

Polling Results: 28 April 2020

About WW-CSC 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.

This report

This report covers questions asked between 14th April and 28th April 2020.

Participants were asked which sector they worked in, further details on the impact of coronavirus on their relationships with families, completing assessments remotely and their emotional wellbeing using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) personal wellbeing questions.

Some of these questions form a part of our ongoing series of polls about the response of social workers and local authorities to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

126 Social Workers replied to this poll, with 29 giving additional qualitative information.

Employment Sector

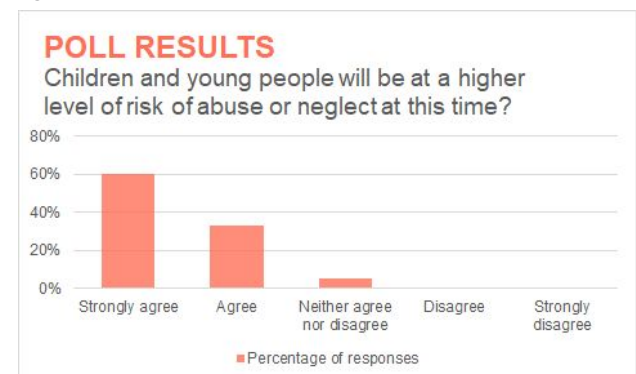
Participants were asked to identify which sector they worked in. Most participants (94%) work within children and families, indicating that our data reflects the experiences of those working within a

Local authority context. The remaining 6% are from CAF/CASS, mental health, academia, fostering and practice education. We would actively seek to increase wider representation from these groups in the future.

Do you think children might be at greater risk of abuse at this time

Participants were asked if they believed children would be at a greater risk of harm. 60% strongly agreed that children might be at greater risk and added to those that chose agreed gave a combined total of 93%. None felt children would not be at greater risk (fig 1).

Fig 1.



There was a high proportion of responses indicating concern for a greater risk for vulnerable children at this time. Data suggests that these most vulnerable children are not attending school, and so there is both higher risk to those children who are already known to children's services, and to those who might otherwise be referred after contact with other professionals. There is data to suggest that referrals to social care have dropped whilst the NSPCC have reported

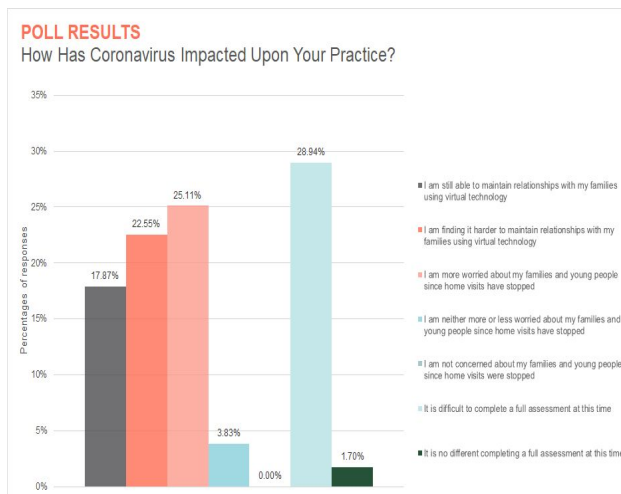


an increase in calls to their Childline service regarding abuse. Increased levels of abuse and neglect have yet to be evidenced but the perception that levels have increased is reflected in this poll. Social workers will feel an increasing level of concern and singular responsibility.

Impact on practice regarding home visits and assessments

Following on from the March polling question, participants were asked how they felt the current measures impacted on their relationships and whether they believed they could complete comprehensive assessments in the current climate. In figure 2, below, 28% of participants felt they could not complete such an assessment, 25% felt more worried about their families and young people since home visits have stopped and 22% found it harder to maintain relationships with families and young people at this time.

Fig 2



As one participant commented;

“assessments still need to be completed, babies will still be born, decisions still need to be made and some children are not safe. I do feel that undertaking assessments virtually has somewhat made me feel deskilled because you can't rely on all the non verbal communication and observational skills but I have to do the best in the circumstances”

Despite concerns being raised regarding maintaining relationships, participants were also able to provide examples of creative ways to engage their families and young people.

For some families, physical presence is being maintained through the use of 'garden visits', whilst other workers are opting to conduct 'video-call visits' instead, as one worker describes: 'I heard a 4-year-old walked around the house with the camera and show[ed] the practitioner her bedroom and toys'. The use of toys whilst visiting virtually was mentioned by other practitioners, and was thought to be helpful, enabling the children 'to communicate more easily as the focus is not just on them, creating a more relaxed atmosphere for them'.

One social worker said that they were sending direct work sheets to the school to be completed by the child whilst on a video-call with them. Other practitioners are using online games such as 'charades' and 'pictionary' to maintain relationships whilst others are using more traditional communication methods such as 'letters or notes' and sending resources via post. This variety of communication options suggests a need to give 'children and families a choice about the method of communication'.

Planning and structure were raised as strategies which enable virtual visits to be

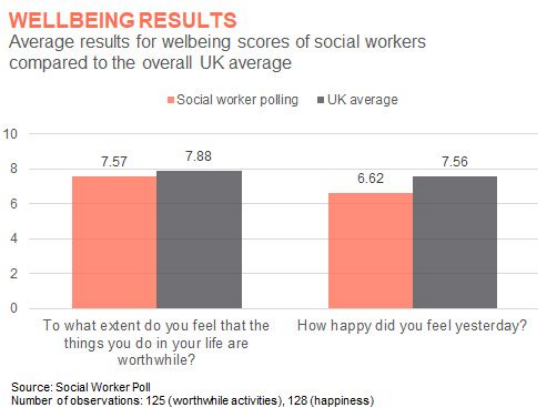


more productive and sharing resources (with parents), *‘the day prior or on the day in preparation for the session to aid our working together’.*

Wellbeing

Participants were asked to answer two out of the four personal wellbeing questions from the ONS. Please see figure 4, below for the results.

Fig 4.



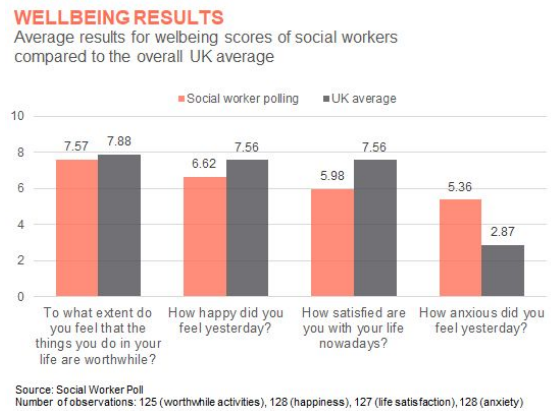
Social workers scored a mean of 6.62 out of 10 for feeling happy. This is slightly lower than the UK average of 7.56, last recorded 2018 - 2019.

Social workers scored a mean of 7.57 out of 10 for life feeling worthwhile. Again, slightly lower than the UK average recorded in 2018 - 2019 and which was 7.88.

(Source:ONS- annual pop.survey 2019).

Comparing the results from the previous polling period, scoring for anxiety and life satisfaction it appears the wellbeing of social workers has improved. Taking into consideration the time lapse between the two questions it may be that participants have now settled into this new status quo. Please see figure 5 for full comparison of all 4 results for wellbeing.

Fig 5.



In this latest poll, evidence of creative team building exercises to enhance wellbeing were shared e.g.: a ‘bake off competition’ via skype, engaging in ‘virtual team yoga’, and encouraging the use of ‘online counselling’ for young people were highlighted. The innovative use of technology in maintaining relationships with others may have increased feelings of connectivity and therefore wellbeing.