Emotional Labour in Child and Family Social Work Teams:

A Hybrid Ethnography

Sara Carder

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Abstract

Child and family social work – particularly child protection - is recognised as an emotionally demanding job with implications for worker resilience, retention, and the quality of decision-making for vulnerable children and families. The requirement to manage and display emotions as part of the professional role involves emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) which creates a performative aspect to social work practice which can be experienced as emotionally demanding. Support to manage these emotional demands is therefore vital. To date, dominant discourses of emotional resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and emotional labour have largely focused on a) the individual social worker's capacity to manage or b) collegial peer support. Despite the recognition that these forms of support are enacted within the team setting, few studies have taken the team as the primary focus of research. Existing ethnographic studies that have explored support at the team level have largely considered the management of anxiety through a psycho-social paradigm (e.g., through the concept of emotional containment). Other studies have focused on participants' retrospective accounts of managing the emotional demands of practice using interviews and surveys rather than examining how team support is enacted and experienced on a day-to-day basis. Few studies have considered the performative nature of practice and how team support is enacted across the increasingly online and hybrid spaces inhabited by the social work team.

This study addresses these gaps by using innovative hybrid ethnographic methods to understand the role of team support in two child and family social work teams in local authorities rated as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. This study examines how everyday activities, relationships, and interactions across physical and online team settings either support or hinder social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. Drawing on Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy, this study builds upon the 'team as a secure base' (Biggart et al 2017), 'team as containment' (Ruch 2007) and team as a 'community of coping' (Cook and Carder 2023, Korczynski 2003) by providing a novel framework for conceptualising the performative nature of team support. The '*theatre model of team support'* considers how social work teams help to manage the emotional demands of practice by exploring the interdependent nature of 1) *where* the team is situated (setting), 2) *who* the individual team members are (roles) and 3) *how* stories about practice, the team and the wider profession are told (scripts). This in turn has important practice implications at an individual, team, organisational and macro level.

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List of abbreviations

AP	Advanced Practitioner
BASW	British Association of Social Workers
CIN	Child in Need
DfE	Department for Education
FSW	Family Support Worker
ICS	Integrated Children's Systems
II	Individual Interviews
ILACS	Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services
LA	Local Authority
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
NQSW	Newly Qualified Social Worker
Obs	Observation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework
SP	Senior Practitioner
SWE	Social Work England
TGI	Team Group Interview
TM	Team Manager

Data key

The sources of data used in the finding's chapters are referenced in the following way:

1) The method used: Observations (OfficeOb, or OnlineOb), Individual interviews (II), or Team group interview (TGI)
2) The participants role: Team manager (TM), Practice manager (PM), Senior practitioner (SP), Advanced practitioner (AP), Specialist systemic practitioner (SSP), Team Clinician (TC), Social worker (SW), Newly Qualified social worker (NQSW), Family support worker (FSW), Student (ST), Team coordinator (TC).
3) The team: Team 1 (T1), or Team 2 (T2).

All participants names have been anonymised using pseudonyms throughout this study.

Introduction to the thesis

Achieving good outcomes for children and families engaged in the social care system in England relies upon a healthy, confident, and competent workforce (MacAlister 2022, Munro 2011). However, child and family social work - in particular, child protection - has been identified as an inherently emotionally demanding area of practice. The longstanding impact of these working conditions have been associated with staff burnout and ongoing recruitment and retention issues in social work (McFadden et al 2018, Ravalier et al 2021, Tham 2022, Carpenter and Webb 2012). As identified by McFadden et al's (2014:156) systematic literature review 'child protection workers suffered from more psychological distress than the general population and many had distress levels greater than those reported by typical outpatient mental health clients.' Similarly, a systematic review by Moriarty et al (2015) exploring issues across the social work profession found that one third to a half of the workforce were above the clinical threshold for stress. The impact of these emotional demands, reported by Galpin et al (2018), included increased numbers of social workers' taking stress related time off work, with typical burnout estimated at 7 years. These findings are reinforced by Ravalier's (2018) survey of 1600 social workers which found 52% intended to leave the profession within 15 months, with 55% of those working in children's services intending to leave social work all together. The most recent analysis of social work retention found that 2,780 child and family social workers left local authority social work altogether in 2020/21, the equivalent of 8.6% of the workforce (Department for Education, 2022c).

However, whilst the emotional demands of practice have long been associated with negative psychological, emotional and physical health issues for social workers, there is also evidence to suggest many social workers are satisfied in their practice. A recent survey of 2,000 social workers (BASW 2022) indicated that a significant majority either agreed (43.7%) or strongly agreed (16.9%) with the statement "I am happy working in the social work profession". In addition, a small but growing body of research identifies that child and family social workers continue to not only survive, but even thrive in practice (Collins 2008, Nordick 2002, Rose and Palattiyil 2020, Stalker et al 2007, Wendt et al 2011). The emotional demands of practice and how they are managed therefore has important implications for children and families in need of support, for workforce wellbeing, social work organisations and the wider social work profession.

This thesis reports on a hybrid ethnographic study of two local authority child and family social work teams in England. It identifies the emotional demands of practice and how they are managed within a team context. Given the timing of this study, social workers' experience of practice and team support during the Covid-19 pandemic is also captured.

The structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts. Part one is the literature review, consisting of three chapters. The first chapter explores how emotions are understood in social work, outlining two dominant psychosocial paradigms. The chapter then identifies the different sources of emotional demands experienced by social workers and the consequences of these for their practice. The second chapter identifies the different ways social workers manage the emotional demands of practice. It identifies four conceptual frameworks in the existing literature (emotional resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence and emotional labour). The literature highlights that peer support plays a key role in helping social workers to manage the emotional demands of their work. Therefore, chapter three of the literature review focuses specifically on the role of teams in child and family social work. The first part of the chapter identifies the different team structures and settings in local authority social care, and the way in which teamwork underpins practice. The second part of the chapter draws on the three dominant paradigms of team support 1) team as a secure base, 2) team as containment and 3) team as a community of coping. The literature review concludes with a summary of the current gaps in the literature, providing the rationale for the present study.

Part two of the thesis outlines the methodology used in this research. The chapter describes how a critical realist (Bhaskar 1978) and psychosocial – sociologically oriented approach (Woodward 2015) was used as a means of exploring the interdependent nature of social workers' individual subjective emotional experience, and wider societal and team relationships structures and systems. Data was gathered using a hybrid ethnographic approach to capture the complexities of physical and online spaces occupied by social work teams during the Covid-19 pandemic. The chapter also details the rationale for using the Listening Guide (Doucet and Mauthner 2008) as an analytic framework and how this aligns with the overall methodology through which to capture psychological, social, structural, and reflexive processes within and across the data (Gilligan and Eddy 2017).

Part three outlines the findings of the study and is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explores the emotional demands experienced by social workers across the two teams. The findings supported much of the literature which included the emotional demands of 1) engaging families, 2) multi-agency working, 3) wider societal discourses about their role, 4) team membership and 5) working during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, team members predominately talked about the demands of emotional labour as part of performing their professional role (Hochschild 1983). The subsequent three findings' chapters therefore explore the way team support was enacted and performed - including the challenges and dilemmas – through the dramaturgical concepts of 1) stage setting, direction, and props, 2) team roles and 3) team scripts.

Part four discusses the significance of the findings in the context of the current literature and their implications for social work practice. Drawing on Hochschild's emotional labour (1979, 1983) and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy, a novel framework for conceptualising team support is provided. Managing the emotional demands of practice is not only a process but is also socially constructed. The '*theatre model of team support'* therefore builds on current models of team support by incorporating *where* the team are situated, *who* the individual team members are and *how* stories about practice, the team and the wider profession are told. This approach provides a useful tool to enable reflective conversations about the way emotions are experienced, processed and presented within the workplace at 1) an individual level, 2) the team and organisational level and 3) the wider macro level.

Part One: Literature review

This literature review explores the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers, the consequences of these demands and how these emotional demands are managed. Existing research identifies the team as a vital component in supporting social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. The literature review is therefore divided into the following three chapters:

Chapter one – Chapter one explores the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers with a particular focus on those engaged in child protection work. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one explores how emotions are understood and used in social work practice through two different psychosocial paradigms, 1) a psychoanalytic perspective and 2) a sociological perspective. The study of emotions in social work is dominated by psychoanalytic schools of thought, with the sociological tradition under-researched and thus identifying a gap in the literature. The second section outlines the different sources of emotional demands and their consequences for social worker wellbeing and practice. Drawing on an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1999), these are found at the micro (individual level), meso (team and organisational level) and the macro (community and societal level). These are grouped under three key themes 1) direct contact with abuse and neglect, 2) the organisational context and 3) the socio-political context. Given the timing of this study a further theme 4) social work during the Covid-19 pandemic, will also be explored.

Chapter two – Chapter two explores the different ways social workers manage the emotional demands of practice identified in chapter one. In ascending order of prevalence within the literature, four conceptual frameworks were identified, 1) emotional resilience, 2) critical reflection, 3) emotional intelligence, and 4) emotional labour. Each of these approaches involve specific interventions for supporting social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. These are outlined in turn. Whilst not always explicitly stated, a key underpinning theme in these approaches is the role of peer and team support.

Chapter three – Chapter three focuses on team support in child and family social work and is divided into two sections. The first section outlines existing team structures including hierarchical, systemic, and multidisciplinary approaches, as well as team settings which include small office, open plan and hybrid working environments. Teamwork and the influence of diversity amongst its members is also discussed in the context of emotional support. The second part of this chapter draws on literature that explores how teams enact emotional support in practice. This part of the chapter is structured through the following three concepts, 1) team as secure base, 2) team as containment 3) team as a community of coping. The chapter concludes with a summary of identified gaps in the existing literature which provides the rationale for this study.

Literature review strategy

A review of the literature was conducted using a narrative and thematic synthesis approach. A narrative review is ‘aimed at identifying and summarising what has previously been published, avoiding duplications, and seeking new study areas not yet addressed’ (Ferrari 2015:230). This study was concerned with how teams support social workers with the emotional demands of practice. A narrative review helped to identify key trends and their interconnections within the literature, which was helpful due to the potential breadth and exploratory nature of the subject (Baumeister and Leary 1997, Thomas and Harden 2008). Given the potential abundance of published literature, it was important to develop an appropriate search strategy. This helped to define the limits of the search by establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria. Key concepts were used to create Boolean search terms such as ("social work*" AND (team* OR Org* OR culture) AND (child* OR fam*) AND (resilience OR Emotion* OR Demand*) and applied to relevant databases. The search primarily focused on peer reviewed literature including journals, books and academic theses published in the last 20 years and written in English. Seminal texts considered relevant to the topic that were published more than 20 years ago were also included. Given the focus of this study on social work practice and team support in England, the literature search primarily drew on UK-based studies. However, international studies were also drawn upon to explore comparisons and similarities across international workforce development research and practices. References from the literature were also identified via the ‘snowball’ research technique (Ridley 2011) and included suggestions from my supervisory team and postgraduate research peers. The identified literature was recorded in a summary table, and then thematically synthesised in relation to the different aspects of the topic. This helped to identify the prevalence of key conceptual frameworks and interventions, as well as to identify gaps within the literature. For example, when considering how social workers managed the emotional demands of practice, the conceptual paradigm of emotional resilience was most prominent and therefore considered first in section two of chapter one.

Chapter one: The emotional demands of child and family social work

Introduction

Child and family social work – in particular, child protection - is described as 'emotional work of a high order' (Howe 2008:1). However, the way emotions are understood and used in such contexts present a 'paradox' for social workers (O'Connor 2019:645). This is because emotions are seen as both an invaluable resource for sense-making and relationship-based practice, as well as a potential barrier to rational decision making and professionalism. To explore this complexity, this chapter is divided into two sections. Section one defines emotions through two different psychosocial perspectives and how these are applied in practice. Section two identifies the different emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers', and their consequences. These sources can be grouped under three key themes, 1) direct contact with abuse and neglect, 2) the organisational context and 3) the socio-political context. Given the timing of this research, an additional theme is also explored, 4) social work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Section one: Emotions and child and family social work

Emotions are considered an essential tool in the way social workers engage in relationship based, reflexive and emotionally intelligent practices (Hennessey 2011, Howe 2008, Ingram 2013, O'Sullivan 2019, Trevithick 2018). However, social workers' emotional responses can also be considered a threat to rational decision making and team functioning (Morrison 1990, Whittaker 2011). In addition, social workers have been found to mask their emotions during interactions with families, other professionals, and co-workers for fear of being viewed as unprofessional or unable to cope with the demands of practice (Ferguson 2005, Myers 2008, O'Connor 2022). The role of emotions in social work practice is therefore an essential but complex terrain that requires ongoing critical exploration and understanding. As highlighted by Ruch (2007b:374):

> *It is unacceptable and undesirable for organisations to ignore the emotional realities of practice. Avoidance behaviour is costly and irresponsible. It is a contributory factor in the low levels of job satisfaction and burnout, high rates of staff turnover and long-term sickness and the widespread and persistent recruitment and retention problems within the social work profession.*

Whilst this warning was made over 15 years ago, section two of the literature review below suggests that this emotional reality remains an ongoing issue for the social work

profession and continues to impact negatively on outcomes for children and their families and the wider workforce.

Forsberg and Vagli (2006:11) suggest the way emotions are understood depends upon whether they are perceived as being '…located in the head, the body, the heart, the soul, the mind, in speech or in interaction.' This perspective aligns with Ingram's (2015a) four broad perspectives of emotions relevant to social work, which include *evolutionary* (Bjerre and Nissen 2021, Darwin 1872, Damasio 1999), *cognitive*, (Collins 2008, Frijda 1988, Lazarus 1991), *psychoanalytic* (Cooper and Lousada 2005, Freud 1938, Klein 1946, Whittaker 2011), and *sociological* (Barrett 2012, Berger and Luckmann 1984 Goffman 1959, Hochschild 1983). However, the literature highlights that an understanding of social work and emotions has predominately been considered through a psychosocial approach. As summarised by O'Connor (2019:647) emotions in social work '…involve complex physiological, cognitive, neurological, social, cultural, and unconscious processes' (Sclater et al 2009). There are two main paradigms that constitute psychosocial approaches to emotions in social work which are differentiated by Woodward (2015:16) with a hyphen as follows:

1. *'Psycho-social': Heavily influenced by psychoanalysis which asks, 'how do outer worlds operate within the inner world of the psyche?'*

2. *'Psychosocial': A contemporary, critical approach, influenced by social theorists, sociological and feminist critiques. This perspective asks ''how does the psyche operate within the social worlds and do unconscious forces play any part in social worlds?'*

Both approaches emphasise the interrelationship between a subject's inner personal world and their outer social world, yet depart on the role and influence of the unconscious and how it can come to be known (Cooper and Lousada 2005, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Hollway and Jefferson 2013).

1.1 A 'psycho-social' approach to emotions and social work

A dominant psycho-social paradigm in the study of emotions in social work suggests that our everyday emotional encounters and expressions are influenced and shaped by our earliest relational experiences in childhood. These 'emotional markers' (Ingram 2015a: 21) are often outside of our conscious awareness and, if unpleasant, or unbearable, can be unconsciously defended against using psychological strategies such as denial, projection, splitting, and repression (Freud 1915). Since the pioneering work of psychoanalysts such as Freud (1915, 1938), Bion (1961), and Klein (1946), studies have explored what may unconsciously 'lay beneath' the emotional experience of those working in human services work, including social work (Clarke and Hoggett 2009, Cooper 2009, Hollway 2009). As identified by O'Sullivan (2019:15) 'many tragic events have made explicit how dangerous it is when professionals become

disconnected from their own emotional distress and anxiety and that of their clients.' For example, in the case of Victoria Climbie, an 8-year-old child who was tortured and killed by her carers, Cooper (2005:8) identified workers 'both saw and did not see what was in front of their eyes.' The seminal psycho-social study by Menzies-Lyth (1960) identified the way in which nurses unconsciously defended against the painful reality of practice through observing rigid hierarchical structures, fixed roles and repetitive, compulsive behaviours. Armstrong and Rustin (2015:14) also suggest, 'institutions will select for those who find their defensive structures and cultures tolerable or welcome and will tend to marginalise or expel those who find themselves resisting it.' This is observable through the mechanism of blame and scapegoating which permeates the child protection system (Leigh 2017a). Drawing on the defensive strategy of labelling the 'troublesome individual' (Obholzer and Roberts 1994), Ruch et al's (2014) systematic review of the literature highlights that 'whilst one might expect social work organisations to exhibit solidarity and close ranks in the face of media and public hostility, experience shows us that scapegoating dynamics are rife both internally and externally' (2014:318). Theorising that teams may operate defensively to manage the emotional demands of practice, Johnson et al (2019) also identified that blame and scapegoating can appear within the relational qualities between professionals who come to mirror the distorted and abusive relationships within families (Ferguson 2011, Ruch et al 2014, Horwath 2016). This can result in silo practices within and between teams and a breakdown in interagency communication.

Criticisms of a psychoanalytic perspective highlight a preoccupation with the presence and management of anxiety can be at the expense of positive emotional experiences such as joy, hope and gratitude, which are important aspects of managing the emotional demands of social work practice (Collins 2015). In addition, viewing emotions through internal psychic defences can lead to 'pathologising' social workers (Whittaker 2011:492). An over emphasis on early life experiences also does not take account of social and organisational structures, cultures and norms that influence the management and expression of emotions (Ingram 2003a, Turner and Stets 2006). Given the realities of social work teams operating within wider social and organisational structures, Frost (2015:90) determines 'it is not…possible to understand the social work subject without understanding the sociological concepts of power, agency, identity, risk, emotional labour and cultural capital.' Given this challenge, a growing body of research considers social work team support through a more critical psychosocial lens.

1.2 A 'psychosocial' approach to emotions and social work

Whilst a psycho-social approach - particularly in ethnographic research - is the more dominant paradigm, a psychosocial lens is also helpful to explore emotions and social work. This approach emphasises that through our relational, social, and cultural norms and experiences we come to understand how emotions should be both experienced and expressed (Berger and Luckmann 1984). As highlighted by Turner and Stets

(2006:25), a psychosocial approach to emotions draws on 'dramaturgical, structural, symbolic interactionist, exchange and ritual theoretical perspectives.' This involves paying close attention to language, symbols, and gestures as the way we come to know the role and value of emotions in our social worlds (Barrett 2012, Wharton 2009). Applying a dramaturgical metaphor of theatre, Goffman (1959, 1967) conceptualised the role of emotions as part of everyday social performances. This includes the way people present themselves to others in accordance with the expected values, norms and emotional displays expected within different social settings. For example, social workers perform their professional role by managing their outward behaviours, including their display of emotions as a way of adhering to their organisational and professional context. From this perspective, a psychosocial paradigm acknowledges the relationship between internal psychological processes, social relations and the wider macro structures, systems, and powers that social workers operate within (Sclater et al 2009). Building on Goffman's emotion management and performance, Hochschild's (1983) conceptualisation of emotional labour – which will be explored in greater detail later in the literature review - has been applied to the study of emotions and social work. For example, emotion strategies are used by social workers to maintain empathy, calm and understanding in the face of parental hostility. This approach differs from the psychoanalytic concept of containment (Ruch 2004) as it involves not just the containment of anxiety, but the active shaping of feeling within the social exchange (Hochschild 1979, Rosenberg 1991).

Child and family social work is emotionally demanding due to its inherently relational nature. A psychosocial perspective helps to understand how emotions are shaped and given meaning within our social worlds. Turner and Stets (2006) however concede that emotions cannot be viewed purely as socially constructed as it does not account for the influence of the unconscious or biological aspects of emotions, both of which can override social scripts and norms. The emotional demands of child and family social work and their consequences - with a particular focus on those engaged in child protection work - are explored next.

Section two: The emotional demands of child and family social work and their consequences

Section two identifies the emotional demands and their consequences, as experienced by child and family social workers. These can be grouped under four key themes,1) direct contact with abuse and neglect, 2) the organisational context, 3) the socio-political context and 4) the emotional demands experienced by social workers during the pandemic.

2.1 The emotional demands arising from direct work with children and families

A significant source of emotional demand for social workers comes from their everyday closeness to children experiencing abuse and neglect. Social workers must allow themselves to think and work with the 'unthinkable' that is child abuse (Cooper 2005:9). As a result, the contemporary child protection system has an 'emotional texture' (Poletti 2018:140) that is experienced by social workers in their day-to-day practice. Parton (2011) suggests that social workers operate in the 'intermediary zone' between state and family, public and private, resulting in a powerful liminal position for those working in the profession (Warner 2014). As Cooper and Lousada (2015:150) observe, this involves the '...difficult but basic task of bearing to know about the terrible emotional realities of child torture and murder.' Child protection social work requires an engagement with the totality of the human condition and thus the full range of human emotions (Trevithick 2018), which inevitably impacts on the wellbeing of social workers engaged in such work. This has been shown to lead to vicarious trauma, burnout, and moral distress (Ashely-Binge and Cousins 2020, Kinman and Grant 2020, van der Kuip 2020).

2.1.1 Parental hostility and resistance

Altruism, which involves wanting to make a positive difference to people's lives, and the rewards felt from building positive social relationships are identified as motivations for becoming a social worker (Johnson et al 2022). Social work support can be welcomed by families and positive working relationships established. However, child and family social workers also require the capacity to work with parents and carers who are often in a state of acute emotional distress and who may deploy a range of strategies to keep professionals at a distance. As identified by Horwath (2016:1610) these include 'fight behaviours', such as physical or verbal aggression, or 'flight behaviours', such as avoiding meaningful professional engagement by not keeping appointments, stage-managing home visits, or limiting whom the social worker speaks to and what they see. Social workers must manage these emotive responses and, from a psycho-social perspective, find ways to cope with being regarded as the 'bad object' by families (Valentine 1994).

Heightened emotional reactions are an understandable response to social work involvement in private family life. The issues of unwanted state intervention and the imbalance of power gives rise to social workers having to engage with 'involuntary clients' as part of their day-to-day practice, which can be emotionally demanding for everybody involved (Ferguson 2005). In a study of the working conditions and wellbeing of social workers, Ravalier et al (2021) identified 64% of surveyed respondents had experienced regular, in person abusive behaviour from service users, and over a quarter regularly experienced such behaviour online. A survey of 590 child protection workers (Littlechild et al 2016) identified how hostility and

aggression from parents engaged in the child protection system affected the wellbeing of social workers who reported suffering anxiety, stress, panic attacks and depression. The survey also highlighted threats made towards the social worker's family were the most emotionally challenging. Thus, psychological threat, physical harm, and threats of violence is a pervasive part of child protection practice. These experiences can impair the social worker's performance of their professional role. Potential or actual hostility can result in loss of confidence, lower quality assessment and decision making and avoidance, all of which can leave vulnerable children at higher risk of ongoing harm (Ferguson 2010a, Hunt et al 2016, Littlechild et al 2016).

Drawing on a psycho-social understanding of emotions, existing research suggests that in a climate of intimidation and threats of violence, social workers' capacity to safeguard children can become impaired as their own need for physical and psychological survival dominates (Cooper 2005, Fraser and Lock 2013). Sudland (2020) identified that social workers draw on a range of unconscious psychological strategies to preserve their physical and mental wellbeing. As a form of 'accommodation syndrome' (Morrison 1990:253), social workers can collude with or increase dangerous dynamics within a family. They may identify with aggressive parents, deny the harm caused to a child, under-report, rationalise, and justify the parents' behaviour (Morrison, 1990). Ferguson et al's (2021) ethnographic study of child protection social workers' experiences of hostile relationships also identified defensive mechanisms such as 'splitting' (Klein 1946) – reframing parents as bad objects - as a way of protecting themselves against unbearable feelings of fear and anxiety. These findings resonate with Cook's (2017) study of the impact of emotive child protection home visits on workers' professional judgement. Through narrative interviews and focus groups, the study identified that social workers regularly managed being disliked – often because of the societal perception that social workers take children away - by emotionally withdrawing from the relational aspects of the work, positioning families as 'bad objects' and constructing themselves as invulnerable.

2.1.2 'The smell of the real'

Child and family social work can give rise to painful emotions which can impact on the social worker, their practice, and their capacity to safeguard children. Ferguson (2016b) conceptualised social work as an embodied experience, where encounters with neglected and abused children are mediated through emotions and the senses (Pink 2009). Encapsulating movement, speech, observation, smell, and touch, it is this closeness to practice that Cooper (2009:429) described as the 'smell of the real'. The social workers' visceral experience of walking into a home where children experience neglect can give rise to complex and challenging emotional processes. Through a 'psycho-social' lens, studies have identified children can become invisible during home visits as social workers unconsciously defend against the pain, anxiety and sensory experiences evoked by seeing an abused child. This can include psychological

defences of denial, othering and splitting which impairs the social worker's ability to hold the child and their experiences in mind (Cohen 2013, Cooper and Lousada 2005, Ferguson 2005, 2014, Young 2011). In turn, this can impact significantly on the social worker's judgement and decision making. As a form of 'turning a blind eye' (Steiner 1985:61), what is known becomes split off from the emotional experience. Social work inaction resulting from 'sensory and emotional overload' is highlighted in Ferguson's (2016b:2) ethnography of child protection practices. The study identified an absence of intimate practice with some children, including eye contact, talk, play, and touch which meant some aspects of the children's experiences remained unknown. Similar findings were echoed in O'Sullivan's (2019) small scale study which found child protection social workers coped with the emotional demands of practice by distancing themselves from children and families. This included becoming preoccupied with other aspects of practice as way of managing the emotional pain evoked by the reality of the child's situation.

As identified above, the task of protecting children from abuse and neglect evokes strong emotions. Yet despite these emotionally charged encounters, social workers operate within a larger 'performative state' (Cooper 2010:10) where they are assessed on their behaviours and ability to meet defined performance standards. From a psychosocial perspective, Orzechowicz (2008:144) highlights that 'workers are the public face of the company, and as such are subject to strict organisational feeling rules imposed by service organisations…'. Social workers are expected to display sensitivity, warmth, and unconditional positive regard as part of their professional role (Ferguson 2005). These emotional display rules are embedded within the occupational professional standards (SWE 2021: Standard 2.4) which stipulate social workers must 'practice in ways that demonstrate empathy, perseverance, authority, confidence and capability'. Adherence to occupational and organisational display rules as a form of emotion management that are counter to how one actually feels can be emotionally demanding and increase the risk of professional burnout (Hochschild 1983, Brotheridge and Grandey 2002, Wharton 2009). For example, the requirement to practice compassion and empathy can lead to over empathizing which can result in vicarious trauma (Ashely-Binge and Cousins 2020, Kinman and Grant 2020) and compassion fatigue (Grant and Kinman 2012). Social workers have also been found to consciously distance, shut off or defer their emotions to protect themselves from the emotional complexities of practice (Winter et al 2019).

2.1.3 Resonances and social workers' use of self

Relationship based practice and use of self is at the core of social work, requiring practitioners to maintain awareness of how their own values, emotions, beliefs, and experiences intersect with their personal and professional selves (Hennessey 2011, Ruch et al 2010, Trevithick 2018, Whitaker 2019). However, this can be challenging. As Leigh's (2014b) narrative interviews with 8 child protection social workers identified, personal and professional identities can merge when 'professionals do not just do

social work, they are social work.' (2014:636). An individual's motivation for entering the social work profession is based, in part, on personal experience (Johnson et al 2022, North 2019) which means the personal biographies of social workers may resonate with the children and families they encounter. From a psycho-social perspective, the concepts of transference, countertransference and projection help to explain the unconscious emotional transactions that occur between social workers and children and families. For example, previous negative experiences of parenting can be 'transferred' onto the relationship between a family member and the social worker. In response, the social worker may also be triggered on an unconscious level to respond emotively – a process known as counter transference (Ruch et al 2010, Winnicott 1965).

A systematic review of the literature on stress and burnout found that social workers with personal experience of mistreatment risk experiencing secondary trauma when faced with similar situations in their professional lives (Moriarty et al 2015). Overidentification with a family's situation can lead to the occurrence of 'empathic distress' (Grant 2013:338) when emotional boundaries are breached. This can lead to burn out and compassion fatigue, particularly for those who have experienced childhood traumas (O'Sullivan 2019). Pecnik and Bezensek-lalic's (2011) study of Slovenian social workers sought to understand how personal experience of violence within their own family related to workers' professional decision making. The results of 106 questionnaires found corporal punishment in the social worker's childhood was linked to higher levels of children and families meeting child protection thresholds in practice. Social workers' experiences of intimate partner violence were also associated with perceiving lower risks to children exposed to domestic violence and physical abuse. O'Sullivan and Cooper (2021) sought to understand the experiences of child protection social workers who were mothers. They found that their dual identity as mother and social worker could impact profoundly on their practice with mothers and their children. Baum (2010) also explored the experiences of social work students who became pregnant during their training. The findings from semi-structured interviews showed trainees came to their fieldwork torn between a preoccupation with their pregnancy and their clients' needs, which gave rise to feelings of guilt and professional inadequacy.

2.2 Emotional demands arising from the organisational context

The third source of emotional demand for social workers arises from the organisational context which involved social workers' professional relationships, including multi-agency partners, and within collegial team relationships. In addition, the statutory nature of child and family social work means it is a highly regulated and monitored profession. Policies and procedures directly impact on the way organisations operate and thus experienced by the workforce. The social workers' experiences of these organisational factors will be explored next.

2.2.1 Professional relationships

Effective partnership working is essential to ensuring positive outcomes for children and families with complex needs (Sidebotham et al 2016, Walker 2018). The requirement for local authorities to 'work together' with other professionals is embedded in child and family social work statutory guidance (DfE 2018:10). Despite the recognised benefits of collaborative multi-agency working – including expertise and knowledge exchange across disciplines (Frost and Robinson 2007), significant challenges continue to emerge particularly when a child is seriously injured or dies (Brandon et al 2020, DfE 2022b). A lack of information sharing, and breakdown in interagency communication has been found to result in silo practices (Burns and Christie 2013, Horwath 2011, 2016, Pithouse 1998, Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991). Exploring the perceptions of social workers held by other professionals, Baginsky (2013a) found the poor status and undervaluing of the profession along with a lack of clarity about the social work role created low morale, leading to some social workers leaving their posts. From a psycho-social perspective, social workers not only experience anxiety, fear, and frustration as part of their daily work, but also experience the same feelings projected on to them by other professionals (Ferguson 2005, Morrison et al 2019, Obholzer 2019). In addition, blame, scapegoating and enmeshment can appear within the relational qualities between professionals who can mirror the distorted and abusive relationships within families, as well as act out macro level tensions within and between organisational settings (Cousins 2018, Morrison 2007, Webb 2011).

From a more psychosocial perspective, social workers regulate their display of emotions when engaging with other professionals as part of their occupational requirement (Ingram 2015). For example, during formal meetings, Rose (2022:30) suggests, 'it is unlikely…that open displays of sadness, anxiety or distress would be seen as acceptable.' The requirement to perform professionalism, as stipulated in the social work codes of ethics and practice standards (BASW 2018, SWE 2021) can create tensions for social workers whereby emotions are considered central to professional practice, yet, are not perceived as 'professional' (O'Connor 2019:654).

2.2.2 Collegial relationships

Whilst the team is identified as a site where the emotional demands of practice can be managed (see chapter three, section one below), the literature also identifies that social relationships within a team context can be emotionally complicated (Hudson 2002, Tschan et al 2005). Team identity can be achieved through the dramaturgical cooperation of its members (Goffman 1959, Grandey 2000). Maintaining the team impression or 'team face' to display loyalty (Flower 2018), ethical sensitivity (Banks et al 2020), or professional competence and credibility (Leigh 2017b) requires impression management strategies through the use of props, voice, costume, gestures, stories, rituals and the cooperative management and display of emotions. This can lead to

individuals using ‘emotional tactics’ (Waldron 2000:65) such as expressing humour whilst masking anger as a way of maintaining group cohesion and belonging.

Shielding feelings of vulnerability, stress, or incompetence in front of families, other professionals and colleagues has been described by Fineman (2003:139) as the ‘stress trap of professionalism’. Similarly, Morrison (2007) notes that staff may continue to work at great personal cost and hide their felt emotions, fearing that signs of distress will lead to them being viewed as incompetent. As part of this social performance within teams, studies highlight emotional management and ‘masking’ (Grandey et al 2013:10) of anxiety amongst social work students is used as a way of appearing credible and competent to the audience of ones colleagues. For example, Myers’ (2008) study of resilience amongst social work students found the expectation to ‘step outside’ their emotional responses to practice and develop a more ‘rational’ and ‘non-judgmental’ approach encouraged a perception that such emotional experiences were unprofessional. Similarly, Rajan-Rankin's (2014) qualitative study found ‘emotionality in self was met with unease and fear of being unprofessional’ (2014:2432) which led to students who were less likely to ask for help. Cleveland et al’s (2019) study of early career social workers found the perceived status of being a more experienced social worker equated to less emotional support being provided. This created anxiety for early career social workers who feared a dramatic reduction in support as they progressed through their career. Barlow and Hall (2007) also identified that social work students felt anxious and stressed when their individual emotional responses in practice were incongruent with what they perceived to be the required ‘public face’ in supervision.

Whilst there is an inevitable focus in the literature on student social workers’ presentation of a professional self within their teams, other studies have explored how experienced social workers adhere to occupational and emotional display rules. For example, the performance of a ‘good social worker’ has been found to reinforce unhealthy working practices which can manifest in behaviours such as working late, missing lunch breaks and engaging in ‘them and us’ mentalities (Bissell 2012). The findings from a comparative ethnography exploring professional identity in child protection work (Leigh 2014a) found experienced social workers hid their distress as a means of achieving a credible performance of professionalism and competence in front of team managers and co-workers. North’s (2019) small scale study of experienced child protection social workers working with intrafamilial emotional abuse also found significant risks associated with viewing the sharing of emotional responses as unprofessional. This is mirrored in Stanley et al’s (2012) interviews with 50 social workers who had experienced depression. Over half delayed seeking help due to concerns about letting colleagues down or being seen as unable to cope.

Existing research suggests that managers also engage in emotion management strategies as part of performing their professional role. Social work managers find themselves positioned between the team and the wider organisation which can create

a sense of isolation or not belonging. For example, Patterson (2015:2079) identified '…even if there is rational understanding that team members need space to vent their feelings without a manager present, it can feel lonely to sit in an empty office imagining others sharing lunch together.' Exploring emotional labour in the context of austerity, Grootegoed and Smith's (2018) case study found managers faced the same moral and emotional challenges in their practice as social workers, however, these were likely to be less visible due to the managerial emphasis on performance. Similarly, Ferguson et al's (2021:33) study of the culture of child protection social work found that managers, as well as social workers 'walked a very delicate line' between acknowledging the emotional demands of practice and not showing too much distress. This meant emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, and guilt were less openly expressed within the team and amongst colleagues.

2.2.2 Bureaucracy and integrated children's systems

Since the 1990s, social work services in England have been subject to ongoing modernisation in the wake of austerity cuts, high-profile child deaths and subsequent reviews (Brandon et al 2020, Laming 2003, 2009, Munro 2011). The government's aim of reducing room for error by addressing risk in a systematic procedural way has significantly shaped both child protection policy and practice. The introduction of computerised Integrated Children's Systems (ICS) has been described by Garrett (2005:545) as the 'electronic turn' where the formalisation of social work has turned practice '…into a range of standardised procedures, workflows, protocols, templates, and timescales' (White et al 2009:18). Whilst effective and proactive workflow management systems and tools can lead to positive working environments for social workers (Stanley and Lincoln 2016), a recent review of social care in England found poorly configured IT systems added to the emotional demands experienced by social workers in their day-to-day work (MacAlister 2022). The findings from a social worker poll identified that 80% reported having their work disrupted on a fortnightly basis by poor case management systems, and three quarters reported that they were not consulted before a new system was brought in (Stevenson 2019). Using a behavioural science approach to explore clinical judgement and decision making across five local authorities, Kirkman and Melrose (2014) also found that despite prescribed, seemingly objective assessment and decision tools, social workers still experienced 'decision fatigue' and emotional biases in the face of time and workload pressures.

The move towards a more bureaucratic agenda has led to an increase in emotional labour for social workers where rules and regulations have assisted in 'distorting, manipulating, redirecting, and neutralising emotions' (Rogers 2001:185). Bureaucratic systems and ritualised task performance have been framed by some commentators as an organisational defence against anxiety by seeking to eliminate child abuse and the complex emotional and relational aspects of practice (Morrison 2007, Munro 2011, Reder and Duncan 2004, Ruch et al 2014). However, an uncritical reliance on ICS to record and manage tasks has led to social workers being perceived as uncaring 'street

level bureaucrats' (Evans and Harris 2004, Lipsky 1980). Drawing on Menzies Lyth's (1960) seminal framework of social defences against anxiety within organisations, Whittaker's (2011) ethnographic study of frontline social workers identified technology was used as a 'defensive buttress' against the realities of child protection work. The strategies observed included upward delegation, ritual task performance and continuous checks and counter checks as a way of reducing the weight of responsibility of safeguarding children. These findings align with Ruch (2007a) who emphasised the role of repetition compulsion as a defence against the anxiety of in-depth thinking and feeling in child protection decision making.

The development of computerised, bureaucratic procedures as a response to reported 'failings' in the child protection system has paradoxically prevented social workers from spending time with children in need of protection (Ferguson 2016, Johnson et al 2022, MacAlister 2022, Munro 2011). As Hoggett (2015:56) poignantly stated, the risk of this is '…a virtual and electronic child [comes] to replace an actual child engaged in real relations with professional staff'. Increased levels of bureaucracy, excessive hours and decreased time with children and families in need have been associated with risk of burnout and stress amongst social workers (Hall 2023). A longitudinal study of local authority child and family social workers conducted by Johnson et al (2022) found social workers were working on average an extra seven hours a week with 44% of those working in child protection reporting working over their contracted hours 'all of the time', and 62% of social workers across England stating their workload was too high. Baginsky et al's (2010) study of 1153 social workers work diaries found that 22% of their time was spent on case recording and 26% on face-to-face contact with clients. Reduced direct work with children and families was experienced by social workers as demoralising and reduced the emotional rewards of the work. Leeson's (2010) exploration of emotional labour in social work with looked after children identified difficulties in maintaining active emotional engagement with children within a bureaucratised system. Gibson's (2016:1187) ethnography of two English child protection social work teams also found feelings of disillusionment, conflict and a reduction in empathy as social workers wanted to engage in relationship-based practice but were 'required to perform a contemporary form of social administration.'

2.2.3 Auditing and monitoring culture

Driven by social, economic, and political factors, the process of auditing in children's services in England has developed into a complex framework of standardised systems and forms to promote the accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency of public services (Munro 2004). The purpose of auditing is two-fold involving a focus on effectiveness - improving professional practice that achieves agreed outcomes for children and families – and efficiency with attention paid to bureaucratic outputs and targets through performance indicators and increased managerial control (Ruch 2004, Strathern 2000). The latter has been identified as the dominant model of auditing practices in local authorities. In England, Audits are experienced as a significant

emotional demand for social workers as they navigate the tensions and increased anxiety arising from administrative tasks (Baginsky et al 2010, Munro 2011, Wastell et al 2010). A preoccupation with targets and outputs can lead to 'shallow rituals of verification' at the expense of organisational and individual intelligence and decision making (Power 1997:123). As described by Munro (2004:1073) 'the process of making social work 'auditable' was in danger of being destructive, focusing on achieving service outputs with little attention to user outcomes.' This concern was also reflected in Ferguson et al's (2020) ethnographic study which found audit requirements and the pressure for performance data overrode attention to what was occurring emotionally between social workers and the families they were engaged with. Twenty years on from Munro's concerns, MacAlister's (2022) review of social care continued to identify that audit still easily became compliance checks rather than a meaningful consideration of practice.

Social work supervision is described as a core tenet of social work practice and has been conceptualised as a triad of managerial, supportive and educational functions (Kadushin 1976). This has been expanded by Morrison (2005) to include mediation, whereby the supervisor communicates key messages up and down the organisational hierarchy. Described by Laming (2009) as the 'cornerstone of good social work practice' and reiterated within Munro's (2011) review of child protection services, 'effective supervisory relationships... should be emotionally supportive but challenge you to reflect on practice and on the needs of the people you support' (SWE 2021: s4.2). Yet despite this contention, the literature identifies that supervision can also be experienced as a form of 'policing' (Munro 2004:1082) and surveillance which is experienced as emotionally demanding.

2.3 The emotional demands arising from a socio-political context

The wider socio-political context in which social workers practice also creates additional emotional demands. As Leigh (2014a:629) highlights, social workers' professional identity cannot be understood without considering the 'cultural narratives' that are connected to society and the institutions in which they work. Social work is therefore considered an inherently political endeavour (Parton 2014, Warner 2014), where the complex needs of children and their families, and the actions of social workers engaged in meeting those needs, take place within an ongoing rapidly changing political and social climate (O'Sullivan 2019, Featherstone et al 2012). The literature identifies public and media scrutiny, inspections, public enquiries and continuous social care reform, as well as working in a context of austerity were particularly emotionally demanding for social workers.

2.3.1 Public and media scrutiny

Engaging with the often distressing and painful realities of child abuse in a context of significant political and media scrutiny, particularly when a child dies or is seriously injured, can contribute to a culture of blame, shame and fear (Thomas 2018, Cooper and Lousada 2005, Cooper and Lee 2015, Reder and Duncan 2004). Governments, fuelled by the media, hold that all risk should be foreseeable and thus child abuse can be stopped (Power 2007). In response, social workers can develop stoic and omnipotent beliefs about their ability to end child cruelty which can lead to a reduction of help-seeking (Beddoe et al 2014, Davies 2008). Despite public policy that affirms safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility (DfE 2018), hostile media coverage depicts social workers as either heroes or villains when this implicit cultural contract is broken (Cooper and Lousada 2015, Munro 2011). Outpourings of blame can fuel public fear and mistrust and lead to scapegoating the very individuals and systems created to protect children from harm (Leigh 2017a, 2016, 2017, Shoesmith 2016). From a psychoanalytic perspective, this form of 'splitting' can lead to social workers embodying the role of 'bad object' within wider society (Valentine 1994, Emmanuel 2002). Such experiences of projective identification have been described by social workers as feeling 'beset by [a] siege mentality…' (Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991:173). In addition to being positioned as a bad object, Warner (2014:45) identified the emotional demands of the social work role which 'in real terms and symbolically...[is] to maintain its proximity to these groups and in the process, police the divide between 'us' and 'them.' Social workers therefore shield the wider public from the realities of child abuse by adopting a liminal position that separates 'vice from virtue, good from evil, pure from polluted' (Ward and McMurray 2016:56). As a result, social workers have been positioned as undertaking society's moral and emotional 'dirty work' (Ferguson 2007, Howe 1996, Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991) that takes place within an 'invisible trade' (Pithouse 1984:2).

In the context of a high stakes blame culture, studies continue to identify social workers' experiences of low morale, weakened professional identity and a fear of practice failure (ADCS 2022, Beddoe 2010, McFadden 2018, Ruch et al 2014). As identified by Munro (2004:1085), 'public suspicion and distrust cause particular distress because so many staff join the public sector for altruistic reasons.' More recent studies have demonstrated social workers globally feel they are treated with a lack of respect and understanding of the social work role by the public, media and government which fuels an ongoing negative public perception (Ravalier 2019, Ravalier et al 2022). In a survey (BASW 2022) 2,000 social workers were asked to rate the public's perception of their profession on a sliding scale from one (poor) to ten (excellent) – the average score was 3.6. Exploring the experiences and coping strategies in the face of such negativity, Legood et al (2016) found social workers either corrected public perception or concealed their professional identity, which could produce considerable psychological strain. This was echoed in Beddoe et al's (2017) New Zealand study where social workers were asked about expressions of pride and stigma encountered

in their professional and personal lives. The findings identified strong feelings of ambivalence in social workers' professional identity. Despite a feeling of pride, social workers felt misunderstood, undervalued, and stereotyped as 'child snatchers' which made them reluctant to disclose their profession in social situations. For example, one social worker was quoted as being happier to say she drove trucks, rather than disclose she was a social worker.

2.3.2 Inspection, public enquiries, and structural reform

Since 2007, the non-ministerial government department 'Office for Standards in Education' (Oftsed), have been responsible for inspecting and regulating children's social care services in England. The current framework called the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) has been in operation since 2018, with inspection visits taking place on average every 3 years. The result of an Oftsed inspection is an overall judgement of effectiveness based on a four-point scale from 1 – Outstanding, 2 – Good, 3, Requires Improvement and 4 – Inadequate. Whilst it is acknowledged that regulation and inspection is important, the potential for Ofsted inspectors to name individual departments and local authorities deemed to be 'failing' has created working environments dominated by defensive behaviour practices. This includes a preoccupation and concern with compliance and outcome measures to the detriment of using professional judgment (Hood and Goldacre 2021, Munro 2011). Despite Ofsted's intention to adopt Munro's (2011) recommendations to lift prescription, relax strict timescales and remove performance indicators, social workers continue to experience these pressures. As identified by Jones (2015) such inspections are experienced by social workers as '…belligerent, bullying, battering, and bruising [where] interviews feel like an intensive intrusion and interrogation, with the intention to identify weakness and failure…'. The outcome of a negative Ofsted inspection can lead to senior managers losing their jobs (Forrester et al 2013), increased workloads, staff turnover and can ultimately lead to ongoing inconsistency for children and families (Kelly 2015).

In Murphy's (2022) ethnographic case study of one local authority child protection team, social workers continually referred to the concept of 'Ofsted anxiety disorder.' Social workers in the study estimated only 15% of their average working time was spent with children, 70% was spent on paperwork and the remaining 15% of their working week spent on efforts to appear compliant with managerial expectations of inspection preparedness. This resonates with MacAlister's (2022) independent review of social care which reported increased time spent on information recording in preparation for inspection did not add value to overall decision making. Frequent changes to organisational structures in response to inspections and the resultant changes in team membership can also be emotionally demanding (Moriarty et al 2015). For example, Pepper's (2016) ethnographic case study of child and family social work found the reorganisation and relocation of teams in response to an

‘inadequate’ Ofsted inspection directly contributed to feelings of threat, loss, and anxiety.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (formerly known as Serious Case Reviews) and Public Enquiries are independent investigations undertaken when a child dies or has been significantly harmed. The aim of the process is to establish learning and implement changes whereby agencies and professionals can learn from and improve practice. Often in the context of high-profile child deaths, such as those of Victoria Climbie and Peter Connelly, fuelled by significant media attention, recommendations predominately focus on structural, technical, procedural, and educational reforms as a way of ensuring social workers ‘do the basics well’ (Laming 2003, 2009). However, structural reorganisation in local authorities has been identified as having a significant impact on team stability and sense of containment (Cooper and Dartington 2004, Ruch 2007). As highlighted by Brandon et al’s (2012:6) review of Serious Case Reviews 'the typical route to grappling with practice complexities … was to recommend more training and the compliance of or creation of new or duplicate procedures with fewer supporting professional judgement or reflective practice.’ This approach aligns with what Warner (2014:69) describes as a ‘crisis reform cycle’ where repeated recommendations and reforms seek to eliminate risk simply by putting the ‘right’ structures in place (Munro 2011, Parton 2014). However, commentators highlight that repeated structural reforms continue to be ineffective because they do not take account of the underlying role of emotions that can influence practice (Lousada and Cooper 2005, Munro 2011, Reder and Duncan 2004, Ruch et al 2014, Rustin 2005, Whittaker 2011). For example, Rose and Palattiyil (2020) explored resilience amongst social workers in a local authority in Scotland and found organisational and structural factors threaten resilience more than the emotional intensity of working with those receiving services. This resonates with Whittaker and Havard’s (2016:1170) study that consisted of focus groups with ninety final year social work students. The findings identified explicit talk about ‘the fear of public inquiry or serious case review... as the main reason why social workers engaged in defensive practice.’

2.3.3 Working within a context of austerity

Over the last decade social workers have endured a combination of public sector pay freezes and a current cost of living crisis where rising energy and fuel prices has led some social workers to take second jobs or move to better paid jobs in other sectors (ADSC 2022, BASW 2017). In addition to the personal impact of austerity on social worker wellbeing, statutory child and family social work departments have continued to operate in a context where demand for services and availability of resources have remained in constant tension. Despite cuts to central government spending on social care, the number of children requiring statutory social work intervention has continued to increase. As identified in Thomas’ (2018:4) Care Crisis Review, Sir Munby concluded the family justice system was in crisis, with care order applications at record

levels and the number of looked after children at its highest level since the implementation of the Children Act (1989). The Department for Education's (2022) annual Child in Need census identified a total of 50,920 children were subject to a child protection plan in England, up 1.8% from the previous years. In addition, services that had previously sustained families such as early years and youth services have been forced to close, forcing more families into the child protection arena (Bywaters et al 2018, Morris et al 2018). This has led local authorities to engage in a form of 'rationing' (Devaney 2019:459) of who receives what services and in what circumstances (Platt and Turney 2014). In response, social workers have described the emotional demands of working in a context of austerity as 'sinking' and 'drowning' in the face of ever-increasing demands for services (Morris et al 2018). An ethnographic study of child protection teams by Murphy (2022:207) also identified how social workers referred to government budget cuts, increased caseloads and limited time and resources for families and a feeling 'overstretched and spread too thinly.'

Operating within a context of austerity with limited resources can restrict social workers' ability to exercise their professional values and sense of social justice (Rose and Palattiyil 2018). For example, Leigh's (2016a) autoethnography described an incongruence between ethical standards of practice, moral judgements and organisational demands that could lead to feelings of 'moral distress' (van der Kuip 2020:741). If not recognised and supported by the organisation, the personal costs of such distress could lead to burnout and an intention to leave practice (Andela et al 2015, Roh et al 2016). To explore how these tensions were managed in practice, Grootegoed and Smith (2018) conducted a case study within a Scottish local authority children and families social work team. The findings revealed that ethical stress created the need for increased emotional labour. Applied on a continuum, social workers either consciously distanced themselves from direct engagement with families, or strongly advocated for clients' needs. The majority however took a middle ground of 'muddling through' in a state of continued emotional dissonance (2018:1943). Lavee and Strier's (2018) study also identified the influence of social, institutional, and political contexts where emotional labour took place. In depth interviews and focus groups identified the way social workers experienced emotional flooding, emotional numbness, and the psychoanalytic social defence of 'othering' to manage their relational encounters. The need for supervision was identified as essential to reconcile empathetic, meaningful, and lasting working alliances with families in the context of constraining and oppressive institutional policies.

Whilst there is an abundance of literature highlighting links between families subject to child protection systems and their socio-economic status (Bywaters and Skinner 2022, Featherstone et al 2019) social workers engagement with affluent families remain an under researched area of practice. Issues of power, control, social class, and privilege in the working relationships between social workers and families become more prominent and thus also experienced as emotionally demanding (Bernard 2017). Exploring child protection interventions with affluent families, Bernard and Greenwood

(2018, 2019) found social workers faced highly resistant families that were more likely to use solicitors and complaints procedures. During such encounters, social workers managed these demands by carefully considering how they performed their professional role. For example. the study found social workers remained aware of their 'personal attributes, including how they dressed and spoke as a means of presenting themselves as knowledgeable' (Bernard and Greenwood 2019:2275). This aligns with Fineman's (2003:31) contention that in some contexts, 'appearance matters.'

2.4 Social work during the Covid-19 pandemic

On the 23rd of March 2020 England went into lockdown in response to the Covid-19 global pandemic. As of February 2023 is estimated to have killed 6.77 million people worldwide and over 204,000 in the UK (Elflien 2023). The then UK prime minister Boris Johnson announced a series of measures with the aim of preventing the spread of the coronavirus. This included working from home, restricted travel, social distancing rules, the closure of shops, schools, and other public buildings and services. Within the literature, two key themes emerged in relation to the emotional demands experienced by social workers, 1) changes to working practices and 2), the exacerbation of pre-existing workforce challenges including poor working conditions, recruitment and retention issues, increased complexity of casework and poor public perception.

2.4.1 Changes to working practices

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic local authorities across England adapted their working practices quickly. Whilst the use of technologies was not new in social work, increased hybrid arrangements including a mix of online video conferencing, digital and in person engagement came to dominate working practices (Baginsky and Manthorpe 2021, Glauser 2020, Kong et al 2021, Pink et al 2021). The emerging research identified a mixed picture of the benefits and challenges of such changes for social workers. The benefits included reduced work-related stress through more flexible working hours, reduced commute time and a better work/home life balance (Ashcroft et al 2022, Cook et al 2020). The use of virtual technology also increased participation and engagement in multi-agency meetings due to the absence of travel time (Baginsky and Manthorpe 2021). 'Virtual' home visits mediated through video conferencing also created an immediate flexibility in seeing families, with young people more willing to engage in online platforms (Cook and Zscholmer 2020, Driscoll et al 2020). However, social workers also reported finding it difficult to engage in the embodied aspects of assessment work, including touch, smell and nonverbal, relational cues (Cook and Zscholmer 2020, Ferguson et al 2020, Kong et al 2021). Evidence from other studies also found changes to working practices also led to increased mental health concerns due to exhaustion (Ashcroft et al 2022, Gonzalaz et al 2020, Shanafelt et al 2020), the blurring of boundaries between work and home,

virtual fatigue and feelings of isolation (Ashcroft et al 2022, Cook et al 2020, Harrikari et al 2021, McFadden et al 2021, Taylor et al 2021).

Pre-pandemic, social workers were identified as operating within some of the most challenging working conditions in the UK (Ravalier 2019, Ravalier et al 2020, 2021, 2022) with social care reported to hold the highest levels of stress related sickness of any occupational sector (Collins 2008, McFadden et al 2018, HSE 2021). Exacerbating these issues, Ashcroft et al (2020:23) highlight the impact of the pandemic and the cumulative effect of 'high client needs, high demands and transformative changes in practice' which significantly increased the emotional demands experienced by social workers during this time. At the start of the pandemic, Banks et al (2020) conducted an international qualitative survey to explore the ethical challenges faced by social workers practicing during Covid-19 and identified a range of heightened emotions. This included anxiety related to increased health risks; grief in response to families' experiences of bereavement and living conditions; and moral distress due to inequality and injustices in the context of reduced services and resources. The impact on workplace wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic was explored by Johnson et al (2022) who identified that over two-thirds of social workers considered anxiety (67%), workloads (73%) and work-related stress (73%) to have increased. The emotional demands experienced by social workers were associated with an increase in casework complexity, a rise in professional anxiety from partner agencies and the loss of professional and family support networks for those in receipt of services. Many respondents held the view that the social impact of the pandemic had been intensified due to the preceding decade of austerity in public services which included entrenched poverty, cuts to services and jobs and increased isolation (Banks et al 2020). Ongoing staffing challenges including recruitment and retention issues were also considered to have been exacerbated by the pandemic resulting in an unstable workforce and significant consequences in relation to increased caseloads and numbers of agency staff (ADCS 2022, BASW 2022, Ofsted 2022).

Summary

The existing literature highlights that social workers operate in highly emotionally demanding contexts. The sources of these demands are multifaceted and interrelated, arising in their direct work with children and families, from within their organisational setting and the wider socio-political landscape. In addition, at the time of this study, social workers also experienced the challenges of working during an unprecedented global pandemic. The consequences of these demands on social worker wellbeing and staff retention are well documented, yet despite these significant challenges social work continues to be a chosen career path for many who find satisfaction and enjoyment in their work. It is therefore important to understand what enables social workers to remain positively engaged in practice and how they successfully manage the emotional demands identified above. This will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter two: Managing the emotional demands of child and family social work

Introduction

Chapter one identified the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers engaged in child protection work and the consequences of those demands which included occupational stress, burnout, low retention, and high staff turnover. This chapter identifies four dominant discourses that frame how social workers manage these emotional demands which include 1) emotional resilience, 2) critical reflection, 3) emotional intelligence, and 4) emotional labour. The way these concepts are constructed in practice - through interventions aimed at the individual, interpersonal, and organisational level - are identified and explored. The chapter concludes with identifying the social work team as the key site where these different forms of support are enacted.

Section one: Emotional resilience

Emotional resilience was identified within the literature as a key concept for understanding how social workers manage the emotional demands of practice. Emotional resilience can promote social workers' capacity to recover and learn from adverse and stressful situations. The following section begins with a definition of emotional resilience and how it is understood in child and family social work followed by a review of interventions that have sought to develop and support the emotional resilience of social workers.

1.1 Defining emotional resilience

Emotional resilience has been described as 'the general capacity for flexible and resourceful adaptation to external and internal stressors' (Klohen 1996:1067). Emerging from studies in the 1970's that explored why some children thrived whilst others struggled in the face of adverse experiences (Rutter 1979), the conceptual development of emotional resilience has since been applied to professional roles including social work (Grant and Kinman 2014). Chapter one of this thesis illustrates child and family social work can be emotionally demanding when working with hostile or resistant families and exposure to children who have been abused and neglected. As identified by Beddoe et al (2013:101) 'exposure to abuse, neglect, violence... and trauma all fulfil the definitional requirements of adversity...'. Therefore, how social workers successfully cope in the face of such experiences has positioned emotional resilience as a core professional requirement to ensure workforce wellbeing and retention (Galpin et al 2020, Grant and Kinman 2015, McFadden et al 2014). For example, the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) stipulates that social work students must evidence their professionalism, by showing an awareness of their own

'safety, health, wellbeing, self-care priorities and emotional resilience, and seek advice as necessary' (BASW 2018:1).

Described as an individual's ability to 'bounce back' from adverse events and stressors, emotional resilience is, in part, considered a personality trait including characteristics such as cognition, temperament, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism (Grant and Kinman 2012, Pooley and Cohen 2010, Rutter 2007). However, considering emotional resilience through this perspective alone can result in attributing blame when the individual 'fails' to cope rather than taking into account wider systemic issues (Galpin et al 2018, Hart et al 2016, Webster and Rivers 2018). However, it is generally accepted that emotional resilience is dependent on repeated interactions between the individual, their interpersonal relationships, and their wider environmental context (Ungar 2008). The expansion of the concept of emotional resilience therefore includes 'the ecologies of the social work environment' (Adamson et al 2014:524) which recognises the interdependent nature of the social workers' individual characteristics (Grant and Kinman 2014), social support, organisational cultures (Hartwig et al 2020, McFadden et al 2018, Thompson and Cox 2020) and wider structural factors including policy, procedures, and resources (Hart et al 2016).

1.2 Interventions to support emotional resilience

A range of interventions have been developed to support emotional resilience among social workers. These occur at the individual (intrapsychic) level which involves reframing challenging experience with hope, and optimism, mindfulness practices and wellbeing days that occur at the relational (interpersonal) level. Research that has considered supporting and sustaining emotional resilience at the organisational level has also recently seen the development of a diagnostic tool 'SWORD' (Grant et al 2021). The following section explores each of these in turn.

1.2.1 Reframing with hope and optimism

Whilst acknowledging the challenging wider context, individual characteristics such as positivity, hope and optimism has been identified as a way to support and sustain the emotional resilience of social workers (Adamson et al 2014, Burns et al 2019, Nordick 2002, Stalker et al 2007, Collins 2008, Wendt et al 2011). A small number of studies recognise that whilst social workers experienced anger, frustration, and anxiety as part of their day-to-day practice, they also actively engaged in reappraising and reframing their situation more positively leading to higher levels of emotional resilience (Youssef and Luthans 2007). Collins (2008) suggests cognitive restructuring can help to reinterpret stressful situations more positively. For example, Burns et al's (2019) longitudinal study examining retention over a 10-year period identified social workers who reappraised their practice as challenging, interesting and a place to learn contributed to their intention to stay. As suggested by Snyder (2000) burnout is the

absence of hope and therefore the ability to focus on success can be a panacea to feelings of hopelessness (Evans and Harris 2004). In an American large-scale quantitative study Schwartz et al (2007) found that the presence of hope displayed by social workers positively correlated with levels of hope reported by those receiving social work services. Nordick's (2002) small scale Canadian study also found reframing stressful situations as challenges helped some child protection social workers avoid burnout. Wendt et al's (2008) Australian appreciative enquiry with social care professionals also found reframing stressful experiences as 'enjoying the challenge' and a 'desire to make a difference' helped to sustain emotional resilience. Interestingly, the study identified these statements may have been shaped by dominant discourses of professionalism and social work values, therefore influencing the management of emotions 'to the point that people may feel they have to adhere to such views if they are to be competent within their profession' (Wendt et al 2008:323). This may indicate that social workers engage in a form of 'social desirability bias' (Larson 2018:534), by hiding emotions that do not align with the expression of hope and optimism, (Corp 2021, David 2016).

Whilst there has largely been a focus on the individual's ability to cognitively reframe the emotional demands of practice, commentators also highlight the influence of others who model hope and optimism to co-workers (Adamson et al 2014, Collins 2015, Ingram 2015b). For example, Banks et al's (2020) international survey of 607 social workers and students working during the Covid-19 pandemic identified positive stories of caring practices and pride at belonging to a profession committed to being compassionate and resourceful. This helped to mitigate feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, and fear. Optimism can therefore be learnt (Seligman 1991) whereby emotional displays can positively influence the workplace via a form of mood contagion (Bono and Ilies 2006). Wellbeing champions and the importance of praise, celebration of successes and achievements have been highlighted by Ravalier and Allen (2020) as having a positive impact on the emotional resilience, morale, wellbeing, and energy within the team. Group supervision with one's peers has also been identified as a means of cultivating hope. Koenig and Spano (2007) found that a strengths-based approach to practice that used group supervision and reflective questions refocused hopeful perspectives whilst Ingram (2013c) also identified supervision as a forum for social workers to explore feelings such as joy and contentment and the importance of modelling hopeful behaviours to colleagues and to children and families (Collins 2015). At a broader level, building supportive and hopeful organisational cultures challenge pathology and problem focused practices (Koenig and Spano 2007, Schwartz et al 2007).

1.2.2 Mindfulness and wellbeing days

The practice of mindfulness has been studied as a means of supporting social workers to develop and sustain emotional resilience (Kinman et al 2019, Maddock et al 2021, McCusker 2022, Sewell 2020). Drawing on the findings of online questionnaires with

240 social work students, Grant and Kinman (2012) identified those who could use their reflective abilities to communicate effectively with others tended to be more resilient to stress and more psychologically healthy. The outcome of the study resulted in a series of wellbeing days designed to raise awareness of the importance of resilience and self-knowledge more generally. Topics included mindfulness, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) strategies, supervision, and self-awareness. Over a two-year period more than 200 social work students attended the wellbeing days. The evaluation indicated that students found the sessions to be informative and helpful, and they believed they had acquired new skills. A study of 30 social work students from two universities by Maddock et al (2021), identified that participation in a mindfulness-based programme reduced feelings of stress and anxiety whilst promoting a sense of wellbeing. The positive outcomes mirrored an earlier study of 25 early career social workers across 5 local authorities (Kinman and Grant 2017) who engaged in a 2-month training programme that comprised of CBT strategies, goal setting and mindfulness. Findings showed the enhancement of resilience including emotional self-efficacy, self-compassion and reflective skills increased over time and compassion fatigue and psychological distress reduced. Although the independent effects of each strategy were not tested, mindfulness training as a way of promoting emotional resilience was rated particularly highly at follow-up. A further mixed methods study by Kinman et al (2019) found similar findings as part of an eight-week mindfulness training course for social workers. Emotional self-efficacy, psychological flexibility and compassion satisfaction increased following the intervention. An interesting outcome of the study identified no significant changes in reflective ability and self-compassion, but instead acknowledged the changes observed may have been attributable to other factors including enhanced support and encouragement from co-workers who attended the training. Whilst links between mindfulness and emotional resilience occur in the literature, some commentators remain critical of approaches when used to promote individual responsibility for systemic issues (Webster and Rivers 2018).

1.2.3 Organisational diagnostic tool (SWORD)

As identified in the previous chapter, local authority social workers face some of the most demanding working conditions in the UK, resulting in burnout and associated recruitment and retention issues. Grant et al (2021) developed a diagnostic survey to assess organisational resilience, and an associated workbook provides evidence informed approaches to build organisational strength and wellbeing for its staff. This approach focuses on the wider, social and organisational influences on resilience, avoiding a narrow focus on individual workers. The ‘SWORD’ (Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic) tool is based on five ‘key foundational principles’ of 1) secure base, 2) sense of appreciation, 3) learning organisation, 4) mission and vision, and 5) wellbeing, to create a workplace climate that builds in resilience (Grant et al 2021:4). The practice tool was updated to include learning from the Covid-19

pandemic, such as the support of remote workers. Further empirical studies on the implementation and effectiveness of the tool are yet to be published, however the study represents a move away from the individual to a more ecological view of resilience (Ungar 2008).

Section two: Critical reflection

Critical reflection is the second concept identified within the literature as a key mechanism through which social workers manage the emotional demands of practice. Critical reflection has clear connections with the development of emotional resilience which requires the social workers' ability to recognise, reflect upon and take appropriate action in response to one's own and others' emotions. The following section begins with a definition of critical reflection and how it is understood in child and family social work, followed by interventions that have sought to support critical reflection in practice.

2.1 Defining critical reflection

Reflection is fundamentally a process of thinking about and making sense of experience and, in social work, informing future choices, decisions and taking appropriate action (Kolb 1984, Reynolds 2011, Ruch 2007). Whilst there are interchangeable terms for reflection including 'critical reflection' (Fook and Gardner 2013, Lehmann 2006, Ruch 2009) and 'reflexivity' (D'Cruz et al 2007), the process of reflection is considered a core requirement of professional social work practice. For example, the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW 2018) identifies critical reflection and analysis as one of nine core social work skills to promote best practice and inform decision making in complex situations. The social work professional standards (SWE 2021:10) also require social workers to maintain their continuing professional development by critically reflecting on their learning needs and activities, reflect on and share best practice, and reflect on their own values and the impact this has on practice.

Critical reflection is used to reappraise emotionally demanding encounters, setbacks or disappointments and thus underpins the development of emotional resilience (Kinman and Grant 2011, Ruch 2007). Critical reflection is also used to explore professional identity which is important given Ramvi and Davies (2010:445) contention that the 'personal, social and professional selves [of social workers] cannot be separated'. Critical reflection is therefore a means for social workers to consider their use of self which underpins relationship-based practice, (Ruch et al 2010, Trevithick 2018, Wetherell 2008). As highlighted in Munro's (2011:87) review of child protection services in England, social workers need time to engage in critical reflection with others which is 'often best achieved in conversation with others, in supervision, for

example, or in discussions with colleagues.' A review of evidence-based interventions to support and enhance reflective practice will be explored next.

2.2 Interventions to support critical reflection

A range of interventions have explored the way critical reflection can be developed and thus support social workers with the emotional demands of practice. These interventions have focused on the individual (intrapsychic) through reflective writing, and relational (interpersonal) level through reflective peer forums and supervision. The following section explores each of these in turn.

2.2.1 Reflective and narrative writing

Reflective writing as a tool for processing the emotional demands of practice is predominantly limited to social work students as a means of reflecting upon 'critical incidents' (Fook 2002:98) and as a way of bridging learning into future practice. As summarised by Newcomb et al (2018) tools include student reflective journals, critical incident analysis logs, reflective essays and case studies (Bolton 2005a, Chaumba 2015, Fook and Gardner 2013, Sage and Sele 2015). Whilst reflective writing for assessment remains the dominant tool for building critical reflection in social work training, commentators have highlighted the tension students experience when balancing academic requirement and performance with personal reflection (Baum 2012, Leigh 2016b, Ross, 2014). Critical reflection assignments require an engagement with emotional experience and as a result, the process can be cathartic (Sutton et al 2007) and highly emotive (Ghave 2007). A mixed methods evaluation of social work students completing reflective diaries to increase emotional intelligence by Grant et al (2014) found positive results. The diaries supported students to identify and reflect upon their emotional reactions to practice and increase empathy and overall wellbeing. Baum's (2012) Israel based study of a reflective writing assignment found the process provided students with the opportunity to work through an unresolved poor supervisory relationship. As a result, students reported a greater understanding of themselves and the process and looked forward to the future with hope and optimism. However, given the assignment was marked by tutors, questions were raised as to whether student responses were influenced by what they thought was expected of them as a reflective practitioner, rather than an authentic reflection on their experiences.

The pressure to present oneself according to expected social behaviour has also been identified in other studies. For example, Rajan-Rankin's (2014) study identified that students struggled to express some emotions for fear of being judged as unprofessional. Drawing on Goffman's (1963) work on self-disclosure Rai's (2012) 12-month case study of reflective writing assignments with undergraduate social work students found self-expression was restricted for fear that revealing too much might affect their grades or the tutors' perception of them. Social work students who self-

identified as having suffered adverse childhood experiences were also found in Newcomb et al's (2018:337) Australian study to find reflective writing 'emotionally taxing'. Whilst some found the process therapeutic, others were concerned about the stigma of self-disclosure and fear of being negatively judged by others. Instead, students identified non-written means of reflection such as talking to friends or digitally recording reflections to be the most helpful.

2.2.2 Reflective forums

To manage the emotional demands of practice, Ruch's (2004) ethnography of two local authority family support teams identified critical reflection could be achieved when managers not only contained anxiety arising from practice and organisational uncertainty but also actively encouraged, coordinated, and facilitated reflective forums. As identified in chapter one of this literature review, social workers could experience resonances between their own biographies and families they worked with as emotionally demanding. To explore this, O'Sullivan, and Cooper (2021) conducted a mixed methods small-scale study that investigated the impact of a monthly psychoanalytically informed reflective work discussion space. Participants included seven social workers whose dual identities as mothers also intersected with their work with parents and their babies. By providing a safe space the study demonstrated the potential reflective groups had to explore the emotional aspects of practice - including fear and anxiety – which allowed space for their ambivalence about mothering to emerge and be made sense of. Team managers and those in supervisory positions also experience emotional demands particular to their leadership role, however support tends to focus on managerial and administrative tasks (Beddoe and Davys 2016, Cousins 2004, Morrison 2005, Patterson 2019). Drawing on direct practice experience as a social work manager, Toasland (2007) identified the need to 'contain the container' and suggested an approach based on reflective peer collaboration enabled managers to identify and explore issues affecting them personally, as well as professionally with colleagues.

Whilst reflective forums are seen as an important intervention for supporting critical reflection, studies have identified a range of external factors that can create barriers to accessing such interventions. For example, O'Sullivan's (2019) small-scale qualitative study of reflective work discussion groups found a climate of concern with efficiency and bureaucracy continued to reduce opportunities for reflective and considered practice. In addition, Cooper and Lee's (2021) mixed-methods, longitudinal evaluation of monthly reflective practice group's (RPG's) found the approach enhanced social workers' capacity for reflection and was associated with a reduction in staff vacancies. However emotional overload, work pressures and time commitment limited attendance. This also resonates with Dugmore et al's (2018) single case study of one local authority which found group systemic supervision could potentially promote team resilience, reflexivity, and relationship-based practice. However, the

availability of time and wider work pressures limited social workers' attendance which made it more difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach.

2.2.3 Reflective supervision

The four functions of social work supervision according to Morrison (2005) include management, mediation, development, and personal support. Studies identify that the supportive and containing element of supervision enables social workers to reflect on and process the emotional impact of their work (Dwyer 2007, Grant and Kinman 2014, Harvey and Henderson 2014, Hingley-Jones and Ruch 2016, Ruch 2007, Wilkins 2017) which can increase social workers' emotional resilience and wellbeing (Adamson et al 2014, Cleveland et al 2019, Horwath 2011). The previous chapter highlighted that supervision can be experienced as a form of surveillance when focused purely on task-based administration and organisational outcomes. However, Johnson et al's (2022:84) longitudinal study of local authority child and family social workers found those most satisfied with their job were more likely to receive reflective supervision at least every three to four weeks compared to those who were dissatisfied (52% compared to 32%). This resonates with Beddoe's (2010) small scale study involving semi structured interviews with 6 social work supervisors who actively rejected a surveillance role within supervision and instead, supported the maintenance of a reflective space as crucial to effective practice.

Reflective supervision has been found to reduce the risk of distorted decision making by identifying and exploring unconscious emotional drivers that shape and influence practice (Bingle and Middleton 2019, Fook and Gardner 2013, Gregory 2022). For example, Gibbs' (2009:290) single case study of 11 social workers included in depth interviews and observations to explore the role of reflective supervision for holding and working through the 'emotionally intrusive nature of child protection'. This research identified the danger of unprocessed feelings and emotions and the need to bring these to light within the supervisory relationship. Research undertaken by Smith (2000) also explored the role of supervision and fear in social work. Respondents were asked what they most valued in a supervisor in the context of a frightening experience. The general response was someone who 'would be there for them, have time for them and listen to them without criticism' (Smith 2000:18). However, Ferguson et al's (2021) study found social workers 'suspended' their emotional responses and felt unable to express their feelings of vulnerability during supervision for fear of judgement from colleagues. Several commentors have therefore argued for a more diverse range of options to meet the needs of different workers at different times with different aspects of practice. For example, Wilkins (2007) cites coaching, counselling, and clinical supervision as different models of social work support. Beddoe (2019) also questioned the role of traditional supervision models for providing emotional support to social workers. As an alternative, the study offered Schwartz rounds (Maben et al 2018)

found in health care which involves colleagues from different disciplines sharing the emotional and social aspects of practice within reflective group forums.

Section three: Emotional intelligence

In addition to emotional resilience and critical reflection, emotional intelligence was also identified in the literature as a key concept used to support social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. The following section defines emotional intelligence and how it is understood in child and family social work and the interventions that have sought to develop and support emotional intelligence in practice.

3.1 Defining emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is described as 'the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate between the two and use this information to guide one's own thinking and actions' (Salovey and Mayer 1990). According to Morrison (2007:245) social workers use emotional intelligence in relation to five core social work tasks, 'engaging service users, assessment and observation, decision making, collaboration and cooperation and dealing with stress.' From a psychodynamic perspective, an emotionally intelligent social worker is better able to deal with stress by drawing on their internal sense of emotional security to maintain the capacity to think, make sense of, tolerate, and moderate their emotional responses (Grant 2013). As a form of 'compassionate communication' (Miller 2007:223), emotional intelligence involves the process of 'noticing, feeling and responding' to the needs of others through verbal and nonverbal behaviours and as such, creates the conditions for compassion and empathy which is at the heart of relationship-based practice (Hennessey 2011, Howe 2008, Morrison 2007, Ruch et al 2010). The emotionally intelligent social worker also perceives, appraises, and utilises emotions to make sense of and facilitate practice-based assessment and decision making (Beddoe et al 2013, Goleman 1996, Morrison 2007). Beyond direct practice skills, emotional intelligence also supports social workers to manage the emotional demands of their work by drawing on strategies to deal with stress, including the ability to collaborate and cooperate with colleagues in the workplace. For example, the manager's ability to generate and maintain positivity and enthusiasm in the team relies upon their ability 'to appraise how [team members] feel and be knowledgeable about how to influence these feelings' (George 2000:1041).

3.2 Interventions to support emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence can be learnt through life experience and training (Fariselli et al 2008, Goleman 1996). A small number of studies have considered the effectiveness of workshops to promote the development of emotional intelligence to support

students and social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. A greater number of studies have also identified the significance of co-worker's use of emotional intelligence as a means of noticing and responding to each other at times of need. The opportunity to debrief with colleagues formally and informally is identified as crucial for supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice.

3.2.1 Emotional intelligence workshops

Within research, workshops have been used to explore the development of emotional intelligence in students and social workers. For example, Grant et al's (2014) mixed methods study evaluated two approaches aimed to enhance the emotional intelligence of 28 undergraduate social work students during their first year of training. The first was an experiential workshop where students listened to the emotional experiences of practicing social workers prior to their initial social work placement. The second approach was the completion of reflective diaries identifying their emotional reactions to practice situations. The findings identified that the promotion of mindfulness and emotional writing could enhance reflection, empathy and improve psychological wellbeing amongst students. Hearing experienced social workers talk about their emotions and how they had managed these in practice also helped to normalise and validate the students' own emotional experiences of anger, fear and dislike which was felt counter to wider social work values. This led to an increase in emotional openness and a decrease in the stigma of disclosure and fear of being seen as unprofessional (Rajan-Rankin 2014). A limitation of the study was social workers limited time and a lack of organisational support to attend workshops and engage in such activities.

Examining the relationship between emotional intelligence, stress, and burnout amongst social workers, Biggart et al (2016) conducted a randomised control trial evaluating the effectiveness of a 2-day emotional intelligence training course. Whilst participants reported the initial training as helpful, the results yielded no statistically significant effects. The study highlighted a range of possible reasons for this including social workers' relatively low experiences of stress at the time of the training, participants were assessed as already high in emotional intelligence traits, and there was no follow up to refresh the knowledge gained from the intervention. The outcomes of these studies support Ruch's contention (2007b:376) that 'one-off short training events - often the model of local authority in-service training - are not conducive contexts for the development of ongoing emotionally informed thinking.' Therefore, any interventions that focus on the development of emotional intelligence within the individual also needs to consider the wider context and factors within the workplace over time.

3.2.2 Formal and informal collegial ‘debriefs’

Emotional intelligence involves being able to position and shift one’s perspective to understand others' emotions, and thus underpins the development of empathy not just for children and families but also for one’s peers and colleagues. The ability to informally debrief - have someone else notice or ask how you are - and the sense of ‘not being alone in the work’ has been identified as a key factor in preventing stress related ill health and burnout (Babin et al 2012, Salloum et al 2015, Itzick and Kagan 2017, Ravalier and Allen 2020, Ruch 2007). The absence of such support was noted by Guerin et al (2010) as a factor in social workers leaving their jobs. Collins’ (2008) literature review exploring job satisfaction amongst social workers found the importance of formal and informal support systems, the proximity and care from experienced colleagues and mutual group support were vital elements for social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. For example, Ravalier and Allen (2020) identified formal and informal support included peer ‘check-in’ that was often initiated after over hearing challenging or difficult conversations on the phone. This resonates with Nordick’s (2002) small scale study of 6 ‘healthy’ child protection social workers in Australia which revealed the importance of de-briefing as a way of increasing empathy between colleagues. Ingram’s (2015b) study of social work forums found that social workers chose to articulate their emotions within informal settings with peers rather than supervision, with the latter identified as potentially leaving social workers feeling vulnerable. As with Rose and Palattiyil’s (2010) interviews with social workers, informal peer debriefs were considered an invaluable way of expressing emotions within non-hierarchical environments.

Although hybrid and home working during the Covid-19 pandemic hampered the opportunity for workers to notice how colleagues were feeling, Johnson et al’s (2022:80) longitudinal study of local authority social workers found team weekly ‘check ins’ and forums, including virtual coffee meets and lunches were viewed positively and helped to maintain morale and job satisfaction. This was also identified by Cook and Carder (2023) who found social workers operating during the first and second wave of the pandemic identified ‘not seeing’ colleagues greatly impacted their ability to exercise emotional intelligence in relation to their colleagues. The findings revealed the creation of virtual spaces and a culture of ‘camera’s on’ helped workers to check in with each other and mitigate the isolation of remote working.

Section four: Emotional labour

Emotional labour is the fourth concept identified in the literature to understand the way social workers manage the emotional demands of practice. As with emotional resilience, critical reflection and emotional intelligence, emotional labour requires the ability to bring together emotion and reason ‘intelligently’ in social work practice (Fineman 2003, George 2000). The next section begins with defining

emotional labour through a 'trifocal lens' (Grandey et al 2013:10), before reviewing interventions that have been applied in practice.

4.1 Defining emotional labour

The concept of emotional labour refers to the management and display of emotions in a work context. Employment involves the exchange of physical or intellectual labour for a wage (Wong and Law 2002). However, Hochschild's (1983) seminal study *The Managed Heart* and the study of flight attendants, identified emotional labour as the commercialisation of emotions for those working in the public sector. Whilst it is acknowledged men and women both perform emotional labour, the socioemotional work women perform in their families, means it is more prevalent in female-dominated professions (Hochschild 1983, Turtiainen et al 2022, Wharton 1999). It is therefore not surprising that the concept of emotional labour has been explored in a wide range of caring professions including nursing (Gray and Smith 2008, Theodosius 2008), health care professionals (Andela et al 2015, Roh et al 2016), teachers (Kinman et al 2011) and social work (Ferguson 2016, Lavee and Strier 2018, Winter et al 2019).

Within the literature, emotional labour has been studied from different perspectives including psychological processes (Brotheridge and Lee 2002, Hochschild 1979, Lazarus 1991), organisational factors (Grandey 2000, Stalker 2007), cultural and social structures (Turtiainen et al 2022, Wharton 2009) and unconscious emotional processes (Theodosius 2008). However, Grandey et al (2013:17) argue that 'emotional labour does not reside in any one construct, but rather emerges as a result of the dynamic interplay of occupational expectations, expressed emotions, and emotion regulation strategies.' Emotional labour is therefore best understood through a 'trifocal' lens of 1) occupational requirements, 2) emotional displays, and 3) intrapsychic processes.

As an '*occupational requirement',* employees perform emotional labour to adhere to organisational sanctioned 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1979, 1983). For example, Hochschild (1983) highlighted air flight attendants perform their 'service with a smile' as a means of ensuring customer satisfaction, despite difficult or emotionally charged interactions with passengers. Others have suggested feeling rules should be more accurately described as emotional 'display rules' given organisations cannot control employees' internal emotional states but, instead, are concerned with their outward behaviour (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Rafaeli and Sutton 1989). Emotional display rules can thus be likened to emotional scripts associated with the professional role, implicitly and explicitly reinforced through professional training programmes, as well as processes such as induction, recruitment, policy, appraisals, and supervision (Bolton 2005b, Erickson and Stacey 2013). The occupational requirement of emotional displays can also be reinforced through the professional socialisation of newcomers by managers and co-workers (Pugh et al 2013, Van Maanen and Schein 1979). From this perspective the team engage in a form of 'emotional teamwork' (Waldron 2000:65)

to uphold the expected norms, beliefs and values associated with the collective team identity and the wider profession. As highlighted by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993:103):

> *Through more or less structured experiences of both a direct nature, (eg: training, feedback, discussion, rituals) and indirect nature (eg; stories and myths, metaphors, observation of models) the agent come to learn the content, intensity, and variety of emotions that ought to be experienced and expressed while performing the work role.*

As an '*emotional display',* verbal and nonverbal performances are used to create a desirable impression of oneself in the eyes of another. For example, being seen as credible and competent in a work setting (Goffman 1959, Leigh 2014a, O'Hara 2011). Emotional labour as an emotional display can therefore be viewed as a form of 'impression management' (Hochschild 1983:35) where employee's performances can be likened to that of 'an actor performing on a stage for an often-discriminating audience' (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993:90). Building upon the work of Goffman (1959) and his dramaturgical analysis of everyday social interactions, the stage is demarcated between the 'frontstage' region – often focused on the service encounter and the performance of occupational display rules, and the 'backstage' which provides employees temporary respite in which to step out of character and relax. However, Goffman (1959:96) also described the dramaturgical cooperation of team members as 'a troupe or caste of actors [who] take on different roles to perform an overall team impression.' From this perspective, individuals continue to engage in emotional displays to the audience of their peers. Emotional displays are also used as a strategy to influence the mood and emotional state of others (Newman and Smith 2014, Othman et al 2008). As described by Ward and McMurray (2016:22), emotional labour 'is as much about managing your own emotions as it is about managing the feelings, behaviours and actions of others' and therefore closely aligns with the emotional intelligence literature (Newman and Smith 2014). Two types of emotional display rules have been identified by Wharton and Erikson (1993:466). These include 1) *masking display rules* – suppressing negatively perceived emotions and displaying calm to convey impartiality and authority and 2) *integrative display rules* – showing emotions such as empathy and humour that bind a group together. Integrative emotional displays can therefore be used to motivate others, boost morale and build rewarding and meaningful relationships (George 2000, Humphrey et al 2008).

As an *'intrapsychic process'*, emotional labour involves two internal regulatory strategies, 1) surface level acting and 2) deep level acting (Hochschild 1983, Humphrey et al 2008). The psychosocial concept of surface and deep level acting differs from the surface and depth metaphors found within psychoanalytic discourse and applied psycho-social research (Clarke and Hoggett 2018). From this perspective, depth represents a process of 'digging down to deeper and deeper layers' (Wachtel 2013:8) of the unconscious to discover what may be influencing behaviour and actions

at a surface level. Surface acting from a more sociological perspective involves a conscious 'display of emotions that one does not actually feel' (Humphrey et al 2015:749) and is primarily deployed for the sake of outward appearance (Goffman 1959). Displaying inauthentic emotions can result in emotional dissonance and depersonalisation which has been identified as a predictor of burnout and emotional exhaustion in the helping professions (Andela et al 2015, Brotheridge and Grandey 2002, Hochschild 1983). As highlighted in chapter one of the literature review, the need to hide emotional vulnerability in the context of performing professionalism and competence to the audience of one's peers can lead to social workers reluctance to ask for help (Barlow and Hall 2007, Grootegoed and Smith 2018, Rajan-Rankin 2014). Deep level acting is synonymous with 'emotion work' (Hochschild 1979:561) and as described by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993:93) can be compared to 'the way the actors "psyche themselves" for a role, a service agent psyches himself or herself into experiencing the desired emotion.' This can be achieved though 'trained imagination' (Hochschild 1983:38) and has associations with cognitive reappraisal by recalling past events to help bring forth the required feeling (Brotheridge and Lee 2022, Grandey 2000). The literature identifies deep level acting can result in feelings of self-efficacy, personal accomplishment, job, and customer satisfaction, higher coworking rates and feeling connected to the organisation (Zapf and Holz 2006).

Emotional labour can also be performed through the expression of authentic emotion such as pride and joy when there is an alignment with the required emotional display rules (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Smith 2014). Genuine emotional display is therefore positively correlated with professional identity formation and those who regard their role as a valued component of who they are (Humphrey et al 2015).

4.2 Interventions to support emotional labour

Whilst many parallels can be drawn with interventions that underpin emotional resilience, critical reflection, and emotional intelligence as already discussed above, only a handful of studies have specifically considered emotional labour interventions as part of social workers' supportive strategies with the emotional demands of practice.

4.2.1 The professional socialisation of emotions: '*occupational requirement'*

The term 'professional socialisation' relates to a dynamic process of internalising a specific culture of a professional community and becoming a legitimate member by adopting the required professional conduct of that community (Sadeghi et al 2019). This process begins at the initial training stage and continues throughout the social worker's career (Miller 2010, Wheeler 2017). For example, social workers at all stages of their career are required to 'demonstrate professionalism in terms of presentation, demeanor, reliability, honesty, and respectfulness' (BASW 2018). In addition, managers and team members shape the professional socialisation of emotions

through induction, supervision, and appraisal processes (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Miller 2010, Whitaker 2019).

As part of an ethnographic case study of one social work department in England Whitaker (2019:326) explored how managers encouraged the display of feelings to align with the organisational mantra of 'bring yourself to work.' This included the performative expectation to enact compassion, enthusiasm, empathy, commitment, and creativity. The findings identified these occupational requirements were akin to emotional scripts, reinforced through training, supervision, managerial directives, and bimonthly monitoring groups. Whilst the aim was to create a sense of collective professional identity not all employees adopted the emotional scripts that were being imposed by the organisation. Social workers managed this dissonance by 'getting by' through discretion, or 'getting back' through resistance. As identified by Denham (1998:122) 'scripts... fall short when people have different/opposite emotional reactions to the same event.' A sense of enforced compliance was also echoed in Gibson's (2016) ethnographic case study within a local authority child protection service. Drawing on the concept of 'institutional guardians' (Creed et al 2014) the study found those with cognitive, emotional and or moral commitments to the organisation either shamed or praised others in attempts to change behavior and enforce compliance with institutional prescriptions.

4.2.2 The impression management of emotions: *'emotional display'*

Drawing on Goffman's (1971) notion of performative emotional displays, Ingram (2013c:998) argues that 'social workers need to exercise impression management in a range of contexts, whether it is within direct interactions with service users or within their communications in relation to the organisations and structures that govern their work.' Showing an outward display of calm can reduce potential conflict during highly emotive encounters. For example, Kanasz and Zeilinska (2017) identified different emotional display strategies used by social work students when confronted with work-related situations, particularly with hostile clients. These included controlling and therefore masking their feelings of anger by displaying calm and refraining from expressing negative emotions.

Team managers also adapt their emotional displays and draw on integrative display rules to motivate staff, boost morale and contain staff anxiety (Wang and Siebert 2015). For example, Tham and Stromberg's (2020) study of first line social work managers explored how they perceived their role and the demands placed upon them. The findings identified the importance of being present and available as well as drawing on their own personal qualities which included calmness and the ability to motivate. This resonates with Morley's (2022) Australian study which explored how experienced social workers, including those in supervisory positions, drew on emotional labour to build relationships with families and colleagues. The findings revealed they had to 'dig deep' to maintain a 'professional face' during challenging

periods – a form of masking - whilst also remaining open, responsive, and understanding through the display of 'empathic gestures.' However, as Smith and Grandey (2022) warn, this can result in an 'authenticity paradox' where leaders, must perform enough emotion but not so much that it undermines their authority, whilst also simultaneously managing the emotional demands inherent in their role.

4.2.3 The regulation of emotions: *'intrapsychic processes'*

The previous chapter identified social workers and team managers walked a 'delicate line' (Ferguson et al 2021) between acknowledging the emotional demands of practice and managing their own distress, anxiety, and frustration as part of performing their professional role. Surface acting, which requires social workers to maintain an outward emotional display counter to how they may be feeling inside, can result in compassion fatigue and burnout (Ashely-Binge and Cousins 2020, Kinman and Grant 2020). Surface acting has also been used to consciously distance, shut off or defer their emotions when working with children and families (Grootegoed and Smith 2018, Lavee and Strier 2018, Leeson 2010, Moesby-Jensen and Nielson 2015). The use of surface level acting by team managers to motivate staff has also been identified as '…transparent to the receiver and will counteract any positive effect of the emotional display' (Wang and Siebert 2015:589). However, deep level acting, or emotion work, can help social workers to regulate their internal states and thus increase their capacity to cope with the emotional demands of practice (Adamson et al 2014, Collins 2015, Seligman 2003). As identified in the emotional resilience literature above, this included a strengths-based approach that actively applied hope and optimism to the social work task, including reframing emotionally demanding encounters into positive challenges (Burns et al 2019, Nordick 2002, Wendt et al 2008).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the dominant conceptual frameworks used to understand how social workers manage the emotional demands of practice. At present, interventions used to develop emotional resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and emotional labour can be difficult to access due to social workers' emotional overload, work related pressures, availability of time and a lack of organisational support (O'Sullivan and Cooper 2021, Dugmore et al 2018, O'Sullivan 2019). In addition, whilst interventions primarily focused on support at the intrapersonal and interpersonal level, the literature identified that support is an inherently social endeavor that is enacted within social work teams. The following chapter therefore outlines the literature that focuses on the social work team as the key site for managing the emotional demands of practice.

Chapter three: Team support in child and family social work

Introduction

Chapter two identified that the conceptual frameworks and interventions used to support social workers with the emotional demands of practice focused largely on the individual or the relational level. However, what was apparent in the literature was the significance of support being enacted within social work teams. As identified by Ruch over 15 years ago (2007b:370):

> *Social work practice has been undertaken, historically, in the context of social work teams. Unfortunately, the capacity for teams to offer support to practitioners has been under-recognized and as a consequence the potential of teams has not been fully realized…in the context of child protection, investigations need further attention to ensure these important collective resources do not continue to be overlooked.*

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section explores the current context of local authority child and family social work team structures and settings in England and the influence of diversity on teamwork. The second part of this chapter draws on research that has explored how teams enact emotional support through three conceptual frameworks, 1) team as a secure base, 2) team as containment and 3) team as a community of coping. The chapter concludes with a summary of the gaps in the existing literature and the rationale for my study.

Section one: Child and family social work teams

Each local authority in England has a range of structures and models of social work practice that operate within different organisational settings. Each team is also uniquely made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences. These factors intersect and influence each other, bringing both benefits and challenges in supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice. These are explored in turn below.

1.1 Social Work Teams: Structure

Teams are identified as the primary organisational structure for social work practice (Ruch 2004). Local authority child and family social workers engaged in child protection work predominately operate within the formal structure of specialist teams (DfE 2020). The way teams are structured, i.e.: the chosen practice model, differs dependant on theoretical and practice orientations, local community need, availability

of resources, and wider political decisions regarding the privatisation or commissioning of services (Jones 2019). The way teams are structured also influence relational dynamics between its members. Two dominant organisational team structures can be found within child and family social work, 1) the traditional, hierarchical structure, and 2) the systemic unit model. A third, multidisciplinary team structure, described as the 'Family Safeguarding Model' (Forrester et al 2017) is also currently being implemented and evaluated across local authorities in England. This latter configuration aligns with the recent independent review of social care that recommended a family service model of multi-disciplinary teams based in local communities to replace current early help and child in need services (MacAlister 2022).

1.1.1 Traditional hierarchical structures

The most prevalent structure of local authority child and family social work teams is traditionally hierarchical. This can be conceptualised as a vertical top-down chain of command, with clear delegation of roles, responsibilities, duties, and lines of accountability (Moriarty et al 2015, Saiti and Stefou 2020). Team managers hold overall responsibility, direction and decision making for the team, whilst other team members – usually based on experience, qualification, and role distinction – seek guidance and instruction from those above them. Social workers operating within these structures predominantly hold their own caseload are described by Forrester et al (2013) as 'individualised and private in nature'. This is because engagement with families, other professionals and compliance with tasks are not collectively shared with the wider team. The individualised nature of managing casework and the emotional demands of practice was recently highlighted in MacAlister's (2022:70) review of social care, which found that 'social workers nearly always carry out the most crucial part of their work alone, such as visiting families' and 'navigating their own emotions'. This model has been criticised for not providing opportunities for career progression other than management (SWTF 2009) which more recent studies suggest can lead to a feeling of stagnation resulting in experienced social workers leaving the profession (Johnson et al 2022, Cook et al 2022). The hierarchical model also assumes that those in senior roles are more experienced and thus require less support (Beddoe and Davys 2016, Patterson 2019). For example, in a study exploring the experience of early career social workers, Cleveland et al (2019:1443) found the perceived status of being a more experienced social worker meant that less emotional support was provided.

1.1.2 Systemic unit model

The second dominant organisational structure found within child and family social work teams is the systemic unit model, also referred to as the 'Hackney Model' or 'Reclaiming Social Work' (Forrester et al 2013). Based on an applied systemic family therapy approach the model sought to redress the individualistic nature of traditional hierarchical structures through shared learning and responsibility for case work within small multi-disciplinary teams (Antonopoulou et al 2017, Dugmore 2018, Moriarty et al

2015, Munro 2011). The systemic unit model involves specialist team roles, including a consultant – equivalent to deputy team managers in traditional teams - and a systemic clinician with specialist social work skills and therapeutic knowledge.

In a mixed methods evaluation of the traditional model and systemic models of practice, Forrester et al (2013:105) identified positive features of the systemic approach. These included 'shared working and caseloads, intensive case discussion, specialist roles and focused skills development.' This supported social workers with the emotional demands of practice because they did not feel alone or stagnant in their professional development. The adoption of systemic peer group supervision also provided emotional support and containment for social workers as well as the capacity to better hold and share risk. Whilst the research highlighted benefits of the smaller systemic unit model, it also identified the tensions and conflict that can occur in a multi-agency context. This included different specialists working in different ways, and the potential for the blurring of roles and responsibilities.

1.1.3 The 'Family Safeguarding Model'

Models for integrated or multi-disciplinary teams working with children and families are not new and have experienced renewed attention to improve joined up working between professionals (MacAlister 2022). As part of Hertfordshire local authority's reform of their children's services, they introduced a multidisciplinary team and group supervision approach called the Family Safeguarding Model. Supported by the Department for Education's Innovation Programme, adult specialist workers and children's social workers came together to form a team around the family. This approach acknowledged the systemic and often complex and intersecting challenges faced by children and families – including parental alcohol and drug use, domestic abuse, and mental health issues. A mixed methods evaluation of the model by Forrester et al (2017) identified that group supervision including adult workers helped to create different ways of thinking about the family system. As a result, job satisfaction remained high amongst social workers, with at least three-quarters agreeing that their work gave them a feeling of personal achievement. In addition, social workers' intention to stay in practice remained stable and reported stress, although higher than the general population, remained comparatively low for social work samples.

1.2 Social Work teams: Settings

The various structures of social work teams outlined above are operationalised within different settings. These include the small social work office, large open plan hotdesking arrangements, and as an outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic, an acceleration in hybrid and remote working. Ethnographic research has highlighted an important relationship between the team setting and the practice and wellbeing of social workers (de Montigny 1995, Ferguson et al 2020, Jeyasingham 2013, 2014,

Leigh 2014b, O'Connor 2019, Pithouse 1998, Ruch 2004). In addition, a small number of studies have explored the role of objects and artefacts that frame the team setting (Jeyasingham 2013, 2020, Rose et al 2010). The team setting and how the environment influences social workers experiences of their team is explored next.

1.2.1 The small social work office

Being situated with colleagues in a small team environment can create a sense of shared responsibility and emotional and practical support for social workers, resulting in high levels of work satisfaction and wellbeing (Antonopoulou et al 2017, Forrester et al 2013, Newcomb 2022). Comparing the small office with larger open plan settings, Jeyasingham's (2014) ethnography of two children's safeguarding teams identified the proximity to colleagues in the small office was a valuable resource for discussion, reflection, and collegial support. Similarly, Ferguson et al (2020) found that having a stable workforce who had their own desks and co-located with managers in small office teams generated a much more supportive reflective culture for social workers. Small teams coupled with group supervision, and managers who knew the staff and children well were also identified by Stanley and Lincoln's (2016) study as key contributors to social workers' reporting positive experiences of their organisational setting. The team managers' presence within the office enabled them to see team members and observe their emotional states which meant they were able to provide support when needed (Daley 2023). However, the construction and layout of office space beyond glass fronted reception areas and locked doors can also create the impression of a 'fortress' (Leigh 2017:424) that can alienate families, hinder relationship-based practice (Jeyasingham 2020, Taylor 2011) and reinforce social work practice as an invisible trade (Pithouse 1998).

1.2.2 The open plan office and hotdesking

The increased use of digital technologies as a tool in social work practice, cost saving by local authorities and a shift towards more flexible working has seen social work teams move away from the small office setting towards open plan, hotdesking and agile arrangements (Jeyasingham 2014, 2016). However, studies have identified agile working and hot desking could lead to a sense of disconnection from the team (Jeyasingham, 2014, Leigh and Morris 2019, Stanley and Lincoln 2016). For example, spending less time in the office and reduced physical proximity to co-workers has been found to impact team identity and informal collegial support (Biggart et al 2016, Horwath 2016, Turkle 2011). The lack of privacy in the open plan office has also been identified by Leigh (2014b) as a 'panopticon model of surveillance' (Foucault 1995) where individuals are observed, and their actions monitored by others who attend and adhere to the 'performance regime' of the organisation (Featherstone et al 2014:79). As part of an ethnographic case study Gibson (2016) identified some team members took on the role of 'institutional guardians' (Creed et al 2014) reinforcing the required emotional displays and behaviours of the organisation. Given this sense of

surveillance, the importance of office spaces and how they provide social workers with ‘a variety of degrees of openness, exposure, intimacy, and seclusion’ (Jeyasingham 2014:301) is an essential aspect of social workers ability to manage the emotional demands of practice.

1.2.3 Remote and hybrid working

Remote and hybrid working has become a common feature of social work practice over the last decade (Daley 2023, Jeyasingham 2021, Pink et al 2021). For example, Jeyasingham’s (2019) qualitative study explored eleven social worker’s practices away from the office space and found working from home the most common location for remote working. The benefits included social workers being able to moderate their immediate environments to get work done, including the ability to reduce distractions and noise common in office settings. However, working from home also led to social workers extending their working hours which created feelings of exhaustion. Working from home therefore has implications for social worker resilience. For example, as part of a larger ethnographic study, Disney et al (2019) used GPS to trace social workers’ movements between the office, home working and visits to families. The findings highlighted remote working increased the seeping of work into their home environments which was experienced as unwelcome and at times ‘deeply distressing’ (2019:47). Other remote working spaces identified in the study included cafes and the social worker’s car (Ferguson 2010b). Whilst these spaces offered solitude, issues of confidentiality, data security and the potential to come across families in the community remained an ongoing challenge.

Whilst home working was already a part of working practice for social workers, this was accelerated by the pandemic. Johnson et al’s (2022) study identified increased flexibility and reduced travel time due to online meetings were helpful. However, the lack of physical boundaries between work and home meant social workers found it difficult to switch off as it created pressure to regularly check and respond to emails outside of working hours. In addition, 61% of social workers felt relationships with colleagues had worsened because of social distancing and home working. Social workers expressed feelings of isolation due to being unable to share professional knowledge, offload or de-stress following challenging encounters with families. Moving from office-based to hybrid and online working meant social workers had to establish different ways of staying connected to their professional communities which included the need for ongoing formal and informal team support systems (Ashcroft et al 2022, Cadell 2022). Whilst feelings of isolation were alleviated through the creation of online and virtual team support groups (Cabiati 2021, Cook et al 2020, Peinado and Anderson 2020), studies suggested online interactions could not compensate for the benefits of informal face to face peer support and ad hoc supervision between colleagues (Cook and Zscholmer 2020, Cook et al 2020, Saraniemi et al 2022). As Daley (2023:18) suggests, a longer term move to hybrid working practices means ‘…

some teams are facing a future without a stable (physical) workspace [that] will likely impact team cohesion and therefore social worker well-being and quality of work.'

1.2.4 Artefacts, objects, and props in the team setting

Control of the team setting through the placement and movement of artefacts, objects and 'props' are considered an intrinsic aspect of 'conveying information about oneself and the team through scenic means' (Goffman 1959:88). From a psychosocial perspective, Turner and Stets (2006:28) identify:

> *'...individuals are seen to be actors, who know their lines from a cultural script as they "act" on a stage composed of physical props and other equipment in front of an audience of others.'*

Spaces are co-produced through the way social workers use and experience them (Jeyasingham 2013), and therefore become the site for 'performative events' (Rose et al 2010:335). For example, the importance of desk spaces, personal items for self-care, including 'mugs with a distinctive message' (Jeyasingham 2020:342), and work materials that sit alongside each other represent the social workers' daily support needs. A lack of 'inspired symbolic gestures' in the office was identified in Leigh's (2014b) comparative ethnography of two child protection offices. One team in England was in an open plan setting, whilst a Belgium office was arranged with social workers who had their own rooms. The lack of objects in the England office was in stark contrast to the private personalised office spaces of their Belgium counterparts. Within virtual work settings, Fineman (2003:59) identified a process of 'impression formation' including the use of familiar props or virtual graphics. However, despite the move to hybrid working in social work, the use of artefacts and props in virtual settings remains under researched (Cook and Carder 2023).

1.3 Social work teams and teamwork

Teamwork is described as a collaborative process where an interdependent group of people work together towards a shared goal (Hackman 2002). The social work code of ethics stipulates that 'all employers are required to…promote effective teamwork and communication' (BASW 2021), with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) also stipulating that social workers must evidence their ability to 'contribute to team working and collaborative support' (BASW 2018:12). The intrinsic importance of teamwork is captured by Ferguson (2011b:135) who highlights that 'the health of an organisation is…deeply influenced by the stability and continuity of its staff and the strength of teamwork.' Yet, the shared goal of teamwork in child and family social work varies dependent on the task and theoretical perspective. Statutory legislation and guidance in England places 'a duty on local authorities to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need in their area' (DfE 2018:6). From this perspective teamwork can be viewed as 'an instrument for carrying out the policy of the agency' which is to

safeguard children (Payne 1982:13). However, the goal of teamwork can also promote the development of professional and team identity (Flower 2018, Goffman 1959, Ingram 2015b, Leigh 2014a), to unconsciously mobilise defensive strategies against anxiety inherent in the work (Cooper and Lousada 2005, Ruch 2012, Whittaker and Havard 2016), and as a means to emotionally and socially support coworkers (Burns et al 2019, Carpenter and Webb 2012, Johnson et al 2022, Ruch et al 2014).

1.3.1 Teamwork: The role of diversity

Teamwork is deeply influenced by the diversity of its members (Mallow 2010, Skyberg 2022). Operating at two levels, diversity includes what is visible, such as gender, language, age, and ethnic background, and what is invisible which includes factors such as education, socioeconomic status, knowledge, experience, and skills (Duchek et al 2020). The debate as to whether heterogenous or homogeneous teams result in better team performance yields mixed results within the literature. It is widely accepted that diversity can bring both advantages and disadvantages to team functioning and support. Viewing teams as a 'community of difference' Tierney (1994:11) highlights the advantages of diversity. This includes the sharing of different perspectives which can lead to increased creativity, innovation and problem solving (Horwitz 2005, Van Knippenberg and Schippers 2007). Diversity within teams can also promote healthy debate and avoids 'group think' (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007:991). However, diversity within teams can also inhibit effective teamwork. For example, different perspectives and opinions can create 'collaborative dilemmas', resulting in dysfunctional group dynamics which can led to increased conflict and misunderstanding, poor communication, bias, discrimination, mistrust, difficulties with social integration and team cohesion (Mor Barak 2000, Williams and O'Reilly 1998, Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991).

Within the context of a predominately white British (71.4%) workforce (DfE 2021), and an under representation of ethnic diversity within social work leadership roles (Bernard 2020), Johnson et al (2022:152) explored the impact of ethnic diversity on social workers' experiences. Many respondents raised the importance of seeing ethnic, racial, and cultural identity as part of a broader and more intersectional conversation about difference. Similarly, the independent review of children's social care identified that ethnic diversity within teams positively 'broadened their own knowledge of other cultures…' (MacAlister 2022:154). Despite the benefits of diversity within teams, the same review identified a lack of knowledge about people from different ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds meant some colleagues were uncomfortable talking about difference which caused tensions within the workplace. Specifically, the report identified 'managing these micro-aggressions [creates] emotional labour for those experiencing them in addition to the already challenging nature of child and family social work' (MacAlister 2022:155). This finding is supported by other studies that have explored experiences of organisational racism within the workplace. For instance, the

findings of a survey by the Principal Social Workers Network and What Works for Children's Social Care (wwwfcsc 2021) found 28% of social workers had experienced racism from colleagues or managers (Gurao and Bacchoo 2022). A small-scale study exploring the experiences of 6 female black social workers (Obasi 2022) also suggested that rather than the team being a source of emotional support, all participants experienced feelings of isolation, hypervisibility, and invisibility within their team. This experience led to some participants attributing their decision to leave the profession to racism. One way of tackling race issues within the workforce is to address how language can be used to maintain the status quo. For example, Campbell-Stephens (2020) highlights that decolonising the language within the workforce by reframing conversations from ethnic minority to global majority can help to address power imbalances, and thus create a more inclusive work environment. As Dei (2000:111) suggests, 'inclusion is not about bringing people into what already exists; it is about creating a new space, a better space for everyone.'

Studies have also explored the role of gender diversity within the social work workforce. The role of social worker continues to be dominated by women and as such has been described as a 'feminised' profession (Shaub 2017). As of December 2022, the local authority child and family social work workforce in England consisted of 83% women and 16% men (Johnson et al 2022). Challenges faced by men in social work have been studied in the context of gender identity and social constructs of masculinity (Cree 2001, Mclean 2003, Featherstone et al 2007). This has included men's dominance in social work management and high-status specialisms at the expense of career progression for women (Christie 2006, Lupton 2006). As suggested by Pease (2011: 417) 'If we fail to examine the social construction of masculinities in social work, we will be unable to acknowledge the ways in which masculinities affect women's lives.' Yet despite the importance of gender diversity, no studies have considered how gendered dynamics affect peer support in social work teams.

The importance of different specialisms within teams has been described by Horwitz (2005:226) as 'job related diversity.' This form of diversity can contribute to 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998:1) whereby the sharing of diverse knowledge and skills can positively contribute to decision making within a team context (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007, Kent de Grey et al 2018, Williams and O'Reilly 1998). Applied to social work teams more broadly, the sharing of knowledge and skills within collegial relationships can support the development of practice, including strengthening decision making and sense making (Baginsky and Manthorpe 2015, Cook et al 2020, Cook and Gregory 2020). This is particularly important for newly qualified social workers who - early in their careers - experience a 'beginners dip' where their decision making differs to their more experienced colleagues (Devaney et al 2017). As identified earlier, one advantage of the systemic unit model of social work is the diversity of ideas and different perspectives, as well as 'being surrounded and challenged by highly skills colleagues' (Forrester et al 2013:133). Cognitive diversity (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007) and the sharing of different perspectives and thoughts

within social work teams has also been explored by Brooks (2022) who drew on De Bono's (1985) six coloured hats representing different thinking styles. These include 1) facts and information, 2) feelings and emotions, 3) caution, 4) positives, 5) creativity, and 6) thinking. The Research in Practice tool identifies that everyone thinks differently, and a strong or successful team will include a balance of these styles.

Diversity has also been considered in the context of different social roles. As described by Davis and Newstrom (1985) the success of diversity requires a focus on how team members achieve 'social equilibrium' in the context of organisational factors such as social influence, status, power, and culture (George 2000, Mor Barak, 2000, Williams and O'Reilly 1998). Through the perspective of role theory, Belbin (2010) found people in teams tend to assume one of nine roles which are grouped under 1) action oriented, 2) people orientated and 3) thought oriented behaviours and styles. Those who assume *action-oriented roles* focus on challenge, problem solving and are organised, but can be inflexible, and find it difficult to delegate. Those who assume *people-oriented roles* value team members individual contributions, supports others, and build relationships outside the team, for the team, but can be overly optimistic. And thirdly, *thought orientated* team members who are critical thinkers, and have specialist knowledge, skills, and ability, but may be less focus on the bigger picture. Teams with mixed roles are considered to perform better than those that are 'unbalanced' (Prichard and Stanton 1999), thus highlighting the importance of collective team strengths by appreciating everyone's unique contributions. Despite the importance of diversity, there has been limited research to date that has examined the intersectional role of visible and invisible diversity within social work teams - e.g.: socialisms, gender, ethnicity, and class - and how this may affect the giving and receiving of support with the emotional demands of practice.

Section two: Existing models of team support in social work

The second section of this chapter outlines the small body of literature that considers the social work team as the primary unit of support for social workers with the emotional demands of practice. A review of the literature identified three dominant conceptual frameworks which include 1) team as secure base, 2) team as containment and 3) team as community of coping. These are explored in turn below, drawing on other studies that align with the different perspectives.

2.1 Team as a 'Secure Base'

From an attachment perspective (Ainsworth et al 1978, Bowlby 1988), the team can be viewed as a secure base where social workers are supported with the emotional demands of practice (Biggart et al 2017). In the context of child development, the concept of a secure base represents an infant's biological drive to seek proximity to another at times of physical and psychological threat. In social work practice, secure base has been developed into a five-dimensional model of therapeutic caregiving for

children in foster care (Schofield 2002, Schofield and Beek 2014). The interconnected features of availability, sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation and belonging act as a guide to developing and sustaining nurturing relationships for children who have experienced abuse and separation from their families. The 'team as a secure base' was developed by Biggart et al (2017) who conducted in-depth interviews with 52 frontline child and family social workers across 8 local authorities. The study explored the five dimensions of availability, sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation, and belonging to identify how teams supported social workers to manage the emotional demands of the work. The findings identified that teams who embodied these dimensions provided a secure base for their members and thus increased social worker's resilience. Each of these five dimensions - although interlinked - are discussed in turn below.

2.1.1 Dimension one: Availability

The first dimension of the team as a secure base is availability - promoting trust that 'people are there for me' (Biggart et al 2017:122). As the previous chapter identified, the development of emotional resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and emotional labour was strengthened when co-workers could draw on each other for support. From this perspective, Ferguson (2011b:197) highlights 'the office should provide a secure base for workers to go into in the morning and to return to after visits, where the relationships and support that are needed can be found'. The proximity of team members is therefore an important feature of the dimension of availability. As identified from the literature, small office settings, where managers sit within their teams and where co-workers could observe each other's practice resulted in high levels of work satisfaction and wellbeing (Antonopoulou et al 2017, Forrester et al 2013). This aligns with the significant body of literature that identifies support from colleagues and immediate supervisors to be associated with lower levels of perceived work related stress and increased resilience, improved performance, and staff retention (Adamson et al 2014, Cleveland et al 2019, McFadden et al 2019, Mor Borak et al 2006, Nielsen et al, 2016, Smith 2000).

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic saw a rapid change to working practices including working from home. In this changing landscape, Cook et al (2020) considered how social work teams could function as a secure base in the context of remote working and how technology was used to signal availability to each other across virtual spaces. In-depth interviews were conducted with social workers across 9 local authorities. The study found that formal and informal spaces were created using emails, MS Teams, Outlook diaries and WhatsApp, which addressed feelings of isolation and helped social workers remain connected to the team. The findings identified that whilst social workers felt supported and the team had become more cohesive during the crisis, there remained several challenges, particularly for those who were new and therefore had no prior established relationship with colleagues.

2.1.2 Dimension two: Sensitivity

The second dimension of the team as a secure base is sensitivity – promoting emotional regulation and knowing 'my feelings are manageable' (Biggart et al 2017:123). As identified by Ferguson (2005:794) 'the more that workers are cared for, nurtured and protected the more they will be able to provide this for the children they serve.' From this perspective team sensitivity links to the body of literature on emotional intelligence and emotional labour where team members identify and respond to one's own and others' emotional states and thus show compassion and empathy to those who may be struggling. This includes the importance of formal and informal collegial debriefs, critical reflection through reflective forms and supervision, and the importance of the team as a form of containment (Ruch 2004, 2007a), which will be explored in more detail below. A move to hybrid working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic did however highlight the ability to 'notice' when colleagues may have needed support meant sensitivity was more difficult to achieve (Cook et al 2020).

2.1.3 Dimension three: Acceptance

The third dimension of the team as a secure base is acceptance - building self-worth and acknowledging 'I don't always have to be strong,' where social workers feel safe to express their vulnerabilities and accepted by others when they do (Biggart et al 2017:124). Supervision can be considered as a secure base where social workers can process the emotional demands of practice (Williams 2022). However, social workers can also be reluctant to express vulnerability to the audience of their peers and supervisors for fear of being perceived as incompetent or unable to cope (Barlow and Hall 2007, Baum 2012, Leigh 2017b, North 2019, Rai 2012, Rajan-Rankin 2014, Ross, 2014). Acceptance therefore requires workplace cultures that challenge the normalisation of stress where social workers can be honest about emotions as a 'mark of professionalism rather than failure' (Van Heugten 2011:11). During the Covid-19 pandemic McFadden et al (2021) conducted a UK based survey of 3,425 social workers and found those who allowed themselves to think and deal with their personal family difficulties at work had higher levels of work-related quality of life. The study suggested that whilst it may be more common to keep home and work life separate '…the right balance in the integration of work and family can be associated with enrichment' (McFadden et al 2021:15). Team environments that challenge wider discourses of professional performance, including the acceptance of mistakes, showing vulnerability, and acknowledging the intersectional realities of their personal and professional identities support social workers to recognise the reality and 'humanity of social work' practice (Grant and Kinman 2012, Munro 2019, Rose 2022).

2.1.4 Dimension four: Cooperation

The fourth dimension of the team as a secure base is cooperation – promoting self-efficacy and self-worth that 'I can work with others to find a solution' (Biggart

2017:125). As identified above, teamwork is a central tenet of child and family social work practice (Ferguson 2011, Ruch 2007). Within the Professional Capabilities' Framework, (BASW 2018:2) students, social workers and managers are expected to evidence their professionalism by establishing 'a network of internal and external colleagues from whom to seek advice and expertise' and their leadership capabilities by contributing to the learning of others. The ability to cooperate with team members underpins many of the interventions of support highlighted in the previous chapter, including peer based reflective forums, reflective supervision and informal peer debriefs. Such arrangements enable social workers to believe it is possible to be 'both vulnerable and competent' (Biggart 2017:125). Seeking support, being open to learning from others, and acknowledging one's own limitations even as an experienced social worker, was identified by Beddoe et al (2014) as a vital aspect of supporting worker resilience. Social workers are also supported to manage the emotional demands of practice through the sharing of practice wisdom and expertise (Cook and Gregory 2020, Helm 2013, 2021, Saltiel 2016). Studies have identified the importance of mentors, buddying and peer to peer learning which is considered emotionally rewarding for those that receive and provide such support (Ravalier 2021, Stanley and Lincoln 2016). Social workers also benefit from practical cooperation (Kent de Grey et al 2018). As suggested by Antonopoulou et al (2017) co-operation with practical support in small teams with high staff-supervisor ratio, created a sense of shared responsibility and support for individual workers. However, ongoing recruitment and retention of experienced staff has been found to limit opportunities for learning and support for less experienced colleagues (Baginsky 2013b, McFadden 2018).

2.1.5 Dimension five: Team membership

The fifth dimension of team as a secure base is team membership – promoting the feeling 'I am valued, and I belong' (Biggart et al 2017:126). As described by Katzenbach and Smith (2004:5) the 'essence of a team' involves a set of shared values that encourage listening and responding constructively to the views of others, and recognition of the interests and achievements of others (Mosley and Irvine 2014). Feeling valued has been found to increase an individual's commitment and motivation to their team, including increased pride, staff morale and a greater willingness to share knowledge and help colleagues (Bowyer and Roe 2015, McFadden et al 2018, Tham 2022). For example, Gibbs (2001) small rural study in Australia identified the significant role of feeling valued, receiving praise and positive feedback provided social workers with the capacity to better cope with subsequent adversity' (2001:328). More recently in the UK, Mitchell et al (2021) conducted randomised control trials that involved the sending of a personalised letter of gratitude from a senior manager and the social workers' direct line manager. In addition, free coffee machines were installed across several social work buildings with a laminated message of thanks from senior management. The studies identified small acts of kindness positively impacted social workers' sense of feeling valued and increased motivation and subjective wellbeing.

In addition, the coffee machines contributed to a sense of community when team members would congregate around the machine to talk.

Team membership involves 'implicit psychological membership' (Biggart et al 2017:126), where a sense of belonging is established through adherence to the teams' norms and behaviours. These included social activities and rituals, such as the sharing of food and celebrations. Rituals are intrinsic to social life and therefore team life, symbolically communicating a groups values, beliefs, and feelings (Turner 1969, Wiles 2017). Rituals that involve the sharing of food and drink are used to express friendship (Douglas 1999), encourage group cohesion, and define social boundaries (Winter et al 2019), and thus provide 'emotional nourishment' to support the demands of work (Thomson and Hassenkamp 2008:1797). The ritual of storying telling within teams through 'narrative performances' (Leigh 2017b:197) also supports collective professional identity and team belonging through a mutual understanding of the complexities of the work (Gabriel 2000, Leigh 2014a). For example, White's (1997) ethnographic case study of a social services department identified the display of team loyalty and caring values was a crucial part of the team leaders' 'identity talk' (1997:163) and showing mutual concern between team members was a fundamental aspect of collective team identity. The role of storytelling within teams has also been explored by Cook (2019). Themes arising from a series of focus groups with social workers identified solidarity, affirmations, partnership, persistence, and courage enabled social workers to construct their work in a way that made it more emotionally manageable. However, the findings also suggested that these stories could construct families and the team in unhelpful ways. This aligns with other studies that have identified the socialisation process of team belonging can lead to individuals regulating their behaviour and emotions to adhere to the team's wider scripts (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002, Garcia-Prieto 2003, George 2000, Gibson 2016). Therefore, whilst the team can function as a secure base it can also paradoxically be a place of emotional insecurity.

2.2 Team as containment

A model of team as containment has been conceptualised by Ruch (2007a) where the multifaceted nature of collegial, team and organisational containment provide the conditions for critical reflection to take place. Holistic containment therefore recognises the 'inter-dependent contexts of practitioners and the diverse structures and systems that are informed by both technical-rational and practical-moral knowledge' (Ruch 2007:676). The concept of holistic containment has since been developed into a tool for practice supervisors described as the 'containment wheel' which explores the three dimensions of 1) emotional, 2) epistemological, and 3) organisational containment (Fairtlough 2019). These are explored in turn below.

2.2.1 Emotional containment

The first dimension of the holistic containment wheel 'recognises the significance of secure individual and group relationships, whether they be between peers, peers and managers, or others, that provide space for emotions to be recognised and processed' (Fairtlough 2019:2). Through an applied psychoanalytic understanding of emotions, an individuals' capacity to reflect on emotional experience is underpinned by supportive and secure relationships (Bion 1959, Klein 1946). The containing 'object' can be applied to teams as a symbolic substitute for the containing caregiver in infancy, enabling social workers to experience their feelings as manageable and thus 'make the unbearable, bearable' (Ferguson 2011:199). As identified within chapter one of the literature review, social workers can find themselves engaged in defensive practices whereby overwhelming emotional experience can threaten the capacity for thought (Cooper and Lousada 2005, Munro 2011, Ruch 2004, 2007a, Woodhouse and Pengelly 1991, Whittaker 2011). For example, a key tenet of emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise one's own and others' feelings, yet, as Locke (2005:426) suggests, 'if one is unaware, due to defensiveness, that one can feel fear, one will not be able to empathize with fear in others.' This perspective is relevant given Cooper and Lee's (2015:243) contention that social work teams find themselves 'infused with unconscious primitive and powerful emotional processes' arising from the nature of the work. Emotional containment can therefore be provided by social work teams through interventions identified in chapter two of the literature review. This includes reflective forums and reflective supervision, and emotional intelligence and emotional labour through informal collegial debriefs and noticing and responding to how others in the team may be feeling.

2.2.2 Epistemological containment

The second dimension of the holistic containment wheel 'refers to the capacity of the organisation to enable practitioners to integrate multiple forms of technical, process and ethical knowledge into their reflections on practice' (Fairtlough 2019:2). Building on and expanding Bion's (1961) studies of emotional 'containment' in groups, Ruch (2007a) identified the importance of epistemological containment where team members share and integrate different sources of knowledge and skills to discuss the complexity and uncertainty of their work. To be effective, social workers require safe, physical, mental, and emotionally containing spaces where they can be open to learning from their mistakes, be vulnerable and develop their ability to 'not know'. This aligns with the team as a secure base dimension of cooperation described above. working with others, including buddying and co-working arrangements can support social workers to feel that they do not have to manage alone. From this perspective, the team can be viewed as a 'community of practice' (Weinger 1998:1) which is described as an experience-based learning environment where individual members learn about localised customs, practices, and routines from their coworkers. This aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991:29) concept of 'legitimate peripheral

participation' where team members invite other members to serve as role models on matters that they are perceived as having expertise (Fook et al 2000). Localised practices can provide social workers with strategies to manage the emotional demands of practice. As identified by Kram and Charniss (2001:266), 'observing colleagues handling particular situations with customers, peers, and superiors, [means being] ...exposed to strategies different from their own.' In addition, Broadhurst et al's (2010) ethnography identified how the emotional demands of practice were managed at a team level when prescriptive organisational procedures were buffered against through localised responses to keep workloads down and thresholds for interventions high. This form of resistance was also identified in Saltiel's (2016:2108) ethnography of decision making in children protection. The findings identified how teams managed the emotional demands of practice by collectively mocking official procedures which reinforced the integrity and identity of the team.

2.2.3 Organisational containment

The third dimension of the holistic containment wheel 'requires organisational, professional, and managerial clarity and thoughtful, and consistent managerial relationships' (Fairtlough 2019:2). Organisational containment involves clear management guidance and oversight, regular observation and feedback, appraisals, workload management, organisational praise, recognition, and professional development and opportunities. This is significant given that barriers in accessing some interventions described in chapter two of the literature review included a lack of organisational support (O'Sullivan and Cooper 2021, Dugmore et al 2018, O'Sullivan 2019). Team managers, and those in supervisory positions play a pivotal role in containing team members' anxiety through their managerial and supervisory relationships (Beddoe et al 2021, Ruch 2007, 2012). In addition - aligning with the emotional intelligence and emotional labour literature - managers also need to be aware of their own emotions and those of others to problem solve, motivate, boost team morale, and encourage participation and positive interactions between different team members (Mallow 2010). For example, Poletti's (2018) multiple case study of two child protection teams in England and Italy investigated the way social workers mediated the emotional demands of practice and the statutory duties and responsibilities in their role. The study identified the importance of containment offered by supervision, the team manager, and coworkers as a site for modulating and managing intense emotional experiences.

2.3 Team as a 'Community of Coping'

Building on Hochschild's (1983:114) concept of 'collective emotional labour', Korczynski (2003:55) identified teams as 'communities of coping' by studying the way Australian call centre workers provided mutual emotional support in the face of challenging customer encounters. Subsequently described as a form of 'reciprocal

emotional management' (Lively 2000:33) or 'emotional teamwork' (Waldron 2000:65), collective humour, camaraderie, venting and reassurance can be strategically deployed - away from the view of managers - as a means of alleviating the occupational requirement to display empathy towards disgruntled customers or clients. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of theatre, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993:105) identified 'organisations that require frequent emotional labor…often rigorously demarcate "frontstage" and "backstage" regions to allow employees to temporarily step out of character…' This strategy allowed team members to drop their cooperate mask to show how they are 'actually' feeling' (Goffman 1959, Fineman and Sturdy 2001). Demarcating work environments into different 'emotional arenas' (Ingram 2015a:56), with different emotional display rules therefore creates physical and psychological boundaries to support and manage the emotional demands of practice. Within child and family social work teams, Leigh et al (2021:1084) highlighted 'the back [stage] region is where the show is prepared and rehearsed, the front region is where the performance is presented to another audience'.

Such rehearsals occur within the formal regions of supervision, reflective peer forums and within informal collegial debriefs. However, as identified by Bolton (2005b:102), backstage rehearsals can also occur within the 'unmanaged spaces that exist within the interstices of organisations' such as corridors and kitchens. For example, exploring team behaviour and support within a family law unit, Stroebaek's (2013) study found communities of coping often spontaneously occurred during informal kitchen coffee encounters. This resonates with Mitchell et al's (2021) findings above whereby a sense of community was created by social workers congregating around free coffee machines. However, whilst communities of coping can be beneficial for workers to collectively vent and let off steam, Stroebaek (2013) also found that established team social norms were challenging for newcomers to engage in. This highlights that the boundary between frontstage and backstage regions are more complex within teams than the literature suggests. Viewing the social work team as a community of coping and a community of practice during the Covid-19 pandemic, Cook and Carder (2023) identified the way team members recreated backstage regions in online spaces. For example, WhatsApp groups for informal chats, online breakfasts, quizzes and virtual 'water cooler' meetings facilitated the sort of backstage talk that previously occurred in kitchens or smoking areas. These informal online spaces enabled social workers to vent, share experiences, provide emotional support, and share a sense of solidarity both in relation to the work and the challenges of the pandemic.

Humour, camaraderie, and collective venting has been identified as an important strategy in child and family social work as a means of releasing emotional tension and increasing group cohesion (Coffrey et al 2009, Gilgun and Sharma 2012, Kowalski 2002, Pouthier 2017). As a form of collective emotional labour, Winter et al (2019) identified social workers used humour and self-care through a focus on bringing in and sharing food together and distraction which included a focus on social lives and social

activities with colleagues. The use of humour as a means of translating 'unacceptable thoughts and feelings into a socially acceptable form of expression' was explored by Sullivan (2000:49). Findings from the study identified that over two thirds of social workers who took part described using gallows humour as an informal, spontaneous method of stress management and as a means of re-affirming collegial relationships and feelings of acceptance. This resonates with Fogarty and Elliot's (2020) small scale qualitative study with 6 social care professionals. The study identified how humour could relieve negative emotions, avoid stress and cynicism, and achieve a sense of normality and perspective. The study did however also highlight the negative use of humour when it was at the expense of others.

Summary

This chapter identified how child and family social workers operate within a variety of team structures and settings and, as part of teamwork, engage with diverse co-workers. These interdependent systems and team contexts create both benefits and challenges in supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice, thus highlighting how teamwork and team belonging can be a rewarding yet also complex endeavour.

Summary of the literature review and the identified gaps

The study of emotions and social work has been dominated by a psycho-social exploration of anxiety and the consequences of managing this through a defences paradigm. A smaller number of studies have explored the emotional demands of child and family social work through the psychosocial concepts of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983), and dramaturgy (Goffman 1959). Social workers operate in emotionally demanding contexts where the sources of these demands arise at the individual, organisational and socio-political level. Yet, social work continues to be a chosen career path for many who find satisfaction and enjoyment in their work. Across the conceptual frameworks of emotional resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and emotional labour, it was the availability of trusted colleagues within a team context that enabled social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. Through the three dominant paradigms of supportive teams, 1) team as a secure base, 2) team as containment and 3) team as a community of coping, the interdependent nature of physical, emotional, practical, knowledge and skills support were found to enable social workers to manage the multi-faceted demands of practice. However, given the prevalence of emotional labour within social work teams these dominant models pay limited attention to the performative aspects of the professional role. Also, studies have yet to explore the hybrid spaces and places occupied by social work teams and how support is both provided and received across these settings. This study has therefore sought to address these identified gaps in the literature by undertaking a hybrid ethnographic study to explore the way teams support social workers with the emotional demands of practice.

Part Two: Methodology

Chapter four: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter details the methodology of the study and is divided into six sections. Section one outlines the rationale for the research and the development of the research question. Section two outlines the ontological and epistemological position on which the research is based. Section three outlines my chosen methodology of hybrid ethnography and the methods of data collection. Section four provides a chronological account of my study design, including sample selection and recruitment, ethics process, and data collection. Section five outlines the different types of data that were analysed and integrated. The final section details the ethical issues that have been considered throughout the research process.

Section one: Development of the research question

This section begins with the development of the research question, how it has developed from the literature review and how my professional and academic interests informed the choice of topic.

1.1 Rationale for the research

The social work team is the primary organising structure of child and family social work in England and a key site in supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice (Ruch 2007). Whilst current studies identify important insights into the relationship between social workers and team support, there is a gap in the literature on how team support is managed and performed in organisational contexts. In addition, there is limited research considering how team support is enacted or constrained across the physical setting of the office and online, hybrid spaces. This study is the first hybrid ethnography of child and family social work teams to address these gaps.

1.2 Researcher background

It is important for researchers to acknowledge their position and influence on the research rationale (Davies and Harre 1990). I have been a qualified social worker for 15 years. I have spent my professional career within local authority children and family social work in a variety of managerial, workforce support, and strategic service development roles. I am also a trained art psychotherapist and studied systemic and psychodynamic leadership. Throughout my academic and professional career, I have been curious about the relationship between the individual's emotional experience and

the wider social and organisational context. One period in my social work career can be credited for laying the foundations of this study. In 2011, I joined a child protection social work team as a senior social worker. The team was understaffed, with 70% agency staff, high sickness rates, and staff regularly reporting high levels of stress. Within 18 months, the team was in a very different place. Staff were recruited and stayed, sickness went down and individuals in the team reported feeling better able to cope with the emotional demands of practice. I wanted to understand what factors enabled this change to happen and what role the team played in its own transformation.

1.3 The research questions

The following research question arose from the gaps in the literature and my professional and academic experiences:

> *How do teams support child and family social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice?*

Guided by this research question, the aim of this study was to first understand the emotional demands of child and family social work practice. Secondly the study aimed to examine how everyday activities, relationships and interactions within the team either supported or hindered social workers in managing these demands. The research question was therefore distilled into the following sub-questions:

1. *What are the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers in teams?*

2. *How is support to manage the emotional demands of practice enacted within teams?*

3. *What are the challenges and dilemmas of team support and the implications of these for managing the emotional demands of practice?*

Section two: Ontological and epistemological position

All researchers adopt a philosophical position on what can be known about reality – ontology – and how that reality can be understood – epistemology (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Being explicit about this position is important as the researcher's stance ultimately influences the methodology chosen to answer the research question. Within the social sciences Moses and Knutsen (2012) identify two traditional paradigms. The first, positivist position suggests there is one objective reality that can be identified mainly through quantitative experimental research designs. The challenge of applying this approach to the study of social work teams is that it would

not have allowed for investigation of the nuanced subjective differences that may be operating within such systems. The other, social constructionist position argues that reality is constructed and given meaning through our social interactions, and thus open to multiple subjective interpretations (Berger and Luckman 1984). Whilst this approach fitted well with the subjective nature of the research question, I was mindful of the shortcomings of constructionism. For example, Frosh (2003:1557) questions the idea of entirely socially constructed individuals, suggesting that human subjects are 'both a centre of agency and action… and the subject of (or subjected to) forces operating from elsewhere…'.

2.1 'Critical Realism'

Critical realism provides an alternative philosophical position within the social sciences for the study of organisational life. A constructionist view considers that reality is created and constructed through social experience. However, a critical realist perspective recognises the existence of an objective 'Real World' that is independent of human experience (Moses and Knutsen 2012:10), whilst also recognising that reality consists of complex layers available to the researcher in which to study. For example, a critical realist perspective addresses both social workers' experiences and perspectives on the work, their emotional experiences *and* acknowledges the social structures, including macro level structures that shape those experiences. According to Bhaskar (1978), reality consists of three stratified layers, *The Real*, *The Actual* and *The Empirical*. As summarised by Easton (2010:123):

> *The empirical domain is where observations are made and experienced by observers. However, events occur in the actual domain and may be not observed at all or may be understood quite differently by observers. There is a process of interpretation that intervenes between the two domains. Events occur as a result of mechanisms that operate in the real domain. It is not the case that the real or actual cannot be observed but simply that it may not always be capable of being observed. We see just the tip of an iceberg but that doesn't mean that the invisible three-quarters is not there or is unconnected to what we see.*

Despite the acknowledgement of an objective reality, it is 'always connected to the social worlds we inhabit and cannot be understood independently of the social actors (i.e., workers, and clients, researchers and research subjects) involved in producing knowledge' (Longhofer and Floersch 2012:507). Critical realism therefore recognises the complex interplay between social structures and human agency (Lawani 2020). This makes it a fitting framework to explore the way teams support child and family social workers with the emotional demands of practice. This is because it not only identifies constraining or enabling social structures, but also provides insights into what actions may be required to change such systems (Anderson 2020, Taylor 2018).

2.2 A ‘psychosocial’ approach

A psychosocial approach was adopted for this study as it seeks to understand the relationship between the ‘individual and their society’ (Frosh 2003:5). This is consistent with a critical realist perspective as it acknowledges the interdependent nature of an individual’s subjective emotional experience, and wider social relationships, structures, and systems (Woodward 2015). As identified in chapter one of the literature review, two psychosocial paradigms have been used to study emotions in social work. The more dominant being 1) ‘psycho-social’ – influenced by psychoanalysis, as opposed to 2) ‘psychosocial’ a more sociological lens. However, criticisms can be levelled against the former (1) psycho-social approach. By its very nature the unconscious cannot be directly known either by participants or the researcher. This presents a danger that the researcher is positioned as ‘expert’ with privileged access to participants’ unconscious (Frosh 2010, Hoggett et al 2010). For this reason, I adopted the psychosocial (2) approach for this research. This is because it centres the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher as a way of continually checking assumptions and biases that may arise. As such, it acknowledges power imbalances between researcher and researched, and the influences of the wider social context of which they are a part (Frosh and Baraister 2008). The psychosocial approach also provides a sociological lens through which to view the study of emotions in social work and thus contributes to the gap in the literature identified in chapter one.

Section Three: Study design

This section outlines how my interest in a psychosocial approach has drawn me to ethnography which is a practice-near research methodology (Cooper 2009, Ferguson 2016, Froggett and Briggs 2012, Hollway 2009). The way the Covid-19 pandemic shaped my hybrid ethnographic approach and data collection methods are also discussed.

3.1 Rationale for ethnography

The research questions seek to understand the emotional experiences of social workers and how these are shaped within their organisational and team context. It was therefore important to choose a research methodology that could capture human experience from multiple perspectives. Ethnography is a methodological approach that typically involves a combination of observations and interviews. It involves the researcher immersing themselves in the field and using ethnographic fieldnotes to capture a thick description of the everyday events, customs, rituals, and interactions of the community under study (Emerson et al 2011, Geertz 1973).

Ethnography is a useful methodology for researching relationships and has a long tradition in exploring the ‘invisible trade’ of social work practice (Pithouse 1984:2). Ethnographic studies have included social work engagement with children and families

during home visits (Ferguson 2010b, Morrison et al 2019) collegial case talk, and decision making within the office (Broadhurst et al 2010, Gregory 2022, Helm 2013, Jeyasingham 2014, Leigh 2014a Ruch 2004, Saltiel 2015, Whittaker 2011). As identified by Longhofer and Floersch (2012:503), there are two basic orientations towards understanding social work practice, the first is the subjective experience for both the client and the practitioner and second, the 'enactment or performance of social work activities.' These dimensions of practice are available to the ethnographic researcher through discursive (what is heard), visual (what is seen), embodied (what is felt), and liquid (movement/mobility) systems. These intimate sensory imbued practices might otherwise remain invisible through interview or survey-based methods alone. Ethnography also has a further advantage; it enables participant interactions to be observed live by the ethnographic researcher, rather than relying solely on the retrospective accounts of participants (Floersh et al 2014). Ethnography is therefore consistent with the aims of this study, which sought to capture social workers' perceptions of team support and how this is enacted in the team space.

3.2.1 Rationale for hybrid ethnographic observations

At the time of this study, social work teams were adopting hybrid working practices in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and were thus operating across a range of in person and online spaces. I therefore adopted a hybrid ethnographic approach to address the shortcomings of 'single realm' ethnography (Lui 2022:2) by capturing human culture and experience across physical, in-person and technological spaces (Pink et al 2016, Postill 2016, Przybylski 2020). Hybrid ethnography builds on traditional in-person ethnographic research by emphasising the need to rethink 'basic ideas about locality, place, space and time' in contemporary cultures (O'Reilly 2012:170). During the pandemic, ethnographic research captured social workers' video-recorded online meetings with families (Pink et al 2021). As identified in chapter one of the literature review, team support during the pandemic involved the use of video conferencing for supervision, team meetings and other team activities. Despite these practices, there are currently no ethnographic studies that have captured how teams supported each other despite becoming increasingly mobile (Ferguson et al 2020, Jeyasingham 2020). In addition, there are very few hybrid ethnographies focusing specifically on how social work teams provide support across online and offline spaces.

3.3.2 Rationale for semi-structured interviews

Given the aim of this study was to explore the emotional demands of practice and team support, it was important to capture spontaneous, naturally occurring talk between participants as well as provide a confidential space for individual team members to talk about their experiences away from colleagues (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, O'Reilly 2012). Interviews are predominately structured, unstructured, or semi structured in nature. In general, structured interviews follow a standardised

predetermined interview schedule to elicit comparable data across interviewees (Berg 2009). Given the exploratory nature of the research question, this approach would not have allowed the interviewees responses to go beyond the specific questions posed. An unstructured interview - an open-ended style of conversation premised on broad themes – would have allowed for an exploratory understanding of an individual's experience. However, this approach would have made it difficult to compare responses across participants and would be vulnerable to leading questions and could be time consuming (Adams 2010). I therefore adopted a semi-structured approach that enabled me to create a set of predetermined questions whilst allowing for unplanned thoughts and reflections to arise (see Appendix H). This approach also allowed me to include questions to explore conflicts, contradictions, and convergences between what was seen and what was said during the observation phase of data collection.

3.3.3 Rationale for team group interviews

Team group interviews provide a space for established team members - including those in hierarchical team positions such as managers and supervisors - to come together to capture the collective team experience (Hochschild 2009, O'Reilly 2012). Team group interviews can complement other ethnographic data collection methods by offering different viewpoints to confirm or dispute findings arising from observations and individual interviews. From this perspective, team group interviews align with the psychosocial approach of co-created meaning where ideas are aired, agreed with, or contested. Team group interviews enabled me to explore emerging themes arising from observation and individual interview data through a carefully crafted topic guide (Appendix I). The process also acted as a debrief and space for reflection for the teams at the end of the data gathering process and my time in the field. Applied to an exploration of team experience, group interviews have been used in practice-focused social work research to develop a more nuanced understanding of working conditions and support (Tham 2022).

Section four: Research process

This section provides a chronological account of the research process including sampling, ethics, recruitment, data gathering and data analysis.

4.1 Sample decisions

Child and family social work in England - including child protection - is a statutory task undertaken by social work teams based in local authorities. Given the nature of the research question, I purposively sampled from this professional group (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) and approached local authorities with a current Ofsted rating of 'Outstanding'. The literature review highlights that studies have often focused on difficulties and stressors in social work teams; however my primary interest was how

teams facilitate rather than hinder social workers in managing the emotional demands of practice. Therefore, whilst recognising 'Outstanding' may have meant different things to different local authorities, teams, and social workers, this sample could have potentially offered a positive starting position through which to examine team support.

The decision to study two teams across two different local authorities was informed by other social work ethnographies of team experiences where the sample sizes provided a sufficient exploratory field to identify differences and commonalities across the data (Broadhurst et al 2010, Ferguson et al 2020, Kirkman and Melrose 2014, Poletti 2018, Ruch 2004). The existing literature, together with my own professional experience of working in local authorities suggested that these teams tended to be traditionally hierarchical. The sample would therefore include managers, supervisors, and social workers with up to 26 participants in total across the two teams. The target was to observe a minimum of 70% of the whole team at any one time; to interview individually as many team members as possible and for there to be a minimum of four participants per team group interview. I later realised the limitations of only considering social workers and consequently included student social workers, administrators, clinicians, and family support workers. This recognised that they were integral to the overall culture and functioning of the team.

4.2 Ethics application process

Before any recruitment took place, I gained ethical approval from the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the Research Governance Panels of both participating local authorities in April 2020 (Appendix A). Amendments were made to the ethics application in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including a UEA Covid-19 risk assessment for fieldwork which was resubmitted and approved in July 2020 (Appendices C and D). The ethics of conducting fieldwork during this period is discussed in more detail in section six below. As my research design was a qualitative, practice-near ethnographic study of social work teams – which included the office environment and online spaces - it was important to consider emerging ethical issues throughout the research process related to harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of the data (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). As part of conducting an ethnography, I was also mindful of the potential additional research burden to participants particularly given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on social workers' working arrangements.

4.3 Recruitment

Ethical approval, recruitment and data collection took place over an 11-month period between April 2020 and March 2021 as detailed in table 1 below:

(3rd Apr 2020) UEA Ethics Committee approve application for an ethnography.		
(3rd Apr 2020) Approach LA1: approval in principle		**(3rd Apr 2020)** Approach second LA: Approval in principle
(6th Apr 2020) Ethics application to LA1 research governance		**(13th May 2020)** Second LA withdraws citing pressures of Covid-19 on the workforce
(9th Apr 2020) LA1 research governance approval		
(3rd Jul 2020) Revised application to LA1 research governance	**(2nd Jul 2020)** Revised Ethics application approved. (Hybrid ethnography)	
(6th Jul 2020) LA1 research governance approves revisions		**(15th Jul 2020)** Approach second LA: agreement in principle
(Jul 2020) LA1 Gatekeeper negotiates access to teams		**(18th Aug 2020)** Second LA withdraws citing research fatigue/team pressures. Gatekeeper forwards information sheet to colleagues in 2 other LA's
(4th Aug 2020) Team Manager of Team 1 (T1) agrees to study in principle pending team briefing		**(1st Sep 2020)** Team Manager of Team 2 (T2) agrees to study in principle pending team briefing
(4th Sep 2020) T1 Team Briefing: Consent sought for observation		**(8th Sep 2020)** Ethics application to LA2 research governance
		(9th Sep 2020) LA2 research governance approval
(Sep – Oct 2020) Data collection: T1 hybrid observations		**(30th Sep 2020)** T2 Team Briefing: Consent sought for observation
(Oct 2020) Consent sought for individual interviews		**(Oct – Nov 21)** Data collection: T2 hybrid observations
(Nov – Dec 2020) Data collection: T1 individual interviews		**(Nov 2020)** Consent sought for individual interviews
		(Dec - Jan 2021) Data collection: T2 individual interviews
(Jan 2021) Consent sought for team group interviews and transcription service	**(Jan 2021)** Revised Ethics application approved (Transcription service)	**(Feb 2021)** Consent sought for team group interviews and transcription service
(Mar 2021) Data collection: T1 team group interview		**(Mar 2021)** Data collection: T2 team group interview

Table 1: Timeline of recruitment and data collection

4.3.1 Recruitment and sample: Team 1

'Team 1' was identified in April 2020 via an established connection between the gatekeeper of the local authority (LA1) and my second PhD supervisor. The LA1 research governance team accepted the initial UEA ethics approval. During July 2020, the gatekeeper was provided with a copy of the research information sheet (Appendix E) and negotiated access to a team that met the sample criteria. At the beginning of August 2020, I received an email from the team manager of an assessment and intervention team interested in taking part in the study. Further discussions took place where I was able to provide information about the research and gain information about the team.

Team 1: Description

Team 1 were based in a town within a large local authority that covered both rural and urban areas. The average population of the town was around 190,000 with 92% of residents described as white (www.ons.gov.uk). The team manager described a large, transient, eastern European population with parts of the town experiencing high levels of deprivation. The team was hierarchically structured and consisted of 1 team manager, 2 senior social workers, 1 specialist social worker, 4 social workers, 2 newly qualified social workers, a family support worker and a student social worker. The team manager supervised everyone in the team whilst the senior practitioners allocated and oversaw casework. The team was predominantly female and white British. Everyone in the team held a permanent position and had been in post for over 12 months. This was except for the family support worker and the student social worker who had recently joined the team. The average number of years spent in the team was 5.7 years with the team manager and one senior practitioner having remained in the team for over 8 years. The demographics of the team are summarised in Table 2 below.

Job title	Age range	Gender	Ethnicity	Years in the team
Team Manager	31-40	F	White British (WB)	<9
Senior Practitioner	31-40	F	WB	<9
Senior Practitioner	31-40	M	White other*	<3
Specialist SP	41-50	F	Mixed British	<2
Social Worker	31-40	F	WB	<2
Social Worker	21-30	F	WB	<2
Social Worker	21-30	F	WB	<3
Social Worker	51-60	F	WB	<2
Social Worker (ASYE)	21-30	M	WB	<2

Social Worker (ASYE)	21-30	F	Black British African	<2
Family Support Worker	31-40	F	WB	<1
Student SW	21-30	F	WB	<1

** anonymised to maintain confidentiality*
Table 2: Team 1 sample and demographics

The team manager explained that as an Assessment and Intervention team, they primarily dealt with initial safeguarding referrals from the public and other professionals. Once triaged, social workers completed an assessment and where necessary, conducted initial child protection investigations, home visits, held strategy discussions with the Police, provided services of support, and went to court, if required. If the child and their family needed longer term support and intervention, they would be transferred to the 'longer term' team they were co-located with. During the initial telephone discussion, the team manager described a young, predominately white British, female team that were 'very settled' with a low turnover of staff. Some of the social workers had previously been students on placement and had decided to stay in the team once qualified. The team manager spoke at length about the changes in working practices due to the pandemic, and how difficult it was working with child protection cases where 'they are bringing trauma into their own homes.' The team engaged in a two-week rota system. During week one, the whole team worked from home and used MS Teams to join team-based activities. On alternate weeks, a maximum of up to 8 members of the team worked from the office as part of the duty rota system. The team manager confirmed they had not had a researcher in their team before but were looking forward to the experience.

4.3.2 Recruitment and sample: Team 2

The recruitment of the second team was more complex. One local authority pulled out citing Covid-19 pressures on the workforce and a second declined citing research fatigue and low team morale. I drew on my professional contacts to explore other local authorities and at the beginning of September 2020, I received an email confirmation from a local authority that met the sample criteria. After forwarding the research information sheet and revised ethics approval to their Head of Social Work, I received an email reply from the team manager of a generic child and family social work team. A subsequent telephone conversation with the team manager allowed me to secure their participation.

Team 2: Description

Team 2 were based in a small local authority within a highly affluent, large metropolitan area. The average population had declined by 9.6% in the last 10 years to around 140,000 in 2021 (www.ons.gov.uk). Only 39% of local residents described themselves as white British, with the highest proportion of 'white other' - including Americans,

Europeans and those from the middle eastern region - compared to any other local authority in England. Compared to Team 1, a higher proportion of Team 2 held managerial or specialist titles. As table 3 below shows, this consisted of 1 team manager, 2 practice managers, 1 specialist practitioner, 2 advanced practitioners, four social workers, a team coordinator (administration support) and a systemic clinician. The team manager was responsible for supervising the practice managers and the specialist practitioner, whilst the practice managers shared responsibility for allocating casework and supervising the advanced practitioners and social workers. As with Team 1, team members were predominantly female, however they represented a more diverse ethnic mix. Team 2 were on average 39 years of age. Like Team 1, everyone in Team 2 held a permanent position. Whilst those in more senior positions had been in post for a minimum of 5 years, 3 out of 4 social workers (75%) had been in the team less than a year. This meant the average number of years spent in the team was 3.8 years.

Job title	**Age range**	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**	**Years in the team**
Team Manager	41-50	M	White other*	<12
Practice Manager	31-50	F	WB	<6
Practice Manager	31-40	F	White other*	<6
Specialist Practitioner	41-50	F	Black British other*	<8
Advanced Practitioner	31-40	F	WB	<2
Advanced Practitioner	31-40	F	Black British African	<2
Social Worker	51-60	F	White other*	<1
Social Worker	21-30	F	WB	<1
Social Worker	31-40	F	WB	<2
Social Worker	21-30	M	White Asian	<1
Systemic Clinician	51-60	F	White other*	<3
Team Coordinator	31-40	F	Arab**	<5

** Specific demographics have been anonymised to maintain confidentiality*
***the participant's description of their ethnicity*
Table 3: Team 2 sample and demographics

The team manager described a generic practice model 'from referral to adoption and everything in between.' This meant no transferring of children between specialist teams. Whilst the team did conduct child protection investigations, there were no children on child protection plans at the time of this study. The manager shared the team had a high degree of autonomy within the wider organisation and within the team itself, suggesting they are 'pretty much left to run things the way they want to.' Staff were systemically trained, which included specialist systemic roles in the team,

including a team clinician. The manager shared they were based in a very affluent inner-city area which meant most of the team - who were relatively young - struggled to afford to live in the local community without shared accommodation. Working with such affluence could also 'create difficult conversations within the team about the nature of their work.' In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, social workers predominately worked from home unless they were 'on duty' in the office, working with colleagues from other teams. The team were encouraged to come into the office at least once a week, and together as a whole team once every two weeks. The team manager remained office based. As with Team 1, Team 2 also used MS Teams as a way of engaging in team-based activities and remaining connected across office and home environments.

4.4 Team briefings

Both team managers had been initially approached by their respective local authority gatekeepers to see if they were interested in taking part in this study. However, it was also important to ensure that the teams were happy to participate before any fieldwork took place. The team managers were sent a copy of the research information sheet to share during their team meetings. The purpose was to gain team members consent to participate. Once agreed in principle, I attended a team briefing online via MS Teams. This was to meet the team, answer any questions and seek their consent to take part in the first stage of the study. A briefing schedule (Appendix F) and an initial round of introductions at the start helped me to put names to faces and build rapport with both teams. This was especially important given we were meeting online rather than face to face. It was during the introductions that other members of the team were identified and subsequently formed part of the study. This included students, family support workers, a team clinician and administration support. I used the team briefing as an opportunity to establish the different spaces and places the team came together during different points of the working week. This approach drew on Burrell's (2009) suggested strategy for not rushing to define the ethnographic field site straight away. I was keen to establish a collaborative approach to the observations and was guided by the team as to what they felt would be helpful for me to observe without interrupting their work (Blix and Wettergren 2015, Leigh et al 2021).

The issue of informed consent and the participants right to withdraw from the study was explained during the briefing. I shared that individual consent forms would be provided for each stage of the study. It was important to note that these would only be seen by me, thus avoiding undue pressure to participate. I also made it explicit that participants were able to change their minds by opting in as well as out at different stages of the data gathering phase. I gave participants the opportunity to contact me separately if they had any questions by ensuring my contact details were available on the information sheet, and in the MS Team chat function. I also referred the teams to the research disclosure protocol ie: it was my responsibility to report any concerns if I

observed or heard practice that was deemed a risk to the participant or those in receipt of services (Appendix E and F).

4.5 The process of data collection

The collection of ethnographic data involved a 'staged process' starting with hybrid observations, followed by individual semi structured interviews and concluding with team group interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:158). In total, I was able to capture 66 hours of data across the two teams as summarised in tables 4 and 5 below.

Team 1:

Type of data collection	**How the data was observed**	**Total hours**
3x office-based observations	In person	9hrs
9x hybrid 'check in' observations	Via MS Teams	9hrs
11x semi structured individual interviews	Via MS Teams	15hrs
1x Team Group Interview	Via MS Teams	1.5hrs

Table 4: Team 1 summary of data collected

Team 2:

Type of Data	**How the data was observed**	**Total hours**
3x office-based observations	In person	11hrs
4x hybrid 'coffee morning' observations 1x hybrid 'case discussion' observation** 1x hybrid 'social work space' observation 1x hybrid 'team meeting' observation	Via MS Teams	6hrs
10x semi structured individual interviews	Via MS Teams	13hrs
1x Team Group Interview	Via MS Teams	1.5hrs

***one hybrid case discussion was cancelled due to low attendance*.

Table 5: Team 2 summary of data collected

4.5.1 Ethnographic hybrid observations

As part of the initial briefing and in further discussion with the team managers, it was agreed I would observe each team in their office and during online team gatherings over a 6-week period for up to 18 hours each. This gave me a total of 35 hours of observational data across the two sites. Given the teams were in a state of flux and uncertainty due to the pandemic, it was important to strike a balance between becoming sufficiently familiar with the teams whilst also avoiding unnecessary intrusion during an already challenging time. The observations were timetabled to include different days of the week including mornings, lunchtimes, and late afternoons. All team members from across both teams consented to the observations which were obtained through consent forms individually emailed to participants (Appendix G).

Office-based team observations

I completed three office-based observations in each team. I was mindful of participant consent given that both teams were co-located with other teams. This was addressed by ensuring there was no identifiable information about colleagues beyond the immediate team in the written recordings. Before entering the teams' office, I waited in the reception area of the larger local authority building. Both team managers greeted me and accompanied me through the security doors to where their team was based. On one occasion, the manager of Team 2 was busy and sent a senior practitioner to greet me instead. Whilst team members wore lanyards with security cards that allowed them to move freely in and out of the office and around the wider building, I was not offered or provided with one. I therefore relied on the team manager or another team member to escort me to an available desk. There were generally anywhere between 2 and 7 members of the team being observed at any one time. For Team 1, wider organisational rules meant only a maximum of 8 team members (out of a team of 12) were allowed in the office at any one time. This made me acutely aware that I was occupying valuable space. For Team 2, most worked from home, other than the team manager and those who were scheduled to be 'on duty.'

At either end of the participation spectrum ethnographers either seek to obtain full insider participation status by 'going native' or maintain an outsider 'fly on the wall' observational position (Seim 2021:2). In an ethnographic study of social work teams, Helm (2013:28) adopted an 'overt non-participatory approach,' positioning himself on the participants' peripheral vision, so that his presence was recognised but unobtrusive. I adopted a similar approach, choosing to remain at a spare desk shown to me by the team manager. The space between desks had been risk assessed in line with social distancing requirements and I was required to wear a mask when not seated. This was in accordance with government guidelines required at the time. I moved positions on a few occasions when my view of the team was obscured or when the team meeting took place in a different part of the building. I also followed the team manager into a side room when she shared difficult news with the team about a young person who had taken their own life.

During the office-based observations I took shorthand notes as I paid attention to my physical surroundings and participants' everyday social interactions with colleagues and other co-located teams, team talk and rituals. I also captured the objects and artefacts in the space and how participants interacted with these, including personal effects, posters on walls, phones, office equipment, and how people dressed. As a form of sensory ethnography – usually applied to social workers' encounters with families - (Ferguson 2016, Pink 2009), information was also gathered about the way social workers not only socially engaged with each other, but also the sounds, sights and smells of the office throughout the day. For example, office observations captured the smell of food, the changes in temperature, the sounds of keyboards tapping, team members heavy sighs, and for one team, the loud clunk of the security office door that

protected the team from the outside world. Being situated in the office enabled me to listen to the different conversations team members had as they entered the team space after meetings, or when coming back from lunch or cigarette breaks, whilst on the telephone and during online meetings social workers had at their desks.

To try and reduce any anxiety about my presence I made sure I was approachable and non-threatening by greeting anyone in the team when I arrived, or who entered the team space during my observation (Leigh et al 2020). I would also glance around the room, avoiding staring, and engaged in conversation when initiated by others. I was, however, conscious of drawing the attention from some members of staff. As noted in my first in person office observation of Team 2:

> *Isabel comes over and sits down close beside me. She says, 'are you watching him… are you observing the manager… he's a good one to observe… I'm just taking a break you know… [Isabel rubs her eyes] I have to do this observation of an infant… training… I'm not to take any notes… [Isabel nods at my notepad] … (Office observation: Team 2)*

I wrote continuous shorthand fieldnotes as if working at the desk with the aim of blending into the busy team environment (Emerson et al 2011). As Goffman (1959:130) suggests writing ethnographic fieldnotes 'before an act has begun or after it has started' means participants are less likely to know what events are being recorded. In Team 1, the desks were surrounded by large Perspex screens which meant it was not always obvious when I was writing fieldnotes. My shorthand fieldnotes were later written up into full descriptive records.

Online team observations

In response to Covid-19 and social distancing measures, both teams used video conferencing via MS Teams to 'see each other's faces' and meet collectively. This arrangement created a hybrid environment where some team members joined online from the office whilst others joined from their own homes. The two teams created different configurations of hybrid meetings that were scheduled in their Outlook diaries throughout the week. This included formal team meetings, peer reflective discussions where the focus was primarily on case discussion and practice, and hybrid 'coffee mornings' and 'team check ins' which aimed to replicate informal office based social interactions. I observed a total of 15 hours of formal and informal hybrid team gatherings across the two teams. Many of the participants joined the hybrid meeting from their own homes, and to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission, I also joined the meetings online by having the MS Teams invite emailed to my university email address.

Observation of hybrid online spaces can take the form of overt participant observer, or covert, passive observer described by Jowett (2015:289) as 'lurking.' Whilst

unobtrusive online observation can avoid the risk of the researcher influencing the forms of interaction and discourses produced (Jowett, 2015), they can also be experienced by participants as covert surveillance. Mindful of the ethical issues involved in covert 'lurking' and given that both teams had a culture of 'cameras on' during hybrid meetings, I adopted the same participatory observational approach online as the physical observations. This involved joining online meetings with my camera on so participants could see me, but I kept my microphone on mute and refrained from engaging in the general discussions unless directly invited to do so. Whilst I tried to make my presence as unobtrusive as possible there were times when the audience of the researcher clearly impacted on the teams' behaviours. For example, I had been invited to observe one team's online reflective case discussion. Whilst these were described as hybrid, only myself and one other practitioner joined online. This meant the team spent some time moving their laptops around so that I could see them. Despite my request for them not to worry and just do what they would normally do, I had to remind myself they wouldn't normally be observed by a researcher.

As with the office-based observations, I took shorthand fieldnotes during the online observations and wrote them up into full descriptive records after the meeting had finished. Paying careful attention to the virtual surroundings occupied by the team, I was interested in the way the team socially interacted and whether this differed and, if it did, in what ways compared to being in the office. I paid attention to who took the lead in discussions, how conversations were navigated including the use of the online chat function, symbols, and emojis; how emotions were expressed, talked about, and shared online. I also paid attention to the way the online spaces were created behind participants. For example, whether backgrounds were blurred or hidden, what was on show and who else was present in the background, either at home or in the office.

4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Once the observation stage had been completed, new consent forms were emailed to team members inviting them to participate in an individual interview. A Senior Practitioner was signed off work sick and the Team Coordinator in Team 2, did not wish to take part. This resulted in 20 interviews across both teams capturing the views of 2 team managers, 6 social workers in senior or supervisory roles, 7 social workers, 2 newly qualified social workers, 1 family support worker, 1 social work student, and 1 systemic team clinician. Given that many team members were working from home because of the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted remotely using MS Teams (Pink et al 2021). On two occasions technical difficulties meant I had to resort to telephone interviews using the loudspeaker function to record the discussion using the Dictaphone. I chose to conduct video conferencing interviews which are considered a complimentary data collection tool for qualitative researchers, rather than a replacement for more traditional face-to-face interviewing processes (Lo Lacono et al 2016). The benefit of this approach was it allowed for face-to-face interviews that

transcended geographical boundaries, allowing me to interview people in the office and at home (Deakin and Wakefield 2013).

Interviews ranged in length from 55 minutes to 90 minutes. The semi-structured questions that formed the interview schedule (Appendix 1) sought to elicit the participants' perspectives on what it was like to be in their team. It also allowed for flexibility so that areas of interest to the research questions could be followed as they occurred. Team members were asked for words they would use to describe their team and why, what was unique or different about their team and what roles and responsibilities they felt their co-workers adopted beyond their professional titles. In addition, they were asked how they felt the team was viewed by others in the organisation and the wider community. This approach appeared effective as participants often provided a different view of the team when positioning themselves as someone 'looking in.' For example, when asked to describe their team, words often centered around being 'supportive, friendly, stable and reliable.' Yet, when describing how others may view the team, the stability of the team evoked such words as 'cliquey', 'hard to get in to', and 'jealousy.'

Once all the interviews had been conducted, I realised I had not sought consent to use a third-party transcription service. I therefore submitted a further ethics application to the UEA ethics committee (Appendix J). Once approved, I contacted the participants via email to seek their consent (Appendix K). Despite assurances that the data sent to the service would be fully anonymised and the company used were fully GDPR compliant, one social worker did not provide consent citing 'the information in it is too sensitive.'

4.5.3 Team group interviews

Once the individual interviews had taken place new consent forms were emailed to team members inviting them to participate in a team group interview. The dates and times were agreed in discussion with both team managers to minimise the impact on the team's day-to-day work. 9 members of Team 1 and 10 members of Team 2 agreed to take part. Both team group interviews took place using MS Teams, recorded using a Dictaphone and lasted no longer than 90 minutes. Like the individual interviews, the use of MS Teams helped to alleviate some of the practical difficulties of arranging a face-to-face team group interview for a busy social work team during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some team members did not attend due to pre-booked meetings, sickness, training commitments or cited work pressures. Only one participant in Team 2 declined to participate without stating why. At the beginning of the team group interview I outlined the structure of the discussion, the time they could expect the interview to finish, reiterated their consent to take part and for the session to be recorded and an agreed set of ground rules (Appendix I).

During the team group interview participants were invited to collectively respond to two themes that had arisen from my analysis of the observation and individual interview data. The first theme was ‘the balance of being a professional and being human’ – what does this statement mean to you individually and collectively and what influence does this have, if any, on the role of emotions in the workplace. The second theme was ‘a team people want to be a part of’ – what are your thoughts on why this might be and what are some of the challenges this may create individually and as a team. This exploration was followed by a group activity that sought to elicit the teams' collective ideas about what made for a supportive team environment and their aspirations for team support for the future.

Sharing themes from the data enabled a debrief with the teams at the end of the data collection phase and created the opportunity to test out and explore my initial findings within a co-created environment. I therefore remained aware of issues of power within the team group interview process, including the prevalence of dominant voices and the need to encourage quieter voices to come forward (Sayer 2011). I reiterated the importance of confidentiality given the topic of team relationships, and emotional experiences. Once the interviews had been completed the recordings were transcribed. The whole data set was then analysed using the analytic framework described next.

Section five: Data analysis

This section details the rationale for my chosen analytic framework, the Listening Guide (Brown and Gilligan 1992, Doucet and Mauthner 2008), explaining how this approach aligns with the research questions and the theoretical and methodological unpinning of the study. I then detail the steps I took to code, analyse and integrate the three different forms of data - observations, interviews and team group interviews.

5.1 ‘The Listening Guide’

Whilst there are a variety of well-established frameworks for analysing qualitative data in the social sciences, I chose the Listening Guide as it aligned with a critical realist and psychosocial methodology and thus enabled me to explore psychological, social, structural, and reflexive processes within and across the data (Brown and Gilligan 1992, Cruz 2021, Gilligan and Eddy 2017). Used by researchers as a way to understand participants as ‘narrated subjects both inside and outside of narrative’ (Doucet and Mauthner 2008:399), the Listening Guide’s strength was it overlapped with other qualitative methods of data analysis. For example, the approach combined thematic and narrative strands to identify themes and meaning across the data – as found when applying thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021), narrative analysis (Reismann 1993) or discourse analysis (Wodak and Kryzanowski 2008) – whilst also allowing space for existing theory from the literature to be drawn upon (Gilligan 2015).

Originating from a feminist critical approach in the study of marginalised and under studied voices (Brown and Gilligan 1992), the Listening Guide has been successfully applied to qualitative research that has explored the subjective experience of emotional encounters within wider social structures. This has included women in combat (Daphna-Tekoah et al 2021), post-partum depressed mothers (Mauthner 2002), men's sexual behaviours (Moeller 2012), and adolescent experiences (Chu 2005, Woodcock 2005). The Listening Guide has also been applied to a small but growing number of studies that foreground the emotional experiences and voices of social workers operating within an often 'invisible trade' (Pithouse 1984:2). This has included child protection social workers' emotions and resilience (Poletti 2018) and working with intrafamilial emotional abuse (North 2019).

Developed into a structured analytic framework by Doucet and Mauthner (2008), the Listening Guide is commonly used to analyse interview transcripts but has since been adapted and applied to videotaped focus group discussions and family therapy sessions (Van Puyenbroeck et al 2014). Similarly, I have also adopted this approach to analyse ethnographic observations which capture verbatim collegial chat, my reflexive responses, observations of the setting and everyday social interactions within the office and online spaces. The analytic process required consecutive readings of each piece of observation, individual and group interview data from four different perspectives as follows:

Reading 1: Relational and reflexively constituted narratives

The focus of the first reading was to reflexively ask, 'what is happening here?' by paying attention to reoccurring words, narratives, themes, events, plots, and key characters. In practice, this considered the way team spaces were occupied physically and online, including how the team moved around and interacted with each other, the stories they told about their work and their team to each other, and to me as the researcher. The process also involved linking the reading of the transcripts with my own reflexive notes from my research diary and the thoughts and feelings I experienced whilst in the field.

Reading 2: Tracing the narrated subject

The second reading considered where and how the participants spoke about themselves by tracing the 'I' in the data. These included perceptions of self and shifts between 'I' and 'you' identities (Doucet and Mauthner's (2008:406). This reading helped me to consider how social workers spoke about themselves and their emotions in relation to their personal and professional identities. For example, team managers spoke of managing their outward display of emotions as part of their management role.

Reading 3: Relational narrated subject

The third reading focused on tracing participants' social networks and close intimate relationships (Doucet and Mauthner 2008:406). It considered 'self in relation' to others and the use of 'we' and 'our' in the subjects' narratives. This was particularly useful when exploring how participants viewed their professional, personal and team identities and how support was perceived, provided, and experienced. This also included paying close attention to relational encounters within the team, but also the way participants spoke about their relationships with the wider organisation, other professionals, families, children, and wider society.

Reading 4: Reading for structured subjects

The fourth reading focused on 'structured power relations and dominant ideologies' that framed participants and the linkages between 'micro-level narratives with macro-level processes and structures' (Doucet and Mauthner 2008:406). This reading helped me to consider the impact of wider systems and processes on the social workers experiences in their team. For example, team members described the differences between the deficit narratives held about social work by wider society, and the positive narratives they held individually and collectively shared about their professional identity.

Applying the Listening Guide to the data:

At the end of each stage of data collection I used a worksheet technique to code and analyse the data against the four Listening Guide readings outlined above (Brown and Gilligan 1992, Doucet and Mauthner 2008). I initially used the software package NVivo to assist with generating codes and themes from the large dataset, however I found the process fragmented and decontextualised both the observations and the participants' statements. I therefore chose to analyse the data using Microsoft word through a colour coding process which had been successfully applied in other qualitative studies (Doucet and Mauthner 2008, Poletti 2018, Woodcock 2016). As Figure 1 shows below, the transcribed data – in this case an individual interview - was copied into the left-hand column. Extracts from the data was then colour coded to visually represent the different readings in the remaining columns:

Source of data: Individual Interview	Reading 1: What is happening here? (plots, themes, characters, events)	Reading 2: Tracing Narrated subjects (The I, me)	Reading 3: Relational narrated subjects (We, our, us)	Reading 4: Structured subjects (processes, macro)
...I think what's unique about the team is, I would say the combination between being professional but	Combination of the **personal and the professional**			

also having that personal touch..... I think it's very unique in the sense that everybody is really nice and nice to each other. And, everybody is honest, although, I know that honesty doesn't come very easily, but there are real honest conversations as opposed to people, sort of, if you like, bitching behind closed doors and feeding those weird dynamics... Friendships, there are strong friendship groups outside of work, and I certainly have good friends within the team, although, that in itself raises a number of challenges I think people feel they belong to the team and there is quite a strong team identity, but I don't know what forms it and how people would describe the identity.	Closed doors – what is said in **public and in private** (cf: dramaturgy/ emotional labour – front and backstage regions?)	Importance of **honesty** **Challenges of the manager role** and balancing friendships within the team	**Belonging** linked to a strong team identity	

Figure 1: Individual interview data analysed using the Listening Guide

In addition to reading the transcribed data, I also listened to the audio recordings of the individual and team group interviews multiple times. Listening back for nuances, pauses, and breaks in speech as well as my reflexive responses to 'listening' to participants narratives helped me to immerse myself in the data and remain close to the story (Raider-Roth 2014).

5.2 The stages of data analysis

The observation fieldnotes and the individual and team group interviews were transcribed and written up in full using Microsoft Word. Each piece of data was copied into individual worksheets, as highlighted above, and manually colour-coded across the four readings. Reading the data and listening to the audio recordings multiple times from multiple perspectives and drawing on my reflexive diary (see more details below), helped me to gain a deeper view of participants' experiences as well as my own in relation to the field. Themes were generated under each of the four headings which involved several coding cycles until the categories identified could be synthesised (Appendix L). Coding and analysing the data set was sequentially structured so that

themes from the observations informed the individual interview schedule, and the themes from the observations and individual interviews informed the team group interview schedule.

Whilst this process of analysis was labour intensive, it did prevent me from analysing one form of data in isolation from another (Illingworth 2006). It also minimised the risk of 'over interpretation of the data' by checking my findings with the team's own perspectives (Hollway and Jefferson 2013:xi). The stages of data analysis are outlined below in table 6 below.

Stage 1	
Substage	**Process/activity**
1	Code and analyse the observation data individually, across each team and across both teams to generate themes.
2	Draw on the identified themes from the observation data to inform the individual interview schedule.
3	Code and analyse the interview data individually, across team members and across both teams to generate themes.
4	Apply the identified themes from the observation and individual interview data to inform the team group interview schedule.
5	Code and analyse the team group interview data within each team and across both teams to generate themes.
Stage 2	**Process/activity**
	Integrate the three forms of data through an ongoing, iterative process of analysis by grouping codes and themes from across the whole data.

Table 6: Stages of data analysis

The three forms of data collection 1) observations, 2) individual interviews and 3) team group interviews were integrated by following Doucet and Mauthner's (2008:135) thematic analysis approach which 'taps into different dimensions of the data sets' and applies existing theory from the literature to make sense of the findings. Themes arising from the data were indicative of the more psycho-social demands of practice i.e.: managing anxiety, and support i.e.: team as secure base (Biggart et al 2017), and the team as containment (Ruch 2007). However, themes that included a conscious management and display of emotions were prominent within the data and highlighted the performative nature of the professional role. For example, data included reference to 'wearing different hats', or the 'pressure to perform' and 'no negative Nancy.' These were grouped together to generate a wider theme of 'display.' Below figure 2 shows an example of grouped codes from across the three data sets:

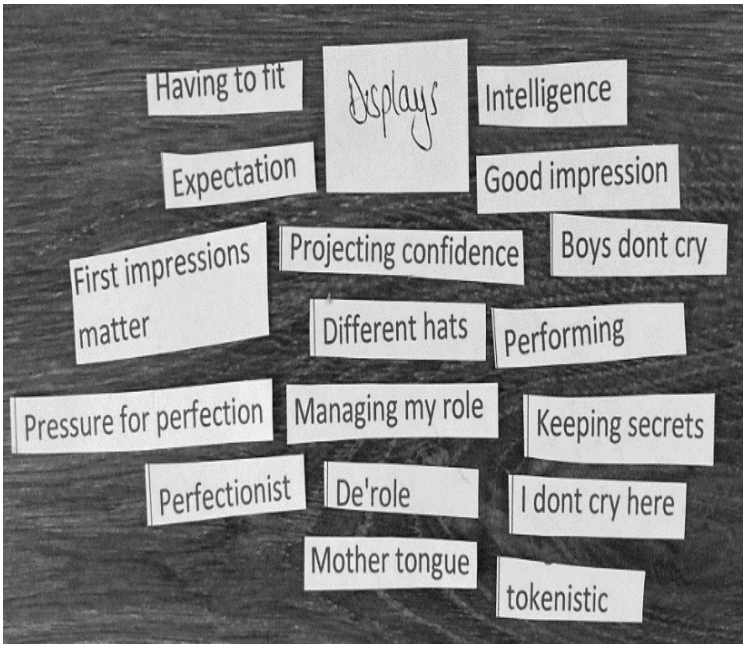

Figure 2: Grouping codes across Team 2 data set: Reading 2

The theme of 'display' also aligned with my reflexive notes which were suggestive of performance. For example, I experienced a level of anxiety about my own presentation before being 'let in' to the teams' online spaces. I often found myself checking what was on show behind me, as did social workers in the team. It was then interesting to note how team members chose to display their private homes in the public workspace. One observation experience also highlighted the prevalence of collective enactment or staging by the team. Whilst I assumed I had been attending established online coffee mornings, it became apparent during my last observation that I had not. As I joined the online space, I observed one team member interacting with the team manager:

> *[the social worker] is looking across her screen and then picks up her mobile phone saying, let me just take a picture…' as she points it towards her computer. [The manager] then appears on screen...[she] says to him, 'I was worried people were in the other one… I've just sent a picture to the group…' [the manager] replies, 'shall I log in to the other one to see if people are there…? He leaves the virtual space... I find myself asking if there are two coffee mornings. [the social worker] responds, 'yeah we have two, the one we usually have and the ones [business support] set up for you…' (OnlineOb/T2)*

References to the performance of the professional role and the management of emotions continued to be a prevalent feature across the data sets and thus 'professional appearance' also became a wider dominant theme as shown in figure 3 below.

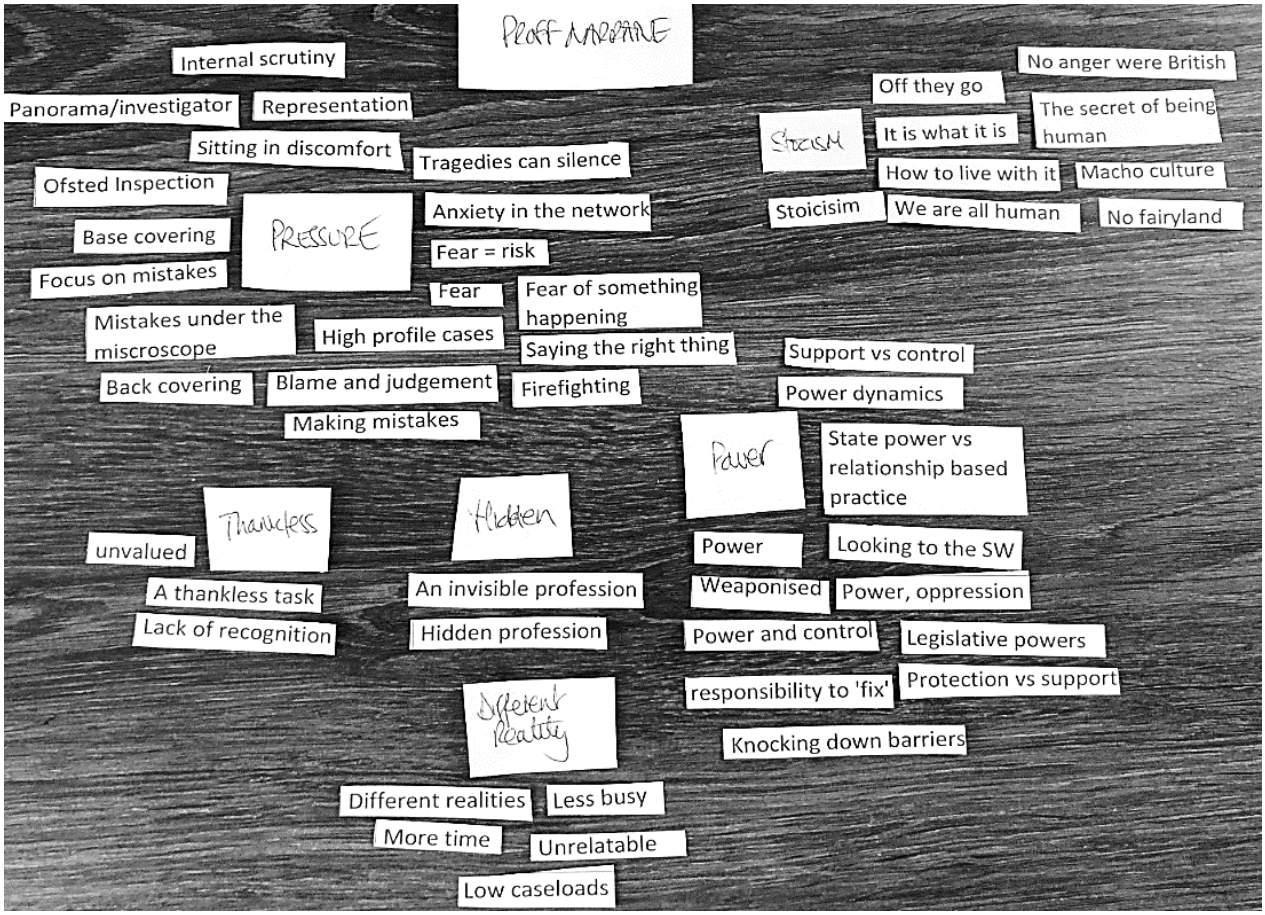

Figure 3: Grouping codes and generating themes across both teams

The 'performance of professionalism' as discussed in chapter one of the literature review sensitised me to themes related to Hochschild's (1983) emotional labour and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy. This was because themes of performance, acting, being observed, putting on a 'hat' or adopting a role, were one of the most repeated metaphors within and across the data. I repeatedly returned to the data to look for wider extracts of text that either supported or contradicted the identified themes and the theoretical lens that was being applied. For example, the theme of managing emotions and performing one's professional role correlated with the way a social worker talked about her relationship with a co-worker:

> *'...sometimes I feel, I don't know if [they're] **masking**, [they're] trying to, I don't know, mask [their] own feelings, I don't know, but sometimes that has been unhelpful... I just felt like [they were] making a **staged** sort of thing out of something that was not really that big, it didn't feel that helpful' (II/SW/T2)*

As themes of performing the professional role, managing emotions, masking and staging became more prominent, I adopted a three-dimensional visual strategy to map out and conceptualise the data shown in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Three-dimensional Theatre analysis

This thematic representation of the data helped to conceptualise the theoretical application of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy and Hochschild's (1983) emotional labour to the analysis of the data and thus informed the structure of the finding's chapters. For example, chapter six explores the immediate environment of team support through the lens of stage setting, direction and props, chapter seven considers the performance of team roles and chapter eight explores the concept of scripts and how these are enacted within the team.

5.3 Reflexivity and the analysis process

Reflexivity is a cornerstone of credible and rigorous psychosocial research. It involves acknowledging the mutual and continual influence the researcher and participants have on each other in the research process (Alvesson and Skoldburg 2000). As described by Beaulieu (2017:36) the ethnographer can be viewed as an 'epistemic instrument… drawing on embodied knowledge of being in the field and beyond.' This

also includes the experience of navigating online and offline hybrid spaces (Markham 1998, Lui 2022). During the research process it was therefore neither desirable nor ethical for me to consider myself as a passive, objective recipient of information or feeling, but rather I needed to engage in a process of reflexivity to consider how I influenced and was influenced by others (Braun and Clarke 2021). This meant actively and continually considering how data was gathered, the influence I had on what was being observed and shared by participants, and what I chose to define as interesting or noteworthy in the analysis. This was important because the emotionally demanding nature of child and family social work, my professional biography, and my anxiety at being a novice researcher meant I was vulnerable to either over-identifying or defending against difficult emotional experiences whilst in the field (Hollway and Jefferson 2013).

Having been a social worker in a child protection team I was familiar with the field which, as suggested by Mannay and Morgan (2016), meant I had a level of 'epistemic privilege.' Drawing on this part of my professional identity helped me to develop trust with participants and blend into the team space (Ruch 2004). Participants referred to me as 'being one of us' or 'you know what it's like' which suggested some mutual understanding had been established. However, this strategy also raised ethical challenges, including the ongoing risk of over-identifying with the team and making assumptions about their unique experiences and narratives. For example, I experienced feelings of guilt as a result of being a researcher in a busy team. While I didn't act on it, I felt a strong desire to step into my previous social work identity and support the team when a safeguarding referral came in late on a Friday afternoon.

Reflexivity helped me to consider how I experienced the qualitative research process as a form of emotional labour (Blix and Wettergren 2015, Hubbard et al 2001, Leigh et al 2021, Lewig and Dollard 2003). As outlined in chapter two of the literature review, emotional labour refers to the management and display of emotions in a work context and includes impression management strategies, emotional displays, and intrapsychic processes (Grandey et al 2013, Hochschild 1983). Whilst not detracting from the participants' narratives and experiences of emotional labour themselves, the management and display of my own emotions formed part of the data gathering and analysis process. To help me process these embodied emotional experiences I kept a reflexive journal where I wrote down my immediate thoughts, reflections, and interpretations whilst in the field (Emerson et al 2011). For example, my reflexive journal captured my emotional responses of anxiety and intrusion – despite the warm welcome - when I crossed the boundary into the private space of the team setting for the first time. Yet despite these internal feelings, I outwardly conveyed calm and friendliness to establish connection and rapport with the team. As suggested by Service (2012:172) 'when workers experience a dissonance between felt and displayed emotions, they can experience emotional exhaustion.' This was captured in my reflexive dairy following my first online interview with a participant:

I was nervous before the interview… I wanted to do a good job, present as a knowledgeable and competent researcher. For the first few minutes of the interview the online format felt intense, we were facing each other - closer than we would have if we were meeting in person. I was aware of my own reflection looking back at me in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. My every nod, smile, hand movement felt exaggerated, like I was performing the role of researcher… I found myself working hard to hide my own anxiety in an attempt to make the participant feel relaxed and felt exhausted once the interview had finished.

(Researcher reflexive journal entry)

Adopting a reflexive position also helped me to consider team dynamics and interactions beyond what was verbally communicated. These included paying attention to the way colleagues nodded in agreement, subtly tilted their heads when listening, smiled, frowned, rolled their eyes, or heavily sighed which conveyed their emotions to each other and myself as the researcher. As identified in the emotional intelligence and emotional labour literature in chapter two, these forms of 'compassionate communication' (Miller 2007:223) involved noticing, feeling, and responding to the needs of others through verbal and nonverbal behaviours.' As identified in the reflexive diary extract above, I too found myself engaging in such emotional displays as a means of conveying empathy and understanding towards participants. I also used my reflexive journal to explore collective emotional labour processes within the teams and my role as a researcher within these. This included the social ritual of sharing food and drink (Winter et al 2019) where cakes, takeaways, shared lunches and making each other tea and coffee all formed part of the teams' established daily norms as a means of supporting each other. I too was actively invited to participate in such rituals. However, the significance of these - in relation to team cohesion and belonging - became apparent during one of my first office visits. As recorded in my reflexive diary at the time:

From across the bank of desks, a member of the team smiled, said hello, told me their name and offered me some 'posh chocolates for the whoosh!' I politely declined and thought nothing more of it. Another member of the team came over and sat down next to me. They smiled, said hello, and introduced themselves. Moments later the colleague with the chocolates joined us and offered them to us both. These were readily accepted by the co-worker and even though I had declined once, I quickly followed suit and took one. In that moment I had an overwhelming feeling that refusing the chocolates the first time had felt like a faux pas.

(Researcher reflexive journal entry)

Given the performative themes arising from the data, I also drew on my reflexive journal to process moments in the research process where I too engaged in impression management strategies through the use of props, voice, costume, and

gestures (Leigh 2017b). For example, I found I had become preoccupied with my shoes before one office visit and had a strong urge to buy a new pair. My reflexive diary helped me to process why this might have been particular to one team and not the other. Looking back through the observational data different team members actively reinforced an expected dress code – or costume - by using humour to highlight transgressions, such as reference to a co-worker's 'ugly trainers.' Without becoming completely aware of the powerful influence of such exchanges, I had internalised a sense of embarrassment and fear of judgement based on my clothes. This helped me to consider how new team members may experience the process of team belonging.

A Listening Guide framework, underpinned by feminist perspectives, argues that issues of unequal power relations, gender, class, and ethnicity can influence research encounters (Archer 2007, Butler 2005, Doucet and Mauthner 2008). As suggested by Leigh et al (2021:1079) ethnographic research 'positions researchers in situations where they can easily influence encounters and, in effect, become part of the findings as well.' For example, during an office observation my researcher presence was described by one participant as 'overkill' which was followed by a social exchange that centred around the concept of power:

> *The social worker walks towards me as I wait outside the meeting room saying 'I thought you were here at 12…' I explain the arrangement is for me to be here from 10 – 3, observing different activities, she responds with 'that's a bit overkill! She then walks around the empty room saying out loud, 'where shall I sit… where can I go where I can have power… I mean I have a lot of power anyway, but….' She sits down at the other end of the room facing the door we have just walked through. I find myself sitting at the opposite side of the room. (OfficeOb/T2)*

In addition to my reflexive journal, my PhD supervisory team also supported my reflexive positioning by asking exploratory and challenging questions about my ongoing reflections and interpretations. I also created and attended a monthly PhD student led reflexive seminar group at the University.

Section six: Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations have been threaded throughout the five sections above. This has included the importance of outlining my academic and professional background and interests in the study, issues of sampling, recruitment, and access to local authorities in the context of a pandemic, the importance of consent and reducing researcher burden during data collection and the need for critical reflexivity during the analysis stages. There were however two further ethical considerations that emerged as part of this study, 1) conducting ethnographic research during the Covid-19 pandemic and 2) exploring emotions within social work teams individually and as a team.

6.1 Ethnographic research during the Covid-19 pandemic

I conducted a hybrid ethnography in the middle of an unprecedented global pandemic. The UK went into a national lockdown on the 23rd March 2020. This was followed by a series of measures to try and prevent the spread of the coronavirus which included people working from home, restricted travel, a two-meter social distance rule, closure of shops, schools, and other public service buildings. The impact on social workers' daily lives was immediate. Not knowing when lockdown would end created high levels of uncertainty within social work practice, as well as within the research community. Social work teams were in a state of flux and entry to the field site would not be straight forward. As highlighted by Leigh et al (2021:1087) gaining access for ethnographic research needs to be sensitively approached given 'participants may have a lack of incentive to cooperate when they have pressing concerns of their own to attend to.' This was evident when two local authorities withdrew from the study citing service pressure and worker fatigue. To ethically conduct an ethnography during a global pandemic was to strike a balance between avoiding undue pressure on teams whilst also capturing their lived experience during this period.

As required by the University, I completed a 'risk assessment for fieldwork in high-risk situations during the covid-19 pandemic' (Appendices C and D). This was reviewed on a weekly basis with my supervisory team for the duration of data collection. The risk assessment considered the people, activities and environments that were part of the fieldwork and the controls that needed to be in place to reduce the risk of being exposed to or the spreading of the virus. Both local authorities also required me to complete their own internal risk assessments which included keeping a 2-meter distance, adhering to one-way systems, wearing a face mask when moving around the buildings, and regularly sanitising my hands. I returned to the UEA ethics panel in July 2020 with an amended proposal that outlined a hybrid ethnographic approach which was subsequently approved.

6.2 Exploring emotions and support in social work teams

Social work teams are constantly subjected to external inspection and internal auditing processes as a means of monitoring and evaluating practice. Therefore, when considering ethical issues of coercion and deception Hamersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest careful attention is paid to those in positions of power, such as gatekeepers, who may want insider information about their teams. Exploring working conditions can also be a sensitive topic, particularly when asking participants to share negative aspects of their work and the feelings it evokes (Antoft and Peterson 2014). For example, participants sought reassurance during individual interviews that the information they shared - such as experiences of team dynamics, or wider organisational decisions - would not be recognisable to individuals. This meant ethical decisions needed to be made about the use of participant quotes in the findings. To

reduce the risks of identification further the two local authorities remained anonymous to each other. This made it more difficult for the findings to be attributed to one team or individual.

Whilst the team group interviews can be considered 'collaborative, ethical and based on trust and rapport' (O'Reilly 2012:137), participants were likely to have performed differently in this context compared to their individual interview. For example, they may have felt more relaxed to share their thoughts within the familiarity of the team or felt inhibited or silenced within a group context where other voices dominated. The team group interviews differed from focus groups in that they included those in hierarchical roles including team managers and supervisors. Whist this created opportunities for sharing team members' points of view, it also inevitably raised ethical questions in relation to power for those seen as or considered subordinate to other group members. This may have led participants to measure their responses, feeling inclined to agree with consensus views, or not share their views at all (Rubin and Babbie 2010). To address this, I positioned myself into a more active role by encouraging quieter members of the team into the group discussions. Also, during the team group interview, themes arising from observation and individual interview data remained broad so as not to reveal team members' individual views and thoughts.

Given the emotional demands of social work practice, the ability to use unguarded humour, vent and let off steam with colleagues was an important aspect of team support. I was therefore mindful that my presence may have influenced the way the team censored their social interactions and use of language to mitigate reputational damage. For example, one social worker directly commented on the presence of outsiders in social work teams and '*those Panorama things where people sit and talk badly about families and all the other bits are edited out*.' It was therefore important to consult with the team where I could observe and when and avoid the temptation to follow people into private spaces such as side rooms, or outside during cigarette breaks (Garcia et al 2009). This highlighted the ongoing challenge of ethnography, which was how to capture people behaving naturally in their setting with a researcher present. As Ulus and Gabriel (2016:10) suggest, 'when a stranger or outsider crosses into organisational terrain and begins asking questions, those answering may feel duty bound to present their working life in a positive manner.' Being in the field for a prolonged period may, over time, have created a level of familiarity so that participants could relax. However, observing participants in different settings at different times during naturally occurring interactions would have helped to address this. However, given the limited timeframe I had to assume there was always an element of performance in the researcher-researched encounter, including my own (Blix and Wettergren 2015, Leigh et al 2021).

Ethical dilemmas of navigating public and private boundaries were also present due to the teams' hybrid and home working arrangements. The use of video conferencing for hybrid observations and interviews meant I was privy to the participants' private

spaces, and they too were privy to mine. To address this, the data was not video recorded and relied on my observation notes and the audio recording of interviews. As described earlier, participants were provided with the option to have their cameras on or off, but all decided to keep them on. The face-to-face engagement of video conferencing was a familiar format for both teams, and as such helped build rapport with the participants. As suggested by Hanna (2012:241), this enabled 'both the researcher and the researched... to remain in a safe location without imposing on each other's personal space' (Hanna 2012:241).

Whilst the potential risks of exploring emotions were at the forefront of my mind, I was also aware of the potential advantages of creating a space for social workers to reflect on and process such experiences. The goal of any ethical research is to minimise risk and maximise the benefits to those who participate in research and to wider society (OHRP 2018). For Ruch (2014), the benefit of undertaking an ethnographic study of social work teams was the researcher's ability to offer an emotionally containing space for participants to explore a range of issues. Whilst exploring emotions was experienced as exhausting, one team manager shared during the team group interview, the benefits for her and the team of engaging in the study:

> *I just think we found it really helpful. I know there was a lot of discussion after individual interviews, people came out feeling exhausted because of the questions being asked, because we had to think about things. Your interview promoted some really good discussions between us within the team. So, for me, I've really enjoyed it and I think we got quite a lot out of it so thank you (TGI/T1).*

And whilst reflecting on what worked well within their team and their aspirations for the future, the second team manager also shared openly during the team group interview a clear message about being cared for:

> *I do hope, and it's also an aspiration in a way, I do hope people understand and know they are being cared for. And, that we've got each other's backs. And I think for me it's really crucial because it's what I want to do. I want us to be in a team where everyone feels they are being cared for. Irrespective of different people have different ways of showing it (TGI/T2).*

As an acknowledgement of the benefits of taking part in the research, a seminar will be offered to each participating local authority at the end of the research process.

Part three: Findings

Introduction

Part three of this thesis outlines the findings from the research. Chapter five answers the first research question 1) 'what are the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers?' The subsequent three findings' chapters answer the questions 2) 'how is support to manage the emotional demands of practice enacted within teams?' and 3) 'what are the challenges and dilemmas of team support and the implications of these for managing the emotional demands of practice?'

Data from observations, individual and team group interviews were analysed to provide a picture of how teams both help, and hinder, social workers in managing the emotional demands of practice. The findings are structured using two key concepts - Hochschild's (1983) emotional labour and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theatre metaphor. Both concepts emphasise the performative nature of emotional management – a theme running though the data. The chapters therefore follow three key themes, 1) stage setting, direction, and props, 2) team roles and 3) team scripts. The contents of each of the four findings chapters are summarised below:

Chapter five: The emotional demands of practice. The first findings chapter identifies the range of emotional demands experienced by social workers as part of their day-to-day work. Whilst both teams did refer to bureaucratic organisational pressures such as paperwork and deadlines, these were surprisingly minimal. Team members predominately talked about the demands of consciously having to manage their emotions as part of performing their professional role (Hochschild 1983). These emotional demands arose as part of 1) engaging families, 2) multi-agency working, 3) wider societal discourses about their role, and 4) team membership. Given the timing of this study, a fifth emotional demand was also identified, 5) working during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter six: Stage Setting, Direction and Props. The second findings chapter draws on the concept of stage setting to consider where team interactions took place, and how this enabled or hindered support with the emotional demands of practice. As suggested by Goffman (1959:88), setting the stage meant 'conveying information about oneself and the team through scenic means' which in this study included the physical office and online spaces. Stage direction was used to refer to the movement of team members within and across these settings including the use of physical and virtual 'side rooms' inside and outside the building and 'offstage areas' which were guided by different emotional display rules. Props included the strategic use of objects and artefacts within these settings such as furniture, personal items on desks, wall displays and virtual backgrounds. The interrelated nature of stage setting, direction and props played a key role in how teams responded to and processed the emotional demands of the work.

Chapter seven: Team Roles. Through the theatrical metaphor of roles, the third findings chapter explores the professional, social, and symbolic roles adopted by individuals within the team and how support was individually and collectively enacted through such roles. According to Goffman (1959), a team performance is guided and directed by an individual who has been given the authority to ensure adherence to the overall 'dramatic production.' The role involves both modelling the expected performance and allocating parts. From this perspective, the team manager can be considered a 'performance director' to the audience of the team. Other team members – the cast – are concerned with both the performance they put on for each other, and collectively stage for the wider audience. In social work teams this wider audience included managers, co-located teams, the wider local authority, visiting professionals and me as researcher.

Chapter eight: Team Scripts. The final findings chapter explores individual and team scripts and the way in which they can either help of hinder social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. These scripts consisted of individual and collective narratives about the social worker role, the team, and their wider profession. Both teams sought to positively 're-story' and thus reconstruct the dominant deficit-based discourses of social work by generating team scripts that recognised 1) we are human too, 2) we don't manage alone and, 3) we are positive, hopeful, and proud. Whilst these scripts did not minimise the emotional demands experienced by social workers', they were identified as a way of reclaiming their professional identity and thus helped find meaning in their work and a sense of solidarity and belonging within their team.

Chapter five: The emotional demands of practice

Introduction

For the two teams in this study, the emotional demands of practice were grouped into four key areas, 1) working with children and families, 2) professional relationships, 3), society's portrayal of social work and, 4) working during the Covid-19 pandemic. While many of the themes were identified in the literature, the emotional demands of working with affluent families, and the emotional labour of team membership emerged as new areas with which social workers and managers required ongoing support.

Section one: Working with children and families

As identified in chapter one; section two of the literature review, social workers can experience direct work with children and families as emotionally demanding. Whilst observations of direct practice were not part of this study, team members regularly talked to each other in the office and during the interviews about such encounters. These discussions suggested that social workers experienced a range of strong emotional reactions in their day-to-day work which included feelings of pride and hope (see chapter eight, section three) as well as anxiety, sadness, and fear. Performing the professional role therefore required considerable emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) which involved the 'dynamic interplay of occupational expectations, expressed emotions, and emotion regulation strategies' within a work context (Grandey et al 2013). This was experienced as most challenging when faced with hostility and threats from families, when witnessing the consequences of abuse to children and when the families' experiences resonated in some way with the social workers' own personal biography. In addition, social workers who engaged with affluent families - as with Team 2 – experienced a unique set of emotional demands which challenged their professional role and identity.

1.1 Experiencing hostility

Social workers across both teams described emotionally demanding encounters with families as part of their day-to-day work. Social workers acknowledged the hostility towards them was at times understandable, although difficult to manage. During interviews and collegial talk within the office, social workers spoke of parents' fear of criticism and judgement about their parenting. This included the *'stigma' (II/SW/T1)* of social work involvement and the fear of having their child removed. Social workers described doors being slammed in their faces, being threatened, screamed, and shouted at:

> *Quite often we're the ones that are, like, this is what we have to do and we have to see your children, we have to see your house, we have to do all these things, we're the invasive ones... we all have those*

experiences... we've all had the doors slammed in our faces and we've all been shouted at and called names… (II/SW/T1)

Experiencing hostility was emotionally demanding and could cause frustrations when social workers wanted to just 'do their job' and create meaningful relationships. For those that did not like confrontation this aspect of practice was particularly challenging:

Well, from certain families you can get a lot of abuse when, obviously, you're just trying to do a job and you wouldn't be involved if you didn't need to be… I really don't like confrontation, being shouted at can be really intimidating and it makes you worry. (II/SW/T1)

One senior social worker described an emotionally challenging week where she experienced verbal abuse, aggression, and physical threats. What was striking during this interview was the social workers use of laughter whilst she recounted a very threatening incident:

I was like stuck in the house with quite a high-risk volatile young person and he had a massive knife (laughs)… like a big zombie knife, and it was horrible… I managed to get the knife off him but it was really scary and it was in the dark… it was in the basement and I didn't have any phone signal and it was after work hours… the police took two hours to arrive. That same week, another parent tried to abduct their child from me in the street and caused quite a scene and was really, really abusive and aggressive towards me (II/AP/T2)

Laughter and humour were frequent features when team members recounted physical risk or had experienced abuse from families. As identified in chapter two; section 2 of the literature review, humour can be used as an emotional labour strategy to mask feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, or stress. It can also be used as a means of translating unacceptable thoughts and feelings into socially acceptable forms of expression (Biggart et al 2017). However, masking authentic feelings through surface-level acting could also be experienced as emotionally demanding. For example, the emotional labour required to present as calm in the face of emotionally charged situations can be 'difficult work:'

Seeing the parent very often is going to be very hostile and having to negotiate and navigate. Having to be able to discuss in a calm manner with the parent why they're there and why they have these concerns and why they're having to do the work they are doing, you know I think it is really, really difficult work... they have to be fairly emotionally attuned (II/TC/T2)

Similarly, social workers needed to manage their feelings of sadness during encounters with families. In a context where social workers are expected to display the appropriate emotion of neutrality and calm as part of their professional role, one social worker had to work hard to remind herself that it was 'ok' to feel sad about the decisions she had to make:

> *Last week I had a meeting with two parents, we had to tell them about a recommendation that the children should be in foster care, and it's really sad telling a parent that you don't think they can look after their child again, ever... I felt awful about it even though it was the right thing for the child... and I'm trying really hard to be like, this is sad and its okay to feel sad about this because it is an extraordinary thing to have to do. (II/AP/T2)*

Social workers frequently spoke of managing their emotional responses during encounters with families by consciously seeking to separate their personal from their professional selves. This was a message that some social workers said they had received at university as part of learning to be a professional social worker. This had then been taken into and integrated into their wider professional performances once qualified:

> *I think more through your training, this is your professional self, and this is your personal self, and you don't mix those together, especially with families you put your professional hat on. (II/SW/T1)*

Putting on one's 'professional hat' and performing a role was one way to manage the emotional demands of practice. However, it could also paradoxically increase the challenges of engaging in relationship based practice with families. Hiding the more personal and vulnerable aspects of oneself could prevent social workers forming more meaningful working relationships. Describing a social worker's strategy for managing feelings of vulnerability, the team clinician shared:

> *Sometimes she was protecting herself from fully immersing herself when she was with families. It was almost like she was going in with a shield... she was afraid of showing her vulnerability to the families and I think in a way, the families were sort of sensing that something was in between them… and without the social worker getting rid of that shield, the relationship couldn't work properly... I think… she had to be able to show her vulnerability in order for the family to also be able to show theirs (II/TC/T2)*

The ongoing challenge for social workers was therefore to produce the correct emotional display i.e., by remaining calm and professional in emotionally charged situations but while doing so, avoid 'masking' (Grandey et al 2013:8) these emotions

entirely, and thus failing to acknowledge the personal impact of practice. This included the challenge of engaging with children who were experiencing abuse.

1.2 Witnessing abuse

As identified in chapter one; section two of the literature review, child and family social work is an intimate, visceral, sensory experience that requires social workers to come into direct contact with children who have experienced abuse and neglect. Such encounters can led to social workers experiencing both physical and psychological symptoms they have to manage on a day-to-day basis:

> *I had this case that like, blew up… my supervisor at the time told me to go to my doctor... I tell him I have headaches and he's like, 'they are migraines'… I tell him I can't sleep and he's like 'it's exhaustion'. (OfficeOb/T2)*

The team's nonverbal somatic and sensory responses to the emotional demands of practice could be observed within the office setting. The social worker's yawn, heavy sighs and the tapping of feet were just some of the ways the team expressed the ebb and flow of their daily emotions:

> *I notice tension in my shoulders and a slight headache has come on. The student social worker yawns next to me in the quiet of the room. I too yawn. Peter exhales a deep sigh. At the other end of the room, I can hear a social worker from the other team describing her difficult day... [later in the observation] From across the room Fran is heard saying 'my brain feels inflated'. The team manager says 'if your brain feels inflated, do you need to go home? Go home'. Fran says, 'I have emails to respond to, it just never stops, does it?' (OfficeObT1)*

The experience of witnessing the impact of child abuse as part of the social work role was described by one senior practitioner as a form of 'shock' which they managed by going into 'social work mode.' This is consistent with the emotional labour strategy of temporarily masking one's immediate emotional reaction to perform the professional role:

> *We got a referral…that this child is really, really skinny… as soon as I saw him I was just in shock at what I was seeing... we went to see his bedroom…no carpet, no bed, no bedding…he had been locked in and it was just horrible... I couldn't believe what I was seeing and you, kind of, go into that social worker mode, you do what you need to do. And then, you come away from that and you're just driving home, like, gosh, what has gone on there... why does someone do that to a child, I just cannot understand it. (II/SP/T1)*

Social workers stepped into role to maintain a desired impression regardless of their internal feelings. As such they adopted what Hochschild (1983:43) referred to as 'surface-level acting.' Producing the appropriate emotional response in the moment was however a temporary strategy until – as described above - they could return to their car where the performance could be dropped. Another strategy used to manage the emotional demands of working with abused children was to separate the event from the child. However, masking the emotional reaction of shock, disgust, and anger to display calm and neutrality could create an impression of being uncaring or blasé:

> *I think the way that we deal with really difficult cases or situations... is probably separate it from the child... maybe to some people when you initially come into that they may be thinking, oh god, it's… not that they don't care, but it's a bit blasé about it, I suppose…I think that's how we have learnt to deal with those difficult … you know, if it comes in that a child has been sexually abused…you try and separate that from the person… to try and deal with it... (II/SP/T1)*

Even when the abuse was not directly observed by co-workers, the emotional experience of a colleague could be vicariously felt by others within the team. The emotional demands of practice could therefore be collectively held and experienced. Talking about the same child above who had experienced significant neglect, a team member shared:

> *What happened to that client was awful, that was in the first week of me starting so that was a…lot. But I didn't know that person…it was awful to see the social worker upset. (II/FSW/T1)*

Despite how emotionally demanding it was for social workers to witness child abuse, they were expected to perform an outward display of calm as part of their professional role. Emotional labour involves impression management, where deliberate attempts are made to foster a certain perception of oneself in the mind of another. For social workers it was important to portray their ability to be 'ok' in line with performing organisational and professional expectations. As identified earlier, this form of impression management was often incongruent with the emotional realities of practice:

> *You're dealing with sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and we just take and absorb that because that's our job... I think that emotional demand just to be okay and to keep going is…expected when actually, that's not necessarily normal to be hearing and dealing and managing with all that. (II/SP/T1)*

The tension inherent in being emotionally available, attuned and attentive to the suffering of others whilst also managing the emotional demands of practice was described by one social worker as a constant tightrope:

> *I think we just get used to stuff we shouldn't get used to, but it is quite traumatising... we have this horrible balance of…needing to be emotionally available and empathetic, and mentalise, but not too much because else we couldn't cope so, yeah, it's a constant kind of tightrope… (II/AP/T2)*

Performing emotional neutrality and calm as part of their professional role was a re-occurring strategy, used by social workers as a way of managing their emotions when confronted with the realities of child abuse. However, this form of emotional labour could take an emotional toll. The masking of emotion was only ever temporary and inevitably resurfaced at a later point:

> *Whether it's a child that's been neglected constantly or they've been hit, all of that does play on your emotions. And it can take its toll because, obviously, we remain professional and you have to try not to get attached… in order to protect yourself and in order to do the work as effectively as possible. But…when you sit there and think about some of the things you hear, it can really take its toll on you. (II/NQSW/T1)*

Displaying the required emotions as part of the social work role, whilst also managing the emotional impact of practice remained a constant source of emotional labour for team members. This appeared to be most challenging when social workers engaged in surface-level strategies that required an outward display of calm and neutrality whilst masking how they were really feeling. This form of emotional dissonance was also encountered when social workers experienced resonances with families in their day-to-day work.

1.3 Resonances with families

Aligning with chapter one; section two of the literature review, social workers described the emotional demands that arose when their personal biographies and experiences intersected with the families they worked with. Being aware of these similarities and the impact of this on practice was described by the team clinician as working with 'resonances:'

> *You have to look at the resonances between yourself and the families you're working with. Not just the difficulty they have, but the way they present, what they remind you of... all of these things that resonate between you and this family. (II/TC/T2)*

During a formal team reflective group discussion - created as part of Team 2's systemic practice - a social worker was observed describing the resonances she experienced in her work with a family. Within the wider group, she shared her feelings of frustration and familiarity by drawing on both her personal and professional context:

> *I think she sees me as an aunt… I tell them I'll never be a mum… she can come to me… the aunty relationship... but hey, the frustrations are like a mum… the young person has been through so much instability… This family reminds me of my family at home… I'd go in the house… they would be playing music and I'd be, oh, ok, I'm at home!'… I have to think about that… (OnlineOb/T2)*

Whilst an identified strategy to manage the emotional demands of practice was to maintain personal and professional boundaries, this could prove difficult in practice:

> *Just talking to her about everything she's gone through you just feel so much more for them. And, it is a black family, and it is a family… that is not too far from where I'm from, so there are little things that you just feel like you could so be someone in my own family... That kind of stuff is emotionally … yes, it plays on my emotions a bit sometimes. (II/AP/T2)*

Resonances also occurred when children and their families saw social workers, not as professionals, but as family figures in their lives. Whilst this could create deep connections and empathy within the working relationship, it was also experienced as emotionally draining:

> *I have a case I have been working since October, very sad… the mother has become a little bit too reliant on me, which I've recognised and tried to pull back a bit. But, at the same time she really needs the support, and I think the little girl is seeing me as a grannie figure because I'm older. That was quite draining... there are just certain cases that touch you more than others.... (II/SSP/T1)*

The motivation for entering the social work profession is in part based on personal experience (Johnson et al 2022). Whilst this may have included experiences of helping and supporting others, it could also include the social workers' own personal experiences of harm, abuse, and neglect. As described by one senior social worker:

> *The work that we do... is quite intense it's quite emotion provoking…There are people that have probably experienced some of those things that they're having to go out and deal with. (II/SP/T1)*

Resonances with families could therefore create emotional triggers for social workers, a reminder of the challenges that they faced in their own personal lives:

> *I think some cases will maybe remind you of your own difficulties... which I do think has that sort of emotional impact…bringing stuff up... I feel able to cope, although I'd be lying if I said that it hasn't got the better of me on occasions…that's definitely part of the work that has a bit of a toll… when you're working with a family where you can see your own history... (II/NQSW/T1)*

Experiencing these resonances and their emotional impact was a reoccurring theme among social workers across both teams. However, social workers also engaged with families that challenged their professional identities. This was particularly evident when working with affluent families who did not fit the wider dominant discourses of being 'in need.'

1.4 Working with affluent families

Wider societal discourses hold that child and family social workers predominately engage with families that are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Featherstone et al 2019). However, Team 2 was located within a wealthy inner city local authority that challenged these assumptions. This was exemplified by a social worker during the team group interview when she asked, '…w*hat is it then to be a social worker and how do you make sense of your identity…what is our role? (TGI/AP/T2).* In response the team clinician shared:

> *...usually, the dominant narrative of human distress is that it happens to the poorer families. And I wonder if there then seems to be this incongruence… all this affluence... I wonder if it requires your ability to deal with two extreme positions. To deal with really poor families, financially poor, and very, very affluent families… (TGI/TC/T2)*

As identified by the team manager, affluent families had '…*the privilege and the power [to] change the story [of suspected abuse] … backed by experts who can change the narrative' (OnlineOb/T2).* Instead of being viewed as a statutory safeguarding service, one social worker described feeling treated as if they were paid staff:

> *Families that we deal with at the wealthier end of the spectrum don't approach me in the same way that families that I've worked with in other local authorities do. There's an expectation that we are like a service for them, like we're almost one of their paid staff or we're weaponised in lots of horrible private law divorce cases rather than seen as a safeguarding service. (II/AP/T2)*

The shift in power and authority that arose when working with affluent families created a level of discomfort and nervousness for social workers as it challenged their professional identity (Bernard and Greenwood 2019). Some team members managed this by engaging in impression management strategies which included paying attention to the way they spoke during home visits:

> *I did my first visit to a very, very wealthy family and I felt nervous, and I never really feel nervous in practice anymore, or hadn't done until that point…I think part of the reason was because, yes, I'm a very middle-class guy, I'm from a middle-class upbringing, and I think I maybe felt uncomfortable in that scenario because, a) it was unusual to me, going to a very rich family to do child protection work or child in need work is not something I've done before. And there is something to be said for the power dynamics and how that works and how you have conversations and even the words you use. (II/SW/T2)*

The impression management strategies used to engage affluent families not only shaped the way social workers spoke, but also the way they physically presented themselves. The use of professional dress, or the theatrical concept of 'costume' as a means of creating the 'right' impression will be described in more detail in the following chapter. However, for Team 2 it was important to create an outward appearance of professionalism that also evoked class status and intelligence. Maintaining this impression was however experienced as emotionally demanding:

> *I like dressing nice but when I came to work in this [local authority]… made much more of an effort… phone calls… what do they hear… my accent… first visit, what do they see… that I've eaten at McDonalds once too many times… all these elements that I think about and I don't think about…' Lily responds, 'sometimes I resent we have to do that…I want to go the opposite way… not dress up and still say "I'm as smart as you, that I'm just as good as you...(OfficOb/T2)*

Whether facing hostility, witnessing abuse, experiencing resonances, or working with affluent families, a complex picture emerged of the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers during their day-to-day work. Performing emotional labour as part of a wider impression management strategy was particularly emotionally challenging. Similar challenges were also experienced within professional working relationships.

Section two: Professional relationships

Beyond direct engagement with children and families, the findings identified that social workers also experienced their professional relationships – including multi-agency partners, and collegial relationships - as emotionally demanding. The demands were

particularly felt in the context of emotional labour where social workers had to actively regulate and manage their emotional displays and those of others, whilst also performing professionalism as part of their social work role.

2.1 Multi agency working

Team members were regularly observed talking about the emotional demands of working within a multi-agency context. From education and health colleagues to the police, these relational encounters were often described through the metaphor of 'going into battle.' In addition, within a multi-agency context, team members were also often expected to have 'all the answers' despite the statutory guidance that safeguarding children should be a collective responsibility (DfE 2018).

2.1.1 Battling against professionals

Multi-agency working is recognised as best practice, which is embedded within social work training, and continues as a core component of child and family social work. However, the reality of working with multi-agency partners was at times experienced as emotionally demanding. This was observed in the way social workers shared feelings of anger and frustration towards other professionals with co-workers. The language used by both teams with regards to multi-agency working was dominated by battle metaphors:

> *You're fighting a fire together but you're both battling each other, as well, I think it makes it harder. And, the whole point, we're all taught in uni, you need to all work together, you've got to all be on the same page, you've got to have this collaborative approach, but in hindsight it's quite difficult to do because of what each job role wants from you. (II/NQSW/T1)*

The challenge of 'all being on the same page' whilst also adopting different roles, and different agendas created ongoing tensions as part of multi-agency working. This left social workers feeling that they had to 'fight' to be heard. The language used by social workers to describe their professional performances accentuated the emotional demands experienced:

> *It was battling against professionals and, oh, it was just dreadful... I'd had to fight, stick to my guns and say, no, this is what I'm saying... I'm so angry with all these professionals... it's a big thing, you know, this interprofessional, multi-professional working doesn't happen, it doesn't, because we are all coming from our agendas, and we're always right, they're always right. (II/SSP/T1)*

Different agendas, points of view and opinions within a multi-agency context were not only experienced as emotionally demanding, but could also undermine social workers' decision making and confidence which could feel like a 'battlefield:'

> *There were so many different views about what should happen... that just took I think a very big emotional toll… you're being pulled in so many different directions, you're questioning your own decision-making and second guessing it all the time... I didn't look forward to work at all, I just saw it as a real battlefield (II/PM/T2)*

2.1.2 Managing professional anxiety

Child and family social work, particularly child protection, is not only emotionally demanding, but also highly anxiety provoking for professionals charged with protecting children from harm. Anxiety and frustration arising within a multi-agency context was often described as resulting from a lack of knowledge and understanding about the social work role and what their powers and duties were. For example, one social worker described the challenge of managing such expectations when roles were not clearly understood across the wider professional network:

> *in terms of health visitors... I don't think they really understand our role as a team, and I think sometimes they expect us to be doing things that maybe are not our role and that can cause some frustrations.... And, for us, as well, because there are things we think…they should be doing and they're not doing, where probably for us we don't understand their role. (II/SW/T1)*

Social workers also described the expectation inherent in their role to manage and contain anxiety and frustration within the wider professional network, particularly when it came to differences of opinion about assessing risk to a child:

> *I've literally just closed [the case] this morning, and there was such anxiety, that's another one, is managing anxiety from the professional network of wanting me to stay involved... there are really no safeguarding [child protection] concerns, the work that needs to be done is he needs to continue with CAMHS, he needs to get to school, there are services. (II/SSP/T2)*

As part of multi-agency working, social workers often described the tension of having to contain and manage other people's frustrations, anger, and anxieties as part of their role whilst also having to manage the display of their own emotions. This form of emotional labour was often draining for social workers:

...Sometimes I come back home, and I'm saturated with people just being argumentative, if not shouting…there is a lot of containment there and a lot of people attacking you…. But, not personally, it's not a personal thing, they're not attacking you as a person, but they are projecting on you all their anger, frustration, anxiety. (II/SW/T2)

In addition to remaining calm as a means of containing the professional network, social workers experienced the emotional demands of ultimately holding responsibility for addressing and 'sorting out' child protection concerns.

2.1.3 Social workers will 'sort it out'

Statutory guidance determines that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. However, social workers, as lead professionals, keenly felt the weight of expectation and responsibility that '*other agencies... think that we can solve it all, that we can sort everything out and it's alright the social worker will do it' (II/SP/T1).* As described by one social worker, this resulted in feelings of frustration at having to do the work of the police:

Abbie asks if there are any other cases from last week that are 'causing any bother'. Fran responds with 'yeah the drugs raid, the police told me to go ahead and do what I want, they may get around to it eventually…Ok, I'll go out and do your job for you, I'll find the drugs. What will I do if I find them… citizen's arrest? It's their job. If there is something behind the fridge, I'm taking pictures' (OnlineOb/T1)

As identified above, the emotional demands of practice were often felt at the disjuncture between what social workers could do within their professional role and the power others assumed they had to 'sort it out.' This misalignment was at times felt as 'overwhelming:'

I think it's just overwhelming sometimes this sense of responsibility…because every other profession looks to social care as having all the answers, and really, we don't. We're just people going in to be nosey and see what we can see, and school will quite often be, oh, social care are involved now, health, oh, we've referred to social care they will sort it out. And it's hard to get them sometimes to take some of that responsibility off you. (II/SW/T1)

Accompanying the view that social workers should have all the answers, the perception of sole responsibility to 'sort things' also came with a sense of accountability especially if something were to go wrong. As identified in chapter one; section two of the literature, government, and media rhetoric that child abuse must be

stopped created heightened anxiety and the message that the buck stopped with them:

> *We have so many professionals involved. But, if something happens to her who are they going to look at first, it will be me, and I think that's one of the things we are very aware of. (II/SSP/T2)*

As described above, social workers as 'lead professionals' felt responsible for managing their emotional displays within multi-agency meetings. Emotional labour in this context not only regulated the emotional environment to elicit calm in others but also used as an impression management strategy to elicit a performance of professionalism:

> *I think a lot of responsibility is placed on social workers, especially in multi-professional meetings, you're the one that's leading it, you're the one that's, sort of, multi-managing everyone else. So, I think that's, kind of, why because you're seen as the lead in that area, if the leader of that is then getting emotional and things like that then it will trickle down to everyone else. (II/SW/T1)*

Multi-agency partnership working was identified by both teams as complex and emotionally demanding. A continued sense of battling professionals, whilst also managing professional anxiety and frustration, meant social workers frequently engaged in emotional labour Whilst the social work team could be seen as a backstage region (Goffman 1959) to process such encounters, the findings identified collegial relationships and team membership could also be experienced as emotionally demanding.

2.2 Collegial relationships

In addition to the relational challenges of multi-agency partnership working, social workers also identified a range of emotional demands arising from their day-to-day interactions with colleagues within their team. This included the need to manage feelings of imposter syndrome and emotional vulnerability.

2.2.1 Managing imposter syndrome

The process of developing professional confidence whilst managing feelings of 'imposter syndrome' was experienced as emotionally demanding for social workers. This was particularly felt by students and early career social workers. One social worker described the stress of trying to maintain the required professional standards as a newly qualified social worker:

> *Halfway through my ASYE I started to really question if I was good enough for the job, and I've heard that that's a big thing across social work anyway... I think it's imposter syndrome…every day I was beating myself up, like, I'm not keeping standards good enough... I did struggle because for a while I was going through just stressing myself out, you know, questioning everything. (II/NQSW/T1)*

The perceived need to get things right and thus avoid doing something wrong in front of co-workers exacerbated the emotional demands experienced by social workers in the early stages of their career. As described by one social worker, '*I think it's that fear, because you don't want people to think you're not coping with it...' (II/SW/T1).* Team members therefore engaged in emotional labour strategies to create an outward impression of professional confidence and competence. The consequence of this meant team members struggled at times to ask for help:

> *I'm so critical and worried that I'm going to do something wrong, and because it's new, I don't know the job it's horrible not knowing... I've found it really hard having to ask for help all the time and it makes you feel like you're not good at what you're doing... it's hard to know that you're at the bottom of the scale in a role where you really need to be on the ball all the time. (II/ST/T1)*

Comparing one's own lack of professional confidence with co-workers was not only prevalent in newly qualified social workers and students. Experienced social workers also experienced emotional labour and the need to make a 'good impression' - which included the ability to manage the demands of practice – during the initial stages of joining the team:

> *It was a time where I still felt quite new…I was trying to still make a good impression that I can manage situations. People didn't really know me, although I was five/six months in, it's still not enough time to really get to know somebody I don't think when you're still learning the processes... (II/AP/T2)*

The need to present as professionally confident and competent appeared to be more prevalent when collegial relationships were relatively new and still forming. However, as part of developing professional confidence, team members, including team managers, also spoke of the need to mask feelings of vulnerability to the audience of co-workers within the team.

2.2.2 Managing emotional vulnerability

As identified above, social workers engaged in a range of emotional labour strategies to manage their displays of vulnerability and impress upon co-workers their capacity

to cope with the emotional demands of practice. One social worker described how the expectation to individually manage these demands started at university:

> *I think all of the coping mechanisms and things like that that I was taught in uni were all things I'd be doing on my own. You know, you would go and do a breathing technique or go for a walk, you were never taught team coping mechanisms and things like that... it's, kind of, drilled into your head through university, I feel, that you've got to deal with that on your own (II/NQSW/T1)*

Social workers spoke of the tensions of simultaneously recognising the traumatic nature of the work, whilst also hiding their emotional responses as a way of impressing upon colleagues their capacity to cope:

> *The work we do is very traumatic... I wouldn't always want to express that this is making me really sad or it's affecting how I feel, because you don't want anyone to think that you're not capable or you're not managing very well... I think naturally, as human beings, you just want to look like you're managing okay (II/NQSW/T1)*

Professionalism and expressing emotional vulnerability remained a constant tension for social workers. The open expression of certain emotions in the office setting was regarded as incongruent with the expected emotional display rules of the professional role. This carried with it the risk of judgement from work colleagues of not being seen as competent or able to cope:

> *… sometimes I just want to be able to be like, I'm really stressed I'm really overwhelmed, I'm really sad and worried about this, without them being like, 'ooh, can you handle this'... I think there is just in social work in general but also in [this team] there is a bit of a kind of… is macho the right word? Macho… like this culture of, yeah you get on with it… (II/AP/T2)*

Social workers can find themselves in a 'stress trap' (Fineman 2003:139) where to admit stress is to admit weakness. This was not only felt by students and newly qualified social workers, but also extended to those in management positions. One team manager expressed the inherent contradictions of showing emotional vulnerability in a work environment:

> *It's quite hard to show vulnerability in a work environment, particularly when we talk about resilience and strength and determination and all of that, then it feels quite controversial to what we preach. You feel judged, I suppose…by yourself and your colleagues, and your organisation... And*

I think that's to do with the way in which being professional is understood or talked about or promoted. (II/TM/T2)

Regulating and managing their emotional displays in accordance with occupational and organisational display rules represented significant emotional labour for social workers. Amplifying confidence and masking emotional vulnerability in front of co-workers formed an important part of the social workers impression management strategy to portray the capacity to cope with the emotional demands of practice. This meant colleagues and the team were simultaneously a source of support, *and* emotional demand. These tensions will be explored in further detail in the proceeding chapters.

Section three: Society's portrayal of social work

The emotional demands experienced by social workers in their day-to-day practice were in part influenced by the way their profession was portrayed by wider society. As identified in chapter one; section two of the literature review, the public perception of social work is fueled by government and media narratives that predominantly report on a perceived failure to protect children from harm. This narrow view of social work created ongoing challenges in maintaining positive working relationships with families and other professionals.

3.1 Lack of visibility

The stigma of social work involvement and wider society's desire to be protected from the realities of child abuse has contributed to the social work profession being conceptualised as an 'invisible trade' (Pithouse 1984:2). As identified by one social worker, '*I think social work is a bit of an invisible profession because families aren't going to talk about your involvement to their friends and family' (II/PM/T2).* This lack of visibility, including an understanding of what social workers do, has been perpetuated by unrealistic portrayals of the social work role in populist media and film. During one virtual meeting, team members shared their frustrations about a social worker being cast as naïve and, although based in another country, the misperception that social workers had the power to take children home:

I watched "Case 39" … a naive social worker goes out… why does she have to be naive?... not very realistic at all'. Andres responds, 'I thought it was based on true events?' Abbie confirms it isn't. Andres continues, 'I don't think a child would fit in the oven like that anyway…?' Colleagues laugh lightly. Abbie then says, 'I don't know how America works… but that would never be approved here… I'm just gonna take this one home?... (OnlineOb/T1)

In practice, team members felt a lack of visibility and understanding created a narrow and fragmented perception of social workers' role in wider society. This included being perceived by society as a nuisance and getting on families' nerves:

> *I think in wider society social workers still aren't very well regarded. I just think people don't really know what we do... I think we can be viewed as a bit of a nuisance sometimes…we're viewed as a culture that…gets on families' nerves and we're involved where we shouldn't be, which is not the reality… (II/SW/T2)*

Social workers remained mindful of the polarisation of their role. As identified earlier, social workers were positioned as responsible for 'sorting out' and stopping child abuse. This created anxiety and led to ongoing uncertainty about whether they would be perceived by others as positively saving children, the more negative narratives of leaving children to suffer:

> *It kind of goes one of two ways, either you're brilliant, you save children and then there will be a story about a neighbour they had who was abusing their children and everything was fixed with social care. Or, they've had negative experiences and it goes the other way, but you never know in any situation. (II/SW/T1)*

With a lack of visibility in the wider community and without a full understanding of the professional role, social workers were seen to hold an immense amount of power to take children away from their families. As identified earlier, this was experienced as emotionally demanding for social workers who wanted to engage in relationship-based practice with families. One manifestation of society's portrayal of social work was the reference of "child snatchers."

3.2 "Child snatchers"

Social workers spoke of the emotional impact of being seen as '*child snatchers*', despite their strong desire to make a difference and work positively with families. This popularist characterisation of the social work role undermined other aspects of the task such as keeping families together:

> *People just see us as taking children away and that's not what we do. We might have to in some situations but that's not our bread and butter...we want to support families and them to be together and that's what we try to do... it's partly social media's perception of what we're doing, taking children away. (II/SP/T1)*

Not only was this perception experienced during the social workers' encounters with families, but also in the wider community. As identified by one social worker the

reference to stealing children was experienced at university during her social work training:

> *I remember coming out of a lecture once... we were all in a queue and the guy said, there are so many of you, what are you all studying, and we were all, like, social work. He was, like, yes, you're all learning how to steal children. Okay. We're just trying to get some lunch. (II/SW/T1)*

The dominant script of child snatching was also experienced in the social worker's personal life:

> *Child snatchers, that happens a lot. A couple of weeks ago I was having [work done on the house] home, and he was, like, what do you do. I said, I'm a social worker, and he was like, oh, we all know the children snatchers. I was, like, okay…. he was saying it as a joke but that's not always funny. (II/SW/T1)*

The perception that removing children from their families was the social workers' primary focus was also experienced within social workers' wider family network:

> *If you got a wider family party, family you don't see for a while…they don't even understand it and they will be, like, how many children have you removed today, how many kids have you taken? (II/SW/T1)*

One social worker who had practiced in another country identified the dominant narrative of removing children was not universal. With an emphasis on the need to address the behaviour of the child, rather than the parent – as is the dominant approach in the UK child protection system - social workers could be viewed very differently in the eyes of wider society:

> *I'm from [another country] and in that country we were called 'welfare ladies'… you show up in your white car from the state… you are so respected as a social worker… the poor parent… when the social worker shows up it is to give support… you say to the child, you are naughty and your parents need help, that's why the social worker is here… they know you want to help… but in this country they feel that you are going to take something away… (OnlineOb/T2)*

The view that social workers predominantly take something away from families is heavily influenced by the way the profession is perceived by wider society. This wider deficit-based narrative of social work was an added emotional demand experienced by both teams in their daily practice.

3.3 Media scandals

The influence that social media has in shaping perceptions of the social work role is further exacerbated by a culture of naming and shaming social workers in tabloid papers. This created ongoing anxiety for social workers in the two teams who feared being exposed in the media for potentially making mistakes. A discussion between two team members in the office highlighted these tensions:

> *I get worried with stuff like this [drug use and overdosing] … classic, come out of nowhere, parents didn't know… he's fearless, he does it at home…' Annika responds with '… I see your name in the Metro… it's such a metro story! (OnlineOb/T2)*

Constant media reporting that focuses on things that 'went wrong' left social workers feeling their job was a thankless task:

> *Social work rarely gets positive press... I always find it fascinating why people become social workers, it's one of those slightly thankless tasks, it's kind of like you can't really promote good news stories just because of data protection so it's only when things go horrendously wrong people read about social work and what it is. (II/PM/T2)*

Social workers recognised the importance of responsibility and accountability as part of their aim to keep children safe, and the importance of learning from mistakes, but questioned the helpfulness of the media's role in this process:

> *Scandals in newspapers and poor decisions, mistakes that social care have made across the country over the years have put stuff under the microscope... I mean, putting bad decisions under the microscope is the right thing to do but, I suppose, it's about how you do it, if it becomes a media circus then is it helpful? (II/SW/T2)*

Wider society's narrow portrayal of social work was experienced as emotionally demanding for team members. The lack of visibility and understanding about the social work role remained a dominant theme resulting in fear and hostility from parents, the characterisation of being child snatchers and negative representation and exposure within the media. Despite this wider emotional climate, social workers were expected to perform emotional labour to maintain the impression of calm, neutrality and empathy as part of their professional role.

Section four: Working during the Covid-19 pandemic

Given the timing of this study, I observed and elicited - through individual and team group interviews - the emotional demands experienced by social workers working

during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the statutory nature of child and family social work both teams continued to fulfil their day-to-day tasks, albeit under significant changes to their working practices. This included the challenges of working from home, increased bureaucratic paperwork, the need to wear PPE equipment and difficulty gaining access to families. In addition, social workers also experienced the personal impact of the pandemic. This included not being able to physically see or rely on their friends and family support systems, and for some, balancing work with parenting responsibilities following school closures.

4.1 Experiences of loss

Local authorities across the country quickly implemented hybrid working, however the overriding emotional challenges experienced by both teams could be summarised as an overriding sense of loss. This included loss of boundaries between the office and their homes, loss of team cohesion, loss of spontaneous emotional offloading and the loss of shared learning and knowledge within collegial relationships.

Pre Covid-19, the office building was identified as a place where the demands of practice could be left at the end of the working day. However, working from home meant the blurring of these defined boundaries where '*we're all sat now in our own living rooms or bedrooms or spare rooms or whatever. Our personal life is now our work life...' (TGI/AP/T2)***.** The loss of a physical boundary therefore meant social workers no longer had a pre-defined 'space' between being at work and being at home. As described by one social worker during a hybrid team check in:

> *If you're dealing with a difficult conversation or quite a traumatic event…you can't get away from it. So, when you're in the office you have got your people to talk to and you can have spontaneous kind of conversations and that makes it a lot easier. And then, you come out, you have your drive home…de-stress, you've got out of work mode, you're going into family mode, you get home, and you carry on with your day. You don't have that when you're at home and it's like you can't get away from it... (II/SP/T1)*

Most schools in England had closed during the second wave of the pandemic to contain the spread of the virus. In addition, households were unable to mix. This meant social workers with young children had to balance the demands of working, childcare and home schooling. The loss of these once clearly defined boundaries and external spaces was emotionally demanding for social workers. For one social worker in particular, the experience left her feeling ineffective as both a social worker and a mother:

Tess mentions the [online] chat last week where Abbie's son made an appearance, Abbie groans, 'I don't know how people do it!... I end up being a shit social worker and a shit mum all at once… (OnlineOb/T1)

The blurring of boundaries was also paradoxically experienced by team members as a form of fragmentation. One team manager described the team as *'being pulled apart' (II/TM/T1).* Although the use of video conferencing using MS Teams enabled co-workers to see each other on a regular basis, the loss of physical connection, particularly for those new to the team, meant a loss of rapport and relationship building:

Where we were starting to build more rapport and relationships with people, it got sort of interrupted and it hasn't been as easy when you're online all the time, it's not been as easy to strengthen those relationships... (TGI/NQSW/T1)

The displacement of the team due to hybrid working arrangements created a loss of team cohesion. This made it difficult for managers and supervisors to pick up on any existing or emerging team dynamics. As described by one manager, seeing the team together in the office enabled her to '*pick up on people getting on really well or people not getting on so well…' (II/PM/T2).* Even when there was limited physical proximity to colleagues, the impact of the pandemic had changed the atmosphere in the office. For some this made it difficult to interact:

The atmosphere in the office is definitely different, before COVID the office used to have a real buzz… people speaking to each other, busy, everyone in... it is definitely affecting everyone's mental health… I couldn't work like this if it went on for another year… I was never an extrovert, but I definitely think I have become more of an introvert… it's difficult to interact when you come into the office… having to adapt… it's weird… these screens definitely don't help… I feel cut off… (OfficeOb/T1)

In addition, hybrid working hampered the ability to share practice experiences, and thus the ability to provide both practice and emotional support to each other:

This is what I miss about the office… random discussions… it's all held in our heads… where do we take it….' Lily replies, 'when I read the email I just felt really sad… it's the worst case of neglect and abuse I think I have ever seen… I would normally share it in the office… just say… offload… but at home…so hard… the motivation levels are so… I know I have to do stuff but…' Lucy adds, '…definitely energy gets sapped when you are at home all week…' (OnlineOb/T2)

Before the pandemic, social workers appreciated the informal nature of being able to easily turn around and speak to each other in the office about case work. However, hybrid team arrangements and online working meant social workers thought twice about picking up the phone or sending an email to ask questions. The lack of learning opportunities, including observing colleagues do their jobs, was seen as particularly challenging social work students:

> *It is difficult and, obviously, you've got to maintain the distance, as well, so normally in my old placement you would be close to each other, it's a lot easier to learn. Whereas now everything is done distantly and ...it makes it a lot harder, and it takes longer to get on those levels, I guess, with people. (II/ST/T1)*

Whilst it might be expected that students and newly qualified social workers experienced the loss of learning and knowledge sharing from co-workers, more experienced team members including managers and supervisors also acknowledged the loss of 'hallway chats.' As described by one supervisor:

> *When you're in the office together you can just say something in passing, there's a lot more hallway chats that happen, informal discussions.... I might pass someone in the hallway and say, oh, you know, I've got this funny case where that has happened and somebody else might spike up and go, yes, I came across the same thing, and it creates a discussion... (II/PM/T2)*

The experience of loss within both teams was a prominent feature of working during the Covid-19 pandemic. The loss of boundaries, cohesion, emotional support, and learning - accentuated by home working - added to the significant emotional demands of practice.

4.2 No social work clap

The Covid-19 pandemic brought into sharp relief that social work - as a profession - was neither fully recognised nor appreciated. Social workers referred to the weekly NHS clap where the nation thanked doctors and nurses for working at personal and professional cost in high-risk situations. This contrasted with the lack of recognition for social workers who were legally obliged to continue child protection work in the community. As described by one team manager:

> *I think that there have been a lot of conversations during lockdown and COVID, in particular, around whether social care are recognised as a key worker and the impact of that on people... some people feeling that they're just not recognised and that social work isn't seen as important. Some people feeling that it doesn't need to be recognised and*

> *we do what we do because we know it's the right thing and we're supporting families… I think others have had stronger views that actually, by ignoring social work... by not acknowledging social workers means that some of the issues that go along with social work don't have to be acknowledged. Such as the real poverty that we are dealing with, the social discrimination and all those sorts of things, and I think some people's views are that, if we don't highlight the need for social workers, we don't highlight the fact that there are all those issues. (II/TM/T1)*

Social workers experienced a wide range of emotional demands as part of their day-to-day practice. These demands were experienced during direct work with children and families, within professional relationships, and in response to societal discourses about the social work profession. In addition, working during the covid-19 pandemic also produced an additional layer of complexity and thus added to the emotional demands experienced.

Summary

The data gathered through observations of the teams in their physical office and online settings, individual interviews, and the team group interviews provided a rich understanding of the way the emotional demands of practice were experienced, processed, and managed within the team. Consistent with Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour, social workers described the stressors of producing the correct 'emotional display' as part of the 'occupational requirement' when working with children and families and multi-agency partners. There was, however, little open discussion about the emotional demands of practice within the team space. Instead, the nonverbal, somatic expressions such as heavy sighs, tapping of feet, and headaches may have expressed some of the wider emotional experiences of practice that were not collectively shared. The individual interviews did provide a space where team members expressed more complex emotional experiences. For example, anxiety, fear, sadness, and shock, when working with children and families, but having to consciously manage these emotions by staying professional. As part of multi-agency working, team members relied less on humour during the individual interviews and spoke more readily of feeling saturated, attacked, and overwhelmed whilst also needing to remain calm as a means of managing others' frustrations. And importantly, team members expressed the emotional demands of team membership. This included the dilemmas of managing feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty whilst also wanting to make a good impression and show capability to the audience of one's peers. The findings therefore suggested that the spaces and places occupied by the team influenced the way the emotional demands of practice were processed, expressed, and supported within the team.

Chapter six: Stage setting, direction, and props

Introduction

The theatre concepts of stage setting, direction and props provide a useful metaphor for conceptualising the performance of team support (Goffman, 1959). This dramaturgical framework emphasises the importance of the context or setting, the way different spaces are used, and how the use of props create the 'scenic means' for the team performance (Goffman 1959:88). Across both teams, three regions were identified as important for the performance of emotional support. These were 1) frontstage, 2) backstage and 3) offstage. Each region was governed by different emotional display rules. For instance, collegial support performed backstage in the outside smoking area had different emotional display rules compared to the more public frontstage of the open plan office. This chapter will explore these three regions in turn, identifying how they framed the performance of emotional labour in the teams and how this both complicated and supported social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice.

Section one: The frontstage office setting

The physical office setting has been identified as a backstage region, a place where social workers can remove the mask of their frontstage professional performances and the associated emotional labour when engaging with families, professionals and the wider public (Leigh et al 2021). However, the findings from the present study demonstrated the office was also a frontstage region where emotional labour was performed to the audience of one's peers and visiting professionals. The observations highlighted the way team members engaged with their immediate office setting and used props to guide their performances. For example, posters on the walls of Team 1 provided explicit emotional display rules of positivity whilst the ritualistic offering of food and drink within both teams provided an implicit means of displaying nurture and care to each other. During interviews team members also repeatedly identified being conscious of the way they 'came across' in the office and the importance of presenting themselves as a team player. As identified earlier, this meant the team could be both a source of support and source of emotional demand.

1.1 Team Access – Crossing the boundary

Access to both teams' office setting was restricted by security measures. This created a physical boundary between the team and the gaze of the public. The fixed location of the office with a familiar community of colleagues and the safety of locked doors could provide physical and emotional containment for social workers. However, the office could also be viewed as a 'fortress' that alienate families and hinder relationship-based practice (Leigh 2017:424). The emotional experience of gaining access to both

teams as a researcher highlighted these tensions. As described during my first office visit to Team 1:

> *I entered a council building to a small waiting area. I informed reception that I was 10 minutes early... As I sat on the only single chair in the room, I noticed the notice boards behind me, posters about fostering and domestic violence. A man stood in front of me using a landline phone. Loud tinny music could be heard on the other end as he waited on hold. The notice next to it warned that any personal calls made on the phone would be disconnected. Through the window of an internal door, the Team Manager could be seen coming down a flight of stairs towards the reception room. A buzz and a click of the security door - she stood on the threshold smiling broadly, said hello and motioned for me to follow her through. (OfficeOb/T1)*

Within my reflective notes, I noted '*the team manager felt like a warm breeze in a grey space*.' Her greeting elicited a feeling of reassurance that I was welcome into the privacy of the team. Gate keeping the access to the team setting was an important aspect of team support. For example it provided social workers with physical safety and respite from having to engage with hostile families. As described by one social worker:

> *We've had a few things where people have got through our doors in the office, came up and thrown computer screens over the balcony and things like that. We often have a lot of kick offs in reception so it can be really scary sometimes (II/SW/T1).*

The implicit and explicit messages that framed the reception area of Team 2 - including the additional presence of a security guard – also reinforced the impression of physical containment and safety for the social work team. During my first office visit, a short, automated telephone message felt abrupt and impersonal in comparison to the warm and friendly welcome from a member of the team:

> *Two receptionists sat behind perspex screens; they were wearing uniforms. I introduced myself… one picked up a 'post it' note the team manager had given them saying to expect me…after trying to make a telephone call to the office and getting an automated message saying, 'we are not taking calls at the moment… goodbye', the receptionist then sends an email. I was directed to move along to the next counter to collect my temporary pass… a few moments pass, and a member of the team comes to greet me smiling and lets me through the security doors (OfficeOb/T2).*

Restricted access to the office setting created a physical backstage region that provided respite from the emotional labour of engaging with families. However, the act of displaying the appropriate emotion remained an expectation in the office which also made it a frontstage region.

1.2 The frontstage team impression

Beyond the main reception and the security coded doors, the staging of the office setting and the use of props created the 'scenic means' (Goffman, 1959:88) through which the performance of being a professional social worker and supportive colleague was made visible. There were many structural parallels between the two teams i.e.: based in local government buildings, in open plan offices, co-located with other teams and engaged in hybrid working. However, the scene of the two office settings created different team impressions.

1.2.1 Team 1

As I entered Team 1's open plan office I was struck by an immediate impression that the space was 'lived in' despite the hot desking and hybrid working arrangements. In between the open shelves of easily accessible organisational resources, the more personalised props of children's toys, clothes, suitcases, and child's car seat framed a team that were ready to respond quickly to child protection concerns. In addition, the presence of food, drink and awards created an impression of a team that also actively promoted nurture, care, and celebration. As detailed in my first office observation:

> *A pink plastic dolls house sits in front of one window, a pot plant on another and a tin of coffee on the next one. A small soft toy dog sits on another next to a golden Oscar-looking ornament which appears to glow in the light. At one end of the room … there are open shelves of stacked games and toys. Plastic boxes of children's clothes, a turquoise suitcase sits on top alongside a car seat and a bouncy baby chair. Another cupboard has several dip trays stacked up filled with forms and other kinds of information and resources. On people's desks I notice water bottles, snacks, and personalised mugs. One brightly coloured mug catches my eye and reads 'the struggle is real'. There are highlighter pens on desks and some computer monitors have stickers of bees and butterflies stuck to the corners. Next to me on the desk sits an empty tea tray. (OfficeOb/T1)*

The setting of Team 1 and the use of props created the impression that the team had the resources to support families, as well as a place that met the care needs of its members. This was reinforced by one social workers experiences of the team:

I was in an[other] team before this, it was OK, it wasn't too bad, but this is definitely a feel comfortable, you've got your blanket around you type team (II/SW/T1)

Whilst the frontstage of the team space elicited feelings of comfort, nurture and being held, other props observed in the office, which included posters, and motivational plaques, prescribed how team members should behave and express their emotions:

On the wall a sign reads 'This should not be a one off… WE ARE ALWAYS POSITIVE', typed in uppercase red font. A larger poster is entitled '100 random acts of kindness'... a wooden plaque hangs from the thermometer with the words 'Live Laugh and Love' painted on the front, underlined by three pink gems. (OfficeOb/T1)

The expectation that social workers should 'always remain positive' appeared to reinforce the required emotional display rule of the frontstage office. These rules guided the teams' collective performance of what it was to be a professional, competent social worker and a supportive colleague. Adhering to these frontstage display rules was however also a *source* of emotional demand for individual workers:

I think there is an element in social work particularly about being too emotional… sometimes there is that element that you need to remain professional, so I think when people are more upset, it's not that it's not welcome, but it's just, this is the job, this is what's expected you need to, sort of, pull yourselves together sometimes. Not that we can't talk to our manager and things, I think it's just a general thing people feel. I certainly wouldn't sit and cry in the office, I would go outside, and do it if I was upset about something, just because I think there is a bit of a fear that people think, well, you signed up to this job (II/SW/T1)

Whilst team members spoke of the need to mask emotions in the office for fear of being perceived as unprofessional or unable to cope, a poster on the office wall acted as an explicit prompt to share their experiences with colleagues:

An A4 poster on the wall next to where the senior practitioner has been sitting shows the silhouette of a human head, around it reads 'clear your head… talking helps'. (OfficeOb/T1)

Props that suggested 'talking helps' alongside the prompt to be 'always positive' appeared to create mixed messages about the required emotional display rules within the office. Whilst it was recognised as important to talk about emotions it was also experienced by some team members as '*a barrier because it doesn't come easily (II/SW/T1).*

Ritualistic social exchanges within the office that involved food and drink also supported the enactment of team support. Team members regularly offered to make hot drinks for each other, brought food or drink back from the shops and shared take aways and cake between colleagues from other teams. During one office observation it was noted:

> *Someone from the other team has a large slice of chocolate cake in her hand, resting on blue kitchen paper. She is holding it up high, so it is on display as she approaches Peter. She tells him there is cake and he is to help himself.... She has a colleague standing behind her who also affirms how good the cake is by saying 'it is nice and moist!' They then walk off to the other end of the room. Peter opens a Tupperware pot and starts to eat at his desk, looking at his computer screen. (OfficeOb/T1).*

Although the offering of food and drink was sometimes declined, it was considered an integral part of team support. Food and drink created opportunities to bring co-workers and colleagues from other teams together to *'build a bond' (II/NQSW/T1).* As a form of collective emotional labour, it also provided a means of regularly checking in with each other and noticing when support may have been needed. As identified by one social worker:

> *For our job having the opportunities to be in the office is really important, because sometimes it might be you're not able to physically say anything but just need somebody to notice that you're not feeling quite right. Or you might be a bit emotional and then somebody will just ask how you are, do you want a cup of coffee, and then that helps you to process that emotion and then let it go and move on. (II/SP/T1)*

The office setting and props helped to frame an overall scene where emotional labour was performed. For Team 1, the emotional display rules of nurture, care, positivity, and kindness were reinforced by the messages on the office walls and enacted through the sharing of food and drink. However, there were times when adherence to these prescribed front-stage display rules could also be emotionally demanding.

1.2.2 Team 2

When I first entered the open plan office of Team 2, the corporate setting felt more impersonal and transitory compared to Team 1, this was despite a similar warm and friendly greeting by the team manager. Team 2 had been displaced from their previous office due to the pandemic which may have added to the temporary feeling that was experienced. Framed by the uniform, branded organisational props and the team's flexibility to sit where they wanted created a team impression that actively promoted efficiency and autonomy:

The building feels new and very corporate. The light grey tiled floor is highlighted by the multiple steel spotlights in the ceiling. The walls are cream and dark pink paneling... The team manager points to one part of the space and says 'this is where we usually sit, but the team have moved down to the other end of the room today for some reason…' We turn a corner and walk past banks of white desks and matching chairs on our right. Very few personal artefacts appear to be on display... Low filing cabinets and lockers line the ends of each bank of desks topped with dark green shrubbery... It is not clear if these are real, or plastic and I almost feel compelled to reach out and touch them... The team manager makes me a coffee... I notice the mug has 'Responsive, Innovative, Collaborative, Enterprising, Serving our Public' written in bold colours on the side. (OfficeOb/T2)

For Team 2, a reputation for being efficient and high performing within the wider organisation was collectively enacted by a team that visibly 'got things done.' However, maintaining this outward impression meant there was an '*expectation that you get on with it' (II/PM/T2).* This created an additional source of emotional labour for team members. As described by one social worker:

I think the reputation is that we…excel. I think these are the narratives and the team manager is very keen on keeping these ongoing. So, whenever there is a slip, they start panicking. (II/Is/t2).

Maintaining a team impression of efficiency and competence also created tensions in how the team were viewed on a more personal level by the wider service:

We were always in the office with one other team and there was this perception that we were cold and efficient, but they were a bit more fuzzy but pretty haphazard and disorganised. But I disagreed with that… actually, I think we're quite warm and fuzzy, not necessarily to each other or outwardly, but to our families we're quite warm and fuzzy. (II/PM/T2)

The team had relocated from a small basement office to their current setting in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Described as having previously worked within a '*self-operating little eco system'* (*II/AP/T2),* the move had increased their visibility to other co-located teams. However, in contrast to Team 1, Team 2 did not appear to identify with or choose one part of the setting as their own. This made it difficult to initially get a sense of the emotional display rules of the team beyond the corporate image. This was identified as particularly challenging for anyone new to the team:

The other day when I was in [the office] ... I wasn't on Duty, so I didn't sit on the Duty team, and Sam who had just started came over and said, 'is

there a reason that you're sat over here and not over there?'… it reminded me of when, you're trying to figure out what's going on in a team and who likes who and what the allegiances and alliances are and he'd clearly been like, so some of my team are over here and Lily is over there and I'd literally sat there because I wasn't on Duty but for him, that's part of him trying to be like, who fits with who, who is closer to who… (II/AP/T2)

The team's image of efficiency was however described by some team members as 'a bit of a myth.' One practice manager suggested '*until they've delved a bit deeper, they would think we're quite organised' (II/PM/T2)*. This reinforced the idea that the team engaged in collective impression management strategies – to uphold the 'team face' - within the frontstage office setting. As I 'delved a bit deeper' during my time in the team I observed a more personable scene:

A member of the team goes to leave the office but is stopped several times by colleagues in other teams who smile, chat and share pictures on their mobile phones. As I turn away, I notice a rainbow flag sticking out of a tub on top of a filing cabinet. I also notice very small purple gems stuck to the corner of the monitor I am sitting in front of.... As I look around the room, I notice a pair of black lace up brogues sitting under a desk. They look like they have been there for some time. (OfficeOb/T2)

As with Team 1, the performative and symbolic exchange of food and drink was an important enactment of team support. This included bringing in takeaway coffees for each other, the ritualistic exchange of sweets, biscuits and cake and invitations to leave the office space to get lunch. These rituals support collective emotional labour strategies within the team as a means of checking in with each other. My experience of initially declining the offer of chocolate felt like a transgression from these team rituals. In a later interview, a team member reiterated the way her co-workers' gift of chocolate and cakes was an intrinsic aspect of mutual team support:

...she will buy these little packages of cakes and just put it on everyone's desk. You know, that's her thing, I don't even think she realises, people are just, like, that's so nice. Then, of course, [the team manager] kicks off because he's vegan, why didn't he get a treat, we're like, well nobody cares! (Laughing). (II/SSP/T2)

As identified in the previous chapter, Team 2 engaged with affluent families which created a unique set of challenges to their professional identity. Drawing on the theatrical concept of costume, social workers drew on specific impression management strategies to maintain an appearance of competence and professionalism through the way they dressed. As described by one practice manager, *'I have different clothes, ones for going out, ones for home, ones for work… when I*

am working, I don't want to give too much away about who I am…' (OnlineOb/T2). However, whilst the office setting could be considered a space where props such as professional costume could be removed, team members were observed to collectively reinforce the expected dress code in the office:

> *Bisa notices a large neon coloured stripped glittery bag on Annika's desk and says, 'that's not you… that's more me…'. Annika responds with, 'no, you like ugly things… let's see, what have you got on your feet today…' As she looks under the table, she makes a face at Bisa's cream trainers. Bisa looks at Lucy, raises her eyebrows and says, 'oooh…!', they both laugh. (OfficeOb/T2)*

The office setting was considered a backstage region that offered relief and respite from the demands of performing the professional role. The physical boundary of the office created feelings of safety and containment and the ritualistic sharing of food and drink created the means for checking in with team members. However, the setting and props identified above also highlighted the ongoing tensions of emotional labour and impression management within the team. These tensions were also identified within the frontstage of the teams' online/hybrid settings.

1.3 The frontstage online/hybrid setting

Both teams were primarily office-based before the pandemic but had adopted hybrid working practices – between the office setting and their own homes - at the time of the study. MS Teams' video conferencing was used to facilitate whole team gatherings including team meetings and informal team 'check in' and virtual 'coffee mornings.' As with the waiting area of the local authority building, a virtual boundary was created in MS Teams where visitors entered a virtual waiting area until someone 'let you in.' Due to the pandemic and the closure of the university building at the time of this research I accessed the online setting from my own home. Prior to each observation, I found myself engaging in a form of impression management as I checked what was on display behind me to present as professional. This process appeared to mirror some of the teams' own experiences in hybrid spaces. Both teams had a culture of 'cameras on' as a way of 'seeing everyone's faces' *(II/FSW/T1).* Observing co-workers' display of emotions through video conferencing – which included facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice - served as a useful way for team members to collectively perform the required emotional display. For example, one senior practitioner reinforced the emotional display rule of positivity by challenging co-workers' expressions of sadness:

> *The senior practitioner concludes the meeting by saying, 'you guys look sad! I can't have sad faces on a Friday!'… some team members smile. Tess responds with, '4.30 on a Friday, that's when I'm happy!' The senior*

responds, 'try your best to get your closures and assessments done ready for next week… have a lovely day… bye!' (OnlineOb/T1)

Despite the requirement to 'not look sad,' team members were also regularly invited to share how they were feeling with each other during online check ins. This was experienced by some as 'exposing':

I don't think the team chat, you know, when you're asking everyone if they're okay, they're going to start revealing everything that's going on, because it's a bit of a … well, you're exposed on that. So, even though it's a really nice idea I think that can be a barrier sometimes because you… don't want to bother everyone on there. And, yes, it is just a bit exposing doing that in front of everyone. (II/SW/T1)

As part of their online performances, team members used various impression management strategies. This included adjusting their backgrounds. As team members logged on, the small squares framed a patchwork of individualised scenes. Some settings were framed by the office from multiple angles where team members logged on from their desks. For others, the display of the home setting, or the use of virtually generated images or blurred backgrounds indicated the way team members chose to present their home settings within a professional work context.

The team manager is in an office setting with a large glass wall behind him. Annika is also in an office setting near a window, Lucy can be seen sitting behind her... It is strange seeing Lucy from two angles as she also joins the meeting from her computer screen. Afiza's background is blurred so it is difficult to determine where she is. The space behind her is dimly lit. Jane comes in to view on the screen as she sits down on a chair in front of a large child's painting stuck on the wall behind her. It has spots and stripes and fishes painted in bright bold primary colours…. Jane has her hair pushed back with a large alice band. Annika comments laughing, '… you look athletic… are you going for a run?' Jane responds, 'this is my mum doing the nursery run look…!' (OnlineOb/T2)

A public impression of oneself can be created in online spaces using familiar virtual and physical props (Fineman 2003). During one online observation, a social worker noticed and then removed an object from view which represented a more personal aspect of her life:

I am permitted into the online coffee morning at 10.03am. The social worker is the only one present sitting in a home space… The door behind her is open, and I can see a drying rack and what looks like a red silk dressing gown hanging on it. The social worker appears to notice too when she looks at her home reflected back at her through her computer

screen. She quickly gets up, pulls the item of clothing off the door and throws it out of sight. 'I just noticed my dress was hanging up, gotta move that' she says as she sits back down (OnlineOb/T2)

As with the dress, I also came to later understand that the online setting itself could be moved out of sight from external audiences and therefore used by the team to serve as both a frontstage and backstage region. Whilst I had assumed a level of acceptance and privileged access to the teams' private spaces, Team 2 had remained in control of their 'usual' setting by creating an alternative MS Teams space for me to observe:

I log on, the screen tells me, 'Someone should let you in soon'. I wait for a few minutes and then [the social worker] appears on the screen in a home setting. She says hello and I say hi back. She is looking across her screen and then picks up her mobile phone saying, let me just take a picture…' as she points it towards her computer. The team manager then appears on screen... he has earphones in and appears to be smiling as he looks at the screen. The social worker says to him, 'I was worried people were in the other one… I've just sent a picture to the group…' The manager replies, 'shall I log in to the other one to see if people are there…? He leaves the virtual space… I find myself asking if there are two coffee mornings – the social worker responds, 'yeah we have two, the one we usually have and the one that's set up for you…' (OnlineOb/T2)

Another impression management strategy used in online settings was the way one social worker used makeup before attending an online meeting. This paralleled the use of costume described earlier in the physical office setting. In doing so, the social worker had maintained the impression of 'being a capable adult' to the audience of her education colleagues:

Lily appears in the online space and people smile and wave at her.... Suzie says, 'you look good for someone who has been ill Lily…' Lily responds, I've got make up on… I had [an online] meeting this morning... tricking school into thinking I am a capable adult…! (OnlineOb/T2)

The loss of boundaries that resulted from home working during the Covid-19 pandemic was a particular emotional demand for social workers. However, the impromptu appearance of co-worker's children and pets was always met with sympathetic curiosity, and good humour from team members. This form of mutual emotional support resulted in what Waldron (2000:65) described as a form of 'emotional teamwork:'

The senior practitioner goes to speak but the mute flicks on and off… as it unmutes, I hear her say, 'stop pressing buttons, you keep muting me!'.

> *A small blonde-haired boy, around the age of 2 comes into view and is crawling across her lap, pointing at the screen. He picks up a mobile phone and appears to talk into it... The team who are watching this exchange smile, and some wave. Tess says, 'I wonder what sort of day she is going to have?' and laughs. The senior practitioner responds with, 'I'm just practicing how all the mums and dads managed in lockdown!' (OnlineOb/T1)*

Accepting the interruptions of home life in online team spaces not only showed camaraderie and compassion for the emotional demands of home working, but it also strengthened social bonds. Being able to observe a team members home life in action created different conversations and different ways of knowing each other outside of the professional role:

> *Some of the people in the team I don't see outside of work, so getting to see them in their homes, and we sometimes just have chats, even just little things, their doorbell might ring, or whatever, and then that leads to a different conversation. And, you get to know people, you get to know people's families, as well, which was something maybe with members of the team I didn't know before. (II/SW/T1)*

The office and the online/hybrid team setting created a frontstage region that was framed by a particular set of emotional display rules that guided the teams' performances. For example, impressing positivity and calm and not being 'too emotional' for fear of being perceived as unprofessional or unable to cope with the emotional demands of practice. Drawing on the theatrical concept of stage direction, team members moved to backstage regions to alleviate some of the tensions of emotional labour that occurred within collegial relationships.

Section two: The backstage side rooms

Side rooms represented backstage regions in teams as they were situated away from the audience of the wider office. As identified in chapter 1 of the findings, social workers performed emotional labour when they were expected to maintain an outward impression of professionalism, calm and neutrality despite the significant impact of working with child abuse. Backstage regions with different emotional display rules created the opportunity for co-workers to collectively regroup and rehearse their frontstage performances. This included testing out ideas and perspectives, making mistakes, expressing frustration, and venting about their work. Side rooms consisted of a variety of physical, online and hybrid spaces including WhatsApp group chats and the chat function in MS Teams. These were often used to check in with each other during and after home visits and to share information and resources.

2.1 The room next door

Moving to the 'room next door' - whether a physical side room or virtual space - allowed co-workers to express their thoughts and feelings and process the emotional demands of practice before stepping back on to the frontstage (main office) with a more appropriate and required emotional display. As identified by one social worker '*it will start off in the office and end up in the room next door in private' (II/SW/T1).* During one observation the team manager moved into a small side room before a hybrid team meeting. The purpose of this was to contain the news that a young person had died by suicide from being overheard by others in the wider open plan office:

> *The team manager says quietly to me, 'I'm going into another room because I have news to share with the team and I don't want it overheard'. As I follow, the manager sets up her laptop and explains, 'we've had a suicide… it came in on Friday, it's not in our team, but our other team… Tess had a suicide the other week… a mum… its difficult…especially when we are not all together, and people are working from home... I am reminding people of the counselling service available…how is everyone feeling…. I know that is a bit of a downer…' the chat is very quiet apart from heavy sighs... the manager continues, "it is difficult… but this is the reality of the work (OfficeOb/T1)*

As identified in chapter 1 of the findings, occupational and organisational emotional display rules encouraged co-workers to mask feelings of vulnerability and amplify an outward impression of professionalism and confidence. To manage this, both teams utilised side rooms to privately express and process emotions that did not adhere to these wider expectations:

> *Sometimes you will see certain individuals struggling a little bit more than others, but that's always quite private... we have an office that has got lots of little rooms outside... everyone manages things differently and I think it's quite away from the main team in the office... it's more when people are having out of work issues impacting on them, so things from their private lives, that is obviously private and that's not up for team discussions, which is appropriate. (II/SW/T1)*

The more private backstage 'room next door', also included the staff toilets. These spaces enabled team members to express the emotional demands of practice such as feelings of sadness, anger and frustration that may not have felt safe or appropriate to display in the 'open space' of the frontstage office setting:

> *I think the sadness or anger or tears, they tend to happen more in private and more, sort of, one to one basis. I've had lots of people cry in my*

office...or in supervision, I know people cry in toilets sometimes, yes, so not a lot of that in the open space. (II/FSW/T2)

An important aspect of team support was the ability to notice the nonverbal cues of team members who may be struggling with the emotional demands of practice. This meant seeing beyond the impression management and emotional labour strategies used to enact professionalism and competence. As described earlier, the somatic and sensory expression of daily emotions through sighs, yawns and tapping of feet were more readily visible in the office setting. However, these became more difficult to detect in the 'virtual' room next door:

...it's hard to support people virtually, you don't pick up on the nonverbal cues, in the office you might just know something is not up, or someone might come up to me and say something is not ok…its hard… Like Azia is not alright, I can tell… I am going to call her before I leave this room'. (OfficeOb/T1)

As a form of emotional labour, team managers use their emotional displays to influence the mood of their team members. This became more difficult when the team were not physically located together. As a way of addressing the limitations of picking up nonverbal cues in online spaces, team members considered alternative ways to use technology to signal their emotional needs:

'...we need to get better at using the group chat for random 'pissed off' stuff. The senior practitioner recalls working with a young person who used to get upset and 'stomp off' to her room, her parents didn't know what was wrong because the young person wouldn't tell them. The young person ended up putting a sign on her bedroom door to show how she was feeling. The senior practitioner wondered if 'we could use a little symbol on chat in the same way, but maybe that's too immature'. (OnlineOb/T1)

The chat function and emojis therefore became an important element of the virtual side room where the team could support social workers with the emotional demands of practice.

2.2 The WhatsApp space

WhatsApp group chats came to represent important backstage, virtual side rooms for the team. WhatsApp - a free mobile phone messaging app – is used by groups to share text messages, images, audio, video and online content. Whilst I was not invited, nor did I ask to join any of the WhatsApp groups, they were regularly referred to during the teams' social interactions in the office and during the participant interviews. Being part of the WhatsApp group chat was an important part of team belonging. Those that

did not ascribe to this team norm became the subject of wider discussions. During one observation the team administrator was quizzed by her co-workers why she did not have WhatsApp on her phone:

> *I can't believe you don't have WhatsApp on your phone...!' There is then a general discussion about whether [the team administrator] has WhatsApp on her work mobile or her personal mobile and why she doesn't want to use it for work purposes. She responds, 'what if my profile picture is of me in a bikini… it's not very appropriate for work is it…?' (OfficeOb/T2)*

The team administrator's concern about maintaining professionalism within the WhatsApp space highlighted that the rules of engagement within this backstage region were continually negotiated, and as a result encompassed a mix of personal and professional interactions. This supported the team with the emotional demands of practice by providing a shared responsibility for practical tasks including checking in during and after home visits and sharing resources and information. The WhatsApp group chat was also a backstage region where the emotional labour demands of maintaining the professional role could, to an extent, be suspended. This allowed for the integration of more mundane everyday social interactions:

> *We don't just message about work, we message about politics, we message about gossips, we message about boyfriends, we message about anything really... there is some kind of connection that goes beyond work that is about caring for your own personal life. (II/SW/T2)*

The backstage region of the WhatsApp group integrated everyday social activities and therefore enhanced opportunities for connection and care between team members. As with the online/hybrid setting described earlier, this enabled different conversations and different ways of getting to know each other. For example, Team 1 had created a game linked to the popular television series, the Great British Bake off. As observed during one office team talk:

> *…each member of the team has been linked to a contestant on the show, if they are voted off, then the team member must bake their loosing recipe to share with the team. As the contestant Sura was voted out, Abbie is now charged with baking chocolate brownies… There is comment that the contestant Pete is good but he's gonna have to give up the gluten free, and the contestant Lottie knows what game she is playing by flirting with Paul Hollywood, however, she needs to put her hair up whilst she cooks as it is unhygienic! (OfficeOb/T1)*

In addition, the WhatsApp group chat provided the means for team members to communicate with each other and show concern for those that may not feel comfortable to voice their struggles in the frontstage office setting:

> *sometimes people might be struggling but they won't feel comfortable to say they're struggling, so try to check in on each other and whether it's just sending a little message like, 'how are you getting on with your cases, is everything ok?', because that can lead on to people venting or saying how they are doing, when they otherwise might not have gone to anyone (TGI/T1)*

However, the accessibility of the WhatsApp group chat meant there was greater potential to blur boundaries between work and home, thus increasing the emotional demands of practice:

> *[She] sent a text on Sunday and she did apologise, but she was trying to be helpful, she said, look guys, I'm going to go and do these things, I know it's Sunday, but do you want me to do this. (II/SW/T2)*

Membership of WhatsApp group chats were at times dependent on team roles and were either inclusive or exclusive of managers. This meant team members were free to '*talk about certain things that you don't really necessarily want to talk about with managers (II/Bi/T2).* Whilst it was important for team members to be able to access backstage virtual side rooms away from the manager, it was also important for managers to have access to their own side rooms away from the gaze of the rest of the team:

> *We've started a managers' WhatsApp group for the managers in the building because, again, I think we're all feeling really lonely. I think management can be a lonely place anyway, just by nature of it because you're in that sandwich, aren't you, of things coming up and things coming down. So, we have all come together at the moment...it's a safe space... we're on the same page. (II/TM/T1)*

The backstage region of the WhatsApp group chat created a private and safe space away from the wider office to process the emotional demands of practice. These principles were also identified as an intrinsic function of the backstage region of the smoking area.

2.3 The smoking area

The smoking area was an important backstage 'side room' for Team 1 and had similar features to the 'room next door' described above. Whilst I did not observe this setting directly, its significance was highlighted during interviews and the everyday social

interactions that took place within the office. For those that did smoke, the movement from the frontstage of the open plan office setting to the smoking area was preceded by a ritualistic performance of rolling cigarettes, waiting for colleagues to finish work related tasks, grabbing coats and leaving the office together. As with the offering of food and drink, 'going out for a cigarette' provided the means for checking in on each other:

> *Abbie stands up and disconnects her laptop. She looks over to Fran and Tess and asks, 'are you girls still smoking?' Fran replies, 'yeah, once we went to Tier 2'… Joy stands up and puts on her coat, she approaches Fran and asks, 'are you going out for a fag?... At this point Abbie, Fran and Joy leave the office with cigarettes in their hands. I want to join them, but do not feel I can ask. It is their private space and I do not want to intrude (OfficeOb/T1)*

The smoking area was described as somewhere to *'let off steam and talk...away from the office' (II/SW/T1).* As identified above, expressions of sadness, anger and frustration were not considered conducive to the emotional display rules of the frontstage office setting. As with the use of 'the room next door', the enactment of support involved spontaneously noticing and responding to co-workers need for respite from this form of emotional labour:

> *If they want to cry or shout or swear or vent, or whatever, it's usually picked up by somebody and they will say, come on, let's go and have a chat, or let's go downstairs even and have a cigarette. We make use of the space. (II/SW/T1)*

The invitation to move to the more private setting of the smoking area, away from the gaze of colleagues, managers and the wider team enabled 'more natural' conversations to take place. Trust and feeling safe were important features of sharing the emotional demands of practice. The ability to drop the mask of professionalism and the associated impression management strategies allowed team members to express a wider range of emotions:

> *I think people go off in their own, sort of, safe places, people they feel they can trust to have those conversation. The conversations that go on in the smoking area can just come out of nowhere and then you can find out that, actually they might need a bit more support and that they're struggling, and then you can see what you can do. (II/AP/T1)*

The emotional display rules of the backstage smoking area, included permission to cry, swear, shout and vent. This not only enabled team members to express their felt emotions, but also enabled co-workers to understand more fully the emotional demands team members faced. In response, more formal systems of support,

including supervision could be drawn upon. This did, however, highlight a sense of exclusion for those that did not smoke.

2.4 The supervision space

Formal supervisory arrangements differed across the two teams. The team manager took responsibility for supervising everybody in Team 1, whilst the team manager and two practice managers shared supervisory responsibility in Team 2. Supervision and the supervisory relationship were considered a core aspect of managing the emotional demands of practice:

> *I think it's a given, like supervision. Your supervisor and your team manager... it starts from them really... no offence, but if they're rubbish, how's your team going to be good? If you have an awful manager and don't have the support from your supervisor it's really hard for you to be a part of any team, belong, feel safe, feel contained. In my opinion it's impossible... The anchor all starts with them (TGI/AP/T2)*

As identified earlier, expressions of sadness, anger or tears did not align with the emotional display rules of the front-stage office setting. However, the privacy of supervision space enabled team members to express a fuller range of emotions that arose from performing their social work role:

> *In the office people will cry, or you see someone running to the bathroom... I've never cried, well, I've only cried in supervision... and other people have also admitted that they've cried in supervision, just when things feel unmanageable. (II/SW/T2)*

Considering the emotional labour involved in performing professional confidence, the backstage region of supervision created the opportunity to explore and accept feelings of doubt, fear, and uncertainty. This was particularly important for team members who struggled to share their feelings in the wider team setting:

> *A big part of being able to vent is my supervisions… I'm not much of a group speaker, I prefer one on one conversations so, for me, I just call up the team manager, or if I'm in the office I just pull her to the side and ask if I can have a word, and she will always make time... through supervisions, I think, I can talk about my doubts and, kind of, I've realised it wasn't just me it's human nature to have those doubts sometimes. (II/NQSW/T1)*

However, as identified in the literature review (chapter two, section two), social workers could also experience the supervisory relationship as emotionally demanding, either because supervision was considered a form of surveillance, or team members

feared judgement for expressing vulnerability. As exemplified by one team member, supervision created pressure to maintain an outward appearance of competency and efficiency in front of the team manager:

> *[the manager] is ridiculously efficient and competent, and I do think that kind of probably motivates the team to also want to be competent and quite efficient… if you're more newly qualified then I think maybe you would feel a bit of pressure to quite possibly be as perfect as [the team manager] seems [to be] (II/PM/T2)*

The supervisory space created a backstage region that supported social workers with the emotional demands of practice. However, supervision was also a frontstage region, where team members masked their feelings for fear of judgement. As with the different WhatsApp group chats, it was important that backstage regions were accessible for team members that did not include the team manager or line manager.

2.5 The 'Social Work Space'

Once a fortnight, Team 2 gathered for one hour either in person or hybrid using MS Teams without the team manager or practice managers present. As a formal peer-led support group, the '*social work space*' as it was named, was facilitated by the specialist systemic practitioner and was described by one social worker as a place to '*literally moan or say what's going on' (II/AP/T2).* As a 'community of coping' (Korczynski 2003), co-workers engaged in collective emotional labour to provide mutual support to each other where '*...the personal and the professional come together…' (TGI/AP/T2).* This arrangement was fully supported by the team manager:

> *For me, it really was a bit of a deal breaker in terms of fostering all the relationships, all the trust, opening up those avenues for social workers in particular to be themselves and be able to talk about those things they don't feel conformable talking to their managers about. But also, the way in which it is used, as an avenue to bring things to the manager's attention agreed by the social workers in the social work space. (TGI/TM/T2)*

The collective nature of the '*social work space*' represented a backstage region where team members could '*talk about a case and potentially be able to make some mistakes… Or be challenged in a way that's respectful and quite light-hearted' (II/SW/T2).* In addition, the enactment of collegial camaraderie, reassurance and humour was used to help each other 'digest' the emotional demands of practice:

> *that social work space, sometimes we can come up with lots of emotional stuff that gets digested by the others, so that when we leave, we make some kind of meaning out of this and distress goes down. (II/SW/T2)*

As with the WhatsApp group chats described earlier, it was important that all team members, regardless of role or hierarchy had access to these types of backstage regions. However, as described by one practice manager, being excluded from the '*social work space'* raised questions about support and belonging for managers:

> *...we were excluded from that space so social workers felt like they could really discuss how they were doing and support one another, because we were going to dampen that just by virtue of our roles so they couldn't be as honest.... but then I'm just, well, I kind of like the support... I think a lot of the time I feel quite... where do you belong if you're excluded by that group. (II/PM/T2)*

Despite the '*social work space*' being considered a backstage region, the expected emotional display rules and impression management strategies of being a social worker, still required team members to regulate their emotions and temper their language in front of each other. Due to the nature of the professional relationship, it was recognised that a wider range of emotions could be expressed within more private spaces, but these remained within defined parameters:

> *All of this happens, I think, that's my impression, in some kind of parameters... I don't know if I would really feel met if I would go to the team, possibly not, because I still work at the end of the day... my perception is that we're all aware there is a kind of, line that you draw which may be necessary... also language is also used in the way… you know, how we write things in our reporting, it's also the same, the way we say things is always in a language that takes into consideration that you're talking about your boss or your colleague. So, it can't really be sort of, completely free (II/SW/T2)*

Whilst described as informal, the '*social work space'* maintained an element of formality with set days and times team members were expected to attend. As with supervision, team members therefore entered the space first and foremost in their capacity as social work colleagues. A third region – offstage - was routinely referred to by both teams. Whilst not evident in the literature, the offstage region was an important social setting that encouraged and supported team relationships beyond the professional role.

Section three: The offstage social setting

Whilst not directly observed as part of the study, the offstage setting was regularly referred to during team members' social interactions and during the interviews. The offstage region differed from front and backstage regions, as it referred to the social gathering of team members outside of work hours and away from the office. This included meeting up for drinks, dinner and online 'house parties' (a virtual substitute

used during the pandemic). In the offstage region the emotional displays rules associated with maintaining 'professionalism' were considered less important. Instead, the focus was primarily on co-workers' social lives and social activities.

3.1 The pub, dinner, and after work drinks

Social activities outside of office hours were described by both teams as an important part of 'getting to know' each other beyond the professional role. Rather than keeping home and work life separate, the two teams integrated aspects of their personal and professional lives which helped to foster the development of friendships. As identified by one team manager, '*I regularly had [the team] over to my house to cook for them' (II/TM/T2).* One consequence of engaging with team members in the offstage setting was a strong feeling of personal connection:

> *it's not like you're just a colleague, they're interested in getting to know you and spending time with you. Yes, I would say there is that support, the professional support and the personal support... a lot of places don't mix work with your home life... But here I think people embrace that team dynamic and friendships... you do sometimes have to talk about personal things. I think if I had a case that reminded me of a personal experience, I would much rather talk to a friend about that than just a colleague... someone who I've got that personal connection with... and not feel as though I'm judged for it or anything, I think that's really important in this role. (II/NQSW/T1)*

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic had greatly reduced the opportunity to meet up socially, going for drinks after work was seen as a way to 'de-stress' with people that '...*know what you're going through and what the job is like' (II/SW/t1).* As with the frontstage setting of the office, the sharing of food and drink created the means to check in with each other. As described by one social worker, 'a few drinks' also made people calmer and more at ease to share their emotional experiences:

> *When we're going out for drinks, you know, after a few drinks people are calmer, I suppose, at ease, and will be quite open and checking, do others have similar experiences or is it just maybe them. (II/SSP/T2)*

Going for drinks after work formed part of the enactment of team support by building bonds and bringing co-workers together. However, wider social norms of drinking alcohol to destress could exclude those that didn't on cultural, lifestyle or religious grounds. As identified by one team member, '...*it's how do you balance that out without making them feel excluded...' (II/SW/T1).* Not participating in such team rituals could lead to a self-perception of being 'boring:'

> *I don't share necessarily all the same interests as everyone on the team, so I'm a Christian, for instance, that's partly why I don't really drink. So, even if someone did ask me to go out to the pub, I might go but then I would be boring because I would only have a juice or something like that. (II/NQSW/T1)*

As with the '*social work space'*, and the WhatsApp group chats, those in supervisory roles understood the importance of team members getting together away from the gaze of managers. The emotional display rules in the offstage setting enabled co-workers to mutually vent, let off steam and even criticise the management role:

> *When there are people, all going off to the pub…I would normally not attend that. Go, let them be free and slag off their seniors if they need to. (TGI/SP/T1)*

Whilst the offstage setting was a space away from management, it also provided an opportunity for managers and team members to come together and see each other 'for who they are.' Meeting socially, away from the office allowed team members to de-role from their hierarchical titles and the emotional labour and collective impression management strategies used within them:

> *I think if you can socially interact with your colleagues and you like them enough to do that, that's a nice thing to do. Because you're not the manager that is being difficult or directive at work, or your social worker who might have said, "I'm not doing that" to you and being difficult with you because they're stressed... you get to see them for who they are, again, outside of work. (II/PM/T2)*

The emotional display rules within the offstage setting enabled team members to move from the role of co-worker to one of friend. However, the shift in personal and professional boundaries still inhibited, to some degree, colleagues' behaviours and supportive responses. This was particularly when offstage social interactions became work focused. As described by one team manager:

> *People do confide in me sometimes outside of work, you know, over a drink... and then it's very hard for me to do something about it, because I have to say, are you just saying it to me as a friend, if so, I don't want to know. Are you saying it to me as a social worker in my team, in that case we should be having a more formal conversation. (II/TM/T2)*

The offstage social setting created an environment where co-workers got to know each other on a more personal level, behind the impression management strategies of performing the professional role. This helped to create bonds and develop friendships within the wider team dynamics. These opportunities were more limiting for team

managers and those in supervisory positions given the hierarchical nature of their role. Some social rituals, such as drinking alcohol were also not shared by all, and although there were opportunities to temporarily de-role, the ability to fully express emotions remained inhibited by the fact that team members were first and foremost work colleagues.

Summary

Through the dramaturgical metaphor of stage setting, direction and props the findings identified team support took place within three regions, frontstage, backstage and offstage. These regions, or settings, had different emotional display rules which guided different types of individual and team performance. Frontstage regions which included the open plan office, were more likely to be framed with props that reinforced social workers' professional performances i.e.: masking fear and anger and amplifying positivity, professional confidence, and competency. The ritualistic offering of food and drink enabled co-workers to enact care towards each other and notice those who were struggling with the emotional demands of practice. In doing so, colleagues directed each other to backstage or offstage regions, away from the pressures of maintaining their professional 'front.' The findings therefore identified the importance of team members' ability to access different supportive environments or settings at different times so that their full range of emotions could be expressed at work.

Chapter seven: Team roles

Introduction

Drawing on the theatrical metaphor of director and cast, this chapter considers the individual and collective roles played by team members and how these support social workers with the emotional demands of practice. According to Goffman (1959:103), a team performance is guided and directed by an individual who has been given the authority to ensure adherence to the overall 'dramatic production.' From this perspective, the social work team manager can be considered a performance director who both models the expected performance and allocates roles to other team members - the cast. These roles are explored in turn below.

Section one: The performance director: Team manager

The team manager viewed as a performance director was instrumental in modelling the expected behaviours within the team. This started at the point of induction by 'molding the newcomer' and continued as the team manager modelled and performed availability, collaboration, calm, recognition, and praise to the team. This ongoing process contributed to the professional socialisation of emotions, thus influencing the way individuals enacted both their professional role and team support.

1.1 Molding the newcomer

As performance director, the team manager requires an understanding of the team and the wider organisational narratives i.e.: scripts. This enables them to audition - or recruit - the right people for the roles in which to fulfil these wider visions (Webster 2010). As identified in chapter two, section four of the literature review, adherence to the occupational requirements of social work involves the professional socialisation of emotion. This is accomplished through organisational activities such as induction, recruitment, and supervision practices. As described by one team manager, '*the way in which we see ourselves and which we speak of ourselves. Do you think that sort of molds the newcomer? (TGI/TM/T2)*. From this perspective the molding process involved team managers inducting newcomers into the teams localised social norms, behaviours and practices. This included the expectation that newcomers should work collaboratively. For example, the team manager of Team 2 was instrumental in ensuring a new team member had a buddy on their first day:

> *Sam starts next week… he's coming in tomorrow to get his ID bag and laptop… if anyone can come in tomorrow… say hi…who is his buddy gonna be…?' Lily responds, I can do the induction like I did with Lucy… Isabel hasn't got one, she can be his buddy…' The manager asks, 'who is on duty next week, I'd like him to shadow…' (OnlineOb/T2)*

The expectation that newcomers would learn localised ways of practice from their colleagues was echoed across both teams. As observed in Team 1, the team manager ensured that the induction process included 'creating some contact' with co-workers on someone's first day:

> *The team manager can be heard speaking to someone asking: 'how are you feeling… no need to feel anxious, your diary will start being filled but don't worry…we are just thinking about how to create some contact with the team starting on Monday… When the manager ends the call she turns to Fran and says 'she's looking forward to starting on Monday'. (OfficeOb/T1)*

Chapter 2 of the findings identified that different team impressions were created within the frontstage of the open plan office. For Team 1, the setting framed the expected emotional display rules of care, nurture, and support. The team manager could be observed molding the newcomer, in this case, a student social worker by modelling these qualities within the open plan office:

> *The senior practitioner and student social worker turn around in their seats to watch the team manager and a colleague from another team sitting on the floor in front of an open cabinet… The student asks what is happening. The social worker explains the children have been 'dumped at school' by their grandparent and aunt who don't want them anymore… The team manager supports the social worker to find clothes, nappies, and baby wipes whilst saying 'it has been difficult for some time'. As the social worker takes a pile of clothes the team manager tells her, 'There are also toys at the back too if you want to take any.' (OfficeOb/T1)*

For Team 2, the front stage of the office framed the emotional display rules of efficiency, competency, and autonomy. As with Team 1, the team manager could be observed modelling these qualities. Although I did not observe the induction of a new team member in the office, my position as a newcomer researcher meant I was able to observe such performances:

> *A social worker comes over and sits down close beside me. She says, 'are you watching him… are you observing the manager… he's a good one to observe…. He [nodding] is very busy… he is tense, I can tell… I don't know how to help him… oh well [shrugs] … The manager looks over to me, 'would you like another coffee?'. I say I would, but that maybe I should be making him one, he seems very busy. John shrugs and smiles, 'no thank you, I don't want a drink and yes I am busy, I am duty manager today, covering the whole [local authority]' (OfficeOb/T2)*

Part of molding the newcomer involved the team manager setting out the expectations of team behaviour. Whilst this was made more challenging due to the Covid-19 pandemic, both team managers were explicit in ensuring team members avoided going over their work hours. For many, this challenged their experiences in previous work environments where long hours and a lack of social life were part of what it meant to be a social worker:

> *I always use an example of my first week when I started here and I had supervision a week later, and [the manager] asked me, I just want to check your time management because I often see you after five when we're leaving, you're still at your desk... (II/SSP/T2)*

Co-workers, including those in more senior or supervisory roles, described a '*change in culture' (II/SP/T1)* when their team manager set clear work boundaries. Modelling attitudes and behaviours that not only encouraged but expected social workers to switch off, led to staff wanting to stay in the team and helped to alleviate stress. The modelling of clear boundaries also challenged the wider narratives of social work stoicism and omnipotence identified in chapter one, section two of the literature review. As described by one social worker:

> *When I first started… I thought it was just an office norm to be working all hours under the sun… and actually, very quickly I realised that you do burn the candle at both ends and going into it I thought I was invincible…I just want to get the work done so I feel less stressed but, actually, I was like a green ogre. [The team manager] … drilled from the offset that there are absolutely no expectations of that. She would make us all leave our laptops in the lockers… (II/SW/T1)*

Molding the newcomer supported the process of 'becoming' a member of the team. As described by one practice manager, when new people start, '*if they've got a visit planned or something it's, no, no, you need to come to the team meeting instead, rearrange that.' (II/PM/T2).* Molding the newcomer was therefore an important part of the socialisation process which avoided individuals feeling 'separate' from the team:

> *They were talking a lot about having an away day when I got here and that seemed like things people actually wanted to do, other than sort of like being a bit forced. And that then probably impacted me and made me like want to be part of a team rather than feeling a bit separate. (II/SW/T2)*

Through the process of induction, both team managers carefully curated newcomers' transition into the team. This not only involved the provision of practical tools and support such as laptops and buddying, but also an induction into localised behaviours, the teams' social norms and ways of doing things.

1.2 Modelling team performances

Beyond molding the newcomer, both team managers, as performance directors, continued to direct the required behaviours of team membership by modelling the desired attributes to the audience of the team. As identified by Ingram (2015b:124) 'professional identity can be scaffolded and enhanced by role-modelling.' For example, both team managers performed availability through being physically co-located with their teams which encouraged collaborative working practices. Both team managers also engaged in emotional labour to perform calm and authority as a means of influencing the emotional experience of others. For Team 1, the overt performance of recognition and praise contrasted with the experiences of Team 2, where such displays were not as forthcoming.

1.2.1 Performing availability

The availability of team managers was highlighted as an important part of supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice. Both team managers were co-located with their teams in open plan offices. They performed availability by regularly '*walking the shop floor'* (researcher reflexive notes):

> *The manager is often on his feet, walking away from his desk for short periods of time, only to return and look intently at his computer screen. He also periodically checks the two mobile phones in front of him. He sits on the end of the bank of desks and different people walk past and stop to ask him questions or chat more generally. (OfficeOb/T2)*

Being available and '*having a team manager that is there all the time' (II/SW/T2)*, helped social workers not to feel alone with their casework, especially when working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Even when the team managers were not physically present, they continued to be available either via a '*pop up message in MS Teams' (OnlineOb/T1),* email or text. During one observation, a team manager, who had taken annual leave, remained available on the telephone during a child protection referral. This suggested that whilst team managers set clear work boundaries for others as identified in section one above, they did not always model this for themselves:

> *The senior practitioner is pacing around the office talking to the team manager on his mobile phone. He turns to Karen, 'you will be doing the [Smith] case… can you call [the police] … ask them if they can do any earlier… basically say you are ready now… they are not happy that they let the child go home, the school…' He remains standing in the middle of the office space as Karen speaks to the police on the phone. (OfficeOb/T1)*

Both team managers sat with their teams in the open plan office and also created a culture of 'cameras on' during online team meetings. This created a sense of availability and visibility. As identified above, the team manager enacted the expected display rules to the audience of their team. This included actively seeking out, noticing, and checking in with the team. As described by one team manager:

> *I think there's something to be said about the role that we as a management group play… we seek people out rather than wait for people to come to us and we do that work related but also not work related, we call to just check in... I think that creates that environment where people feel held and contained, and if you're held professionally or contained professionally in this job, I think that enables one to blossom personally as well. (II/TM/T2)*

Performing availability by the team managers influenced wider team behaviour. For example, team members were observed regularly checking in with each other. For Team 1, this had a dramatic effect on the team's wellbeing as well as their caseloads:

> *... [the manager] really promotes us checking in with each other and that… improves our relationships... whereas, before you just sit on your own in isolation just cracking on with what you've got to do... just having that support from the top to the bottom and making sure that our emotional wellbeing was a priority, that's what then kickstarted us all working together and feeling confident in what we were doing. (II/SW/T1)*

However, the experience of having a constantly available team manager, whilst helpful, could also be experienced as *'overbearing' (II/AP/T2)* or as *'overprotective' (II/NQSW/T1).* Being constantly available to the team was also experienced by team managers (and those in supervisory roles) as demanding. As described by one senior practitioner, *'being everybody's shoulder to cry on [can] sometimes feel overwhelming' (II/SP/T1). B*eing available to colleagues whilst also managing their own emotional responses was experienced as emotionally exhausting for managers:

> *I think dealing with that emotional impact of the workers, but also trying to process that myself, it was really difficult. And also, hold other people that had been touched by it, (II/TM/T1)*

For one team manager, being emotionally available to the team was made more challenging when they were experiencing their own personal difficulties. However, rather than leave the team without this important source of support, the team manager created a compensatory '*social work space'* where colleagues could receive emotional support from each other:

It started off when I was a manager… selfishly at the time I was dealing with a lot of personal issues… and the team was in a bit of flux. So, my intention was to use [the social work space] as a forum for people to get their support from elsewhere (laughs). Not necessarily come to me all the time (TGI/TM/T2).

In summary, the team manager as performance director was instrumental in setting the culture of the team. However, enacting availability as an aspect of emotional labour, could also be experienced as emotionally demanding for team members, including team managers.

1.2.2 Performing calm

As identified in Chapter three, section two of the literature review, team managers play a pivotal role in containing team members' anxiety (Ruch 2007). However, they also consciously manage their emotions to perform calm to set the 'emotional tone' within the team (Pescosolido 2002). For example, the team manager in Team 1 performed calm following a child protection referral:

The team manager scrolls through electronic notes on her computer saying over her shoulder to Fran that she may need to go out and see the child at school. Within a few minutes she confirms that Fran is to try and contact mum and seek her consent to see the child at school, "if she says no, I'll consider a strat'… we want to go out with mums' consent to get more information". As the manager walks back to her desk she passes me and asks me if I am okay and whether I need anything. (OfficeOb/T1)

Whilst not necessarily made explicit, both team managers considered their performances of calm as an intrinsic aspect of their role. Presenting as calm was viewed as a co-regulatory strategy '*which then… does filter out into the team (II/TM/T1).* This was noticed by the rest of the team and experienced as supportive. As highlighted by one social worker:

I think they are a very contained as a manager … just quite calm about things and just very sort of like, we're going to do this and see what happens. And, they are very very thoughtful and I don't think they are being adhoc with decisions, but they are just a contained person I think that then just filters down. (II/SW/T2)

When the team manager performed calm, it modelled to the team strategies for enacting the professional role of social work in front of multi-agency partners. For

example, during one office observation, a newly qualified social worker described feeling stressed but remained outwardly calm during a child in need meeting:

> *Penny asks 'weren't you stressed?' Peter responds with 'I was on the inside but managed to stay calm'. (OfficeOb/T1)*

Whilst the team manager's performance of calm helped the team to develop strategies for managing the emotional demands of practice, both team managers remained conscious of the tensions that arose from managing their own emotional responses. This included attempts to separate the personal from their professional role:

> *I know when I started the role, I was really conscious about keeping the personal and the professional…very separate and almost rigidly keeping them separate… I think as a manager you think you have to be seen as a manager, as a leader, and actually I am a person as well. (TGI/TM/T1)*

However, when a team manager attempted to display calm to mask their true feelings in a highly emotive situation, this was seen as incongruent by their team. For example, one social worker said it would be inhuman if the team manager did not display distress in response to a child's suffering:

> *That difficult case I mentioned earlier… it did affect people and people were really emotionally upset about it...You could tell my manager was feeling upset and they walked out of the room to cry and then came back in and, sort of, said, oh, I'm sorry about that... obviously the things we're working with sometimes it would seem inhuman if you weren't upset about it. I said, don't be crazy, this is a really, really horrible case, I would find it weird if you weren't upset. (II/SW/T1)*

A more emotionally neutral approach to practice could also create the perception that social workers were uncaring and unable to connect with the lived experience of those they served. This was identified in one team where the managers' outward display of calm bought into question whether they were 'masking' their true feelings or whether they team manager truly 'gets it' on an emotional level:

> *Sometimes I feel, I don't know if they're masking, they're trying to mask their own feelings, I don't know, but sometimes that has been unhelpful… they are very rational in their approach, they do care, no doubt about it, but sometimes it doesn't seem that they really get the stress of what a social worker frontline can be, or to the family or the child.... I'm not sure how much they get it on the emotional level. (II/SW/T2)*

The performance of calm was an important impression management strategy used by team managers to model the expected emotional displays within the team. As a co-regulatory function, performing calm also helped social workers to retain the capacity to think and act in highly emotive situations. However, performing an outward display of calm whilst masking or hiding their emotional responses to the work could be emotionally demanding for team managers and seen as incongruent to the team.

1.2.3 Performing recognition and praise

A team manager overtly acknowledging positive practice within the team helped social workers to feel like they were *'part of something good' (II/NQSW/T1).* As identified in chapter three, section two of the literature review, an emotionally containing team provided praise and recognition. The manager of Team 1 was regularly observed to praise team members in the open plan office and during online team meetings. As highlighted in the following office exchange:

> *'That's a good assessment Karen'. Karen responds with 'was it? That's the shittest one I've ever written'. The team manager asks 'what's shit about it? You've got both parents' views? Your assessment that you got outstanding for, was this a prebirth? I'm going to share that'. (OfficeOb/T1)*

As with availability and calm, the team manager's praise, and recognition to the audience of the team modelled the expected display rules that underpinned team membership. During the observations of Team 1, co-workers were heard regularly praising each other, recognising, and celebrating each other's practice. As identified during an exchange between two social workers:

> *Olu asks Karen about completing section 37 reports and then asks how court went. Karen said fine and Olu responded with 'well done you'. (OfficeOb/T1).*

Social work was often experienced as a 'thankless task' surrounded by negative discourses with little praise or recognition from wider society. However, praise within the team helped social workers to re-story and rebalancing these experiences. As described by the team manager in the team group interview:

> *...that is really important, recognising positive practice in a world where we are guided by stats. And it's very easy to get into a 'oh this hasn't been done in timescale, when's this gonna be done. You've obviously got the negative media, who are there every step of the way to tell you the social work profession is rubbish. (TGI/TM/T1)*

Performing praise and recognition with the team therefore not only encouraged individual social workers but also acknowledged the wider, positive contribution of the social work profession. In Team 1, the manager reinforced this wider appreciation by expecting praise for the team from senior management. This included the distribution of individual gift bags for the team from *'the powers that be' (OfficeOb/T1)* as part of an annual corporate appreciation day. In addition to these wider gestures, everyday praise and recognition for the work was acknowledged. For example, a senior practitioner shared:

> *...sometimes you might get a random email from the Director or the Service Manager congratulating us on a piece of work because the [team] manager has spoken to them. (TGI/SP/T1)*

Whilst Team 2 expressed pride in their professional identities and their work, praise was experienced as less forthcoming from those in management positions. In Team 2, the manager described high-quality practice as *'standard'* and therefore the approach was not to *'praise…for doing what you are expected to do' (II/TM/T2).* However, the team manager also recognised this approach did not work for everyone and during the team group interview, accepted that this was an area for development:

> *Lily shares 'this is not necessarily a team where you get a lot of feedback or praise for good work… I think as a team it would be good for our self-esteem and those feelings of intimidation to have that acknowledged more'. The team manager responds, 'yes, I would definitely agree with that Lily…generally speaking accomplishments aren't necessarily acknowledged in an open way… so I think that is something that would be nice to take forward (TGI/T2)*

Overt praise from the team manager, from each other and from the wider organisation helped social workers to feel proud and confident in their work and helped to re-story the wider negative discourses that surrounded their profession.

Section two: The cast: co-workers

Both teams were structured around hierarchical professional roles that had different levels of responsibility and accountability to the overall team tasks. However, beyond management and supervisory positions, both teams placed less emphasis on individual titles and instead placed greater emphasis on the importance of 1) individual diversity and difference, 2) drawing on collective strengths and, 3) viewing the team as family. Each of these themes provided its members with different forms of support to manage the emotional demands of practice.

2.1 Diversity and difference

The presence of diversity and difference within the team including age, experience, culture, ethnicity, and gender were seen as important. Metaphors such as '*jigsaw puzzle' (II/SW/T1), and* '*patchwork quilt' (TGI/TC/T2)* were used to describe the interdependent way diversity and difference came together to inform collective team support. Team 2 had worked hard to address the team's historic lack of diversity and the perception that '…*it's a particular type of person that fits' (TGI/SSP/T2)*. As described by one team member:

> *...before I was a bit nervous coming to the team. I think there was this, kind of, idea that the team specifically was very posh, well-spoken workers, I don't fit into that at all. I didn't get that when I was in [another LA] we were all, kind of like, similar cultural backgrounds, we had a lot more black workers, if I'm honest it's got all those things that are stereotypes... you need to be a certain person, look a certain way, have certain networks and connections…I don't have that... (TGI/T2)*

Creating diversity and difference within the team was seen as '*nice rather than having a team [of] all the people the same,' (II/SW/T2)* but this required ongoing reflection and open discussion. For Team 2, this collective effort was exemplified during an online meeting where the team watched a Youtube video which spoke of challenges and dangers of the 'single story:'

> *A black woman is standing on a stage talking about her experiences of moving to America and the danger of 'single stories'. As she talks certain words or phrases catch my attention, 'Africa filled with beautiful landscapes and incomprehensible people, people without heads, half devil half child'. The woman in the film continues to talk about the narratives that are assumed about her and those she has held about others. (OnlineOb/T2)*

Team conversations about difference in the context of race and ethnicity were described as difficult, tricky, and uncomfortable at times '*for fear of feeling stupid, or ignorant or saying the wrong thing or offending' (II/PM/T2).* However, the team were able to take relational risks. Acknowledging that individuals got things wrong and made mistakes created feelings of safety and appreciation amongst co-workers:

> *I find the team…a safe space because of the sheer fact that we can talk about difference... Not just in looks or background but just the way we function. And we acknowledge the difference, but we are also able to talk about the difference. And sometimes a bit of uncomfortable conversations, but I think what I appreciate is we persevere with it. (TGI/SSP/T2)*

Being able to talk about and appreciate diversity within the team helped to generate different conversations and hold different perspectives. This included the presence of male colleagues within the predominately female profession of social work. Having men in the team was seen as *'fairly unique' (II/TM/T1)* and generated wider conversations about the way in which men are positioned within hierarchical roles compared to their female colleagues. This was highlighted during an office discussion with two practice managers:

> *Suzie explains 'I have children, I work part time, I don't get the exposure. I worked with [Greg] look at him now, just look at the top tier of management, they are all male. Jane then asks me how long I will be observing the team for. 'Will you be here in December… Oh, you'll see how we welcome someone new… and he's a man too! (OfficeOb/T2)*

As identified previously, emotional expression takes place within and is influenced by wider cultural discourses. For one male social worker it was important to explore the narratives of masculinity and how this influenced the way he was expected to previously manage his emotional displays at work:

> *I do wonder sometimes whether ideas about masculinity and about males being quite stiff upper lip and not very emotional, which is not the kind of person I am, has influenced the way I've been supervised in the past... [my supervisor now] was really good at exploring what my experience had been. I could tell she was listening and making a conscious note in her mind about what I found helpful and unhelpful. (II/SW/T2)*

Different personalities were also considered an important aspect of team support. Whether it was *'noticing the sarky social workers' (II/SW/T2)* who brought humour to the team, or as identified in chapter 2 of the findings, those that left chocolates on co-workers' desks, everyone was seen as contributing something of value. In addition, the two teams acknowledged the important role of those who were '*straight to the point... and don't sugar coat' (II/AP/T2)* and those who were considered more nurturing in their style. For example, a social worker described the unique contribution one colleague brought to the team:

> *... if you've got an issue, go to her and she's straight to the point, … she will tell you what she's thinking. So, sometimes she will pull you up on things, you need to get better at doing this, and she will tell you, which I like that way of working, some people don't but that's good for me. (II/AP/T2)*

The variety of different and diverse personalities within the team '*made the day interesting' (TGI/NQSW/T1).* For those that felt less confident in particular areas of

practice, the support from a more confident co-worker was seen as an asset. However, different personalities could also lead to clashes and a lack of understanding:

> *I'm not very confident so I struggle with meetings with more people, whereas other people in the team really thrive in that. So, I think that massively impacts your relationships… sometimes it's good because then you can draw on each other… and work together on that. Whereas other times you can clash… because they don't really have an understanding of your style or what you're struggling with because they don't struggle with it themselves. (II/SW/T1)*

Recognising and drawing on diversity and difference within the team enabled different conversations and perspectives. It also provided the opportunity for different needs to be met by different people at different times. As a result, co-workers felt heard, seen, and supported by the collective diversity within the team. However, diversity and difference could also lead to conflict and misunderstandings and required ongoing reflection and discussion, including the opportunity to take relational risks and get things wrong.

2.2 Drawing on collective strengths

Drawing upon and harnessing the collective strengths of the team meant acknowledging there were *'many different ways to do social work' (TGI/AP/T2).* This brought versatility in experience, style, and approach to practice that other team members could learn from. During one online team meeting a senior practitioner was observed asking the team for shadowing opportunities for his student:

> *I'm gonna keep asking every time we meet… you'll get bored of me asking… it's important … you all have different styles and ways of working and approaches that [the student] can learn from... she needs exposure… getting to know you and how you do your work and learn from it'. (OnlineOb/T1)*

Highlighting strengths and different ways of working were seen as bringing *'something different to the table' (II/NQSW/T1).* This recognition underpinned the expectation that team members did not have to manage alone. As highlighted during one team group interview:

> *I think you know what each other's strengths are… not even around knowledge, but in terms of you know we've got people in the team who are incredibly organised, and I hear a lot of people going to her for advice around organisation. We've got people who are very methodical who like to go through and unpick cases. We've got other workers who jump straight in and work it out while they are there. And I think you all know*

that about each other… If you're going on a visit you're really worried about, you're feeling anxious and you just need someone there to support you, you've all got people the team that are that sort of secure base…which I think is equally important as just the knowledge and skills side of it (TGI/TM/T1)

However, recognising strengths within the team also meant acknowledging the areas of practice in which individuals felt less confident. As identified in chapter 1 of the findings, social workers experienced feelings of imposter syndrome and the need to mask emotional vulnerability. When the team was seen as holding a range of collective strengths, co-workers naturally drew comparisons with their performances and that of their co-workers. As described by one social worker:

Like everyone's really, really, capable and able which is great. But in terms of things like your development and things like that, you feel it a bit, gosh, am I doing it as good as this person would do things sometimes. You do compare yourself, well, I do sometimes. (TGI/AP/T2)

Drawing on collective strengths within the team supported social workers with the emotional demands of practice by enabling different needs to be met by different people at different times. However, acknowledging collective strengths also meant acknowledging areas of practice where people felt less confident. This could lead to individuals questioning their own capabilities.

2.3 Our team is like family

The team viewed as if it were 'like family' was a reoccurring theme for both teams. This was amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, where connections with family and friends outside of the team were restricted, and boundaries between work and home were blurred due to hybrid working. As identified in the second findings chapter, the teams' social interactions and ritualistic and symbolic sharing of food within the frontstage of the office created a team impression of familial nurture and care:

After about 5 minutes, Annika enters the office carrying her laptop and wearing a mask. She sighs heavily as she approaches her desk. She asks Suzie, 'where did Lucy go?' Suzie answers, 'gone to get food out on the high street… check your WhatsApp…' Annika sits down and picks up her mobile phone, she can then be heard saying, 'where are you… where are you going to buy food… can you buy me a Christmas sandwich… none of that vegetarian stuff…(OfficeOb/T2).

The ritualistic offering and sharing of food created natural breaks within the working day and brought the team together and created a sense of team belonging. As experienced during one office-based observation:

> *A person from the other team shouts out 'dinner is here!'. Karen then tells Olu 'dinner is here'. Olu responds with 'oh very exciting, what did you get?'. Karen tells her 'noodles'. Olu then turns to me saying 'oh, we should have asked you, then you could have eaten with us, did you bring lunch? (OfficeOb/T1).*

As described by one team manager, '*I think we are a team that functions around food... I think that forms part of our identity... I suppose, where people aren't seeing friends and family outside of work… this time that we spend together in the office has become much more important…' (II/TM/T1).* Working during the Covid-19 pandemic therefore accentuated the role of the team as a 'work family' where the personal and professional self was more integrated:

> *I don't mix people, so even my friends and my family, and my work family and my Uni friends…but I've come around… especially since I'm not seeing my own friends and actual family for the last year... So yeah, I've been able to lean on [the team] a lot more for everyday human needs. (TGI/AP/T1)*

The team, viewed as a family was also important for those who had come to live and work in England. Where there was a limited external support network, the friendships formed with co-workers became an *'extension of family' (II/SSP/T2)* where personal lives could be brought to work. For one team manager the team as family was important when managing personal challenges outside of work and thus was something they wanted to replicate in the team:

> *I'm here, I'm on my own, I don't have family, and so I used work as a place to recharge, as a place to come in for some human contact, or for some holding... that's why I feel so loyal to this organisation because it's been like my family when I needed it to be, that's why I'm trying to replicate that for people. (II/TM/T2)*

The first findings chapter identified social workers who felt the nature of their work was at times unrelatable to the everyday experiences of their own friends and family. Therefore, it was important that the team provided *'safety and belonging as a fundamental need' (TGI/TC/T2)* to manage the emotional demands of practice. Viewing the team as if it were family that understood the realities of child and family social work created a sense of collective recognition and understanding:

> *I think a good team can become like a mini family where there is a safe space for you to be emotional or to feel like you want to share something you find really frustrating or really annoying or it's getting on your nerves, (II/SW/T2)*

The team as family was observed through the, often gendered, performance of family roles. Older members of the team were at times viewed as '*the mumma figure' (II/SW/T1)* who had life experience and wisdom to share with their younger co-workers. Those in more authoritative hierarchical positions adopted parental roles with co-workers adopting sibling-type roles. For example, one playful online team interaction exemplified such sibling dynamics:

> *Did I tell you guys, Lucy is in the ranking… she is now my favourite… she is so nice and sweet…' Bisa and Lily mockingly gasp, and Lucy shakes her head, shrugs and smiles. The team manager adds, 'can I point out, its irrelevant who Annika's favourite is… its who's my favourite that counts…!' This is followed by laughter (OnlineOb/T2)*

Both team managers acknowledged that their positions within the team were at times akin to parental roles. Whether it was the team manager who described *'I'm like a proud, sometimes very grumpy father….' (II/TM/T2)* or the team manager that wore different hats including '*crossing over into that, you know, motherly support' (II/TM/T1).*

> *Annika seems to have taken on this role of almost like mother hen, if you like, she takes people under her wing and she's very good at looking after people. Checking in with them, making sure that if she feels people's voices are not being heard that she amplifies those voices (II/TM/T2)*

Family roles in the team also mirrored the wider social discourses of child protection social work and the neglectful parent:

> *it's really struck me how hard it is to stay on top of your job [part time]... I think that's probably where I feel like I'm a neglectful mother to my child, sometimes, but then also, you know, for want of a better word, to my other children who are the people that you supervise (II/PM/T2)*

Different parental figures in the team were seen as able to meet different needs at different times, replicating family dynamics:

> *it's almost like a child, they know mum will give you this and dad will give you that, and so they will go to whoever is going to meet that kind of need (II/PM/T2)*

Whilst the team was viewed as if it were like family, team membership could also be emotionally demanding for newcomers who could find the transition into the team as *'intimidating' (II/SW/T1),* as it can '*feel like you're an outsider coming in (II/SW/T2)*. Both teams viewed themselves as stable and established, which created a strong team identity. Whilst this supported team cohesion and belonging, it also created pressure for individuals to *'fit in' (TGI/T2)* to the established dynamics. One social worker recounted a difficult team dynamic – through the lens of family - that led to a team member leaving:

> *It was just quite sad to watch, [the social worker] really had difficulty with her relationship with [the team manager] and then... really influencing the other [social workers] about it... And it was not nice... I think, for us as a team watching it... we were almost like the children left watching this play out in front of us, and still trying to, you know, let's play nice everyone… (II/SP/T2)*

Viewing the team as family may have been exacerbated due to the enforced lockdown and social distancing measures during the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant social support systems that social workers may otherwise have drawn upon outside of work were restricted. Viewing the team as family involved adopting or assigning social roles that mirrored the gendered stereotypes of western families. It also involved engaging in social rituals that enacted kindness, care, and concern for others. However, the process of assimilating into these strong family narratives and team identity was at times emotionally demanding, particularly for newcomers.

Summary

Through the dramaturgical metaphor of roles, this chapter has explored the way team support was enacted by the team manager as performance director, and the other team members as the cast. Team managers performed and thus modelled the expected occupational behaviours and emotional displays to the audience of their team. For example, Team 1's qualities of care, nurture and support compared to Team 2's differing qualities of efficiency, competency, and autonomy were reinforced by the way the managers spoke about and performed such qualities. The individual interviews, however, provided the space for team managers to explore the impact of performing emotional labour as part of their role, as well as team members' experiences of being directed. The demands of emotional labour and team belonging were also evident in the cast's performances. Recognising and drawing upon diversity, difference and strengths in the team were seen to support social workers with the emotional demands of practice. The importance of being able to have uncomfortable or difficult conversations about differences was openly discussed in the team. However, the individual interviews also highlighted that personality clashes and anxiety about offending others can create barriers to holding such conversations.

Chapter eight: Team scripts

Introduction

From a psychosocial perspective, a script guides an expected sequence of events and the way oneself and others are expected to behave and act within a specific social setting (Schank and Abelson 1977). This chapter explores the way scripts guided team behaviours and how these enabled or hindered them to manage the emotional demands of practice. Within both teams, co-workers 're-storied' deficit views of social work at the individual, team, and wider professional level through team scripts of 1) we are human too, 2) we don't manage alone and, 3) we are positive, hopeful, and proud. By doing so, the team collectively rebalanced and reclaimed their professional identity as a way of finding meaning and satisfaction in their work.

Script one: We are human, too

The previous findings chapters identified that social workers performed emotional labour in their teams. This included the expectation to regulate their emotional responses and display neutrality, empathy, and calm as part of their professional role. This meant social workers, at times, felt unable to say they were struggling for fear of being seen as unable to cope. However, re-storying professional identity that acknowledged and integrated 'being human' meant social workers were more able to talk about and acknowledge the complex emotional demands of practice. This, in turn, made it easier for them to seek support. The team script of 'I'm human too' found across both teams was underpinned by 1) our feelings are normal, 2) we get things wrong and, 3) we don't have all the answers.

1.1 Our feelings are normal

As already identified, social workers experienced ongoing tensions between acknowledging and expressing the emotional demands of practice, whilst also maintaining the impression of competency and capability in their role. Whilst some emotions were considered inappropriate to display within the frontstage of the team setting – such as anger and sadness – there were many examples where the team collectively acknowledged the emotional realities of their work. This was particularly evident when team discussions centered on working during the Covid-19 pandemic:

> *The senior practitioner says to the team… 'there is lots online at the moment, more people dying of suicide, more than COVID… Isolation is dangerous… it's tough'… The team manager responds, 'we need to acknowledge this… different people from different teams are hitting a wall… we're all a bit tired… we need to be kind to ourselves and support each other…our work brings up stuff for us, from our experiences and the values we hold…' (OnlineOb/T1)*

The recognition that '*work brings up stuff*' acknowledged that social workers' experienced resonances between their own biographies and those of the families they worked with. Normalising the emotional impact of practice in this way helped to re-story dominant discourses and the emotional display rules of what it is to be a 'professional.' As identified by the team clinician:

> *I think it's very, very, difficult to separate… your personal comes out in your professional. And, equally, your professional comes out in to your personal. But we can of course occupy the different selves of each other. So, if we are in professional self we will try and keep the personal less visible. But it's bound to seep in… (TGI/TC/T2)*

Rather than separating the personal and professional self, team members found a way to re-story the importance of holding these two aspects of their identity in balance:

> '*a good balance between [being] professional and letting people you work with know you're human and that you've experienced things (II/NQSW/T1).*

As described by one team manager, this balance meant recognising, '...*we're human and I think if anyone says their personal life doesn't impact on work, I think they're lying' (II/TM/T1).* Team scripts therefore involved co-workers, and managers being 'honest' about the way their different identities intersected in their day-to-day practice:

> *Lily shares 'I've had to move house… where I'm living is not great… my cases… lots of people competing for my time… I'm tired and disorientated, all I want to do is sleep… I just want someone else to come along and sort it all out professionally and personally… it's really depressing… sorry…' Annika responds with 'it's honest!'. (OnlineOb/T2)*

Normalising emotional experiences such as fear, uncertainty, and frustration helped to rebalance the demands of performing professionalism and co-workers' tendency to hide their vulnerability. As described by one social worker, '…*even though you are doing the job…you're only human so it is going to affect you.' (II/SW/T1).* Normalising emotions within the team also sought to reassure each other they were not alone in their feelings:

> *I think it's just about recognising it; you know, she looks a bit upset, let's talk it through and just explain this happens, you're not alone, those feelings that you are feeling are completely normal. (II/SP/T1)*

Whilst the teams re-storied their feelings as normal, there still remained barriers to displaying the emotional realities of practice. As the first findings chapter identified,

social workers remained consciously aware of how they came across to colleagues and the wider organisation. As described by one team manager:

> *…where do we fit within the wider organisation, do we fit the corporate image? And obviously the word corporate triggers a rash every time we hear it. So, it's to do with that, it's trying to find that balance between professional but also being human, and I don't think we've got that right when it comes to expressing those feeling that are quite hard, you know, sadness and anger. (II/TM/T2)*

In particular, the display of anger, fear and sadness was not seen as conducive to performing professionalism. As identified in chapter one, section two of the literature review this form of emotional labour was a particular requirement for those performing leadership or management roles:

> *I think sometimes managers… [and] social workers... they're stoic people and sometimes it's deemed a weakness to be saying, you know what I'm affected by this, this is really taking me somewhere I feel really uncomfortable... sitting with discomfort is the most difficult thing that we have to do as humans I think... I think if you manage to do that then I think you've found the secret to what it is to be human* (*II/TC/T2*)

Both teams were also situated within and influenced by wider cultural discourses of emotional expression (Fineman 2003). For example, anger, aggression or having a *'direct approach' (II/SW/T1),* were not always perceived as '*the British way' (II/TM/T2)*. As identified by one non-British born team member:

> *I just think because people are British, so they don't do anger, maybe. Because I can sometimes see people being really angry and really frustrated and… then they're like, I'm going on a visit, or, I'm going for a walk, (II/SSP/T2)*

Team scripts that acknowledged a wider range of emotions as normal challenged wider dominant narratives of what it was to enact professionalism as part of the social work role. Being human from the team's perspective was to acknowledge the integration, rather than the separation of the personal and professional. This was supported by messages that co-workers were not alone in their feelings or their work.

1.2 I get things wrong

As identified in chapter 1 of the findings and supported by the literature, social workers were acutely aware of media scandals that routinely focused on stories of when things went wrong. The wider societal perception that child abuse can be stopped also created a sense of omnipotence and stoicism in the profession and thus the need to

mask emotional vulnerability. The teams challenged these narratives by re-storying '*we are all humans aren't we… and you know, sometimes we get it wrong.' (TGI/TC/T2).* For example, a social worker acknowledged with her co-workers that she may not always use the right words when working with families:

> *...the family form ideas about me, I am a migrant… I say to them, please excuse my English… I might not use the right word or understand fully what you say… English is not my first language you know… (OnlineOb/SW/T2)*

Collegial interactions within the team also highlighted the way social workers shared their experiences of getting things wrong. The team collectively drew on humour to alleviate their colleague's embarrassment and to acknowledge that mistakes can and are made in practice. For example, one social worker spoke of an error in the way she addressed a Judge:

> *Fran gets up from her desk and walks over to Karen. She leans in and physically embraces Karen as she asks 'how did court go? How were the parents?' Karen laughs in an embarrassed way as she recounts saying 'yeah' to the judge instead of 'yes, your honour'. Moments later they both grab their coats and head out of the office…. The Senior Practitioner comes in the office and approaches the team manager laughing about Karen saying 'yeah' to the Judge. (OfficeOb/T1)*

As identified in the first findings chapter, social workers engaged in emotional labour strategies which included masking their feelings of frustration and anger, particularly when working in a multi-agency context. However, being human meant recognising the maintenance of these emotional display rules were not always possible:

> *I'm human too, I'm a professional and there are some days where, especially if I'm more tired, then I might come across as snappy, as not really understanding because maybe I want somebody else to understand me. So, at the end of the day, this is a very complex profession, extremely complex, far more than people can imagine. (II/SW/T2)*

The team script of 'we're human too' recognised the fallibility of individuals and that mistakes were part of performing the social work role. This was acknowledged as important no matter what your role in the team was. For example, one team manager shared:

> *I mean, speaking for myself, I put my boot in it so many times (general laughter). I'm not going to lie, but what I think feels good for me… there's always then room for reconciliation and trying again. I know people have*

been written off because of that. So, that sort of safe space is very important where we can get it wrong. (TGI/TM/T2)

However, there remained an ongoing tension between acknowledging and accepting human fallibility, particularly in the context of blame when things go wrong, or when a child is seriously hurt. For those who considered themselves more experienced, talking about and showing emotions in relation to vulnerability was difficult and was accompanied by a fear of judgement by co-workers as an inability to cope:

I don't know what the emotion is called but feeling regret or worrying we haven't done the right thing. We don't really talk about emotions outwardly that much… worrying that other people won't be feeling the same way to you or judge you poorly for it or think you're not coping. I think maybe because we are all quite experienced as well, so I think I talked about these things a lot more when I was a student (II/AP/T2).

Whether social workers got things wrong in their engagements with other professionals or within their collegial relationships, the experience was less emotionally demanding when met with respectful humour, a safe space, and the opportunity for reconciliation within the team.

1.3 We don't always have the answers

As previously identified, social workers found practice emotionally demanding when they were expected to have the answers and 'sort' the issues facing children and families, particularly in a multi-agency context. Social workers also spoke of the emotional demands of imposter syndrome and the need to be perceived as a competent and capable team player by their co-workers. However, observations within the office identified that co-workers were able to share their uncertainty:

Fran, who is on duty and since returned from the kitchen says out loud, 'I don't know what to do, a kid has come in with an injury, she has been dragged up the stairs'. This does not appear to be directed at anyone in particular… (OfficeOb/T1)

Re-storying wider dominant narratives that social workers should have all the answers, helped team members to accept that not one person could know everything. This led to opportunities for colleagues to share their knowledge and skills and draw on their collective strengths to manage the emotional demands of practice. As described by one social worker:

I think that's really noticeable in our team that there's that, sort of, acceptance that we don't all know everything and there is opportunity to learn. (II/NQSW/T1).

As described in the previous chapter, the office setting could be viewed as a safe and containing backstage region where co-workers could test out and rehearse their frontstage performances. During one office observation, a social worker aired her worries, tested out ideas and sought reassurance with colleagues before making a telephone call to a parent:

> *…did you hear about my Ketamine boy?... I saw him yesterday… I'm worried about him… I spoke to his mum about it, I haven't got consent to speak to the school... I've got to ring mum… I feel so bad …' Lucy and Annika listen intently and provide advice as Bisa speaks. When she stops, they go back to looking at their laptops and intermittently looking at their mobile phones. Bisa then makes the call, 'Hello, is it a good time to speak to you… is he still in the hospital at the moment… ok… (OfficeOb/T2)*

The office setting was however also identified as a frontstage region, where social workers maintained the impression of competence and capability to the audience of their peers. This was particularly demanding for those who were newly qualified or new to the team. However, both teams re-storied and re-balanced the dominant narrative of 'having all the answers' with the confidence that there was no such thing as a 'silly' question:

> *I think I probably went through a phase where I still felt like the newbie and I felt like, oh, I don't really know what I'm doing, I feel silly, I'm asking silly questions. But everyone has been really supportive to not make me feel like that. (II/NQSW/T1)*

The perception that the more experienced you are, the more you should 'know' was also re-storied by a practice manager who acknowledged the contributions that students and newly qualified social workers brought to the team:

> *I might have done the job for 14 years or something like that, 15 years, but I certainly can't think of everything, and I value even a newly qualified worker's input. Because it makes you think, it gets you to answer those questions and actually think, oh, right, well, maybe that's not quite enough, or that's not quite accurate, or that's an interesting way to look at it. (II/PM/T2)*

Re-storying dominant scripts of professionalism with being human meant social workers were better able to accept the emotional complexities of practice and the reality that they could not always 'fix' the issues families faced. For example, one social worker acknowledged there were times families functioned and sometimes they didn't, but this was an inevitable part of the complexity of being human:

I even write it in my end of involvement statements, you know, there is a strong likelihood that this case will come back... because we are just human, aren't we, and sometimes some people function and then dysfunction (II/SSP/T2)

Both teams re-storied their professional identity during social interactions within the office, online and during interviews. This included acknowledging their feelings were normal, they got things wrong, and they did not always have all the answers. This helped social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice by reassuring them they were not alone with their feelings. However, social workers paradoxically remained concerned they would be judged as unprofessional or unable to cope when expressing emotions such as fear, anxiety, or sadness in front of colleagues.

Script two: We don't manage alone

Teamwork is regarded as an essential component of social work practice. However, the dominant case management model in England involves social workers holding accountability and responsibility for their own work which can result in an individualised approach to practice (Forrester et al 2013). The narratives surrounding social worker wellbeing, such as 'self-care' and resilience are also suggestive of an individualized approach to coping. This is supported by the findings thus far where social workers expressed the need to perform competency and capability in front of their peers. To challenge and rebalance these dominant narratives both teams reiterated the importance of engaging in 1) practice focused teamwork and, 2) emotion-focused teamwork.

2.1 Practice focused teamwork

Both teams re-storied the more traditional, individualised casework narratives by regularly performing practice focused teamwork within the office setting. This involved providing practical assistance, the sharing of knowledge and skills and a focus on developing specialisms in service to wider team support. This approach enabled co-workers to collaborate and collectively learn from one another.

2.1.1 We provide practical support

Observations within the open plan office and online settings demonstrated that both teams enacted practical support on a regular basis. This included support with home visits, making telephone calls, and help with administration tasks. During one office observation, a social worker - who was feeling stressed - was reminded that her co-worker was available to help:

Anne says, 'its been crazy…one particular case…I'm falling behind with everything else'. The senior practitioner reminds Anne, 'we have Joy

don't forget… use her… we don't want you to fall behind… I'm sure Joy won't mind'. Joy is nodding her head and then says, 'just let me know what I can do to help'. (OnlineOb/T1)

Being visible and available to each other in the office also created opportunities to draw on collective practical support from co-workers. Both teams appeared to listen out for and check in with other when colleagues were on the telephone to other professionals, families, and young people:

Annika is on her mobile phone, she is talking quietly – 'ok, so what you gonna wear… see your dad this weekend… I'll come a bit earlier… can I read a map…?' Annika is still talking on the phone but addressing this last question to her co-workers who are sitting close by. Whilst Annika remains on the phone, she repeats an address whilst her co-workers check their own phones and call out directions. Annika can be heard repeating these to whoever she is talking to. Annika ends the call with, 'I'll text it to you…do you have enough credit on your card? Talk soon, bye'. (OfficeOb/T2)

Practical support within the team was seen as an important aspect of supporting social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. As identified by one social worker, receiving support in this way challenged the dominant narrative that she would be dealing with situations on her own:

...this is my first social care job… I thought it was going to be very much social work, you're going to be on your own dealing with these very stressful situations and you're there simply for the job and to help families... I didn't think that you would…have that strong support feel coming into it, and I think that's probably helped as to why we're all quite stable and there haven't been as many people leaving (II/SW/T1)

Identified in the literature as 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991:29), those less experienced or new to the team could learn from more experienced colleagues about localised ways of practice. Practice-focused teamwork not only got the task done more quickly, but also reassured team members they did not have to manage on their own. The enactment of practice-focused teamwork helped to redefine one student social workers' understanding of collaborative working:

They move so quick… We had one case come up and someone read out the case and within five minutes one person was on the phone to the police, one was on the phone to the hospital, one was calling up the family, and everyone just, this is what is happening and everyone just jumped on it.…it was good to see that collaborative working… everyone was doing all this stuff but all for this one case, and within half an hour

they had achieved all of this stuff. It was really good to watch and that happened in my first week, and after that it set the ground of what to expect from the team. (II/ST/T1)

Practice-focused teamwork helped social workers to ask for help when they were struggling to keep on top of their day-to-day tasks. As described by one social worker, it was important '*knowing there will be no judgement... It will be, 'right okay, what's going on for you that you can't manage this right now, how can I help, what can we pull in. And everyone will do that.' (TGI/SW/T1).* However, despite this reassurance, social workers could find the pressure to perform teamwork as emotionally demanding:

I think there is a pressure to perform, like, you want to show that you're learning, you're listening, and you're working as a team worker, you don't want to be the weak link. So, I think there is always a pressure because you want to do well, you're here because you want to do well and you want … yes, you don't want to let anyone down... (II/ST/T1)

Collaborative working enabled tasks to be completed quickly and efficiently and created a team environment where social workers did not feel alone with their work. However, practice-focused teamwork also created additional demands and pressures for those who wanted to be viewed as a supportive team player.

2.1.2 We share our knowledge and skills

Practice focused teamwork also included the regular sharing of knowledge and skills. Identified as an important aspect of cooperation (Biggart et al 2017), this process began from the point of induction *'… as soon as somebody new comes in [social workers] want to share what they know and support in their learning' (II/SW/T1).* As a form of epistemological containment, (Ruch 2007), the sharing of knowledge and skills enabled social workers to modulate and manage their emotional responses to the work. For example, one social worker was observed seeking advice from her co-workers to support a stressed father:

Olu asks if anyone knows of any agencies that could support a dad who is 'stressed out with court proceedings and stuff' as I've never made a referral for a dad before and wanted to know if there was anything before telling him to speak to his GP. Joy points Olu to the online directory of services and offers to email her the link. (OnlineOb/T1)

Valuing the knowledge and skills of others in the team was not limited to those who were considered more experienced. Family support workers, newly qualified social workers and students were all viewed as helpful '*extra brains' (TGI/SP/T1).* As identified earlier, team managers and those in supervisory positions were able to

express a ‘not knowing’ position and would turn to others or external resources as a means of sharing knowledge within the team:

> *Isabel asks the practice manager, ‘what is the difference between [age] 21 and 24? I know we help with housing and stuff before 21, but what about 24? The practice manager responds, ‘I don’t know the ins and outs about care leavers… [but] I have a crib sheet I can share, I’ve got other things, Ill email it round to everyone. If you’re not sure Isabel, make use of the hub’ (OnlineOb/T2)*

As identified above, practice-focused teamwork challenged previously held assumptions that social workers would be expected to manage casework on their own. Knowing that you were part of a team that worked together within a safe environment appeared instrumental in one student social worker’s decision to work with children and families after qualifying:

> *I thought that you would be left alone quite a bit and that’s your case and you work on your case, and then in supervision you talk about your case. But it’s not like that at all... in the office it’s all a safe environment and you can talk about what you need to and share ideas and work together... I always thought I wanted to work with adults… and then I came here… it’s completely changed my perception of what I wanted to do. (II/ST/T1)*

The stability and retention of workers within both teams – on average 5.7 years in Team 1, and 3.8 years in Team 2 – created opportunities for co-workers to also share their previous work with families who had been ‘re-referred’. As captured during Team 1’s online team meeting:

> *The senior practitioner says to Anne, ‘D’ has come back in…‘I’ve given it to Tess… the issues are the same… drunk, broken glass, smashing things in front of the kids, calling the kids, c-*-*-t-s, she’s not in a good place… but she liked you Anne, maybe you can share what you know with Tess… the huge history… a joint visit… someone mum knows… (OnlineOb/T1)*

Previous knowledge of families and relationship-based practice skills were also identified in Team 2. During one office interaction, the practice manager was observed asking a colleague about her previous work with a family to help her better understand the ‘defensiveness’ she was experiencing in their relationship:

> *The practice manager asks Annika about a family she used to work with who has been referred back into the team. ‘So what do you need to know?’ The practice manager responds, ‘to get a feel for this family… they are defensive…’ Annika replies, she’s always like that… is dad*

involved… mum is grandiose … dad is the more reasonable voice… ISSIS… porn…. Their legacy follows them…' The practice manager sits listening, taking notes on a notepad (OfficeOb/T2)

The creation of practice specialisms also reinforced the expectation that co-workers would develop and share their knowledge and skills in service to the wider team.

2.1.3 We are specialists

Both teams drew on individuals' areas of interest to address the wider teams' knowledge gaps as well to provide a wide range of support. For example, specialist practitioner roles with no supervisory responsibility, were seen as an important bridge between the managers and the team:

In the team meeting sometimes if I notice there was something… going on here… the team dynamic… I would suggest that we do a systemic exercise, and I would try to have an exercise… you know, not every week, but quite often because I think it is important because I don't think… the social workers would have their systemic social work space… but actually the managers weren't part of that and I thought, actually, sometimes… the interaction between the managers and the social worker needs to be addressed as well… (II/TC/T2).

During one office observation, the senior practitioner was observed drawing on different colleagues who had developed specialist knowledge and practice to support co-workers:

Karen and Fran come back into the office, the senior practitioner calls out, 'Karen we need you on standby with Peter this honour based one… the police want a joint visit… I have asked if Tess can go out as she is a lead in this area… anyway… she is an expert you know… I don't want to waste resources…but…'. (Office/Ob/T1)

Whilst developing knowledge and skills for the greater good of the team was seen as positive, it was also experienced as emotionally demanding. Seeing others as '*really, really capable' (TGI/Bi/T2)* led to team members making comparisons with their colleagues and feeling pressure to 'up their game' as part of continually developing their practice:

To be honest, I do feel pressure sometimes…I've only just finished my ASYE and looking around... I can feel a bit of pressure to up my game and increase my skills and things like that. I don't over think it, but it's definitely there. (TGI/SW/T1)

Practice focused teamwork helped social workers with the emotional demands of practice by providing practical support with day-to-day tasks. The sharing of knowledge and skills in service to the wider team also supported social workers to know they did not have to manage alone or expected to have all the answers. However, as identified previously, social workers continued to feel pressure to perform the role of team player to the audience of their co-workers which could be emotionally demanding.

2.2 Emotion-focused teamwork

Co-workers engaged in a form of 'emotional teamwork' (Waldron 2000:65) to support each other with the demands of practice. Emotion-focused teamwork took place in frontstage, backstage, and offstage team settings, and was enacted by co-workers who regularly checked in with and noticed each other's emotional struggles. In response, co-workers drew on collective emotional labour strategies which included 1) providing reassurance to each other 2) laughing and joking and, 3) ranting, venting, and letting off steam together.

2.2.1 We provide reassurance to each other

Reassurance was an important aspect of emotion-focused teamwork and intersected with the 'I'm human too' script, described above. Reassurance aimed to alleviate doubts and fears and thus help social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. Collective reassurance helped to underpin all emotions as normal, and team members were not alone. Reassurance also involved the collective sharing of practice experiences to support co-workers facing new situations. As observed during one team meeting:

> *Olu shares 'it's my first Panel…'. Tess asks who's chairing the Panel and when Olu tells her she says, 'she's lovely… she will ask you certain questions before Panel, so you know what to expect...' The senior practitioner and Karen agree and nod. Olu says thanks everyone… because I am nervous… (OnlineOb/T1)*

Collective reassurance involved regularly noticing and checking in with co-workers. The move to online and hybrid working made this more difficult, however, within the open plan office, it was easier to observe and overhear each other's social interactions. As described by one social worker, this provided the opportunity for co-workers to both seek out and provide reassurance to each other:

> *All of my social work colleagues in my team… I could walk over and say 'god I just had a really horrible phone call'. Or, if they overhead something I think most would be like, 'that sounds tough, are you okay?' (II/LA/T2)*

Collective reassurance also helped co-workers to reframe and reappraise their working relationships with children and families. Within a wider professional discourse of needing to have the answers, and fix problems, one online reflective case discussion saw a team member describe feeling stuck in her long-term work with a young person. In response, her co-workers provided reassurance that 'just being there' was enough:

> *Lily shares, 'just having Annika in the background as a comfort figure… a safe adult…just being there… Annika being predictable, consistent… not a care giver, but support, not a lot of doing… but a lot of being…' Bisa responds with, 'so powerful… it shouldn't be underestimated… when I was 18 I didn't know what I wanted… to have that anchor…' (OnlineOb/T2).*

Responding with collective reassurance created a powerful context whereby team members felt held and supported. As described by one team member, being able to talk about and express worry was not something she often experienced in her previous team, but made a 'massive difference' to how she felt in practice now:

> *I actually feel safer and less anxious in the job I have now... I think it's because I'm able to talk about it and I'm able to say, I'm a bit worried about this... I feel like I can actually say what I think and my feelings and somebody listens... which is a massive difference, and it just alleviates some of that anxiety around what you should do and shouldn't do. (II/SW/T1)*

Team reassurance could be active, such as sharing practice experience or holding a reflective space. However, as highlighted by one social worker, it could be less overt and involve just 'noticing' which was equally important:

> *I'm going on this visit, and I will make a comment, miss me if I don't come back, which will just be, I'm a bit worried about this and then people will check in with you when you come back... It's not necessarily them doing anything particularly active, it's just people will notice and there's an awareness. (II/SW/T1)*

Where relationships were established and trust had been built, co-workers were more readily able to signal their need for reassurance. As described by one social worker, *'someone who I've got that personal connection with, I think I could explain myself a bit more in-depth and not feel as though I'm judged for it' (II/NQSW/T1).* However, emotional vulnerability always remained in constant tension with the need to maintain an outward display that created the impression of *'managing OK' (II/NQSW/T1).* In addition to reassurance, the teams engaged in other forms of collective emotional labour which included the use of collegial humour.

2.2.2 We laugh and joke at work

Both teams drew on humour and camaraderie to support each other with the emotional demands of practice. As declared by one social worker, *'chocolate cake and gallows humour, that's how we emotionally support each other!' (OfficeOb/TM/T2)*. Laughing and joking were not always considered appropriate emotional displays during encounters with families and other professionals but did adhere to the display rules of emotion focused teamwork in the backstage office. For example, humour helped to alleviate the emotional demands that arose as part of multiagency working:

> *The senior practitioner talks about a young person he works with who had 10oz of Cannabis on him. 'The police lost it!... he got away with it…he ended up with a caution, it was over £3,000 of Cannabis. Abbie says he is a 'lucky boy' and then asks how the police can 'loose' that amount of drugs and 'surely they would get in to trouble?' The senior practitioner laughs and says, 'someone smoked it, someone's having a party!' This is followed by general laughter. (OnlineOb/T1)*

Humour and playfulness in the team relaxed co-workers and created *'a sense that no one's going to be judgmental if you're making a joke about things' (II/SW/T2*). Laughing and joking together helped the team to rebalance the demands of performing professionalism as well as relief from the emotionally demanding nature of practice:

> *You need people within the team who do have a sense of humour, it can be quite a difficult and sombre job sometimes and I think having people that take a fun approach can be a relief and it makes you feel like, you know, it's fine to have a laugh at work… I think it helps the function of the team… (II/SW/T2)*

Being able to easily move between professionalism and 'having a laugh' was seen as an intrinsic part of the ebb and flow of the teams' collegial interactions within the office:

> *...when we're in the office, you've got moments when we are chatting, not professionally. And supporting each other through jokes or whatever. And then it's talking about cases, its straight back into professionalism… and it can be like that throughout a day (TGI/SW/T1)*

Humour that was focused on co-workers however needed to be done '*in a respectful way...' (TGI/TM/T1)* to avoid individuals feeling they were the '*butt of jokes' (II/PM/T2).* At times, during the office observations, office humour about co-workers did not always feel inclusive. As identified in the first findings chapter, humour was also used defensively by social workers when they described highly emotive encounters in their

work. During these moments it was important for co-workers to look beyond the humour to what may lie underneath. As described by one social worker:

> *I was upset after this meeting, not visibly upset, but I was trying really hard to acknowledge and balance that emotion... and I purposefully said to [the manager], 'that was really hard and I feel upset' and they joked about it... and I know that in the past [we] have joked together about that but I just don't think that's what I needed, right then… I think what I needed was someone to be like 'are you okay, what happened, do you want to go and talk about it somewhere'. (II/AP/T2)*

The use of humour helped to alleviate the emotional demands of practice and provided sufficient respite from the requirement to act professionally. However, humour could also be used as a strategy to manage more complex feelings that needed to be carefully managed and understood.

2.2.3 We rant, moan, and let off steam together

As identified in chapter six, section two of the findings, social workers moved to backstage settings, away from the gaze of the public and other professionals to talk about and process the emotional demands of practice. These performances were less inhibited by the emotional display rules that required social workers to 'act' professionally and thus enabled co-workers to rant, moan and let off steam about their work with families and other professionals. For example, one online team discussion helped a social worker to vent her frustrations about the actions of the Police:

> *My case at the moment… the CAIT [Child Abuse Investigation Team] officer asked the 4 year old leading questions… we were in there for over 2 hours… when we got the little girl home at 10 at night, the police were there gathering evidence, four of them, all in their PPE, going through her stuff… no notice that they would be there… she's walking in to her home and seeing all this, excuse my French but, what the fuck is going on!... a bit of courtesy you know…her first language isn't English and to top it off they wanted her to go in again the next day. (OnlineOb/T1)*

In addition to the Police, both teams shared ongoing challenges of multi-agency working with Schools, Health Visitors, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other local authorities. As described in chapter five, section two of the findings, this was often framed as going into battle which was experienced as emotionally demanding. An online discussion between a social worker and the team manager highlighted these tensions:

> *CAMHS just sent me report… not their final report… all the things we know already'. The team manager asks, 'have they given a diagnosis?' Annika responds, 'of course not, why would they do that?... It's kinda saying what everyone else says…. She needs to be settled for any work to take place'. They both sigh and roll their eyes. The manager asks, 'what does settled mean anyway? (OnlineOb/T2)*

As with laughter, collective venting and 'moaning' with co-workers helped to alleviate the emotional demands of practice. As described by one social worker, '*the ability just to come in and have a bit of a moan, a bit of a whine and then you're, kind of, getting that vent out and you're getting the support, as well' (II/NQSW/T1).* Emotion-focused teamwork involved co-workers who preempted and accepted co-workers need to let off steam, rant or moan after challenging telephone calls:

> *There have been times where you listen to colleagues on the phone and you know they're having a really difficult conversation with somebody, or with a family member, and they're being really challenging... And, you know, as soon as they put the phone down… that's fine, if you do need to let off some steam or moan or rant, you know, or just thrash something out, there is always somebody there to listen. (II/SP/T1)*

The security measures that surrounded both teams, as identified in chapter 2 of the findings, meant the public were not privy to how social workers talked about their work. However, my presence in the office as an 'outsider' (Bukamal 2022:331), visiting professionals, and students, meant the team remained constantly aware of the need to collectively manage their emotional displays and language. Influenced by wider media undercover reporting, one social worker highlighted the team's emotional displays were always potentially under surveillance:

> *…sometimes you really just need to vent about a family… and then when you are calm… it's going to that pit and then bringing yourself out of it again. So, I think, yes, people can do that, but they are mindful of who is around them in the office environment. I think also we've had enough of those Panorama things where people sit and talk badly about families and all the other bits are edited out (II/SSP/T2)*

Emotion focused teamwork involved collective emotional labour strategies of reassurance, humour and venting to support co-workers with the emotional demands of practice. These emotional displays helped to rebalance wider dominant narratives of what it was to be a professional and helped social workers to integrate their personal and professional identities in their work context.

Script three: We are positive, hopeful, and proud

Child and family social work is emotionally demanding, and the consequences of these demands are well documented. However, a preoccupation with social workers' emotional experiences of anxiety and fear have been found to constrain an exploration of other emotions such as joy and hope (Collins 2015). Both teams acknowledged the emotional demands of practice but also collectively re-storied these dominant narratives by creating team scripts that included being positive, hopeful, and proud. This included themes of 1) no negative Nancy, 2) holding on to hope, and 3) professional pride at the individual, team, and organisational level. This approach helped social workers to find meaning and satisfaction in their work and thus acted as a buffer to the stressors identified in chapter five of the findings.

3.1 No negative Nancy

The office setting, and the use of props implicitly and explicitly framed the way the team talked about and managed their emotions. As in Team 1, messages on the wall that included 'we are always positive' explicitly indicated the management of emotions that social workers were expected to adhere to. Positivity was further reinforced by team scripts that celebrated things that had gone well. During one online team meeting, the manager set a group task to elicit the positives that had happened whilst working during the Covid-19 pandemic:

> *The senior practitioner asks the team to think about the positives they have been dealing with since March, 'things we need to celebrate'. After a brief silence, the senior practitioner acknowledges that Tess has passed her 'PEP's', Andres has 'done his systemic'… she also acknowledges that Peter and Olu are sending in their portfolio for their ASYE and 'then you'll be fully fledged!' Olu smiles and says 'ahhh, section 47s!' Fran then shares that Karen has recently had an outstanding audit… when it goes quiet the senior practitioner concludes, 'well we are still a happy bunch!'. (OnlineOb/T1)*

As already identified, social workers used war metaphors to viscerally describe the emotional demands of working in a multi-agency context. However, there was evidence that both teams also collectively avoided and rejected this analogy, particularly when used by other professionals. During one online meeting, Team 1 reflected on the facilitator's delivery during a trauma training:

> *The facilitator had given the message 'we are at war' and had worked with disaster recovery including Grenville, the twin towers and the 7/7 bombings in London. …despite the facilitators 'jolly demeanour', there was lots of negativity talking about 'the winter from hell' coming up... Anne*

felt the facilitators language was not helpful' and thought the message would have been, 'we have dealt with this, we can deal with this', but it was very negative. (OnlineOb/T1)

Similarly, a facilitator's negative approach was also highlighted during an online meeting with Team 2. The team's enthusiasm to share ideas and develop better ways to engage with and deliver services to families experiencing domestic abuse, came up against the more critical approach taken by the trainers:

Bisa shares… I've been on this training… it's too long of a day on domestic abuse… but they have given us loads of stuff… how to structure assessments, how to engage with the perpetrator… Annika asks, are the trainers an older couple… the training I did before was very negative… (OnlineOb/T2)

Team scripts that focused on positivity directly impacted the way team members managed the emotional demands of practice. As an intrapsychic process, emotional labour could shift from being a surface level, impression management strategy to a deeper form of 'emotion work.' Through a process of cognitive reappraisal team members drew on previous negative experiences to help them reframe their current position more positively:

I try not to be a negative Nancy, so if there is something I try and just focus on the positive stuff, unless it's really bad, and then I just let stuff go over my head... It's really hard to even think, or say any negatives, I think that might be because I've spoken to so many other social workers who are in different teams and do not receive the support that we get… (II/FSW/T1)

Eliciting positivity through cognitive reappraisal took place at an individual level where social workers regularly reminded themselves '…*that its nowhere near as bad as the stress in other places…' (II/AP/T2).* Team members talked of feeling *'lucky' (TGI/NQSW/T1)* and being '*spoilt' (II/NQSW/T1)* with the level of stability and support they received in their team compared to other teams that had worked in. For example, co-workers shared horror stories of working in another local authority where a team member was leaving to start a new position:

Suzie shares… I was based in an awful building… on an awful road… always had smelly issues and rat droppings… it was an off building too… you get forgotten...the patch is huge, big teams…' Jo, [who has a new job in this authority] reflects, 'it is exciting, but it will be busy', Isabel tells Jo, 'they will definitely make you earn your money'. Afiza then speaks for the first time in a while saying, 'don't scare her!'. Isabel says, 'she is

prepared… here we are in a bit of a bubble… outside it is a bit tougher… (OnlineOb/T2)

Despite the high level of emotional demands experienced by social workers on a day-to-day basis, team scripts that included positivity helped to reframe and re-story the wider deficit narratives of the profession.

3.2 Holding on to hope

The social work profession is saturated with stories of professional burnout, high turnover, and ongoing retention issues. Whilst these discourses reflect the emotionally demanding realities of practice, both teams actively re-storied their professional identities and the nature of their practice with narratives of hope. Paradoxically, a team that collectively held on to hope enabled individuals to periodically feel hopeless. As highlighted during one team group interview:

We're able to hold hope, some of us, we can have hope while another part of the team can be hopeless. So, I think we're able to have those extremes and possibly you have someone in the middle that sort of balances, like a fulcrum in the middle. (TGI/TC/T2)

Maintaining hope and optimism was generally enacted by those in more senior or supervisory positions within the team. As with positivity, a process of cognitive reappraisal enabled colleagues to reflect '…*this is a bit shit right now but it's going to get better' (II/SP/T1).* Re-storying a deficit view of social work to one of hope enabled social workers to accept that the emotional demands of practice, including the negative impact of emotional labour could be thought of as transient. This approach meant the emotional demands of practice could be held in balance with a brighter tomorrow:

[we] want to let people know it's OK to feel overwhelmed or stressed, it's just part and parcel but tomorrow will be a different day and things will look brighter. (II/SP/T1)

Balancing hope and hopelessness as part of the team script also helped social workers accept the emotional demands of practice by acknowledging positive outcomes for children and families were possible. In the context of media stories highlighting social work failings, a colleague from another team spontaneously shared a hopeful outcome with the senior practitioner:

A woman from another team walks past the senior practitioner. She asks about a child who was open to the service but since transferred to another team. The boy didn't use to attend school and he never spoke, but the colleague wanted to share her daughter goes to the local high school

where this boy attends, and "now they can't shut him up!" The colleague wanted to share that the boy is happy and 'loving life'. (OfficeOb/T1)

Team scripts that integrated hope also translated into the way co-workers talked about and found meaning in their practice with children and families. As described by one social worker, '*you just hope you're helping shape their future and making it a better place' (II/SP/T1)*. As with positivity, team scripts that included hope helped to rebalance the wider deficit discourses that surround the social work profession.

3.3 Professional pride

Negative public perceptions of social work can create barriers to engaging with families who are fearful of social work involvement. Characterisations of social workers as child snatchers, fueled by media scandals also contribute to an environment where social workers can be reluctant to disclose their profession in social situations. However, within both teams, social workers collectively re-storied these scripts with narratives of professional pride at an individual, team and organisational level.

3.3.1 Individual professional pride

Social workers were acutely aware of the wider negative discourses that surrounded their profession, and for some, being a social worker was '… *not something that you want to really talk about at parties' (II/SW/T1).* However, social workers expressed professional pride in the way they talked about their direct practice with children and families. This differed to the predominant focus within the literature on social worker's experiences of hostility and resistance in their work with families. As with positivity and hope, pride was often experienced when social workers had worked hard to support positive outcomes with children and families. As described by one team member:

She got no support whatsoever from anybody, I managed to get her into education, she started that, she's really enjoying it. She is attending all her mental health appointments now, her mental health is quite stable at the moment, so I think that showing her I care and am there to support her has helped her massively and I'm proud of that. (II/FSW/T1)

A sense of pride was also experienced when the social workers' practice challenged and thus re-storied the wider discourses that they were a profession that was feared and even disliked by families. Receiving positive feedback from one mother was experienced as proud moment for one social worker who had initially feared the worst for a family's situation:

I am so proud of him and his family...the case was audited, and his mum wrote the nicest stuff and even he said, 'Lily's an alright social worker', or something like that, and that meant the absolute world to me because

when I met him, I didn't think he would be alive by the end of the year... (II/AP/T2)

Props found in the office such as *'golden Oscar looking ornaments'* and '*photographs of the team blue tac'd to the wall... above is written 'World Social Work Day (OfficeOb/T1)* served as reminders that social work was a profession to be proud of. As observed in Team 2, these symbols of pride were often intermingled with more mundane everyday office objects:

As I find a spare desk, I notice a thank you card near to where Annika is sitting. A diamante trophy cup sits on the low filing cabinet next to the card. There are staplers scattered around in the centre of the desks, not appearing to belong to anyone. (OfficeOb/T1)

Feeling proud of becoming a social worker enabled one social work student to challenge the dominant discourse that they primarily took children away from their families:

My dad doesn't like social workers and he doesn't like that I'm going to be one. I guess, they've got this reputation that you're going to take a child away... but at the same time I feel like it makes me feel quite proud to going to be one...I feel like it's a proud profession to be in... And then, they say to you, oh, I don't really think that's very good... it's quite nice to then inform them well actually, it's not, this is actually what happens. (II/ST/T1)

Social workers often experienced the emotional demand of displaying competence and being a team player to the audience of their peers. As identified earlier, this experience could evoke feelings of imposter syndrome particularly among those who were newly qualified. Despite this, social workers spoke of the personal pride of developing professional confidence and being able to 'clear the doubt':

I think the proudest thing I've done, really, is just developing the confidence. This time last year I didn't think I would have … well, I've pretty much tripled my caseload so I'm on an average caseload now and I'm working quite comfortably and confidently. So, that for me is probably the thing I'm most proud of, I think, just clearing the doubt in my head (II/NQSW/T1)

Being proud of the job and developing professional confidence also meant social workers were more motivated to share their knowledge and increase their skills. This included team members putting themselves forward for practice educator or specialist roles. As identified by one practice manager:

I think everyone is quite proud of their job and what they do, and they want to be really good at it, as well, so part of that is putting yourself forward for new challenges and stepping up to things. (II/PM/T2)

Individual professional pride was therefore evidenced in the way co-workers talked about making a positive difference in their practice with families, the development of professional confidence and the use of symbolic props in the office setting.

3.3.2 Team and corporate pride

Both teams were described as difficult to get in to due to high staff retention. These narratives reinforced a sense of collective team identity and pride among its members. For Team 1, their collective team pride was based on the enactment of kindness, positivity, and care:

The senior practitioner shares, we were all just sitting there thinking of what our team meant. And people were just coming up with good little words that we put together... so that when people come in, they can go to that board and see what we think about each other: It says we are … confident, supportive, deterministic, success, caring, kindness, friendly, strengths based, supportive, stable, empowering, strong, realistic, ready to help, reflective…. Passionate about social work, dynamic, effort, extraordinary, laughter…. And yeah, that's what we think about our team. (T1/TGI)

Whilst the poster created a collective narrative of team pride, its display on the office wall also served as a daily reminder of the teams' required display rules i.e.: this is who we are, how we behave and how we present ourselves to others. Pride and adherence to a collective team identity created a sense of belonging which supported social workers with the emotional demands of practice. However, this could also be experienced as emotionally demanding for those who worried about moving on and leaving the security of the team:

It would feel worrying to go to a different team, a different area of social work thinking it's not going to be as secure and stable. I'm not going to feel as comfortable as I do here and it's that stepping in to the unknown. As humans, that always worries us, but still wanting opportunities to grow and move. (TGI/SW/T1)

As highlighted by the manager of Team 2, '*people feel they belong to the team, there is quite a strong team identity…[and] we're very proud of that identity' (II/TM/T2).* For Team 2, collective team pride was based on the collective enactment of efficiency, competency, high standards and getting things done. During one online observation

team members expressed pride in the way they practiced when closing children and families to their service.

> *Annika is talking to the team manager and Lucy, 'I was talking to another girl on duty the other day…talking about work in other boroughs. You know how we closes cases, make sure everything is in place, everyone lined up, like IDVA [Independent Domestic Violence Advocate], other services. In other local authorities, they just make the referral and then boom… just close the case! (OfficeOb/T2)*

A strong sense of team pride and team identity created shared narratives and stories about who Team 2 were and how they collectively conducted themselves in their role. This was also part of the wider narrative within the organisation, evidenced when a colleague from another team approached saying *'how's it going team elite!' (OfficeOb/T2).* However, maintaining the collective team impression could be emotionally demanding for individual workers, particularly for those new to the team:

> *That is definitely a challenge when you come into this team. There's you do things in a particular way; work is meant to be of a particular standard. And, you know if it's not…there's a conversation about it. And I don't mean like a telling off, but okay, how can you… (TGI/SSP/T2)*

In addition to team pride there was also evidence of wider corporate from the organization's senior management team. Both teams were operating within local authorities that had been rated as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and had also been put forward by their respective local authority gatekeepers as 'good' teams to research. For Team 2, the team manager shared the kudos and pride of being viewed as the 'flagship team:'

> *We used to be called informally the flagship team, and we're always viewed as being incredibly efficient, you know, things get done... and every time there is somebody from the government or Department for Education or you name it visiting to see how things are being done, they invariably are being directed to our team (TGI/TM/T2)*

For Team 1, corporate pride sent a clear message to the team that they were valued and appreciated for the work they did on a daily basis. This helped to re-story and thus rebalance the emotional demands experienced by social workers who often worked within highly audited and bureaucratised systems. For Team 1, contact with the senior leadership team conveyed a real sense of pride in 'the company:'

> *...the people that run the company, they genuinely look proud of the achievements... I don't feel like they're just being, yes, great job, guys. …here there is a real sense of pride in the company. (II/NQSW/T1)*

Team scripts that included professional pride – observed at an individual, team, and corporate level – helped to rebalance and reframe the wider negative discourses that surrounded the social work profession. This form of re-storying increased social workers' confidence, knowledge, and skills. In addition, team pride underpinned a strong sense of team identity and belonging.

Summary

By drawing on the psychosocial concept of scripts, both teams re-storied wider negative discourses that surrounded their profession. A common theme across these scripts was the importance of sustaining connection with co-workers as a means of finding satisfaction and meaning in their work. This was achieved by recognising the importance of blending their personal and professional identities, to know they were not alone with their feelings, and that they were part of a wider system of emotional and practical team support. The findings also identified the challenges of maintaining these scripts and performing to the audience of one's peers. So, while the team scripts provided a positive way to reframe the demands of practice, adhering to them also involved emotional labour. Social workers felt pressure to outwardly perform confidence by masking emotions that were felt to be unprofessional or suggestive of not being able to cope with the emotional demands of the work.

Summary of all four findings chapters

The emotional demands of child and family social work practice are complex and multi-faceted. These demands arise during social workers' direct work with children and families, within their professional relationships, including multi-agency partners and their colleagues, in response to wider societal discourses about their profession and as a result of working during the Covid-19 pandemic. Of significance, was the need to consciously manage these emotional demands as part of the social workers' occupational requirement to perform calm, authority, empathy, and competence. The performance of team support was dependent upon three interrelated factors, which included the importance of 1) the physical and online team setting – where support was provided, 2) the different roles occupied by team members – who provided support, and 3) the team scripts – how social work and the wider professional role was talked about.

Part four: Discussion, implications, and conclusion

Chapter nine: Discussion

Introduction

This study aimed to understand how teams support child and family social workers with the emotional demands of practice. Dominant discourses of emotional resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and emotional labour largely focus on a) the individual's capacity to manage or b) collegial relationships through which to process such demands. Despite the recognition that these forms of support are enacted within the team setting, few studies have taken the team as the primary focus of research. Ethnographic studies that have explored support at the team level have largely considered the management of anxiety through a psycho-social paradigm i.e., through the concept of emotional containment. Other studies such as the team as a secure base (Biggart et al 2017) have primarily focused on participants' retrospective accounts of team support through interviews and surveys rather than how this is experienced on a day-to-day basis. In addition, few studies have considered the performative nature of team support and how this is enacted across increasingly online and hybrid team spaces. This study therefore sought to address these gaps by undertaking a hybrid ethnographic study of two child and family social work teams which asked:

> *How do teams support child and family social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice?*

Guided by the research question above, this study first sought to establish the emotional demands of child and family social work practice. Secondly, to examine how everyday activities, relationships and interactions within the team setting either supported or hindered social workers in managing these demands. The following set of sub questions were therefore distilled from the research question above:

1. *What are the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers in teams?*

2. *How is support to manage the emotional demands of practice enacted within teams?*

3. *What are the challenges and dilemmas of team support and the implications of these for managing the emotional demands of practice?*

Section one of this discussion chapter begins with exploring why emotional labour - through the trifocal lens of 1) occupational requirement, 2) emotional display, and 3)

intrapsychic process - is an important concept in which to understand how teams support social workers with the emotional demands of practice (Hochschild 1983, Grandey et al 2013). The discussion then introduces a novel framework for conceptualising emotional labour within teams by building upon Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of theatre. '*The Theatre Model of Team Support'* identifies *where* the team are situated (setting), *who* team members are (roles), and *how* they talk about their work (scripts) are important factors that can facilitate or inhibit team support. The remaining sections of this discussion chapter are structured around answering the research questions through an emotional labour and dramaturgical lens.

Section one: Emotional labour in child and family social work teams

1.1 Emotional labour and the study of social work teams

The findings identified that team members – from newly qualified social workers to team managers - experienced a complex relationship between the conscious performance of their professional role and the management and display of their emotions. The metaphors of performing, acting, putting on a social work 'hat' and creating the right impression in front of one's colleagues featured heavily in the data. Emotional labour, i.e.: the management and display of emotions in a work context, was a persistent feature of social workers' daily encounters with families, other professionals, and, importantly, within their collegial relationships in the team. Yet, despite this, emotional labour receives far less attention in the literature as either an emotional demand of practice, or as a means of support (see section Chapter two: section 4.2 and Chapter three: section 2.3 above respectively).

Current studies of social work and emotions are dominated by a psycho-social paradigm that explores the often unconscious defences against anxiety when working with families, (Cooper 2005, Ferguson et al 2021, Fraser and Lock 2013, Horwath 2016, Sudland 2020), abused and neglected children (Ferguson 2016, O'Sullivan 2019), and as a result of social workers' personal biographies resonating with the families they work with (Pecnik and Bezensek-lalic 2011, O'Sullivan and Cooper 2021). A focus on managing anxiety has also been applied to social workers' practice within multi-agency contexts (Baginsky 2013a, Cousins 2018, Morrison et al 2019, Obholzer 2019, Ruch et al 2014), within bureaucratic systems (Ferguson 2011, Hood and Goldacre 2021, Leigh 2017a, Menzies-Lyth 1960, Munro 2011, Ruch 2007, Whittaker and Havard 2016) and as a response to negative discourses about social work in the media and wider society (Thomas 2018, Cooper and Lousada 2005, Cooper and Lee 2015, Jones 2012, Leigh 2016a).

The present study identified that processing and managing anxieties engendered by the work was important. However, the findings indicated that in addition to *managing* emotions, social workers also needed to *perform* emotions in a way that was

compatible with the expectations of their audience – whether this be children and families, other professionals, or their team. The relationship between managing and performing emotions therefore made the concept of emotional labour particularly relevant for the study of social work teams.

Existing conceptual models of team support 1) *team as a secure base* (Biggart et al 2017), 2) *team as containment* (Ruch 2007), and 3) *team as a community of coping* (Cook and Carder 2023, Korczynski 2003) are based on the premise that social workers experience physical and psychological safety within their teams and that collegial relationships are largely considered inherently beneficial. While the present findings suggested that teams did provide this, the performative nature of the role, including the management of emotions, meant team membership was also experienced as emotionally demanding. While a small number of studies have emphasised the relevance of emotional labour for social work practice (Banks et al 2020, Ferguson 2016, Leeson 2010, Whitaker 2019), very few have explored emotional labour within teams (Grootegoed and Smith 2018, Winter et al 2019) and even less so through a dramaturgical metaphor (Leigh 2017b). In addition, no studies to date have explored emotional labour in social work teams through the trifocal lens of 1) occupational requirement, 2) emotional display and 3) intrapsychic process (Grandey et al 2013, also see Chapter two: section four above). Instead, studies have generally chosen a narrow focus on either the emotionally demanding nature of emotional labour (Barlow and Hall 2007, Cleveland et al 2019, Ferguson et al 2021, Gibson 2016, Morrison 2007, Myers 2008, North 2019, Lavee and Strier 2018, Rajan-Rankin 2014, Stanley et al 2012) or its potential benefits (Cook and Carder 2023, Kanasz and Zeilinska 2017, Moesby-Jensen and Nielson 2015, Winter et al 2019).

1.2 The 'Theatre Model of Team Support'

The '*theatre model of team support'* (see figure 5 below) adds to the current conceptual models of 'team as a secure base' (Biggart et al 2017), 'team as containment' (Ruch 2007) and team as a 'community of coping' (Cook and Carder 2023, Korczynski 2003). The unique contribution of this framework considers team support through the trifocal lens of emotional labour (Grandey et al 2013, Hochschild 1983) and how this is constructed in practice through the dramaturgical metaphor of *Setting, Roles,* and *Scripts* (Goffman 1959).

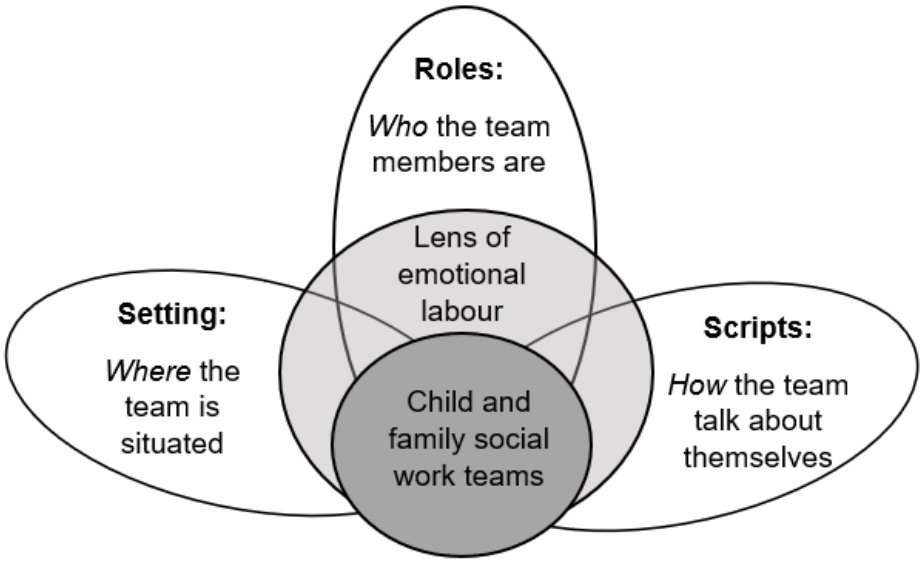

Figure 5: The Theatre Model of Team Support

Incorporating the interrelated components of 1) *where* the team are situated (setting), 2) *who* the individual team members are (roles) and 3) *how* stories about practice are told (scripts) provides a nuanced understanding of emotional labour in child and family social work teams, and how the emotional demands of practice are processed and managed at an individual and team level.

1.2.1 Setting: Where the team is situated

Where the team is situated – including the way different physical and online spaces are constructed with objects and artefacts - is a significant factor in enabling social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice. As an '*emotional display'* emotional labour can be viewed as a form of 'impression management' (Hochschild 1983:35) through which to create a desired impression of oneself and the team. Likened to that of 'an actor performing on a stage' (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993:90) different team spaces present metaphorical stages that are governed by different emotional display rules. Demarcated by two distinct regions, '…the back [stage] region is where the show is prepared and rehearsed, [and] the front region is where the performance is presented to another audience' (Leigh et al 2021:1084). The findings from this study identified three distinct regions, frontstage, backstage, and offstage, within social work teams.

While the frontstage is often referred to in the literature as social workers' encounters with families and other professionals, this study identified how the social work team was also experienced as a frontstage region. The performance of the professional role and management of emotions was enacted to the audience of co-workers, managers and visiting professionals. Backstage regions represented more private physical and

online spaces that surrounded the wider team setting which included meeting rooms, supervision, the smoking area, and WhatsApp chats. Movement between frontstage and backstage regions often involved an explicit invitation from co-workers who recognised the need for temporary respite from performing the professional role. Backstage regions were guided by a different set of emotional display rules which created the opportunity for co-workers to collectively regroup and rehearse their frontstage performances. A third region, not identified within the literature - but prevalent within the findings - was the offstage region. This region differed from the other two regions and referred to team members meeting outside of work hours and away from the office. The emotional displays rules associated with maintaining 'professionalism' were considered less important in the offstage region. Instead, the focus was primarily on team members' social lives, social activities, and the development of friendships. As such, the movement between these three regions provided team members with varying 'degrees of openness, exposure, intimacy and seclusion' (Jeyasingham 2014:301) to process the emotional demands of practice. The accessibility of different spaces within and beyond the team setting therefore has important implications for practice which is explored in more detail in section two below.

1.2.2 Roles: Who the team members are

Who individual team members are and the professional and social roles they play are significant in supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice. As an '*occupational requirement,'* emotional labour requires social workers' to manage their display of emotions to adhere to the wider organisational sanctioned 'emotional display rules' (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Hochschild 1983). The findings from this study identified the team manager as 'performance director' maintained the 'face' of the social work profession by modelling the required performances to the audience of the team. As such, the team manager played a pivotal role in the professional socialisation of emotions in team members (see Chapter two: section 4.2.1). As an '*emotional display,'* emotional labour was also used by the team managers and those in supervisory positions to influence the mood and emotional experience of others. For example, team managers and supervisors displayed emotions to create the impression of calm and authority in their role (Morley 2022, Tham and Stromberg 2020) and at other times, empathy, positivity, and praise to boost morale and increase team belonging (George 2008, Wharton and Erikson 1993). This strategy differed from the dominant psycho-social concept of containment (Ruch 2004) as it involved not just the containment of anxiety, but the active shaping of feeling within the social exchange (Hochschild 1979, Rosenberg 1991). However, despite emotional labour being a significant aspect of the team managers' supportive role, it remains relatively absent in the literature. This raises important implications for team managers which will be explored in more detail in chapter ten below.

The team - viewed as a cast with diverse professional and social roles – also supported social workers to manage the emotional demand of practice. The collective strengths of the team included the way 'emotional displays' as a form of emotional labour were enacted by different team members dependent on the situation. For example, those that confidently displayed authoritative confidence were called upon to support co-workers in difficult or challenging practice situations, or those that readily displayed high levels of empathy and calm took on the role of supporting team members to process emotive experiences. The collective display of emotions such humour and camaraderie were also considered an essential aspect of collective support that bonded the team together (Korczynski 2003, Wharton and Erikson 1993). However, the findings from this study also identified that established team norms and behaviours could also be experienced as emotionally demanding and individually unhelpful. For example, humour could result in mis attunement to what individuals needed at the time. As described by one social worker, '*in the past [we] have joked together… but I just don't think that's what I needed… I think what I needed was someone to be like 'are you okay' (II/AP/T2).* As an *'intrapsychic process*,' emotional labour and the regulatory strategy of surface level acting involves consciously expressing an emotion for the sake of outward appearance. The display of inauthentic emotions can result in a form of depersonalisation and has been identified in the literature as a predictor of burnout and emotional exhaustion (Andela et al 2015). The process of team belonging and participating in wider social norms that are incongruent to individual emotional experience therefore has important implications for how social workers manage the emotional demands of practice.

1.2.3 Scripts: How the team talk about themselves

This research demonstrated *how* social workers talk about their work, the team and their wider profession is key to managing the emotional demands of practice. As a form of emotional labour, 'emotional display rules' – i.e.: what emotions should be expressed in which situation - can be likened to emotional scripts (Erickson and Stacey 2013). These scripts assist in maintaining the 'face' of the social work profession such as the 'occupational requirement' to display professionalism, competence, and credibility (Leigh 2017b, Orzechowicz 2008, Rose 2022). Scripts also maintain the 'team face' (Flower 2018, Goffman 1959) where the cooperation of its members uphold the expected norms, beliefs and values associated with the wider team identity (Leigh 2017b). Whilst not minimising the emotionally demanding nature of their work, the findings from this study identified how team scripts were constructed to re-story and thus rebalance the wider deficit discourses that surround social work. This was encapsulated through three themes 1) '*we are only human,'* 2) *'we don't manage alone'* and 3) *'we are positive, hopeful and proud,'* where the team could reclaim a positive professional identity and experience their practice in different ways. Given the dominant deficit discourses that surround the profession, the way social work teams

re-story their work has important implications for how social workers manage the demands of practice.

Team members engaged in emotional labour to re-story their practice experiences through a process of 'trained imagination' (Hochschild 1983:38) which involved a process of cognitive reframing. As an 'intrapsychic process' emotional labour involved deep level emotion work (Hochschild 1983, Humphrey et al 2008) which can be compared to '…the way the actor "psyche themselves" for a role [to] experience[e] the desired emotion' (Ashforth and Humphrey (993:93). Team scripts supported this process as a means of reappraising emotional experience more positively (Adamson et al 2014, Collins 2015, Seligman 2003). As described above, team members, and particularly managers and supervisors, drew on emotional labour to influence the mood of the team that boosted morale, motivated, expressed empathy, pride and praise. The dramaturgical metaphor of scripts therefore has important implications for the way in which emotional labour is performed in teams as a means of influencing social workers' experiences of practice. This is explored in more detail in section 3.3 below.

Section two: Emotional labour and the emotional demands of practice

The first part of the research question was '*what are the emotional demands experienced by child and family social workers in the team?'* The findings supported the existing literature (see Chapter one: section two) identifying that social workers' experienced aspects of their work with children and families, their organisational contexts, and the wider socio-political system as emotionally demanding. However, while procedural, policy and structural systems governing social work practices were highlighted as emotionally demanding within the literature (Hood and Goldacre 2021, Johnson et al 2022, MacAlister 2022, Munro 2011, Murphy 2022, Pepper 2016), these were less evident within the findings. Instead, the emotional demands arising from direct work with families, the organisational and socio-political context centered around the performative nature of the social work role and the wider 'cultural narratives' that influenced their profession (Leigh 2014a:629). Given the unique timing of this study, the findings also add to the literature that identified the emotional demands experienced by social workers practicing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1 The performative nature of social work practice

As a form of emotional labour, social workers within this study described managing emotive encounters with children and families by consciously *'going into social work mode' (II/SP/T2).* This form of surface level acting enabled social workers to suspend feelings of shock, anger, sadness, or fear to get the job done. However, as an occupational requirement, putting on a 'professional hat' to produce the required emotional display was only ever temporary (Grootegoed and Smith 2018, Irvine et al 2002, Rose 2022, Winter et al 2019). The emotional demands of practice continued to

be experienced somatically through social workers' references to headaches and exhaustion and was observed in the office through '*the rhythmic tapping of feet and the social work sigh' (researcher reflexive journal).* The emotional impact of practice also resurfaced during the social worker's drive home and was vicariously experienced by co-workers in the office.

While dominant discourses suggest child and family social workers predominately work with families who are socio-economically disadvantaged, (Bywaters and Skinner 2022, Featherstone et al 2019), one team in this study also experienced working with affluent families as emotionally demanding. Issues of power, class, and control in the working relationship (Bernard 2017) resulted in social workers' experiencing a form of performance anxiety. The pressure to adapt the way they spoke and dressed meant social workers experienced increased emotional labour when such performances felt incongruent with their sense of professional identity and social work values.

Social workers also experienced multi-agency working as emotionally demanding. The literature is dominated by a psycho-social perspective that identify blame, projection, enmeshment and splitting within and across different professional groups (Burns and Christie 2013, Horwath 2016 Ferguson 2005, Morrison et al 2019, Webb 2011). However, the findings from this study identified that multi-agency working also required significant emotional labour (Ingram 2015, Rose 2022). As an occupational requirement social workers worked hard to display calm, authority, and professionalism within a multi-agency context. This was seen in the way they expressed feeling stressed on the inside but *'managing to stay calm' (ObfficeOb/T1)* on the outside. From this perspective, social workers did not just defend against or contain wider professional anxiety but, as the lead professional, they also consciously managed their emotional displays to regulate and influence the emotions of others. While the team could be considered a place to process the emotional labour inherent in social work practice, the findings add that social workers also performed their professional role, including the management of emotions, to the audience of their peers and co-workers. The fear of judgement from other team members as being seen as unprofessional, incompetent, or unable to manage the emotional demands of practice remained a prominent theme for both teams, regardless of experience or professional role (Barlow and Hall 2007, Leigh 2017b, Morrison 2007, North 2019, Patterson 2015, Rajan-Rankin 2014). The need to perform in social work teams and the resulting emotional labour will be discussed in more detail in section three below.

2.2 Working during the Covid-19 pandemic

The findings from this study supported the literature that child and family social workers found working during the Covid-19 pandemic emotionally demanding. The acceleration of hybrid working created the benefits of flexibility, reduced commute hours and increased engagement with multi-agency partners and families through

digital platforms. However, the same studies also reported social workers' heightened feelings of disconnection, isolation, technology fatigue, exhaustion, blurred boundaries, and reduced opportunities for emotional and practice support from their teams (Ashcroft et al 20222, Baginksy and Manthorpe 2021, Cook et al 2020, Harrikari et al 2021, Johnson et al 2022, McFadden et al 2021, Ravalier et al 2022). The findings identified an overarching theme of loss experienced by social work teams during this time. This included the loss of boundaries between social workers' personal and professional lives. As described by one social worker, *'our personal life is now our work life...' (TGI/AP/T2).* Hybrid working and online MS Teams meetings, with a culture of cameras on, created a loss of boundary that allowed team members to see into each other's homes. This enabled co-workers to get to know each other in ways that were not possible in the office. However, this created additional emotional labour. Where social workers could once de-role in the private backstage region of their own home, their on-line presence meant they continued to perform their professional selves. As with the office setting, the boundary between frontstage and backstage regions in social work teams was identified as more complex than the literature suggests and raises important implications for social workers practicing in increasingly hybrid teams. This is discussed in more detail in the implications chapter below.

Summary

The findings from this study identified that the performative nature of the social work role and the conscious management of emotions was a demanding aspect of daily practice yet was not a prevalent feature in the management of emotions literature (see Chapter two). Vicarious trauma, and burnout (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002, Hall 2023, Kinman and Grant 2011, 2020, Moriarty et al 2015) compassion fatigue (Grant and Kinman 2012) and low morale (Beddoe 2010, McFadden 2018, Ruch et al 2014) remain constant features that have significant consequences for social worker wellbeing, organisational retention and ultimately, positive outcomes for children and families. An emotional labour and dramaturgical perspective therefore contribute to current discourses that seek to understand the emotional demands of social work practice and support to manage them.

Section three: Emotional labour and team support

The second part of the research question asked, *'how is support to manage the emotional demands of practice enacted within the team?'* Applying a trifocal lens of emotional labour through the '*theatre model of team support'* helped to identify how the three aspects of 1) *Setting*: the importance of space and place, 2) *Roles*: teams as a community of difference and 3) *Scripts*: Re-storying professional identity, supported social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice.

3.1 Team setting: The accessibility of space and place

The teams in this study supported social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice by creating and utilising different spaces and places that were easily accessible and available. Movement between the three regions of frontstage, backstage, and offstage – guided by different emotional display rules – enabled social workers to seek respite from the performative nature of their professional role and thus express and process the full range of emotional experiences.

The findings supported existing literature that identify the importance of the team space where social workers derive physical and psychological safety from the emotional demands of practice (Biggart et al 2017, Jeyasingham 2020, Korczynski 2003, Leigh 2017, Ruch 2007). Observed in both teams, the office - protected by security doors – formed a physical boundary between them and the wider public. This created a sense of protection from potentially hostile families and privacy from '*those Panorama things where people sit and talk badly about families and all the other bits are edited out' (II/SSP/T2).* From this perspective, the team was a backstage region that offered social workers respite from the emotional demands of practice. The proximity of co-workers and managers within the office created a shared sense of emotional and practice-focused teamwork. Co-workers shared knowledge and skills with each other but also drew on emotional labour to display 'compassionate communications' (Miller 2007:223) as a way of responding empathetically to each other's needs. Regular check ins, informal debriefs, and social rituals – such as the exchange of food and drink - supported and strengthened team membership and belonging (Biggart et al 2017, Daley 2023, Winter et al 2019). The strategic positioning of objects and artefacts within the team setting also implicitly and explicitly reinforced a sense of the team's wider identity, values, and beliefs (Goffman 1959, Jeyasingham 2020, Leigh 2017b). For Team 1 the impression management of the team space projected a sense of nurture, care, and celebration and for Team 2, this included the values of efficiency, competence, and autonomy - mirrored in the way both teams collectively spoke about themselves. The findings therefore add to the literature the importance of shared spaces within teams and how the framing of these can contribute to a wider sense of team identity and belonging. This has important implications for social work practice that has seen an increase in hotdesking and remote working.

Despite the acceleration of agile and hybrid working arrangements in social work, the 'impression formation' (Fineman 2003:59) of online team spaces and how this supports social workers with the emotional demands of practice is currently under-researched. This study, however, identified the way team members curated their online presence and managed the boundaries between their personal and professional selves when working from home. For example, team members chose to position themselves in front of plain walls, virtually created backgrounds available within MS Teams, or embraced aspects of their personal lives within their working day by making visible their home environments. Team members also virtually expressed

the emotional demands of practice and their support to each other across hybrid spaces using the chat function and emojis within MS Teams. For example, a 'frustrated face emoji' in response to technical issues, and the request for a 'hearty emoji' as a sign of appreciation. The findings therefore provided important contributions to our understanding of how child and family social work teams navigated hybrid working, the performance of their professional role and team support. This highlights the need to consider the notion of 'space and place' for social work teams physically and online, and the implications for team belonging, membership and professional identity. This is particularly important in the context of social work becoming increasingly hybrid and is discussed in more detail in the implications chapter below.

Emotional labour within teams meant some emotions were not considered safe or appropriate to display in the office. This is despite teams being seen as a core component in helping social workers to process the emotional demands of practice (Biggart et al 2017, Ruch 2007). As described by one social worker, '…*I certainly wouldn't sit and cry in the office… I think there is a bit of a fear that people think, well, you signed up to this job' (II/SW/T1).* Therefore, the accessibility of alternative spaces and places - with different emotional displays rules – enabled team members to express and process their emotions away from the audience of the team. Backstage regions identified in the literature include the privacy of supervision, (Beddoe 2010, Grant and Kinman 2014, Ruch 2007), mutual peer support away from the gaze of managers (Cabiati 2021, Cook et al 2020, Rose and Palattiyil 2010), and support for managers away from the gaze of the wider team (Beddoes and Davys 2016, Grootegoed and Smith 2018, Patterson 2019, Toasland 2007). As a community of coping, the teams in this study drew on collective humour, camaraderie, and reassurance to support each other. However, contrary to managers seeking to disrupt these communities which can be viewed as subversive (Korczynski 2003), team managers and supervisors accepted the implicit need for co-workers to have safe spaces – beyond the supervisory relationship – to test out ideas, make mistakes, or *'literally moan about anything' (II/AP/T2)* without fear of judgement. The findings from this study also identified the way physical side rooms, WhatsApp chats, and the outside smoking area were also used as backstage regions to process and express the emotional demands of practice. Given the increasingly open-plan nature of social work team spaces, the findings identify the need to provide social workers and managers with ongoing access to 'backstage' regions. This raises important implications for practice and is discussed in more detail in the implications chapter below.

Whilst rarely acknowledged in the literature, the findings identified a third – offstage region. This referred to the social gathering of team members outside of work hours and away from the office. As a form of collective emotional labour, a focus on social activities and social lives within the office can act as distraction from the demands of practice (Biggart et al 2017, Winter et al 2019). This study adds to the literature by identifying how offstage regions could strengthen friendships and increase trust

amongst team members. This in turn reduced the fear of judgement for expressing emotional vulnerability within the workplace. The offstage region also enabled co-workers to de-role and step out of their hierarchical positions. However, as with backstage regions, team managers and supervisors understood the need for the team to '*be free and slag off their seniors if they need to' (TGI/SP/T1)*. The findings identified the social nature of the offstage region was imbued with cultural norms that included drinking alcohol to destress after work. This could exclude team members who differed on cultural, lifestyle or religious grounds. Therefore, not all regions were equally accessible to all which meant the team needed to consider a) who had access to offstage regions, b) who did not and c) the implications for their ability to both provide and receive emotional support within the team.

3.2 Team roles: Team as a 'Community of Difference'

The findings from this study identified the team as a 'community of difference' (Tierney 1994:11). The collective strengths and diversity within the team alleviated the pressure that any one person - including the team manager - should provide support with all the emotional demands of practice to all team members.

The findings supported the current literature that recognises the importance of visible and invisible diversity in teams. This included cultural and demographic diversity (Duchek et al 2020, Featherstone et al 2007, Johnson et al 2022, Pease 2011), diversity of ideas and expertise (Baginsky and Manthorpe 2015, Brooks 2022, Cook et al 2020, Cook and Gregory 2020, Forrester et al 2013), and diversity of personalities and social roles within teams (Aritzeta et al 2007, Belbin 2010). Diversity in this study was embraced as bringing *'something different to the table' (II/NQSW/T1)* and recognised there were *'many different ways to do social work' (TGI/AP/T2).* As a 'community of difference' everyone in the team was seen as having something unique to contribute. As described by one practice manager, '*extra brains' (TGI/SP/T1)* supported the idea that one person could not know everything. Described in the literature as a community of practice (Wenger 1998), the findings identify how the sharing of diverse knowledge and skills amongst co-workers encourage 'cooperation' (Biggart et al 2017) and provide epistemological containment (Ruch 2007) to process and manage the emotional demands of practice. The active development of practice specialisms addressed the teams' wider knowledge gaps and practical and administrative assistance, where '…*everyone just jumped on it' (II/ST/T1)* was also a significant feature of team support. Reframing the individualist approach of practice to team collaboration and shared responsibility enabled social workers to ask for help. This reduced the fear of judgement and emotional labour that came with displaying competence and capability to co-workers. Managing the emotional demands of practice is more than providing emotional support and instead involves a much wider range of approaches. This raises important implications for practice and the way support is conceptualised in teams.

Viewing the team as if it was family was a recurring theme in the findings. Observed through a predominately psycho-social lens, the literature identifies the way relational qualities within teams can come to unconsciously mirror the distorted and abusive relationships within families (Ferguson 2011, Ruch et al 2014, Horwath 2016). However, team members within this study consciously assigned or adopted westernised family roles such as a '*proud but grumpy father' (II/TM/T2),* or '*the mumma figure' (II/SW/T1)* or '*Granny Figure' (OnlineOb/T2)* which were viewed as more supportive, rather than distorted. Seeing the team as if it were family provided a sense of safety, belonging and loyalty to the team. This may have been particularly heightened during the Covid-19 pandemic when social workers were being restricted from seeing their own families. Social rituals of shared lunches and the sharing of personal stories and experiences came to represent a *'work family' (TGI/AP/T1).* However, the findings from the individual interviews – away from other team members - also provided an alternative view. Team members found some of the familial roles ascribed to them were rooted in gendered stereotypes and experienced as emotionally demanding due to their implicit caring nature. Other gendered stereotypes such as *'ideas about masculinity and…males being quite stiff upper lip and not very emotional' (II/SW/T2)* raised important implications for the way team members were positioned and how support was sought and drawn upon in teams. Strong familial identities and established social dynamics were also experienced as emotionally demanding particularly when new to the team. The process of integrating into the team could be experienced as cliquey, intimidating, and difficult to navigate. As described by one social worker, '*it can feel like you're an outsider coming in' (II/SW/T2).* This identified important implications for how new members are inducted and their experience of transition into established teams.

Unaddressed intolerance of difference in teams can result in organisational racism (Ely et al 2012, Gurau and Bacchoo 2022, Obasi 2022), dysfunctional group dynamics and increased conflict within teams (Mor Barak 2000, Woodhouse and Pengelley 1991). Both teams in this study identified the need for ongoing attention to diversity and difference and the ability to have *'uncomfortable conversations' (TGI/SSP/T2).* Recognising *'the danger of single stories' (OnlineOb/T2)* and keeping difference on the agenda, enabled team members to respectfully challenge assumptions and biases that may have been held in the team. For example, recognising cultural, religious or lifestyle differences could lead to some in the team being excluded from offstage social activities as described earlier, or challenging westernised stereotypes of masculinity and emotions within supervision. Yet, despite the importance of diversity, there has been limited research to date that has examined the intersectional role of visible and invisible diversity within social work teams - e.g.: socialisms, gender, ethnicity, and class - and how this may affect the giving and receiving of support with the emotional demands of practice. This has important implications for practice which are explored further in Chapter ten below.

3.3 Team scripts: Re-storying professional identity

Social workers were supported with the emotional demands of practice by socially constructing team scripts that actively re-storied the deficit discourses that surrounded their profession. Existing approaches on managing the emotional demands of practice tend to focus on the psycho-social paradigm of coping by processing anxiety through resilience, critical reflection, emotional intelligence, and containment. However, the teams in this study had a more proactive approach to managing the emotional demands of practice through reframing and re-storying social work more positively. As described above, emotional labour as an 'intrapsychic process' involved surface level acting that enabled social workers to temporarily mask their emotions in which to get the job done. However, the process of re-storying professional identity within this study was akin to deep level emotion work where social workers came to embody and believe in more positive narratives about their practice. As Leigh (2014: 636) contends, 'professionals do not just do social work, they are social work.' The process of re-storying at both an individual and team level therefore not only enabled social workers to cope with the emotional demands of practice but helped reframe practice experience and their professional identity in ways that supported them to thrive.

The ritual of storytelling within teams can be viewed as 'narrative performance' (Leigh 2017b:197), which – through a mutual understanding of the complexities of the work - can enhance a sense collective professional and team identity (Biggart et al 2017, Cook 2019). The script of, *'we are only human',* which was identified in both teams enabled social workers to balance feelings of emotional vulnerability and competence as a strength, rather than a weakness of practice (McFadden et al 2021, Munro 2019, Rose 2022). Social workers are motivated by wanting to make a positive difference to people's lives and seek reward in doing so (Johnson et al 2022). Social workers' professional identity is therefore closely aligned to their personal values and sense of self (Hennessey 2011, Ruch et al 2010, Trevithick 2018). Cognitively reframing the emotional demands of practice enabled social workers in this study to reframe their experiences of hostility and resistance from families as 'understandable' and the anxiety projected on to them by other professionals as '…*not a personal thing' (II/SW/T2).* Therefore, how the teams talked about their professional and team identity had important implications for how they thought about and managed the emotional demands of practice.

Deficit stories of social work are told by the media when things go wrong (Thomas 2018, Jones 2012, Beddoe et al 2014, Shoesmith 2016), by other professionals views about social work (Baginsky 2013a, Ravalier 2019, Ruch et al 2014) by families who experience the stigma of social work involvement (Ferguson 2005, Horwath 2016, Littlechild et al 2016) by social workers' battle talk (Beckett 2003, Burns and Christie 2013) and by the stories of difficult working conditions and the consequences of low retention, burnout, and stress related sickness (Ashely-Binge and Cousins 2020,

Kinman and Grant 2011, Ravalier et al 2022). Chapter five of the findings highlighted such challenges were faced by social workers in their day-to-day practice. Yet, whilst it was important to highlight the complex emotional realities of the work, the teams in this study also reframed their practice experiences with emotions that included joy, hope and pride (Banks et al 2020, Collins 2015, Nordick 2002, Wendt et al 2011). Team managers and supervisors were aware of their ability to influence team experience and therefore engaged in deep level emotion work – by drawing on positive past experiences of practice - to model positivity, hopefulness, and pride. As described by one advanced practitioner, being able to reflect '…*this is a bit shit right now but it's going to get better' (II/SP/T1)* helped to re-story a deficit view of social work and accept that the emotional demands of practice - including the negative impact of emotional labour - could be thought of as transient.

Re-storying social work practice with pride also involved celebrating successes, providing positive feedback and praise which created a strong team identity and sense of belonging. These were often reinforced by the props and artefacts on display in the frontstage of the open plan office which included thank you cards, trophies, and awards. Despite a feeling of pride within the team, being a social worker was '*not something that you want to really talk about at parties' (II/SW/T1)* and thus carried a degree of stigma (Beddoe et al 2017, Legood et al 2016). This state of incongruence highlighted important implications for practice. This includes how social works' wider regulatory and professional associations also re-story, reframe and rebalance the cultural narratives of social work to reduce the stigma and emotional labour social workers experience in practice.

Section four: Emotional labour and the challenges and dilemmas of team support

The third part of the research question was '*what are the challenges and dilemmas of team support to manage the emotional demands of practice?* While the team can function as a supportive system, it can also paradoxically be a place of emotional insecurity. Applying a trifocal lens of emotional labour through the '*theatre model of team support'* helped to identify how 1) *Setting*: team as frontstage, 2) *Roles*: team guardians, and 3) *Scripts*: the professional socialisation of emotions, presented challenges and dilemmas for social workers' as part of wider team support.

4.1 Team setting: Team as frontstage

The social work team plays an important role in supporting social workers with the emotional demands of practice. Teams can be a secure base (Biggart et al 2017), provide containment (Ruch 2007) and can be experienced as a community of coping (Cook and Carder 2023, Korczynski 2003). This study adds to the literature by identifying the importance of different regions within and around the team setting that

provided varying degrees of respite from the emotional labour of performing the professional role.

While the team setting was viewed as a backstage region – away from the audience of the public and other professionals - the findings from this study identified the team was also experienced as a frontstage region. Social workers remained acutely aware of performing to the audience of their peers – itself a form of emotional labour. Whether a student, newly qualified social worker, or those considered more experienced, team members operated within wider '*occupational requirements'* where the expected emotional display rules of professionalism meant revealing authentic emotions such as fear, sadness or anger could evoke fear of judgement (Cleveland et al 2019, Morrison 2007, North 2019, Rajan-Rankin 2014). This meant team members worked hard to perform an outward display of competence by masking feelings of uncertainty and doubt. As described by one social worker, *'it was a time where I still felt quite new…for me I was trying to still make a good impression that I can manage situations' (II/AP/T2).* As suggested by Jeyasingham (2013), spaces are co-produced through the way social workers use and experience them and therefore become the place of 'performative events' (Rose et al 2010:335). Both teams were based in co-located, open plan offices where the lack of privacy within these spaces could be experienced as a form of surveillance (Leigh 2017b). A culture of 'cameras on' within the online setting as a way of *'seeing everyone's faces' (II/FSW/T1)* supported a sense of cohesion and connection. However, team members also at times felt '*exposed' (II/SW/T1),* particularly when encouraged to collectively share how they were feeling. As identified above, presenting a professional self when working from home created an additional pressure to perform in hybrid spaces, and therefore has important implications for practice.

4.2 Team roles: 'Team Guardians'

While the team could be observed as a community of difference - where the strength of diversity was celebrated and promoted - the findings from this study also identified how team members behaviours, including their display of emotions – were influenced and monitored by others within the team. This meant some forms of emotional expression were inhibited. The concept of 'institutional guardians' (Gibson 2016), has been used to describe those who attempt to change behaviour and enforce compliance with institutional prescriptions within organisations. At a more localised level, the findings identified how team managers and supervisors could be viewed as team guardians who modelled both the occupational requirements of the professional role, and the expected norms that constituted the wider team identity. For example, one senior practitioner was observed telling the team, '*…you guys look sad! I can't have sad faces on a Friday!'…(OnlineOb/T1).* This was further reinforced by the objects and artefacts that frame the team setting such as a sign on the office wall that read in capital letters and red font, *'This should not be a one off… WE ARE ALWAYS*

POSITIVE', (OfficeOb/T1). Team guardians were also observed to reinforce the way team members were expected to dress. For example, during one office exchange a team guardian could be heard saying, '*you like ugly things… let's see, what have you got on your feet today…' (Office/Ob/T2).* Team guardians therefore played a role in maintaining the team as a frontstage region and the performative nature of the professional role.

Maintaining an overall 'team impression' required the dramaturgical cooperation of its members (Flower 2018, Goffman 1959, Leigh 2017b), which led to individuals using 'emotional tactics' (Waldron 2000:65) as a means of maintaining group cohesion. For example, maintaining the impression of being a team player meant social workers were concerned with not wanting to let others down or being seen as a *'weak link' (II/ST/T1).* Adherence to occupational and organisational display rules that are counter to how one feels can be emotionally demanding and increase the risk of professional burnout (Hochschild 1983, Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002, Wharton, 2009). The findings identified that masking emotions to perform professionalism or to fit into the wider team impression could lead to feelings of *'imposter syndrome' (II/NQSW/T1).* This identified important implications for practice by recognising that team membership and belonging can lead to individuals regulating their performances to adhere to the team scripts and wider professional social work values.

4.3: Team scripts: The professional socialisation of emotions

Team managers were instrumental in the professional socialisation of emotions. This form of emotional labour involved team members internalising the required professional conduct – including the management of emotions. Through the induction process team managers *'mold[ed] the newcomer' (TGI/TM/T2)* and influenced the team by the way they spoke about and performed the expected emotional displays within the office. These emotional display rules, embedded within the occupational professional standards (SWE 2021: Standard 2.4) stipulate social workers must 'practice in ways that demonstrate empathy, perseverance, authority, confidence and capability.' These wider prescriptions of professional behaviour appeared to influence the way managers and supervisors masked feelings of vulnerability, sadness, or anger. This reinforced the team space as a frontstage region. In teams that were viewed as high performing, such as those in this study, additional pressure to adhere to the practice standards was set by the team manager and co-workers. As described by one social worker, *'I think the reputation is that we, kind of, excel. I think these are the narratives and the team manager is very keen on keeping these ongoing. So, whenever there is a slip, they start panicking' (II/Is/t2).* Upholding the 'reputation' of the team therefore created an additional source of emotional labour for team members. This raises important implications for practice and how membership of high performing teams - not just teams perceived to be struggling - can be experienced as emotionally demanding.

The professional socialisation of emotions was not just part of the induction process for newcomers, but also remained a continued feature for experienced team members including team managers. As identified in the literature, team managers are perceived as needing less formal and structured support with the emotional demands of practice, with a greater focus on managerial and administrative tasks (Beddoe and Davys 2016, Cousins 2004, Morrison 2005, Patterson 2019). Where emotional support for managers has been identified in the literature, this tends to adopt the psycho-social concept of containment and the importance of peer collaboration (Toasland 2007). However, the findings from this study identified team managers engaged in high levels of emotional labour as part of their professional role. As identified above, team managers modelled the expected occupational requirements and emotional display rules to the team, and actively managed and displayed their emotions to influence others (Morley 2022, Pescosolido 2022, Tham and Stromberg 2020). This form of emotional labour could be experienced as emotionally demanding, as described by one senior practitioner, *'being everybody's shoulder to cry on [can] sometimes feel overwhelming' (II/SP/T1).*

Emotional labour for team managers therefore created an 'authenticity paradox' (Smith and Grandey 2022) between acknowledging the emotional demands of practice whilst not showing too much distress (Ferguson et al 2021, O'Connor 2019). For example, one team manager expressed '*it's quite hard to show vulnerability in a work environment… You feel judged, I suppose…by yourself and your colleagues, and your organisation' (II/TM/T2).* However, in a separate interview, a social worker in the same team shared*, 'I don't know if [the manager] is… trying to mask their own feelings… but sometimes that has been unhelpful… I'm not sure how much they get it on the emotional level (II/SW/T2).* A similar paradox was also identified in the second team, where the team manager shared, '*I think as a manager you think you have to be seen as a manager, as a leader…' (TGI/TM/T1)* yet a social worker, talking about the team manager leaving the office to cry shared, '*don't be crazy, this is a really, really horrible case, I would find it weird if you weren't upset' (II/SW/T1).* This identifies an intense source of emotional labour for team managers who received little support to manage this in their practice*.* The performative nature of team leadership is something that has remained relatively unexplored in the existing literature, and therefore has important implications for how the team manager's role and emotional experiences are supported.

Summary

Emotional labour - as a multidimensional construct - is an inherent aspect of social workers' daily professional lives, present in their working relationships with children and families, other professionals, and within their teams. The findings identified emotional labour presented as an additional emotional demand when there was a dissonance between how they authentically felt, and the requirement to manage their emotions as part of performing their professional role. For example, the team as a

frontstage region where such performances continued (team setting), team guardians who reinforced these performances (team roles), and the professional socialisation of emotions (team scripts) were experienced as emotionally demanding. However, emotional labour in teams also helped to reduce this dissonance gap by creating opportunities for a broader range of authentic emotions to be expressed within the workplace. This included the accessibility of different spaces and places (team setting), seeing teams as a community of difference in which strengths and vulnerability were shared (team roles) and the re-storying of professional identity with being human, hope, optimism, and pride (team scripts). Emotional labour in child and family social work teams therefore has important implications for the way social workers are supported to manage the emotional demands of practice. These implications, and recommendations for practice are discussed next.

Chapter ten: Implications for practice and conclusion

This final chapter of the thesis is divided into two sections. Section one draws on the previous discussion chapter highlighting the implications for practice at three levels, 1) the individual social worker level, 2) the team and organisational level and 3) at the macro level. Section two concludes with a summary of the contributions this study has made to the field of social work workforce support and emotions. This includes the strengths and limitations of the study and areas for future research.

Section one: Implications for practice

Through the psychosocial lens of emotional labour and dramaturgy, this study identified social workers not only managed their emotions, but also performed them as part of providing and receiving support within the team. Current models of team support only minimally acknowledge the performative aspects of the social work role. This has important implications for practice and the way in which social work and emotions are thought about and responded to at an individual, team/organisational and macro level.

1.1 Implications for practice at the individual level

The study has shown how team members engage in emotional labour to manage the emotional demands of their work. This includes temporarily masking their emotions to get the job done, to cognitively reframe experience, to perform the occupational requirements of their professional role and to shape and influence the emotional experience of others. However, social work students and newly qualified social workers are also highly prone to masking their emotional responses to present as competent and capable to the audience of families, other professionals, and their team. While this may have been expected for those who were less experienced or new to the team, more experienced social workers, including team managers also experience the performative nature of their profession role as emotionally demanding. It is therefore important that all team members are supported to recognise emotional labour as an inevitably complex, nuanced, and multi-faceted aspect of daily practice.

Social workers would benefit from being provided with opportunities to de-role and explore the impact of emotional labour and the performative aspects of their professional role. Discussions should recognise when emotions are perceived as inappropriate to display and identify where these can be safely expressed. Team managers, supervisors, and those in leadership positions are perceived as needing less formal and structured support with the emotional demands of practice, despite undertaking significant emotional labour as part of their professional role. To remedy this, team managers should be provided with access to regular, structured, formal,

and informal spaces that provide opportunities to explore the emotional demands of their practice.

The following set of reflective questions shown in table 7 below can be used as a guide during individual, group or peer supervision:

Team setting (Where)	Where are the formal and informal spaces and places within the team that enable you to express your full range of emotions in relation to your work? For example, where can you express frustration, anger, fear, or sadness with others? Where can you express joy, praise, pride, and recognition with others? If these spaces are not available, what do you need and how can you help create them?
Team roles (Who)	What aspects of practice are you currently finding emotionally demanding? (i.e.: direct work, professional relationships, team membership, organisational demands, professional identity). What emotion management strategies are you using to manage these (i.e.: 'going into social work mode', 'putting a professional hat on'?) What are the costs of these strategies for you? What is your professional and social role in the team when it comes to the provision of emotional support? What aspects of this role do you find emotionally demanding? When are you displaying emotions that do not match how you feel inside? What impact is this having on your practice? How do you signal your needs to others? Where and with whom do you share these challenges?
Team scripts (How)	How do the stories about practice, the team, and the social work profession told in the team influence you? What expectations does this create in terms of performing your role and the display of your emotions? How do these team scripts help or hinder you?

Table 7: Reflective questions for individuals

1.2 Implications for practice at the team and organisational level

This study has shown the team setting can be considered a backstage region where social workers can de-role and seek respite from performing their professional role. The boundaries that surround the physical and online team settings – through locked doors, and virtual waiting rooms - create a sense of physical and psychological safety from the outside world. The framing of these spaces, including the use of objects, artefacts and social rituals help to portray a wider team impression and - as a form of collective emotional labour - shared camaraderie, humour, reassurance, and empathy within these spaces can strengthen a sense of connection and belonging. However, open plan office settings, and the accelerated move to hybrid working practices mean the team can also be experienced as a frontstage region, where social workers continued to manage their emotions and perform their professional role to the audience of their colleagues. While current models of team support have begun to assimilate hybrid working arrangements (Cook et al 2020), none to date have incorporated the performative aspects of the role and emotional labour across hybrid settings.

Social work teams and organisations would therefore benefit from mapping how support with the emotional demands of practice is being provided and received across hybrid spaces. This could include where frontstage, backstage and offstage regions are located, who has access to them, who does not and how any identified gaps can be addressed. Teams would also benefit from exploring how their wider team scripts, social norms, beliefs, and values can support or hinder team members' ability to provide and seek support with the emotional demands of practice. In addition, organisations should ensure their continued professional development programmes recognise the importance of team-focused interventions to manage the emotional demands of practice. This should be in addition to the current focus on the individual's ability to manage and the quality of interpersonal relationships.

The following set of reflective questions shown in table 8 below can be used by teams and organisations during team meetings, or development days to collectively consider the impact of emotional labour and team support:

Team setting (Where)	Where are the three different regions of team support (ie: frontstage, backstage and offstage) across our physical and online spaces? In what ways do we invite each other to move between these different regions (ie: noticing, checking in). What are the emotional display rules in each of these regions? How do they allow all of us, regardless of hierarchy or role, to express our full range of emotions in relation to practice?

	Who might be included or excluded from these regions, and how can alternative regions be established and maintained? How do we maintain healthy boundaries as part of hybrid working? How can we use the technology available to us to signal our needs and provide support to each other? How do we stage our physical and online spaces so as to reduce the impact of emotional labour?
Team roles (Who)	How are strengths attributed to each team member and how does this create a balance of preferred support styles within our team? Where there may be an imbalance, how do we collectively address this? How and where do we talk about difference and diversity? How do we encourage and enable uncomfortable or challenging conversations?
Team scripts (How)	When a newcomer enters our team, what implicit and explicit messages do they receive about social work and the role of emotions? How does our team talk increase worker resilience, hope and optimism? How do we do this in an authentic way that also acknowledges the emotional realities of practice? What is our collective team identity? How does the way we see and talk about ourselves mold the newcomer? How do we create space and support for team members who may hold different stories, identities, and values? How do our wider organisations recognise and acknowledge the demands of practice? How does our organisation challenge and re-story the wider deficit discourses that surrounds our profession? How does the wider organisation evidence their ongoing commitment to our team wellbeing and development that builds on pride, optimism, and hope?

Table 8: Reflective questions for teams and organisations

1.3 Implications for practice at the macro level

This study has shown that emotions and social work continue to present a paradox for child and family social workers, where emotions are seen as intrinsic to professional practice, but at the same time are also considered as 'unprofessional.' This study identifies how social workers experience a form of performance anxiety through their ongoing reference to 'making a good impression' or a 'pressure to perform.' This includes masking their emotions for fear of being seen as unprofessional or unable to cope with the emotional demands of practice. Through an emotional labour and dramaturgical lens, these wider prescriptions of professional behaviour can be traced back to the social work professional standards (SWE 2021) and Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW 2018), used as an assessment criterion in undergraduate and post graduate social work degree programmes. While such occupational and regulatory guidance minimally acknowledge the role of emotions in social work practice, they do stipulate social workers, at every stage of their career, must actively manage, maintain, model, and display their professionalism. It is therefore important for social work educators to incorporate emotional labour into their core syllabus and for this to remain an ongoing feature of post qualifying and workforce development programmes. It would also be beneficial to review the Social Work England practice standards (2021) and the language used to describe professionalism to ensure that it does not perpetuate an emphasis on performing at the expense of acknowledging the emotional realities of the work.

The social workers in this study were extremely proud of their social work identity and profession but remained hesitant to share what they did with others outside of their team or organisation. This raises important implications for how Social Work England (SWE) and The British Association of Social Work (BASW), contribute to the re-storying of pride, hope, and optimism in social work practice at a local and national level. This can be achieved through positive stories being shared on social media platforms, blogs, videos, podcasts to both social work and non-social work audiences.

Section two: Conclusion

2.1 Summary

This study set out to understand how teams supported child and family social workers with the emotional demands of practice. This was driven by the need to look beyond the individualist emotional resilience paradigm that dominates social work policy, education, regulation and practice standards (BASW 2021, Galpin et al 2020, Grant and Kinman 2016, SWE 2021). Social workers do not practice in isolation, yet blame can be attributed to the individual who 'fails' to cope (Considine et al 2015, Galpin et al 2018, Hart et al 2016, Webster and Rivers 2018). By not recognising the wider context in which social workers operate, team and corporate responsibility for the wellbeing of staff will continue to be overlooked (Rhian 2016, Taylor 2016).

Child and family social work – particularly, child protection – is an emotionally demanding job. Yet, the way emotions are understood and used in practice creates an ongoing 'paradox' for social workers (O'Connor 2019:645). This is because emotions are considered central to professional practice but can also be perceived as 'unprofessional' (Ferguson 2005, Fineman 2003, Rajan-Rankin 2014, Rose 2022). In the context of this paradox, social workers' direct engagement with children and families, their teams, organisations, and the wider socio-political context can all be experienced as emotionally demanding. The consequences of such working conditions are associated with ongoing recruitment and retention issues and workforce burnout (DfE 2022c, McFadden et al 2018, Ravalier et al 2021). These pre-existing issues were further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which saw an increase in casework complexity, changes to working practices and a rise in mental health concerns for social workers (ADCS 2022, BASW 2022). Despite this challenging picture, social work continues to be a chosen career path for many who not only survive but thrive in practice (Collins 2015, Nordick 2002, Wendt et al 2011). Support to understand and manage the emotional terrain of social work is therefore vital to ensure a resilient, healthy, and competent workforce that can deliver positive outcomes for children and families in need.

To date, the literature is dominated by a psycho-social paradigm that considers emotions and social work through the management and containment of anxiety. However, the findings from this study identified that managing the emotional demands of practice was both a psychological process and socially constructed i.e.: social workers did not just manage their emotions, but also individually and collectively performed them to the audience of others. Drawing on Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy, this study builds upon the 'team as a secure base' (Biggart et al 2017), 'team as containment' (Ruch 2007) and team as a 'community of coping' (Cook and Carder 2023, Korczynski 2003) by providing a novel framework for conceptualising the performative nature of team support. The '*theatre model of team support'* considers how social work teams help to manage the emotional demands of practice by exploring the interdependent nature of 1) *where* the team is situated (setting), 2) *who* the individual team members are (roles) and 3) *how* stories about practice, the team and the wider profession are told (scripts). This in turn raises important practice implications at an individual, team, organisational and macro level.

Emotional labour is an inevitable aspect of social work that can either enable or inhibit team support. To process the complex and emotionally demanding nature of the work, social workers - including students, experienced practitioners, and team managers - need the opportunity to express their full range of emotional experiences. This includes expressing vulnerability, sadness, or anger without fear of judgement that such expressions suggest unprofessionalism or an inability to cope. Team members also need the opportunity to express and share emotions such as pride, hope and joy to re-story and rebalance the deficit discourses that surround their profession. This study

identified how access to and movement between frontstage, backstage, and offstage regions – with different emotional display rules – raises important implications for team support given the ongoing trend towards open plan offices and ever-increasing hybrid and agile working practices. It will therefore be useful for social work teams to map how and where these different regions are constructed so that the full range of emotional experiences can continue to be expressed, processed, and supported. Despite the prevalence of emotional labour in child and family social work teams, it remains underrepresented in social work practice, education, and policy. The recommendations made above seek to address these gaps.

2.2 Strengths and limitations of the study

A strength of this study was the novel hybrid ethnographic approach that was used to capture team experience across physical and online spaces. Hybrid ethnography involves the study of human cultures online, offline, and in between (Przybylski 2020) and while social work has become increasingly hybrid and remote over the last decade, there is limited research that has applied a hybrid methodology (Pink et al 2021). Instead, ethnographic studies of child and family social work has traditionally adopted a practice near approach that values the researchers' physical presence in the field (Cooper 2009, Ferguson 2016, Hollway 2009). Through observations, individual and team group interviews and the reflexive positioning of the researcher, this study was able to capture a thick description of the 'enactment or performance of social work activities' (Longhofer and Floersch 2012:503). This included how social workers engaged with children and families remotely through telephone calls, how they emotionally processed and made sense of the work within the team (Broadhurst et al 2010, Gregory 2022, Helm 2013, Ruch 2004, Saltiel 2015) and their relationship to and movement within the office setting (Jeyasingham 2021, Leigh 2014a). In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, studies have begun to explore social workers' experiences of team support as part of hybrid working practices, but these have largely been captured through interviews and surveys. This study has shown how hybrid ethnography can be applied to the study of hybrid social work teams as a means of understanding team relationships and practice experience within and across such settings.

Another novel aspect of this study is its contribution to the wider re-storying and rebalancing of social work. The approach taken to the research started from the position of exploring how teams facilitated rather than hindered social workers in managing the emotional demands of practice. While the literature is saturated with the consequences of poor working conditions, occupational stress, compassion fatigue and burnout, (Galpin et al 2018, McFadden et al 2018, Ravalier et al 2021, Tham 2022), there is evidence that social workers not only survive, but also thrive in practice (Collins 2008, Nordick 2002, Rose and Palattiyil 2020, Stalker et al 2007, Wendt et al 2011). This study purposively sampled local authorities rated by Ofsted as

‘Outstanding’ with gatekeepers putting forward child and family social work teams they considered exemplars of good practice. The findings identified both teams were well resourced, relatively stable and were not experiencing the kinds of organisational or socio-political demands - i.e.: bureaucracy, monitoring, structural reforms or ‘Oftsted anxiety’ (Murphy 2022) commonly identified in the literature. It is likely that in the absence of such external demands, this study was able to gain a picture of how teams can work effectively to manage the emotional demands of their work and what this looks like in daily practice.

A potential limitation of the study was whether the time spent observing the two teams – 3 hours a week over 6 weeks per team - was long enough to be fully immersed in the field and for the presence of the researcher to become a normalised part of the setting. Traditionally, ethnographic research requires a sustained period of connection to enable the researcher to capture a thick description of the everyday events, customs, rituals, and interactions of the community under study (Emerson et al 2011, Geertz 1973). Given the timing of this study - which took place during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic - it was important to strike a balance between access to the team and the study not being experienced as an additional burden. Observing participants across different settings, on different days and at different times helped to capture the ebb and flow of office life. Given the limited timeframe, it also had to be assumed that the researcher-researched encounter was likely to always involve an element of performance (Blix and Wettergren 2015, Leigh et al 2021). Rather than impeding the ethnographic research process, the performative aspect of the professional role and that of the researcher contributed to the data analysis and the findings. In addition, the extensive interviews also captured the views of individuals beyond observing team performances within the office which helped to mitigate the slightly shorter observation time.

2.3 Areas for further research

This is the first hybrid ethnographic study to provide novel and important insights into the way teams support social workers with the emotional demands of practice across physical and online spaces. In addition, team support considered through the trifocal lens of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983, Grandey et al 2013) and the dramaturgical metaphor of theatre (Goffman 1959) acknowledges that social workers not only manage their emotions, but also perform them. This psychosocial understanding of emotions and social work adds to the literature that is currently dominated by a psycho-social perspective that focuses on the management and containment of anxiety. This raises important implications for practice and thus the need to identify and explore opportunities for further research in the following areas:

1. The traditional, office based social work team is evolving toward more remote, agile and hybrid working practices. Team focused research therefore needs to rethink basic ideas of locality, boundaries, space, and place that constitute the team experience. Further hybrid ethnographic studies are needed to explore how the providing and receiving of support is navigated across physical, online and hybrid spaces.

2. Current studies have explored emotional labour in child and family social through a narrow perspective which has positioned it as either inherently beneficial or emotionally demanding. Further research is needed that explores social work teams through the trifocal lens of emotional labour as a) an occupational requirement, b) emotional display and c) an intrapsychic process. A more nuanced and intersecting framework for exploring emotions will help to identify the challenges and benefits this brings to individuals, teams, organisations and outcomes for children and families.

3. The emotional demands of child and family social work practice and support to manage these demands is dominated by a psycho-social paradigm that focuses on the management and containment of anxiety. Further research is needed to explore the more psychosocial, performative nature of team support. This should include the ways that social workers actively construct positive narratives about practice as a means of supporting their resilience.

4. The way team managers, supervisors, and those in leadership roles manage and are supported with the emotional demands of practice is currently underrepresented in the literature. Given the significant emotional labour that is performed by those in such roles, more research is needed to understand the needs of this population of the workforce.

Appendices

Appendix A Ethics approval Letter

School of Social Work
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of East Anglia
Elizabeth Fry Building
Research Park
Norwich
Norfolk NR4 7TJ

03.04.2020

Dear Sara,

The Research Ethics Committee considered your application for ethical approval for your doctoral research: *'An ethnographic study of how teams support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work'*.

The reviewers are in agreement that the ethics issues have been satisfactorily considered and addressed. I am happy to confirm that ethical approval is granted and you are able to begin your study subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

It is a requirement of your approval that you should report any adverse events that may have occurred, these being defined as "any unanticipated problem involving risk to subjects which ultimately results in harm to the subject or others".

If you plan to make any significant changes to the design of your study, you should also contact me.

With best wishes – I hope your research goes well.

Yours sincerely

Dr Georgia Philip
Chair of SWK Ethics Committee

Appendix B Updated ethics chair approval re: Covid-19

From: Georgia Philip (SWK - Staff) <G.Philip@uea.ac.uk>
Sent: 03 July 2020 02:53
To: Sara Carder (SWK - Postgraduate Researcher) <S.Carder@uea.ac.uk>
Cc: Laura Cook (SWK - Staff) <L.Cook@uea.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Fw: Updated ethics application

Hi Sara,

I've now read through the documents you sent, and have no issues or concerns to raise. It's clear you've thought carefully about the need to adapt to the ongoing impact of the COVID pandemic, and tried to turn some of the challenges into opportunities (always a good approach!). I think the combination of virtual and 'actual' observation and interviewing will be interesting, and the opportunity to study how CP practice works in a digital/remote team environment will be really important.

I can, and am happy to, approve the amendments by Chair's action, so can confirm that this is the decision and you can continue with your research.

With thanks and best wishes,
Georgia.

Dr Georgia Philip
Lecturer in Social Work
Centre for Research on Children and Families
Elizabeth Fry Building
University of East Anglia
Norwich NR4 7TJ

Tel: 01603 593297 email: g.philip@uea.ac.uk

Read our latest article on fathers and recurrent care proceedings: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104392

Read our recent article from the Counting Fathers In study of men's experiences of child protection services: https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/jtEu9qy4bjAkQv4P2iUw/full?target=10.1080/0312407X.2019.1627469

To download the *Counting Fathers In* study report, click here https://www.uea.ac.uk/centre-research-child-family/child-protection-and-family-support/current-projects/-counting-fathers-in-

Appendix C Covid-19 risk assessment

Activity assessed / title of risk assessment:	**Undertaking fieldwork activities following a Government easement of the lockdown restrictions for research.**		
Detailed description of activities covered by this assessment: ***(Include numbers of persons involved, equipment used etc.)***	**ATTENTION LINE MANAGERS: This Risk Assessment Template is for Fieldwork activities that have a High (Covid-19) Risk, only. See Section 4 of the Guidance document for Low (Covid-19) Risk activities. Please delete this bold text and replace it with a description of activities that will be conducted by those you are responsible for, & other required info as specified on the left.** **Then continue to modify the Additional Controls section for those individual(s), the work activities they will be undertaking, the equipment they will be using, & the area(s) they will be working in. Use this in conjunction with the Guidance document.**		
Location of Activity:	Sara Carder will be based in two local authority offices for short periods as part of her PhD fieldwork. She will undertake ethnographic observations of social workers in the office. Where practical, data collection will take place virtually. However, some in-person observation is an essential part of the research.	**School / Department:**	SSF - SWK
Risk Assessment reference number / local identifier:		**Risk Assessor: (Full Name)**	Laura L. Cook (PhD Supervisor) for Sara Carder (PhD Student)

Identify the Hazards – What can happen and how can it happen?

Number	**Hazard** (what has the potential to cause harm?)	**Hazardous Event** (how can the hazard cause harm?)
1.	SARS-CoV-2	**People** that are infected with SARS-CoV-2 (knowingly or unknowingly) who can pass it on to others. **People** that are exposed to / come into contact with other individuals who may be carrying SARS-CoV-2.
2.	SARS-CoV-2	**Activities** that cause individuals to be exposed to / come into contact with others who may be carrying SARS-CoV-2.
3.	SARS-CoV-2	**Instruments, equipment or other articles** that may be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 that individuals can be exposed to / come into contact with.

Number	**Hazard** (what has the potential to cause harm?)	**Hazardous Event** (how can the hazard cause harm?)
4.	SARS-CoV-2	**Environment** that promotes the spreading of SARS-CoV-2 such that individuals may get infected.

Identify Who Might be Harmed – Consider any and all types of person who may come into contact with the hazard

	Select all that apply							
☒ Employees	☒ Contractors / other workers	☒ Public / visitors	☒ Students	☒ Clinically vulnerable / Clinically extremely vulnerable	☒ New / expectant mothers	☒ Disabled persons	☒ Young persons	☒ Other

Establish Existing Controls – Is anything currently in place to mitigate the risk of each identified hazard, if so what?

Hazard	Controls and Safe System of Work	Additional Controls Required?
1. **People** that are infected with SARS-CoV-2 (knowingly or unknowingly) who can pass it on to others. **People** that are exposed to / come into contact with other individuals who may be carrying SARS-CoV-2.	Current / Existing Controls have been implemented by the University. You must read and understand the University Covid-19 Risk Assessment. Note, this document is under review, so please check it for updates. You / your department may also have controls that *are already in place*. If so, you can add them here. Additional controls yet to be implemented / measure that are planned are added in the Additional Controls section, below.	☒ Yes ☐ No
2. **Activities** that cause individuals to be exposed to / come into contact with others who may be carrying SARS-CoV-2.	Current / Existing Controls have been implemented by the University. You must read and understand the University Covid-19 Risk Assessment. Note, this document is under review, so please check it for updates. You / your department may also have controls that *are already in place*. If so, you can add them here. Additional controls yet to be implemented / measure that are planned are added in the Additional Controls section, below.	☒ Yes ☐ No
3. **Instruments or equipment** that may be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 that individuals can be exposed to / come into contact with.	Current / Existing Controls have been implemented by the University. You must read and understand the University Covid-19 Risk Assessment. Note, this document is under review, so please check it for updates. You / your department may also have controls that *are already in place*. If so, you can add them here.	☒ Yes ☐ No

Hazard	Controls and Safe System of Work	Additional Controls Required?
	Additional controls yet to be implemented / measure that are planned are added in the Additional Controls section, below.	
4. **Environment** that promotes the spreading of SARS-CoV-2 such that individuals may get infected.	Current / Existing Controls have been implemented by the University. You must read and understand the University Covid-19 Risk Assessment. Note, this document is under review, so please check it for updates. You / your department may also have controls that *are already in place*. If so, you can add them here. Additional controls yet to be implemented / measure that are planned are added in the Additional Controls section, below.	☒ Yes ☐ No

Evaluate the risks and decide on Additional Controls – What is required to mitigate this risk further?

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
1. **People** that are infected with SARS-CoV-2 (knowingly or unknowingly) who can pass it on to others. **People** that are exposed to / come into contact with other individuals who may be carrying SARS-CoV-2.	***Restricting Movements of People*** ✦ Where a person is clinically extremely vulnerable, they will not be asked to undertake fieldwork on, but continue to work from home where they are able to do so. ✦ Any individual showing any symptoms of the virus (a recent onset of a persistent cough and / or a high temperature and / or a loss of taste / smell), must not undertake fieldwork and must self-isolate at home. ○ The individual must inform their Line Manager immediately at the onset of any symptoms. ○ The Line Manager must immediately follow the University's reporting procedure for individuals who are or suspected of being infected with SARS-CoV-2 ***Substituting the People*** ✦ Where an individual is essential for completion of a task, however it is not appropriate for them to be out of their home (they have been identified as clinically	Sara Carder with immediate effect. N/A	Sara is not classed as a high-risk or vulnerable. However, should I show symptoms I would stop all fieldwork immediately and follow the controls as outlined in this risk assessment. Update (05.11.20) This remains the same

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
	extremely vulnerable), consider assigning the tasks to other individuals, where possible; ***Engineering Controls for People*** ✦ None. ***Administrative Controls for People*** ✦ Line Managers should host a short weekly meeting where individuals can discuss the success or failure of controls and any concerns they have about the fieldwork. Time should be allocated to discuss the mental health and wellbeing of individuals. Line Managers must address any causes where possible, or signpost individuals to resources and support mechanisms provided by the University. ✦ A general induction on the new way of working will be provided by Safety Services, which all staff and students must undertake. ✦ Line Managers must provide training and information to their staff and students in the specifics of the risk assessment and any other procedures or measures, such as the below: ✦ Reinforcement of social distancing measures at all times. ✦ Reinforce frequent handwashing requirements (use soap and water for 20 seconds or hand sanitiser where hand washing facilities are not available). ✦ All staff must read relevant risk assessments and must be aware of new control measures. ✦ Line Managers must ensure that the number of individuals each person has contact with is minimised by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others).	N/A Sara Carder and primary supervisor Dr Laura Cook.	This will continue to be discussed weekly between researcher and supervisor as well as in supervision. Both field sites (local authority agencies at Colchester and Chelsea) also have specific safe working policies in relation to Covid-19. Sara will adhere to these when on site. Update (05.11.20): In response to the second lockdown both local authority agencies have reviewed an updated their risk assessments. Sara will adhere to these whilst on site.

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
	○ Individuals are not to meet, socialise or otherwise congregate with others outside of their 'fixed team', nor visit other places unless for *essential* work. ○ Where possible, contact with others should be made remotely using phones and / or videoconferencing. ✦ Line Managers to ensure that working times of individuals are arranged to prevent crowding and gatherings. ✦ Increase communication and enforce safety rules. ✦ Include unsafe acts or breaches of social distancing in disciplinary procedures. ✦ Publicise the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). ***PPE*** ✦ People must continue to use PPE for existing work activities where a risk assessment has identified PPE is required to control residual risk. No additional PPE is required to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in these circumstances. See the guidance document for further information.	Sara Carder – with immediate effect	Sara will wear a mask on public transport to and from the field sites. Hand sanitiser will be regularly applied. Sara will keep to the socially distanced rules when in the office and will also adhere to the field sites own PPE rules. Update (05.11.20): Sara will wear a mask within the local authority sites when not seated an at an allocated desk. This is in line with updated guidance and risk assessments within the local authority agencies.
2. **Activities** that cause individuals to be exposed to / come into contact with others who may be carrying SARS-CoV-2.	***Eliminating the Activity*** ✦ Where a task or process presents a significant risk such as a manual handling or other tasks such as sample collection where individuals must work in close proximity, consideration should be given to cancelling the process or task. ✦ Where fieldwork requires interaction with lots of people or working in a public space where lots of	Sara Carder – with immediate effect.	Data gathering activities include observations both virtually and physically. Data collection will be conducted virtually where possible. Where in-person data collection is necessary Sara will maintain the social distance rules at all times. The field sites have their own risk

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
	people could be present and social distancing cannot be maintained, consideration should be given to cancelling the process or task. ***Substituting the Activity*** ✦ Where a task or process presents a significant risk such as a manual handling or other tasks such as sample collection where individuals must work in close proximity, consideration shall be given to using equipment to allow social distancing such as mechanical aids. ✦ Certain pieces of equipment may also require individuals to work closer than social distancing allows. Consideration should be given to using alternative methods/processes to achieve the same outcome. ✦ Where fieldwork requires interaction with lots of people or working in a public space where lots of people could be present and social distancing cannot be maintained, consideration should be given to conducting the work remotely, virtually (e.g. videoconferencing), or at a different time. ***Engineering Controls for the Activity*** ✦ Set up tape barriers, rope off or mark out areas to allow 2 meters of space from others where a particular task is conducted to enforce social distancing. ***Administrative Controls for the Activity*** ✦ Restrict the length of time individuals are working together or in areas occupied but other people, limit this to essential tasks only. Work that can be socially distanced, must be done socially distanced.	Sara Carder – with immediate effect. Sara Carder – with immediate effect. Sara Carder – with immediate effect.	assessments in place, which includes a reduction of staff in any one place. This limits the possibility of being in close contact with large amounts of people at any one time. If the risks increase at any time, data gathering can revert to virtual spaces. The need to revert to virtual data collection will be regularly reviewed by Sara and her supervisor in relation to a) current government guidance b) UEA's guidance and c) the guidance of Essex County Council and the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Updated (05.11.20): This remains the same. Both local authority agencies continue to support Sara physically attending the offices during the second lockdown provided that the necessary risk assessments are in place and guidance is followed. Field work is limited to 3 hours maximum. Sara's own equipment will be used and this will be regularly sanitised Update (05.11.20) This remains the same

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
	✦ When conducting tasks or processes that involve the handling and transfer of items from one individual to another, social distancing must be maintained. ○ Use a put down and walk away procedure, so that the other person can safely pick up the item. ***PPE*** PPE must continue to be used for existing work activities where a risk assessment has identified PPE is required to control residual risk. No additional PPE is required to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in these circumstances. See the guidance document for further information.	Sara Carder – with immediate effect.	PPE will be used in line with the field sites own risk assessments and guidance. Update (05.11.20) This remains the same
3. **Instruments or equipment** that may be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 that individuals can be exposed to / come into contact with.	***Eliminating the Instrument or Equipment*** ✦ Certain pieces of equipment will require individuals to work closer than social distancing allows. Consideration should be given to ceasing use of this equipment. ***Substituting the Instrument or Equipment*** ✦ Equipment / clothing that can increase the likelihood of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 may be substituted for alternative equipment or methods. ***Engineering Controls for the Equipment*** ✦ Set up tape barriers/rope off areas/mark out areas to allow 2 meters of space where a piece of equipment is used to enforce social distancing. ✦ Move equipment to allow 2 meters of space from other people. ***Administrative Controls for the Equipment*** ✦ Wipe down all equipment before and after use with an effective detergent / disinfectant that is suitable	N/A Sara Carder – with immediate effect Sara Carder – with immediate effect	Clothes will be changed at the earliest opportunity and washed after visiting the field sites. Update (05.11.20) This remains the same Data collection activities, including observations and interviews will be conducted with the socially distanced rules in place. If there are increased risks, then the data collection will be undertaken virtually using video conferencing. Update (05.11.20)

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
	for the equipment / environment it is being used in, if it will be handled by another person. ✦ Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitiser before and after using the equipment, if it will be handled by another person. ✦ Line Mangers shall ensure that hand washing facilities or hand sanitiser is always available. ✦ Consider limiting the use of, or assigning communal equipment to individuals or groups where possible. ***PPE*** PPE must continue to be used for existing work with instruments / equipment where a risk assessment has identified PPE is required to control residual risk. No additional PPE is required to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in these circumstances. See the guidance document for further information.		In addition to the above, Sara will wear a mask when moving around the office space.
4. **Environment** that promotes the spreading of SARS-CoV-2 such that individuals may get infected.	***Eliminating the Environment*** ✦ This is not possible, it should be assumed that the SARS-CoV-2 may be present in all areas. ***Substituting the Environment*** ✦ Where an area is too small or crowded to allow for safe working with social distancing a different area should be used for critical work. ***Engineering Controls for the Environment*** ✦ Set up a physical barrier (tape, rope, barrier) to enforce social distancing of 2 meters. ***Administrative Controls for the Environment*** ✦ Assess the maximum number of individuals that are likely to be in an area at any one time to ensure that social distancing measures can be met. When carrying out this assessment you should consider:	Sara Carder – with immediate effect. Sara Carder – with immediate effect. Sara Carder – with immediate effect.	Protective measures will be put in place as outlined above. If the risks increase to Sara or others are suspected of getting COVID, then the field work will continue virtually. If social distancing measures cannot be safely put in place, then Sara will conduct the data collection virtually. In both sites, Sara will work with the team managers to find a space

Hazard	Additional Controls Required	Implemented by whom & by when?	Control(s) in place and effective?
	○ Where people are likely to be ○ Transit routes through or around the area ○ Obstacles ○ Access to places / things of interest. ✦ Individuals should not work face-to-face, back-to-back working is preferable. Where this cannot be achieved individuals should work side-to-side, but only where absolutely necessary. ✦ Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser, before and after work. ✦ Use storage facilities separate from equipment and others to store personal clothing and items. ***PPE*** PPE must continue to be used for existing work with instruments / equipment where a risk assessment has identified PPE is required to control residual risk. No additional PPE is required to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in these circumstances. See the guidance document for further information.	Sara Carder – with immediate effect.	to observe that adheres to the socially distanced requirements. Update (05.11.20) This remains the same

Details of the person assessing the risk

Risk assessor's name:	Laura Cook and Sara Carder
Risk assessor's position:	Lecturer in Social Work, Sara Carder's PhD Supervisor.

Appendix D: Covid-19 risk assessment, supplementary information

Government guidance:	Interpretation
New National restrictions 1. Stay at home, except for specific purposes. 2. Avoid meeting people you do not live with, except for specific purposes. 3. Close certain businesses and venues.	My request to leave my home is for a specific purpose, that being, to complete one more office observation as part of my ethnographic study is for my PhD
1. Staying at home You must not leave or be outside of your home except for specific purposes. These include: **Work and volunteering** You can leave home for work purposes, or to provide voluntary or charitable services, where you cannot do this from home. **Education and childcare** You can leave home for education (formal provision, rather than extracurricular classes such as music or drama tuition), training	My observation is part of my PhD work, the physical observation cannot be achieved without leaving my home. I would be leaving my home for educational purposes
2. Meeting others safely In general, you must not meet people socially. However, you can exercise or meet in a public, outdoors space with people you live with, your support bubble (or as part of a childcare bubble), or with one other person. You should minimise time spent outside your home. When around other people, stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household - meaning the people you live with - or your support bubble. Where this is not possible, stay 1 metre apart with extra precautions (e.g. wearing a face covering).	I would not be meeting people on a social basis, but on an educational/work basis. I would maintain a 2 meter distance during the office observation and would be wearing a face mask and regularly sanitizing. The organisation in which I will be observing also have their own risk assessments and precautions in place.
3. Where and when you can meet in larger groups There are still circumstances in which you are allowed to meet others from outside your household or support bubble in larger groups, but this should not be for socialising. A full list of these circumstances can be found in the regulations.	I would be in proximity to a larger group, but this would not be for the purposes of socialising. The reason for coming into closer proximity to a larger group is for the purposes of work and formal education or training.

The main reasons are for work, voluntary or charitable services, and formal education or training (as opposed to extracurricular classes).	
4. Businesses and venues Public Services The majority of public services will continue and you will be able to leave home to visit them.	The organisation in which I will be observing is a public service (a local authority building)
5. Going to work To help contain the virus, everyone who can work effectively from home must do so. Where people cannot do so - including, but not limited to, people who work in critical national infrastructure, construction, or manufacturing - they should continue to travel to their workplace.	I am undertaking an ethnographic study which includes physical observations. The team in which I am observing are still physically going into the office and therefore a virtual observation of this practice from home would not be possible.
11. Travel If you live in England, you cannot travel overseas or within the UK, unless for work, education or other legally permitted reasons, and you should look to reduce the number of journeys you make. However you can and should still travel for a number of reasons, including: • travelling to work where this cannot be done from home • travelling to education and for caring responsibilities If you need to travel we encourage you to walk or cycle where possible, and to plan ahead and avoid busy times and routes on public transport. This will allow you to practise social distancing while you travel. If you need to use public transport - to travel to work for example - you should follow the safer travel guidance. This includes the rules on wearing face coverings and advice on car sharing.	I would be travelling for the purposes of work/education in the context of my PhD. I would be travelling by train and following safer travel guidance which includes wearing a face mask throughout the journey.

Ref: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november

Appendix E: Local Authority general information sheet

Local Authority Information Sheet

Research Question:

How do teams support child and family social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice?

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the day to day activities, relationships and interactions within the team environment support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work. By identifying what factors support the emotional demands on social workers from the perspective of those who are directly engaged in the work, the findings from this study will inform the support provided to social workers and may contribute towards a conceptual framework for training, team development and organisational learning.

What will I be asking of you?

If you agree to take part in this study, I will be asking you to identify and seek agreement from a frontline child and family team, engaged in child protection work, who are willing for me to:

1. Observe everyday practice based within the team 'office' once a week for up to three hours over a six-week period. This will involve me observing the daily activities, relationships and interactions that constitute the life of the team.
2. Conduct one semi-structured interview with each of the social workers and their managers in the team. Interviews will last up to one hour. The interviews will focus on social workers individual perceptions of how their team supports social workers to manage the emotional demands of their work.
3. Facilitate one focus group with the same team of social work practitioners (excluding managers), lasting no longer than 90 minutes. The focus group will consist of prompted open ended questions and facilitated group exercise to explore how participants collectively experience their team and how it supports the emotional demands of the work.

What are the benefits of taking part?

It is anticipated that the team's contribution will provide valuable insights into how teams support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work. The study will also provide individuals and the team with opportunities to reflect on what works well for them and their aspirations for the team in the future. A seminar of the

research findings will be offered to each participating local authority when the research is complete.

How your team's contribution will be used?

The study is not an evaluation of specific practice and findings will not be disaggregated by team, instead, the data will be used to analyse the themes and patterns of how teams support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work across two local authorities. As well as the completion of a thesis, the findings will be used by the researcher when presenting at academic conferences, workshops and when writing publications. All identifying names, places and other details will be removed or changed so that no individual participants, teams or agencies will be identified.

Confidentiality and storage of data

All data will be stored in line with GDPR 2019 guidelines and the Data Protection Act 2018. Electronic data and images will be anonymized and stored securely on a password protected computer. Anonymity of the two participating local authorities and teams will be maintained wherever possible. However, should information be obtained during data collection which indicates either risk to the participant or those in receipt of services, or professional misconduct, the information would be passed to the relevant organisation and/or regulatory body. In the unlikely event that this should occur, the decision to pass on information would be discussed with the participant and the local authority where possible.

The right to withdraw.

Involvement in this research study is voluntary and individual participants have a right to withdraw up to two weeks after each of the data collection points described. After two weeks it will not be possible to withdraw the data as analysis will have started and the data will have been anonymised. This is done by contacting the researcher either by telephone or email.

Who is doing the research?

Sara Carder PhD Researcher. School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ, Email: s.carder@uea.ac.uk, tel: 07555803750.

My principal supervisors are:
Dr Laura L. Cook. School of Social Work, School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ, Email: l.cook@uea.ac.uk

Professor Marian Brandon. School of Social Work, School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ, Email: m.brandon@uea.ac.uk

Any concerns about this this research can be directed to:
Professor Jonathan Dickens. Head of School. School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ. Email: j.dickens@uea.ac.uk.

Appendix F: Team Briefing

Hi everyone, thank you for letting me come to your team meeting.

Introduction

My name is Sara Carder. I am a researcher at the University of East Anglia in the school of social work. It would be great if you could introduce yourselves and your role in the team?

The study

Amy would have told you a bit about my research already, but just to briefly explain, I am looking at how Teams support social workers with the emotional demands of child protection work.

We know child protection work is emotionally demanding and on top of this COVID-19 came along. What is interesting is the literature talks a lot about the importance of individual resilience in social workers to manage this, with less about the role of the team. I believe looking at where, when and how wider emotional support is available to social workers and how the team support each other is missing from research and I want to fill this gap by working with you over a period of 3 months.

The process

Information will be gathered in 3 stages. Team observations, then individual interviews, then one group interview. I am going to explain the observation stage in more detail now and then I will come back to you after this stage is complete to go through the process and seek your consent for the interviews.

I will begin with observing team interactions. This would be in formal and informal settings in virtual and physical spaces. You wouldn't have to do anything differently, although I appreciate my presence may feel a little odd. I would not be observing any direct work with children or families and will not record any names of identifying information. I will not be audio recording any observations. However, if I observe or hear practice deemed to be unsafe for you or others, I do have a duty to inform the relevant manager which I will notify you of. I may take brief notes while observing but would keep these to a minimum. Any write ups of the observation later would be completely anonymised. I hope to have on average 3 hours of observations over 6 weeks, but this is flexible and needs to work around you as a team. I would like to ask you in a bit where these opportunities might be.

Consent

Consent is essential. Before anything can start, I need to be clear that you want to participate in the observations and that you feel under no pressure either way. I have asked the team manager for a list of your email addresses so I can email you separately with a consent form that asks if you want to participate or not. It also asks for some basic information about you so that I have a better understanding of the make-up of the team. You are also welcome to email me with any additional questions or queries that may come up after today.

If you do not want to participate in the observations, there is no pressure. I will:

- Let the team know in advance what I will be observing and when
- Make sure I do to attend or observe everything so as not to interrupt your engagement
- If you are present, I will not record or make notes directly linked to you.

Any questions?

Planning

It would be good to hear from you where you meet as a team formally and informally, both in physical and virtual spaces and what might be helpful for me to observe without interrupting your work? (Refer to table below).

	Physical space		Virtual space	
	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
Week 1				
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				
Week 5				
Week 6				

Email addresses for consent: (Type in message bar)

Name	**Role**	**Email address**

Appendix G: Participant information sheet, consent form and demographics

Participant information sheet and consent form

Research Question:

How do teams support child and family social workers to manage the emotional demands of practice?

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the day to day activities, relationships and interactions within the team environment support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work. By identifying what factors support the emotional demands on social workers from the perspective of those who are directly engaged in the work, the findings from this study will inform the support provided to social workers and may contribute towards a conceptual framework for training, team development and organisational learning.

What is involved in taking part?

The study involves three stages. Your consent to participate will be sought at each stage:

Stage 1: The study will start with an observation of everyday practice within your team. I will observe the team on six occasions over a six-week period for up to three hours each time. This will involve me locating myself within your office and other communal areas. I will observe the daily activities, relationships and interactions of the team. You do not need to do anything differently when I am there. You will be aware of my presence, but I will try not to disrupt your day to day practice. I may make a few short notes or ask clarifying questions, but I will keep these to a minimum.

Stage 2: After the observations have been completed, I will seek consent to interview each social worker and their manager in the team. The interviews will last up to one hour. During the interview I will ask you what it is like to work in your team, and you will be invited to share your ideas on how your team supports social workers to manage the emotional demands of their work. I will contact you by email to arrange a convenient time for your interview.

Stage 3: Once the interviews have been completed there will be a one-off focus group lasting no more than 90 minutes, involving qualified social workers in the team but will exclude management to ensure a focus on those in frontline practice. The focus group will consist of prompted open ended questions and a facilitated visual group exercise to explore how participants collectively experience their team and how it supports social workers to manage the emotional demands of the work. I will contact you by email to invite you to the focus group.

What are the benefits of taking part and how will my information be used?

Your contribution will provide valuable insights into how teams support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work. The study will also provide individuals and the team with opportunities to reflect on what works well for them and their aspirations for their team in the future. Your contribution will provide a practitioner voice within academic research and will help to inform social work training and development processes. The findings from the study will be used for an academic thesis, journal articles, conference papers and workshops.

Are there any drawbacks to participating?

You may feel uncomfortable about being observed or worried that something you do or say may reflect on your practice. It is important to note that this study is not an evaluation of practice but will be used to explore themes and patterns of how teams support social workers to manage the emotional demands of child protection social work across two local authorities. If you have any worries or questions about any part of the study, you can either approach me in person or contact me via email during any stage in the process.

How will my information be stored?

All the information you provide will be stored in line with GDPR 2019 guidelines and the Data Protection Act 2018. During the observation phase I will write some notes on a notepad. These notes will not contain any information such as names, that could identify any individual or team. Handwritten data will be transferred on to a word document and the initials will be replaced with pseudonyms. The word document will be stored on an encrypted memory stick and will be immediately uploaded on to the University secure server.

Confidentiality

Electronic data and images will be anonymized and stored securely on a password protected computer. Anonymity of the two participating local authorities and teams will be maintained wherever possible. However, should information be obtained during data collection which indicates either risk to the participant or those in receipt of services, or professional misconduct, the information would be passed to the relevant organisation

and/or regulatory body Social Work England. In the unlikely event that this should occur, the decision to pass on information would be discussed with the participant and the local authority where possible.

Do I have to participate? Can I change my mind later?

Participation in the research is voluntary. Consent will be sought at each stage of the project. If you do decide to take part, you are free to withdraw from the study up to two weeks after providing consent. You can do this by contacting the researchers. After two weeks it will not be possible to withdraw the data will have been anonymised and the analysis will have started.

Contact information:
The person undertaking this research:
Sara Carder PhD Researcher. School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ, Email: s.carder@uea.ac.uk, tel: 07555803750.

Consent form:

I have read the information above and agree to take part in the observation/interview/team group interview stage(s) of the study (please tick):

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Name……..

Signature …….....

Email address……

Date ……..

Demographic information:

Participant name	
Age	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Local authority	
Team	
Current job role/title	
Type and year of qualification	
Length of service in current team	

Appendix H: Individual interview schedule

- Interview will be no longer than 60 minutes.
- The interview can be stopped, paused, or ended at any time.
- The interview will be audio recorded but not video recorded.
- Confirm video on or off.
- Remind participant of the research question.

Research Question: How do teams support social workers to manage the emotional demands of the work?

1. **Please describe what it is like to work in your team**

(Prompts)

- What words would you use to describe your team and why?
- What is unique or different about your team?
- Beyond professional titles, what roles do you and others adopt in your team?
- If a new social worker started, what would they notice about the team?
- How would colleagues in your wider organisation describe your team?
- Are there any views held by your local community or wider society about social work that impacts on your team's experiences?

2. **In what ways do your team support each other to manage the emotional demands of the work?**

(Prompts)

- What are the emotional demands experienced in your day to day work?
- Where and how are emotions experienced and expressed within your team?
- Are some emotions expressed more than others in your team?
- Can you describe any barriers to the team supporting you with the emotional demands of your work?
- What has been the greatest emotional challenge you have experienced whilst working in this team and what helped you to manage this?
- How does the team recognise and respond to emotional demands of the work?
- Can you think of a time when the support offered by the team has not matched what you needed?
- What has been your greatest sense of achievement whilst working in this team, what contributed to this sense of achievement?

Debrief:

- Signpost to support services if required (wider MH charities)
- employee assistance programme which is 08003281437- we are moving to new provider shortly so they may not be able to access support immediately but they also have access to mental health first aiders including myself.
- Ask how they found the interview, check they are OK
- Remind them of the group interview.

Appendix I: Team group interview schedule

Timing	Activity
10am	Housekeeping • Consent (audio, not video, right to withdraw). • Timings: up to 90 minutes, broken in to three sections, will explain more in a moment. • Confidentiality (ground rules, anonymised, I will transcribe) • Technology (cameras on, mute off, confidential space, emails/phones silent, chat off) • **(NOTE: keep to time)**
10.05	Introduction and structure • How do teams support social workers with the emotional demands of the work? • In order to answer this question, the first part of the group team interviews I will share with you two broad, reoccurring themes that came up during the observations and the individual interviews. We will spend about 20 minutes on each where I will be encouraging your collective thoughts and reflections on these. • During the second part of the team group interview I am going to ask you to think together as a group and work on a short activity for 20 mins with 10 mins feedback, again as a way of seeking to answer the RQ. • Purpose of team group interview (Important to capture your individual and collective voices.) • Expectation – to encourage and hear you talk to each other about what you think and to share your ideas with each other. Don't worry about muting or putting your hands up as we try to recreate as near to a conversation and discussion as possible in this virtual space. • For the purposes of the audio, could you please say your name and your role in the team.
10.10	Theme 1: **The team presents as more than the sum of its parts** During the observations and interviews, there is a strong theme that Everyone's individualness and difference actually brings something unique and of value to the team as a whole. I'm really interested to hear from you as a group • What are the strengths of this in terms of support? • What are the vulnerabilities or challenges this can bring? During the observations and interviews I was struck by the ways in which being personal and professional played a role in the team. I'm curious to hear from you, when is the team a professional space and when is it a personal space? • What have the strengths been of this for you as a team? • What are some of the challenges?
10.30	Theme 2: **This is a sought-after team, and one people want to get in to**

	During the observations and interviews it was apparent that this is a team that people want to be a part of, I'm curious to hear from you as a team, • What are the day to day things that make this so? • How does it feel to be in a team people want to be a part of? • What are the sorts of challenges or pressures this can create?
10.40	Group activity: **Replicating what works** • You are a team within an 'Outstanding' Local Authority, in a sought after team. • Appreciating that your team is unique to you, including the people that make up the team, the setting and the environment • If another team wanted to learn from you about team support what would you tell them? • With this question in mind, I want to invite you to talk together as a group to consider a team blueprint of key factors to give them.
11.00	Group feedback: • And the final point to end on. Given everything we have talked about, what are your collective aspirations for the team now and in the future?
15 mins	Final thoughts and ending: • Thank you • What next. I will be transcribing the recorded team interview which will then contribute towards the findings of my thesis and may also be shared at academic seminars, conferences and may be published in academic journals. • I will send you an A4 briefing outlining the findings of my research towards the end of the PhD and also invite you all to an online event at the University in which I will further share the findings of the study. • Reiterate that they can contact me directly if they have any questions or concerns

Appendix J: Amended ethics approval Letter re: transcription

University of East Anglia

School of Social Work
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of East Anglia
Elizabeth Fry Building
Research Park
Norwich
Norfolk NR4 7TJ

19.01.21

Dear Sara,

As Chair of the SWK-REC I have considered the application for an amendment to your research project, involving seeking consent from participants to use an external transcription service. Your amendment has considered the issues of gaining informed consent, and the GDPR implications of using the transcription service.

I am satisfied that both issues have been adequately addressed and am therefore happy to approve the amendment by Chair's action.

It continues to be a requirement of your approval that you should report any adverse events that may have occurred, these being defined as "any unanticipated problem involving risk to subjects which ultimately results in harm to the subject or others".

If you subsequently need to make any other significant changes to your study, you should also contact me again.

With best wishes for the successful completion of your research,

Yours sincerely

Dr Georgia Philip
Chair of SWK Ethics Committee

Appendix K: Participant permission to use transcription services

Dear,

Thank you for your involvement in my research study thus far, exploring how teams support child and family social workers with the emotional demands of their work. Despite the challenging impact of Covid-19 on participants time and availability I have been very fortunate to have collected a large amount of rich data through the team observations and individual interviews. Now that the interviews are complete, the next task is to transcribe and analyse this data prior to the third and final stage of data collection which is the team group interviews. Transcription and analysis take time and I am mindful of not wanting to leave too long a gap before coming back to you as a team.

I am therefore writing to ask for your consent to use an external transcription service provider called 'Transcript Divas'. The process would include sending Transcript Divas the original, (and thus, not anonymised) audio recording of your interview via their online portal. As part of their GDPR security and confidentiality agreement, the information is uploaded and stored by their UK based team using UK encryption processes. The service complies with the University of East Anglia's data security policy and aligns with ethics approval requirements and the GDPR. More information about the service can be found on their website transcriptdivas.co.uk.

If you consent to the use of the transcription service, your interview will be sent to Transcription Divas via the process outlined above. The completed transcription would then be returned via their secure online portal and saved directly on the University Onedrive system which is only accessible to me and my supervisory team. I will then anonymise the transcript and the audio recording will be erased.

If you do not give consent for the use of a transcription service, your information will still be included in the analysis, I will personally transcribe and anonymise the audio recording. The completed transcript will then be saved on the University Onedrive system as described above and the audio recording erased.

Could you please confirm whether you do or do not consent to the above by way of return email, indicating one of the following two options:

A. I have read the email below and agree to my interview data being transcribed by Transcript Divas
B. I have read the email below and do not agree to my interview data being transcribed by Transcript Divas.

If you wish to speak to me before deciding, then please do email me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Appendix L: Themes generated under each of the Listening Guide headings

Individual interviews: Team 1& 2: **Reading Three** (the 'we' in the relational landscape)

Groups and connections (T1)

(Inside/outside, personal/professional)

- Personal sub groups: friendship, close knit, tactile, strong bond, religious support.
- Professional sub groups: Authoritative/good manager, over protective, wider org support, collocated teams.
- External sub groups: Hierarchy, the 'other', agendas, blame, them and us.
- Team as....family, team sport, jigsaw, in our groove

Groups and connections (T2)

(Inside/outside, personal/professional)

- Personal sub groups: friendships, family, social gatherings, in/out groups, prominent figures complex dynamics
- Professional sub groups: Marmite manager, expectation, sister teams, wider org support,
- External sub groups: resonances, well regarded, butting heads, power, privilege, class, control, assumptions, prejudice
- Team as... family, bubble, ring fenced, belonging

Moral team voices (T1)

- Mutual respect
- Shared pride
- Acknowledging difference
- You are never alone (not seen in T2)

Moral team voice (T2)

- We are human
- No weak links
- Love language
- Trust
- Kindness
- Acknowledging difference
- Containment and privacy

Team values and norms (T1)

- Sharing: Responsibility, accountability, knowledge, practical advice, understanding, support, pressure, laughter, food and drink, venting and ranting.
- Recognition, collective, corporate, strengths, struggles
- Visibility, of manager, reading each other inc body language, seeing faces, showing care
- Availability, checking in, connection, approachable
- Listening, making time and really listening
- Having conversations, always someone to talk to, individual and team conversations

Team values and norms (T2)

- Sharing, crapness, humour, resources, knowledge, advice, learning, accomplishments, responsibility, moaning, practical support and history
- Recognition, Flagship team, (much less than T1)
- Visibility, seeing faces, noticing, being noticed, watching, check ins
- Availability, approachable, approaching, time together, making an effort
- Listening, being heard, reflection,
- Having conversations, being silenced, vocalising, uncomfortable convos, corridor convos
- Role fulfilment, the glue, performing empathy, the go between, the instigator, the bridge, the therapist, scapegoating, port of call,

Interviews: Team 1& 2: **Reading Four** (Wider processes, structures and narratives)

Systems, processes, structures (T1)

- Technical systems – ticking boxes, statistics, measures, system blocks
- Bureaucratic systems – procedures, thresholds, paperwork, timescales,
- Networked systems – staff turnover, transfers, diversity, caring corporation, integration
- Learning and development systems – formal training, versatility, individual coping

Professional narrative (T1)

- Pressure - long hours, fast paced, judgement, adrenaline, being watched, contradictions, anxiety, the unknown, hard job, reputation
- Power – conflict, enforcer, rights vs risk, support vs state, having to battle, lack of power
- Exposure – to abuse, crisis, raw, trauma, first at the door, we are the shock
- Stoicism – it is what it is, norms, that sw life, the nature of the work
- Thankless – lack of appreciation/recognition, undervalued, assumptions, stigma

Public/Cultural narrative (T1)

- Hated profession
- 'bad' social workers
- Media perception and paranoia, bad press
- Child snatches, stealing children,
- Uncaring, lack understanding
- Politicised
- Ofsted
- austerity

COVID (T1)

- Not normal, before and after, No clap, lockdown, no hero, strange new world

Systems, processes structures (T2)

- Technical systems – KPI culture, ticking boxes, stats, performance
- Bureaucratic systems – oppressive systems, thresholds, caseload, organisational demands
- Learning and development systems – systemic perspectives, frontline, got the certificates
- Networked systems – recruitment and retention, ethnicity and racism, lack of males and neglectful mothers,

Professional narrative (T2)

- Pressure - Ofsted, high profile cases, tragedies can silence, mistakes under the microscope, firefighting, fer, anxiety, blame and judgement, panorama, internal scrutiny
- Power – support vs control, power, oppression, weaponised, responsibility to fix, knocking down barriers
- Hidden – invisible and hidden profession
- Stoicism – it is what it is, macho culture, off they go, no anger we are British, living with it. No fairyland
- Thankless – Unvalued, thankless, lack of recognition.
- Different reality – more time, less busy, low caseloads, unrelatable

Public/Cultural narrative (T2)

- Media sensationalising, and scandals
- Child snatchers, punitive, scary, untrustworthy
- Political agendas and social movements
- Resource rich and flash with the cash
- Wealth disparity and class

COVID (T2)

- An odd year

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