

Polling results report: 28 October 2020

This report

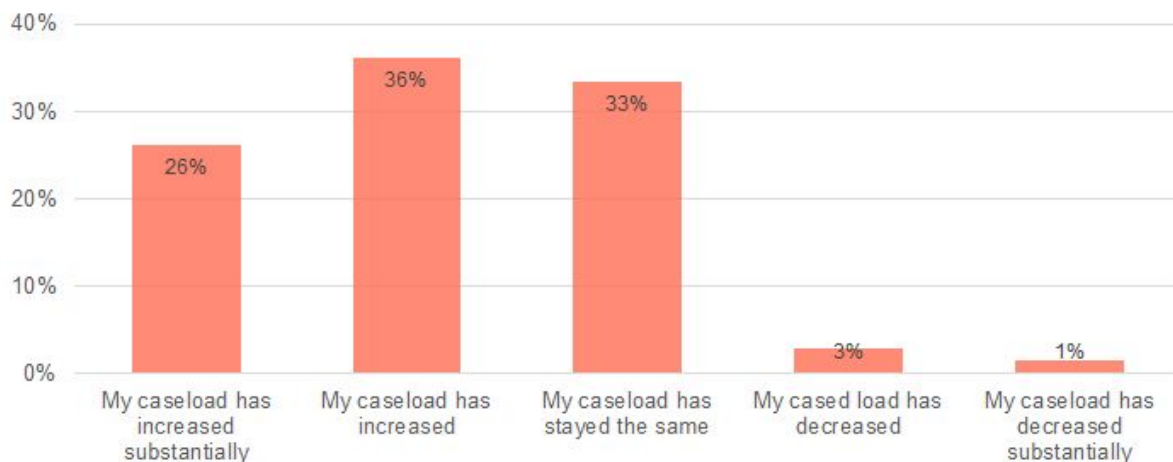
This report covers the period between the 13 October and 26 October 2020. Participants were asked questions about their current caseloads and whether they believed they would increase or decrease over the winter months. They were also asked what their current caseload number was.

Current caseload

Participants were asked whether their caseload had increased/decreased or remained the same relative to pre-covid times. see below in Fig 1.

Fig 1

Which of the following statements best describes your current caseload relative to pre-lockdown caseload



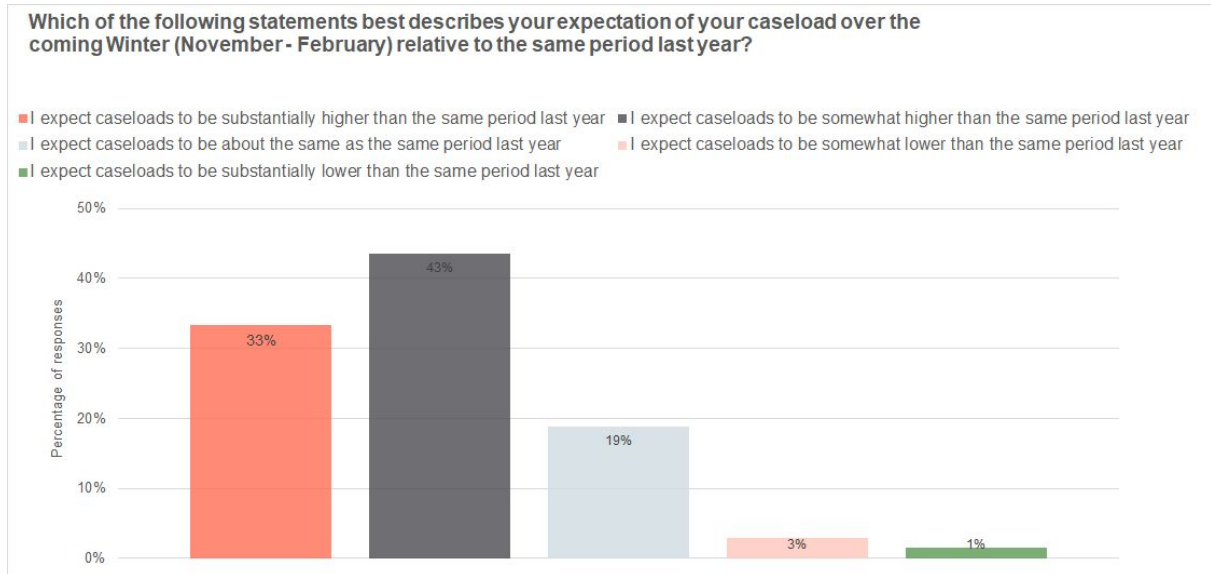
The majority of participants (62%) stated that they have seen a rise in their caseloads when compared to pre - covid times, very few had seen a decrease. In July we had asked social workers whether they believed their caseloads would increase once lockdown measures were eased. 70% responded that they felt they would and the results here indicate that this has been the case.

Expectations of caseload numbers over winter months (Nov - Feb)

Social workers were asked their views on what they thought their caseload might look like in the coming winter months (November - February). They were asked to compare this to what they experienced at the same time last year. See Fig. 2



Fig.2



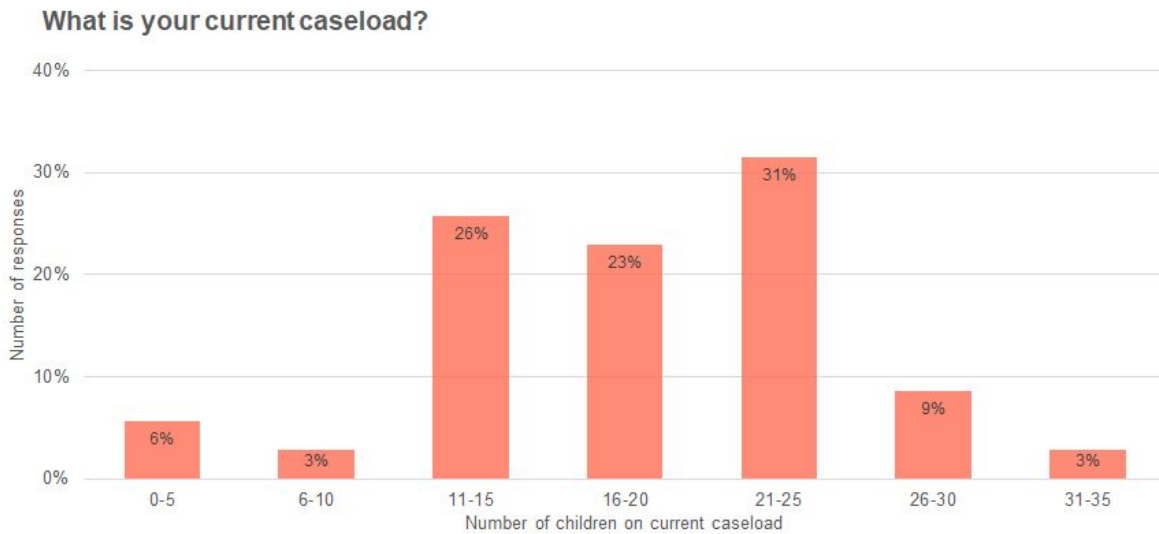
Most felt their caseload would increase with 33% believing this would be a substantial increase. The majority felt it would increase somewhat. It will be important to follow up to find out if caseloads did increase over this period in the New Year.

What is your current caseload

Forty-six practitioners responded giving their caseload numbers or a text response. Although it was useful to know how many cases people have it is difficult to contextualise it as we do not know the teams that social workers work in. For some teams, for example referral and assessment teams, they may have higher numbers but for a shorter period whereas safeguarding and permanency teams who are considered long term teams tend to have lower caseload numbers. The table below gives a visual example of the caseload numbers reported.



Fig 3.



A caseload of between 21 - 25 was the highest response given by social workers. Working out the average from the respondents which included isolating only those who provided numerical responses and calculating full time equivalents from the data provided an average of 22 cases per social worker. The national average reported by The Department of Education (DfE) in its workforce statistics [report](#) published in February 20 reported a national average of 16.9 for 2018 - 2019. However the DfE calculates average caseloads by dividing the amount of children known to social care with the full time equivalent(FTE) registered social workers which includes those who have roles that traditionally do not case hold, ie managers which would therefore bring the average down.

Some of the free text responses added context to the number of children on their caseload by explaining which areas they worked within and the type of work they are doing. For example:

"I'm a manager, so I don't have families in terms of numbers of children. Also fostering, so we have workstreams, not just children on our workload, as with children's teams"

Contracted hours

Respondents also included information on whether they were full or part time, with 4 social workers working part time hours. Furthermore, some respondents did not hold a caseload, or were conducting other types of work within their service, for example:

"I am conducting 3 audits, 3 moderations and writing a report on pre-proceedings currently"

Differences within teams

Social workers also explained differences within teams and expected numbers on caseloads, with one social worker commenting:



“3 families but I work in MASH so not a good one to compare with”

“2 - I am an ISW doing kinship care assessments so this doesn't really apply to my work.”

Complexity of cases

One respondent indicated the complexity of their cases, commenting “15 and more complicated” and 2 social workers explaining they had “too many!” and “too many to say” on their caseloads to give an exact figure.

COVID-19

One social worker commented on the differences in referrals prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting their workload had increased stating:

“I often end the week with 8-10 referrals outstanding. Prior to Covid I would end the week with between 2-3 outstanding.”

Implications for practice:

Results from this poll indicate a wide range of caseload numbers, and appear to reflect the hours the social worker is contracted to work, and the nature of their role. Two social workers felt they had too many people on their caseload, and one suggested COVID-19 had directly impacted upon their workload, increasing the number of referrals left outstanding. This aligns with other questions asked in this poll, for example “Which of the following statements best describes your current caseload relative to pre-lockdown caseload”, with ‘my caseload has increased’ being the most popular response (36% of respondents). This is also in keeping with the responses to the question “Which of the following statements best describes your expectation of your caseload over the coming winter months (November - February)” with 43% answering ‘I expect caseloads to be somewhat higher than the same period last year’, the most popular response, followed by ‘I expect caseloads to be substantially higher than the same period last year’, with a response rate of 33%. This implies social workers expect caseloads to increase and are managing heavier workloads compared to their pre-lockdown caseload.

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. 69 Social Workers responded to this poll, with 46 participants providing qualitative data, the highest response thus far for free text response.