

Analysis of Polling Workstream 2020

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 820 social workers currently registered to participate. This is an increase of 49 from 771 from December.

This report

This report explores the responses given by social workers during the period from January 2020 to August 2020. Over the last 6 months the sector has been impacted by the Covid -19 pandemic and this has had implications for the way social workers do their job and provide support to those that are vulnerable and in need of assistance in the community. This additional layer of complexity has led to some innovative ways of working especially with regards to maintaining contact with children and families. With little recognition social workers have continued to keep children safe and support families as best as they can in the circumstances.

As well as asking how social workers have adapted during the pandemic other factors have also been explored. Little was known about the demographic makeup of the cohort prior to January, so demographic questions have been asked and data collected. Wellbeing has also been measured using the Office of National Statistics (ONS) four wellbeing questions and has been tracked over time and compared to the national picture of wellbeing. This has been alongside our regular feature of asking the sector for feedback regarding new research projects and published results on research.

Recruitment to Polling site

Recruitment has been slow over the last six months. The aim was to get one thousand social workers signed up by the end of this year. Previous experience has shown that recruitment is most successful at events when social workers can be signed up on the spot. However with the COVID 19 pandemic this has obviously not been possible with the events planned being cancelled for this year. The plan will be to begin to reach out and visit local authorities and attend events in 2021 subject to the COVID - 19 landscape at that time.

Recently, conversations with both The British Association of Social Workers and Social Work England have resulted in agreement for the Polling site to be promoted via their websites and it is envisaged that this will encourage new registrants.

Use of Data collected



Results from the data collected are now published through a variety of mediums that also advertise the polling site. Prior to this, results had not been shared with the wider public and were mainly used internally.

A report is produced fortnightly when data is collected. The two page briefing report has been used to update the Department for Education.

Thematic analysis of participants' text responses forms part of the briefing report. A Thematic analysis report is being compiled as an accompaniment to this report. This provides a rich source of information about how social workers feel on the subjects raised and can give a contextual feel to the questions raised.

Our Communications team now produces a Graphics interchange Format (GIF) of some of the results on a fortnightly basis in line with when the results are published. Results are also shared in the newsletter and in the report to the board of trustees.

A separate polling page is now planned which will sit under practice heading on the website and will have the link to register. It will also provide the opportunity to see GIF's and access reports that have previously been published.

Demographics of polling participants

The following are the results of asking participants a variety of demographic questions. The plan going forward will be to ask these questions regularly as numbers of participants increase with the aim to keep an accurate picture of the cohort.

The majority of participants (62%) are social workers or senior practitioners (See Fig 1 in the appendix). There is representation from operational (12%) and strategic managers (14%) in similar numbers. By far the lowest group represented is the ASYE population (2%). It may be that in the first year of qualification focus is on completing the ASYE portfolio and also adjusting to the role of being a social worker.

Participants tend to be in the older age bracket with 62% being aged between 30 - 54 (See Fig 2). The Department for Education's annual workforce census, also indicates a greater representation within the 30 - 50 age range so our cohort reflects the wider sector. (Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018 -19).

Participants were asked about how long they had been qualified (Fig. 3). The largest response of 34% was from those who had 15 years experience or more. 78% of the cohort have over 6 years social work experience and therefore bring a wealth of experience when responding to the polling questions. The high proportion of experienced social workers in the cohort does not reflect previous research in this area which finds that the average working life of a social worker is just over seven years (Baginsky 2013), suggesting that our sample is unrepresentative.

Most participants have worked for their employers between 0-3 years (See Fig. 4). This reflects the data from the Department for Education (Source: children's social work workforce 2018 - 2019) which indicates the highest proportion of social workers have worked for their



employer for two years or less. However, there is also a high proportion of participants who have worked for their employer for 10 years or over which does not reflect the national picture. The low number for the 7 - 10 years service might reflect the research regarding the average length of service for a social worker which is 7 years (Baginsky 2013).

Social workers were asked which region they worked in (Fig.5). Just over 50% work in Greater London and the South east. This might reflect that proportionally a greater number of social workers are employed in the South. There is low representation in the North East. Now that this data has been collected, WWCS can start to focus on those areas with a lower sign up and encourage registration via national events and promoting the polling site with existing partners in those areas.

Polling and research

Questions have been sent to participants relating to a number of the projects WWCS has been running in order to gain their feedback.

For Happier, Healthy Professionals (HHP2) participants were asked their views on Flexitime options and Dictation software (Fig. 6 and 7). Results from both polls helped the research teams to formulate their trial protocols and advertise open calls to partners using GIF's to publish the polling results. Providing social workers feedback via the polls lends itself well to promoting research projects to prospective partners as they can gain sense of the sector's view.

Participants have also been asked their views on Predictive analytics (Fig. 8), Family group conferences (Fig.9) and our Research priorities (Fig.10). Not all the results are printed here but please see the relevant figure in the appendices for additional examples. Results from these polls have been used for reporting and also for consideration when looking at new projects.

The impact of Covid 19

The Covid 19 pandemic brought many changes to the way the sector worked as it did for the whole country. Social workers found themselves communicating with families and young people using virtual technology not widely used in practice previously. Many social workers found creative ways to continue their relationships with families and children from having virtual baking sessions to playing games. Children took their social workers on virtual tours of their homes through their mobile devices and others met families in the garden. Meetings with professionals and attendance at court also became virtual. One of the main changes to working conditions was social workers working from home and overall this was well received and successful for most. Supervision also appeared to fare well whilst virtual as did multi agency meetings (Fig.11, 12, 13 and 14). There was a view from some social workers that they would prefer to continue to work from home in the future (Fig. 12) However for some, they were keen to return to the office and felt their work/life balance had deteriorated since working from home.



There were concerns that caseloads would increase as lockdown eased and children return to school in greater numbers in September. There was evidence that some participants were already experiencing increased referrals and subsequent case load increases (Fig.15).

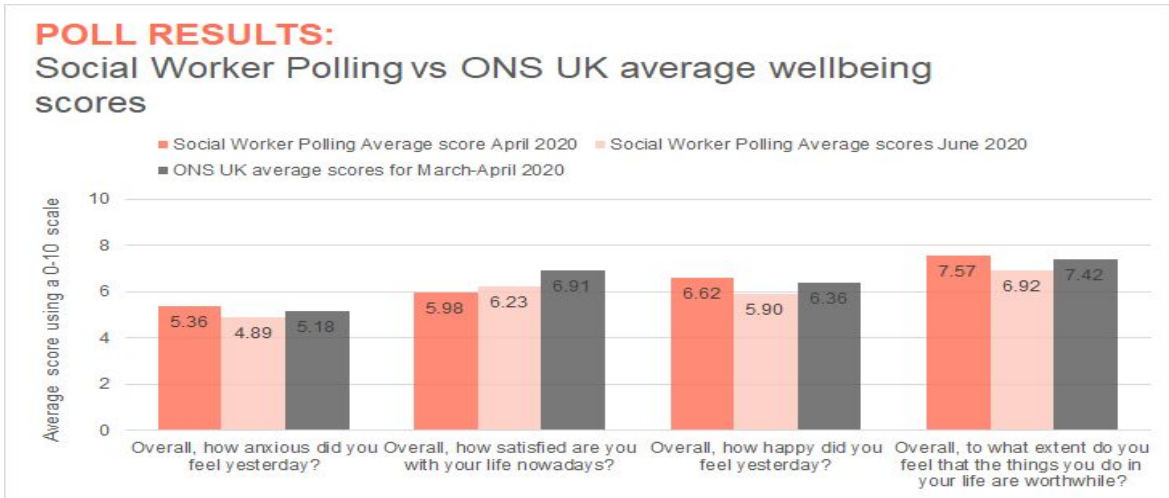
Wellbeing results

Since the end of March when the whole country faced the impact of COVID - 19 and subsequent lockdown measures the wellbeing of participants has been measured using the Office of National statistics (ONS) four well being measures. We now have data for the last five months and this will continue to be collected monthly so that any changes to well being can be monitored. In the table below you can see how participants have responded since April on the four measures of anxiety, happiness, life worthwhile and life satisfaction.



As can be seen and not unsurprisingly anxiety was high in the first month of lockdown but has since slowly come down. With the other four measures there has been some movement but not noticeable differences in responses.

In the table below we were able to compare the national data for wellbeing to our cohort and note that there was little difference. Anxiety appears to be slightly higher and life satisfaction slightly lower than the general population. As social workers will have been concerned about their families and children early on in the pandemic these two measures may reflect that worry. Further comparisons will be made with the general public as data becomes available. Asking the wellbeing questions alongside views on working conditions and practice issues at this time may help us to identify future support that might ease worries for social workers.



Comparison data between wellbeing and demographic profile

Some attempts to analyse the data by comparing age groups/length of experience and region of the country are provided here. With such low numbers it is not possible to make any assumptions about the results. However, it is interesting to see some of the differences between groups. Please see below:

WELLBEING SCORE BY AGE GROUP:

Age group	Anxiety	Happiness	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile	Total # of responses[NA1] [NA2]
25 - 34	6.25/6.00	6.47/5.63	5.91/6.13	7.27/6.94	16
35 - 44	5.61/5.59	6.78/6.04	6.17/6.21	7.06/7.08	24
45 - 54	5.17/3.94	6.61/5.95	5.43/6.16	7.74/6.63	19
55 - 64	5.40/4.67	7.22/6.14	7.60/6.71	8.10/7.57	7



WELLBEING BY LENGTH OF QUALIFICATION

<i>Time of being a qualified social worker</i>	Anxiety	Happiness	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile	Total # of responses
1 - 5 years	6.27/6.00	5.93/5.36	5.30/6.21	7.29/7.14	13
6 - 10 years	6.17/5.29	6.74/5.47	6.06/5.59	7.58/7.00	17
11 - 15 years	5.71/4.92	7.17/6.00	5.93/5.73	7.33/6.33	12
15 years and over	4.55/4.47	6.82/6.35	6.45/6.90	7.70/7.25	17

The older age group and more experienced social workers appear to have felt less anxious and happier at this time. However with such small sample sizes it cannot be assumed that this would represent the sector in any significant way.

<i>Region</i>	Anxiety	Happiness	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile	Total # of responses[NA1]
Greater London	6.36	5.6	6.38	6.81	14
Midlands	4.38	6.13	6.47	7.07	13
North East	5.50	4.5	4.5	7.0	2
North West	3.50	5.86	6.0	6.57	6
South East	4.0	5.75	6.0	7.63	6
South West	4.11	6.00	6.1	7.0	9
Yorkshire and the Humber	4.71	5.86	5.57	6.71	7



Summary and next steps

In summary, polling data has allowed us to have a greater understanding of our cohort of participants through collecting demographic data. We have been able to chart how social workers have managed through the pandemic and its subsequent impact on practice and on work environments. Asking the ONS wellbeing questions is beginning to help build a picture of social workers wellbeing and in future may help us understand where we might be able to consider further research. Participants have helped shape our research and provided us with a temperature check on a number of projects.

With regards to next steps, there can now be a focus on areas with low representation which we were not aware of before. Encouraging participation is also a focus so that we can increase the numbers voting on Polls already registered. These may include prize draws and donations to chosen charities. The exciting prospect of Social Work England and British Association of Social Work supporting the polling site will also do much to increase the numbers. A dedicated polling page will increase its visibility and will hopefully encourage more social workers to become involved. Access to results from previous polling questions will also help to promote the site.



Appendix

Demographic data

Fig. 1 - Role in social care.

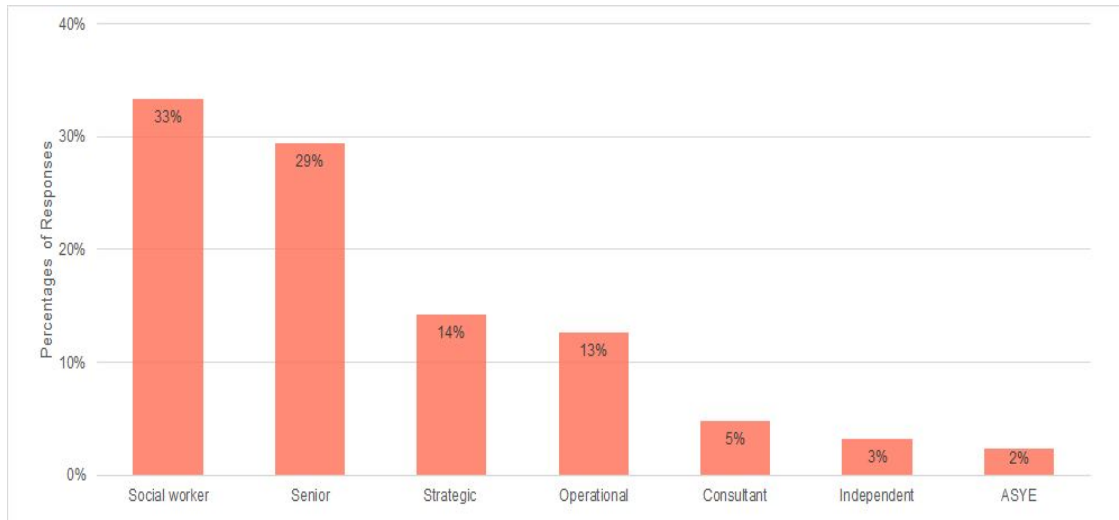


Fig. 2. Age of participant.

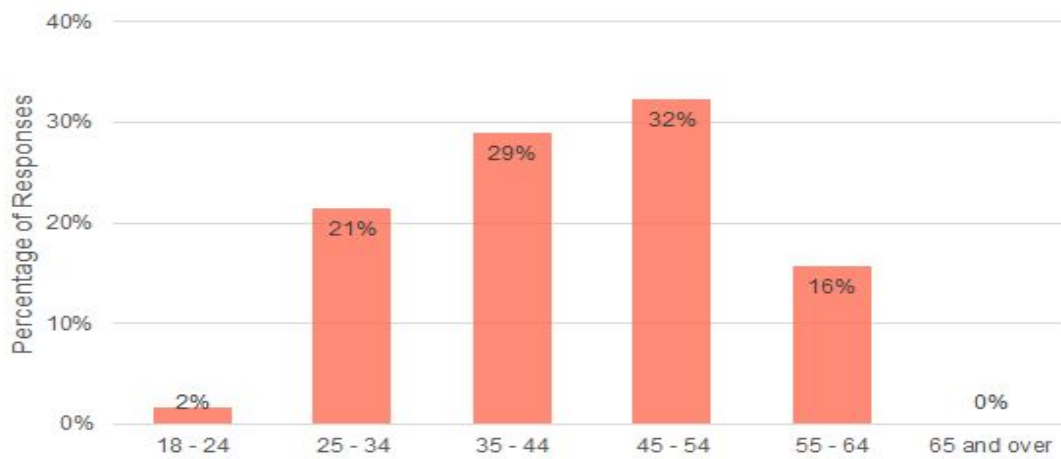


Fig. 3. Length of time qualified as a social worker.

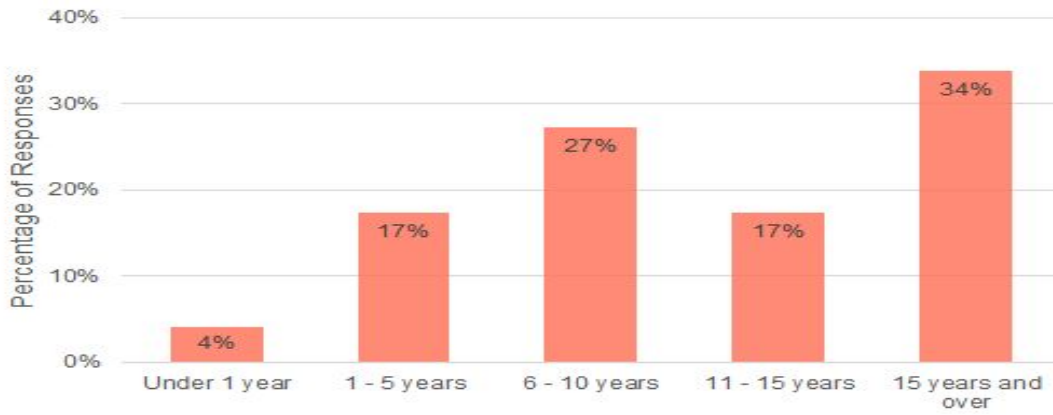


Fig.4 - Length of time with current employer.



Fig. 5 - Region of employment.





Research based Polling questions

Fig. 6

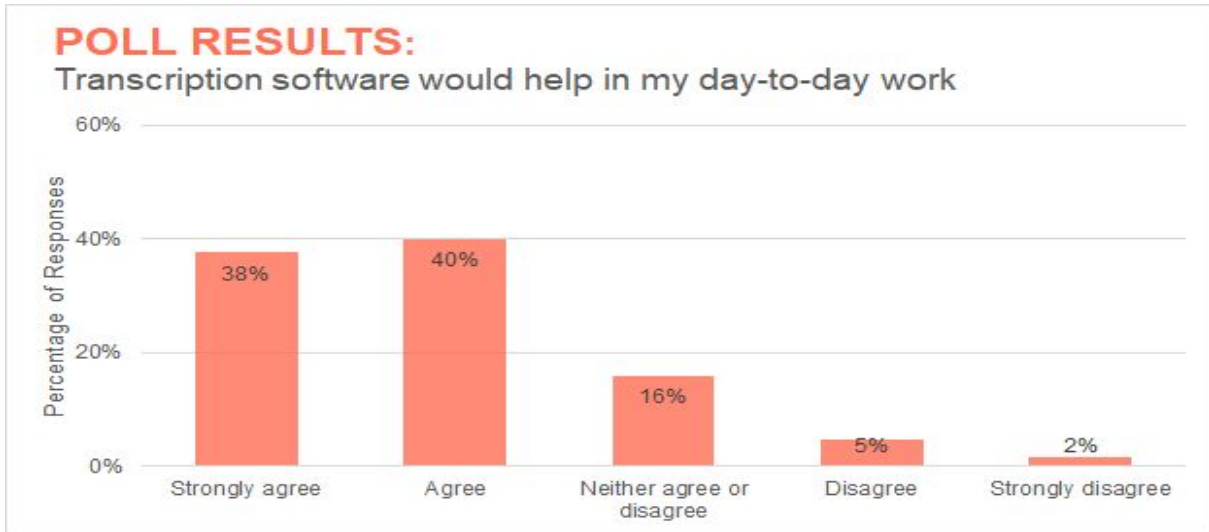


Fig.7

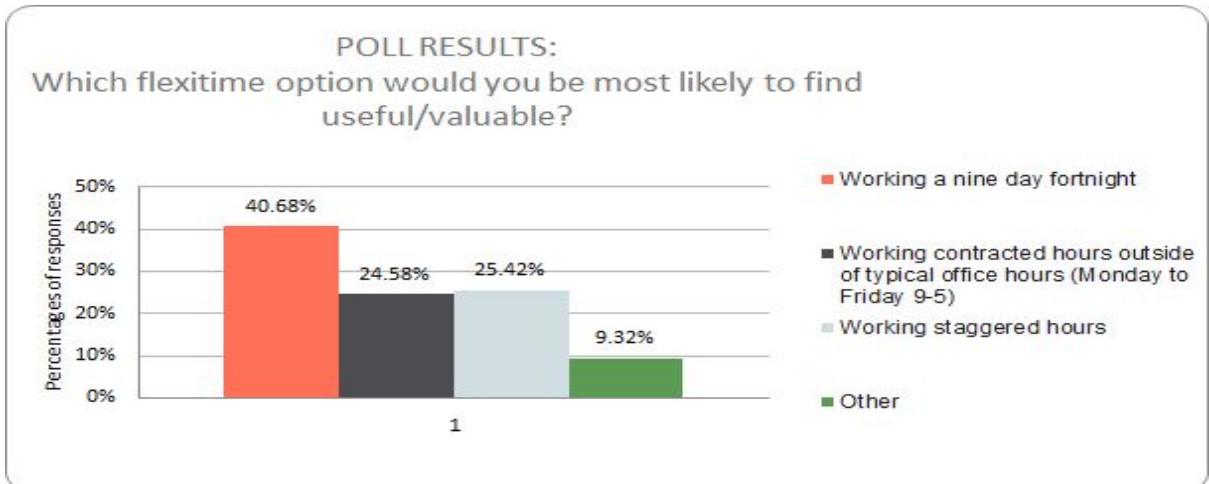




Fig.8

POLL RESULTS

Do you think that predictive analytics has a role to play in decision making in social care?



Fig 9

POLL RESULTS

Of the following outcomes, which do you believe Family Group Conferences are effective for?

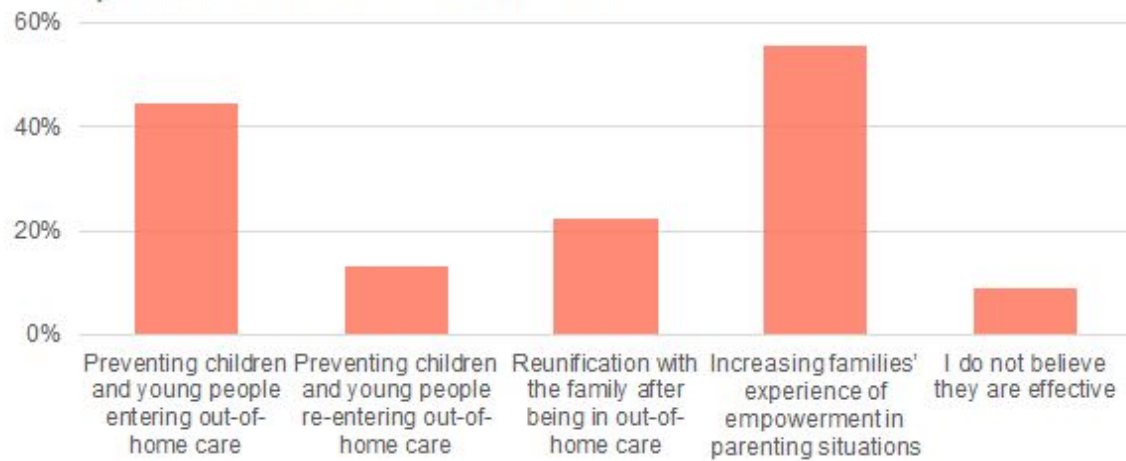
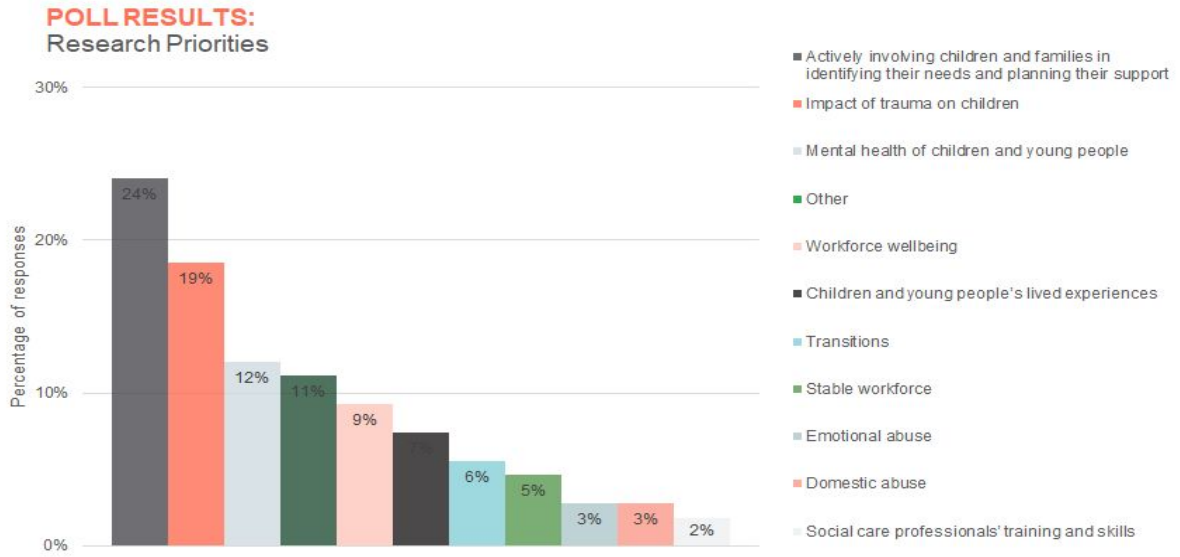




Fig.10



Questions on impact of COVID - 19

Fig.11





Fig.12

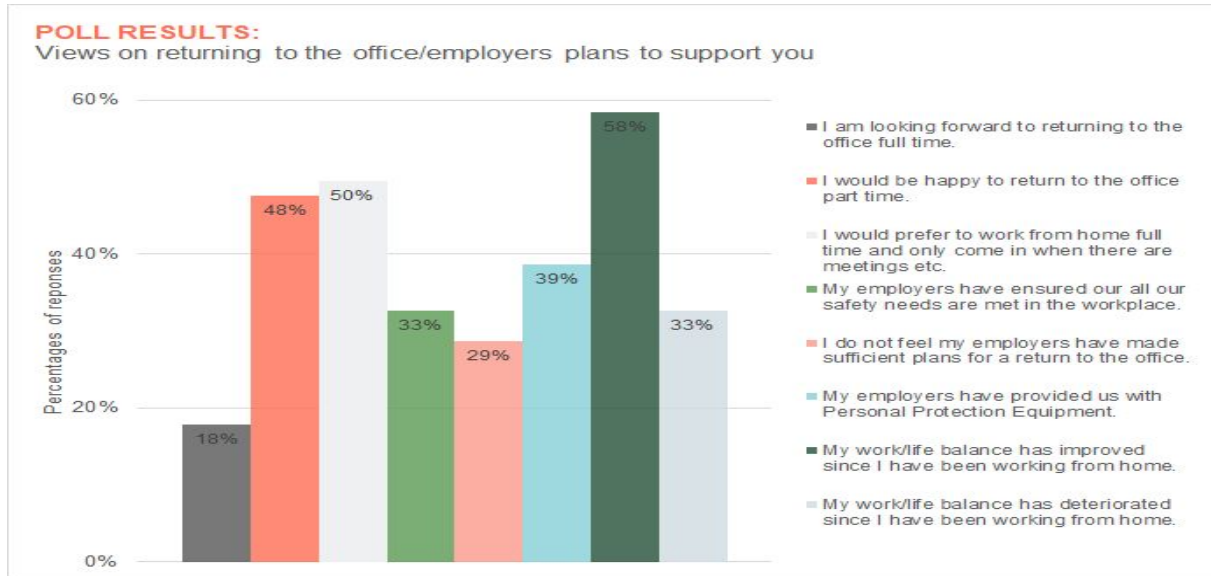


Fig.13

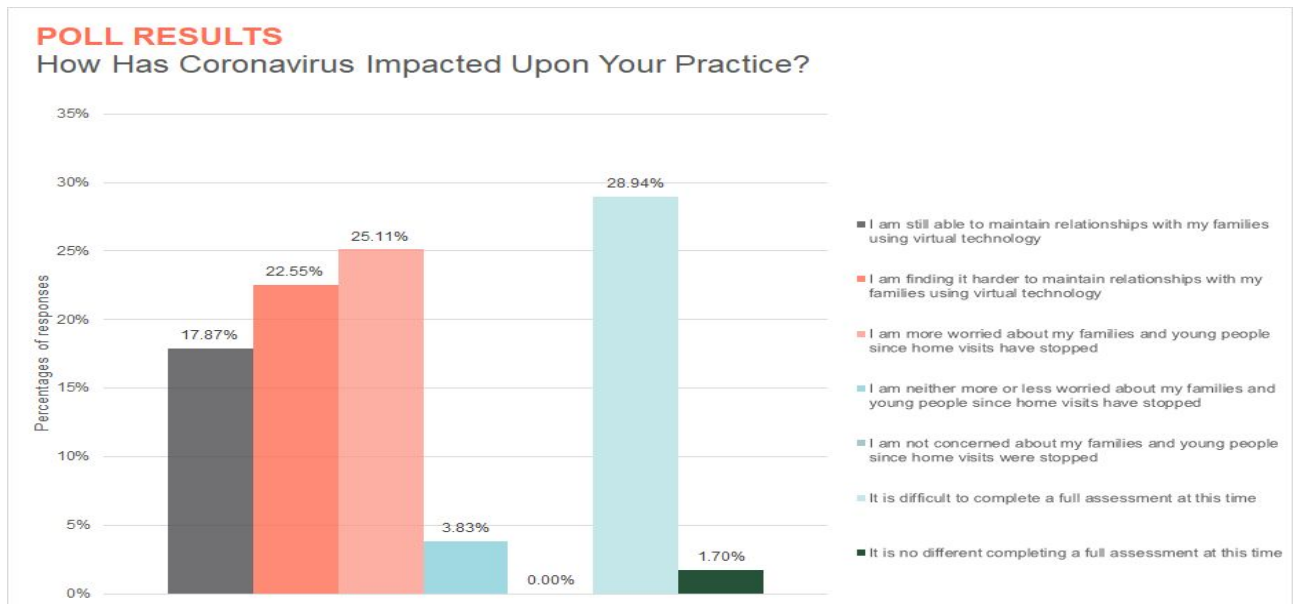




Fig.14

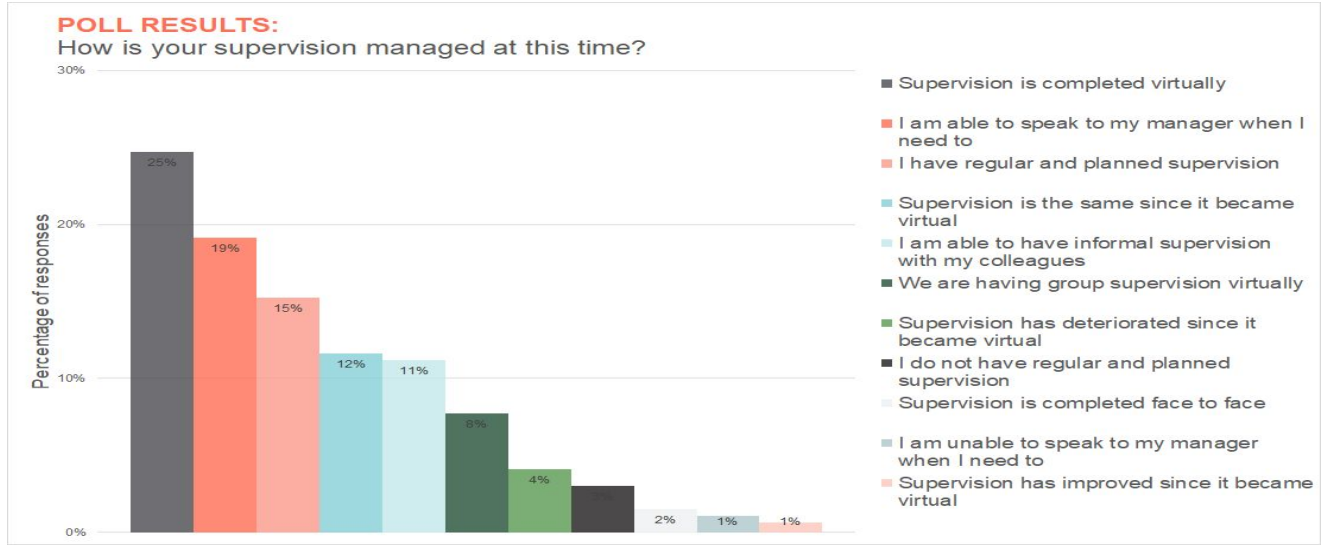


Fig.15

