

Polling results report: 12 October 2020

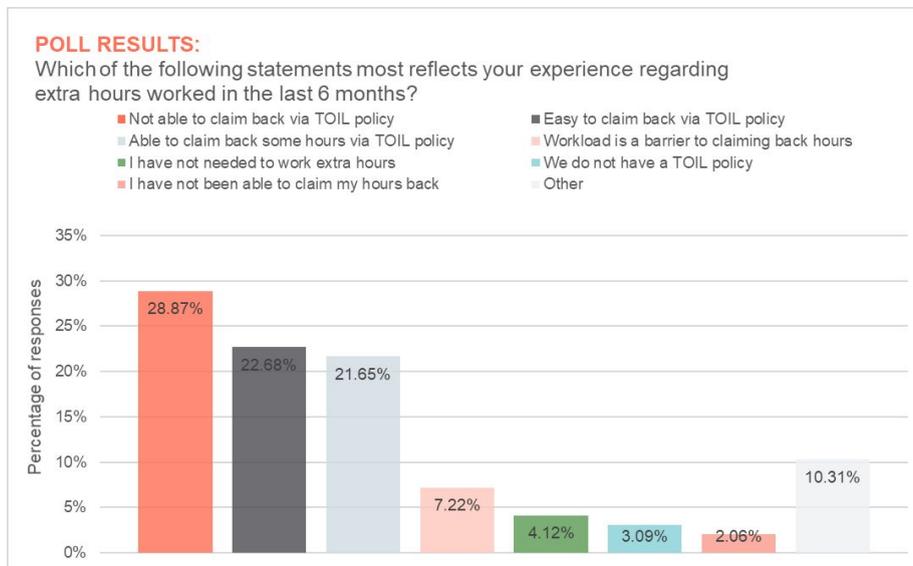
This report

This report covers the period between the 29 September and 12 October 2020. Participants were asked questions on their employers Time off in lieu (TOIL) policy, whether they had worked extra hours over the last 6 months and their view on their work/life balance.

Employers TOIL policy

Participants were asked questions of their employer's TOIL policy and how easy it is to claim for extra hours worked, see below in Fig 1.

Fig 1



The question provided a spread of responses across the options with being unable to claim TOIL being the biggest response. It is positive to see that the second highest response was that TOIL can be easily taken for some social workers. Overall, TOIL remains an area of frustration for many social workers who are working over their contracted hours to keep up with the work demands and then unable to claim back the time because of their workloads.

Average overtime worked in the last six months

Social workers were asked to choose the statement that most reflected their experience of working overtime in the last six months. See Fig. 2



Fig.2

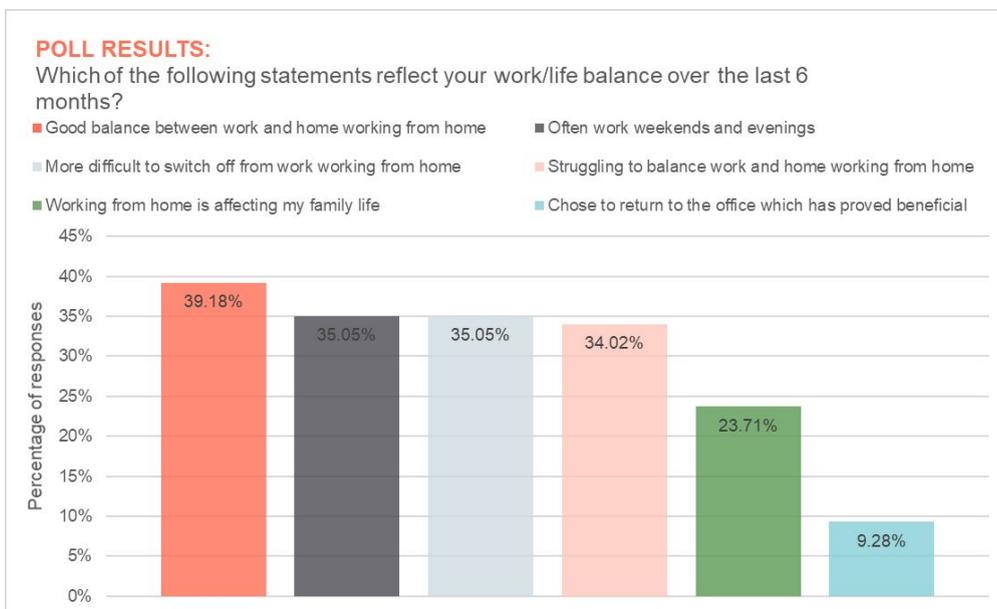


Only 8% of respondents did not have to work extra hours. For the majority however, overtime was worked and for over 40% they reported that they worked an extra ten hours and over per week. Over a month this could amount to an extra week of work and over the duration of a year could amount to three months of unpaid work. When we are thinking about wellbeing and retention we would do well to address this neglected area of workplace experience for many social workers.

Managing a work/life balance

In the table below you will see results for social workers views on their work/life balance.

Fig.3





In this new working from home landscape that social workers inhabit there is an emerging theme of difficulty managing where work and home life begin and end, boundaries have become blurred. This issue is not just limited to the social care workforce but for many who now work the majority of their time at home. However, for social workers the additional stress of managing crisis for families and young people within their own home will make it even more difficult to switch off. Some participants have chosen to return to the workplace and have found this to have been a positive step.

If you were to conduct research on the TOIL policy in your organisation what question would you want to ask

Forty-six practitioners gave free text responses to this question and are categorised under the following headings:

Contextual facilitators and barriers

Some staff seek to understand what are the contextual barriers and facilitators to claiming TOIL. For example: *What prevents you from taking/ accessing TOIL?* Several responses sought to understand the barriers and facilitators in relation to management e.g. *Would you like your manager to encourage you to take your TOIL back, if so how?*

Shamed for taking TOIL

Some responses suggest there are elements of feeling uncomfortable, distrust, and shame for taking TOIL. For example:

'Feel shamed when we want to take the TOIL back. It's not ideal. I am always happy to go above and beyond and work outside of office hours, but I don't want to then feel bad for taking the time back.'

One practitioner asks: *How comfortable do you feel making your manager aware of the extra hours you've worked?* Related to this is the concept of trust; one social worker proposes the question: *Do you feel your employer trusts you in relation to TOIL?* Another worker introduces the idea of 'secret TOIL': *How much 'secret' toil is there?* (Where people work extra hours but feel unable to tell their employer).

High workload

'How would you guarantee that social workers with high caseloads actually have the time/capacity to take TOIL?'

Staff propose research on understanding how high caseloads, workforce capacity issues, and TOIL interact and any effect on workforce wellbeing. For example, one practitioner proposes that 'caseloads and staffing, not just TOIL policies' need to be considered. Another



worker asks: *If everyone has so much TOIL and most of the time it can't be taken, does this not prove more staff are needed?*

Lack of clarity around policy

'We are told not to build too much up, told we need to work overtime to meet deadlines but not to work outside of office hours.'

Many questions focus on the lack of clarity around what practitioners can and cannot do when it comes to TOIL: *Why is there no clear policy on TOIL?* Further, the limitations of local authority policies were also raised: *Why do you limit the take back of TOIL to 2 days a month if worked extra?* Other questions ask why - at the organisational level - there are inconsistencies between colleagues (i.e. managers but not practitioners) benefitting from flexible working practices. There is a desire from staff for a policy on TOIL to be 'equally applied across the organisation'.

Some questions ask about the duration and frequency of TOIL and others focused on formal reporting and tracking measures. For example: *Is there any formal reporting on how much TOIL is accrued within the social work team?* Another person presents an idea to research TOIL in practice: *Can we purchase a clicker to record the time spent working in reality?*

Pay overtime instead

Several practitioners ask: *Why do we take TOIL and not have paid overtime?* One person suggests asking social workers: *Would you rather have TOIL or be paid overtime for the extra hours you have to work?* The practitioner expands highlighting a potential route to achieving work-life balance in the social work profession:

'Would this then promote a culture of a more balanced work life, as employers are more likely to refuse to pay overtime, rather than relying on SWs to accrue TOIL that they are not able to take, as they are too busy?'

Another worker discusses TOIL in the context of Covid-19: *Why haven't we been given extra time off as leave or extra payment?* Stating that there is 'no recognition at all for the long hours and extra work'. Related to this, one practitioner asks: *Why is the system 'social work' run on the good will of practitioners and their commitment to the families they work with?*

Implications

Social workers provided a number of suggestions for research questions in relation to the policy of TOIL. Free text responses were the highest recorded and highlights how important this area is for social workers. Overtime worked for many was over 10 hours a week and when contrasted with the ease of claiming back this time can be seen to be a source of frustration. This is not a new phenomenon and has been an issue for some time. Managing



a work life balance results indicate that this area can be problematic. Employers will need to look at ways of supporting their staff to manage this as it is likely to be part of future working practice.

About WWCSC Polling

What Works for Children's Social Care runs regular polls with social workers who have registered with us. Social workers are currently employed in a range of organisations and we canvas their opinions about our current and future research agenda as well as topics impacting on social work practice. There are 833 social workers currently registered to participate. 97 Social Workers responded to this poll, with 46 participants providing qualitative data, the highest response thus far for free text response..