

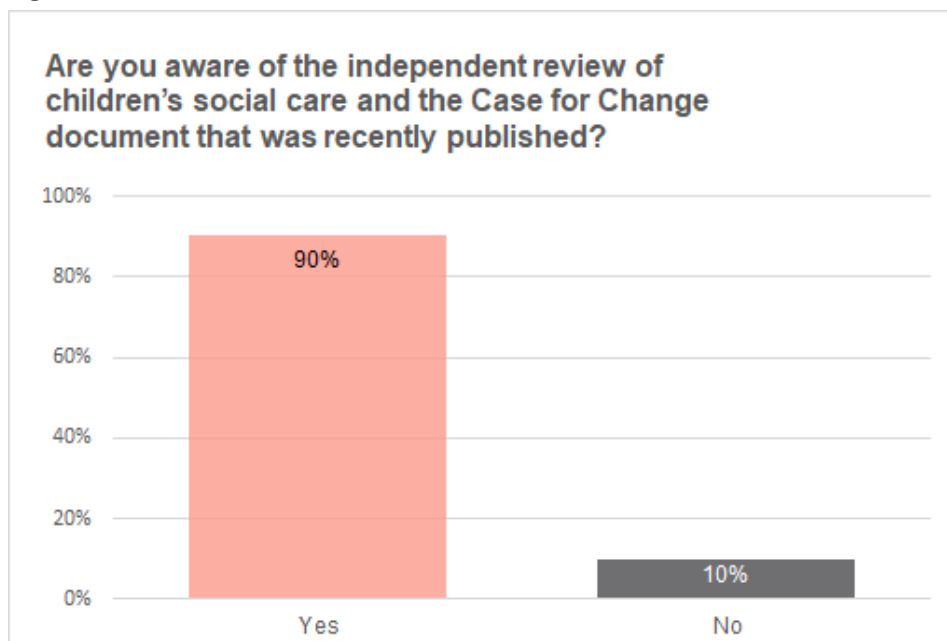
The Independent Review of Children's Social Care: Polling Results Report

The first in a series of special polls for the Independent Review of Children's Social Care was open between the 9th and 14th July 2021. A total of 186 participants answered this polling survey. Social workers were asked about how aware they thought the profession was of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. They were then asked a series of questions on how well they felt they were able to provide for children and families in the current system.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care

Participants were asked whether they were aware of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Case of Change document that was recently published (see Figure 1).

Fig 1.

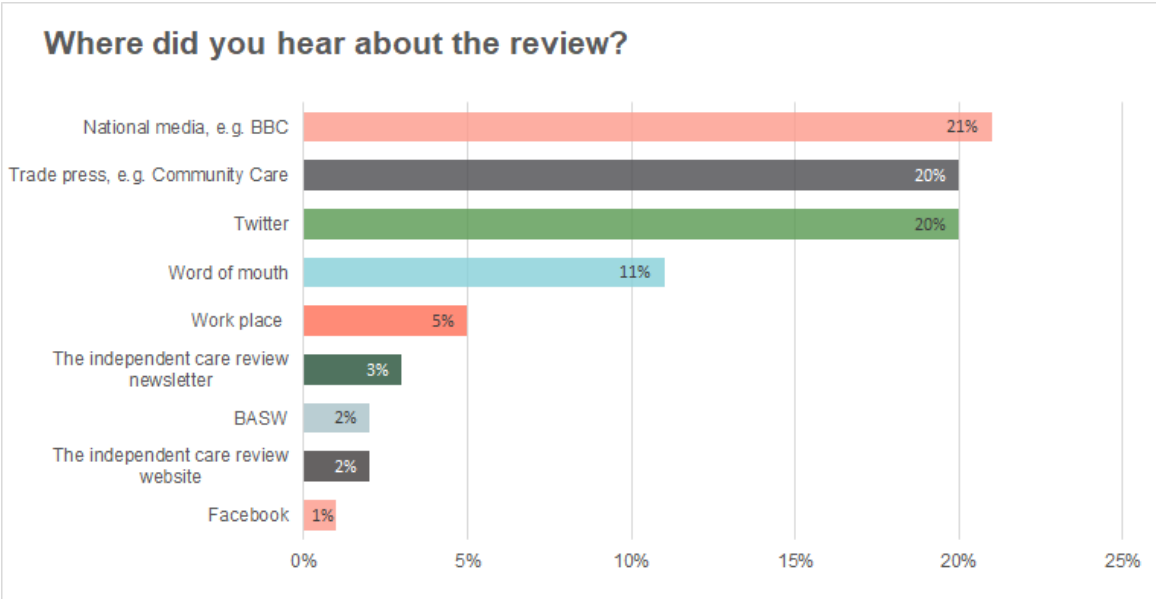


An overwhelming majority (90%) were aware of the review and The Case for Change, with only 10% reporting that they were not. However, this finding should be viewed in light of the fact that it may be biased due to the sampling method using voluntary response, meaning that those who chose to fill out the survey were more likely to be aware of the review beforehand.

How did you hear about the review?

The participants that had responded yes to the question on whether they were aware of the review and The Case for Change were then asked how they had heard about the review (see Figure 2).

Fig 2.

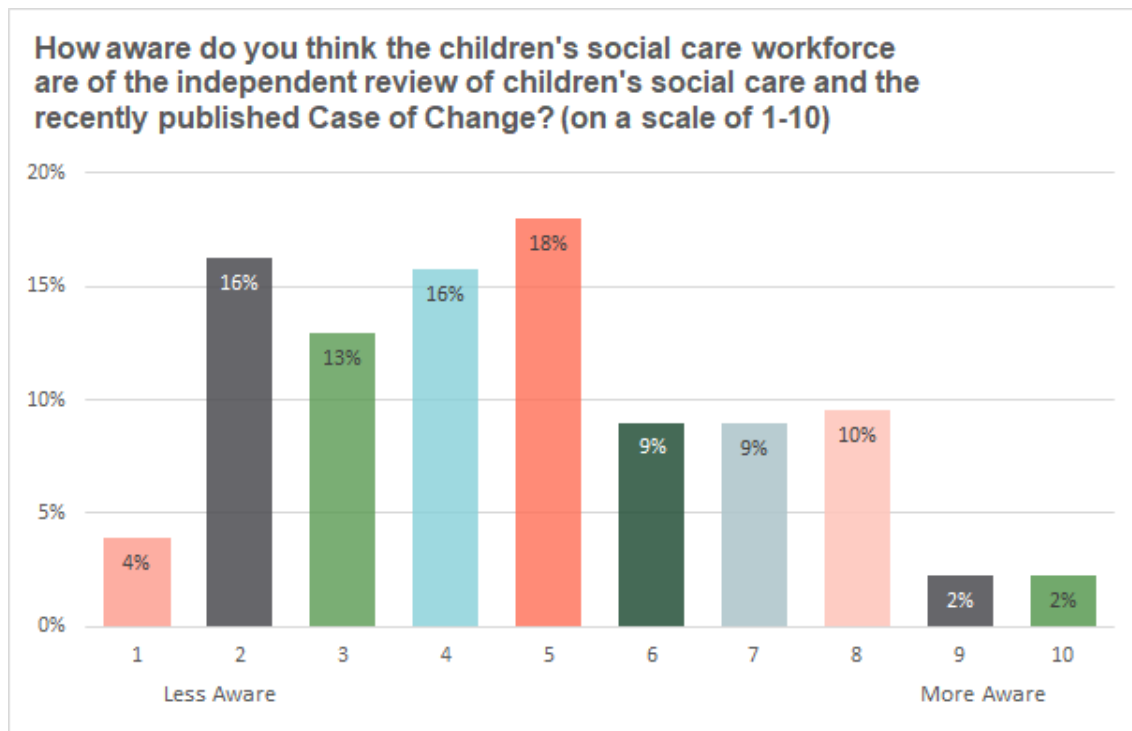


The most popular response was having heard of the review through the national media (21%), this was closely followed by those that answered trade press (20%) and Twitter (20%). 11% of respondents had heard about the review through word of mouth, and 5% through their workplace. Three per cent of the social workers in the survey said they heard about it through the reviews newsletter, whereas 2% had seen it on the review’s website. Two per cent listed the British Association of Social Workers, and finally, 1% said Facebook.

How aware are the children’s social care workforce of the care review and Case for Change?

Participants were asked, on a scale of 1-10, how aware they thought the workforce was of the review and The Case for Change (see Figure 3).

Fig 3.

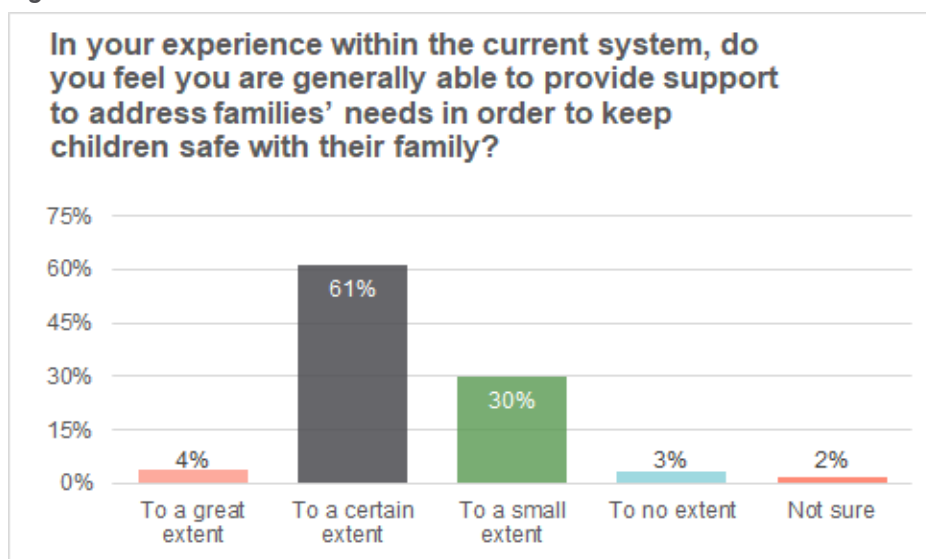


The majority of respondents (67%) rated the profession's awareness at 5 or below on the scale (i.e. less aware), with numbers tapering off higher up the scale. This means that, on average, the polling participants do not think the children's social care workforce is particularly aware of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and The Case for Change. This finding is interesting, as while 90% of our respondents answered that they were aware of the review, many didn't think that the rest of their profession was, with only 4% of respondents grading the workforce's awareness at 9 or 10.

Do you feel able to provide support to keep children safe with their families?

Participants were asked whether, in their experience within the current social care system, they felt they were able to provide support to address families' needs in order to keep children safe within their family (see Figure 4).

Fig 4.

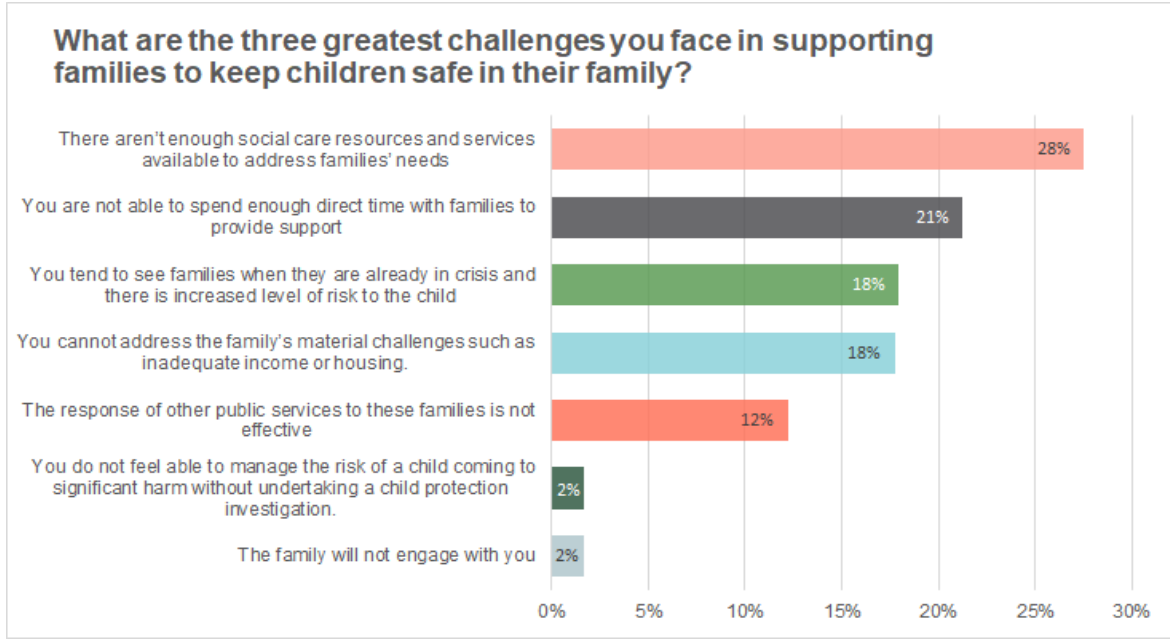


The majority of respondents (61%) answered that to a certain extent they felt able to provide support to address families' needs to keep children safe. This was followed by respondents who felt that only to a small extent they were able (30%). Four per cent of social workers answered to a great extent, and 3% answered that to no extent did they feel able to provide support to address families needs in order to keep children safe with their family.

What are the three greatest challenges you face in supporting families to keep children safe in their families?

Following on from the previous question, respondents were asked to choose three of the greatest challenges they face in supporting families to keep children safe in their family (see Figure 5). All 186 participants provided an answer for this question. They were then given the option of adding their own free text response.

Fig 5.



The graph above shows that at 28%, the most common answer was that there aren't enough social care resources and services available to address families' needs. Indeed, 21% of the 38 free text responses also cited government cuts and austerity measures leading to reduced services and increasing poverty as a challenge to them keeping children safe in their family - the single issue most mentioned.

'Poverty and inequality in communities'

The top four challenges that were selected by social workers reflect a system whereby social workers don't feel they are able to spend enough direct time with families (21%) and report that they tend to see families when they are already in crisis (18%), suggesting earlier intervention would enable them to respond more effectively. This was echoed in the free text responses, where eight participants explained that there were not enough social workers, which led to high caseloads and a lack of time to spend with individual families. They explained that this was intensified by high staff turnover.

'High workload meaning I am completing tasks, but not going above and beyond.'

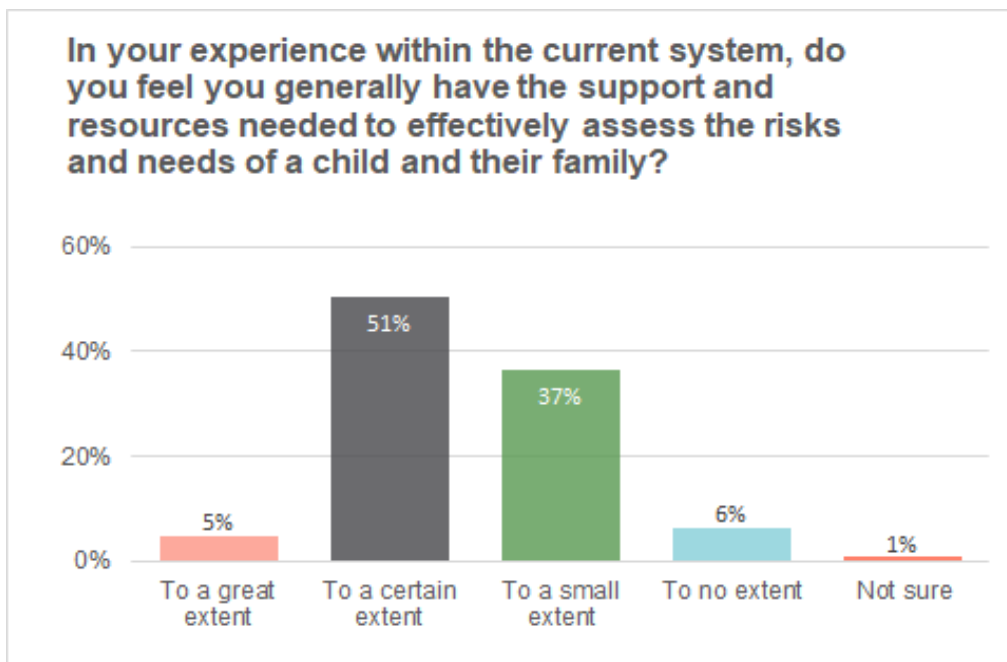
'Increased caseload decreases quality of service'

'Staffing and high turnover has a big impact. We are chronically understaffed, covering others' sickness etc.'

Do you feel you generally have the support and resources needed to effectively assess the risks and needs of a child and their family?

Participants were asked whether, in the current system, they felt they generally have the support and resources needed to effectively assess the risks and needs of a child and their family (see Figure 6).

Fig 6.

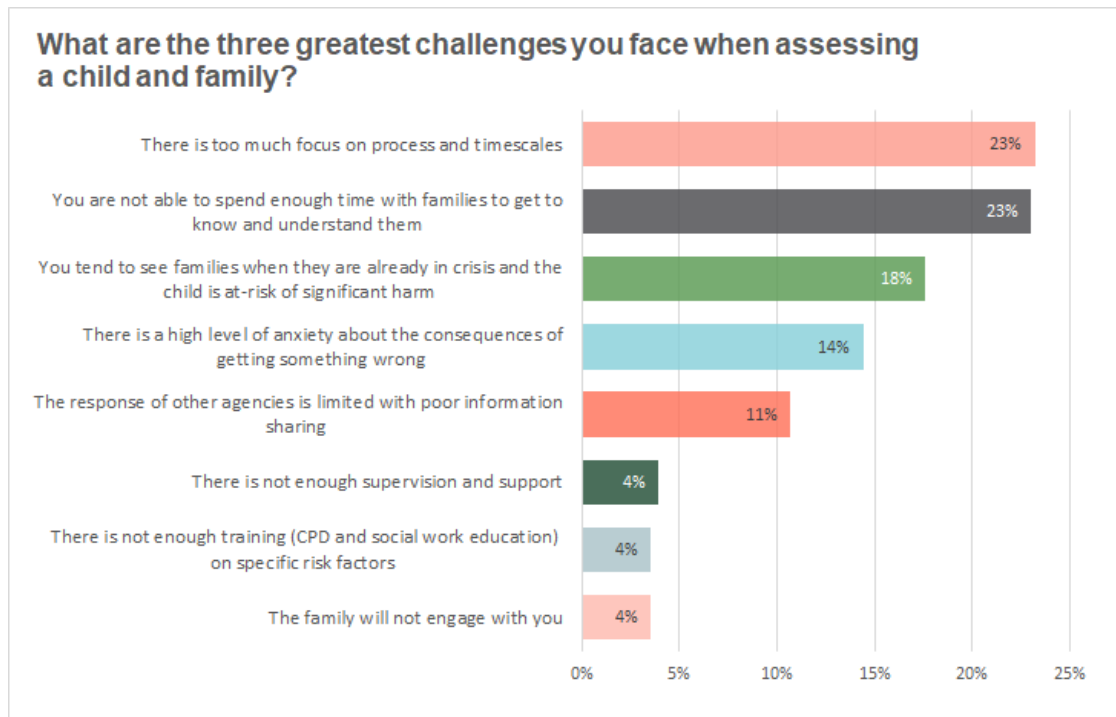


Half of the respondents (51%) answered to a certain extent, 37% answered to a small extent. Six per cent of social workers polled answered that to no extent did they feel they had the support and resources needed to effectively assess the risks and needs of a child and their family. However, a similar number (5%) responded to a great extent.

What are the greatest challenges you face when assessing a child or family?

Following on from the previous question, social workers were asked to choose the three greatest challenges they faced when assessing a child or family from a number of options (see Figure 7). They were then given the opportunity to provide a free text response. Two of the participants did not choose from the options below. One left it blank and the other wrote *'I do not have challenges with this. I think we do this very well in the LA I work for'*.

Fig 7.



The answers that were chosen the most were that there was too much of a focus on process and timescales, and that social workers felt they were not able to spend enough time with families to get to know and understand them (both chosen by 23% of participants).

Participants then answered that they tend to see families when they are already in crisis and the child is at risk of significant harm (18%) and that there was a high level of anxiety about the consequences of getting something wrong (14%). 11% of respondents listed that the response of other agencies is limited, with poor information sharing, which offers a reflection on how effective social workers in our poll felt multi-agency working was enacted.

In the free text section, austerity measures and cuts to services were mentioned in a quarter of the 27 responses, with some suggesting that the approach to social work needed to be more holistic.

'Austerity has pushed a lot of families into crisis. The models of social work we use are based around the individual but the problem is often societal and is around massive inequality'.

'There are not enough support services to prevent families coming into crisis in the first place due to funding cuts and services closing. There is not a 'whole systems' approach which sees families in a wider context of their community'.

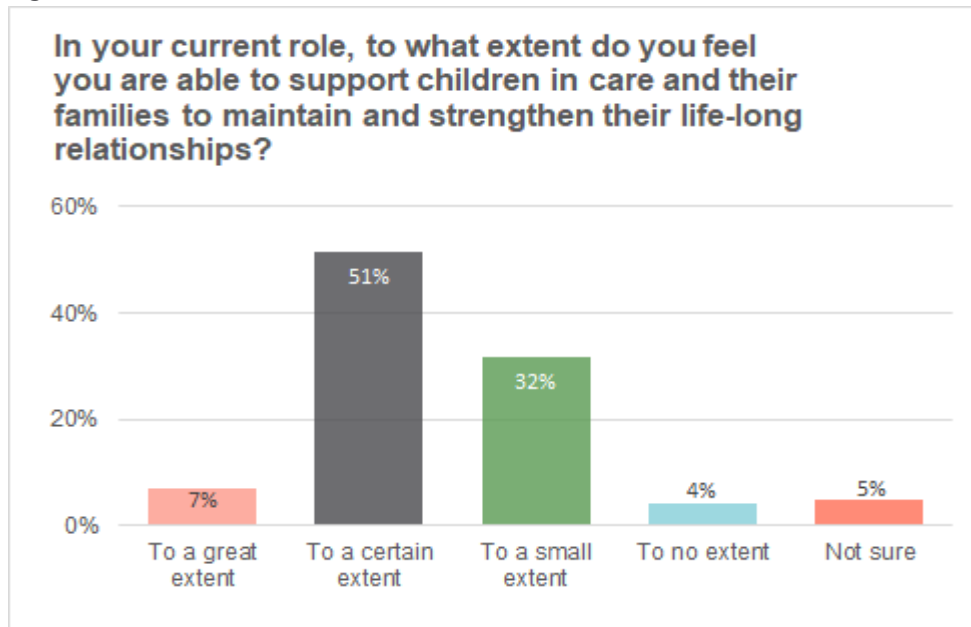
'Budget reductions and rising demand - it's that simple!'

This issue was followed closely by the number of respondents (22%) that mentioned high caseloads as preventing them from assessing a child and their family effectively. Three respondents cited distrust of social workers as making their work more difficult.

Do you feel able to support and maintain children in care's relationships with their families?

Participants were asked to what extent did they feel able to support children in care and their families to maintain and strengthen their life-long relationships in their current role in children's social care (see Figure 8).

Fig 8.

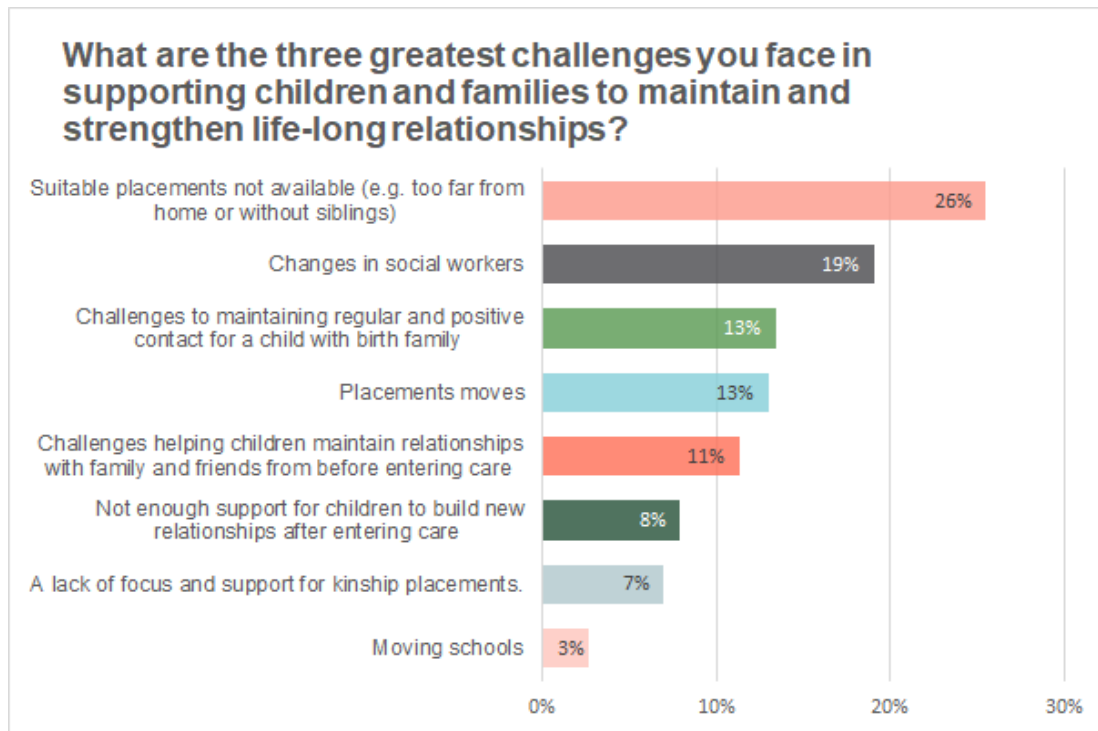


This graph depicts a similar spread of answers as Figure 6 - 51% answered that they felt they were to a certain extent able to support children in care and their families maintain and strengthen life-long relationships. A third (32%) felt they were to a small extent able to support children in care to maintain a relationship with their families. A small number of participants (4%) felt they were to no extent able to support children in care to maintain and strengthen their relationships, whereas 7% answered to a great extent.

What challenges do you face in supporting children and families to maintain and strengthen life-long relationships?

Following on from the previous question, participants were asked to choose three options for the greatest challenges they faced in supporting children and families to maintain and strengthen life-long relationships (see Figure 9). Six participants did not answer this question, meaning the total is 180. This could have been impacted by the slightly higher number of participants who listed 'not sure' for the previous question.

Fig 9.



The greatest number of respondents (26%) listed a lack of suitable placements (e.g. too far from home or without siblings) as a challenge for them in supporting children and families to maintain and strengthen life-long relationships. This was followed by changes in social workers, which 19% of respondents answered. Thirteen per cent of participants answered challenges to maintaining regular and positive contact for a child with their birth family, and the same number chose placement moves.

In the free text response section, three respondents cited that there can be resistance from some foster carers which act as a challenge in supporting relationships with birth families.

'Some foster carers are not willing to promote positive relationships for children with their birth families and can be negative about the family.'

As with the previous questions, participants mentioned a lack of funding to services as increasing difficulty in their jobs. Two respondents mentioned a lack of adult services to help the parents of children in care. One mentioned that there are not adequate services for parents to address their own traumas, meaning they are not in a position to re-build healthy relationships with their children and wider family.

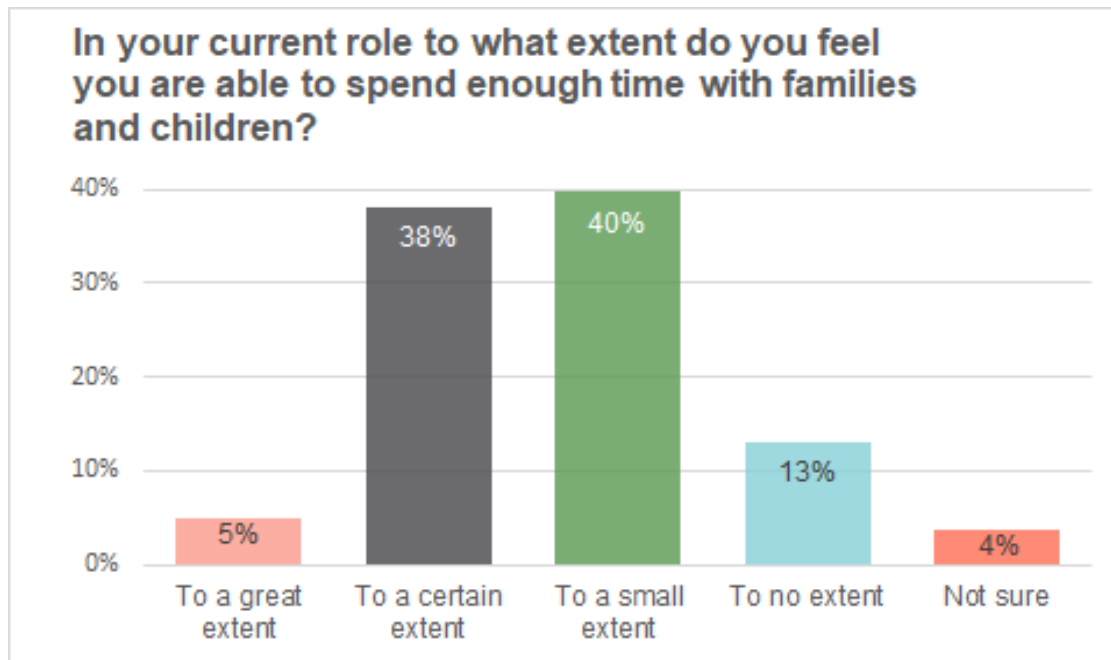
Two participants mentioned that life-long relationships for children in care and their families were not something that was emphasised by the service. One social worker suggested that this could be neglected as it is not formally assessed:

'I am not a fan of performance management at all, but this is not an area we are performance managed on so it does not get a lot of focus, unless there is a service manager particularly passionate about it. Supporting children to maintain and create lifelong relationships is one of the most important things we do, but it needs a lot of tenacity and support. It should be the focus of our work but it isn't. We are not told that Ofsted will judge us on this, but they should.'

To what extent do you feel you are able to spend enough time with families and children?

Participants were asked to what extent they feel they are able to spend enough time with families and children in their current role (see Figure 10).

Fig 10.

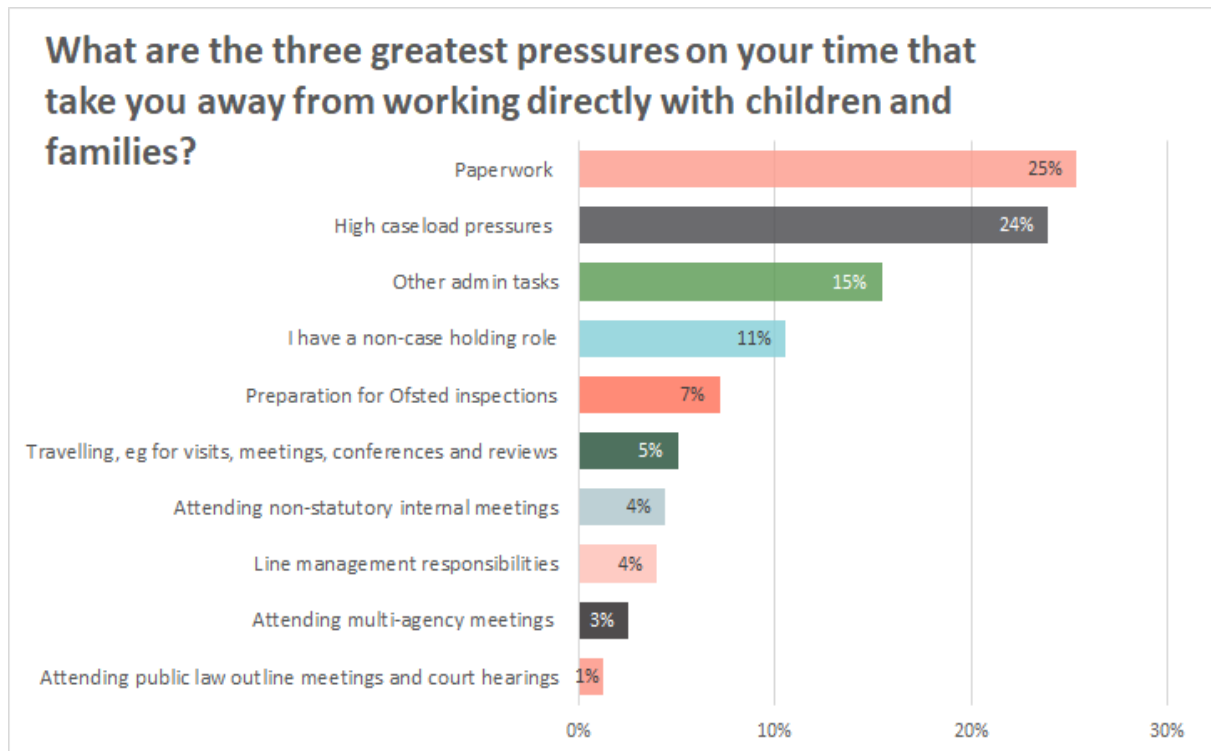


A similar number of participants answered to a certain extent (38%) and to a small extent (40%). The number of social workers that answered to no extent (13%) was more than double the number that answered to a great extent (5%). These results suggest that on average, social workers do not feel they are able to spend enough time with families and children.

What are the greatest pressures on your time that take you away from working directly with children and families?

Following on from the previous question, social workers were asked what the greatest pressures on their time that took them away from working directly with children and families were (see Figure 11). This question had the largest number of participants choosing not to answer (33), meaning the total was 153. Most of the participants with missing data for this question wrote that they had a non-case holding role, but some of those social workers with non-case holding roles still answered the question, with high incidents of choosing 'preparation for Ofsted inspections' and 'line management responsibilities'.

Fig 11.



A quarter of respondents listed paperwork (e.g. preparing for child protection conferences or court appearances) as a factor that caused them to have less time to spend with children. This was closely followed by high caseload pressures (24%). Fifteen percent of respondents answered that other admin tasks acted as a pressure on their time. Eleven percent explained that they do not have a case holding role.

In the free text section, participants emphasised that paperwork acted as a burden on them. Some mentioned large caseloads and the lack of efficient multi-agency working. One respondent explained that COVID-19 restrictions had increased time pressure in their role.

One respondent questioned whether these tasks were necessarily a negative drain on time:

'The question seems leading - I don't think most of these tasks above are a negative or that more time with families is the most important thing. Quality of time matters and meetings and recordings matter too.'

About WWCSC Polling

What Works for Children's Social Care runs fortnightly polls with social workers who have registered with us. Social workers registered with us are currently employed in a range of organisations and we canvas their opinions about our current and future research agenda as well as current affairs, wellbeing and social work practice. We would like to thank you all for taking the time to complete the polls and also ask that you encourage your colleagues to [sign up](#).