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First-stage development of a Team as Secure Base questionnaire using a Delphi study

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ABSTRACT

Teams help mitigate emotional demands in high-stake professions, like social work. Providing a secure base fosters trust, giving individuals confidence to work competently and provide effective care for service users. The Team as Secure Base model (TASB) proposes that team availability, reliability and sensitivity promote reassuring internal mental representations that the team can be supportive in adversity. Creating secure base teams is of interest to organisations as identifying and articulating team issues is challenging. It is unknown whether the TASB framework reflects perceptions of secure base function in wider work teams. Creating a TASB measure could help establish this evidence. The Delphi method was employed developing initial questions for a TASB questionnaire, measuring Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Co-operation and Team Membership. Across three phases, social work experts provided qualitative and quantitative data of items evaluating content validity. The final questionnaire (n207 items) conceptually captured five TASB dimensions for supervisors and co-workers.

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Team as Secure Base; social work; emotional demands; Delphi method

Introduction

Helping professions, such as child and family social work (CFSW), aim to provide high-quality compassionate care to support family functioning and protect children from harm (Bywaters et al., 2020). Social workers deal with difficult circumstances, such as family trauma, which can impact their own emotional state (McFadden et al., 2015). Sometimes, these emotions can be overpowering, resulting in poor emotion regulation and reduced capacity to cope and make decisions (Pabst et al., 2013).

Multiple factors buffer negative effects of occupational stressors on emotion regulation (Leahy et al., 2011). One job resource is social support, which has a positive relationship with physical and psychological wellbeing (Jolly et al., 2021). Social support, usually in the form of work teams, helps coping by colleagues and supervisors being available and attentive to individual needs which positively predicts wellbeing and work performance (Nielsen et al., 2017). Individuals tend to positively approach work-related challenges when they believe they have a supporting network they can rely on to help process

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emotions and thoughts during difficult times (Ruch, 2007). We define team as two or more individuals relating interdependently and collaboratively to accomplish a shared goal (West et al., 2005), particularly focusing on employee discretionary effort towards team goals rather than effort due to organisational compliance (Korsgaard et al., 2005).

The Team as Secure Base model offers a framework for understanding how team environments can promote emotion regulation using Attachment Theory principles. The model was developed from research exploring what factors helped sustain social workers working in England. The model resonates with social worker lived experience and has been used in the UK Department of Education's Practice Supervisor Development Programme and highlights the importance of team and line manager support (Biggart et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2020).

Developing Bowlby's (1988) original attachment theory in children, Shaver and Mikulincer (2002) found in adults that a secure attachment improves security-based emotion management strategies. A secure attachment can reduce distress, improve adaptation to change through flexible coping mechanisms and support intimate relationships. Secure attachments develop and maintain a set of beliefs about the world (internal working model) in which others are reliable, sensitive, non-judgemental, collaborative and inclusive. Such beliefs can preserve self-efficacy, resilience and optimism even when key attachment figures are not present or social support is not available (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004).

Mayseless (2010), hypothesised that leaders often fall into the category of significant attachment figures during adult life, due to the sense of security and safety that they provide for team members, especially in challenging contexts. Popper and Mayseless (2003) proposed that leaders would meet attachment figure criteria if they were sensitive to their employees' needs, supported autonomy and praised success. Such behaviours would encourage employees to seek their support and guidance when tackling problems and feel reassured by the support that leaders provide (Kahn, 1993).

Team members also influence individual emotional experiences (Druskat et al., 2018). When team emotions are effectively contained, this leads to higher quality social interactions and better collective outcomes (Huy, 1999). Research has identified that emotion is triggered within teams due to unconscious social needs stimulated when people enter groups, with three primary social needs being, belonging, recognition and acceptance, as a unique and valued team member, shared understanding and control (Druskat et al., 2017; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004).

Druskat et al. (2017) claimed that emotionally intelligent norms can construct a team culture that meets a team's social and emotional requirements, which results in productive social and emotional environments that boost team effectiveness. Within these social and emotional environments, they explained that there are two motivational systems that play a role in team effectiveness, these being team psychological safety (Frazier et al., 2017) and team efficacy (Gibson & Earley, 2007).

Team psychological safety refers to cognitive and affective states of a team that are defined by how much the team's social environment facilitates taking interpersonal risks, where a higher tendency and willingness to take interpersonal risks encourage questioning, seeking feedback and discussing mistakes, which contribute to team effectiveness and learning (Edmondson, 1999). Team efficacy arises when team members collectively believe that they are competent and can perform tasks effectively. Here, teams seek to

understand strengths and weaknesses of team members, discuss team's past experiences and exchange information about one another to develop a shared sense of team potential (Gibson, 1999). With these underlying motivational systems, Druskat et al. (2017) proposed six team emotional intelligence norms that were thought to meet the basic social and emotional needs of a team, these included interpersonal understanding, confronting members who break norms, team self-evaluation, proactive problem-solving, organisational understanding and building external relations.

Some of these social norms could be promoted by five behavioural dimensions of the Team as Secure Base (TASB) framework of Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Cooperation and Team membership, which provide emotional support for individual team members (Biggart et al., 2017). The Team as Secure Base model was developed from qualitative analysis of interviews with child and family social workers and adapted Schofield and Beek's (2014) Secure Base model to an adult social work context for managers and teams. The model's presence and relevance in social work teams is supported in Cook et al. (2020) study exploring the impact of virtual social work.

The first TASB dimension, 'Availability' refers to the manager and team being emotionally and physically available to needs of individual team members in times of need. When individuals feel their needs are met consistently and reliably, they develop a sense of trust. Trust gives individuals the confidence to address problems and challenges, as well as encouraging learning and exploration.

The second TASB dimension, 'Sensitivity' refers to managers supporting team members in managing their emotions, helping them reflect on, manage and regulate their behaviour. Being tuned into and curious about team members' feelings and responding in a relevant and appropriate way demonstrates interest in team member welfare and performance. This understanding leads to increased trust between team members and improved emotion management, which also enables team members to engage with and be receptive to service user feelings.

The third TASB dimension, 'Acceptance' is the acknowledgement of team member strengths and development areas, without passing negative judgement of the person's worth. Trust and safety are developed within a team when setbacks or problems are approached in a non-judgemental way using constructive feedback to facilitate team members to be open to learning from challenges (Campion et al., 1993). With constructive feedback, team members develop a realistic understanding of achievable standards (Väänänen et al., 2003).

The fourth TASB dimension, 'Co-operation' encourages team members to seek help from other team members when required and collaborate to achieve collective goals. Social work relies on collaboration to promote a culture of service user-centred care. For social workers to provide the best possible services, they must work together as a team to share expertise, come up with innovative solutions to problems and embrace new techniques that will help them satisfy requirements of social-care organisations (Almost et al., 2016).

The fifth TASB dimension, 'Team membership' refers to colleagues and supervisors building an interpersonal understanding of each other's needs, preferences and abilities and awareness that diverse experiences, knowledge and skills are beneficial to the team's work. High-quality interpersonal relationships enable individuals to feel valued and connected in ways that support efficient exchange of information, which is crucial to

creating and sharing problem-solving solutions and innovative methods to improve work outcomes (Dutton & Ragins, 2017).

The present study

The TASB model is a framework for organisations and supervisors to encourage emotion regulation efficient cooperation and team efficacy. However, there is currently no quantitative measure to assess the presence of TASB within a team. There are related measures such as, e.g. 'Psychological Safety' (Edmondson, 1999) and 'Safety Culture' (Vogus et al., 2016); however, these measures do not cover all dimensions of the TASB model. The development and validation of any new scale is divided into three stages (Boateng et al., 2018). The goal of this study was to complete the first stage of scale development, which operationalises each dimension construct, question item generation and assessment of item initial content validity: construct relevance and representativeness (Haynes et al., 1995). Since colleagues and supervisors play distinctive functions in assisting with emotion regulation within the team, this study will develop two questionnaires, one assessing TASB among co-workers and the other assessing TASB in managers/supervisors using a Delphi Study.

Method

Design

The Delphi method is a reliable tool for the development of new concepts and construction of new measures (Vogel et al., 2019). It draws on skills and judgements of participants who have been carefully selected from their expertise, aiming to establish consensus on a variety of topics that would eventually constitute a new measure (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004); consensus is achieved through group agreement on items within topics, and addressing disagreement, which may result in removal or modification of items. An advantage of the method can be to avoid inter-participant influence or confrontation and enable creativity and expression of expert opinions (Fink-Hafner et al., 2019).

Guion (1977) established five characteristics that must be fulfilled to attain content validity. These included domains that are unambiguously defined, a generally accepted interpretation of domains and items by our experts, domain material that is relevant to the aims of the measure, expert consensus on items and all responses to be reliably observed and evaluated.

Typically, the Delphi method involves three survey phases. Phase 1 involves generating material that creates the initial set of question items that participants rate on a Likert scale of agreement in Phases 2 and 3 (Stone Fish & Busby, 2005). Three phases were used in this study allowing participants to refine their view of TASB questions. We follow the Delphi reporting guidelines of Hasson et al. (2000).

Participants – recruitment of experts

A panel of participants were recruited with expertise in social work and the Secure Base model (Hardy et al., 2004). Such experts were defined as individuals who worked or had

previously worked in the practitioner or research setting and had extensive experience (at least 5 years' experience for practitioners) in the field of social work and being fluent in the English language. Participants were sampled purposively to meet the inclusion criteria for the study.

Six participants (five females, one male), aged between 39 and 70 years ($M = 55$, $SD = 11.9$) took part. Participant occupations included social work academics, practitioners and PhD students, with time spent in occupation ranging from 6 months to 40 years ($M = 15.1$, $SD = 14.8$). Participants had a good level of understanding of the Team as Secure Base model from experience co-developing the TASB model, using the TASB model in practice and research, using the model for training purposes and engaging in debate about the TASB model's development.

Materials – questionnaire development

Research suggests that the initial question item pool of a questionnaire should be three or four times larger than the final question set, as this allows for the selection of the most representative items of the construct, improving content validity (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). As we expect that at least five items per domain for both co-worker and supervisor would be needed in the final questionnaire, 50 in total, therefore, 195 items were created for the first version of the questionnaire.

Development of the question item pool

Question items were developed from Biggart et al. (2017) paper and original interviews with CFSWs; literature review and Phase 1 responses from experts.

A literature review was undertaken to ensure there were no existing measures of the same concepts as the TASB questionnaire and to identify dimension relevant additional questions to be added to the TASB item pool. During the literature review, some measures that reflected TASB dimensions were identified. For example, Carmeli et al. (2009), explored high-quality interpersonal relationships which predicted learning behaviours. Some concepts included emotional carrying capacity, mutuality, connectivity and positive regard. Some items within these subscales are related to some TASB dimensions, therefore some items were extracted and adapted for the original item pool. For example, for the TASB dimension of Sensitivity, the item 'We are not afraid to express unpleasant feelings at work' from the emotional carrying capacity subscale (Carmeli et al., 2009) was adapted to 'I am not afraid to express difficult feelings at work'. Other instruments from which question items were considered and adjusted to accommodate TASB dimensions included Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 1999), Mindful Organising (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001), Safety Climate (Zohar, 1980) and Inclusive Leadership (Carmeli et al., 2010).

In Phase 1, participants were instructed to write any words or phrases that they believed corresponded to the five dimensions of TASB. Participants could write unlimited text for each dimension (Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Cooperation and Team Membership). Some questions were derived from this data and added to the original item pool for Phase 2. See supplementary Tables 3–7 for original item pool and changes made to the item pool across Phase 2 and 3.

Procedure and analytical approach

Demographic information was collected at the beginning of the survey, which included gender, age, ethnicity, disability, occupation and time spent in this occupation, and the nature of knowledge on TASB. Participants were sent an online link to a Qualtrics survey for all three phases.

Phase 1

Participants were invited to write words or phrases they believed corresponded to five dimensions of TASB. From Biggart et al. (2017) paper, interviews and literature review, researchers created an initial pool of 52 question items for Co-worker TASB and 41 question items for Supervisor TASB. Phase 1 participant feedback data was analysed to assess whether to add, amend or delete items for the initial item pool. Most initial items pre-Phase 1 were kept as they matched participant feedback. Some items were moved between dimensions for better conceptual fit and some new items were added to dimensions. The final item pool for Phase 2 was 108 question items for Co-worker TASB and 87 question items for Supervisor TASB (see supplementary Tables 3–7).

Phase 2

Participants rated 195 statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree to 7 – Strongly Agree) assessing whether the item adequately represented each dimension. Statements were grouped by TASB dimension and co-worker/supervisor. Participants were also given an optional open text box for each domain, providing an opportunity to offer additional information about their responses.

Phase 2 analysis calculated quantitative item consensus (mean score) and an evaluation of the participant's qualitative feedback. Prior to the analysis, researchers agreed on justification criteria, see Table 1, for deletion, modification, addition or removal of items across phases. Participant consensus was defined as ≥70% of participants scoring 'agree/strongly agree' to the statement (Likert 5–7) and <15% of participants scoring 'disagree/strongly disagree' (Likert 1–3). In previous Delphi studies, this degree of agreement was deemed appropriate (Slade et al., 2014). If the distribution of scores across experts was diverse (e.g. Likert 1,3,7), this was deemed to show a lack of consensus (Harman et al., 2013).

Table 1. Pre-agreed criteria for changing/deleting/adding question items in Delphi study.

Justification criteria	Justification code
Qualitative suggestion – rewording	A
Qualitative suggestion – confused meaning	B
Qualitative suggestion – more appropriate for different dimension	C
Qualitative suggestion – 'I' statements – dimension not about individual behaviour towards other team members	D
Qualitative suggestion – not relevant to/necessary for dimension	E
Low mean item score	F
Large disagreement among item scores	G
Qualitative suggestion – new item	H
Alternative to other question items	I
Moved from a different dimension	J
Qualitative suggestion – too much similarity with other question items	K

From Phase 2 analysis, 30 items were altered from participant feedback or low scores, and 48 items were new items developed by the researcher to reflect participant feedback. A total of 18 questions from the Phase 1 original question set were deleted, either from negative participant feedback, low scores (below the score of 5), or high discrepancy between participants' scores.

Phase 3

Participants re-scored 225 revised question items from Phase 2 responses. A total of 147 items were original statements from Phase 2 which were presented alongside its Phase 2 mean score providing a visual means for the participants for re-assessing their scores against mean scores from all participants as recommended by Iqbal and Pipon-Young (2009), see Figure 1. Participants could also offer feedback in a free-text response.

Phase 3 analysis calculated quantitative item consensus (mean score) and evaluation of the participant's qualitative feedback. As for Phase 2, prior to analysis, researchers agreed on justification criteria (see Table 1) for deletion, modification, addition or removal of items across phases. An overview of item pool development across three phases is presented in Figure 2.

Ethics

Ethical approval was gained prior to the study commencing, by the University of East Anglia Ethics Committee on 7 March 2022 (ETH2122-1031). Informed consent was obtained by all participants at the beginning of each of the three surveys, and participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher by email. Participants were also debriefed at the end of each phase of the study, where the aims of the research were explained.

Findings

Response rate

Initially, six participants agreed to take part in this study, with all six completing the first phase of the Delphi method. The response rates for the consecutive rounds were 5 of 6 (83%) for Phase 2, and 4 of 5 (80%) for Phase 3. Out of six participants, four (67%) completed all three phases of the study.

Consensus/agreement

A summary of pooled Delphi statements across five TASB dimensions and their quantitative consensus is shown in Table 2. In Phase 2, consensus was achieved for 94% (n = 184) of the 195 statements, and in Phase 3 consensus was achieved for 94% (n = 212) of the 225 statements, showing stability of consensus between phases. By the third phase, Consensus stability (<10% variation) was achieved for eight out of the ten domains, see Table 2.

Q4 AVAILABILITY of CO-WORKERS - ORIGINAL ITEMS
Beside each question is the average rating from everyone who responded to Phase 2. Please could you rate each question again - to what extent do you agree these ORIGINAL question items to be representative of Availability within the Team as Secure Base model? Note - questions with an asterisk * are reverse worded questions - the opposite of expected good Availability.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neutral (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
1 - It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help* (6) (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5 AVAILABILITY of CO-WORKERS - CHANGED ITEMS
Please could you rate each question - to what extent do you agree these CHANGED question items to be representative of Availability within the Team as Secure Base model?

	Strongly Disagree (1)	. (2)	. (3)	Neutral (4)	. (5)	. (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
10 - My team have an online chat platform to ask each other questions (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6 AVAILABILITY of CO-WORKERS - NEW ITEMS
Please could you rate each question - to what extent do you agree these NEW question items to be representative of Availability within the Team as Secure Base model?
Note - questions with an asterisk * are reverse worded questions - the opposite of expected good Availability.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	. (2)	. (3)	Neutral (4)	. (5)	. (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
16 - I often feel alone and isolated from my team* (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Figure 1. Phase 3 item evaluation presentation.

Question item pool development from qualitative feedback

Three phases allowed for generation and refinement of an original item pool, with an emphasis achieving good content validity representing each dimension of TASB. Table 1 shows prior agreed criteria by which questions were changed, deleted or added. Tables 8–17 in Supplementary materials show how the question item pool developed over three phases of the Delphi study for each TASB dimension.

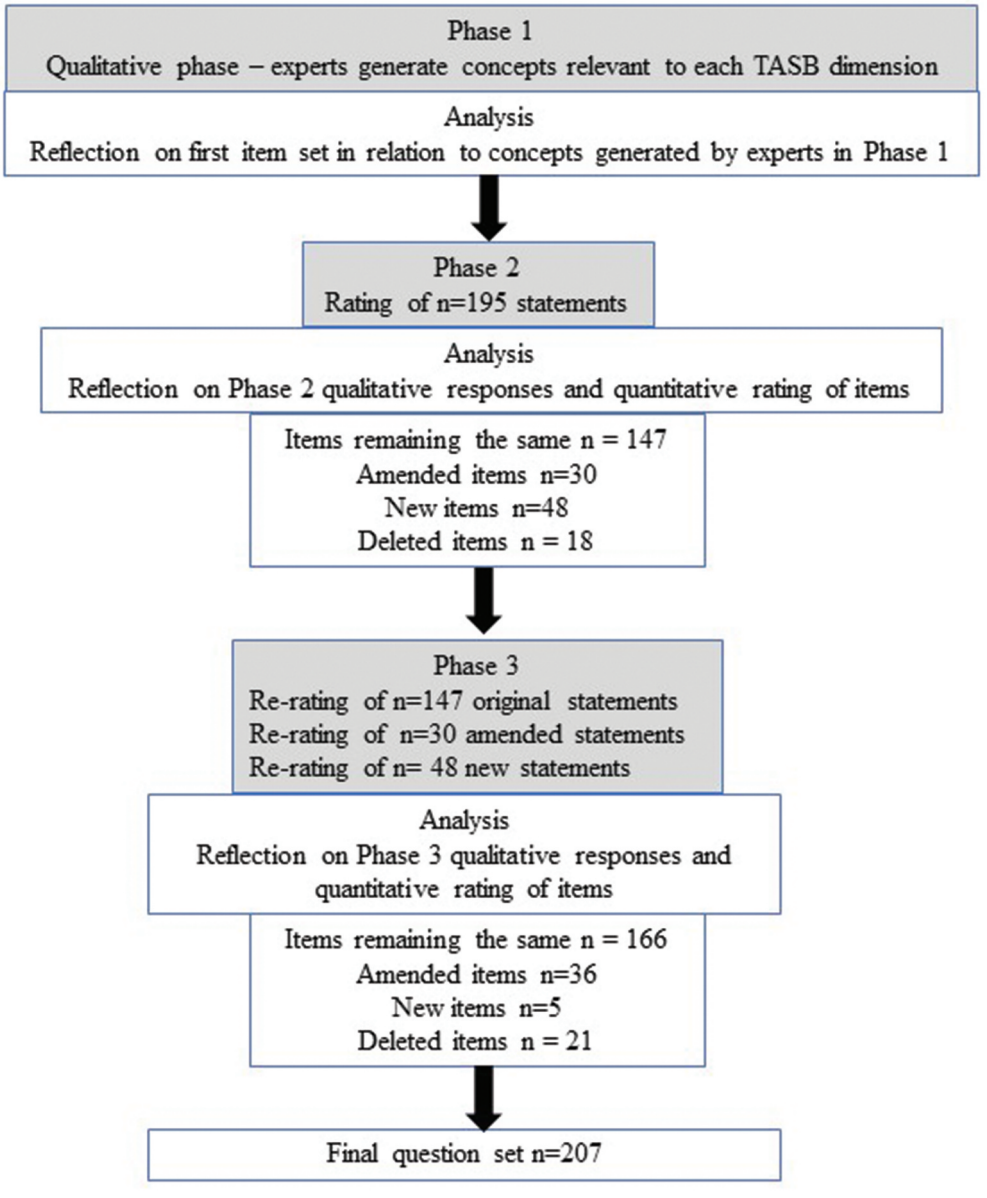

Figure 2. TASB question set development over three Delphi phases.

Definitions for each dimension were created from the qualitative responses from experts with questions created and amended against key concepts within definitions for each dimension. For final mapping of questions to definition concepts, see Supplementary Tables 18–22.

During the questionnaire's development, experts offered valuable qualitative feedback for item wording. For example, experts raised the issue of 'always on' availability, i.e. 24–7 afforded by the common use of email and mobile phones. In any team context, it is unlikely

Table 2. Quantitative consensus summary across domains and phases.

		Statement number in dimension		Consensus percentage agreement for statements (n)	
TASB Dimension		Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 2	Phase 3
Co-workers	Availability	15	17	86.7% (13)	100.0% (17)
	Sensitivity	25	32	84.0% (21)	87.5% (28)
	Acceptance	18	24	100.0% (18)	100.0% (24)
	Co-operation	25	28	100.0% (25)	78.6% (22)
	Team Membership	25	24	92.0% (23)	100.0% (24)
Supervisors	Availability	19	22	100.0% (19)	95.5% (21)
	Sensitivity	23	20	95.7% (22)	100.0% (20)
	Acceptance	14	22	100.0% (14)	100.0% (22)
	Co-operation	18	19	88.9% (16)	89.5% (17)
	Team Membership	13	17	100.0% (13)	100.0% (17)

Consensus – ≥70 of participants agreed/strongly agreed with a statement.

and impractical that all team members will be able to provide elements of secure base relationships and will always be accessible for support when needed, which applies to both the co-worker and supervisor dimensions. Some original items implied that all co-workers' availability might be expected, which is impractical and unnecessary, so to address this issue for the co-worker domain, several items were modified to state, 'At least one co- worker . . . ' rather than 'My co-workers . . . ', e.g. *'My co- workers offer support relevant to me'* was changed to *'At least one co-worker offers support relevant to me'*. Similarly, for the supervisor dimension, it was suggested that some items should acknowledge that the supervisor may delegate support to another leader or team member in their absence, this was amended to items such as *'My supervisor makes time for me or signposts me to another colleague when I need them'*.

Experts also suggested that it is essential to reflect that the TASB questionnaire items are not measuring individual behaviour towards other team members or individual values but measuring the perceptions of team members towards the team. This distinction stood out when original question items began with 'I' statements. Therefore, all statements beginning with 'I' were reviewed, and multiple items were amended so they reflected team perceptions of team behaviours. For example, an item such as *'I am flexible about how to get work done'* represents a team member's own behaviour, rather than their perception of their team's behaviour. This item was altered to *'Team members are flexible about how to get work done'* for the dimension of Co-operation of co-workers.

In many dimensions, some items were identified to represent a different dimension more accurately. For example, '*My co-workers help me think about my problems from different perspectives*' was moved from Sensitivity to Co-operation as it emphasised the working with others aspect of the work more than sensitivity.

Some items were identified to represent the team member item pool than the supervisor item pool more accurately, e.g. experts suggested that it is the responsibility of supervisors, rather than co-workers, to keep the team up to date on happenings within the workplace, therefore the co-worker items of *'My team is kept up to date on changes and developments within the workplace'* was reworded to '*My supervisor keeps us up to date on changes and developments within the workplace*' and moved to the supervisor item pool for the Cooperation dimension.

Some items were thought to be too specific and therefore at risk for being unrelatable to all social work teams, for example, the item *'My supervisor organises "away days" for*

the team to share good practice and reform shared goals' was deemed to be too specific as not all teams will use away days as their method of team-building. Therefore, this item was altered to a more generic item of '*My supervisor organises time for the team to share good practice and reform shared goals'* for the Cooperation dimension.

Some conceptual gaps were identified by experts. For example, experts highlighted that the Acceptance dimension has two components: One component emphasises the management of setbacks and that it is not realistic to expect to be perfect all the time. The management of setbacks component was captured in the original item pool. However, the second component of building self-esteem by colleagues and supervisors was not represented in the original pool. Seven self-esteem items were developed and added for Phases 2 and 3. For example, *'I am praised by co-workers when I do well'*.

Another conceptual gap was identified with experts highlighting that Co-operation should express both co-operation and self-efficacy because both collaborative work and flexible and confident autonomous work are essential and inter-linked for effective performance in the team. Since the original item pool predominantly covered the co-operation component, new items were added to reflect the self-efficacy component such as *'In my team, we are able to work confidently on our own and with others'*.

Experts highlighted the important role of the supervisor within team context, given their positional power and influence over their team. Experts explained supervisors had responsibility to establish and role model shared norms and values for secure base relationships within the team. The supervisory role was also important for facilitating inclusion and acknowledging contribution from all team members whilst managing potential difficult group dynamics. For example, if supervisors set up time in team meetings to allow time to share feelings or reflect on cases, they also needed to ensure that more vocal or confident team members did not dominate these opportunities. Therefore, we added items such as *'My supervisor quickly addresses/responds to any difficult dynamics in the team'* and *'My supervisor facilities compromise and consensus to achieve shared goals'* to reflect these additional supervisor responsibilities.

Another important factor was for supervisors to recognise individual differences in emotional expression and regulation among team members. For example, where some team members might share or express feelings more freely than others who might be more reserved. Therefore, it is helpful to establish a team culture where norms about sharing feelings without over-sharing are led by and role modelled by supervisors and experienced team members. Opportunities to manage the sharing and expression of feelings include providing formal and informal opportunities for colleagues to reflect on the emotional demands of the work with supervisors and colleagues in a boundaried way. Additional items representing individual differences in emotion expression and regulation were integrated into Sensitivity, for example *'My supervisor helps me reflect on my thoughts and feelings and the thoughts and feelings of others'*.

The original item pool was designed to include items that represented similar aspects of each dimension but worded differently so that the research team could identify which item wording was preferred by experts. Qualitative and quantitative (mean item scores, and disagreement among scores) feedback highlighted which items were too similar, helping the researchers to reduce the item pool whilst retaining representative items.

Discussion

Teams are an essential and effective mechanism for organisations to achieve goals and benefit from a pool of knowledge and skills. Effective teamwork relies on both technical and people-focused leadership and team members trusting one another to feel confident in collaborating and setting aside personal interests in favour of the collective effort (Korsgaard et al., 2005). The TASB model offers a framework to assess whether individuals feel psychologically and emotionally secure within their team environment – a secure base underpins trust. The goal of this study was to undertake preliminary stages of questionnaire development for measuring TASB in social work, as there is no existing measure which covers all five dimensions of Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Co-operation and Team Membership. This study developed a large item pool (n195) to represent five TASB dimensions for supervisors and co-workers. We assessed the content validity of this item set among a panel of social work experts employing the Delphi method. After three phases of item development, the analysis created a final item pool (n207) for a TASB questionnaire, which better represents the concept of each TASB dimension, with a 100% quantitative consensus being achieved on seven of the ten TASB domains, with the lowest but still reasonable quantitative consensus at 78.6% for the Co-operation of co-workers' dimension.

A limitation of this study is the loss of two participants over the three-phase process; however, the remaining four expert participants provided enough depth and breadth of data to evaluate the item pool. There is much to do to reduce the final item pool, mapping of items to definitions and refining items to be relevant and understandable to social work practitioners in different contexts. Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis will further reduce the item pool to the most appropriate and statistically effective items which capture each dimension to achieve the final version of the questionnaire.

Implications and considerations for future research

To date, the existence of Team as Secure Base and its importance has been developed from qualitative studies. This work has helped understand in detail what social workers find important for remaining resilient in an emotionally demanding role. A validated TASB measure which shows relationships with important outcomes such as psychological safety, and resilience will enable researchers to provide an evidence base for the importance of the TASB concepts of Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Cooperation and Team membership across larger samples of social workers. A validated TASB measure could be a useful tool for organisations and supervisors to explore whether individuals feel emotionally and psychologically secure within their teams at work and to understand where gaps in a secure base might exist. It is too early to say how the final questionnaire will be administered. We will be guided by the British Psychological Society psychometric standards (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2024) which suggest that the administration of such tools is best undertaken by those qualified in psychometric testing. This would help avoid socially desirable reporting from social workers if, for example, the tool was administered by their managers and would also ensure that a neutral third party interprets results and offers

recommendations for action. We aim to report standardised scores by dimension and by team and supervisor to give a team profile.

This study is an essential first step towards the development of a new measure for TASB within social work, which included the item pool generation and assessment of item content validity. Next steps in validating the TASB questionnaire include testing content validity in social work practitioners across different contexts, e.g. child and family, adults, mental health, country, team structure and size, hybrid and remote working. This will be followed by testing convergent, divergent and predictive validity with related constructs such as well-being, resilience, emotion regulation and psychological safety using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and multi-level modelling.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Viktoria Behrova holds an MSc in Social & Applied Psychology from the University of East Anglia, where they also completed their BSc in Psychology. Their academic journey was complemented by collaboration with Dr Laura Biggart, their academic advisor, with whom they worked closely both during their undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Driven by a passion for enhancing psychological tools in contemporary society and inspired by Dr Biggart's prior research on Team as Secure Base (TASB), with the support of Dr Biggart, they embarked on the first stages of developing a questionnaire to measure TASB among social workers. Recognising the potential implications of this research beyond the field of social work, Viktoria aspired to contribute positively to interdisciplinary teams across various industries. Through their academic pursuits and collaborative efforts, Viktoria aims to make meaningful contributions to the field of social work practice and beyond, advocating for the integration of psychological insights to enhance emotion regulation tendencies among teams and professional effectiveness.

Laura Biggart is an Associate Professor in Psychology and Social Science Research Methods and member of the Centre for Research in Children and Families (CRCF) at the University of East Anglia. She is a Graduate member of the British Psychological Society and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Laura's research is focused on emotional resilience. Laura was lead investigator on an ESRC-funded project (2012–15) examining Emotional Intelligence in the social work profession. From her research, Laura has developed The Team as Secure Base model and Emotional Resilience Training, which has been delivered to many organisations in the public and private sectors. Laura was co-inventor of a student support app – *OpenUp UEA* 2017–2020 with Dr Kamena Henshaw and undertakes user experience research exploring how people interact with technology.

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