplinary participation,
- establishing ethical guidelines,
- advocating for ecological sustainability,
- using AI in compliance with legal and data protection regulations.

These findings provide crucial principles and form an important foundation for implementing/working with AI and fulfilling fundamental ethical values of social work regarding social justice, inclusion and participation. It is essential to understand the importance of active participation, driving innovation rather than passively reacting to external changes.

Content of the presentation

- Presentation of the research project
- Presentation of recommendations for action for the social economy
- Outlook and presentation of further work on the project
- Open Question and Answer session and discussion with colleagues

The aim of the workshop and relevance to the ECSWR 2026 is to raise awareness among professionals in the Social Work and Economy on the topic of AI, to promote and strengthen AI literacy by developing new critical knowledge, to exchange, critically discuss important aspects of the practical and suitable use of AI. It encourages networking and potential future collaborations.

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## Care recipients experiences of welfare technologies in eldercare

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The use of welfare technologies has increased within elder care in Sweden, particularly in relation to in-home services provided by municipalities. Some of these technologies have the potential to reduce reliance on care staff in the delivery of care, and it is these types of technologies that are the focus of our research. Examples of such technologies included in the study are: nighttime camera checkups, which replace physically present staff with digital monitoring; automatic medication dispensers; and digital grocery shopping services, which shift the responsibility for picking and delivering groceries from care staff to store employees via online orders. The common denominator among these technologies is that they in some way replace the physical presence of care staff in the provision of care. This, in turn, might alter how care is given, received, and experienced.

Current knowledge is limited regarding how older adults experience care when welfare technology fully or partially replaces human staff in service delivery. Policy analyses indicate that welfare technology is often framed from an organizational perspective, emphasizing efficiency and resource management over the lived experiences of care recipients. This framing risks overlooking the nuanced ways in which technology can be experienced by individual adult in need of help and support from eldercare services. Relational aspects of care—such as interactions with care staff, connections with family, and feelings of independence or loneliness—are central to meeting individuals' everyday support needs. Welfare technology has the potential to reshape these relationships in various ways, including those between older adults in residential care, between care recipients and staff, and between care recipients and their relatives. While technology may offer solutions to organizational challenges such as staff shortages, its implementation must be guided by considerations and an understanding of individual needs, rather than assumptions that technology alone can resolve systemic issues.

This study aims to explore older adults' experiences of technology-integrated care in their daily lives, focusing on how such care influences social relations with care staff and others. Specifically, it investigates:

- (1) How do older adults experience technology-integrated care in their everyday lives?
- (2) What significance does this integration have for the formation and transformation of relational aspects of care?

Using a qualitative and exploratory design, the study will recruit 6–8 participants aged 65 and older who receive municipal home care services, including at least one digital intervention such as remote camera monitoring, automated medication dispensers, or e-shopping. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and participant-kept diaries. Interviews will provide contextual background and allow for in-depth exploration of participants' narratives, while diaries will offer insights into the everyday realities of technology-integrated care. A phenomenological approach will guide the interviews, emphasizing open-ended questions, active listening, and dialogic engagement to capture participants' lived experiences.

By centering the voices of older adults, this study seeks to nuance the understanding of welfare technology in care settings and contribute to a more ethically grounded and relationally sensitive implementation of digital interventions in social work practice.

## Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage in the First Thousand Days: Integrating Social Work and Educational Practices through a Participatory and Reflective Parenting Support Approach.

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Protecting children at risk of poverty or social exclusion has become a pressing priority in Europe (Council Rec. (EU) 2021/1004). Poverty, as a multidimensional stressor, limits families' access to services and undermines caregivers' ability to provide stable, nurturing environments, with negative consequences for child development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

There is broad consensus that early socio-educational experiences, especially within the family, are decisive for child development (Milani, 2018; Shonkoff & Richter, 2013). Inclusive, high-quality ECEC and parenting support during the first thousand days are widely recognized as crucial to promoting development and breaking the cycle of disadvantage (REC 2013/112/EU; WHO et al., 2018; OECD, 2025).

Addressing neglect in vulnerable contexts requires sustained parenting support and integrated approaches linking social work, health, and ECEC services (Tamburlini, 2025; Bove & Sharmahd, 2020). Intersectoral collaboration and interprofessional learning can strengthen practitioners' capacity to address complex needs, though barriers remain (Milani, 2025). Yet little research has explored how ECEC can be effectively integrated with family support in cooperation with other services (Ooms et al., 2025)

In response, P.I.P.P.I. (Intervention Programme for the Prevention of Institutionalisation) fosters alliances among families, socio-educational services, and communities through an ecological, multidisciplinary, and participatory approach. The program supports vulnerable families by innovating practices and promoting positive parenting, with special attention to early childhood as a crucial window of opportunity for intervention. Grounded in the Participatory and Transformative Evaluation framework (Milani, 2022; Serbati, 2017, 2025), it co-creates personalized interventions based on a shared multidimensional assessment of the child's needs. Multidisciplinary teams – including families – play a central role, promoting parental engagement, fostering mutual understanding among professionals, and reducing service fragmentation (Milani, 2025).

This contribution presents findings from an impact evaluation of Maps to Explore the 0–3 (Serbati et al., 2023), a participatory and multidimensional assessment tool designed to help professionals and families recognize and address the developmental needs. The tool supports reflective practice, shared observation, and the co-construction of individualized care plans.

Adopting a plural approach (Stame, 2016; Fives et al., 2017) and a mixed-method convergent design (Creswell, 2018), the study explores the tool's potential to strengthen parenting support and foster cross-sectoral collaboration. The quantitative component

included a pre–post quasi-experimental design (Treatment N=72; Control N=250) and an itinere practitioner survey (N=376). The qualitative component comprised four practitioner focus groups (N=29; purposive sampling) and three parent interviews (N=5; convenience sampling), analyzed through content analysis with a mixed inductive–deductive approach. This contribution specifically focuses on results from the survey and the qualitative study. In a context often lacking specialized training and age-appropriate tools, the Maps enhanced professionals' observational and reflective skills, fostered cross-sectoral collaboration through a shared framework, and supported parents in developing more intentional and responsive caregiving.

These findings confirm the centrality of professional development and underscore the role of social work research in advancing interdisciplinarity, informing practice, and shaping policy for more inclusive systems. Shared tools emerge as concrete levers for promoting integrated approaches, while reflective processes can trigger transformative learning and strengthen parental agency.



## Finding Family Across Borders: Challenges and Insights from International Kinship Placements of Children

Ms Sara Bellamio<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lancaster University

This project explores the challenges related to the placement of looked-after children across borders. In England, when children require out-of-home care, local authorities are required to consider family placement first. However, identifying and assessing relatives becomes significantly more complex when children's families and potential caregivers live abroad. According to Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB, 2024), a London-based organisation providing case management services in cross-border child protection, the number of children placed in kinship care abroad rose by 71% between 2020 and 2022, reaching 192 children placed with family overseas. Despite this increase, cross-border kinship placements still account for less than 1% of all children in care. The number of children in care who may be eligible for placement with family abroad might be much higher, since the Office for National Statistics estimates that in England and Wales 37% of live births in recent years have at least one foreign-born parent (ONS, 2024).

To date, there has been insufficient research on how practitioners navigate complex international statutory frameworks to ensure that best-interest decisions are made for children whose family resources extend beyond UK borders, and this project seeks to address that gap.

Using a mixed-methods design, this PhD study investigates the challenges and opportunities associated with overseas placements of looked-after children, with the aim of expanding the evidence base and informing judicial decision-making through policy and practice recommendations. The first stage of the project involves close cooperation with CFAB, which has granted access to its database containing aggregated information on cases of children involved in international placements. The second stage consists of semi-structured interviews with family justice professionals, including CAFCASS children's guardians, CFAB caseworkers, and lawyers representing both children and parents in cross-border cases.

By combining quantitative data with qualitative insights, the study bridges empirical evidence and practitioner perspectives, emphasizes children's rights, and aims to inform policy and practice to better protect children whose family networks extend across UK borders.

This presentation will share work-in-progress findings from this doctoral project, focusing on preliminary results and emerging themes, and will address three main areas:

1. Literature overview: A review of the international literature on cross-border placements, with a focus on what is currently known about placing children abroad in increasingly diverse societies, and specific attention to the situation in England.
2. Quantitative insights: An analysis of CFAB's database to better understand the characteristics of children involved in international placements.

3. Qualitative perspectives: Preliminary findings from interviews with practitioners, highlighting their experiences, challenges, and recommendations for practice in navigating international placements.

By integrating these approaches, this project aims to shed light on an under-researched but increasingly relevant area of child protection.

## **‘What do we know’: A literature review exploring the preparation of social workers in training for inter-professional practice**

Ms Ann Flynn<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Open University

### **Background and purpose**

This literature review explored what is known about preparation of social work students in training for their practice within an inter-professional setting. The literature review was planned to inform a doctoral thesis on this subject undertaken in a UK based university. The study that the review would ultimately inform was an inductive qualitative exploration. The policy and law landscape changed considerably in England from the start of the review. This was reflected in the change in emphasis of inter-professional practice through seminal policy shifts.

Data bases were searched from January 2012 to December 2024. Criteria for inclusion focused on students studying a qualifying social work programme, international texts published in English, and peer reviewed literature. Electronic databases were searched: Assia, CINAHL, SAGE journals, Scopus and Social Care Online. Reference lists of relevant studies were searched for additional sources. Grey literature was excluded. Search terms comprised single and combinations of ‘inter-professional working’, ‘inter-professional education’, The search was further focused with the addition of ‘social work’ and then ‘social work students’. Data for analysis derived from the included studies were managed via an Excel spreadsheet. Identified abstracts were initially reviewed for relevance, then full text articles were reviewed for eligibility. Finally 36 peer-reviewed articles were synthesised within the review.

The literature review identified that student social worker insights were less identified within literature relating to preparation for inter-professional practice. Longitudinal research was also underdeveloped in the literature searched on this topic. This suggests that qualifying programmes are not always supporting social workers in training to meet their personal learning needs in this area.

The definition of inter-professional practice was explained in 26:36 articles and so difficult to compare like with like, as so many differing variables e.g., size of sample, experience of placement. The identified studies were conducted in Global North countries. There were different methodological approaches, including: ethnographic (n=1); IPA (n=1); mixed methods (n=13); qualitative (n=14); quantitative (n=3), systematic review (n=1) and conceptual papers (n=4).

The sample sizes of the studies varied from 1 to 630 students. Social work was identified as a small sample of the overall number of participants in this study. There was little focus on the impact of systemic inequalities in society for the student and how they could impact them in the interprofessional space.

Social work is a smaller workforce than health care and related professionals and there is a need to amplify the professions voice. Inter-professional practice at a post qualification stage is important to understand, but so is the preparation for this practice landscape. Social work students in training are likely to have discrete needs e.g., to embed the professionals standards in their new role. This will support informing a foundation stage for their personal co-creation of knowledge and professional identity. This implies a need to develop good relationship skills, how to manage conflict, promote personal and professional leadership and to create spaces to explore the emotional impact of the work for them in a safe space.

## Social work perspectives are under pressure, while the number of social workers is growing.

Professor Øystein Henriksen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nord University

A research group at Nord University conducted a research project from 2021 to 2023 where we studied the status and position of social work perspectives and competence in Norwegian health and welfare services. We concentrated the study on three services: child welfare, labour and welfare administration (Nav) and mental health and substance abuse services. The study used a multi-method approach that consisted of document analysis, qualitative interviews, register data from Statistics Norway from 2011 to 2021, and a survey among members of FO (the trade union for Norwegian social workers). Here we would like to highlight a finding from this study that also appears as a paradox: Social work professional perspectives and competence are under pressure in the services, while at the same time both the number and proportion of social workers within the same services are increasing.

Through the document analysis and interviews, we see that the “social words” such as social work, social problems, social policy, are absent or less prominent. These have been replaced by service-specific terms. Furthermore, we find that service specialization and de-professionalization is a central theme in the analyses. Service specialization is about a demand for specialized professional perspectives and competence. De-professionalization is about the professional identity being linked to a greater extent to the service organization than to the discipline and educational background. The quantitative data show that there has been a large increase of social workers in child welfare services, both in the number of employees and the proportion of social workers. For the other services, the picture is more complex; for Nav there is a small increase in the number, and the proportion of social workers. When it comes to mental health and substance abuse services, we only have figures from the inpatient treatment. For mental health services there is a general decrease in the number of employees for all professions, and the proportion of social workers is stable. For substance abuse services there is an increase in the number, and the proportion of social workers is also stable here.

We will discuss three main explanations for this finding. The first can be linked to the labour market. In general, the number of employees has continued to increase in the Norwegian welfare services. And as focused on in public documents there is a particular shortage of psychologists and nurses. It is therefore possible that the proportion of social workers is maintained because of this development. Secondly, all services have become interprofessional, which creates both opportunities and challenges for social workers. Thirdly, this can also be understood in a power perspective where individual-oriented and health professional discourses gain hegemony. The paradox is in this case is that social workers also become representatives of professional perspectives that are in opposition to the core perspectives and competence that characterize social work.

## Financial inclusion as a part of social inclusion for people with mental health issues: possibilities from Fintech

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Collaborative efforts of different systems is needed to support social inclusion of people with mental health issues. Usually the coordination and cooperation between health and social care system and policies is stressed. Complexity and interconnectedness of problems necessitate expansion into other areas. Relationship between mental health status and material status is well explained through social drift and social causation theory. Mental health status affects financial management, accessing and using financial services and can make people with mental health issues in more risk as well as in need for assistance. Presentation will focus on financial exclusion and challenges people with mental health issues face. Financial inclusion will be discussed from three level perspective, micro, mezzo and macro. Social workers have the opportunity and skills that are useful in building financial literacy and increasing the financial capabilities of service users on micro level. On the macro level the need for regulatory governance frameworks to promote financial inclusion will be stressed. Focus will be on possibilities that arise from collaboration between financial industry, technological, healthcare and social care system that can contribute to Fintech-driven solutions enhancing financial inclusion of people with mental health issues. That cross-sectoral collaboration can contribute to participatory and personalized models of financial services as well as investment from the financial industry for public good. Additional research is needed as well as education for social care workers regarding Fintech-driven solution and financial inclusion. It is important to raise awareness of the challenges that people living with mental health issues face and also to talk about possibilities that arise from digital to enhance independent living, financial inclusion with support when needed.

# Unveiling the Unexplored: A Family Perspective on Disabled Parenthood - Barriers, Capabilities, and Struggles

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## Background and Purpose

This study explores parenthood in families where at least one parent experiences cognitive difficulties (e.g., intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, etc.). Such families are often overlooked in social work research, despite growing recognition of the competencies of parents with cognitive impairments and their need for tailored support. Cognitive impairment can affect memory, learning, and decision-making. Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) affirms the right to parenthood for persons with disabilities. This study aims to investigate the lived experience of parenthood from a family perspective when one parent has cognitive impairment. By examining both barriers and capabilities, the study highlights the unique challenges and strengths inherent in this form of parenthood.

## Methods

A qualitative, explorative study (Stebbins, 2001) was conducted, involving semi-structured interviews with five parents with cognitive impairment in Norway. Each participant was interviewed on two occasions between October 2016 and July 2018. The recruitment process was complex, reflecting the challenges of engaging this underrepresented group.

## Main points of findings

Thematic analysis revealed three central themes:

1. Challenges in parenthood practice linked to individual impairment
2. Parenthood: rising beyond barriers to pursue aspirations
3. Navigating parenthood: overcoming struggles for a fulfilling family life

Despite facing significant obstacles, parents with access to social or familial support structures were able to maintain fulfilling parenting roles. However, persistent barriers, particularly those arising from a lack of understanding or patience in their environments, continue to limit their parenting capacities.

## Relevance to the conference's aim and theme

Although parents with cognitive impairments may represent a small demographic in many countries, they are disproportionately affected by custody deprivations and child protection investigations (Pacherco, Feldman, MacConelli, 2022; Sigurjónsdóttir & Rice, 2018). This paper contributes interdisciplinary knowledge aimed at improving social service practices and developing supportive interventions tailored to this form of parenthood.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of recognising the aspirations of parents with cognitive impairments. It brings attention to the often-overlooked dimensions of their family lives, contributing to a broader understanding of diverse parenthood practices and experiences.

## Supporting Sexual Expression and Preventing Sexual Harm in Nursing Home Care: An Investigation into the Irish and Catalan Experience

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### Background

The freedom to express one's self sexually throughout the life cycle is widely considered a basic human right. When one transfers into nursing home care, however, there is often little support for sexual expression, particularly for people living with dementia (PLwD) or when there is doubt around capacity to consent to sexual acts (Abellard, J., et. al., 2017). Nursing home staff find themselves in a complicated position of trying to simultaneously support one's right to sexual expression and also safeguard them from sexual harm. Whilst considerable progress has been made in countries such as Australia (Bauer, M., et. al., 2014) and the UK in identifying measures to train and guide staff, currently there is a lack of research into support for sexual expression of PLwD in Catalonia and Ireland and a need for training and educational materials for nursing home staff.

### Methods

This research project endeavours to identify current nursing home understanding and practice in supporting sexual expression and to address any ethical/moral dilemmas it may raise in Catalonia and Ireland. No protocols to improve sexual expression and prevent possible incidences of sexual harm have been identified in either country. An action research methodology, which includes both qualitative and quantitative elements will be used, and stakeholders such as PLwD, multidisciplinary nursing home staff, family members, supporters and advocates of PLwD will also be included.

### Results

Quantitative and qualitative research results will be shared with the wider community and will be incorporated with co-production methods involving all stakeholders (but with a focus on PLwD and a reflective sample of multidisciplinary nursing home staff) such as world cafés, focus groups and cooperative inquiry groups to develop a guide for nursing home staff and family members of PLwD in both Catalonia and Ireland (produced in English, Spanish and Catalan), with the aim of addressing the right to sexual expression and preventing sexual harm.

### Conclusion

In addition to the development and publication of a guide for nursing home staff and family members of persons living with dementia (PLwD) in 3 languages (English, Spanish and Catalan), summary findings will be collected and disseminated around nursing home staff understanding and practice of sexual expression of PLwD, as well as the opinions and desires of PLwD and their family members. Social work research is well positioned in both countries to draw on a shared understanding of how cultural, historical and religious underpinnings may shape and affect current efforts to support sexual expression of PLwD in nursing homes.



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## Rapid assessment of needs and services among Slovenian residents after extensive flooding

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In 2023, Slovenia was hit by extensive flooding. It was not extensive only due to the intensity and volume of rainfall, which caused the failure of basic infrastructure, flooding from rainwater, watercourses, and groundwater within a short period of a few days. It was also extensive because it covered a large part of the country's territory, making the immediate and subsequent response complex and the recovery long and complicated.

Although the consequences for most residents of capital were negligible, the floods also affected parts of Ljubljana, where they significantly disrupted the daily lives of neighbourhoods located along the Sava River. The swollen river overflowed its banks and, together with rain and contaminated water from sewage pipes and other sources of pollution, flooded the basements, ground floors of houses, and courtyards of residents' homes. It destroyed gardens, walls, infrastructure, furniture, and various other items. The initial response from the state and other residents was one of exceptional solidarity and assistance with the clean-up. A few months later, however, public interest waned and those affected were pushed into the background.

Six months after the floods, at the end of 2023, Faculty of Social Work at the University of Ljubljana and two units of the Ljubljana Social Work Centre collaborated to design a survey to assess satisfaction of residents with the support offered by the welfare centres and to identify their remaining needs. The survey was designed on the rapid needs and services assessment methodology. The method was initially developed within the WHO during the AIDS epidemic and has been used and adapted in Slovenia in numerous other cases. It is characterized by its attempt to quickly obtain useful knowledge about complex situations at the local level and by its action-oriented approach.

In this article, we will present the results of the study, focusing on the methodological challenges that were revealed in the process. The research has shown that Rapid Needs and Services Assessment is certainly an extremely useful method for identifying the unmet needs of affected populations, especially in urgent situations where (green) social work is required. However, it has its shortcomings, when conditions enabling insight into the most vulnerable segments of the population are not met.

## Participatory Research in Social Work for Engaging Older Adults in Knowledge Co-Creation

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Social work practice increasingly requires inclusive and participatory approaches that recognise the lived experiences of service users as a vital source of knowledge. In the context of ageing populations and growing demands for responsive services, participatory research offers ways to co-create knowledge that informs evidence-based practice and policy (Žemaitaitė et al, 2023). According to Fudge et al. (2007), it is defined as research conducted 'with' or 'by' older adults rather than 'about' or 'for' them. James and Buffel (2023) highlights its potential to reverse power imbalances and contribute to social action aimed at improving quality of life in later years.

The objective is to examine how engaging older adults as co-researchers in participatory research fosters knowledge co-creation and contributes to addressing the needs of ageing societies. Research question - How does participatory research in social work foster older adults' involvement in knowledge co-creation and contribute to addressing the needs of ageing societies? The study was conducted within the project UMANAS – University's Mission in Addressing the Needs of Ageing Society.

Participatory research involved 14 older adults and 2 social workers from social services NGO, as well as 3 university academics. Participants co-designed the study, formulated research questions, conducted interviews with social work and university representatives, analysed data, and reflected on the process. Additionally, focus group discussions and reflections with co-researchers were conducted to capture their experiences in participatory research. All data were analysed using content analysis. Ethical standards of voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality were rigorously maintained. Findings reveal that although the role of "co-researcher" was initially unfamiliar and challenging for older adults, participation strengthened their research competencies, enhanced self-confidence, and amplified their voice in shaping discussions on ageing and social services. Their reflections highlighted opportunities and tensions in collaborative knowledge production, particularly in balancing professional expertise with lived experience. This study demonstrates that participatory research in social work offers a powerful method for engaging older adults in knowledge co-creation, thereby bridging research and practice. This project also illustrates the value of university–NGO cooperation and serves as a transferable model for integrating participatory methods into social work. Future research should further examine the scalability of participatory research approaches across diverse social work contexts, and policy development should encourage such frameworks as a core strategy for inclusive social innovation.

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## Co-defining quality in wraparound care for young people with complex mental health issues: linking research and practice through reflexive cycles

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### Background

Across social work, questions of quality and the frameworks used to assess it are of growing importance for practice and policy (1). Yet dominant frameworks are often standardised, top-down, and insufficiently responsive to the complex realities of frontline work. In this project, we deliberately refrained from applying existing models. Instead, we sought to co-define what “quality” means within the CARE programme in Antwerp (Flanders). CARE provides mobile wraparound interventions for families with complex, long-term support needs, including severe child and youth mental health challenges.

This presentation demonstrates how reflexive cycles were implemented to integrate professional, experiential, and scientific knowledge in the co-definition of quality. By focusing on this process, we highlight the potential of reflexive, practice-driven approaches to inform quality frameworks in social work.

### Methods

The project combined professional knowledge from practitioners and managers, experiential knowledge from young people and families, and scientific knowledge from researchers. Reflexive cycles created structured spaces for dialogue on what constitutes “quality” in care (2). A facilitator guided the cycles, while researchers contributed as both data collectors and knowledge brokers, feeding the discussions with insights from document analysis, registration data, and interviews.

Data were thematically analysed in NVivo. Four reflective group meetings were organised with each of the three CARE teams, supplemented by meso-level staff discussions. Additional data came from surveys and interviews with professionals from referring organisations (N=25), and interviews with young people and families who had recently completed a CARE trajectory.

### Findings

A key insight concerns the tension between system-focused formulations of quality (continuity of care, inter-organisational collaboration, data monitoring) and need-focused formulations (personalised, accessible, trust-based support). Professionals and referrers tended to stress the former, while families emphasised the latter. Bridging these orientations requires both process- and outcome-based indicators. Their absence was especially visible in decisions about starting and completing trajectories.

The reflexive cycles also showed that many quality themes—such as accessibility, trust, and professional boundaries—are not unique to CARE but recur across social work. The

challenge is to unravel the specificity of each theme in its organisational and client context. This underlines the need for measurable indicators, but equally for a culture of ongoing dialogue in which practitioners, clients, and partners continuously contextualise, test, and refine what quality means in practice.

### Conclusions

By linking research and practice in real time, this study contributes to a reflection-driven quality system in social care. Beyond the immediate context, the findings show how co-defining quality can inform next-generation frameworks in social work—frameworks that integrate robust indicators with sustained reflexive processes, and that value both system reliability and client experience. Such an approach strengthens practice, supports organisational learning, and informs evidence-informed policy.

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## The development of social skills of children in permanent care: the analysis of social workers experiences

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The aim of the study is to identify the development of social skills of children in permanent care, based on the experiences of social workers working in family-based homes.

Qualitative research was conducted for the study using a semi-structured interview method. The research questions were: 1. What social skills of children social workers successfully develops through daily activities? 2. What challenges social workers face in development the social skills of children in permanent care? The data obtained during the study was analysed using qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis was based on an inductive logic of category formation based on the study data. The study involved 15 professionals working in family-based homes from different regions of Lithuania.

The study showed that children in care develop the following social skills in various everyday activities: polite communication, expressing and managing emotions appropriately, resolving conflicts constructively, cooperating with others, planning and organizing activities, solving problems and making decisions, and learning to resist peer pressure. The study shows that challenges in the development of social skills in children in care occur at the level of the family-based home, the child's family and the child individually.

## Fluid boundaries between formal and informal social work practices

Elke Plovie<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ucll

Interdisciplinary social work and social work research mostly focusses on how social work interrelates with other disciplines such as health care, urban planning, etc. and looks at how interdisciplinarity is key in addressing wicked problems in today's society. In this presentation I focus on a very specific form of interdisciplinarity, that is on the dialectical relationship between formal and informal actors in social work practices.

Today, informal actors such as volunteers, active citizens in the neighborhood, grass-roots organizations, social movements and activists are playing a vital role in realizing human rights and bringing about social change (Schrooten, Thys & Debruyne, 2019). They are for example involved in realizing the right to housing for migrant families (Debruyne & Plovie, 2025), are engaged in caring neighborhood initiatives (Plovie & Goris, 2023) or are advocating for equal rights for persons with disabilities.

The active role of informal actors is off course nothing new to social work, as in fact this is how social work started all together. In Belgium, charity initiatives from the church and the local guilds and later on, the labour unions and the feminist movements, prepared the way for the professionalization of social work (Claessens, 2017).

Recent 'participation turns' in policy (Dean, 2017; Garrett, 2018; Roets, Vanderkindere & De Stercke, 2018; De Rynck & Steyaert, 2019) invite citizens to actively engage while at the same time there is a bottom-up movement of citizens organizing themselves (Hurenkamp, Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2006; Holemans, Van de Velde, De Moor & Kint, 2018; Plovie, 2019; Schrooten, Thys & Debruyne, 2019, Schrooten & Welschen, 2022).

This presentation will deepdive into to the dialectical relationship between formal and informal actors in social work practices. I will make use of two empirical researches to construct a framework to understand this dynamic. In a first research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with citizen initiatives and questioned their collaboration with formal social work practices. In a second study, I focused on the collaboration between formal and informal actors in the specific context of care at the neighborhood level. In an action-research we both observed and intervened in this dynamic.

In the framework I present, I will challenge the strict demarcation between 'formal' and 'informal', identify different models of interaction between the formal and informal actors, question which kind of knowledge is valued and the claims each of those actors make. Dzur's (2008) framework on the democratic professional provides on interesting perspective to define the role of professional social workers in this dialectic relationship.

## SIMULATION AS A REFLECTIVE LEARNING METHOD IN THE EDUCATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS: A SINGLE CASE STUDY

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In 2022, the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards and the Social Work Accreditation Standards formally recognized simulation as one of a key pedagogical approach in the preparation of social work students for professional practice.

Simulation-based learning is an educational method that enables students to practice and develop professional skills in a safe and controlled environment (Gaba, 2007). A growing body of research supports the role of simulation in fostering skill acquisition in social work education (Badger & MacNeil, 2002; Bogo et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2018). However, further research is required to examine how simulations influence student competence in practice, including the transferability of skills to field training, readiness for employment, and the measurable development of competency-based skills (Roberson, 2021; Sunarich, 2017; Jefferies et al., 2023; Kipang, 2022; Baker et al., 2022). Schürmann et al. (2025) advise further investigation of how debriefing supports collaboration within interdisciplinary or intercultural teams.

This study explores simulation-based learning from the perspective of international students enrolled in the Erasmus Mundus European Master Programme “Social Work with Children and Youth” (ESWOCHY) (2020) implemented by four partner universities: Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Rīga Stradiņš University (Latvia), the Catholic University in Ruzomberok (Slovakia), and the University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal). The aim of the programme is to educate highly skilled professionals to take on leadership roles in international, intercultural, and comparative social work with children and youth. The two-year curriculum includes four semesters, each hosted in a different partner country—offering students a unique opportunity to gain first-hand experience with diverse European approaches to social work. This student group is not only international but also interdisciplinary, as many participants bring prior professional experience from various fields.

The aim of this study is to analyze student reflections on the use of simulation as a reflective learning method in the study course on Interactive Methods with Children and Youth. The following research question guides the analysis:

How does post-simulation reflection during debriefing phase contribute to student learning in the context of social work?



**Method:** a qualitative research methodology involving focus group discussion and written reflection was applied. The study involved 17 students. Data were collected and recorded in May 2025. Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Analysis was based on qualitative thematic analysis.

Reflections on the simulation-based learning experiences demonstrate that the debriefing phase equips future social workers with essential knowledge and practical skills. The study also identifies limitations and potential improvements in the organization of the simulation's debriefing phase.

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## Between Hope and Uncertainty: Experiences of Ukrainian Mothers in the United States and Canada under Temporary Protection Statuses

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Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, over 6.9 million Ukrainians have fled abroad. More than half a million have resettled in the United States and Canada, with the U.S. implementing the Uniting for Ukraine humanitarian parole program and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Canada establishing the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET). These temporary protection statuses initially offered legal stay, benefits, and work authorization. As programs close, benefits are reduced, and permits near expiration, many displaced Ukrainians now face legal and economic limbo. This study explores the lived experiences of Ukrainian mothers navigating these shifting conditions. We conducted a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with 29 women aged 31–44, all holding higher education degrees and mothers of one to three children. Participants were recruited through Ukrainian community networks, social media, and local support organizations across the U.S. and Canada. Interviews, conducted between 2024 and 2025, examined migration trajectories, legal status, employment, housing, access to benefits, and perceptions of the future. Transcripts were analyzed thematically to identify shared challenges and differences between national contexts. Four key themes emerged. Legal liminality: participants described living “on borrowed time,” anxious about losing legal status, work permits and complex renewal procedures. Economic and housing insecurity: cuts to benefits left families struggling to cover rent, food, and childcare. Many reported frequent relocations, reliance on host families, or overcrowded living arrangements. Barriers to labor market participation: despite high educational attainment, respondents faced language barriers, lack of childcare, and non-recognition of foreign credentials. Some accepted survival jobs below their skill level; others were unable to work once authorizations expired. Psychosocial stress and intergenerational effects: prolonged uncertainty contributed to anxiety, depression, and disrupted parenting, with consequences for children's schooling and sense of security. Our findings show that while temporary protection offered crucial initial refuge, its time-limited nature generates chronic instability. The case of Ukrainian mothers illustrates how humanitarian programs risk producing long-term vulnerability if not paired with clear pathways to durable solutions. This presentation situates these experiences within the evolving policy frameworks of the U.S. and Canada, showing how administrative timelines and benefit structures shape refugee well-being. Extending or regularizing protection status, streamlining work authorization renewals, improving recognition of foreign qualifications, and expanding language and employment support are necessary to prevent further marginalization. By centering the voices of highly educated mothers navigating forced displacement, this study contributes to social work scholarship and policy debates, offering actionable recommendations to safeguard the dignity, stability, and resilience of Ukrainian refugee families.

## Bridging knowledge and practice: how experts by experience support culturally sensitive care for people with challenging behaviour

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### Background and purpose

Interprofessional education (IPE) has long been promoted as a way to prepare professionals for collaborative practice. Yet, as Bolger (2020) demonstrates, such learning is often fragmented and siloed. A similar challenge is evident in the field of mental health care, where both professionals and experts-by-experience (EBE) report a lack of attention to culturally-appropriate care for people with challenging behavior. Professionals frequently feel uncertain about how to respond in diverse cultural contexts, while EBE struggle to make their lived experience visible and actionable.

This project addresses the central question: How can EBE contribute to improving culturally appropriate care for people with challenging behavior? The specific objectives are to identify culture-specific elements of experiential knowledge with regard to different mental health concerns, to explore how these can contribute to more culturally appropriate practices, and to develop collaborative learning processes between professionals and EBE.

### Methods

The study adopts a qualitative, participatory design across 3 settings that involve experts-by experience (EBE):

(1) EBE with a Dutch-Caribbean background working in the Netherlands; (2) EBE working in the Caribbean; (3) EBE with a Dutch background working in the Netherlands, and 2 settings that involve Dutch-Caribbean professionals without lived experience. Participants are recruited through professional networks and community organizations. Data are collected through focus groups, interviews, and collaborative workshops that encourage reflection and knowledge exchange. Measures focus on identifying culture-specific elements of experiential knowledge, barriers to their recognition in professional practice, and strategies for embedding such knowledge in education and organizational routines. Data analysis combines thematic analysis with cross-case comparison to capture differences and commonalities across cultural groups and professional roles.

### Findings

Preliminary results indicate three main challenges:

- 1) differing perspectives and priorities: while all groups acknowledge the importance of culture-sensitive care, they vary in how urgent and central they perceive it to be;
- 2) a persistent knowledge gap: both professionals and EBE have limited opportunities for structural exchange of culture-specific knowledge, resulting in feelings of uncertainty;
- 3) weak institutional support: organizational structures and curricula offer few mechanisms to embed culturally appropriate experiential knowledge, which hampers both education and practice.

The project also identifies opportunities. Experts by experience provide valuable insights into culturally specific interpretations of behavior, and when integrated into professional training and organizational routines, they enhance professionals' confidence and capacity to act. Collaborative learning settings, such as knowledge networks and peer groups, emerge as promising vehicles to bridge gaps.

**Conclusions and implications**

The study underscores that the barriers described by Bolger (2020) such as fragmented learning opportunities and structural collaboration requires institutional anchoring through knowledge networks, professional development materials, and curricula that value experiential knowledge as a legitimate source of expertise.

For social work professionals in particular, practice implications are threefold: (1) in education, curricula must integrate culturally appropriate experiential knowledge to prepare students for diverse settings; (2) in practice, professionals need structured opportunities to learn from EBE; and (3) in interdisciplinary collaboration, building shared frameworks and mutual recognition of expertise is essential to overcome disciplinary divides.

## Exploring Potential Pathways from Adverse Childhood Experiences to Bullying and Victimization: Implications for Clinical Practice and Policy

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### Background and Purpose

Literature suggests a strong connection between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and bullying. However, individuals who experience ACEs probably go through various behavioral and psychosocial problems before eventually exhibiting bullying behavior. Individuals with ACEs are susceptible to psychological distress, which can reinforce social difficulties. Depressive symptoms can put children in a vulnerable state, increasing their risk of being bullied by their peers. Depressive symptoms are also a risk marker for bullying behavior. ACEs have been documented to be directly related to problems in socialization, such as difficulties with friends and peers, which is a salient predictor of bullying and victimization. The current study proposes and tests the pathways from ACEs to bullying perpetration and victimization for male and female youth.

### Methods

This study utilized data from the 2023 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH). The NSCH collects annual parent-reported data on key indicators of children's health, well-being, and service needs across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This study focused on 18,397 caregivers of adolescents, aged 12 to 17 years. The final analytic sample included 16,170 caregivers of adolescents. Measures include ACEs, bullying victimization, bullying perpetration, youth depression, and covariates (child sex, child age, race/ethnicity, caregiver age, educational level, number of children at home, and family income). Bivariate analyses, confirmatory factor analyses, and structural equation modeling were conducted.

### Results

ACEs were significantly associated with bullying victimization for both sexes. ACEs were positively associated with bullying perpetrators for females only. ACEs were positively related to depression for both sexes and difficulty making friends for females. Depression was positively associated with difficulty making friends for both sexes. Depression was found to be positively associated with bullying victimization and perpetration for both sexes.

### Conclusions and Implications

Interventions should address the psychological and social challenges faced by at-risk youth, particularly those affected by caregiver-related adversities. Practitioners should incorporate validated ACEs screening tools into assessments in schools, child welfare systems, and community health settings to identify children at risk of developing psychosocial difficulties. Accessible, trauma-informed mental health services are essential. Practitioners should collaborate with other professionals to provide interventions aimed at reducing depressive

symptoms. Cognitive-behavioral therapy can be effective in addressing depression in children with ACEs. Practitioners can also implement programs aimed at improving communication, conflict resolution, and peer bonding. Moreover, anti-bullying programs should focus on depression prevention and improving socialization and peer relationships. Cognitive-behavioral therapy for depression and peer mentoring for communication and bonding with peers are two strategies that could help adolescents who have been through difficult situations avoid these negative outcomes. Teacher training in recognizing and responding to trauma, creating safe classroom climates, and implementing restorative justice approaches could also reduce the negative effects of ACEs and improve peer interactions. Practitioners should engage in community-level advocacy to strengthen support networks for families and children. Partnerships with policymakers and community organizations can promote resilience by addressing structural factors that exacerbate ACEs and their outcomes.

## Social Work Leadership in Interdisciplinary Psychiatric Rehabilitation: Lessons in Potential from a Psychosocial Clubhouse

Dr Lydia Ogden<sup>1</sup>

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Psychiatric rehabilitation is, by definition, interdisciplinary work. The work of psychiatric rehabilitation integrates psychiatry, psychology, nursing, occupational therapy, peer specialists, and social work. Within this ecosystem, social work's potential to lead is significant but underexamined. This paper explores the leadership role of social work—both actual and latent—in advancing psychiatric rehabilitation through the psychosocial clubhouse model, an evidence-based community program that supports recovery and social inclusion for individuals living with serious mental illness.

Drawing on findings from an ongoing ethnographic study of a psychosocial clubhouse in the northeastern United States, I note how social work's core values—dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, and commitment to social justice—are interwoven throughout the interdisciplinary dynamics of clubhouse work. However, few clubhouse staff have BSW or MSW degrees. Through participant observation, interviews with staff and members, and narrative analysis, I examine strengths and missed opportunities for social work leadership at the micro (relational), mezzo (programmatic), and macro (policy and systems) levels.

Currently, clubhouses excel at building intentional partnerships with community agencies to address members' housing, employment, and healthcare needs. However, the unique contributions of social work could further deepen recovery-oriented practice. These include but are not limited to: Embedding trauma-informed care more systematically; facilitating more intentional use of group dynamics in non-clinical settings (such as member activities in work units); developing systematic approaches to help members navigate complex service systems; and training interdisciplinary teams to recognize and respond to structural barriers impacting recovery. The absence of formally trained social workers can leave clinical leadership diffuse, resulting in underutilization of evidence-informed interventions and limiting advocacy at systems levels—as evidenced by lack of policy-maker and public awareness of the clubhouse model.

Increasing social work presence and leadership in clubhouses specifically, and within psychiatric rehabilitation more broadly, could strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, elevate member voices, and expand the reach of evidence-informed psychiatric rehabilitation practices embodied within the clubhouse model. Recommendations include integrating clubhouse-based case studies into social work curricula, increasing social work practicum placements in clubhouses, and forging academic–community partnerships to cultivate the next generation of social work leaders in this essential psychiatric rehabilitation setting.



## Identifying challenges and co-creating solutions for LGBTQIA+ young people who have had statutory social work involvement in Aotearoa New Zealand

Dr John Fenaughty<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Auckland | Waipapa Taumata Rau

### Background and Purpose

Little formal research has explored the experiences of takatāpui and rainbow (LGBTQIA+) young people who have been involved with statutory social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. An analysis from a large, representative, and general youth study identified significant disparities for young people at the intersection of these identities and experiences (King-Finau et al., 2022). This presentation details findings from a project that brought together takatāpui and rainbow young people who have had statutory social work experience with youth advocates and researchers to explore, with greater nuance, the challenges facing these young people as evidenced by data from a large LGBTQIA+ youth-specific survey. The purpose of this presentation is to share the process and some specific outcomes generated by co-creating knowledge and recommendations with LGBTQIA+ young people.

### Methods

Four takatāpui and rainbow young people with care experience, alongside three youth voice advocates, were invited to participate in a series of workshops to identify challenges facing young people who reported statutory care involvement via data queries to a database from a large-scale LGBTQIA+ youth survey (ages 14-26 inclusive). The database was formed from data collected in the Identify survey (N = 4,784), which included 418 young people who reported involvement with statutory social work services. The four young people, along with the adults involved, were integral partners throughout the research process, co-directing data analysis and formulating recommendations and solutions across four key domains. An ecological systems analysis is utilised to frame some of the findings in this presentation.

### Findings

Overarching findings included the confirmation of wide-ranging and significant disparities for LGBTQIA+ young people who reported statutory social work involvement compared to those who did not have involvement. Additionally, young people with involvement had a significantly higher likelihood of other intersectional experiences (e.g., racism, ableism, deprivation, etc.) compared to those with no involvement. Intersectionally relevant solutions across multiple ecological levels are required to produce lasting positive changes. For instance, at the microsystem, ensuring young people have more autonomy in their day-to-day lives (including chosen social connections, financial expenditure [especially on identity-affirming experiences and products/clothes], health care access, and cultural and identity supports). At the mesosystem, improved processes to manage the sharing of young people's developing identity markers to prevent the need for repetitive and draining coming-out (or being outted) experiences. At the exosystem and macrosystem levels policy changes that improve statutory caregiver selection; placement in LGBTQIA+ appropriate settings; and training for all carers and professionals on LGBTQIA+ young people, especially trans, non-binary and gender diverse young people, and their needs, including within statutory contexts.



**Conclusions and Implications**

Knowledge co-creation with takatāpui and rainbow young people is valuable, important, and useful in addressing the myriad of challenges reported. The findings reiterate the need for a systemic analysis of statutory social work experiences and highlight important opportunities for more effective social work practice to improve the experience of LGBTQIA+ young people.

## Social work research addressing the problem of NEET youth: Results of scoping review and implications for further research

Professor Mary Collins<sup>1</sup>, Professor Sook Hyun Kim<sup>2</sup>, Ms. Rachel Dooley<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Boston University School Of Social Work, <sup>2</sup> Salisbury University School of Social Work

### Background and purpose

Youth who are disconnected from work and school are recognized as a social problem across the globe. The term “NEET” (not in education, employment or training) is most prominent in Europe; “disconnected” or “opportunity” youth are more common in the U.S.; “nini” is used in Central and South America; in Asian countries “hikikomori” is used to describe young people who are socially isolated. There are numerous health and social risks for this population. Social work frequently engages with these young people but the extent to which social work research has contributed to the knowledge base is not known. The current study conducted a scoping review of the literature to examine how social work research has been engaged in addressing problems of NEET youth.

### Methods

The search strategy included a search of five databases: Web of Science, Social Service Abstracts, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Social Science Full Text, and Social Science Premium Collection. Searches included the following string of terms: “NEET” OR “not in education employment or training” OR “opportunity youth” OR “nini” OR “disconnected youth” OR “hikikomori” AND “social work.” Identified articles also needed to be written after 2015, be written in English, and be peer reviewed. From the searches, 3,161 articles were identified. Identified articles were then uploaded to Covidence, an online program that streamlines systematic and scoping review processes. After two series of screenings by the researchers for relevance, a total of 86 articles were examined in full text review.

### Findings

Studies were conducted in over 30 countries with most studies being conducted in the United States (13), Hong Kong (12), and the United Kingdom (9). The 86 articles represented social work in one or more of the following ways: social work author, social work journal, social work content. Some other professions were identified in the sample; over 20 professions were noted with the majority being from psychology (19), sociology (10), education (7). Most of the 86 articles were connected to social work based on the authors’ biographical statement or location in a school of social work. Social work content, mostly via interventions was less common. These studies, however, are critical and identify ways in which social work practice is addressing the problem of NEET youth. The reviewed literature is diverse and heterogeneous, addressing structural inequalities, psychosocial challenges, educational and vocational support, and intervention strategies. Studies highlight the importance of coordinated, flexible, and strengths-based approaches, with social work playing a key role in providing holistic and coordinating services to youth. The review also identifies gaps in cross cultural comparisons, long-term outcomes, and research on underrepresented regions.

**Conclusions and implications**

Social workers work with NEET youth in various settings yet social work research appears underrepresented in the scholarly literature. This is a missed opportunity for the profession of social work. The study results have implications for increasing the visibility of social work research in this practice space and identify specific ways in which social work research is uniquely relevant to this critical social problem.

## Healing Digital Wounds: Empowering Practitioners to Address Cyber Abuse Among Young People

Dr Eleni Athanasiou<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Panagiotis Parpottas<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Thanos Koulos<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> European University Cyprus, <sup>2</sup> IDM Consulting

Cyber abuse among young Europeans has reached an alarming level. The anonymity afforded by the internet fuels behaviours such as online bullying, image-based abuse, and revenge pornography, creating persistent threats for young people. Unlike traditional bullying, cyber abuse can infiltrate the safety of one's home, leaving victims feeling powerless and isolated.

Global studies underscore the scale of this problem: one in three children report experiencing online bullying. In Europe, 33% of girls and 20% of boys encountered disturbing online content monthly in 2020—a figure likely worsened by the pandemic. Nearly one in six contacts to EU-funded helplines in 2022 concerned cyberbullying (European Parliament, 2023).

The DigiHeal Project (KA210-YOU-4F630283), funded under the Erasmus+ programme, seeks to address this urgent challenge by developing innovative training materials and fostering collaboration among experts across Europe. By integrating diverse perspectives and approaches, the project aims to create a more inclusive and effective response to cyber abuse.

Launched in September 2025 and scheduled for completion in August 2026, DigiHeal brings together an international consortium of experts from the Netherlands and Cyprus. Using a mixed-methods approach, the project will collect both quantitative and qualitative data. First, a survey of young people aged 16–18 will assess the prevalence, impact, and underlying factors of cyber abuse behaviours. This will be followed by focus groups with social workers, youth workers, and educators to gain professional insights.

The findings will underpin the development of future interventions to combat cyber abuse by: equipping youth workers and educators with practical tools and knowledge; fostering inclusion and diversity; reducing stigma and strengthening victim support; and promoting policy change to ensure a safer online environment for young people. Ultimately, DigiHeal aspires to become a catalyst for systemic change, empowering professionals to protect young people and build a more resilient digital society.

**Keywords:** cyber abuse; young people; victims; perpetrators; practitioners

## Guardianship in the Greek context of Child protection: Bridging the Gap between Law and Child-Friendly Practice for migrant and refugee children.

(Within the EU-funded GUARD-UP project, coordinated by the Centre for European Constitutional Law - CECL)

Dr Argyro Karakosta<sup>1</sup>, Mrs. Melina Chalkidi<sup>2</sup>, Mrs. Maria Koumianaki<sup>2</sup>, Dr Panagiotis Douros<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Vasilios Ioakimidis<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Work, University Of West Attica, <sup>2</sup> Centre for European Constitutional Law - CECL

### Background and purpose

Across Europe, polarised debates on migration give frontline guardianship systems international relevance. Greece remains a principal EU entry point for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), sustaining long-term pressure on reception and protection. Despite reforms establishing a national guardianship system for UASC, questions persist over how a child-rights institution can co-exist with well-embedded practices, roles, and potential gaps in service provision. Within the EU-funded GUARD-UP consortium – aiming to strengthen guardianship across Greece, Italy, Poland, Cyprus, Croatia and Belgium through capacity-building, peer networking and evidence generation – this paper examines the gap between policy intent and frontline implementation for Guardianship Mandated Persons (GMPs) in Greece. We assess alignment with child-friendly standards – rights-based, age-appropriate, participatory and protective (UNCRC General Comment No. 14; EU FRA guidance) – in settings where children are often processed through adult-centred systems. Findings speak to broader European efforts to reconcile borders and child-protection.

### Methods

Mixed-methods: (1) structured systems assessment (GUARD-UP PAS-Tool); (2) desk review of Greek legislation, policies and procedures (June–September 2024); (3) qualitative fieldwork in Athens (1–2 October 2024): two in-person focus groups with GMPs/ coordinators (n=14; PRAKSIS NGO: 7 women; METAdrasi NGO: 4 women, 3 men), 1.5–2 hours each, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed and thematically coded. A three-day stakeholder visit provided additional consultations and field observations.

### Findings

System enablers. A comprehensive legal base; clarified roles; state supervision and evaluation; mandatory training; and crisis-response capacities via the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM); peer Mentorship Project supporting UASC, Best Interests Procedure (BIP) toolkit.

Practice gaps undermining child-friendliness.

- Timeliness: Recurrent delays in guardian appointment weaken early best-interest representation.

- Coverage/continuity: Children's mobility and a fixed 70/30 provider split (METAdrasi/PRAKSIS) complicate seamless representation and relational continuity.
- Integration deficits of the Greek child protection system: Limited transition-to-adulthood housing, scarce mental-health/substance-use services and absence of day-centre alternatives heighten risks.
- Adult-centric procedures: Despite child-friendly measures – e.g., a complaints mechanism with multi-channel access and child-friendly leaflets, and a standardised BIP for all actors supporting a child – implementation gaps persist. Limited communication/uptake and the fact that using the mechanism often presupposes a relatively “mature and goal-oriented” child constrain participation; specific accessibility measures for information documents are not mandated. Bureaucratic duplication and dispersed reporting tools reduce time for direct work, and inter-agency inconsistencies in recognising the guardian's role restrict timely, coordinated best-interest reasoning.
- Workforce sustainability: High caseloads, turnover, limited supervision and largely front-loaded induction training – without recurrent, practice-anchored refreshers - leave guardians overburdened; legal vs psychosocial skill mismatches.
- Shifting profiles/volume: Fluctuating flows and rising population of Egyptian UASC increase case complexity.

### Conclusions and implications

To deliver child-friendly guardianship, interdisciplinary priorities include: (1)streamline guardianship appointment to meet strict timeframes; (2)codify rapid safety evaluations for precarious living situations; (3)scale specialised services (mental health, legal aid, interpretation) and expand transition-to-adulthood housing; (4)introduce safeguarded, education-linked work permits to reduce exploitation risk; (5)institutionalise external professional supervision and recurrent, practice-based training tailored to legal and psychosocial skill gaps; (6)mandate periodic independent evaluation with children's participation.

**Keywords:** guardianship; child protection system; unaccompanied minors; Greece; child-friendly services; evidence-informed policy; social work practice

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**Keywords:** guardianship; child protection system; unaccompanied minors; Greece; child-friendly services; evidence-informed policy; social work practice



# Evaluating the Applicability of AI Avatars in Immersive Training on Coercive Control in Social Work

Dr Anastasia Karpunina<sup>1</sup>, Dr Michaela Rogers<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Univeristy of Sheffield

## Background and purpose

Coercive control (CC) represents one of the most complex forms of abuse encountered by social workers. More than 45,000 CC offences were recorded in England and Wales (ONS, 2024), though the real figure is likely much higher. Despite criminalisation through the Serious Crime Act (2015) and recognition of children as victims under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), evidence from the BBC (2024) highlights that students and early-career practitioners frequently struggle to recognise and respond to CC. Current training is predominantly theoretical, with interviewing as the main assessment method, which is particularly problematic in CC cases, especially when working with very young children, disabled children, or in situations where fear, stigma or loyalty inhibit disclosure.

In response to this rising prevalence and the urgent need for innovative pedagogy, this study evaluates the feasibility and applicability of AI avatars in immersive training for social work students. It explores whether and how these technologies can enhance preparedness to identify, assess and manage risks associated with CC in social work practice.

## Methods

An existing workshop at the University of Sheffield was augmented in 2025 with immersive scenes using AI avatars delivered via WondaVR. Four scenarios were included:

- identifying signs of CC in a perpetrator's narrative;
- engaging with a victim of identity abuse in an LGBTQ+ couple;
- observing a home visit to a family with suspected CC;
- and conversing with an Expert by Experience (a CC survivor) about their experience with social work services.

The six-hour, face-to-face workshop involved social work students (n=8). Data were gathered via online surveys (pre-, mid- and post-workshop), an in-person focus group immediately after the session, and follow-up online interviews over one month. Quantitative measures were used to assess changes in knowledge and skills, while qualitative analysis explored students' experiences of participating in immersive training with AI avatars.

## Findings

Using AI avatars enhanced students' confidence in communication, offering opportunities to practise skills while simultaneously reflecting on how and why the avatar of a victim or perpetrator responded as it did. Participants highly valued the chance to rehearse sensitive interactions in safe yet realistic scenarios, and highlighted the adaptability and authenticity of AI avatars. They also noted that immersive training required greater attentiveness and active engagement, including practising observation and verbal skills, and stimulated more discussion and reflection than traditional methods. From the facilitators' perspective, immersive scenarios demanded substantial preparation, including scenario design, avatar

prompt development, technical support and strict safeguards against bias or inappropriate content.

**Conclusions and Implications**

This pilot study demonstrates that AI-avatar immersive training can strengthen students' preparedness for working with CC and complements traditional teaching methods. Successful implementation depends on careful preparation and facilitation with attention to both technical and ethical aspects. Future research should examine the longer-term retention of knowledge and skills, refine methods for developing training with AI avatars, and establish evidence-informed standards for integrating AI avatars into social work education.

## Immersive Learning Across Borders: Piloting the ERIS VR Showcase on Child Protection in European Countries

Dr Anastasia Karpunina<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Univeristy Of Sheffield

### Background and Purpose

Child protection systems across Europe share common principles but differ significantly in regulation, services, research themes and professional practices. Social work students and educators often lack accessible, comparative resources that present these differences in an engaging, interactive way. At the same time, immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) offer unique opportunities for situated, experiential, and cross-boundaries learning. The European Research Institute for Social Work (ERIS) developed the VR Showcase - a virtual exhibition platform with multimedia materials and conversational AI avatars. Four member countries (England, France, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) contributed structured information on their national child protection systems.

The aims of this pilot study were to (1) evaluate the ERIS VR Showcase as an educational resource for social work students and educators, (2) explore its potential for wider use in social work research and education, and (3) test AI avatars as a tool for collecting data in social research settings.

### Methods

We employed a case study-based, mixed-methods design. Participants were 50 social work students and educators from four European countries recruited through ERIS.

Before entering the VR showcase, participants interacted with an AI avatar that collected demographic information (university, country, study level), prior experience with VR or virtual exhibitions, baseline knowledge of European child protection systems, and expectations for the visit. Participants then accessed the ERIS VR Showcase via smartphone, desktop, or VR headset and freely explored the country rooms. The system automatically logged navigation patterns and avatar interactions. After the visit, AI avatar conducted a short conversational survey about overall impressions, knowledge gained, perceived usefulness, suggestions for improvement, and ideas for integrating VR exhibitions into their teaching or learning. Data were anonymised. Quantitative measures were analysed descriptively; qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns in user experience, perceived educational benefits, and the feasibility of AI-driven data collection.

### Findings

Preliminary data indicate high engagement, with participants spending on average over 15 minutes per room and interacting frequently with avatars. Early thematic patterns suggest increased awareness of cross-national differences in child protection and positive attitudes toward using VR exhibitions in teaching. The AI avatars successfully collected demographic and feedback data in a conversational format, but their performance required careful prompt design and iterative refinement to ensure accurate and consistent responses. Participants also provided constructive suggestions for improving accessibility, interactivity, and avatar behaviour.

**Conclusions and Implications**

This pilot demonstrates that immersive VR exhibitions can enhance comparative learning in social work education, offering students and educators a dynamic way to explore child protection systems across Europe. It also shows the potential of conversational AI avatars not only as learning guides but as tools for collecting social research data inside VR environments.

The study's findings have implications for curriculum development, international collaboration, and methodological innovation. VR showcases could be scaled to include more countries, integrated into training modules for educators, and used for professional orientation to attract young people to social work.

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# RGU Campus Map





