

The BASW Annual Survey of Social Workers and Social Work: 2021

A summary report



BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

FOREWORD



The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the collective voice of social workers across the four countries of the UK. I am therefore particularly pleased that with this survey we have captured the individual voices of over 2,000 social workers. These voices came from across the profession, covering professional motivation, workload, caseload, the challenges of social work, public perceptions of the profession, levels of bullying, harassment and discrimination, the consequences of the pandemic and the issue of 'moral distress'.

This survey is a 'go to' document not only for social workers themselves, but for their managers, for their employers, for social work regulators, for social work educators and for policy makers in government and elsewhere to increase their understanding of social work and social workers, to build on their strengths and redress the deficits.

A clear evidential basis is essential for any effective advocacy on behalf of the profession and for those users of social work services. Consequently, I am also pleased to report that while this is the first survey, it will not be the last. BASW will make this survey an annual event allowing us to track the voice of social workers on a range of issues over the years.

While this survey covers the UK, BASW will also be producing nation-specific versions of this report covering England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

This is a descriptive account drawn from the survey responses. It is not an account of the work BASW has done, is doing or needs to do to respond to these issues.

It remains for me to thank all of you who contributed to the survey. I invite those of you who did not complete the questionnaire this year, to make a mental note to complete the next – and make your voice heard!

Gerry Nosowska
Chair BASW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this summary report, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) presents the findings of its 2021 annual survey providing an insight into the state of the profession, the views of social workers and student social workers on key topics and the on-going impact of working during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. The survey was launched in December 2021 as a place for social workers to reflect on their profession and their experiences in the preceding twelve months. Throughout the pandemic, social workers have demonstrated their resilience, their determination, their creativity and their on-going desire to help and support those with whom they work. Yet this comes with a price: respondents describe their workload as “impossible”, leaving them “utterly exhausted”, given the challenges the sector faces which have only been aggravated further by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on funding, on services and on wellbeing.

The findings offer a snapshot of how current and future members of the profession feel about core issues right now, including public perception of the profession, what they find most rewarding in their current role and workplace, the challenges facing the profession and their plans for the immediate future. Our ambition is to create an annual survey to allow us to monitor feeling on such issues over time, create high-level data that allows us to explore topics in greater depth in the future and use the findings to promote and support the profession to the public and to politicians and policymakers across the UK. This report is not, however, a policy statement.

The survey was conducted across the four nations of the UK. It was hosted on the BASW website from 7 December 2021 to 9 January 2022 and open to both member and non-member social workers. 2062 social workers and student social workers, in a range of roles, took part. We are grateful to the participants for giving the time to complete the survey.

A discussion of the way in which the survey was conducted, including the limitations of the methods used can be found in Appendix B – How we conducted this survey. This summary report will be accompanied by a full report that disaggregates combined questions and presents findings as a percentage of the total sample size as well as a percentage of the number of respondents who answered each question.

KEY FINDINGS

- 71.87% of respondents felt unable to complete their work within their contracted hours;
- Almost one-quarter of those who felt unable to complete their work within their contracted hours reported working 10 or more additional hours per week, with the vast majority of these additional hours being unpaid;
- More than one-third (37.13%) of respondents to the question reported that the numbers of people with whom they worked had increased during the pandemic and had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels;
- The biggest challenges facing people in their workplace were considered to be: the demands of administrative tasks; the adequacy of staffing levels; workload demand; and access to resources for the people with whom respondents were working;
- The biggest challenges facing the profession currently and in the immediate future were considered to be: the failure to adequately fund social care; and cuts to local services;
- Respondents felt that the public perception of social work and social workers tended to be negative;
- Better promotion of social work with politicians and policy-makers was clearly identified as being most important for the development of social work in the immediate future.

SUMMARY REPORT

In undertaking a survey on the state of the social work profession in the UK, BASW focused upon the experiences of those currently working within and those training to work within the profession. Questions ranged from asking how they felt the profession was perceived by the general public to the impact of the pandemic on aspects of their work. There were also questions relating to professional and employment status and area of practice. These are contained in Appendix A which looks at the workforce profile of those who responded.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

When asked to rate the public's current perception of social workers on a scale from 1-10, where 1 is 'poor' and 10 is 'excellent', of those who responded to the question, the average score was 3.6. When this result is considered in conjunction with responses to other questions (see Tables 4, 13 and 14), it is clear that there is concern within the profession that there is a negative public perception of what social work is and what social workers do, and that media portrayal of social work plays a role in how social work is perceived. Numerous respondents describe immense pride in their work, but are left heartbroken and demoralised by negative press and stigma they feel "powerless" to redress.

"SOCIAL WORK CHOSE ME"

For most respondents, including students, the main reasons for entering the profession relate to the opportunity to work with, support and help people to improve their lives. The top three responses may very well be inter-related as a respondent's interest in social justice and welfare may also relate to a desire to help the people with whom they work who may be disadvantaged by social and economic circumstances.

Table 1:

Which of the following most closely reflects your reason for entering the social work profession?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1840)
I enjoy working with and supporting people	543	29.51%
Interest in social justice and welfare	539	29.29%
To improve people's lives	532	28.91%
Using my personal experience in a professional role	116	6.3%
Other (please specify)	59	3.21%
To become part of a recognised profession	51	2.77%
Answered	1840	
Skipped	222	

50.40%

HAVING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELLBEING

43.96%

ENABLING INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES TO HAVE MORE CHOICE AND CONTROL

32.73%

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE

Respondents other than students were then asked to choose the three things they found most rewarding about their current or most recent role. The three most popular answers in Table 2 clearly resonate with the responses provided in Table 1 around reasons for entering the profession. After the top two most popular answers, there were a cluster of answers which were chosen by a similar number of respondents. 'Working with the local community' ranked relatively low, which doesn't seem to reflect the importance placed on working with local communities in some other questions, but may indicate that working with local communities has become more challenging.

Table 2:

Of the following options please choose 3 that you find most rewarding about your current (or most recent) role		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1754)
Positive impact on people's health and social wellbeing	884	50.40%
Enabling individuals and families to have more choice and control	771	43.96%
Promotion of social justice and anti-oppressive practice	574	32.73%
Varied nature of the role	559	31.87%
Co-production of solutions with people I work with	525	29.93%
Protecting people	511	29.13%
Opportunity to protect and promote human rights	494	28.16%
Continuous learning/professional development	467	26.62%
Working with the local community	157	8.95%
Other (please specify)	98	5.59%
Answered	1754	
Skipped	308	

Respondents other than students were also asked to choose the three options (out of twelve) that have the most positive impact on their current (or most recent) workplace experience. There was a marked gap between the top three choices and the rest of the responses. The three options that were considered to have the most positive impact in this respect were: peer support; effective multi-agency and/or partnership working and an appropriate level of management and supervision. The results do not indicate the value respondents attach to the different options – it may be, for example, that a respondent would value effective multi-agency working highly but had not experienced it having the most positive impact in their current or most recent role.

Table 3:

Of the following options, please choose 3 that have the most positive impact on your current (or most recent) workplace experience		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1754)
Peer support	820	46.75%
Effective multi-agency and/or partnership working	781	44.53%
Appropriate level of management & supervision	691	39.40%
Training and learning opportunities	543	30.96%
Research and knowledge sharing opportunities	400	22.81%
Space and time for reflective practice	395	22.52%
Service development and improvement opportunities	356	20.30%
Engage in rights-based practice	316	18.02%
Sufficient resources for people I work with	264	15.05%
Career progression	180	10.26%
Trade union membership, knowledge, advice, and support	149	8.49%
Effective workplace policy on anti-discriminatory practice	119	6.78%
Answered	1754	
Skipped	308	

46.75%
PEER SUPPORT

44.54%
EFFECTIVE MULTI-AGENCY &
OR PARTNERSHIP WORKING

39.40%
LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT
& SUPERVISION

All respondents were asked what they felt was most important for the development of the social work profession in the immediate future. Table 4 demonstrates that promoting the profession with policy makers and politicians was ranked highest, which may be connected to concerns about public perception of the profession. It is worth noting that students ranked 'working with local community services and networks' third, which is much higher than the majority of respondents.

Table 4:

Of the following options, please choose 3 that you consider to be most important for the development of social work profession in the immediate future		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1847)
Better promotion of social work with policy makers and politicians	1105	59.7%
Effective multi-agency and/or partnership working	737	39.9%
Effective practice leadership	599	32.43%
Learning from and co-production with people using or in need of social work support	571	30.91%
More organisational support for wellbeing	534	28.91%
Working within positive legislative and policy frameworks	480	25.99%
Working more with local community services and networks	466	25.23%
Better access to CPD and professional development	364	19.71%
More opportunities for peer support and learning with other social workers	336	18.19%
Knowledge, advice, and support from profession-specific trade union	142	7.69%
Increased capacity to engage digitally with the people I work with	136	7.36%
Answered	1847	
Skipped	215	

WORKLOAD

The non-student respondents were asked about their current workload, exploring aspects including manageability, working additional hours and the number of people with whom a respondent was working on average. Two-fifths (40.89%) agreed and strongly agreed that they felt able to manage their current workload, whilst almost two-fifths (37.78%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. This suggests that a substantial minority of respondents are feeling that their workload is currently unmanageable for them.

Table 5:

I feel able to manage my current workload		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1739)
Strongly Agree	159	9.14%
Agree	552	31.74%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	281	16.16%
Disagree	363	20.87%
Strongly Disagree	294	16.91%
Not Applicable	90	5.18%
	Answered	1739
	Skipped	323

The next question asked whether respondents worked directly with those who were using services, as some respondents may not be in roles that do so. This then allowed those who were not working directly with people using services to skip the next two questions as those questions were only relevant to those who did. A very large majority of respondents worked with people using services directly, although for around one-fifth (19.16%), they did so in a managerial or supervisory capacity.

Table 6:

Do you work directly with people using services?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1743)
Yes – I work directly with people using services	1139	65.35%
Yes – I work directly with people using services in a managerial or supervisory capacity	334	19.16%
No	270	15.49%
	Answered	1743
	Skipped	319

The next question sought to understand whether respondents were working with primarily individuals, families, groups or communities. More than half of those who responded to this question worked with families, reflecting that just over half of respondents to the survey reported that their area of practice was with children and families (see Appendix A, Table A4). Very few respondents reported working with groups or communities.

Table 7:

Do you work primarily with:		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1468)
Individuals	669	45.57%
Families	751	51.16%
Groups	29	1.98%
Communities	19	1.29%
Answered	1468	
Skipped	594	

Asking about the number of people with whom a respondent usually worked was a measure to gain understanding of whether social workers were working with a relatively concentrated number of people (or 'cases') or working with lots of different people. The latter would suggest a potentially heavy workload, although it may also indicate working with a specific group of individuals. It can be seen that more than four-fifths of respondents (82.95%) of those who answered this question reported usually working with 40 people or fewer. However, more than 1 in 10 reported that working with more than 60 people was usual for them.

Table 8:

How many people do you usually work with?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1455)
0-20	689	47.35%
21-40	518	35.60%
41-60	88	6.05%
61+	160	11.00%
Answered	1455	
Skipped	607	

Respondents other than students were then asked whether they were able to complete all their work within the hours they were contracted to work. Here, more than 7 in 10 (71.87%) reported that they were unable to do so. Those who reported that they were able to do so were not asked the next two questions around working additional hours.

Table 9:

Are you able to complete all your work within your contracted hours?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1710)
Yes	481	28.13%
No	1229	71.87%
Answered	1710	
Skipped	352	

Respondents who answered that they were unable to complete their work within their contracted hours were then asked whether they worked any additional hours in order to do so, and if they did, how many additional hours they worked in an average week. A large majority of respondents reported working additional hours. Almost one-quarter (23.58%) reported working 10 or more additional hours per week.

Table 10:

In an average week, do you work any additional hours to complete your work?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1230)
No, I do not work any additional hours	44	3.58%
Yes, up to 1 hour per week	22	1.79%
Yes, between 1 and 5 hours per week	452	36.75%
Yes, between 5 and 10 hours per week	422	34.31%
Yes, between 10 and 15 hours per week	162	13.17%
Yes, over 15 hours per week	128	10.41%
Answered	1230	
Skipped	832	

Those who worked additional hours were also asked whether they received overtime pay for the additional hours they worked. The vast majority of respondents (93.31%) did not receive any additional pay for additional hours worked.

Table 11:

Are you paid overtime for the additional hours you work?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1180)
No, I am not paid overtime for any of the additional hours I work	1101	93.31%
Yes, I am paid overtime for some of the additional hours I work	63	5.34%
Yes, I am paid for all of the additional hours I work	16	1.36%
Answered	1180	
Skipped	882	

CHALLENGES

Respondents other than students were asked to identify what they considered to be the three biggest challenges they faced in their current/most recent workplace from a list of fifteen options. Two of the challenges were selected by more than half of those who responded to the question: demands of administrative tasks (51.20%) and adequacy of staffing levels (50.55%). These two challenges were followed by two more: workload demand (46.58%) and access to resources for the people worked with (43.08%). There was then quite a gap to the fifth most-chosen option, inadequate reflective time, space and/or practice supervision.

The demands created by administrative tasks have long been reported as a challenge for those working in social work, reflected in calls to rebalance the workload to enable social workers to spend more time working with those who use services. Adequacy of staffing levels reflects on-going concerns relating to recruitment and retention of social workers, the number of vacancies and the impact of those vacancies upon distribution of workload.

Table 12:

Of the following options, please choose 3 that you consider to be the biggest challenges to you in your current (or most recent) workplace		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1713)
Demands of administrative tasks	877	51.20%
Adequacy of staffing levels	866	50.55%
Workload demand	798	46.58%
Access to resources for the people I work with	738	43.08%
Inadequate reflective time, space and/or practice supervision	322	18.80%
Inadequate managerial support	285	16.64%
Management of change in organisation	268	15.65%
Keeping up with professional development and/or mandatory training	246	14.36%
Lack of progression	144	8.41%
Bullying and/or harassment	105	6.13%
Autonomy in my work	101	5.90%
Relationships with colleagues	90	5.25%
Support and induction for Newly Qualified Social Workers	78	4.55%
Discrimination	64	3.74%
Receiving knowledgeable and profession-specific advice and representation from my trade union	28	1.63%
Answered	1713	
Skipped	349	

In addition, respondents were asked to identify what they considered to be the biggest challenges for the social work profession now and in the immediate future. A similar question, with a slightly different selection of answers, was also asked of students (answers contained in Table 14). More than two-thirds (67.25%) of non-student respondents chose the failure to adequately fund social care as one of the three biggest challenges to the social work profession, followed by cuts to (other) local services (60.60%). There was then quite a big gap to the third most-chosen option, but this was still selected by more than one-third (35.49%) of respondents to the question, which was 'not enough time to spend with people using services' – this may reflect 'demands of administrative tasks' being the most-chosen option in the preceding question on challenges in the current or most recent workplace. Concerns about funding were also the most-chosen options for student respondents (Table 14). A common theme among the comments provided by respondents was "increased expectations" of social workers despite "chronic underfunding".

67.25%
FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY
FUND SOCIAL CARE

60.60%
CUTS TO LOCAL SERVICES

35.49%
TIME SPENT WITH PEOPLE
USING SERVICES

Table 13:

Of the following options, please choose 3 that you consider to be the biggest challenges for the social work profession now and in the immediate future		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1713)
Failure to adequately fund social care	1152	67.25%
Cuts to local services	1038	60.60%
Not enough time to spend with people using services	608	35.49%
Recruitment & Retention	573	33.45%
Media/TV/news perception	371	21.66%
Privatisation and profit driven models in health and social care	364	21.25%
Widening/deepening poverty	339	19.79%
Public perception	241	14.07%
Abuse or violence at work	121	7.06%
Communicating digitally with the people I work with	107	6.25%
Meeting the requirements of the regulators	97	5.66%
Encouraging/promoting social worker activism and campaigning	77	4.50%
Recruiting and encouraging social workers to be active trade union members	23	1.34%
Answered	1713	
Skipped	349	

Table 14: (student respondents only)

Of the following options, please choose 3 that you consider to be the biggest challenges for the social work profession now and in the immediate future		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 93)
Cuts to local services	61	65.59%
Failure to adequately fund social care	59	63.44%
Not enough time to spend with people using services	49	52.69%
Privatisation and profit driven models in health and social care	24	25.81%
Public perception	21	22.58%
Widening/deepening poverty	20	21.51%
Recruitment & Retention	14	15.05%
Abuse or violence at work	13	13.98%
Communicating digitally with the people I work with	10	10.75%
Meeting the requirements of the regulators	6	6.45%
Encouraging/promoting social worker activism and campaigning	2	2.15%
Answered	93	
Skipped	1969	

BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Following on from questions around challenges in the workplace and the profession respondents were asked about experiences of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination. Questions covered two aspects of this, whether a respondent themselves had had this experience or whether they were aware of someone else who had experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination in the last twelve months. Whilst more than half of respondents reported that they had not, worryingly, more than two-fifths of respondents (43.14%) reported that this had been the case. Those who answered 'No' were not asked the subsequent question.

Table 15:

Have you experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination in your place of work or study over the past 12 months, or are you aware of someone who has?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1792)
Yes	773	43.14%
No	1019	56.86%
Answered	1792	
Skipped	270	

Those who responded 'Yes' to the previous question were then asked which of four options they had experienced in the previous twelve months. Respondents were able to select more than one option. Almost three fifths (58.25%) of those who responded to this question reported that they personally had been a victim of bullying, harassment or discrimination. This represents more than one-fifth of the total number of respondents. More than two-fifths (45.29%) reported that someone had confided in them about an experience of bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Further details about these experiences were not explored within the parameters of this survey. It is therefore not known whether bullying, harassment or discrimination was carried out by colleagues, whether more senior or peers, or by someone using services. Nor does it seek to identify the nature of the bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Table 16: (Respondents could select all which applied)

Please indicate which of the following you have experienced in your place of work or study in the past 12 months:		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 764)
I have personally been a victim of bullying harassment and/or discrimination	445	58.25%
I have witnessed someone else experience bullying, harassment and/or discrimination	186	24.35%
Someone has confided in me about their experience of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination	346	45.29%
I have witnessed someone else do or say things that I consider to be bullying, harassment and/or discriminatory	236	30.89%
Answered	764	
Skipped	1298	

SATISFACTION AND NEXT STEPS

Respondents were also asked how happy they were working within the social work profession (Table 17) and in their current role (Table 18). Three fifths (60.64%) of those who responded to this question agreed or strongly agreed that they were happy working in the profession. However, almost one-fifth (18.7%) indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Table 17:

I am happy working in the social work profession		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1781)
Strongly Agree	301	16.90%
Agree	779	43.74%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	330	18.53%
Disagree	203	11.40%
Strongly Disagree	130	7.30%
Not applicable	38	2.13%
Answered	1781	

Similarly for happiness in the current role, almost three-fifths (58.54%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. 17.23% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 18:

I am happy in my current role		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1717)
Strongly Agree	315	18.35%
Agree	690	40.19%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	346	20.15%
Disagree	190	11.07%
Strongly Disagree	123	7.16%
Not applicable	53	3.09%
Answered	1717	
Skipped	345	

Finally in this section, survey respondents were asked what, if any, career changes they planned to make in the next three years. More than 10% of respondents indicated that they were taking early retirement or planning to retire, which has implications for the challenges of adequate staffing highlighted, earlier, especially when linked with over 15% of respondents who planned to leave social work for an alternative career and over 15% who planned to reduce their hours. It is notable that working more hours, for example moving from part-time to full-time work was the least popular option, being chosen by less than 1%.

23.32%
INTEND TO CONTINUE IN THEIR
CURRENT ROLE

18.24%
INTEND TO CHANGE AREA OF
PRACTICE

17.17%
INTEND TO APPLY FOR PROMOTION

Table 19:

What if any career changes do you plan to make in the next 3 years?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1771)
I intend to continue in my current role	413	23.32%
Change area of practice	323	18.24%
Apply for promotion	304	17.17%
Work fewer hours (EG: change to part time working)	275	15.53%
Leave the profession for alternative employment	273	15.42%
Become independent or locum social worker	193	10.90%
None of the above	157	8.87%
I have already planned to retire	132	7.45%
I am taking early retirement	83	4.69%
I will qualify as a social worker in the next 3 years	80	4.52%
Take a career break	79	4.46%
Work more hours (EG: change to full time working)	12	0.68%
Answered	1771	
Skipped	291	

CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMIC

In January 2021, BASW released findings from a survey conducted in December 2020 about social workers' experiences of working during the pandemic (available at: [basw_social_working_during_the_covid_19_pandemic_initial_findings_26.01.21.pdf](#)). The following questions followed up on some of the issues that emerged from that survey, including working from home/returning to the workplace, impact on mental health and the use of digital forms of communication in respondents' work.

Table 20 looks at whether respondents are continuing to work from home in large numbers or whether they have been returning to the office. It can be seen that fewer than 5% have returned to the office (or campus) following a period of studying or working from home. Almost one third (30.59%) report dividing their time between working/studying from home and being office (or campus) based and more than one third (34.25%) report that they continue to work or study predominantly from home. With almost two-thirds of respondents hybrid working or predominantly working from home, this has implications for the way in which the profession works going forward.

34.25%
CONTINUE TO WORK OR
STUDY FROM HOME

30.59%
DIVIDE TIME BETWEEN
HOME AND BEING OFFICE/
CAMPUS BASED

4.97%
RETURNED TO OFFICE/CAMPUS
FOLLOWING A PERIOD OF
WORK/STUDY FROM HOME

Table 20:

As a consequence of the pandemic, I currently:		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1752)
Am office- or campus-based and have been throughout the pandemic	146	8.33%
Have returned to the office/campus after a period of home-working/studying	87	4.97%
Divide my time between working/studying from home and being office- or campus-based	536	30.59%
Work/study predominantly from home	600	34.25%
Work/study exclusively from home	208	11.87%
Work/study from home as I did prior to the pandemic	67	3.82%
None of the above	108	6.16%
Answered	1752	
Skipped	310	

In the survey on working during the pandemic, and anecdotally, concerns had been raised about being able to work safely with access to adequate and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This reflected concerns about the supply of PPE more generally to the broader social care sector. Respondents were therefore asked whether they were satisfied that they were able to work (or study) safely at this stage of the pandemic. More than two-thirds of respondents (66.94%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. However, 13.1% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. As the question was framed in relation to being able to work safely, it is possible that this reflects concerns other than access to PPE items, and may, for example, reflect the concerns of people who were previously shielding for health reasons.

Table 21:

I am satisfied that I am able to work/study safely at this stage of the pandemic		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1745)
Strongly Agree	350	20.06%
Agree	818	46.88%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	277	15.87%
Disagree	174	9.97%
Strongly Disagree	72	4.13%
Not applicable	54	3.09%
	Answered	1745
	Skipped	317

Concerns were also raised about the impact on working during the pandemic on social workers' mental health in the earlier survey, when almost three-fifths of respondents (58.8%) reported that working during the Covid-19 crisis had impacted negatively upon their own mental health. Following up on that question, this survey looked at whether respondents were continuing to experience a negative impact upon their own mental health. Of those that answered this question, just over half (50.35%) reported that working/studying during the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health. Of these, 27.92% reported that their mental health had subsequently improved. However, more than one-fifth (22.43%) reported that the negative impact upon their mental health was continuing.

Table 22:

Please choose the statement which best applies to you:		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1748)
Working/studying during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions impacted negatively upon my own mental health, and continues to do so	392	22.43%
Working/studying during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions impacted negatively upon my own mental health, which has since improved	488	27.92%
Working/studying during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions did not impact negatively upon my own mental health	416	23.80%
I had a positive experience of working/studying during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and continue to do so	292	16.70%
None of the above		
Answered	1748	
Skipped	314	

In the December 2020 pandemic-related survey, more than two-thirds of respondents (69.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had encountered more difficulties in communicating with those using services as a consequence of the latter's digital exclusion (such as lack of online access or lack of knowledge or capacity to use the technology). However, this survey suggests that at least for some that experience has improved in the last year, with over half (53.76%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that their experience of communicating digitally with people using services had been largely positive. Yet almost one-fifth (19.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and there is a continued risk that increased use and reliance on digital methods of communication could be excluding some people from accessing help and support.

53.76%
**HAD POSTIVE EXPERIENCE OF
 COMMUNICATING DIGITALLY
 WITH THOSE USING SERVICES
 LATER IN PANDEMIC**

Table 23:

Since the introduction of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I have had a largely positive experience of communicating digitally with people using services		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1745)
Strongly Agree	198	11.35%
Agree	740	42.41%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	381	21.83%
Disagree	260	14.90%
Strongly Disagree	82	4.70%
Not applicable	84	4.81%
Answered	1745	
Skipped	317	

Findings from the pandemic-related survey also indicated that respondents had been receiving increasing numbers of referrals as lockdown restrictions were eased, for both adults and children, young people and families. This issue was followed up by asking which of the statements presented in Table 24 below best applied to a respondent’s current situation. More than one-third (37.13%) reported that the number of people with whom they worked had increased and had not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Nearly one-quarter said that this did not apply to their situation – if those results are excluded, nearly one half (48.5%) of those to whom it did apply reported an increase that had not yet begun to reduce.

37.13%
EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE THEY WORK WITH SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC

26.14%
HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE THEY WORK WITH SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC

Table 24:

Please choose the statement which best applies to you:		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1748)
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the number of people I work with has increased, and this has not returned to pre-pandemic levels	649	37.13%
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the number of people I work with increased but this has since returned to pre-pandemic levels	93	5.32%
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I have not experienced an increase in the number of people I work with	457	26.14%
I have only recently (6 months) experienced an increase in the number of people I work with	63	3.60%
I started or returned to practice after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began	76	4.35%
Not applicable	410	23.46%
Answered	1748	
Skipped	314	

Respondents in the pandemic-related survey also reported that they had encountered more moral and ethical dilemmas since the introduction of lockdown restrictions, with almost two-thirds (63.5%) indicating that this was the case for them. This has raised concerns about the on-going impact of facing challenging moral and ethical questions, or seeing others face them, whilst being unable to take the desired action to resolve them. This is sometimes known as moral distress, a term that can be found in the literature on healthcare provision, and specifically in relation to nursing. Given a definition of moral distress as a basis, more than half of respondents (55.38%) reported that they had experienced more moral distress in relation to their ability to work with and support people during the pandemic. Ongoing moral distress can undermine a person’s ability to continue in their chosen profession.

Table 25:

Moral distress: Moral distress can be understood as the emotional and/or psychological impact of knowing what is the ethical thing to do, but being unable to take that action. It can also be caused by seeing others take, or having to take, unethical actions.

On that basis, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: During the pandemic, I experienced more moral distress in relation to my ability to work with and support people		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (n = 1746)
Strongly Agree	345	19.76%
Agree	622	35.62%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	409	23.42%
Disagree	181	10.37%
Strongly Disagree	62	3.55%
Not applicable	127	7.27%
Answered	1746	
Skipped	316	

It is clear from this section that the consequences of the pandemic continue to impact the sector and will continue to influence the way in which social workers operate going forward. Elsewhere in this annual report, it can be seen that there were many challenges that predated the pandemic, but these have been exacerbated further. The social work profession has demonstrated hard work, resilience and creativity in confronting these challenges already but the responses to the BASW annual survey highlight both ongoing difficulties in the sector but also what attracts social workers to the work they do.

55.38%
EXPERIENCED MORE
MORAL DISTRESS

APPENDIX A – WORKFORCE PROFILE

This appendix contains the data from the introduction questions to the survey which collected information about the nation of the UK in which the respondents worked, their professional status, employment status, current or most recent area of practice and the length of time since qualifying as a social worker. For some of these questions, respondents had the opportunity to specify something other than one of the options listed. For the respondents who chose to do this, it was often because they either combined two different roles e.g., part-time working as the employee of an organisation and the rest of the time as an independent social worker (Table A3), or because they had a role which covered more than one area of practice, for example working on an Emergency Duty Team (Table A4).

The largest number of respondents were working in England. This is unsurprising given that England is the largest constituent part of the UK, containing around 85% of the UK's total population. This unequal demographic distribution is reflected in both the social work population and the BASW membership and as a result, the largest percentage of respondents come from England, and also of the BASW membership. Whilst not all respondents were members of BASW, 93.07% of those who reported their membership status were current members of BASW.

Table A1:

Where do you currently (or most recently) work?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 2056)
England	1727	84.00%
Northern Ireland	66	3.21%
Scotland	166	8.07%
Wales/Cymru	97	4.72%
Answered	2056	
Skipped	6	

The majority of respondents reported being experienced social workers or working at a senior level. This reflects responses in Table A5 where almost two-thirds (64.59%) of respondents reported having been qualified for more than ten years.

Table A2:

Which best describes your professional status?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 2062)
Student social worker	106	5.14%
Newly Qualified Social Worker	154	7.47%
Experienced social worker	997	48.35%
Social work supervisor	88	4.27%
Manager	351	17.02%
Social work educator/academic	118	5.72%
Retired	95	4.61%
Other (please specify)	153	7.42%
	Answered	2062
	Skipped	0

Note: Question 2 was a mandatory question as respondents who self-reported as students followed a different survey pathway.

Table A3:

Which best describes your employment status?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1851)
Self-employed/Independent social worker	291	15.72%
Agency/Locum staff	215	11.62%
Employee	1280	69.15%
Unemployed	25	1.35%
Other (please specify)	40	2.16%
	Answered	1851
	Skipped	211

Table A4:

Please specify your current (or most recent) area of practice		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1946)
Adults	474	24.36%
Children & families	980	50.36%
Youth/young adults	38	1.95%
Mental health	211	10.84%
Justice	27	1.39%
Social work educator/academic	89	4.57%
Other (please specify)	127	6.53%
	Answered	1946
	Skipped	116

Table A5:

How long ago did you qualify as a social worker?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
		% of those who responded to this question (<i>n</i> = 1946)
Less than 5 years ago	346	17.78%
Between 5 and 10 years	332	17.06%
10 or more years ago	1257	64.59%
I am not a qualified social worker	11	0.57%
	Answered	1946
	Skipped	116

APPENDIX B – HOW WE CONDUCTED THIS SURVEY

The survey was conducted on-line through the BASW website. It opened on 7 December 2021 and closed on 9 January 2022. The survey was designed to allow social workers to reflect on their role and the profession during 2021 and is thus the 2021 BASW Annual Survey. Although hosted on the BASW website, it was open to non-member social workers to respond. The survey used a combination of mostly closed questions, although some questions included the option to include a free-text response to provide an alternative answer. Qualitative responses have not been included in this summary report. For some questions, respondents were able to select more than one response.

Some of the questions used Likert scale responses, which are commonly used in questionnaires. The Likert scale is used as a way of establishing respondents' attitudes on an issue as they indicate whether they strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree with a statement. In this instance, an option to indicate that the statement did not apply to their situation was also included.

Respondents did not receive any incentive for completing this survey. As an on-line survey, there are caveats that should be noted. Respondents represent a self-selecting sample, being those social workers and students who felt motivated to respond. Consequently, this may result in bias if those with particular types of experiences were more likely to respond.

In total, the survey received 2062 responses from across the UK. Descriptive statistics have been produced from the results. Not all respondents replied to all questions. Descriptive statistics have been calculated as a percentage of those who responded to the question, as there were two pathways in place, one for student respondents and one for non-student respondents. Not all questions were asked of those who reported themselves to be students, as questions of workplace experience would have lacked relevance to their current situation. Where students were asked the same questions as those currently or previously in

practice, a combined result has been calculated. In addition, some questions created skips allowing respondents to bypass questions that were not relevant to their situation based upon their earlier responses. The number of 'skipped' in each table therefore includes both those who did not answer the question and those who were not asked the question.

In the results, percentages have been calculated to two decimal places. Percentages may not total 100% due to non-responses and the rounding process. Where respondents were allowed to select more than one option in response to a question, percentages will not total 100%. Where respondents were allowed to select more than one option, tables show the ranking of results in highest to lowest order, not the order in which options were presented in the survey.

Cite as: BASW. (2022). *The BASW Annual Survey of Social Workers and Social Work: 2021 – A summary report*. Birmingham: BASW.

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