"You can't eat salad with a spoon"

What social workers say they need.

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Data and ethics statements

The datasets that support the findings of this study are available from the author, Claire Yates, upon reasonable request.

This study was approved by the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel on 26th October 2021. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk).

All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study and for any associated datasets to be utilised as presented within this thesis.

Dedication

It feels entirely surreal to be finally submitting this thesis. I find myself with the same feelings I had when about to run the London Marathon; people like me don't do things like this. That doesn't come with any sense of false modesty or looking for reassurance or compliments, it is entirely reflective of a long journey which at times seemed to have been beyond me.

I am both proud and relieved to be at this point, this is a topic of great personal importance to me and knowing that this could make a contribution to my much-loved profession fills me with hope and expectation. Lots has changed in the last six years both professionally and personally and my work life is now shared between facilitating social work education in a higher education institution and practising as an independent social worker. I continue to value the opportunity to remain in practice and to have opportunity to be a part of the journey of new social workers about to embark on their career adventure.

So, thank you to my supervisory team, Jermaine, Elaine, Paula and Rob, for your patience, guidance and encouragement, particularly in the times when this day seemed a long way off. To my family, Luke, Emma and Jack, for when I have been distracted, and my wider family, Bro, Becky, and Gini, who have shown interest from the start. To my friends, 'The Covid Bubble', Nicky P, Fiona, Grammar Queen Liz and 'The Girls', some of whom I am fairly sure forgot about 3 years ago that I was doing this and will be incredibly surprised to hear about my submission. Nonetheless they have all offered fun and joy. To my work colleagues, from 'Old Work' (particularly my original partner in crime Becky, Mawson) and 'New Work', Lauren, Marianne and Che for their cheerleading, Forensic Emma and Alex for his thoughts about triangulation, all keen to offer thoughts and help. Not forgetting Rachel Leigh Bakes for the cinnamon buns and Unit 1 for the flat whites.

And finally, thank you to the social workers who have shared their story with me, you enabled this to happen, and I am privileged to have been able to hear what you said and work with you to design an intervention that could really help.

This has been a journey, but in the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, if you face the sun, the shadows will always be behind.

Abstract

Whilst there is little doubt that social work is a rewarding career that many enter for altruistic reasons, contemporary literature clearly evidences the challenges of the role and the concerning picture of social workers leaving or thinking of leaving the profession. This issue needs to be addressed for a number of reasons, firstly the impact on social workers of workplace stress, secondly on organisations who have to employ qualified social workers, and thirdly on those in need of safety and support who may be impacted by changes of social worker. Although much is already known and understood about the challenges of the role and the factors that can impact workplace wellbeing, there is limited knowledge about what is effective in making a positive and long-lasting impact in addressing this.

This thesis sought to explore social worker wellbeing using Appreciative Inquiry as a research approach, a participatory approach with the assertion that effective change happens when rather than focusing on deficits, the focus is on what is already working well and building on this. The aim was to understand better what social workers identified they needed and creating an intervention to meet these identified needs. Data was collected through four studies; a scoping review, semi structured interviews and two focus groups, the latter stages involving participants working in statutory social work roles, and the outcome was a co-designed intervention which provided the mechanism for a meaningful conversation about wellbeing at work.

The key findings in this thesis were that social workers reported that their wellbeing comprised of number of facets; practical working conditions, support, opportunity, personal satisfaction and making a difference and that these facets could be placed in hierarchical order. This order provided the foundation for the co-design of the intervention, a structured evidenced based discussion to optimise the opportunity for social workers to experience wellbeing at work. These findings not only make an important contribution to academic knowledge about interventions that support social worker wellbeing but, in the potential, to influence and impact social work experience and practice.

Key words

Social Work, Social Worker Wellbeing, Appreciative Inquiry, Wellbeing Intervention

Table of Contents

Table of Tables

Table of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

> *'Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not'*
>
> *Dr Seuss, (1971).*

M otivation for a career in the helping professions is varied, however those entering professions such as nursing or social work often give an altruistic reason; that is a selfless concern for the wellbeing of others (Moriarty et al., 2012). A helping profession is described as the professional interaction and relationship between a helping expert and a person who needs help or support, emotionally, physically, psychologically (Graf et al., 2014) and social work falls into this category.

1.2 Background to the study

Social work is a regulated profession in which staff are uniquely educated and qualified to support people in times of crisis and challenge, with social workers playing a leading role in the safeguarding of people's rights (BASW, 2018; Social Work England 2024). Social work is a statutory role, and local authorities have to employ qualified social workers in order to exercise their statutory duties in terms of support and safeguarding, with 122,400 social workers registered with Social Work England, the professional regulatory body, in the first quarter of 2024 (Social Work England, 2024). The social work role covers the delivery of statutory duties for all those in society deemed 'in need of support or safety' (Social Work England, 2024), including adults with disabilities, children and young people, those experiencing mental ill health, learning and physical difference and disabilities and is governed by key legislation such as The Care Act 2014, The Children Act 1989 and The Mental Health Act 1983. This legislation, which informs policy, provides for both support and safeguarding and is used to define those 'in need' and details the response required from local authorities as statutory agencies.

Examples of such support offered are for an with adult learning disabilities to have provision on 1:1 personal intervention in the home to look at managing finances under a care plan, or to a family struggling with routines and boundaries, the provision of support in the home to role model positive strategies under a child in need plan under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 or for a disabled child, the provision of

respite accommodation. In terms of safeguarding, examples of this could be an intervention with adults struggling with their mental health who may require an approved mental health practitioner to undertake an assessment under The Mental Health Act 1983 to consider whether they require compulsory admission and treatment in hospital or for children assessed to be at risk of harm the convening of a child protection conference under The Children Act 1989.

Social work is a helping profession and that those joining the profession often have an altruistic reason for doing so, with wanting to make a difference cited as the main reason for becoming a social worker by 81% of social workers and 95% of social work students (Social Work England, 2024). However, a concerning picture has been seen in surveys undertaken by the British Association of Social Workers (2018, 2023) reporting that 40% of the social work workforce are considering leaving or planning to leave the profession.

1.3 Social Work as a unique profession

Each industry reports sickness and staff turnover. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2023) report nearly 1.8 million workers in Great Britain were suffering from work related ill health in 2022/2023 with almost half reporting stress, depression or anxiety with 17.1 million work days lost to work related stress. However, Health and Social Care sectors have consistently reported the highest levels of stress and mental health sickness absence in the UK (HSE, 2023), indicating that staff sickness for social workers is different from other occupations. Studies undertaken in 2018 and 2023 established poor working conditions and high levels of stress, high caseload, challenges with administrative tasks and IT systems in social work, varying organisational support structures as well as the challenges of the social work task as important factors impacting on social worker's experiences at work and their wellbeing (BASW, 2018; Ravalier & Boichat, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2020). The wider literature base considering social worker wellbeing also evidences that social work can be experienced as stressful for social workers because of the social work task, that is dealing with crisis situations such as engaging with those who have been harmed and seeking to promote safety for them, and managing complex emotional situations (McFadden et al., 2014; Kinman & Grant, 2016). Because of this, social workers could be at greater risk of negative outcomes such as depression, burnout and compassion fatigue, which could lead to poor retention and high turnover of staff, contributing therefore to the 40% of social

work staff considering leaving the profession (Kinman & Grant, 2011; McFadden et al., 2014; BASW, 2018; Ravalier & Boichat, 2018; BASW, 2023). This indicates that the social work job is stressful because of the nature of the job and because of working conditions.

1.4 Outline

In response to the picture evidenced in literature, this thesis seeks to explore whether Appreciative Inquiry can be used to co design an intervention to support social worker wellbeing at work. Qualitative data will be gathered in four stages, a scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1 and focus group 2, using Appreciative Inquiry to inform the structure and format of data collection for the semi structured interviews and focus groups and thematic analysis to analyse the data, leading to the co-design of an intervention to support wellbeing.

Literature considering social work staff wellbeing is extensive and this thesis will firstly establish through a scoping review, previous studies detailing interventions undertaken and their effectiveness. The existing literature indicates that the development of interventions to support the wellbeing of staff need to consider both individual and organisational approaches to wellbeing and support and a shift from managing stress and illness when this is being experienced by staff to preventative measures (Kinman & Grant, 2011; Adamson et al., 2014). In addition, previous studies have considered in detail both organisational and individual factors, indicating that an approach that considers individuals in the context of their organisation important in ensuring the best opportunity for effectiveness and impact (Kinman & Grant, 2011; Mc Fadden et al., 2014; Kinman & Grant, 2016; McFadden et al., 2019). Developing an approach therefore that enhances wellbeing in a proactive and holistic way rather than responding to distress and crisis remain current issues (Social Work England, 2020; Owens et al., 2023) and further knowledge is required to further inform how best employers can build and maintain working environments that provide for positive wellbeing of social work staff (Kinman & Grant, 2016; McFadden et al., 2014; Ravalier et al., 2020).

The studies will begin with a scoping review which will lay the foundation to consider what has already been implemented and tested in the academic literature. The data gathered in this stage will inform subsequent stages of data collection of semi structured interviews and focus groups. The second, third and fourth stages of

data collection will use Appreciative Inquiry as a participatory research method to design an intervention, adopting a constructivist approach to understanding experience and developing knowledge.

1.5 Relevance

Employers have a duty of care for their employees (Health and Safety Executive, 2023; Unison, n.d.) and a healthy workforce becomes a competitive advantage for both recruitment and retention, increasing the likelihood that employers will be willing to invest in strategies to increase staff wellbeing and retention (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2012). The literature relating to social work staff establishes that social workers experience poor working conditions, and this can have negative impacts on individual health and wellbeing (Kinman & Grant, 2016; Ravalier & Boichat, 2018) and in addition, organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, recruitment, retention and meeting business needs are likely to be poorer in organisations whose employees report poorer wellbeing. Moreover, there could be negative impact on service users who may be impacted if staff wellbeing is poor, for example making a difference to their time keeping, motivation, interest in their work and availability, as well as assessment skills and safeguarding duties (Adamson et al., 2014; Truter et al., 2017; Kiley et al., 2018). It is therefore crucial that the wellbeing of social workers is prioritised, and this study will therefore contribute to knowledge and practice about the co-design of wellbeing interventions with social workers, with the aim of making a difference to the current picture presented in literature.

1.6 Research Question and Objectives

The research question for this thesis is whether Appreciative Inquiry can be used to co-design an intervention that could support social worker self-reported wellbeing. The objectives of the four stages of data collection studies are:

1. To review work wellbeing interventions previously published through a scoping literature review;
2. Using Appreciative Inquiry, to use interviews to gather data to support the development of an intervention that aimed to support the wellbeing of Local Authority employed social workers;
3. Through the use of Focus Groups to further the design and development of an intervention to support self-reported wellbeing at work.

1.7 Personal interest and rationale

In terms of my own interest and experience in social work, at 14 years of age I had a careers interview and one of the careers identified as suiting the answers I had given was that of social worker. My parents advised me away from this career choice, having heard from a friend of a friend that social workers had a terrible time; being sworn at and their hair often got pulled. I therefore embarked on an undergraduate degree with the intention of progressing to teacher training, but having gained an Honours Degree in Religious Studies, dipped out of the PGCE qualification and opted for a practice based youth work qualification instead. An opportunity to apply for a social work qualification through employment arose, the first scheme of its kind and post qualification, I remained in the same area of practice, my motivation sitting with the altruistic value of wanting to help and make a difference. Managing a team of social workers focused my attention and interest in staff wellbeing, from a professional perspective in considering the management role; the individual support staff require to report positive wellbeing in their role and perform their job role, from an organisational perspective; how the statutory role of social worker is carried out to meet the business needs and from the perspective of the families using the service in terms of the quality of service they receive.

1.8 How this thesis meets the requirements of a PhD

The significance of this thesis lies not only in making an important contribution to academic knowledge about interventions that support social worker wellbeing but, in the potential to influence and impact social work experience and practice. As will be evidenced through the scoping review, the current knowledge base is small and not enough is known about what could improve self-reported wellbeing at work for social workers. This thesis therefore makes a crucial contribution to the limited evidence base through the data gathered and analysed in the empirical studies and provides important recommendations for future research.

Importantly, using Appreciative Inquiry represents a novel and unique approach to research and intervention design. Whilst taking a strengths based approach to questioning, rather than identifying deficits, this fully collaborative approach provides for the design of an intervention based upon existing strengths and what is known to work well. This study occupies an important gap between the extensive evidence base about why social workers leave or consider leaving and how to support wellbeing and

potentially influence thoughts to stay. The findings in this study provide new insights into what social workers report they require at work to support their wellbeing and how what they require should be scaffolded, providing for clear opportunity and potential to inform practice and policy for both individuals and organisations that employ social workers.

1.9 Introduction to each chapter

1.9.1 Chapter 2 Wellbeing and wellbeing at work

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of wellbeing, considering established definitions and the multi-faceted descriptions of what is experienced when describing wellbeing. This chapter considers both objective and subjective definitions before focusing on wellbeing at work for social work staff, drawing on contemporary literature and further providing the background and rationale for this study as well as introducing the Job Demands – Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001).

1.9.2 Chapter 3 Conceptual and theoretical methods

This chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework, considering epistemological and ontological positions and Appreciative Inquiry as a participatory approach. This chapter details the design of the studies, outlining and providing critical analysis of the methods of both data collection and analysis used at each stage. The organisational structure of where the studies were undertaken is described and the process of each stage is outlined.

1.9.3 Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter presents the research methods used in each of the empirical studies; the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus groups, confirming the overall research question and those specific to each study. This chapter also presents the method for the triangulation of the results and data analysis.

1.9.4 Chapter 5 Results - scoping review

This chapter brings together the key findings of previous studies exploring wellbeing interventions, exploring strengths and limitations and pointing to future research areas, highlighting key issues of support and training and development.

1.9.5 Chapter 6 Results – semi structured interviews

This chapter presents the results of the semi structured interviews, using thematic analysis to analyse the data and presenting the generated themes; wellbeing, practical

working conditions, support, making a difference, opportunity and personal satisfaction.

1.9.6 Chapter 7 Results – focus group 1

The results of focus group 1 are presented using thematic analysis, with themes of wellbeing, support, making a difference, opportunity and making a difference.

1.9.7 Chapter 8 Triangulation of the data from the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1

The process of the triangulation of the data from the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1 is presented in this chapter, considering similarity and difference and presenting a table of triangulated results and forming the foundation for focus group 2.

1.9.8 Chapter 9 Results – focus group 2

This chapter presents the development of the intervention and its finalised form, a co-designed intervention to represent a constructivist individual approach to wellbeing in the context of an organisation.

1.9.9 Chapter 10 Discussion

The main findings of the four studies and the thesis as a whole are presented here, with critical analysis of the methodology, theoretical approach and the results. The chapter concludes with consideration to the strengths and limitations.

Chapter 2: Wellbeing and wellbeing at work

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the concept of wellbeing, considering established definitions and the multi-faceted descriptions of what is experienced when describing wellbeing. This chapter considers both objective and subjective definitions before focusing on wellbeing at work for social workers, drawing on contemporary literature and further providing the background and rationale for the empirical studies in this thesis.

2.2 Defining Wellbeing

Wellbeing has become a frequently used word in society (OED, 2023) particularly with the increased focus on mental health in recent times, contributed to by the global pandemic in 2020 (Mansfield et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2021). There is a wealth of research relating to wellbeing, however many studies comment that there no clear agreement about a definitive and agreed upon definition of the term (Atkinson, 2020; Burns et al., 2020; Gennings et al., 2021; Simons & Baldwin, 2021).

Burns et al. (2020) consider that the World Health Organisation's early definition of wellbeing laid the foundation for contemporary discussion. This states "Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. It is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose" (World Health Organisation, 1948). This moves away from the traditional health led definition that focused on the absence of disease and towards a wider consideration of how 'feeling well' could be understood (Simons & Baldwin, 2021). The work by Bradburn (1969) provided a shift from considering wellbeing in terms of psychiatric illness towards a psychological understanding of people's lived experiences, defining wellbeing being present when psychological wellbeing is high that is where positivity is effective over negativity and considering the effect over time. Furthering this, Shin and Johnson (1978) began consideration of a subjective, multifaceted approach stating that wellbeing is 'a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his chosen criteria' (p478). This provides something of the context to some of the current perspectives, with contemporary concepts of wellbeing considering holistic, multi factored definitions of what it is to be well in society today (McNaught, 2011). The Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2023) for

example, defining wellbeing as a broad concept encompassing different aspects of life, including work, relationships, health, and personal fulfilment.

Traditionally, research looking at wellbeing has largely reflected two perspectives; the focus on being happy, feeling positive and satisfied, the hedonistic approach, and the eudemonic approach which considers positive functioning and flourishing (Forgeard et al., 2011; Mansfield et al., 2020). These perspectives have been seen historically as largely contrasting, with the eudemonic approach that wellbeing comes from seeking a life full of meaning and the hedonistic approach with the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. Most researchers now consider that wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct and that wellbeing will most often include both hedonistic and eudemonic components (Atkinson et al., 2020; Genning et al., 2021). With a focus on exploring dimensions rather than definitions (Voukelatou et al., 2020), Ryff (1989) proposed a six-factor model which determined self acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships, mastery of the environment, purpose in life and personal growth. Seligman (2011) put forward a framework for happiness and wellbeing based on positive psychology, considering five aspects; positive feelings, engaging in activities which are challenging and offer reward, having relationships and social connections with others, having meaning and a sense of purpose, and achieving and accomplishing goals. Both models include both hedonic and eudemonic factors however focus to an extent on individual experience and do perhaps not take enough account of the wider cultural factors or societal context that could also impact wellbeing, for example discrimination, financial hardship and inequitable access to services (WHO, 2018).

McNaught (2011) suggests a framework that takes account of both of subjective and objective wellbeing factors. Objective wellbeing refers to the conditions that provide opportunity for a good life, such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities and is often measured using indicators such as income, expectancy of life, and literacy rates (Das et al., 2020). Subjective wellbeing considers individual personal experiences and perceptions about life and is measured using indicators such as life satisfaction, happiness, and sense of purpose (Carter & Anderson, 2023; Voukelatou et al., 2020). To gain a comprehensive picture of wellbeing, it is likely that consideration of all these factors is required; individual difference and character as well as external circumstances influencing individual experience and perception of being well,

and individuals are likely to pursue interests and activities that evoke feelings of happiness and joy as well as engaging in activities which are more altruistic in nature and seeking to bring meaning from the experience. The understanding of these wellbeing factors is crucial, in order that any co-designed intervention is able to address the factors the social workers have identified. Alderson et al. (2020) considers that 'when we understand what makes people's lives go well, see the positive things people bring to situations, and understand people's social and emotional needs, projects and services can be better designed to respond to the many aspects that make up people's lives' (p1905).

2.3 Model used in this thesis

This study seeks to understand the experiences of social worker's wellbeing at work, recognising the opportunity to capture the holistic picture of the participants lived experience. Indeed, as will be explored further in Chapter 3, this thesis adopts a constructivist approach to knowledge and meaning and the empirical data collection stages aim to understand through interviews and focus groups the experiences of social workers and how they define and experience wellbeing. Whilst holding in mind the constructivist position of this thesis, it is crucial to be certain that it is wellbeing that is being looked at in these empirical studies.

In considering therefore theories to support and provide for this, a prominent theory of wellbeing at work is the Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001). This theory considers that all of what happens at work can be characterised into demands and resources and that wellbeing at work is impacted by the balance between what the demands of the job are and the resources available to not only meet these but to provide a buffer and therefore mitigate against unwanted and negative impacts of the demands. The theory explains how job demands and resources could influence job performance through wellbeing and how both proactive and reactive factors influence job demands and resources (Bakker, 2015). The model considers that high job demands lead to strain and health impairment, the impairment process, and that a high level of resources can lead to greater wellbeing and productivity, the motivational process (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Job demands describes the physical, psychological, social aspects of the job which could be impactful for the employee (Demerouti et al., 2001). In considering social work, demands may include high caseload or the emotional toll of the type of work being undertaken, the theory providing

for some job characteristics being more general and some being unique to the specific job.

Resources consider factors that help to achieve goals, regulate the demands of the job and provide for personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), such as a supportive environment, opportunity for training or development and self autonomy. Interestingly, the employee is not seen as passive but active in individual responses and characteristics and experiences they bring to the role and creation of resources (Xanthopolou et al., 2009; Bakker et al., 2023). The Job Demands-Control model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) similarly considers demands of workload and posits that if the demands are too high, this can lead to experiences of stress. The theory maintains this experience can be mitigated by the capacity to control the demands, through autonomy in day to day work and the use of skills and knowledge. Both models therefore consider a balance of the demands of the role and that there could be a negative impact in terms of wellbeing if the balance is not achieved.

The Job Demands-Resources model aligns with this thesis and specifically the empirical studies; rather than focusing on the interaction between demands and control, the Job Demands-Resources model extends to provide for a wider consideration of what factors are included in resources, considering team support, manager direction and that individuals are nested in teams, that are nested in organisations (Bakker et al., 2023) which can be experienced as impactful. More recent reviews by Bakker et al. (2023) have considered the importance of providing for a person x situation approach, that is that acknowledging that work events and job demands in terms of work load might vary from day to day or week to week and that individual perception of what is experienced as particularly demanding could vary. In addition, the Job Demands-Resources model could be used to guide practical interventions in the workplace (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) through considering the impairment and motivational process. This model provides a satisfactory way to underpin how wellbeing is approached in this thesis and will be utilised in the studies.

The Job Demands-Resources model is not without critique or caution, Schaufeli and Taris (2014) consider approaching the model as a framework rather than a well developed theory, due to the interpretations of what demands and resources could mean across different contexts, this could indeed make applying this to a range of research settings more challenging. Additionally, there is concern about the reciprocal

nature of the demands and the resources, whether these are influential in a bidirectional way (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) and whether the model can be applied to anything other than at an individual level. These issues will be addressed in this study by clarifying terms used and confirming the terms could be context specific to the role of social worker, indeed this model is appropriate because of the flexibility and adaptability to account for different professions and job roles. In addition, the constructivist approach provides for understanding experience and building knowledge and understanding and therefore this model provides for this opportunity throughout the studies. This will be explored further in Chapter 3.4.

2.4 Wellbeing at work

Employers have a duty of care for their employees (Health and Safety Executive, 2020). This is a legal obligation that employers have towards their employees requiring them to take reasonable steps to ensure employees' health, safety and wellbeing whilst at work, including a safe working environment, taking action to safeguard against discrimination and bullying and actively taking steps to prevent work related stress (GOV.uk n.d). As stated in Chapter 1, the HSE report nearly 1.8 million workers in Great Britain reported suffering from work-related ill-health in 2022/2023. The wellbeing of individual staff in the context of their wider organisation is considered a competitive advantage for organisations in recruitment and retention, it is often linked with positive performance and productivity and when employers are seen to invest in wellbeing, employees reciprocate with positive attitudes to work and greater task performance and therefore the wellbeing of employees is an organisational priority for many employers (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2012; Kowlaski & Loretto, 2017).

2.5 Social worker wellbeing at work

The Public Sector employs 17% of the workforce in the UK, with Human Health / Social Work industry sectors reporting the highest levels work related ill health absence in the UK, higher than any other industry (Kowlaski & Loretto, 2017; HSE 2020). Social work is a regulated profession where staff have to be educated to professional standards to support people in times of crisis and challenge and to take a lead role in safeguarding (Social Work England, Professional Standards, 2019; BASW, 2023).

As introduced in Chapter 1, social work is a helping profession and those joining this often have an outward looking and altruistic reason for doing so, with most social workers (81%) and social work students (95%), citing wanting to make a difference as

the main reason for becoming a social worker (Social Work England, 2024). Fewer say they joined the profession because of friends or family who are social workers (13%) or for the salary (11%) (Social Work England 2024). Therefore, a worrying picture is seen in key studies undertaken by the British Association of Social Workers and Social Work England (BASW, 2018, 2023; Social Work England, 2024) as these report that 40% of the social work workforce are considering leaving or planning to leave the profession. Key studies by McFadden et al. (2014) Kinman and Grant (2016) Ravalier and Boichat (2018), and Ravalier et al. (2021), evidence that social workers are exposed to poorer working conditions than most other UK occupations and establish that poor working conditions and high levels of stress, specifically high caseload, challenges with administrative tasks and IT systems, varying organisational support structures as well as the challenges of the social work task as important factors contributing to this picture. Current research indicates 85% of social workers report stress as a result of their job; the most common causes of stress identified are a high administrative workload (62%), a focus on targets rather than user issues (56%), and a high caseload (48%) (BASW, 2023; Social Work England, 2024) confirming that the issues identified in previous studies remain current.

In considering the social work task, the literature establishes that social work is stressful, with some studies finding that social work staff are more vulnerable to stress because of the nature of the actual work; dealing with crisis situations such as engaging with those who have experienced harm and seeking to promote safety for them and managing complex emotional situations (Kinman & Grant, 2011; McFadden et al., 2014; Ravalier & Boichat, 2018). There is a high risk of vicarious trauma due to the exposure over time of traumatic situations, either first hand or through associated work in a larger team environment (Finklestein, 2015) as well as the experience by some social workers of abuse from families and individuals they are working with (Ravalier et al., 2020). Social workers could be more likely to experience depression, burnout and compassion fatigue (Kinman & Grant, 2011; McFadden et al., 2014). Those in helping professions can often be deeply engaged and committed to their role, linked to their reason for entering these types of professions, and at the same time feel levels of stress (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

There are conditions present in every type of work and working conditions, that is 'the physical and psychological conditions workers are exposed to whilst working'

(HSE, n.d.). Working conditions is term used to capture all elements of work, for example how much work, when the work is done, how it is done, what is provided for it to be completed, and how is it supported and managed. Working conditions can be described as 'poor' if elements are experienced negatively and over time. In considering social workers, what contributes to the description of poor working conditions is lots of work; evidenced in high caseloads, the administrative load, lack of management support, long working hours and poor IT systems (Ravailer et al., 2021; Ravalier, 2023).

2.6 The impact of poor working conditions

From an organisational perspective, statutory agencies such as local authorities require qualified workers to carry out duties only those registered are able to fulfil. If there are fewer social workers, when social workers leave, the responsibility for statutory duties remains and this can lead to additional pressure and demands on those staff remaining, and the cycle of high workload would continue (Bedford, 2024).

This could also place additional financial pressures on Local Authorities to employ agency workers, who whilst potentially providing a rapid solution to vacancies, have a greater financial impact on budgets than council employed workers and do not have the same contractual obligations (Koutsounia, 2022). Existing literature certainly points to the importance of further knowledge to understand how best employers can build and maintain working environments that provide for positive wellbeing of social work staff and that understanding the context and culture of the organisation is key when considering the design and implementation of wellbeing approaches (Kinman & Grant, 2016; McFadden et al., 2015).

In considering the impact on individuals of course, experiencing poor working conditions and experiencing the nature of the work can lead to both physical and mental ill health (Ravalier et al., 2020). For those who have entered a helping profession, likely having completed extensive training with some personal financial cost, to consider leaving could be accompanied with distress and disappointment. For some, job role is heavily aligned with identity and self-efficacy and individuals could perceive that others will consider they were not managing the role (Peetz et al., 2013). There could also be a direct impact on service users, both in their experience of working with a social worker who is negatively impacted by working conditions and stressors as outlined and where turnover, reallocation or sickness absence could lead to repeated

change of worker. Research indicates there can be multiple effects of turnover of staff (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010), a disruption to the helping relationship, frustration for the service user retelling their story, a potential delay in assessment and support being received (Carr et al., 2023; Ravailer et al., 2023).

These things together evidence the pressing nature of supporting wellbeing in the social work profession. This study therefore seeks to understand the subjective experience of wellbeing of social workers in the context of their organisation in order to design an intervention to support wellbeing further, with the aim of leading to a greater proportion of social workers remaining in the role and self-reporting wellbeing in doing so. Through understanding what makes people say their work is going well, hearing the positive things that are already happening, and understanding what it is social workers need, an intervention can be better designed (Atkinson et al., 2020). It is also hoped that the design of an intervention will therefore support employers in their duty of care, support social worker wellbeing, and ultimately practice.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has explored the concept of wellbeing, considering definition of the term in the context of this study as well as more widely. Focusing on wellbeing at work and subsequently wellbeing at work specifically for social workers has set the scene for the empirical studies as part of this thesis, drawing attention to the current picture for social workers and the impact on them individually, on those using services and on the organisation.

Chapter 3: Conceptual and theoretical Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail how the research question and aims of the thesis will be addressed.

The aims are detailed in Chapter 1.6. and the research question was whether Appreciative Inquiry could be used to co-design an intervention that could support self-reported social worker wellbeing. This chapter will begin by considering the design of the study, outlining and providing critical analysis of the methods of both data collection and analysis used. It will outline the stages of data collection then detail the process of each stage before providing the organisational context in which the study was undertaken.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The research process is a series of stages, which derive from the researcher's basic beliefs about the world, a set of assumptions and lens of interpretation about life which is made up of stories and values and expectations about what happens in the world and how it works (Moriarty, 2011). There is discussion amongst researchers about process and how to best conduct research, with significant discussion being between the varying approaches to research; positivism, interpretivism or constructivism (Atieno, 2009; Ravalier, 2013). Choosing the research paradigm is vital, as it is this that provides the logical structure for the study, the paradigm is representative of a set of assumptions about reality, knowledge of that reality and ways of investigating that reality (Adom et al., 2016; Crabtree & Miller, 2022). The positivist research paradigm is underpinned by the assumption that objective reality exists and is independent of human consciousness and that knowledge about this is based on empirical evidence which can be gathered objectively and can be measured. The emphasis is on behaviour and facts and data is usually gathered in numerical form, which is most often presented as a statistical result which can attempt to be generalised (Golafashani, 2003). The positivist research paradigm most often uses methods such as experiments and surveys to gain data with the aim of identifying patterns or laws that are generalisable (Atieno, 2009; Queiros et al., 2017). The role and position of the researcher can often be put forward as objective in the research process with the aim of presenting less bias in the study.

The interpretive research paradigm in general considers knowledge, reality and meaning to be constructed, more subjective and context specific with emphasis on hearing and understanding experience (Moriarty, 2011). Qualitative methods of interviews, observations and focus groups are most often used, with the researcher being part of this process and recognising their own position and the position of others as influencing the study with the aim of understanding how reality is constructed and the meaning of this (Adom et al., 2016; Davies & Fisher, 2018). Subjectivity has often been linked with bias, meaning it is problem that should be managed and could be a threat to credibility (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Roulston and Shelton (2015) discuss different types of bias; selection bias, experimenter bias, observer bias for example, outlining that discussion about the positionality and impact of the researcher in any form of research requires acknowledgement and consideration. Certainly, Braun and Clarke (2022) encourage a move away from using the term bias and replacing this with personal reflexivity to recognise and celebrate this more readily. The researcher was positioned in the organisation in which the studies were undertaken and proposes throughout this chapter the rationale for this being a positive part of the research design and implementation.

3.3 Research paradigm – constructivism

These different ontological and epistemological positions outlined above inform the decision about the research method for this particular study. This study adopts a constructivist approach, with the epistemological position that knowledge about reality and the human experience is socially constructed rather than objectively real and specific to the context and participants being studied. This is because this study aims to understand experiences and the constructed individual and group realities of social workers, and this research paradigm provides for this study to seek to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences in their everyday settings (Adom et al., 2016).

The Job Demands–Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) outlined in Chapter 2, sits appropriately in this approach for a number of reasons. Firstly, through recognising individual perception about demands and resources and experience of these (Schaufeli, 2017) and in addition, recognising the active and dynamic role in presenting responses and characteristics and experiences brought to a role and the creation

of resources (Xanthopolou et al., 2009; Bakker et al., 2023). Providing for the experiences to be explored individually and as a group gives opportunity for consideration about both the demands of the role and about the resources available. This effectively lays the foundation to develop an intervention which is reflective of these things (Schuafeli & Taris, 2016).

The constructivist approach is heavily aligned with qualitative research methods, methods that allow the researcher to understand what is being studied from the experience of the participants (Adom et al, 2016). As such, this study used the qualitative methods of semi structured interviews and focus groups. Qualitative approach is a broad term which describes the range of research methods which have origins in terms of theory in largely the social sciences (Moriarty, 2011; Ravalier & Boichat, 2018). Qualitative approaches vary but do have core characteristics including having a small sample group, aiming to provide a rich in depth understanding, analysis and interpretation of the experience and story of participants (Moriarty, 2011; Ormston et al., 2013).

The social work research evidence base indicates a preference for qualitative approaches, from 2010 onwards, three qualitative studies were undertaken per quantitative study (Moriarty, 2011). Where the research questions are focused on exploring experience to understand situational behaviours and meaning, qualitative approaches are beneficial for both practitioners and policy makers and can encourage a greater understanding and perspective of all stakeholders (Shaw, 2003; Hammarberg et al., 2016).

3.4 Challenges to the Qualitative Approach

Qualitative approaches are not without challenge, as well as considering the suitability of the method for the research question, the decision about research methods should also take account of the advantages and disadvantages of the approach (Querios et al., 2017). Importantly the concerns for reliability and validity require addressing. In quantitative research reliability relates to the ability of the study to be replicated and repeated and validity relates to whether the tools used measured what they set out to measure (Golafshani, 2003). These terms are rooted in the positivism paradigm but to ensure that research conducted in the constructivism paradigm is seen as meaningful and having credibility, they require consideration for this study. Golafshani (2003) maintains that that the terms require redefining for their use in qualitative studies and

Leung (2015) considers that in qualitative research, reliability and validity lie with demonstrating consistency, with there being demonstration of the appropriateness of the process and the tools used. This is explored further in this chapter, but bringing this together here, Rose and Johnson (2020) discuss trustworthiness, considering the importance of asking the question about overall sense of quality of the study. Quality includes alignment between the research question, the methods used to gather data and to analyse data and whether there is enough information to enable the type of study to be replicated. Furthermore, it should be clear how the researcher made the findings and that there is evidence of how the researcher engaged with reflexivity with the study and consideration about methodological integrity (Levit, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Stenfors et al., 2020).

The approach adopted in this study follows the pattern of similar studies with social workers (Grant et al., 2015; Gibson, 2016) and evidence that the use of semi structured interviews and focus groups is well established. This study follows similar research steps of a rapid literature review, followed by data collection and analysis of qualitative data, enabling this type of study to be replicated further. Whilst positivist paradigms maintain the objectivity of the researcher to ensure the minimisation of bias, constructivist approaches support a different position. The researcher is an active part of the research process, bringing themselves with their experiences and their world view to the study and that this is positive (Davies & Fisher, 2018). The positionality of the researcher in relation to the subject, the participants and the research context and process is important because this reflects what the researcher themselves brings to the study both in world view and perspective. For part of the period of this study, the researcher worked in the organisation that the interviews and focus groups were undertaken. It therefore follows that this study takes the view that there are benefits of the researcher being 'an insider' in terms of knowing the research context, understanding the structure of the organisation, knowing well the process and nature of the role, as well as being aware of the resources available (Toy-Cronin, 2018) and that this indeed adds to the overall trustworthiness.

3.5 The Insider / outsider position

In this context, 'outsider' and 'insider' are terms which refer to the position of the researcher. A researcher who is part of the group being studied, sharing experience, language and context is referred to as an insider, whereas a researcher who does not

share this is referred to as an outsider. However, Leigh (2014) argues that rather than a binary position, there is a continuum between the two positions. Certainly research about insider / outsider position maintains that the researcher is not in fact neutral, encouraging the researcher to embrace the space in between, acknowledging the position of the researcher and recognising expertise as a shared strength (Golofshani, 2003; Toy-Cronin, 2018). Certainly, as an insider researcher, there is a unique position to be able to bring specialised and pre-existing knowledge and understanding to the complexities of an issue or an organisation (Costley et al., 2010). Being an insider researcher could bring greater legitimacy and credibility, that the participants have confidence that their experiences are understood and perhaps shared (Berkovic et al., 2020; Aburn et al., 2021).

Conversely, the role of this researcher was manager in the organisation in which the studies were taking place. Murphy (2023) considers the dilemmas and challenges arising from being an 'intimate insider' (p4) when the researcher is positioned in their employing organisation, noting the potential impact on collegiate relationships and how the research role was perceived. At the outset of the data collection consideration was given to the issues that may arise from the researcher's role. Certainly, there was a shared knowledge and understanding about context, about case work and about the wider organisation. However, it was considered how the role could impact firstly on participants feeling compelled to take part, but also whether they would feel able to be free in the interview to give their view or whether they would be concerned about the passing on of information to higher management. These issues were addressed at the outset through ethical approval for the study and specifically to the participants in pre-prepared Information Sheets (Appendix 4) and Consent Forms (Appendix 5) and discussed verbally prior to each interview and focus group. The data collection took place only through semi structured interviews and focus groups, and therefore, it is argued the role of researcher, as opposed to manager, was reflected in these times. Indeed, Adu-Ampong and Adams (2020) consider that there is value in conducting research at home, that credibility is gained through being known and being approachable, showing oneself as an eager learner. Chammas (2020) adds that being an insider researcher gives opportunity for fuller questions to be asked, balancing the concern that the researcher may already have the answers in mind to the questions posed.

There are of course both professional and ethical challenges in this position of insider researcher. Floyd and Arthur (2012) consider Tolich's (2004) external and internal confidentiality, with external confidentially referring to matters such as informed consent and ethical applications and internal confidentiality referring more to more complex issues such as navigating personal relationships after the research has been completed and holding the thoughts and emotions of participants. Drake (2010) considers the dual role of researcher and employee, highlighting issues such as loyalty to the organisation and being in a position of holding privileged information. Taylor (2011) considers these are important issues in the context of this study and arguably whilst there is no agreed way of managing all of the arising issues (Fleming, 2018) matters of both external and internal confidentiality have been managed through a clear ethics application, provision of information at the outset, including confirmation of anonymity, acknowledgement of the potential power dynamic in the relationship (Fleming, 2018), informed consent and provision of post participation signposting.

Rose and Johnson (2020) consider that the 'demands for quality' are also made by the researcher who constantly reflects and asks the question 'did we get this right?'. They suggest a tension between the nature of constructivism, which is subjective and what they term as the 'perceived need' to justify quality through positivist terminology, which comes back to Golafshani's (2003) view of addressing what the terms mean for qualitative research. The seminal work by Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered the overall trustworthiness of research and Morse et al., (2002) consider further overall significance and utility of the research as contributing to matters of quality and rigour. There is argument than rather than a strict criterion in terms of credibility, that methodological awareness is key, that is clarity about the method and rationale. Indeed Barusch et al. (2012) consider that rigour does not necessarily mean good, because good is also judged on the usefulness of the actual research. In relation to the empirical studies in this thesis, it is posited firstly that the method is set out clearly in Chapter 4 , with clear sequential steps and rationale for each step and that the usefulness is located in contributing to the small evidence base about interventions that support social worker wellbeing, with a unique approach to the co-design of an intervention.

Additional concerns regarding qualitative studies are the timeliness of data gathering in interview planning, the interview itself and transcribing compared with larger data collection in quantitative studies, which can gather a wider amount of data

in a shorter amount of time (Adom et al., 2016). The findings could also be considered less generalisable because of the difference in sample size, qualitative studies taking a rich in-depth approach to data collection which may not be representative of wider groups (Golafshani, 2003; Davies & Fisher, 2018). However, the research question and aims of this thesis are about understanding experience of social workers and the meaning of the experience, with the intention of making sense of this together to explore the design of an intervention to support greater self-reported wellbeing. Hammersley (2000) considers that qualitative approaches can enable a slowing down of thinking and exploration of each step of the experience, noting that social workers have taken for granted thinking which is part of day to day working life which when unpicked could elicit useful insights. For this study this is noteworthy, because the nature of front-line social work is busy and demanding (Unison, 2022) and the qualitative research process provides opportunity for a slowing down so that each part of the whole experience can be explored. This would be incompatible with a quantitative study which assumes that there is an objective reality, that people can know, describe and explain because this study seeks to understand the experiences from the perspective of the participants rather than provide a statistical analysis (Queiros et al., 2017).

It is of course noted that this study includes a scoping review used to explore and identify previous wellbeing-based interventions for social workers. Scoping reviews can provide insights into the characteristics of previous studies and explore how an issue has previously been researched and reported on. Scoping reviews are often best used when the research questions focus on exploring and identifying (Peters et al., 2022) and aim to explore and describe the extent and nature of the existing literature on a subject area. Transparent and rigorous methodology is required to ensure reproducibility as well as ensuring reliability and quality (Munn et al., 2018). There are key indicators for a scoping review as the first study in this thesis, firstly to identify the available literature, with a broad scope to include all available material that considered wellbeing interventions for social workers, therefore mapping the available evidence (Peters et al., 2020). Secondly, defining key terms and concepts was crucial to ensure clarity and to explore further how definitions of wellbeing were constructed in practice contexts (Munn et al. (2018). Having an overview of the methods used for carrying out

research in the field with exploration of the quality, design and characteristics of research in the topic area provided insight and subsequent confirmation about the best fit for the stages of data collection this thesis. Importantly, knowing what had already been implemented and the impact of these interventions (Munn et al., 2018) provided the foundation upon which to consider what could be next, by building upon what had been experienced as positive as well as understanding those areas that had been highlighted as more challenging.

A scoping review was considered most appropriate for this thesis; whilst other types of review, such as systematic reviews, are most often used to inform clinical or practice recommendations or guidelines, scoping reviews provide an overview of the evidence and knowledge available and importantly enabled the foundation for the development of interview questions and for the stages of data collection (Peters et al., 2020). Scoping review methodology could be suggested to be more aligned with quantitative approaches and the positivist research paradigm, that is clear steps and clear criteria with a focus on providing an objective picture. However rather than a positivist search to specifically identify gaps in the literature or to provide an objective position, this scoping review sought to provide a context and dialogue with the field (Aveyard et al., 2021).

3.6 Research Approach: Appreciative inquiry

The Appreciative Inquiry approach has been used across various sectors and organisations as a process for positive and effective change (Cooperrider et al., 2008; McAllister & Luckcock, 2009). Since the foundational work of Cooperrider and Srivastva in 1987 the Appreciative Inquiry approach has been applied in diverse settings in the USA and internationally and has evolved into a comprehensive organisational intervention framework (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Appreciative Inquiry builds on Seligman's positive psychology of the improvement of wellbeing through promoting positive aspects of individual subjective experience (Ravalier, 2013). Appreciative Inquiry is a participatory process with the central assertion that a starting point for effective and sustained change is through appreciating what works well already, considering that every organisation has something that is working well which can be built on (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Ravalier, 2013).

Appreciative Inquiry uses positivity in its approach to questioning, exploring and thinking about change and therefore rather than focusing on what is not working and working to address deficits, considers that improvements and change can be made more effectively through building on strengths (Coghlan et al., 2003; Cooperider et al., 2008). Importantly, Appreciative Inquiry is a process of creating conditions for change, with the focus on co-construction, creating a safe space to express and explore accomplishments, experiences, vision and values (Miles et al., 2018). The foundations of Appreciative Inquiry are in the ontological and conceptual positions of social construction, that language, knowledge and action are linked, and that reality is constructed through interactions, experience and language (Grant & Humphries, 2006). There are three interconnected aspects, firstly, Appreciative Inquiry as epistemology; that is the way the world is understood and experienced, secondly as an intervention theory grounded in social construction and thirdly a change theory, using a strengths-based approach to allow for what is possible (Watkins 2011, cited in Wocken 2020).

Therefore, the Appreciative Inquiry approach fits readily with the overall constructivist approach of this study. Additionally, Appreciative Inquiry supports the participation of individuals at all levels of organisational structure, thus promoting an environment of collaboration. Furthermore, the staff group were used to using Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to considering casework, and the positivity of approach, rather than a deficit model, was hoped to provide confidence to the organisation that the study did not seek to highlight problems. This was further consolidated through the information provided to participants about the study. This is significant in considering the insider role of the researcher in this study and the commitment of the researcher to support thinking about change in an environment that they are part of and know well. Considering the position of organisations whose employees are involved in research, Holiday et al. (2023) highlight the benefits for organisations seen to be research active, that engagement is seen as linked with a commitment to improvement, particularly when utilising co-production. Indeed, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the systematic discovery of what it is that gives life for an organisation when it is 'most alive' looking at positive attributes that could lead to change (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). Certainly, focusing conversation and discussion on deficit may not inspire enthusiasm for change, additionally systems seem to grow in the direction of what they ask questions about. Therefore, the valuing

of the best of what is opens opportunity for different conversations and rather than looking at what is wrong, looking at what is possible (Ludema et al., 2001; Grant & Humphries, 2006). Arguably Appreciative Inquiry has benefits for the employee, in generating feelings of being heard and involved in telling their story (Cooperrider & Fry, 2000), for the organisation in the creative generation of ideas for improvement and indeed for the researcher in providing informative and rich data on which to build upon. This is particularly significant for the studies in this thesis focused on intervention design.

In considering further the underpinning premise of social constructionism in Appreciative Inquiry, this is explored in the core principles of the approach (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

The Poetic Principle - this principle considers that organisations and teams are endless sources of learning and of study, and this learning and study in itself contributes to the creation of reality. The principle considers that the choice of what to study makes a difference to the reality of what is being studied (Coghlan et al., 2003).

The Constructionist Principle – the constructionist principle maintains that reality is socially created through language and conversations, and that change, when specifically thinking about teams or wider organisations, begins by understanding the experiences of those living it and with the questions being asked (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

The Simultaneity Principle – This principle maintains that the process of the inquiry influences change. This principle holds that because organisations and teams are 'alive' that moment that a question is asked, there is change being made (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

The Anticipatory Principle – The anticipatory principle considers that systems move in the direction of what they see for the future, the more positive and hopeful, the more positive the current action. The image of the preferred future is seen as a key motivation for change and creativity and imagination is an important resource in thinking about what is wanted from the future (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

The Positivity Principle – This principle considers that momentum for change is achieved best through positivity because people want to face towards something positive. The principle considers that individuals and their systems best respond to positivity and long lasting and effective change comes from building on the momentum created by this individual and collective positivity (Fitzgerald et al., 2010).

This study took a constructivist approach, with the epistemological position that knowledge about reality and the human experience is socially constructed, rather than objectively real, and specific to the context and participants being studied. This was because this study aimed to understand experiences and the constructed individual and group realities of social workers, and this research paradigm provided for this study to understand how individuals made sense of their experiences in their everyday settings (Adom et al., 2016). The Core Principles of Appreciative Inquiry fit well with this, the data collection in the form of semi structured interviews and focus groups provide opportunity for the reality of the current experiences to be explored, whilst at the same time using the process of Appreciative Inquiry and the strengths-based approach in the question design, capturing opportunity for change and considering the preferred future. The combination of using individual interview and focus groups captured both individual and shared experiences, specifically the sharing or creativity and imagination.

3.7 The Appreciative Inquiry Cycle

The most common approach used in Appreciative Inquiry is the 4D's. These are Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (see Figure 1) as developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987).

Figure 1

The Appreciative Inquiry Cycle (Ludema et al. 2001, p190)
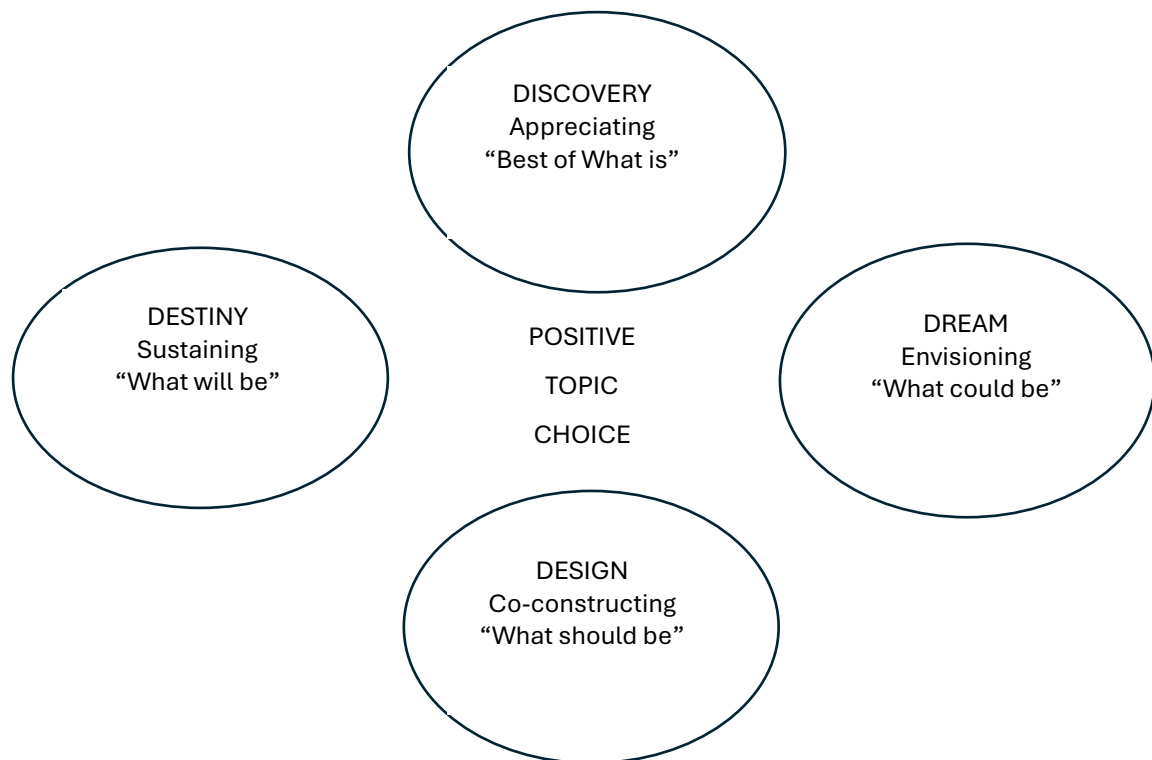
3.7.1 The stages of the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle

The Discovery stage provided for discovering the factors that 'give life' to the organisation and naming the best of what is and focusing on times of organisational excellence (Cooperrider et al., 2008, Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012). It is to explore and identify what is working well when something is said to be working well. For example, where there has been excellent support offering to a colleague, what happened? What was being done for this to have been experienced as excellent? For the empirical studies, this stage gave opportunity for social workers to explore their experiences of when things are working well, what was happening for them as individuals in semi structured interviews, and then collectively in focus groups, when they experienced this.

The next stage in the cycle, Dream, was about imagining and envisioning the future (Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012). Taking the narrative of the Discovery stage and thinking forward, what does the preferred future look like? This study this included

exploring what does what is known about what is happening for social workers already and how meaning they give to these experiences impacts thoughts about what can be done in the future, what could be possible?

The Design stage takes this a step further, articulating the strategic focus (Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012) and considering how the dream could be practically outworked and thinking about options to make this happen. The final stage, Destiny, represents the conclusion of the first three stages and considers the beginning of the future (Cooperrider & McQuaid, 2012). This stage considered what is needed for the Dream to be realised and set a tone for change and momentum for this to be actioned.

3.7.2 Suitability of Appreciative Inquiry for this study

As discussed briefly above, the Appreciative Inquiry approach is a suitable research and philosophical approach for this study. Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in social construction, that human development is a social process and that the way people experience and understand the world around them and how they organise themselves to reach their goals is constructed through communication, relationships with others and wider cultural and social interactions. This thesis considers that the experiences of social workers who work with those who use the service, with a team of colleagues, in the context of a wider organisation and a wider social work community, all of which adds to the construction of their experience and how they make sense of this.

Research from the British Association of Social Work in 2018 and 2023 indicates that almost half the workforce is planning to leave or think about leaving the profession and the literature, for example Kinman & Grant (2017), McFadden et al., (2014) Ravailer & Boichat (2018), broadly focuses on why this this, and this was explored further in Chapter 2. The literature provides an important general narrative of dissatisfaction and distress. The scoping review evidences that there have been very few interventions specifically to address this. A fundamental premise for this study is that including the social work staff in the co-design of an intervention will provide a greater depth of understanding of their experience, draw on their expertise and increase the likelihood of effectiveness and maintenance of an intervention. Appreciative Inquiry engages and enables participants from the outset in finding out the best of what is happening already and thinking together to create what could be (Coghlan et al., 2003), providing opportunity for supporting people through change and increasing

confidence about sustainability. Bushe (2013) comments that the approach was designed for staff to use together, talk with one another and the focus on the positive aspects of the role and so that what is going well can be shared and built upon, providing staff with confidence about moving forward.

Furthermore, the collaborative approach of Appreciative Inquiry is particularly important for the researcher working in a large organisation and conducting research locally, as an 'insider researcher,' as discussed earlier in this chapter. Therefore, the interest of the researcher is not only as a researcher but also as a practitioner. The author considers that there are benefits of the researcher being 'an insider' in terms of knowing the research context, understanding the structure of the organisation, knowing well the process and nature of the role, as well as being aware of the resources available (Toy-Cronin, 2018). As discussed in Chapter 3.5, the researcher is not neutral but that there is just more or less awareness of bias and the Appreciative Inquiry process of participation and shared power will allow the researcher to conduct the study as an 'insider', as the focus is on change and positive dialogue. In addition, the author is aware the Appreciative Inquiry approach has been used in the organisation already, so although it is being utilised slightly differently to the way that staff are used to, there is a general understanding of what it is and how it works.

3.7.3 Potential pitfalls and how these are overcome

Whilst there is a breadth of literature as detailed above regarding the positive aspects of Appreciative Inquiry, and indeed this chapter has explored positive attributes of this approach and why this is appropriate for the data collection studies, there is critique of the Appreciative Inquiry approach and it is right to consider and address these. A common critique is that it is 'too Pollyanna-ish' or excessively focused on 'warm hugs and fuzzy feelings' (Fitzgerald et al., 2001, p17) and there is limitation to its ability to change deeper organisational structure. In considering the response to this, a rounded model of appreciation is proposed, that Appreciative Inquiry does not just focus on the positive but on the task of appreciating, that is being conscious of the process of hearing and taking account of what is there and moving beyond thinking in a polar way about what is negative or positive (Cooperrider et al., 2008) and more considering what is and what brings life here (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). This is an important alignment with the Job Demands – Resources model, understanding what the social workers experience as demands as well as their description and experience of resources

contributes to understanding better an intervention that can support their holistic narrative (Adom et al., 2016). Additionally, through the dreams part of the process, challenges and difficulties are often articulated as hopes and aspirations for the future are spoken about (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Patton, 2003). This point is vital because to not be conscious of all what is being presented could leave participants feeling that they had not been heard or that what they had said was not important or valued and one of the reasons that this approach is the right approach for this study it because of the focus on co-operatative learning and reflection and co-design for a preferred future.

For this study, the author would concur that Appreciative Inquiry has an evangelical movement about it. This is not a model for intervention or indeed a problem solving approach, but it is about a changing the mindset in organisational life (Ludema et al., 2001). In working in a large organisation, the staff group may consider that they are relatively powerless to implement change and have a vision for change without the investment of the management team. To address this, the study included at the earliest opportunity the management team as part of the initial pilot study, to give their expert view about the questions and receive their feedback. This ensured that they were aware of the nature and purpose of the study, that they were aware of the questions being asked and had opportunity to contribute to these and this in turn enabled the participants to feel supported by their management team to participate and have hope that this will be meaningful for them.

The author of this study has noted the concern in the literature regarding Appreciative Inquiry's ability to provide deep rooted change (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). For this study, the design and plan for the future had to take account of the nature of the job, the statutory responsibilities of the organisation and how the team and individual fit into this. For example, one vision for the future might include a lower referral and caseload rate, but these are things that are out of local team and wider organisational control because the social work role is needs led. To address this in the current study it was important to set the scene in the interviews and focus groups, in terms of being clear about the statutory constraints of the social work role whilst also confirming the transformational approach of Appreciative Inquiry.

3.8 Organisational context

The organisation in which this study took place is a public sector organisation in England. The organisation is hierarchical with a clear management structure. For provision of social work services, the organisation is separated into similar sized areas based on geography and population and each area is further separated into local services.

The service in which this study was undertaken is a Children and Families Social Work service, which at the time of the data collection consisted of a service manager, team managers, senior practitioners and social workers. By virtue of being newly qualified and undertaking their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, 4 employees were not eligible to participate.

The geographical area of this service ranks third in the organisation for economic deprivation (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The unemployment rate is 4.5%, which is higher than the average for the geographical area of the wider organisation, which is 3.4% (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The area covered by the service extended to 30 miles from each boundary and there is a population of just over 100,000.

The work undertaken by the service is statutory social work. Referrals are received by the organisation's central service and sent to the geographical service. The service receives referrals relating to children (including unborn babies) up to the age of eighteen years. The service undertakes Assessments under Section S17 of The Children Act 1989, Section 47 Investigations and planning for children under Child in Need Plans and Child Protection Plans. The service also works with children subject to Court proceedings and placed outside of their family under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or under Section 31 of The Children Act 1989. National figures for the period of data collection indicate that 404,310 children were subject to Child in Need planning with 50,920 children subject to Child Protection planning (Explore Education Statistics Service, 2025). For this organisation, the local statistics are similar to those of three nearest statistical neighbours.

This study did not record recruitment and retention figures or sickness days or the overall Service demographic. The demographics of participants of this study are recorded in the methods chapter of this study.

4. Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Overview of the research process and structure of data collection

Data collection through undertaking the scoping review, and subsequently with participants, took place between November 2019 and October 2022. Ethical approval was gained from the Bath Spa University School of Sciences Ethics Board prior to starting the scoping review and updated during the period to account for the second and third stages of data collection involving participants and further following the slight adjustment to focus group 2. A pilot study was undertaken which informed further the question design following the results of the scoping review and the semi structured interviews and focus groups subsequently took place. This timeline is depicted below.

Figure 2

Timeline of data collection
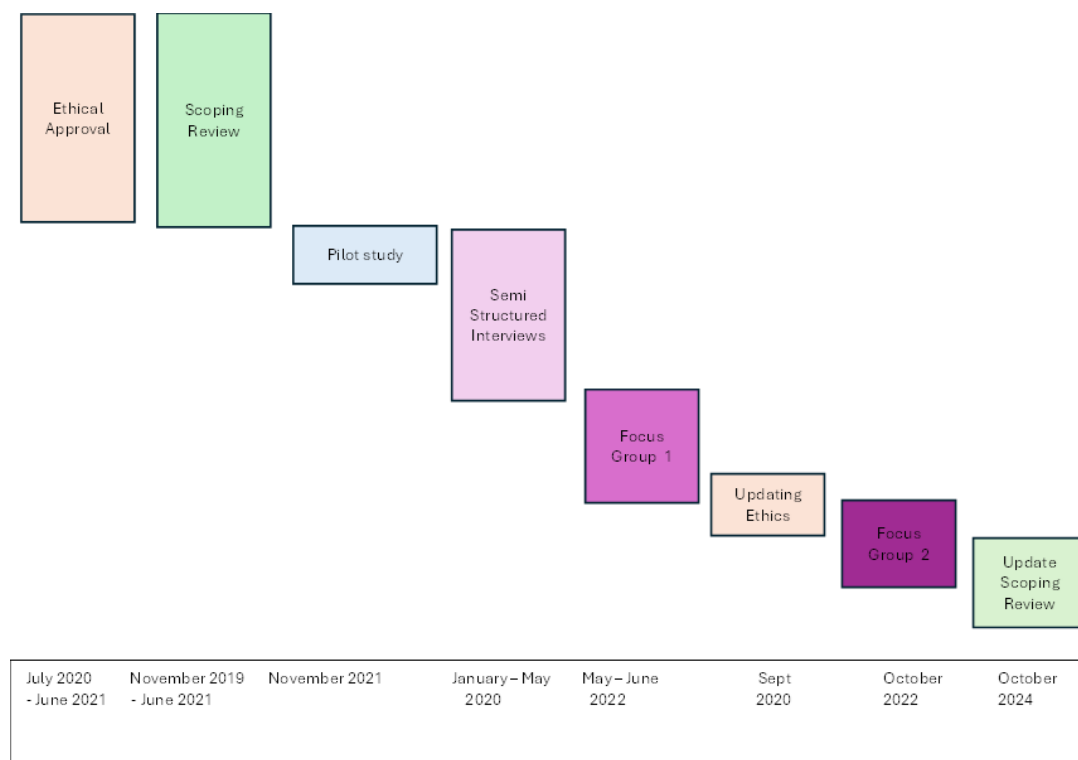
4.2. Method – scoping review

The scoping review formed the first study and first part of the data collection and laid the foundation to consider what has already been implemented and tested and therefore as well as contributing to the triangulated results, supported the design of the questions for the semi structured interviews and focus groups. The objective of the scoping review was to identify all the available quantitative, qualitative and mixed

methods literature about interventions that have been used to improve the wellbeing of social workers and their effectiveness.

A Scoping Review Protocol (Appendix 1) was developed to ensure clarity of the objectives and provide for replicability and detailed the methods used. The methods for this study were based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review methodology and subsequent additions by Levac et al. (2010) and used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) checklist (Trico et al., 2018). The method details six different stages:

- identifying the research question
- identifying relevant studies
- selecting studies
- charting the data
- collating, summarising and reporting the results
- consulting with relevant stakeholders (optional and not used in this study)

The PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018) contains 20 essential reporting items and 2 optional items for inclusion. The checklist was used alongside the above method (Appendix 2) to ensure consistency and rigor. Using a clear methodology such as this ensures transparency in the review and consistency in how reviews of these types are carried out. It also enables each step taken to be repeated by someone else undertaking a similar review.

4.2.1 Research questions

The overall research question was whether Appreciative Inquiry could be used to co-design an intervention that could support social worker self-reported wellbeing and the questions for this scoping review to contribute to this overall question were:

- What interventions have been used to investigate wellbeing for social work staff?
- What tools were used to measure wellbeing?
- How were the interventions experienced?
- Do the studies identify barriers to effectiveness and implementation?

4.2.2 Identifying relevant studies

The following databases were searched for both published and unpublished studies from their inception:

PsychARTICLES

PubMed Central

Science Direct

PsychINFO

Web of Science

Google Scholar

In addition, web-based material found in Community Care, British Association of Social Workers and What Works in Children's Social Services was used to explore articles and new items related to the research question but not published in journals.

Initial search terms and their combinations were categorised as follows:

Table 1

Categories of search terms

Wellbeing	Intervention	Social worker
Well-being	Occupational health	Social work
Well being	Activity	Social worker
Resilie*	Programme	
Self care	Support	
Happiness	Intervention	
Stress	Retention	
Absenteeism		
Presenteeism		

When the search terms were trialled in one database at the outset, using the terms 'social worker' and 'wellbeing' provided results not only about social workers as a work group but also service user groups and the role of social workers in their supporting their wellbeing. Adjusting the search terms to include one of the words from column two (e.g. activity, programme, support, retention) provided a more comprehensive identification of literature relating to the research questions. Adjusting search terms further to a specific geographical area (UK only) provided a further focus of relevant material across the databases. Initial searches not using the geographical

term showed 10,572 hits and to ensure thoroughness, the first 200 hits of every combination were reviewed for relevance. This confirmed initial impressions from prior literature searches that there was already a wealth of research into the wellbeing of social workers, some focused on children and families social workers specifically.

A full search of all the identified databases was undertaken using all the identified keywords in each possible combination. A further 'by hand' search of the reference lists of identified articles was undertaken to find any additional relevant studies that have not already been identified. This follows the three-stage approach as outlined by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Aromataris & Munn, 2017).

4.2.3 Selecting studies

Studies identified by the search were initially searched for duplicates which were removed and then reviewed, initially looking at the title and abstract to establish if the article appeared to meet the eligibility criteria (see table 2). If on first review they did, these studies were saved for further examination. Following the completion of all of the searches, the remaining studies were then reviewed in full to ensure the criteria was met.

Table 2

Eligibility criteria and rationale for the inclusion of studies

People	This study will look at research relating to
	qualified social workers employed in local authority children and families social work positions
	Social workers who are not in their Assessed and Supported Year of Practice (ASYE)
	Social workers employed in the UK
Intervention	Interventions that have been implemented to increase staff wellbeing
Outcome	Identification of studies that are effective in increasing wellbeing
	Identification of any barriers to either implementation or effectiveness

4.2.4 Extracting and charting the data

The data were extracted from eligible studies and charted in a spreadsheet (Appendix 3). This firstly included specific details about the article; source, title, author and date and secondly, data relating to the research question; setting, design, intervention, measures used, findings and recommendations. A draft spreadsheet was piloted on several articles to establish whether appropriate data was being charted to ensure the research questions are answered. The spreadsheet was effective and no changes required. As this was a scoping review, there was no quality assessment of the articles included in this review.

4.3 Method – Pilot Study

A pilot study is a smaller scale test of the procedures and methods to be used on a larger scale (Malmqvist et al., 2019). It is a method in research to work out the best methods for the study and provide an estimate of the time and resources that will be needed to undertake it (Watson, 2016). It can also assist the researcher in considering the epistemological issues underpinning the study (Crossman, 2021; Aziz & Khan, 2020; Ayesha et al., 2020).

Whilst pilot studies are often used in quantitative studies, it has been suggested that for qualitative research, they are not necessary (Watson, 2016; Crossman, 2021), considering that through the qualitative research process, which is usually interview or focus group, the researcher will develop the process over time, learning from each interview or group and using this learning moving forward in the study (Ismail et al., 2018). Qualitative research is seen as more flexible and able to adapt to change and so pilot studies are often considered not to be required (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001; Ismail, et al., 2018). In considering the value of a pilot study here, firstly, the author of this thesis is a novice researcher and although confident in a professional role, the language used and the purpose of work, this thesis identifies the author as researcher which is different and a role the author lacks experience in. The literature identifies that a pilot study is useful for novice researchers, suggesting that qualitative research looks at human experience through direct interaction between the participant and the researcher, and the pilot study assists the researcher in considering their skills, rigour and enthusiasm in the researcher role (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001; Majid et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2018). Moreover, as a human experience is investi-

gated through direct interaction, a pilot study is very useful from the researcher's perspective, as it helps to minimize the risk of the problems expected to rise in the main study during the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Majid et al., 2017). Furthermore, the smaller scale pilot study could identify problems, barriers, areas of development which will be useful when moving forward to the large scale substantive study (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Aziz and Khan (2020) describe this as road map building. Certainly by undertaking a small pilot study, this could make the researcher more aware of potential challenges and therefore better placed to mitigate against them. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) suggest that the pilot study enables the researcher to be better prepared to face any challenges and provides for being one step ahead of the process of learning that would occur through the main study in any case. Ismail et al. (2018) consider this more bluntly, using the phrase 'advance warning' for the larger scale study. Majid et al. (2017) consider this particularly important for the novice researcher, considering that the pilot study could help to minimise the risk of any problems expected to rise in data collection, the analysis of the data and interpretation. Based on the pilot study feedback, the researcher can make adjustments (Prescott & Soeken, 1989). Aziz and Khan quoting De Vaus, (1993, in Aziz and Khan, 2020) put it, "Do not take the risk, pilot study' (p757).

Importantly, researchers bring to this study their own values and assumptions, language used and perception of the world around (Toy-Cronin, 2018). Exploring the method, particularly the questions in a pilot study could help explore and identify unhelpful or pre-conceived ideas and thoughts brought to the study and therefore influencing the data collection. This is supported in the literature, that being aware of potential bias as a researcher, the importance of reflecting on different perspectives is crucial for research (Ismail et al., 2018). As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, this is particularly important as an 'insider researcher', who is in a unique position to study a particular issue in depth and with special knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the issues at hand and therefore able to take the role of practice change expert (Costley et al., 2010). There are benefits of the researcher being 'an insider' in terms of knowing the research context, understanding the structure of the organisation, knowing well the process and nature of the role, as well as being aware of the resources available (Toy-Cronin, 2018). However it is important for the researcher to

be aware of their own thoughts and values in the researcher role and it is considered that the pilot study process would assist in greater awareness moving forward.

Direct Interviewing is widely acknowledged as an appropriate technique for qualitative study to explore and seek insights from those who have experienced or are experiencing what the study is about (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000; Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Majid et al. (2017) comments that although the need for a pilot study might not be as obvious because of the progressive and iterative nature of the data collection and learning and reviewing at each point, it is 'distinctly helpful' to pilot the questions before the large scale study, thus in piloting for interviews it is crucial to test the questions and to gain some practice in interviewing. Crossman (2021) adds to this, considering that testing the research instruments, in this case the interview questions, and testing time and resources required is an important part of planning the main study. Although well practiced in interviewing in a professional role, gaining experience in interviewing as a researcher can only be helpful.

Caution is given against the pilot study being used to test the study hypothesis about the effects of the intervention, the argument being made that the pilot needs to answer the 'can this be done' question rather than the 'does this work' question, which is the focus of the main study (Kistin & Silverstein, 2015). Additionally, Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) comment that the pilot study does not guarantee the success of the larger scale study, and there may be some problems that arise when a larger group of participants is used. For quantitative research, contamination of data can be a danger when using pilot studies, for example if the data collected in the pilot study is subsequently added to the data collected in the main study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). For qualitative research, there could be a challenge if the potential pool of participants is small and participants that took part in the pilot could also participate in the main study, this could have an effect on results, as participants would not be hearing the questions for the first time and this could impact the answers given.

It is important to consider what this means for the empirical data collection here; the potential usefulness of the pilot study, mitigating for dangers and accepting potential limitations. To summarise, the value of the pilot study here is that it is considered that the researcher is a novice researcher and there is value in opportunity to develop interview skills relating to research rather than professional role. Apilot study would enable the research instruments, in this study, the interview questions, to be tested

and developed if necessary, as well as developing the 'road map' (Aziz & Khan, 2020) of how the study will progress. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) suggest that a pilot study can increase the likelihood of a successful larger scale study as some of the challenges that could arise will have already been dealt with. In considering the limitations and dangers, when considering the pool of participants, it is considered that for this study it would be appropriate to identify participants for the pilot that will not then take part in the main study to prevent the questions being familiar and potentially data collection being impacted by this.

The literature informed the decision making about undertaking the pilot study and confirmed that this would be useful and beneficial. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) suggest that a pilot study can be used in two ways; a feasibility study which is a small scale trial run or testing out particular research instrument. It is considered that testing out the research instrument, in this study the interview questions, was helpful, firstly by exploring the questions as a whole with the management team and then with one participant.

The first part of the pilot study was undertaken with 4 social work managers, it was considered that the management team were an appropriate group of people to explore the questions with as firstly, they share the context in which the main study was undertaken. Secondly, they would not be interviewed as part of the main study. The literature advocates for a different group of people for pilot and main, if the pool of participants is large enough. This mitigates the risk of 'semantic satiation', the concern that repetition of same questions may cause lack of interest for the interviewee and influence the answers given in the main study (Majid et al., 2017). Thirdly, it was considered that including the local management team at the outset of the study would build confidence in the study and allow for questions and concerns to be raised. The researcher was aware of their role in the organisation and in the service and that there could be some discussion about 'insider researchers' or 'reporting back' somewhere. By including this team at the very outset ensured that the researcher could give a full explanation of the study and look through the consent and information sheets with them. This study uses Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 1987), which was designed for staff to use this together, interviewing one another, and therefore lent itself ideally to this study and for the researcher to be able to undertake the interviews in the study (Bushe, 2013). In addition, this approach was already familiar to the social

work staff group who used this regularly. Beginning this process by involving the team managers in the co-design of the interview questions sits at the heart of the Appreciative Inquiry approach and gives an expert view on the questions to be used (Majid et al., 2017).

The pilot study therefore consisted of the researcher outlining the aims and objectives of this present study, discussing the stages of the Appreciative Inquiry approach and then reviewing the questions under each stage together and agreeing subsequent changes as detailed in Chapter 4.4, this was recorded using an encrypted device and transcribed and the digital copy then deleted.

4.4 Rationale for question design in qualitative stages

On reviewing other studies where Appreciative Inquiry had been used, there was evidence that question design focused on the four stages; the current experiences of participants in thinking about what was going well, the Discovery stage, a focus on forward thinking and being curious about what could be, the Dream stage, a further exploration about bringing these thoughts and dreams into reality, the Design stage and consideration of how this could be achieved, the Destiny stage. The questions in the Discovery stage in other studies included 'what is working well?' (McGonagle, 2015), 'tell me one of your best experiences of working here?' (Arnold et al., 2022), and 'what do you value most about your workplace?' (Douglas et al., 2024). The Dream stage included 'imagine a happy school day in the future, what would be happening?' (McGonagle, 2015) and 'what helps you thrive and stay well in the challenges?' (Arnold et al., 2022). Using 'what helps you feel successful and energised?' (Maegli, 2014) located the Dreams stage in the context of the reality of the workplace. Finally, questions in the Destiny stage included 'what can we continue to do?' (McGonagle, 2015).

In taking this forward into considering the design and choice of the questions used in the pilot study and subsequently for the semi structured interviews and focus group 1, the findings of the scoping review were reviewed to establish the key issues of peer support, supervision and line management, training, personal resources and emotional impact and the gap between front line staff and senior management. This study adopted a similar question style as utilised in the studies reviewed above making specific links to the findings of the scoping review.

As stated in Chapter 2, this study did not seek to add to the volume of definitions of wellbeing., However in order to design an intervention to support social worker wellbeing, it was crucial to understand how the participants self-defined this. Atkinson et al. (2020) considers that defining what the term means for social workers can enable the design and implementation of an intervention more likely to address what is considered important. This is supported by Butcher (2022) in asserting the importance of self-definition to understand what wellbeing looked like for participants. This constructivist approach also provided for a narrative to be gained about what the demands of the job were, as well as the experience of the participants of the resources available to them in meeting and mitigating these demands. Considering the factors that could lead to stress and health impairment and those that lead to greater wellbeing, motivation and productivity (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014), enabled the robust exploration and reflection of the nuanced experiences of employees.

An important stage of question design was to test them out in the Pilot Study, which identified some important changes to the questions, considering terms used, the potential for 'leading' questions where the researcher had implied something by the way the question had been phrased and the importance of having a thread through the process. The discussion and agreed changes are detailed below in table form.

Table 3

Pilot Study Questions with Changes

Original question developed from scoping review	Action or revision
Discovery – the best of what is	-
1. When you think about wellbeing, what does this mean for you?	- Unchanged
2. When you are feeling positive about your role, what is happening?	- Unchanged
3. When you are feeling supported by your colleagues, tell me what is happening for you?	- Changed to 'what does that look like for you because the group considered that 'happening' could

		be understood to link with an action or doing rather than incorporating other aspects of support
4. When you are feeling supported by your line manager, tell me what is happening for you?	-	Changed to 'what does this look like for you?' for the same reason as above
5. When you've had a particular challenge can you think of something that's helped you or what would have helped you?	-	Changed to 'can you think of a time you were faced with a challenge and you felt appropriately supported, what was it that helped?' to focus on a specific time to aid the description of the process of help
Dream – what could be		
6. Can you think of something that would increase your feelings of wellbeing?	-	Unchanged
7. What advice would you give to a newly qualified social worker about managing challenge?	-	Changed to 'what advice would you give a newly qualified social worker about managing the day to day role?' to allow for a wider description of the role
8. What is happening on a day in the future if you can picture an ideal work day?	-	Changed to 'on an ideal work day in the future, what is happening?' as this was considered easier to understand
Design - what should be		
9. What would make you feel supported by senior management?	-	Changed to 'makes you feel' and 'would make you feel more supported?' to focus on future thinking
10. In thinking about training, what would you be excited about?	-	Unchanged

11. What is an optimal office environment for you?	- Changed to 'optimal work environment' as post COVID it is recognised that office working may not be the day to day experience for everyone
Destiny – what will be	
12. What changes would you most like to see?	- Unchanged, however section to be introduced with 'understanding the statutory parameters around the social work role' as this grounds the question in achievable outcomes
13. What support is needed to make this happen?	- Unchanged

Following completion of the pilot study, the questions were adjusted to account for the discussions as detailed above.

4.5 Method - semi structured interviews

The semi structured interviews formed the second study and second stage of data collection.

4.5.1 Research question and objectives of the semi structured interviews

The semi structured interviews contributed to exploring the research question by gathering data about social worker's experiences of wellbeing at work. The specific research questions for this stage are aligned with the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle stages of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny and were as follows:

- What do social workers identify as working well for them?

- Are there ways that this could be built on further and if so, how?

As discussed in detail earlier in this Chapter and in Chapter 3, qualitative methods provided the best fit for this study for a number of reasons; this study sought to provide in depth and an interpreted representation and understanding of the social world of the research participants, the researcher was immersed in the context of the

study and the qualitative approach is most likely to best fit the untidy and varied challenges that social work interventions most often focus on (Moriarty, 2011; Carey, 2017). Quoting Cameron (1963, p 37) 'Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted'. Additionally, the skills at the core of qualitative research have often been mastered by social work practitioners. This is particularly pertinent to this study as the researcher is a social worker, for example skills of relationship building, communication, interpretation and analysis (Barusch et al., 2012; Padgett, 2016).

Interviewing is most often used in qualitative studies. Interviews are a familiar way of asking people about their experiences and opinions and provide opportunity for a lot of data to be gathered in a relatively short period of time (Moriarty, 2011; Brinkmann, 2014). Brinkmann (2014) suggests that humans are 'conversational creatures' (p 425) and the conversational process of knowing has been conceptualised into what is understood as interviews. This study uses semi structured interviews, that is a set schedule of questions to guide the interview rather than to be stuck to (Ravalier, 2013). This provides opportunity for both credibility and reliability to be demonstrated by having the overall schedule set but allows for flexibility to ensure the best opportunity for data gathering to capture experience of social workers, having in mind both demands and resources which could contribute to their experiences (Schaufeli, 2017).

There are of course aspects of interviews that are considered to be more arduous, the time spent in setting up the interview, undertaking the interview and subsequently transcribing for example (Moriarty, 2011). Additionally, the data is reliant on the participant being open and truthful in their answers and not simply playing their role in the interview (Brinkmann, 2014). Addressing this lies in rapport building between the participant and researcher, and time spent in preparation (Ravalier, 2013; Brinkmann, 2014,) and for this study specifically, the insider status of the researcher played an important part in trust and credibility.

It was anticipated that a sample size of at least 8 interview participants would allow for an understanding of a range of experiences but retain an in-depth approach to interviewing with rich data collection (Sandelowski, 1995; Morse, 2015).

4.5.2 Interview questions

The final interview questions used were as follows:

Table 4

Final Interview Questions semi structured interviews

Discovery – the best of what is
1. When you think about wellbeing, what does this mean for you?
2. When you are feeling positive about your role, what is happening?
3. When you are feeling supported by your colleagues, what does that look like for you?
4. When you are feeling supported by your line manager, what does this look like for you?
5. Can you think of a time you were faced with a challenge and you felt appropriately supported, what was it that helped?
Dream – what could be
6. Can you think of something that would increase your feelings of wellbeing?
7. What advice would you give to a newly qualified social worker about managing the day to day role?
8. On an ideal work day in the future, what is happening?
Design - what should be
9. What makes you feel supported by senior management and what would make you feel more supported?
10. In thinking about training, what would you be excited about?
11. What is an optimal work environment for you?
Destiny – what will be
12. Understanding the statutory parameters around the social work role, what changes would you most like to see?
13. What support is needed to make this happen?

4.6. Method - focus groups

The third study and third stage of data collection was focus groups. Two focus groups were held.

4.6.1 Research question and objectives of the focus groups

The focus groups contributed to exploring research question through further data gathering about social worker's experiences of wellbeing at work and through the development of an intervention to support this. The specific research questions for this stage are aligned with the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle stages Dream, Design and Destiny:

- What do social workers identify as working well for them?

- Are there ways that this could be built on further and if so, how?

For focus group 2 the specific research question was aligned with the final stage of the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle, Destiny:

- Can the data gathered in the previous stages be used in the design of an intervention and if so, what would this look like?

Focus groups are used in qualitative research either independently or alongside another method of gathering data and have gained a reputation for their ability to capture the voice of those who otherwise may not be research participants (Moriarty, 2011; Barbour et al., 2019). Focus groups rely on the participants having shared an experience or experiences together and data and meaning is co-produced and explored through the discussion between participants (Wilkinson, 1998; Simm & Waterfield, 2019). Focus groups can encourage and support greater participation and honesty, particularly in discussing more sensitive topics and matters that participants may not disclose during 1:1 interviews (Barbour et al., 2019; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).

The researcher considered that discussion and exploration in a group context would add to the data collection, sitting well within the social constructivist position of the study and with the use of the Appreciative Inquiry approach, that is opportunity for collaboration and co-production, generating excitement and creativity (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Two focus groups were planned to provide the best opportunity for a wide range of views and perspectives to be shared but for the group not to be so unwieldy that individuals did not have space to participate. This decision proved to be fruitful, providing for the intervention design to be furthered as data gathering progressed.

The role of the researcher in the focus group is key, with Barbour et al. (2019) asserting that the effectiveness of the discussion being found in the researcher being active in encouraging and then being attentive to the group interaction. For this study,

the researcher was well known to the participants, and they were well known to each other. The role of the researcher whilst in the group was to consider rules at the outset of respect and listening to each other and to introduce the topics for discussion (Ravalier, 2013). The attentiveness to the discussion and interaction is key in the usefulness of this method, because this discussion gave further insight into the shared experiences of the group and the construction of their sense of reality as well as capturing the excitement and energy of the group (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Barbour et al., 2019).

The use of focus groups has generated criticism, as with interviews, there is of course time attached to organisation, recording and transcribing and arranging for a large number of people to be together at one time (Ravalier, 2013). Confidentiality and anonymity, that is use and attribution of information, can be a concern for participants, that other participants may share information about attendance or that the generalised findings will be attributable to them regardless of whether this is something they shared or agreed with in the discussion (Simm & Waterfield, 2019). There is also the risk of over disclosure, where a participant shares more than they intended, and whilst this could be recoverable in a 1:1 interview setting, this could be less so in a wider group, particularly if, as in this study, the group participants are known to one another (Bloor et al., in Simm & Waterfield, 2019). Morgan (1996) suggests that participants should not be known to one another, however for this study it is asserted that a group known to one another with shared experiences is key to the research aims and question and fits with the Appreciative Inquiry approach.

As discussed above, the role of the researcher is crucial in providing the boundaries for the group and guiding and moderating their interactions (Morgan 1996) and this is particularly important in addressing the concerns about using focus groups. For this study, the researcher utilised communication and rapport building skills from social work practice in setting the ground rules for the groups, in gaining trust and guiding the discussion in line with the research questions and with the Appreciative Inquiry approach, generating a positive environment and a creative and energised space. As detailed further in the ethics section of this chapter, all participants received Information Sheets (Appendix 4) prior to their participation, giving details of the study and the use of their information and were asked to sign Consent Forms (Appendix 5) to confirm they were in agreement with this. This was also reiterated verbally in the group.

4.6.2 Focus group 1 questions

The questions used for focus group1 are detailed below and were chosen from the wider pool of questions for the semi structured interviews.

Table 5

Questions used in the focus groups

Discovery
When you are feeling positive about your role what is happening?
When you are feeling supported in your role what is happening?
Dream
What would increase your feelings of wellbeing?
What advice would you give to a new worker in their role?
Design
What helps you feel supported by senior management?
What training would you be excited about?
Destiny
What changes would you most like to see?

The rationale for choosing these questions for the focus group was to facilitate the forward thinking of the group. The research aim, as outlined at the outset of this chapter, was for the focus groups to further the development of an intervention. These questions created opportunity for actions to begin to be described and considered for the future.

The questions were reviewed for focus group 2 following the analysis and subsequent triangulation of the data from the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1 and subsequent provision through the amended ethics application

The questions used were:

- Considering the themes generated from the responses in the interviews and focus group, what are the priorities when thinking about what is needed to experience wellbeing at work?

- What is needed to support these priorities happening?

These questions provided a further forward focus to the discussion and towards the design of an intervention, sitting in the final part of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle, Destiny. The rationale for these additional questions followed a number of responses in the semi structured interviews indicating that exploration of a priority in the generated themes could be important aspect of considering wellbeing.

4.7 Analytical procedures

The data from the semi structured interviews and focus group 1 were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, a method for data analysis frequently used in qualitative studies for developing, interpreting and analysing patterns across a qualitative data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis can be presented as one 'method', however although there is most often a shared interest in patterns and meaning, there are a variety of ways that thematic analysis is carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p4).

Braun & Clarke (2021) consider that 'a theme in reflexive thematic analysis is a pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept' (p 77) and it is the shared meaning that aligns with the constructivist approach and epistemological position. As detailed earlier in this Chapter, the research approach asserts that knowledge about reality and the human experience is constructed rather than objectively real and specific to the context and participants being studied because this study aims to understand experiences and the constructed individual and group realities of social workers. (Adom et al., 2016). Reflexive thematic analysis is used in this study as the process of reflexive thematic analysis is not linear (Braun & Clarke, 2022), there is space for revisiting and adapting. Generating themes that reflected a constructed meaning of wellbeing and the factors that contributed to wellbeing at work enabled the first step to be taken to explore the design of an intervention. This is because these themes identified aspects of what was important for the participants and what was happening when these aspects were in place or working well. This could therefore be built on when considering intervention design. In addition, as explored in Chapter 3.2, qualitative methods such as interviews, observations and focus groups involve the researcher being part of the process, recognising this as meaningful rather than problematic (Adom et al., 2016; Davies & Fisher, 2018). Linking this further with the insider role of the researcher, opportunity for reflexive awareness of this position was crucial, rather than seeking objectivity, embracing the opportunity to make use of this role in

order to provide a deeper sense of understanding of the themes generated and their context. Braun and Clarke (2022) consider this to be 'owning one's perspective' (p 2).

Drawing the distinction between other approaches to thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2021) consider the term thematic analysis a 'family of methods' (p 2) and that having an understanding of the specific approach used as important. Certainly, the ontological and epistemological positions of this thesis are aligned with Big Q, that is qualitative methods in a qualitative paradigm. Non positive qualitative approaches to research and reflexive thematic analysis are aligned well with providing for and enabling an ongoing dialogue with the data, offering an iterative process that allows for reflection and change (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This was particularly important for focus group 2, where a reflection of the triangulated data presented opportunity for additional questions to be added to build on important themes and take them forward into the intervention design. Of course caution is given about researchers allowing their preconceptions to interfere with the generation of themes (Patton, 2015), and it is likely therefore that there will be familiarity in the data and theme generation in line with the researcher's own experience. Indeed, engaging critically with one's role as a researcher is considered by Braun and Clarke (2021, p12) to be the 'fuel that fires the engine' in reflexive thematic analysis and contributed to the rationale for its choice. Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight the importance of the difference between summarising shared thoughts which likely could be set at the outset of the research, and meaningful interpretive stories, themes. This was a crucial consideration when combined with the position of the researcher, the balance between bringing experience, shared language and knowledge to enhance the research process and engagement with the data, whilst not holding set ideas and thoughts about what could be communicated.

Approaching the analysis in this way provided for opportunity to reflect on the data and meaning as well as the role of the researcher in the process, being mindful of the critiques focusing on influence, but drawing on the benefit and contribution of being an insider researcher has on this process, particularly a shared understanding of experience, context and the specific nuances of the social work role (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2021) set out six stages of reflexive thematic analysis and the analytical process used in this study using these stages is detailed in the

table below. The stages were exercised for the data gathered in the semi structured interviews and focus group 1.

Table 6

Process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p36).

Stage	How the stage was exercised
Familiarisation with the data	The participant responses were reviewed within 5 days of the interview taking place through listening to the recording and subsequently the transcripts re-read
Coding	Initial coding was completed for all data by hand, using coloured highlighter pens and reviewing each transcript line by line to note recurring phrases, thoughts or ideas
Generating initial themes	Themes were generated through reviewing the initial codes and subsequently drawing these together into overall themes
Developing and reviewing the themes	The overall data, initial codes and themes were reviewed again to ensure they were reflective of the data
Refining, defining and naming the themes	Each theme was then named, with sub themes noted clearly with consideration of a brief description
Writing up	The findings were presented as part of the results Chapters

4.7.1 Triangulation of data

The triangulation of data is broadly defined as the process of 'collecting and comparing information generated by disparate methods and sources' (Campbell et al., 2017, p125). Triangulation can support both the credibility and validity of the findings, through providing a holistic picture of experiences and perspectives of participants

(Noble & Heal, 2019). This thesis presents a number of studies and therefore had a number of ways in which data was collected, and it is therefore important to demonstrate how the data were brought together and the rationale for this (Flick et al., 2018).

Denzin (1978, in Campbell et al., 2017, p126) considered different types of triangulation; methodological, data, theoretical and investigator, each providing for different scenarios and rationale as to why and how data could be brought together to be made sense of (Campbell et al., 2020). For these studies, data triangulation is considered to be the most appropriate approach because it provides for the bringing together of data from a number of sources. In this thesis, data collection was in 4 stages, the scoping review, the semi structured interviews, focus group 1 and focus group 2. The intention of bringing the data together is to present the findings as a whole, providing a wide and reflective understanding of the topic, and opening up the possibility of understanding reality from different perspectives and exposing multiple dimensions (Farmer et al., 2006; Flick et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2020)

Farmer et al. (2006) highlight the importance of a triangulation protocol, to support the development and review of 'decision rules' (p 381) to guide the analysis of results, how findings were reported as well as any limitations of each data set and how the research question was addressed in each stage of data collection. Whilst each study had specific research questions, each were designed to provide for the overall question to be answered. For the studies in this thesis, the decision rules were that each data set had equal importance, and each set of results were reported in a narrative way, using reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the data and present the results and each data set contributed to answering the research question and aligned with the objectives.

Farmer et al. (2006) propose that the triangulation protocol itself consists of a number of stages; sorting, convergence coding, convergence assessment, completeness assessment, and if applicable, researcher comparison, following the sets of data being analysed individually (O'Caithan et al., 2010). In addition, Farmer et al. (2006) name and define the potential outcomes of the process; agreement, where there is full agreement between the data sets both in meaning and prominence, partial, where there is agreement on one component, either meaning or prominence, silence, where a theme is present in one data set but not another and dissonance, where there is disagreement between the data sets, both in prominence and meaning. Flick (2011)

describes one term slightly differently, using complementary rather than partial agreement and describing this as when data in one study respond to questions raised in another study. Certainly this iterative approach aligns with these studies; each study enabled the production of data that exceeded and complemented the study before, the scoping review supported exploration of the context for the study and provided for the development of the interview questions, the participant responses in the semi structured interview questions provided data which was explored further in focus group 1 and the results of the semi structured interviews and focus group 1 provided the basis for the development of intervention in focus group 2.

The triangulation protocol used is set out in the table below, depicting each stage of the process and the results of this are reported in Chapter 7.6.

Table 7

Triangulation protocol

Sorting	Sorting the data from each study into categories that address the research question to identify areas of overlap and difference
Convergence Coding	Following identifying the themes in each data set, comparing the these to establish the degree of convergence to establish whether the meaning and prominence of each of them is reflected across the data sets
Convergence assessment	Assessing the themes for convergence with outcomes of agreement, partial agreement / complementary, silence and dissonance / disagreement
Completeness comparison	Comparing and contrasting any unique topics in the data sets and identifying areas of difference

Triangulation took place at two points, following the completion of the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1, reported in Chapter 7.6 and following focus group 2, discussed in Chapter 8 and 9.

4.7.2 Iterative approach

This chapter has already explored how the findings of the scoping review informed the question design and foundational thinking about the key points in the literature regarding interventions and this study used an iterative approach to enable data generated at each stage to be used and incorporated into subsequent stages. Using an iterative approach rather than rigid linear steps allowed for adjustments to be made to provide the best opportunity for quality data to be gathered in line with the research objectives and research question (Morgan & Nica, 2020).

Considering the use of the iterative approach and constructive approach together, it is useful to consider the common ground they share in terms of building knowledge and participation. To consider the constructive approach in summary, explored earlier in this Chapter, the approach considers that knowledge and what is stated to be true is constructed through experience, prior knowledge and social interaction in the context of the environment. The iterative approach allows for a cycle of review and refinement in light of data gathering and analysis where each stage can be adapted in line with the analysis of the data (Srivastva & Hopwood, 2009). The shared principles are the importance of the participants role in shaping knowledge and meaning in the research task.

Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the systematic discovery of what it is that gives life to an organisation when it is 'most alive', looking at positive attributes that could lead to change (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Ludema et al., 2001; Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). The data collection in the form of semi structured interviews and focus groups provided opportunity for the reality of the participants current experiences to be explored and understood, in line with the constructivist approach. In addition, the use of the iterative approach provided for the sharpening of focus and closing the gap between what the data was showing at that particular stage and what it is that the researcher wanted to know as the data collection continued (Srivastva & Hopwood, 2009).

This provided for a slight shift between focus group 1 and focus group 2. The themes generated in the semi structured interviews and focus group 1 provided a helpful way to understand and structure the important needs and issues presented by the participants. A number of responses had indicated the possibility of a hierarchy in what participants were saying was important to them and contributed to feelings of wellbeing

and this was considered a useful point to take forward into focus group 2 for specific exploration. There are criticisms levied at the iterative approach, particularly in considering researcher bias and that the subjective nature could provide for the opportunity for subjective influence (Lim, 2024). However, as explored thoroughly in Chapter 3.4 and 3.5, this study adopted a constructivist approach with the position that a researcher is unlikely to be neutral, but more or less aware of bias (Golofshani, 2003) and certainly as Braun and Clarke (2022) purport, personal reflexivity and position should be owned. This study has sought to consider issues of quality and in response to potential critique about rigour and replicability, Barusch et al. (2012) considered that rigour and replicability is not only achieved through the clarity of methodological process, which is detailed clearly throughout this thesis, but in the usefulness of the research, which is fully explored in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 9.

4.7.3 Process for developing an intervention – focus group 2

An objective of the empirical studies was to explore the design of an intervention to support self -reported social worker wellbeing and to utilise focus groups to further intervention design. A further ethics application was submitted and subsequently approved to provide for a slight shift in the direction of focus group 2 to use an additional question to those initially submitted and approved. Discussion in semi structured interviews considered that the practical working conditions were fundamental, that is if these were not in place or were experienced as problematic, it was more difficult to then consider feeling supported by those responsible for providing this, more challenging to feel satisfaction in the role, consider training opportunities and feel like social workers are making a difference. Taking an iterative approach as discussed earlier in this Chapter, reviewing the triangulated data from the earlier stages studies, presented in Chapter 8, provided opportunity to explore further whether there was a hierarchical or sequential element to the generated themes, that is to explore whether there was a sense that some facets formed the foundation for other facets to be fulfilled more readily.

This was somewhat reflective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), a motivational theory in psychology, often depicted pictorially as a pyramid, proposing that behaviour is motivated through the satisfaction of an individuals needs in a hierarchical order, beginning by basic physiological needs such as food, shelter and water, moving on then to safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation or reaching

full potential. Maslow subsequently added to this initial approach in considering that the hierarchy could be more flexible in line with individual difference and circumstances (Hoffman, 2008). There is a subjective nature to the approach, as basic needs for one person could be experienced as different to another and there are wider criticisms in literature. These criticisms largely focus on cultural difference and relevance and the lack of empirical evidence for the hierarchical element of the theory (King-Hill, 2015), discussed further in Chapter 10. However, in exploring further what participants had expressed during data collection, that the more one need is met, the more likely the other needs could be met, it was considered this could be a useful framework to consider the design of the intervention (Celestine, 2017).

Focus group 2 therefore considered stage 4 of the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle, Destiny, and used the following questions as a basis for discussion.

- Considering the themes generated from the responses in the interviews and focus group, what are the priorities when thinking about what is needed to experience wellbeing at work? (additional question)
- What is needed to support these priorities happening? (adapted from original question)

Utilising the triangular framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (1943), participants considered the themes and subthemes and created a pictorial representation of the results, this is reported in full in Chapter 10, Results.

4.8 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the studies was initially given in October 2021 by Bath Spa University Ethics Committee. The ethics application took account at this time that the global pandemic may restrict face to face interview and focus groups taking place however this proved not to be the case. Ethical approval was updated during the scoping review to provide for the semi structured interviews and focus groups and again to account for the small amendment to focus group 2.

All participants that participated in the study were from the same service and were recruited on a voluntary basis; an initial email was sent through to all staff in the service asking social workers to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. For social workers showing interest in being interviewed, the Information Sheet (Appendix 4) was provided to give further information about the

study and how to participate. Once participants confirmed, they were asked to give informed consent prior to taking part and this was further confirmed at the end of the interview (Appendix 5). The Information Sheet gave detail of the study, how the data would be stored and used and how the participant could withdraw their data should they wish to after they had completed the interview or focus group but prior to the data being analysed.

The Information Sheet also addressed the ethical concern about whether social workers felt obliged to participate by confirming that their participation was not part of their role as an employee or contract. The Information Sheet confirmed that their employer had given permission for staff to participate during work hours, that personal details and individual responses to questions would not be given to their employer and that participation did not form part of any process relating to participants status as an employee. It was acknowledged at the outset that some of the topics for discussion about wellbeing may prompt an emotional response from participants and a Debrief Sheet was provided for participants following participation, signposting to useful resources (Appendix 6). In addition, there was confidence given to participants that through the use of the Appreciative Inquiry approach that there would be a positive approach to the interviews and focus groups and the focus was on hearing experiences and thinking together about a preferred future.

4.9 Summary

This extensive chapter has provided both the theoretical frameworks and practical processes undertaken in the empirical stages of this study, providing the rationale for the methods used, the study design and analytical processes.

Chapter 5: Results scoping review

5.1 Results - scoping review

The scoping review formed the first stage of data collection with the objective of identifying all the available quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods literature about interventions that have been used to improve the wellbeing of social work staff and the effectiveness of these. This was an important first step because through exploring the literature about what had already been done, the process and what the findings were, the review would provide key information for the further stages of data collection, specifically to inform the design the questions for the qualitative interviews and focus groups as well as informing the intervention design.

The research questions for the scoping review are detailed in Chapter 4. The method for the review is presented in Chapter 4, Method.

5.2 Design of the review

The Scoping Review Protocol (Appendix 1) presented the methods for this study based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review methodology and additions made by Levac et al. (2010) and used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) checklist (Tricco et al., 2018). The method details six different stages which are;

identifying the research question

identifying relevant studies

selecting studies

charting the data

collating, summarising and reporting the results

consulting with relevant stakeholders (optional and not used in this study)

The PRISMA extension for Scoping Reviews (Tricco et al., 2018) contains 20 essential reporting items and 2 optional items for inclusion. The checklist was used alongside the method above (appendix 2) to ensure rigor and consistency and provides for it to be repeated by someone else undertaking a similar review.

The databases detailed in Chapter 4.2.2 were searched for both published and unpublished studies and web-based material found in Community Care, British Association of Social Workers and What works in Children's Social Services was reviewed.

As detailed in Chapter 4.2.2 the initial search terms and their combinations were categorised as follows:

Table 8

Categories of search terms

Wellbeing	Intervention	Social worker
Well-being	Occupational health	Social work
Well being	Activity	Social worker
Resilie*	Programme	
Self care	Support	
Happiness	Intervention	
Stress	Retention	
Absenteeism		
Presenteeism		

A full search of all of the identified databases, as detailed in Chapter 4, was undertaken using all the identified keywords in each possible combination, with a further search 'by hand' of the reference lists of identified articles and follows the three-stage approach as outlined by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Moola et al., 2017).

Studies identified by the search were scanned for duplicates which were removed and then reviewed, initially looking at the title and abstract to establish if the article appeared to meet the eligibility criteria (Table 2). The data was extracted from eligible studies and charted in a spreadsheet (Appendix 3).

5.3 Search Findings

A total of 775 articles were identified and following the removal of duplicates, 585 were initially screened for relevance. Following the review of abstracts, 29 articles remained and were reviewed in full. Nine articles met the criteria and the full process depicted in the figure below.

Figure 3

Process for extracting the data

Identification

Records identified through database searching
(n = 760)

Additional records identified through other sources
(n = 15)

Records after duplicates removed
(n = 585)

Screening

Records screened for relevance
(n = 585)

Clearly irrelevant records excluded
(n = 421)

Eligibility

Potentially eligible abstracts screened
(n=164)

Abstracts excluded
(N=135)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
(n = 29)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons
(n = 20)

Wrong population (n=4)

Geographical (n=3)

Study about working conditions not interventions (n=2)

Not interventions (n=4)

Research not completed (n=1)

Articles (n=6)

Included

Studies included in scoping review
(n = 9)

5.4 Summary of Search Findings

Literature searches found 760 records and additional hand searches of reference lists identified a further 15 studies. Once duplicates were removed, 585 records remained. An initial screening undertaken identified 421 of these to be clearly irrelevant, leaving 164 potentially eligible records. The abstracts of these records were read and a further 135 excluded, reasons for this being the studies did not take place in the UK, were not with qualified social workers (usually students) or that the study related to the wellbeing of service users rather than social workers themselves. Twenty nine full text articles were further screened and out of these a clear nine deemed not to meet eligibility criteria (Table 2). Of the other twenty, nine met criteria fully and are therefore included in this review. Eight studies described organisational interventions and one study described individual interventions. The other six identified interventions but with no measure or findings aside from non-peer reviewed articles (Appendix 3 and detailed below).

The searches were also completed by ZM, an MSc psychology graduate interested in this topic for future PhD study, to ensure that the initial search was accurate.

5.5 Excluded studies

The review identified articles included in the media, including Community Care, which discussed local authority incentives for increasing wellbeing, alongside recruitment and retention. These articles identified a number of things that had been offered, on an individual level, for example gym membership, counselling, and an organisational level, for example increased opportunities for training, financial incentives, supervision. Aside from the article describing career break opportunities, all articles described a combination of more than two interventions which are identified are detailed below.

Figure 4

Interventions offered by Local Authorities to increase wellbeing

Interventions offered
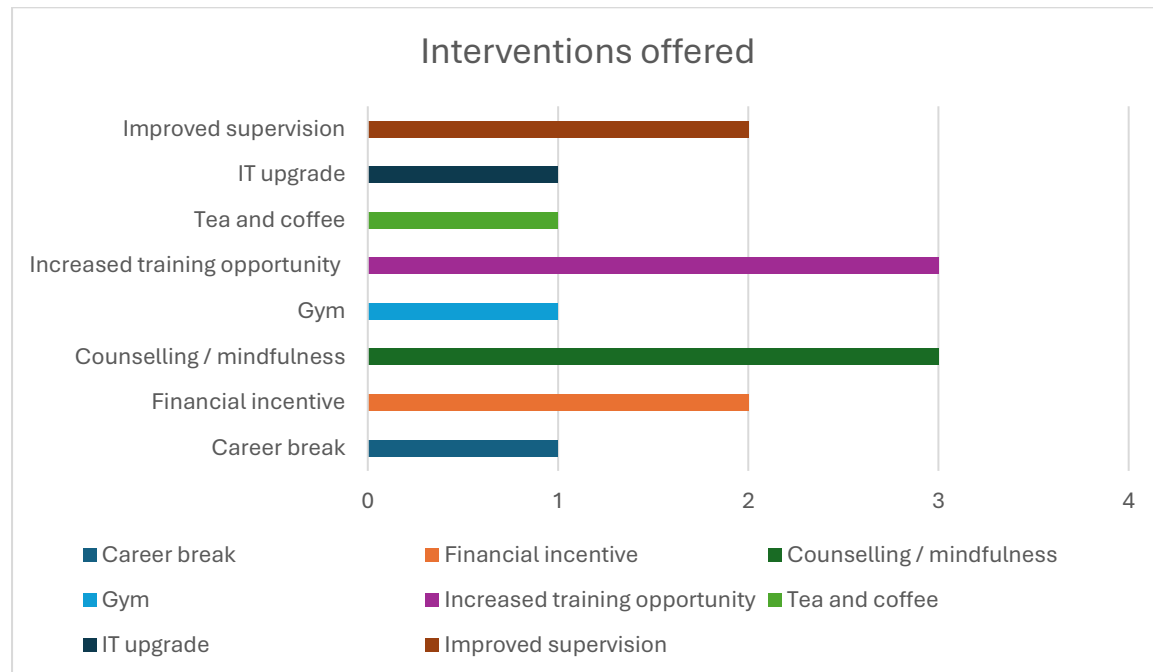
These articles all had a vacancy link to the local authority that the intervention had been offered in, indicating that the information shared was with the view to aid recruitment. Anecdotal evidence in three articles from social workers directly ("I liked the provision of discounted gym' (Community Care, 2019), 'I applied for a permanent position having been agency" (Community Care, Nov 2019), "The career break ensured I didn't burn out" (Community Care, June 2019) indicated a positive feeling from these interventions but none of the articles included links to empirical evidence about the effectiveness of these for staff wellbeing, how this was measured or implemented across a wide staff group.

These articles are not included in this scoping review. They contain information about the context of social work, evidenced by the headlines of "Authorities bring out Cheque Books to recruit and Keep Social Workers' (Children and Young People Now, 2014), "Zero agency staff position down to focus on staff wellbeing, says newly 'outstanding' council's DCS" (Community Care, April 2019) and "How this council is creating a safe supportive environment for children's social workers" (Community Care, Nov 2019). These support what is already known from the literature that social work staff

report challenges in their role and that changes are required. Without further detail of the design of these interventions, the measures and the outcomes, it is not possible to review them in full.

Twelve studies were excluded from the review following the full text being read, reasons for this were that it could not be confirmed that the staff group were not qualified social workers who had completed their first year in practice and / or the geographical area was not the UK or that the study focused on the experience of social workers in their work role and reported useful findings about this rather than implementing an intervention and evaluating it. This information had not been evident on reading the abstract.

5.6 Articles included in the scoping review

The review identified studies which considered interventions at an organisational level (n=8) and an individual level (n=1).

5.6.1 Description of study characteristics

Nine studies are included in this review, and all are concerned with qualified social workers. All of the studies took place in local authority children's social work teams in the UK and focused on an intervention designed to support positive staff wellbeing. Studies included both male and female participants and a range of ages and level of experience. These studies, which were read as full text and included both qualitative and quantitative methods focused on understanding better the experience of social workers who worked in local authority children and family teams and supporting or developing existing mechanisms to support staff wellbeing, for example supervision and training. The literature searches identified one study that considered an individual intervention in the context of a wider organisational initiative for staff wellbeing.

The studies used semi structured interviews (n=3) surveys (n=3), both semi structured interviews and survey (n=3) and one study used observation in addition to interview. All were undertaken in local authority children's social work teams and the number of participants ranged from five participants being interviewed using semi structured approach to 998 completing online surveys.

Table 9

Study characteristics

Author/s	Year	Title	Source	Design and participants,
Ahern, E. C., Sadler, L. H., Lamb, M. E., & Gariglietti, G. M.	2017	Wellbeing of professionals working with suspected victims of child sexual exploitation	*Child Abuse Review, 26*(2), 130-140. doi:10.1002/car.2439	5 social workers in LA Semi Structured Interview
Almond, T. J.	2014	Working with children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours: Exploring impact on practitioners and sources of support.	*Journal of Sexual Aggression, 20*(3), 333-353. doi:10.1080/13552600.2013.836576	16 social workers in LA Semi structured Interview
Antonopoulou, P., Killian, M., & Forrester, D.	2017	Levels of stress and anxiety in child and family social work: Workers' perceptions of organizational structure, professional support and workplace opportunities in children's services in the UK.	*Children & Youth Services Review, 76*, 42-50. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.02.028	193 social workers across 5 authorities Survey
Evans, S., & Huxley, P.	2009	Factors associated with the recruitment and retention of social workers in Wales: Employer and employee perspectives.	*Health & Social Care in the Community, 17*(3), 254-266. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2524.2008.00818.x	998 social workers Survey – demographic and free text
Jeyasingham, D.	2016	Open spaces, supple bodies? considering the impact of agile working on social work office practices.	*Child & Family Social Work, 21*(2), 209-217.	26 social workers across two local authorities Observation

			doi:10.1111/cfs.1 2130	Semi structured Interview
Pithouse, A., Brookfield, C., & Rees, A.	2019	Why are social workers in Wales the 'happiest'? A conundrum explored.	*British Journal of Social Work, 49*(7), 1987-2006. doi:10.1093/bjsw/ bcy119	997 social workers Online Survey
Ravalier, J. M., Wainwright, E., Smyth, N., Clabburn, O., Wegrzynek, P., & Loon, M.	2020	Co-creating and evaluating an app-based well-being intervention: The HOW (healthier outcomes at work) social work project.	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(23), 8730.	PAR – focus groups, 19 Semi structured interviews and steering groups
Rose, S., & Palattiyil, G.	2020	Surviving or thriving? enhancing the emotional resilience of social workers in their organisational settings.	*Journal of Social Work, 20*(1), 23-42. doi:10.1177/1468 017318793614	13 social workers Semi structured interviews
Searle, R. H., & Patent, V.	2013a	Recruitment, retention and role slumping in child protection: The evaluation of in-service training initiatives.	British Journal of Social Work, 43(6), 1111-1129	117 social workers Focus groups Survey 'Desktop' research of documents

Notably, the articles date from 2009 to present day, evidencing that the challenges for social work staff is not a new phenomenon and there has been little significant change over time. This is found in more recent research, for example Ravalier et al. (2020) finding demands on social workers, relationships with peers and staff and

poor communication about change continuing to be challenging and Rose and Palla-tiyll (2020) recommending further research to deal with factors that undermine social worker resilience.

All of the studies included in this review sought to understand the experience of social workers in their role day to day, particularly focusing on structures and mechanisms in place in their workplace to support wellbeing or what it is that social workers did themselves in their personal life to manage their own wellbeing. This body of literature of course adds to the concerning picture for social workers in terms of working conditions and managing stress and wellbeing.

5.6.2 Summary of individual studies

5.6.2.1 Study One

The first study included in this review is "Co-creating and evaluating an app-based well-being intervention: The HOW (Healthier Outcomes at Work) social work project. (Ravalier et al., 2020). Methods used in this study were to undertake a baseline study of working conditions and wellbeing, followed by qualitative semi structured interviews and a post intervention survey, the scales and instruments used were the Management Standards Indicator Tool and the General Health Questionnaire -12. A 'one stop' digital app, that could be accessed via mobile phone or computer, provided information about wellbeing including psychoeducational, awareness of wellbeing events, communication and access to a virtual assistant. This was co-designed by the research team and staff group and implemented across the staff group. This study found organisational change communication was improved as the app gave opportunity for information to be shared from the bottom up and the top down, and the app was seen as bringing together all information about wellbeing in the organisation, which at this time of global pandemic where the workforce is not located together as often, was seen as useful. Limitations to effectiveness were that not every staff member could download the app due to restrictions on their work phone and that not every staff member was aware of this.

5.6.2.2 Study Two

The second study included is Ahern et al. (2017) and this explored the wellbeing of professionals working with suspected victims of child sexual exploitation and considered the experience of social workers and police officers, using semi structured interviews with open ended questions, for example 'tell me about', to explore impact and

support available. The study included five social workers involved in working with young people involved in sexual exploitation and thematic analysis of the interviews generated a number of key themes; firstly, the importance of peer support to 'decompress', this was often spontaneous following an interview with a young person, this was coupled with the support of an immediate line manager to offer a structured, formal and reflective discussion. There was note of immediate support given by a line manager such as an early finish or time off the following day being kept from higher management, giving the sense that perhaps this would not be approved of. The study found that 40% of those interviewed took an active approach to thinking about their wellbeing, for example giving themselves a "pep talk" prior to a work meeting or appointment and all of those interviewed noted spending time with friends and family and having hobbies such as exercise and listening to music helpful to their wellbeing.

5.6.2.3 Study Three

The third study was Almond's (2014) study 'Working with children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours: Exploring impact on practitioners and sources of support'. This used semi structured interviews (n=16) and a later postal survey to investigate the nature of the impact of this work on social work staff and to explore existing sources of support. This study found the co-existence of job satisfaction and negative impact of the work on individual wellbeing. The study found that females identified greater range of external support such as hobbies and interests and 13 out of 16 respondents were reluctant to seek formal support through the employee assistance programme viewing this with some scepticism, the reasons being concern about talking to strangers, confidentiality, being seen as not coping and the potential impact on their job role, Researchers asked what the magic wand solution of support would be and external supervision was frequently suggested, feeling valued and being part of decision making from senior management. Over half the respondents believed that an external clinical supervisor would mitigate against the negative impact on wellbeing and this seems to be linked to the experience of supervision in the workplace. Respondents who described their manager as approachable and open to discussion reported greater feelings of being supported. The study noted positive comments about accepting the nature of the job and this not being a deterrent to remaining in the profession and the importance of team / colleague support.

5.6.2.4 Study Four

The fourth study was Antonopoulou et al. (2017) who examined levels of stress and anxiety in child and family social work and workers perceptions of organisational structure, professional support and workplace opportunities in children's services in the UK. The purpose of this study was to explore how different organisational structures might reduce stress and increase wellbeing. This study used the General Health Questionaire-12 (Golberg & Hillier, 1978) and a cross sectional questionnaire using the nine enabling work conditions framework; wider practical organisational support, strong administrative support, high ration of supervisors to staff, recruitment of high quality staff, limited workload, articulating clear values, quality of individual supervision, and small group discussions (Forrester et al., 2013). Regression analysis was used to explore these factors individually, finding that structural elements can shape individual worker experiences. Attitudes to work, job control, work satisfaction and workplace opportunity for further training and progression in career role, alongside a high supervisor to supervisee ratio, small teams and practical support were found to be significant in predicting social work wellbeing.

5.6.2.5 Study Five

The fifth study was Evans and Huxley (2009) considered factors associated with the recruitment and retention of social workers in Wales: employer and employee perspectives. The purpose of this study was to inform the evidence base about recruitment and retention, considering the personal and organisational characteristics associated with intention to leave and what could mitigate. The study used a multi method approach; a census across 22 authorities in Wales of demographic data of employees and a semi structured survey completed by 998 social work staff. The study found that there was little evidence that initiatives such as a 'golden hello' impacted recruitment and retention and that workers did derive satisfaction from their job. For those reporting intention to stay and job satisfaction, better supervision, recognition supervision were identified as key, alongside opportunities for professional support and training opportunities. The study concludes that staff surveys and acting on what staff groups are saying is important in promoting positive morale.

5.6.2.6 Study Six

The sixth study Jeyasingham's (2016) "Open spaces, supple bodies; considering the impact of agile working on social work office practices" explored the impact of changing work conditions on social worker practice over a 3 month period across two local authorities, interviewing 26 staff and observing the workplace environment. The findings of the study were that social workers found being with colleagues in the workplace important for reflection, discussion and support and that this enabled staff to gain a sense of their own work being part of a greater picture. No specific findings were made regarding wellbeing, but the finding about support being experienced with colleagues does fit with findings of other studies in this review and the wider literature base about working conditions. Therefore as Jeyasingham recommends, further research into what spaces social workers need and why could contribute to understanding better how physical workspace contributes to wellbeing.

5.6.2.7 Study Seven

The seventh study included was Pithouse et al. (2019) who looked at "Why are social workers in Wales the 'happiest?" A conundrum explored". The study begins by confirming that happiness is relative and hard to measure, and it is not suggested that social workers in Wales 'skip across sunlit valleys and mountains to work' (Pithouse et al., p.1988). Their study used an online survey of 997 social work staff in Wales and described the shift in practice between the UK and Wales, noting that the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 is said to 'herald a return to real social work practice' (Pithouse et al., 2019, p1989) and certainly a change in regulatory processes that aim to move away from tasks that do not involve face to face time with the service user group. The study established that staff reported that their wellbeing is improved when staff are not subject to invasive management or workflow systems or feel disconnected from decision making.

5.6.2.8 Study Eight

The eighth study was Rose and Palattiyll's study (2020) "Surviving or thriving? enhancing the emotional resilience of social workers in their organisational settings" used semi structured interviews with 13 social work staff in one local authority. Thematic analysis of the interviews generated themes of the pressure of organisational processes, the emotional demands of the role and resilience being understood in terms of bouncing back. The findings of the study focused on the practice and culture of the

organisation presenting challenges to feelings of being emotionally well, and this being a greater threat to emotional resilience of social work staff than the emotional nature of the work, that in fact the emotional demands of the job were 'inherent' and this gave great job satisfaction. Support identified as helpful was supervision that took account of the emotional needs of the social worker; the supervisor recognising pressures and a willingness to address emotions as an aspect of the professional role rather than something separate. The complex nature of the line manager / employee relationship was discussed and a suggestion that this supervision could take place outside of this relationship to address any potential power imbalance and perceived impact on employment.

5.6.2.9 Study Nine

The ninth study was Searle and Patent's study "Recruitment, Retention and Role Slumping in Child Protection: The Evaluation of in-service Training Initiatives" (2013) and took place over a two-year period. The study was undertaken across 8 authorities with participants from the social work and social work manager staff group. The aim was to investigate the impact of an in-service training programme. The training programme sought to reduce turnover and promote recruitment through creating a range of training opportunities for career progression. The training offered a programme for team managers, comprising of 6 interconnected modules; leadership and supervision, risk management, assessment, managing care planning, processing feelings and unconscious material and a further programme for social workers with three specialisms; domestic abuse, mental health and advanced child protection. The study took a multi method approach, using semi structured interviews, focus groups, 4 surveys which used items from other scales and research of organisation documentation relating to the training. The study found that the training initiatives over time were an important tool in enhancing skill levels, addressing 'role slumping', where tasks are undertaken by a staff member in a more senior position than is required, leading to lack of clarity about role and limited opportunity to develop skill and progression. Built in peer support through action learning sets offered 'rapid reflection' (Searle & Patent, 2013) and transfer of learning back into the work environment and was seen to be helpful and likely to improve employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. This led to the conclusion that this approach to training appeared to be assisting in the recruitment and retention

of social work staff. A limitation identified was that this relied on managers and staff being aware of this opportunity.

5.7 Discussion

This scoping review explored the studies reporting the implementation of interventions aimed at improving the wellbeing of qualified social workers employed in UK local authority social work positions and not in their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). These studies were published between 2007 and 2021. The studies covered a wide range of interventions and were classified into two groups, those delivered to a wide staff group as a group, such as office conditions, training initiatives, n=9 organisational interventions, and those delivered to individuals as part of a staff group, n=1 individual interventions. Of course, it is the case that all interventions are individual to the extent that each person will experience the intervention differently.

5.7.1 Research Methods used

The interventions used qualitative and quantitative methods to gain data across the studies, with some studies combining approaches; a survey, semi structured interviews, focus groups and in one study, Jeyasingham (2016), observation. The quantitative questionnaires across the studies all used Likert scale questions rather than a polar response of yes or no. Only one study used survey alone (Pithouse et al., 2019), the others combining this method with other qualitative data gathering methods. Gaining data is in this way is effective in terms of being accessible to a wide number of participants. Previous studies looking at social worker wellbeing have considered the value of large scale questionnaires in providing the organisational context for the interventions, which has been found to be important when looking at wellbeing, particularly considering the individual in the context of the organisation (Kinman & Grant, 2017; McFadden et al., 2019).

The qualitative interviews all used a semi structured approach, this involved opened ended questions often followed up with why or how questions. This method of data collection of course can be time consuming, requiring preparation, rigorous note taking and coding and then organising and describing the data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Due to the workload inherent in this method, the sample group can be small and there has been significant discussion about sample size and how many interviews are enough to answer the research question. There is an argument that

using data saturation, a commonly used concept for estimating sample size in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020) that is interviewing participants to the point that little or no new information is produced can help determine how many participants are required to provide an adequate sample and mitigate concern about small sample size (Fugard & Potts, 2015). This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, Method 3.4.

Braun and Clarke (2020) and Morse (2015) present a contrary perspective perhaps, noting the importance of recognising the role of the researcher in analysing the information, and moving away from the term 'emerge', considering that this denies the active role the researcher plays in making sense of the data. The advantages of using this method are that it provides a rich opportunity to gather data from participants, allowing opportunity to talk about experience, giving the researcher key insights into what is happening and why. This is not always gained through quantitative collection, which is often focused on the 'what' rather than the 'why' and certainly allows for more detail to be shared. The studies included in this scoping review all sought to understand better the experience of social workers and this method of semi structured interviews across a number of studies was an appropriate method to use to achieve this. This approach also acknowledged that the responses were often interconnected rather than standalone and allowed for the themes arising in the interview to be gathered across the piece (Fenton et al., 2014).

There is some caution when using semi structured interviews in one service or geographical area perhaps, it could be that the context for that service or area will mean that the responses given will not be reflective of a wider staff group. Ahern et al., (2017) and Almond (2014) both consider the responses of staff who are working with children who have been victims of sexual exploitation or those who sexually harm. There has been considerable media coverage in recent years of areas such as Rotherham where allegations of sexual harm and child sexual exploitation were deemed to have been handed poorly by agencies, including social workers. Interviews with staff local to this area could give different interview answers because of the impact of this on their team and local area and there could be questions regarding generalisation of findings. Brett (2017) presents a different perspective to this, offering caution about describing the potential lack of generalisability as a limitation in qualitative research, considering that statistical types of generalisability are not really the aim of qualitative

studies. An earlier paper by Braun and Clarke (2013) had noted that qualitative research results can be generalisable but not in the way quantitative research results are and Brett certainly builds on this position. He considers that there are types of generalisability which can be used in qualitative research; for example naturalistic, where the research resonates with the reader's own experience and transferability, where the reader identifies findings that can be useful in their setting.

Two studies, Ravalier et al., 2020 and Searle and Patent, 2013 used focus groups alongside a survey and semi structured interviews. Focus groups offer an effective way to consider ideas, attitudes and experiences (Goodrich & Luke, 2009) and coupled with semi structured interviews ensure a triangulation of the qualitative data and a comprehensive 'data richness' (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). There is also evidence these focus groups allow for different information to be shared, for example individual interviews identifying more broad themes, whereas more sensitive themes being discussed in a group setting (Guest et al., 2017).

Participatory action research (PAR) used by Ravalier et al., (2020) enabled the staff group to be at the forefront of both telling their story and their story being used to design something that would make a difference to them. PAR considers collaborative participation and collective and self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake means that they can understand and improve the situations they find themselves in. This is crucial, because for interventions designed and implemented to have the best opportunity for positive impact, they should have the investment from those the intervention is designed to help (Atkinson et al., 2020). Certainly, Appreciative Inquiry promotes a collaboration and indeed from a social work perspective when working with families in need, this is entirely the approach taken when planning support interventions, that interventions are with others rather something that is done to others. The other studies did not really lend themselves to this approach due to their focus on what already happening in the teams rather than design of a new intervention.

Post and pre intervention survey questionnaires were used by Ravalier et al. (2020), and specifically suited to this study, as a specific app based intervention was implemented which enabled a before and after picture to be gained and the impact of the intervention measured. It is accepted that there could always be other factors impacting post intervention responses, however this is a helpful way of measuring

change because it gives numerical responses for which increase and decrease can be seen.

Regarding the sample groups, quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires had a greater sample group (n=1337) than qualitative methods (n=5-16). As discussed above, this is to be expected because of the difference in preparation, style and accessibility and what is hoped for in the reach of the research.

Recruitment of participants across the studies varied and this may have impacted whether the results were indicative of a wider staff group and could be seen to be reflective of social workers in general. Selection of participants was undertaken in the following ways:

Figure 5

Recruitment of participants
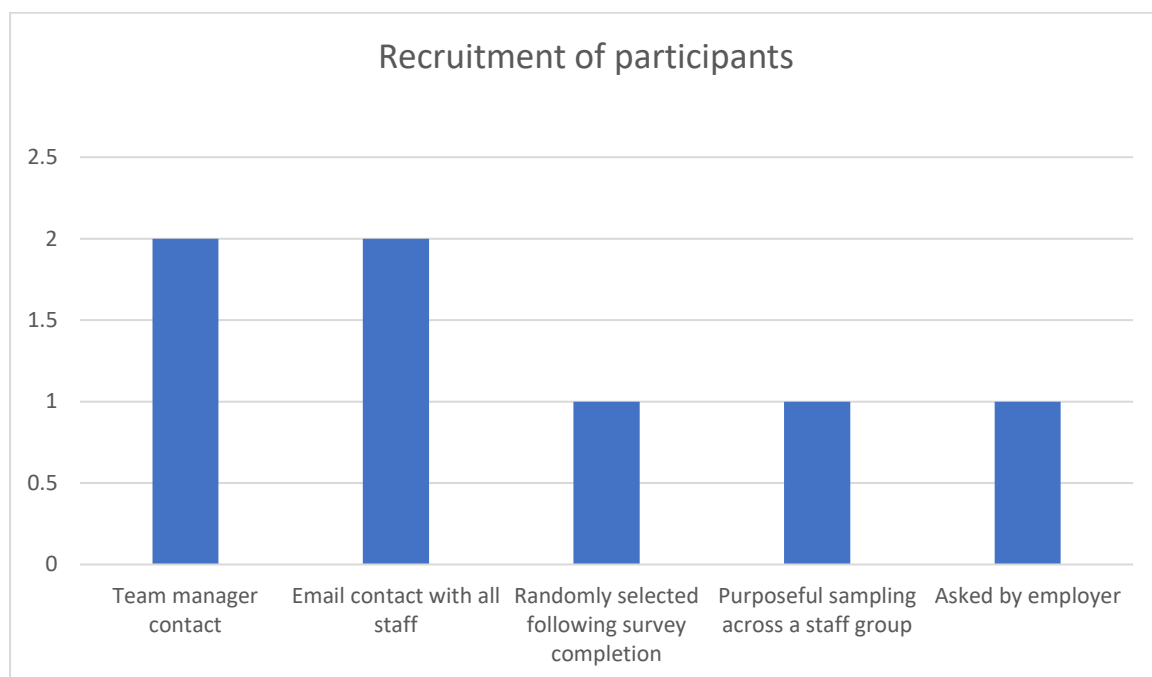
Recruitment of participants was undertaken in a number of ways. In two studies email contact was sent to all staff inviting them to be part of the research, this would have given an entirely random sample group which could have drawn participants of the same age, or different, the same level of experience, or different, and so on. The team manager contacting the potential participants and the participants who were asked by their employer (n=3) has some drawbacks particularly in the qualitative data gathering. The team manager's choice of participant may have influenced the content

of the interview, for example it is likely that the manager would know in the broad sense how the social worker is feeling and what the responses were likely to be. This would have included an element of bias which could have been unconscious or conscious depending on what the thoughts and feelings of the person approaching the participants. In addition, being asked to participate by an employer may bring a sense of obligation as well as a sense of what the expectations are as staff member. Issues of anonymity and freedom to give open answers may also be impacted if it is qualitative interviews that are being participated in. Random selection of participants following their completion of a survey would ensure a completely randomised group in a number of ways similar to the method of sending an email to the wider workforce, however the fact that the participants have already completed a survey means that the group from which participants were chosen is already narrowed, decreasing the opportunity for a wide and diverse participation group.

Most of the studies used a mixed method approach, that is research that looks to gather, analyse and interpret both qualitative and quantitative data in a study or series of studies that are investigating the same phenomenon (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007), considering there is value seen in the different approaches to research. The studies broadly gained a view about the organisation and the key issues through quantitative data spread over a large sample group which set the scene of the organisational pressures, challenges and context. The qualitative data collection through focus groups and interviews provided opportunity to gain data richness about personal experience. Bringing these approaches together is not simply reporting them side by side but considering sampling, the use of one data set to inform the other and analysis of the data set as a whole (Fetters et al., 2013). The studies that have used this approach in this review evidence drawing analysis and recommendations from both qualitative and quantitative measures, for example Ravalier et al., (2020).

Only one study (Ravalier et al., 2020) used pre and post intervention surveys to measure effectiveness of an intervention, and this was also the only study to implement a co-designed intervention which drew on the expertise of staff about what would help. Three studies looked at personal resources that social workers drew on to support their wellbeing, this identified positive social networks, leisure activities as being useful to provide 'down time' to the day to day work. This is an interesting point to

consider, because of course individuals bring their own experiences and personal circumstances to their job and as well as their job role impacting on their personal life, personal life can of course impact on aspects of the job role. In considering how to further the exploration of what individual staff members bring to their role and what personal resources they draw upon, it could be that personal circumstances of staff, for example, whether they were in an intimate relationship, whether they had children, whether they had pets or interestingly whether there were any protected characteristics such as age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation as detailed in the Equality Act 2010, could be considered. This could have been important to be confident that the results were representative of the entire staff group and to see if there were any factors that influenced wellbeing more than others, for example whether people with a dog generally had feelings of greater wellbeing that people who did not.

In thinking about measurements and tools, the studies used a variety of established measurements (e.g. GHQ-12, Goldberg & Hillier, 1979), Management Standards Indicator Tool (Health and Safety Executive, 2009), 9 enabling work conditions for wellbeing (Forrester et al., 2013) and these are well established in the literature for use in studies focusing on wellbeing (Forrester et al., 2013; Ravalier, 2019). Thematic analysis was used to code qualitative interviews to consider generation of themes across the data. Again, this is a well established and valid method to interpret and use this type of information and to make sense of it.

The style of questions used in the focus groups and semi structured interview, studies used positively framed questions, using a strengths based approach, for example 'tell me a time when you felt well supported'.

5.7.2 Key issues presented in the studies

5.7.2.1 Peer Support

Five studies identified that staff found peer support important when considering feelings of wellbeing in their role, these were Jeyasingham (2016), Evans and Huxley (2009), Searle and Patent (2013), Ahern et al., (2017) and Almond (2014). Discussion focused on spontaneous peer support to 'decompress', being with colleagues in the workplace important for reflection, discussion and support which enabled staff to gain a sense of their own work being part of a greater picture and being in a small team and being offered practical support. From a human perspective, being with others who

share experience and can offer informed empathy is likely to offer emotional reassurance and the sense that staff are not alone in what they are experiencing.

5.7.2.2 Supervision and Line management support

Studies identified the importance of supervision and line management support, both in the form of formal reflective supervision opportunity and ad hoc being let off early if required. Ahern et al., (2017) and Almond (2014) found that over half the respondents considered that an external clinical supervisor would mitigate against the impact on wellbeing and this seems to be linked to the experience of supervision in the workplace, respondents who described their manager as approachable and open to discussion reported greater feelings of being supported. In addition, Rose and Palattiyll's study (2019) found that supervision that took account of the emotional needs of the social worker was particularly helpful.

5.7.2.3 Support from senior management

The evidence from these studies is that peer support and first line supervisor support is valued and seen as important when considering wellbeing, however the studies indicated a disconnect between staff and what they see as the organisation or 'higher' management. This is illustrated in Ahern et al., (2017) where there was note of immediate support given by a line manager such as an early finish or time off the following day being kept from higher management, giving the sense that perhaps this would not be approved of and staff being aware of this.

Ravalier et al. (2020) found in their study that organisational change communication was improved following the implementation of the digital app, indicating that staff had been dissatisfied with previous change communication in the organisation and Pithouse et al. (2019) study concurs with this, finding that staff wellbeing was improved when staff were not subject to invasive management or workflow systems or feel disconnected from decision making. Evans and Huxley (2009) noted the importance of listening to the staff voice, concluding that staff surveys and acting on what staff groups are saying was important in promoting positive morale.

Organisation context was found to be a key contributor to feelings of wellbeing, with Antonopolou et al., (2017), Rose and Palattiyll (2019) and Evans and Huxley (2009) finding that attitudes to work, job control, work satisfaction and workplace opportunity, alongside a high supervisor to supervisee ratio, small teams and practical

support were found to be significant in predicting social work wellbeing and key to those reporting intention to stay. Rose and Palattiyll's study (2019) specifically finding that practice and culture of the organisation presents challenges to feelings of being emotionally well, and this was a greater threat to the emotional resilience of social workers than the emotional nature of the work. This is certainly reflected in Ravalier's work (2018) considering working conditions facing social workers and the impact on wellbeing.

5.7.2.4 Personal satisfaction

Interestingly Rose and Palattiyll (2019), Almond (2014) and Ahern et al., (2017) identified that the emotional impact of the job was not always what made social workers feel stressed or overwhelmed. Ahern et al. (2017) found for those working particularly with victims of child sexual exploitation, hearing about harm in this context did impact staff personally. However the studies identified that the emotional impact of the work was an accepted part of the job and at times emotional engagement with those using the service although impactful, enabled feelings of job satisfaction. Rose and Palattiyll (2019) found that the emotional demands of the job were 'inherent' and this gave great job satisfaction and this was mirrored in Almond's (2014) study, finding that there could be a co-existence of job satisfaction and negative impact of the work on individual wellbeing.

There is a wealth of literature about the emotional impact of the social work role and consideration of compassion fatigue (Kinman & Grant, 2011; McFadden et al., 2014; Ravailer & Boichat, 2018; Ravalier, 2019). This is a current topic of research due to the global pandemic (Health and Social Care Workforce Well-being and Coping during COVID-19 2020 to date). An interesting theme, therefore, to find in this scoping review was that the emotional role is described as expected, inherent, and at some times a rewarding part of the role.

How social workers thought about managing their wellbeing was important in understanding how they considered where the responsibility for wellbeing lay, whether this remained completely with the individual or completely with the organisation. Certainly, employers have a duty towards their employees regarding their welfare, but it is unlikely that this takes all aspects of personal responsibility from the individual employee. This is considered in Chapter 10, but important to note here that employers have placed on them a duty of care towards employees, that is to protect their health,

safety and welfare (HSE, 2021; Health and Safety at Work Act; 1974). However, there is responsibility on employees to take reasonable care of their own safety and this is detailed in the professional registration requirements set by Social Work England (Social Work England, 2024). In thinking about practical tasks such as equipment and work space, this seems an easier ask, but in considering emotional impact of the role, this appears to be a more challenging dynamic. Ahern et al. (2017) found that 40% of those interviewed took a proactive approach to their wellbeing, for example giving themselves a pep talk prior to an appointment. All of those interviewed noted spending time with friends and family and having hobbies such as exercise and listening to music helpful to their wellbeing. Almond (2014) found that females identified greater range of external support such as hobbies and interests.

5.7.2.5 Opportunity

Two studies considered the importance of training in how staff reported wellbeing, Evans and Huxley (2009) found that for those staff members reporting intention to stay and job satisfaction, support and supervision were identified as key, alongside opportunities for professional support and training opportunities. Similarly, Searle and Patent (2013) found that training initiatives over time an important tool in enhancing skill levels and job satisfaction.

5.7.3 Review of methodology used in this scoping Review

This review used Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review methodology and used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) checklist (Trico et al., 2018) and detailed in full in Chapter 4.

5.7.4 Strengths and limitations of the scoping review methods

This scoping review adopted broad and inclusive search terms and a wide interpretation of what intervention meant in order to identify and include all studies that had explored interventions to support social worker wellbeing. This enabled as many studies as possible to be included to inform the next stage of this study and draw on existing findings. This review also included a broad range of research designs, number of participants and a variety of settings and styles of intervention.

In focusing on qualified social workers in a local authority position who have completed their ASYE, this immediately precluded consideration of the whole social work team staff group, which most often includes support worker staff and business

support staff who contribute to exercising of the statutory responsibility of social workers. There are of course likely to be stressors and challenges for other members of the team, but the research relating to qualified social workers specifically identifies this role as being very difficult for a number of reasons both individual and organisational. In addition, social workers in their ASYE have additional support and intervention as part of the ASYE offer, meaning it could be more difficult to establish what was experienced as a result of being in the ASYE Cohort.

The review identified a number of articles published in well known social work media (Community Care, Children and Young People Now) which headlined articles 'Authorities bring out cheque book' and 'Zero Agency staff down to focus on staff wellbeing' (Community Care 2014, 2019), these were not included in this review as discussion was anecdotal, with no measures identified to assess success or not. These articles in popular media highlight however what it is that people want to know, what is it that can improve the wellbeing of staff. This continues to be a matter of great interest even when the information is untested.

5.7.5 Implications for future research

All of the studies recommend further research regarding interventions to address social worker wellbeing and from looking at the number of studies included in this review, the literature base in this area is sparse. This evidences that further studies that explore interventions are needed to be able to add to a picture of what is required to change the current concern about wellbeing, working conditions and retention. The studies explored in this review included organisational interventions and individual interventions. Future research and exploration of interventions should hold together both approaches, that is an individual intervention which takes account for, and includes provision for, the position of the social worker in the organisation they work for. Approaches that consider individuals in the context of their organisation is vital when looking at change (Kinman & Grant, 2016; McFadden et al., 2019. Using qualitative and quantitative methods gave the broadest data set and provided for data richness in understanding social work experience, and the use of co-design participatory action research ensured that the design of the intervention lay with the experts, the social workers.

5.8 Summary

The literature indicates that social worker wellbeing continues to be a concern for individuals and employers and this scoping review has identified that there have been few interventions over time developed to address this. Interestingly, most studies used more than one way of gathering data, using surveys and questionnaires to gain a broad data set and then exploring this further in more depth through the use of semi structured interviews. The use of semi structured interviews to understand experience was evident and the benefit of using positive questions rather than adopting a deficit model and that using a strengths-based approach to look at what has worked and could be replicated proved beneficial. The Interventions that strengthened contractual obligations, for example supervision and training, were found to be successful in improving wellbeing, and it will be important to explore this further in the interviews and focus groups. This will be strengthened further from the findings from the studies about the importance of peer support and first line management and supervision, indicating perhaps that an intervention that positions the staff member as an individual, in their supportive colleague network taking into account the organisational context could be effective. Addressing the disconnect between front line staff and senior management and what is seen as 'the organisation' may be useful to explore further. Co-design was seen as a successful method in designing an intervention that social workers wanted and this provides evidence of the value of this approach.

Chapter 6: Results – semi structured interviews

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the results of the qualitative data beginning with the semi structured interviews. This chapter will begin by setting out the demographic and descriptive statistics, the details of the interview and schedule before presenting the results of the interviews and the analysis using reflexive thematic analysis.

6.2 Demographics and descriptive statistics

The demographic information for participants in the semi structured interviews is presented in the table below. Nine interviews were undertaken. The range of age of the participants was between 22 and 53 years and participants spread across the age categories. Similarly, the range of employment was between one and nineteen years, with participants length of employment spread across the categories. There were two male participants and seven female participants. These participants did not participate in either focus group.

Table 10

Demographic information for participants in semi structured interviews

Age	N (%)	Employment length	N	Sex	N
21-30	2	1-3 years	2	Male	2
31-40	3	3-5 years	2	Female	7
41-50	2	5-10 years	2	Prefer not to say	0
51 and above	2	10 years and above	3		

No participants withdrew from the study following participation in the interview.

6.3 Interview details

The length of the interviews ranged from 37 minutes to 53 minutes, with the average time of 45 minutes. All interviews were face to face and took place in a private room in the employee's place of work which provided confidentiality and privacy. All of the interviews were conducted by the author of this study, and each recorded digitally. The files were stored electronically on an encrypted device with access by the author of

this study alone. Following transcription and anonymisation of the transcripts, the audio files were deleted.

Prior to the interview taking place, the participants received an Information Sheet (Appendix 4), describing the study and what the participant was being asked to do. At the beginning of each interview, this was repeated and a discussion regarding consent and confidentiality took place to ensure that the participant was giving informed consent to take part, and this was revisited at the end. The participant was asked to complete and sign the Consent Form (Appendix 5) and a copy was provided for the participant, along with a further copy of the Information Sheet. The author of the study retained a copy of the signed sheet and stored these confidentially. Opportunity was given for participants to ask questions, and it was confirmed to participants their right to stop the interview at any time or withdraw their data after the interview had taken place but prior to the data being analysed. No participants withdrew. After each interview had ended, a Debrief Sheet was provided for all participants (Appendix 6)

6.4 Interview schedule

The structure of the interviews followed the Appreciative Inquiry cycle with four sections, Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. Question design is detailed fully in Chapter 4 Methods, however in summary, the design of the questions was informed by the scoping review, other studies using Appreciative Inquiry as a research approach and the pilot study.

The first section, Discovery, had five questions, exploring with participants their current experience and what they experienced as the best of what was currently taking place. As discussed in Chapter 4 Methods, the first question importantly considered the self-definition of wellbeing to allow opportunity for participants to think about their definition and experience of this:

1. When you think about wellbeing, what does this mean for you?
2. When you are feeling positive about your role, what is happening?
3. When you are feeling supported by your colleagues, what does that look life for you?
4. When you are feeling supported by your line manager, what does that look like for you?

5. Can you think of a time you were faced with a challenge, and you felt appropriately supported, what was it that helped?

The second section of questions followed the Dream stage of Appreciative Inquiry, with three questions focused on forward thinking, allowing opportunity for participants to wonder and curiously dream about what could be, without being tied to the constraints of the day-to-day role:

1. Can you think of something that would increase your feelings of wellbeing? '
2. What advice would you give a newly qualified social worker about managing the day-to-day role?
3. On an ideal workday in the future, what is happening?

The next three questions formed the Design stage, focused on bringing dreams into the realistic day work environment, thinking less about abstract concepts and more about what could be the reality. This section also provided opportunity to think about how challenges could be addressed:

1. What makes you feel supported by senior management and what would make you feel more supported?
2. In thinking about training, what would you be excited about?
3. What is an optimal work environment for you?

The final two questions focused on reality further, taking into account the shared understanding of the statutory role, what is it that could happen and how could this be a reality in day to day experience. These questions completed the Appreciative Inquiry cycle with the Destiny stage:

1. Understanding the statutory parameters around the social work role, what changes would you most like to see?
2. What support is needed to make this happen?

6.5 Results

The analysis of the results of the nine interviews is presented in this part of the chapter. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the analytic procedure fully detailed in Chapter 4 Methods, six main themes were generated each with several subthemes and this is presented in the table below and further discussed therein. It was important to ensure that the themes named were not simply summaries of a topic (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

and to evidence the 'meaning based themes as interpretative stories built around uniting meaning' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p 4), each theme is discussed with an example of the questions used along with the most indicative responses for the theme.

Table 11

Reflexive Thematic Analysis of semi structured interview

Main theme	Sub theme
Wellbeing	Being seen as a person
	Emotions
Practical Working Conditions	Comfortable space
	Equipment and working systems
	Opportunity to eat and drink
	Being together in an office
Support	Colleagues
	Line Manager
	Senior Manager
	Media / Societal perception
	Modelling
Personal Satisfaction	Feeling acknowledged
	Appreciation / Celebration
	Self-efficacy
Opportunity	Path of progression
	Building knowledge and skill
Making a Difference	Positive outcomes for families
	Meaningful work

6.5.1 Wellbeing

The responses to the opening general question to prompt exploration of the meaning of wellbeing for the participants elicited that wellbeing is experienced in a multi-faceted way, with common strands about what constitutes how wellbeing is defined and experienced. A number of these factors are explored as individual themes as detailed further in this chapter, however capturing the experience and definition of the term for participants at the outset was crucial in providing a foundation for understanding the construction of the term in this context. This theme therefore focuses on wellbeing

being described as holistic and including positive feelings such as contentment and happiness.

Example questions:

'When you think about wellbeing, what does this mean for you?'
'On an ideal work day in the future, what is happening?'

Indicative responses:

6.5.1.1 Being seen as a whole person

There was importance placed on being a whole person and wellbeing consisting of a number of factors, reflecting the literature detailed in Chapter 2 when considering how wellbeing could be defined. Using a scaling approach when considering wellbeing was a useful observation, so rather than being well or not, reflecting that participants may experience wellbeing in some aspects of their lives but not in others. Work life balance was discussed across the interviews and a focus on wanting to be seen as a person with a life outside of the work day, perhaps with stressors and challenges that could impact on the work role being known and acknowledged.

Again, this confirms the multi-faceted concept of wellbeing as well as reflecting that this is likely to be experienced differently by everyone. Work life balance is a term widely used (Brough et al., 2020) and the participant responses indicate it is likely that again what this balance means will be experienced differently by different people. The terms work and life could indicate a contrast, in that what happens at work is not part of a person's wider life and that life happens when a person is not at work and balance may indicate a sense of equity in terms of time. Whilst this study has not explored this specifically it is interesting to consider whether this is problematic for those who enter into helping professions for altruistic reasons and this will be returned to in Chapter 10, Discussion. Aspects of physical need are also introduced, having a drink and something to eat, going to the toilet and confirmation that this contributes to wellbeing at work.

Indicative answers in this section were as follows:

"I think, for me, it's largely not just about me as a social worker at work, but me as a person with a personal life and how that might impact on my work. I've been in other jobs where it's all been about me as a social worker, and no kind of

consideration of the impact of that on my personal life, or the other way round. I think it's having a balance, isn't it?" (Participant 1).

"I think it's about how you are as a person and as an individual, how you are doing generally, like in terms of the emotional state, physical state, mental state as well, and just as a whole thing, where you were at in a moment's time. It's almost like it's a scale thing, rather than it like well-being or not." (Participant 2).

"I guess having a balanced caseload, having a good balance between my work life and my home life, feeling that I can take a lunch break and having time to get a drink, have something to eat and go to the toilet." (Participant 3).

6.5.1.2 Emotional wellbeing

Participants indicated that part of being well was experienced in terms of emotional feelings. Participant responses described emotions of positivity, being comfortable, feeling content and happy, as well as being healthy, both emotionally and physically. This again reflects the multifaceted approach to wellbeing, considering that participants are describing this in terms of emotional state and physical condition as well as this linking to both work and non-work life. Interestingly, it is not described just as feeling or being happy, which could reflect an emotional response to an external in the moment factor, but a deeper sense of being comfortable and content.

Indicative responses were as follows:

"Being healthy, fit and healthy, being emotionally fit and healthy. Yes, just feeling positive about things and being in a supportive environment" (Participant 4).

"Feeling and being comfortable happy and healthy within yourself" (Participant 5).

"Feeling content, in my life, like work, relationships, health stuff. Content might be the wrong word but happy sounded a bit twee" (Participant 2).

6..5.2 Practical working conditions

The second theme generated focused on practical working conditions. Participants shared lots of details about what practical measures and conditions were important and across the responses to the thirteen questions, importance was placed by participants on the practical arrangements and practical environment for work, this being associated with positive feelings. This included equipment and systems that worked,

a face to face office environment with opportunity for less formal space and practical arrangements such as a lunch break and facilities to make refreshments.

Example questions:

> 'What is an optimal work environment for you?'
> 'What would increase your feelings of wellbeing?'
> 'What changes would you like to see?'

Indicative responses:

6.5.2.1 Comfortable spaces

Discussion across the responses indicated that participants valued the provision of an 'other' space, aside from formal desk space. Whilst this was initially described as a physical space, it linked also to an emotional space, where there was opportunity to share experiences. This certainly links with the sub theme of 'being together' in this theme and the wider theme of 'support' as discussed further in this chapter, however the responses indicate that there is meaning and importance in the physical space. The data showed that the physical space could impact feelings of wellbeing, with an emotional sense of feeling relaxed, letting out emotions, crying is given as an example and there being some separation from where participants work indicating that the experience of a different physical environment could impact feelings of wellbeing (Tawil et al., 2021).

> *"Comfy chairs, a more relaxed space, I do have a habit of sitting on the floor. I know people who keep pointing that out. Those yellow chairs out there are so uncomfortable, the big ones, and my legs dangle. They're really hard…. Sometimes it can just feel too formal, can it, and it can be a bit off-putting if you're trying to have conversations with someone. I know a lot of people have joked about it in the office, and they said, "Well, what did you used to do when you was in your last job? I said, "You laugh about it, but we actually had a crying room." It wasn't called the crying room, granted, but it was a room. It had beanbags and stuff in it. I suppose you might liken it to a sensory room, really, and there was actually a bed in there. You just needed to go and have 10 minutes, you could do that and that was okay" (Participant 1).*

"You go over at a terrible visit, or there's a manager there, or there's a colleague there or even business support where you can go "You know what? I was terrible." Someone will go "Oh, come on, there's ….There's a bean bag (laughs) a Bean bag and there's sweets on the table" (Participant 4).

6.5.2.2 Equipment and systems

Participant responses confirmed that equipment that predictably works and desk space were important to them. One participant used 'working conditions' to include having in place systems that worked to allow the work to be done and responses from other participants confirmed that working systems in terms of telephone, email and electronic database were crucial. This indicates that there is an impact on how people feel and experience work when the systems are not working. When considering this in the context of the existing research it is known that administrative load and IT systems are reasons contributing to poor working conditions for social workers (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018) and certainly if there are challenges accessing systems that social workers are under pressure to use, this is likely to cause feelings that are in contrast to wellbeing at work.

"I'd be having a good day I guess if I had a desk and had everything working" (Participant 5).

"I guess practical things like having the equipment I need to do the job well, have (IT) systems that can cope with the demand" (Participant 1).

"So, some practical things like better working conditions, so office hours, so having the things in place that allow us to do the job, an office with tech that works, systems that don't crash" (Participant 2).

"Set desks rather than moving around because I think it helps me feel more settled that I know where I will be sitting, that my team would be around me, and I would feel supported by them" (Participant 3).

6.5.2.3 Opportunity for refreshments

Participants considered that making time for lunch and having tea and coffee was important. Taking a lunch break was highlighted as an important factor, that it was perhaps reflective of not just an opportunity to eat but also to have a break and this opportunity had meaning in terms of feeling valued. The responses reflect a number of factors relating to a sense of value; 'solid, consistent expectation to have your lunch

break' (Participant 1) or 'having the fundamental things' (Participant 4) indicating that being provided with this would indicate that there is understanding of what employees need and that there is value in providing this because it would contribute to how they feel about their role. It may also be reflective of the individual factors that interact with this, for example wanting to be seen as working hard and copying what others in the organisation do and the importance of being seen to be busy as well as the demands of the workload and having time to stop. This is an important issue and one that will be returned to in Chapter 10. Participants reported that practical needs being met as the basis for everything else, including the provision of food and drink, alongside the opportunity for these to be enjoyed and, again this is an important issue which provided some direction to the discussions in focus group 2 and to the development of the intervention.

Indicative answers to these questions were as follows:

> *"I think a more solid, consistent, like expectation to have your lunch break. There are days when I feel guilty for taking my lunch break, even though it's what I'm entitled to. I think that's quite key one." (Participant 6).*

> *"This [practical things] set the basis for everything else, like if you have everything working as it should be it sets the right place for the work. Unlimited tea and coffee helps." (Participant 5).*

> *"I bought tea, coffee, sugar, put it in the both of the kitchens and washed up the cutlery thing. I'll tell you just a little story, which is probably not for this. I get to the kitchen, where I am now and there's that two teaspoons, one knife. There's no fork to eat my salad with. So I eat it with a teaspoon and I think "What am I doing?" I went out to the shop and I bought loads of knives and forks.. Having a fork to eat, you need just the fundamental things" (Participant 4).*

6.5.2.4 Being together in an office

The impact of COVID and the consequential enforced physical distance between colleagues was presented by the participants. The importance of a physical sharing of space so that experiences could be shared was strongly linked with feelings of being supported and wellness, as well as having opportunity to share ideas, laugh and express emotions. The participants reflected on the impact that COVID had on dealing with difficult feelings or situations, dealing with these at home, and this links with the

physical environment as having meaning and importance discussed in section 6.5.2.2. Presented in these responses was also the view that social work is not a job that can best be done in isolation. As discussed in Chapter 2, literature evidences that the social work task is stressful, there is a risk of burnout, experiencing vicarious trauma and abuse (Kinman and Grant, 2011; Ravalier et al., 2020) and these responses indicate that there is importance found in being together to experience the role with others.

"Yes, sharing a physical space, lockdown was so hard because this couldn't happen, just sharing experiences, sharing ideas, moaning a bit and laughing together" (Participant 7).

"Just the acknowledgment that that was a really rubbish conversation or whatever. It's just space to vent really, I think. I think that's really hard like when I was at home and stuff because I felt like I was just venting into my living room" (Participant 1).

"Having an environment where particularly in our job, where you've had a terrible visit or you're worried about something and you can come back to an office rather than the telephone" (Participant 4).

6.5.3 Support

The importance of colleagues and what was gained from collegiate relationships was evidenced across the responses. The physical presence of a team as discussed in detail above, examples of what this brought to the individual to build feelings of positivity and also what helped mitigate the impact of what was described as experienced as challenging. The importance of the line manager relationship was also referenced as was the experience of the interaction and connection with senior management and how this could best work. This links to the findings in the scoping review about what was experienced as supportive and helpful and the potential disconnect and impact of this. Interestingly, the perception of the media about the social work role was considered and what this meant for the participants was explored a little, with participants being aware of the negative framing of their role in society and in the media.

Example questions:

When you are feeling supported by your colleagues, what does that look like for you?

When you are feeling supported by your line manager, what does that look like for you?

Can you think of a time you were faced with a challenge and you felt appropriately supported, what was it that helped?'

What makes you feel supported by senior management and what would make you feel more supported?

What advice would you give to a newly qualified social worker about managing the day to day role?

Indicative responses:

6.5.3.1 Colleagues

Participant responses presented a sense of the importance of relationships with colleagues; in offering help, not feeling judged, feeling cared for and heard by others and being with people in a similar role. These responses are indicative of the importance of a sense of belonging, a feeling of deep connection and long established as a basic human need (Waller, 2019). Opportunity to share experiences and being heard featured strongly, particularly sharing this with people who are in the same role and therefore are perceived as having a similar understanding and experience of the role and its context. Given that the literature indicates the emotional impact of the social work role, for example Kinman and Grant (2011), this is important in considering interventions to support wellbeing, that being with others in the same role, possibly with similar experiences or feelings is experienced as helpful. The factors identified in the responses are about being offered help, and whilst it is not detailed specifically what 'help' would like, the responses indicate that the presence of an offer is key to generating a positive feeling. This offer of help could signify a sense of being cared for and there are example practical actions given as ways that this has been experienced positively, going to get lunch, chatting or offering to pick up a practical task or action.

Conversely, a belonging to any group can provide a narrative about and expectation about behaviours and ways that things are done, and whilst there are positive feelings aligned with this, there may be also expectation, although perhaps unsaid, about things like taking a lunch break or working late. This stresses the importance of wellbeing interventions taking into account the context of the wider organisation (Kinman & Grant, 2011) and whilst this could be understood more widely in thinking about

organisational structure, it could also evidence the importance of considering the immediate context in terms of the team or service. Whilst one participant considered that they did not feel judged and that this was important, it is interesting to consider what would happen for a person who did not adhere to the group narrative or expectations, for example always leaving on time, always taking an hour for lunch, whether they would experience the same or different offers of help and support and indeed belonging. Again, this draws back to the importance of considering context both locally and organisationally in intervention design.

> *"Well, er I think working amongst people who I trust, who have similar thoughts and values, a similar ethos and about social work and who can challenge me to be better" (Participant 2).*

> *"When I feel supported by them, you know I feel that I am free to tell them I am struggling and know that they will listen and not judge me" (Participant 8).*

> *"Being able to just take you out and have a chat. Those times where we've come for a walk and have a chat out stuff, or sometimes the guys who smoke I'll just go and stand and just have a look even though I don't smoke" (Participant 6).*

> *"I don't know what it doesn't feel like, I don't know what it doesn't look like. I think if there's an issue generally in the team, and in some of the other teams, people will be like, "Oh, I'll do that?" Or, "Do you need some help with that?" Or, "Do I need to wait around for a bit to see what's happening?" Or it'd be like, "Oh, I'm going to get lunch. Do you want anything?" It could be anything. It doesn't have to be anything massive" (Participant 1).*

6.5.3.2 Line Manager

The responses evidenced the importance of the manager checking in and feeling that participants are being heard and there being an open-door policy with opportunity for any questions to be asked. Participants talked openly about what it was that made them feel supported; practical actions, acknowledgement and feeling heard and having space held for them. Feeling heard was presented as an important thread, that the line manager was not just for direction but participants valued opportunity to speak about anything and experienced this as being listened to. These responses indicated that it was not just the presence of a line manager and opportunity to meet or have

supervision, but when this was 'good quality' (Participant 8) this generated a feeling of being cared for, providing help to find to solutions rather than being directed and being able to present uncomfortable feelings such as struggling with the work with confidence, knowing a caring and helpful response would be given. Although this is a similar thread throughout the responses, it is likely that how this is facilitated and experienced will be slightly different for each participant, and this is important to have in mind when considering the development of an intervention, that whilst feeling heard and understood is important, how this is made sense of for individual workers will differ.

Presented also is the experience of an 'open door' policy (Participant 4), that to have opportunity to go many times to ask questions in a variety of ways is important. This again draws attention to the importance of the context of the team and wider organisation, that for this to happen, it requires an understanding from managers that this is what their employees want and that there might be structural or time changes that can allow this to happen.

"For me it will always be feeling that someone cares about me and what I was feeling, experiencing. Not necessarily solving it, but listening to me and helping me think of how the situation could move forward" (Participant 2).

"The open-door policy, you can go so many times, phone, face-to-face it's becoming more that again now. They respond to emails, and that I can go and ask any questions [laughter] and I don't feel like judged" (Participant 4).

"I feel supported when I am receiving good quality supervision, and to use this time to talk openly about what you know might be troubling me. When I feel supported by them, you know I feel that I am free to tell them I am struggling and know that they will listen and not judge me" (Participant 8).

6.5.3.3 Senior Management

The responses highlighted the importance of a physical presence and seeing the face of senior management as well as supported being linked with being heard when an issue is raised. Physical presence and proximity to others has been a constant theme throughout the participant responses, that being physically close to others in the same role is experienced as important and helpful when thinking about wellbeing and this extends to the physical presence of senior management. There seems some acceptance that physical presence is not achievable all of the time, but that having a

person present signifies that participants are known and valued as employees as well as senior managers understanding the day to day role. This could be linked to a sense of belonging as explored earlier in this theme, that there could be a wider sense of belonging to an organisation if participants have a greater sense of those in charge and who they are as people, with partners, pets, hobbies and the like.

The physical presence of senior management and seeing them as people rather than just in a work role may mitigate some of the impact of top down approaches to leadership and generate a sense of bottom up consultation (Heyden et al., 2017), represented in Participant 2's response regarding action being taken. However, the concept of senior management as separate and unhearing, could serve a purpose for employees when they want to express frustration or disagreement.

"Coming with your actual face, bag and coat is important, it is good when this happens" (Participant 4).

"If I had to name what I would need to feel confident that I would be supported, I would say that I would like to know they are in touch with the role I do and you know show that they understand the pressures of the role. Physical presence is important, you know I know that can't happen all the time but seeing a face has a good impact on how staff feel and give the sense you know that they have been seen" (Participant 8).

"I'd like it when they are present in the office sometimes, you know to see them in person, this helps know they understood what was happening if they were here, so you can see their responses and their faces, people might feel more able to say if they are they sat on one of our chairs, because they are then people, not just a name or a virtual face" (Participant 7).

"I think um when I raise a worry or something that maybe isn't working or going well, to feel that this is heard, that it is er taken seriously" (Participant 2).

6.5.3.4 Media / Societal perception

With regular media coverage of perceived failure of social workers in cases of child protection and adult health and social care, the impact of this was explored in terms of feelings of positivity about the role. Research undertaken by Social Work England (2024) found that most social workers believed that their work is misunderstood and this can lead to a negative perception about the role, feeling that this is attributable to

how the media present the news and how the role is portrayed in the entertainment industry.

Being perceived negatively has an impact on individuals, as evidenced in the participant responses, with an impact on how positive the participant feels about their role and how the role is valued. As discussed earlier, for social workers entering the profession with altruistic motivation, this could impact their sense of pride and identity (Legood et al., 2016). A positive perception of the role has additional implications for recruitment as well as the acceptance of social workers by those in need of safety and support (Legood et al., 2016) and could impact the ability for helping relationships to be formed and maintained.

"I would like to see the social work role be better understood and better respected, you know when child death or injury is reported, the media places all blame on the social worker. This doesn't help us feel positive about our role" (Participant 8)

"Being better understood and respected, I guess in the media, by other professionals, the respect thing is important in feeling valued" (Participant 2).

6.5.3.5 Modelling

Across the responses was a sense that participants understood the value of modelling both in practice matters, so observing another social worker's practice and this being experienced as positive and supportive, as well as in day-to-day management of the role. Responses indicated that setting an example of taking a lunch break would be experienced as helpful as well as an awareness that behaviours set unsaid precedents in teams that others then follow. This links with the earlier subtheme considering support and belonging and how this is experienced as well as the importance of understanding the wider and local organisational context and expectations, whether said or unsaid when considering wellbeing approaches and interventions.

"Just seeing other people's way of dealing with situations, different ways of asking questions and sharing difficult information. I think I could then think about how I do things and use this to improve my work" (Participant 3)

"You've got to set your boundaries really strongly in the beginning because it's really hard to break that habit. We're terrible for it because if we're there until

6:00, they'll think they need to be there till 6:00. You've got to set those bound-aries because it will cause issues at home, partners get the humph. Kids have said to my friends, "You care more about the kids you work with than us," all of that stuff, and it doesn't need to be like that really. There's only so many hours in the day, and it is just short by the end of the day" (Participant 9)

"I think lunch break wise I think it's just, you said it a little bit earlier, about mod-elling side of things from you guys, the managers, I think that's key" (Participant 6).

6.5.4 Personal satisfaction

Across all the responses the importance of personal satisfaction was presented. There were a number of elements to this, firstly in thinking about the importance of feeling seen and feeling acknowledged and experiences validated, and this was considered at a local 'in office' level but also by senior management. Following on from this, the importance of not only being heard but also being appreciated and work celebrated.

The responses did not evidence that participants were unaccepting of the na-ture of the work and there was an acceptance of this alongside the value of self-effi-cacy in having a sense of satisfaction in the role.

Example questions:

When you are feeling positive about your role, what is happening?
What helps you feel supported by senior management and what would make you feel more supported?
What would increase your feelings of wellbeing?

6.5.4.1 Feeling acknowledged

The importance of feeling acknowledged, expressed as being seen and feeling heard was present across the responses. The responses evidenced that a sense of under-standing the nature of the role played a part in feeling acknowledged and that this did not necessarily need to result in a change, but that acceptance that something had happened and having opportunity for someone to know that had happened was voiced as contributing to feelings of satisfaction. These responses indicated some ac-ceptance from participants about the nature of the role "we know what the job is about, working with people" (Participant 8).

Acknowledgement could be linked with feelings of being valued in the role, that participant's experiences are important and that they themselves are important and that this is not linked to achievement or outcomes. Whilst acknowledgement can be used to describe gratitude or thanks, the use in this theme is more to do with acceptance and being seen, with managers cited as an example of this but certainly it is likely that this feeling could equally be generated by the experience with others around the workplace.

"Feeling that managers really know what is going on, understanding the role and what makes it more challenging" (Participant 5).

"Just acknowledgment really. If it's something to do with work, just the acknowledgment that that was a really rubbish conversation or whatever" (Participant 1).

"Probably the being heard thing is most important, because I know sometimes that things can't change but being acknowledged and knowing you have been listened to, your experiences have been listened to is most important" (Participant 2).

"We know what the job is about, what's involved with working with people, knowing that people are aware of that is important" (Participant 8).

6.5.4.2 Appreciation / Celebration

In addition to feelings of acknowledgement, achieving something and gaining positive feedback from this, feeling appreciated and celebrated were presented as important and giving rise to positive feelings. Jalilianhasanpour et al. (2021) considered joy in the workplace, that this is not the same as dealing with issues of stress, but creating and maintaining ways to show appreciation and gratitude as this contributes to feelings of value from employees. Certainly, participant responses indicate it is positive when gratitude and celebration is shown, with the example being given of a noticeboard to use to add to with examples of positive things.

It could therefore be that whilst acknowledgement is a fundamental requirement for all staff regardless of role or output of work, celebration and appreciation for specific pieces of work is experienced as additionally valuable. Interestingly, the best ways to demonstrate appreciation and celebration are likely to be different for different people,

but there could also be a subjectivity present in how work is judged worthy of celebration and appreciation. For example, who judges this and how, is there criteria and is this known? These are interesting points to consider when developing the intervention in terms of how best to capture these aspects and provide for individual differences.

Interestingly, there was no evidence that monetary rewards were necessarily the desired type of celebration or acknowledgement and although this is a separate issue not explored in this study, participants were aware of the financial constraints of statutory services. Importance was laid on understanding the complex issues that families face as well as considering understanding the issues that impact social workers in terms of working conditions.

"Feeling appreciated maybe, having people say what a great job you have done is a nice thing, like the noticeboard we sometimes use" (Participant 7).

"Hearing that you have done a particular thing well, I like that. It helps me feel that what I am doing is valuable" (Participant 5).

"Well I don't think that there is an easy fix to this problem. Would spending more money on social workers fix the issues for families living in poverty? Or would putting that money into free / affordable children care to allow more people to work and then you know increasing their feelings of self worth and opportunity thus then decreasing the need for social work intervention. I do think that increasing the workforce would make it a more manageable job, by working on the societal issues we could then decrease the demand and surely this should be the goal as this is the only way to improve the long term outcomes for children" (Participant 8).

"It seems like employers's think they can throw money into people's pockets to make them stay and this clearly doesn't work. There needs to be consideration into better working conditions, offices working hours and caseloads" (Participant 4).

6.5.4.3 Self-efficacy

Pedrazza et al. (2013) define self-efficacy for social workers as the ability to "exercise influence over events that effect their work life" (p191). Participant responses considered that self-efficacy contributed to feelings of personal satisfaction, and this was presented as personal feelings of being in control and organised as well as being able

to support families well. Being employed by an organisation with statutory responsibilities means that social workers operate within policy and procedures which in addition to the unpredictable nature of social work could lead to social workers feeling out of control with the competing demands on their time and their ability to have effective influence over their workday. Given the acceptance of the nature of the work in the previous theme, it is likely that this is also accepted by social workers, but it perhaps does not detract from feelings of frustration when experienced.

> *"I feel organised, I feel on top of things. I know what my day is looking like and what my week is looking like" (Participant 4).*

> *"I feel more positive when I am able to make you know effective and positive contributions to the families I work with" (Participant 8).*

> *"I guess I would be organised, I would have a couple of visits and then time to write them up well, feeling accomplished, making a plan and feeling like I have done this well so like sharing a worry with them or getting a particular piece of information from them to inform something like a court report" (Participant 3).*

6.5.5 Opportunity

Importance of having opportunity in the role was expressed in considering career pathways and the need for clarity about this, the importance of developing knowledge and skill to improve practice and the opportunity to support the development and practice of others. This contributed to the individual sense of being valued in the social work role and furthering skill and knowledge to be better able to support families well.

Example questions:

What training would you be excited by?
What changes would you like to see?

Indicative responses:

6.5.5.1 Path of progression

Having a clear structure of career progression and what this entailed and why was expressed as important to participants. There could be a number of reasons for this, linking to earlier themes that considered value, the feeling of being invested in by an employer through the offer of career development opportunity is likely to increase feelings of being valued as a staff member. In addition, knowing different options was

shared as being important, that there needed to be clarity about this, indicating that this again is likely to give feelings of being valued as well as self-efficacy in having some influence and choice about work. It is interesting that one participant considered sideways moves rather than upwards moves, perhaps indicating that traditional senses of climbing the career ladder are not always aspirations for all, again contributing to the growing sense that although the threads of thought are similar there are likely to be differences in how these are experienced. There is an underlying narrative in the response of Participant 2 that indicates a sense that having a clear pathway gives confidence in the management structure, that this needs to be 'structured and robust' because of the responsibility that managers have for staff and for families they work with.

> *"Knowing what is available at each stage of our career, it not just being upwards but what about sideways" (Participant 8).*

> *"I'd like to see a more structured and robust path to career progression, to ensure that managers have the experience and knowledge to develop their social workers and make the right decisions for children" (Participant 2).*

6.5.5.2 Building and sharing knowledge and skill

Aspiration for expert, impactful and relevant training was evidenced, with participants keen to convey their excitement for training that added something positive to the way they worked and had a positive impact on families they worked with. Face to face training was seen as more positive than online training, which gave opportunity to be present on a screen but opt out of full engagement in the learning process. None of the participants said that they did not want further training and development, conversely all were keen for this to be explored and pursued. Social Work England requires social workers to undertake continuing professional development (Social Work England, 2024) and there is therefore an expectation that social workers undertake some activity that fulfils this requirement, particularly as a prerequisite of registration is for this to be documented.

The participant responses indicate that there was enthusiasm for training, that this is not seen as an arduous task for registration alone, but that there is enthusiasm for training that adds value to the experience of undertaking the social work task. Responses also evidenced the value of sharing knowledge and skills with others. This is

important as it seems to link well with the wider responses about the importance of being with others in the same or similar role, that there is value in sharing various aspects that are part of the social work role.

"I like training that relates directly to my job, telling me something new about it or giving me ideas to do something different. Face to face I think is more engaging, and I think people then" (Participant 5).

"I would be excited about any training that challenged me and helped me be a better social worker, training in something that captured what is happening in social work, you know the current issues and ways to think about them, developing knowledge and skills" (Participant 8).

"I think that sharing already gained experience and learning together is important, you know sharing training or other learning opportunities we've had with the group" (Participant 2).

6.5.5.3 Making a difference

Making a difference featured strongly across all participant responses and returning to the reasons given for social workers to choose this career, this fits with the altruistic nature of the role. Making a difference was articulated as a positive outcome for a family or individual that was experienced as positive by them. This theme was identified as different from personal satisfaction because it focused on an outward expression about something positive happening for others rather than an inward feeling about oneself. The responses across the interviews firmly evidenced the importance of a positive outcome for service users, not just feeling that a good job had been done, linking perhaps more to satisfaction. This ran through the responses as an important aspect contributing to the feeling of wellbeing in the role and was described as seeing positive outcomes for families and undertaking work that was worthwhile and had meaning.

Example questions:

When you are feeling positive about your role, what is happening?

Can you thinking of something that would increase your feelings of wellbeing?

On an ideal work day in the future, what is happening?

What changes would you most like to see?

Indicative responses:

6.5.5.3 Positive outcomes for families

Impactful work that supported change that in turn supported positive outcomes for families and individuals was cited as generating positive feelings for participants. The sense that spending more time with families came across strongly as important and this spending time with families was linked with there being greater opportunity to support more positive outcomes. Positive outcomes for families could be defined in a number of ways, for example closing statutory involvement or moving someone to a safer situation, and whilst participants did not self define the details of this in their responses, it was described as the feeling of having helped and having supported the changes that families had identified for themselves as being needed.

"Feeling that I am supporting and helping families, doing what I have said that I will do and also having time to do the admin tasks that come with it" (Participant 2).

"Feeling what I do is having an impact, like helping families be safer, make the changes they want to" (Participant 8).

"Less families to work with at one time, more staff yeah I know that this isn't something in our control this would make a great change I think, so I would be more able to spend time with people and help support change quicker for them" (Participant 7).

6.5.5.4 Meaningful work

Participants described that meaningful work is work that is worthwhile. This was differentiated from 'ticking a box' or performance tracking. Whilst of course this is linked with the subtheme of positive outcomes as explored above, meaningful work was presented as something slightly nuanced, that perhaps it was not necessarily just about positive outcomes, but that it was separate from performance trackers.

This is an interesting point, because the framing of performance trackers in this way indicates that trackers to measure the quantity or quality of work are perhaps viewed as lacking meaning, whereas it could be argued that for work with families to be effective there are some aspects of it that need to be undertaken in a timely way and quality needs to be assured in some way. Working for a statutory agency certainly means that there are tasks that require undertaking in set timescales and there are

inbuilt measures and audit approaches to address quality. Certainly, how social workers spend their time has been the subject of studies over time, with findings indicating that time spent on direct and indirect interventions, that is face to face time with a family and then administrative tasks, varies according to the process being followed and the needs of the family (Holmes & McDermid, 2013).

Meaningful work is presented as certainly linking with work that effectively supports change or safety and is presented as less likely to be work that focuses on administration. It is interesting to consider whether the direct work is considered the real social work, but of course there are many implications for paperwork not being completed, for example a failure to comply with agency policy, work undertaken not being able to be known about should workers leave or be absent from work and importantly should children return as adults to read about their lives it is important that accurate records about what happened are available. This is important to note when considering intervention design in that understanding how best social workers are able to undertake this important part of the role is likely to be increase feelings of managing and overall wellbeing given the wider responses about self-efficacy about how work is managed and effected.

> *"On an ideal work day…. Well I would be working directly with families, in an environment that allows me the space to do meaningful work and does not focus solely on performance trackers" (Participant 7).*

> *"An ideal work day is really feeling that I have made a difference and that what I am doing is worthwhile" (Participant 8).*

6.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the semi structured interviews, beginning with the participants self-definition of wellbeing, which included both the importance of being seen as a whole person and wellbeing being experienced as an emotional feeling. This was an important foundational theme, as it provided the context for the other themes generated and the five other themes therefore describing what participants had experienced as valuable and important in experiencing wellbeing at work.

Chapter 7: Results - focus group 1

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of focus group 1. Two focus groups were held, with the second group taking place following analysis of the data from the semi structured interviews and focus group 1, triangulation of the results and subsequent additional ethical approval to confirm a slight change in questions for focus group 2 as discussed in Chapter 4, Method. The questions for the first focus group utilised six of the questions used in the semi structured interviews to build on the responses given. The questions for the second focus group were informed by the data gathered in the scoping review, semi structured interview and first focus group and triangulation of these results and particularly focused on the design of an intervention and therefore stage four of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle. The results of focus group 2 are presented in Chapter 9.

7.2 Demographic and descriptive statistics

The demographic information for those who participated in focus group 1 is presented in the table below. There were five participants and the range of age of the participants was between 23 and 57 and participants spread across the age categories. Similarly, the range of employment was between one and nine years, with participants length of employment spread across the categories. There was one male participant and four female participants. These participants did not take part in the semi structured interviews or focus group 2.

Table 12

Demographic Information for Participants in focus group 1

Age	N	Employment length	N	Sex	N
21-30	1	1-3 years	1	Female	4
31-40	3	3-5-years	3	Male	1
41-50	1	5-10 years	1		
61 and above	0	10 years and above	0		

7.3 Focus group Details

The length of the focus group was 45 minutes and took place face to face in a private room at the employee's place of work. Handwritten notes were taken by the author of this study and participants in addition used post it notes on flip chart paper to share their thoughts and record them in their own words. These were stored confidentially and following transcription, these copies were destroyed. An audio recording was made and this was then transcribed digitally, then destroyed. The written information contained no details of participants.

Each participant was provided with an Information Sheet (Appendix 4) prior to the focus group taking place and a Consent Form (Appendix 5), which confirmed the details of the study, how their information would be used and stored and how they could withdraw from the group at any stage or following the group but prior to the data being analysed. The consent form also confirmed that their participation in the interviews was voluntary and confidential, that information shared in the group would not be shared with their employer. At the outset of the focus group, this was reiterated, and ground rules discussed together and agreed, these included keeping information shared in the focus group confidential to the focus group, that listening to others and giving space to one another was important and that names would not be used in the report. The group knew each other already and therefore introductions were not necessary. After the focus group had ended, a Debrief Sheet was provided for all participants (Appendix 6).

7.4 Focus group Schedule

The questions followed the same cycle as the semi structured interviews, with discussion across the four stages of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle. The questions identified for use in the focus group were developed following the scoping review and pilot study as detailed in Chapter 4, Methods, and specifically focused on forward thinking and change, and although covered the four stages, were identified to encourage most discussion about stages two, three and four in preparation for the second focus group .

The questions used were as follows:

Discovery

1. When you are feeling positive about your role what is happening?
2. When you are feeling supported in your role what is happening?

Dream

    1. What would increase your feelings of wellbeing?

    2. What advice would you give to a new worker in their role?

Design

    1. What helps you feel supported by senior management?

    2. What training would you be excited about?

Destiny

    1. What changes would you most like to see?

7.5 Results

The analysis of the results of the focus group are presented in this part of the chapter. Using thematic analysis, the method fully detailed in Chapter 4 Methods, all but one of the themes generated in the semi structured interviews were again generated in the focus group confirming the generated sub themes as well as adding slightly different subthemes, this is presented in the table below and further discussed therein. Each theme is discussed with an example of the questions used along with the most indicative responses for the theme.

Table 13

Reflexive Thematic Analysis focus group 1

Main theme	Sub theme
Support	Seeing change
Personal Satisfaction	Appreciation
Opportunity	Sharing knowledge and experience
	Path of progression
	Building knowledge and skill – expert training
Making a Difference	Positive outcomes
Wellbeing	Balance

7.5.1 Support

The discussion about support mirrored the responses that were provided in the semi structured interviews when considering what would be happening when feeling supported by colleagues and by managers, again evidencing offers of practical help along with the experience of being heard and this being more than the words being audibly understood by another person, but that this conveyed a sense of understanding.

Example questions:

> When you are feeling positive about your role what is happening?
> When you are feeling supported in your role what is happening?

Indicative responses:

> *"I feel supported when there are people around me stepping in to help with the things I need help with" (Participant 2).*

> *"I feel best supported when I am being listened to, like properly heard and understood" (Participant 5).*

7.5.1.1 Seeing change

A further subtheme was generated when considering how support from managers would be experienced, the focus group responses linked this clearly with there being an action when issues had been identified and raised and the responses indicated that this was because this would evidence having been listened to and understood. Again, this appears to be linked to a sense of value, evidenced particularly in the response 'if we have suggested something, seeing something done about it.' This fits with the responses in the semi structured interviews, that there is a sense of value from being heard and being present and that this is experienced as meaningful.

Example questions:

> When you are feeling supported in your role what is happening?
> What helps you feel supported by senior management?

Indicative responses:

> *"I guess seeing things be different or changing, or showing up and saying they understand" (Participant 2).*

> *"Yes, and see things that you have raised being actioned, showing that we have been listened to, so if we have suggested something, seeing something done about it"* (Participant 5).

7.5.2 Personal satisfaction

The presentation of personal satisfaction in the focus group lent towards a sense of fulfilment in work in terms firstly of managing the work in a timely way and in the way it was planned. Additionally, this was also a feeling of doing social work, which linked also to making a difference, Chapter 7.5.4. There is an indication that there is a separation between the administrative side of the role and the direct face to face work with families, and a sense that the doing of social work is much more aligned with the face to face work rather than all that the social work position in terms of employment includes.

Example questions:

> What would increase your feelings of wellbeing?
> When you feel positive about your role what is happening?
> What helps you feel supported by senior management?

Indicative responses:

> *"Well I'd have more time to spend with people, this is the real part of the job, you know, seeing people and helping"* (Participant 4).
> *"Being able to use my time well, seeing families more"* (Participant 1).

7.5.2.1 Appreciation

Again, as in the participant responses from the semi structured interviews, receiving feedback about work and appreciation of work was cited as valuable. Interestingly, the response indicated that feedback was indeed given, but this was when there were issues about work not being done or the quality of the work, rather than positive feedback. This is an important point because there will be times that feedback needs to be given to improve quality or timeliness of work and the statutory nature of this service means this is likely to be crucial in the discharge of statutory responsibility at times, and certainly this will contribute to the demands of the role. However, the response seems to indicate that it is the balance of this with positive feedback that is the key, so not necessarily the absence of feedback about work requiring improvement but a greater presence of feedback when work has been done well. Feeling appreciated

was also linked with wanting to be recognised for what social workers brought to the role in terms of experience or skill and that this would be appreciated or acknowledged by being given more responsibility. This is an interesting point to consider, as whilst being given greater responsibility could convey a confidence in someone and their ability, it could also be experienced as additional pressure. Nonetheless, appreciation and feedback for positive work was cited as valuable by the focus group.

> *"Yes for me it's also getting feedback about how I am doing, so being told about the good things rather than what we are not doing, not doing well or need to do" (Participant 1).*

> *"Yes I agree, I would also like a greater sense of responsibility in my role, I guess being acknowledged for the knowledge and experience I bring to the role and being able to take on additional tasks, I guess it probably links to the comment about development and moving forward" (Participant 5).*

> *"Yes I think that too, when I am feeling positive I am feeling that I am being appreciated and that it really important" (Participant 2).*

> *"Yeah I agree, acknowledgement of what we are doing, and feeling appreciated for our work" (Participant 3).*

7.5.3 Opportunity

As in the semi structured interviews, the importance of having career pathways, the opportunity to build knowledge and skill to improve practice and the opportunity to support the development and practice of others was presented. In addition, there was discussion about expert training, with participants giving examples of what this could include.

Example questions:

> What training would you be excited by?

> What advice would you give to a new worker in their role?

Indicative responses:

7.5.3.1. Pathway of progression

Similar to the participant responses in the semi structured interviews, the focus group responses evidenced the importance of clarity in the opportunities for progression,

particularly for more experienced workers and raised the possibility of there being spe-
cialist and leadership roles. This evidences the important contribution the opportunity
to develop has on wellbeing, conveying perhaps value and investment.

> *"We need a clear plan for further development, so what happens when you are
> an experienced worker" (Participant 4).*

> *"Yes, so what are the options and what steps are there to get to this" (Partici-
> pant 1).*

> *"I agree, professional development opportunities and thinking about specialist
> roles and leading on something in the district" (Participant 2).*

7.5.3.2 Sharing knowledge and experience

This part of the discussion followed from the previous discussion about opportunity to
progress in the role and have a clear pathway of progression. The value of learning
together and sharing experience was voiced as important but added to this was a
sense of personal satisfaction about seeing others develop because of their experi-
ences and knowledge, and importantly the impact of this on practice and the quality
work with families was noted.

> *"First of all I think that sharing already gained experience and learning together
> is important, you know sharing training or other learning opportunities we've
> had with the group" (Participant 2).*

> *"Yeah I agree that's really important, also being supported to develop a speci-
> ality like something that we can be asked about because we've done some
> additional training and can help others" (Participant 1).*

> "Yes and seeing other people in the team, like newly qualified workers, develop
> and progress in their practice, like genuinely develop, really understand the
> role" (Participant 4).

> "Yeah and then see them making a difference for families they are working with"
> (Participant 3).

7.5.3.3 Building knowledge and skill – expert training

The responses in the semi structured interview considered the importance of training
and that this being something that was valued and wanted by the staff group. This was
echoed in the responses in this focus group also, with a further emphasis on the nature

of the training, that external agency training could be valuable and examples of Lucy Faithful and CUBAS were cited (Participant 3). This is interesting to consider as this evidences that it is not the just the presence of training that is important, but the quality and its purpose and place in the wider development for the individual social worker but also the workforce as a whole. Of course, there are likely to be budget implications for external training, but this could be a valuable investment if it links with increased well-being and this certainly fits with the findings from the scoping review.

> *"I also think that external training is really good, from different agencies with a specialism" (Participant 1).*

> *"Yeah like CUBAS assessment training or Lucy Faithful" (Participant 3).*

> *"It would be great to also have training or something for thinking about or leading up to a promotion if this is what you want" (Participant 4).*

7.5.4. Making a difference

Similar to the semi structured Interviews and reflective of the Social Work England survey (2024), participant responses indicated that contributing to their wellbeing is the feeling that the role and the work being undertaken was making a difference to people. Interestingly, the responses did not use the term 'service user' or 'case' but family, this use of language indicating the value of this and the meaning attached to making a difference to another human. This use of language is reflective of the long standing discussion about terminology in social work (McLaughlin, 2009), responses in this focus group reflecting the 'humanness' of the work, the interaction with people's lives rather than a number on a caseload.

Indicative responses:

7.5.4.1 Positive outcomes for families

As with the semi structured Interviews, participants in focus group 1 considered that making a difference and seeing this in the outcomes for families they worked with was valuable. Interestingly, as with the semi structured Interviews, there was a difference made between 'doing social work' (Participant 1) and what was described as 'ticking a box, completing a visit or task' (Participant 3). This evidences some frustration and indicates that this is more than just the separation between face-to-face work and administrative tasks, but that the face to face part of the work is viewed as valuable and more worthwhile.

"Not just ticking a box to complete a visit or a task but helping families really change and have a positive outcome" (Participant 1).

"Yeah I think that too, knowing that I am helping to make a difference to families" (Participant 3).

7.5.5 Wellbeing

Participants considered that wellbeing comprised of not only 'things' working as they should be, considering different aspects that contributed to feelings of wellbeing, but also there being a balance between working life and non-working life. This sense of balance is linked to feelings of enjoying the job more and feeling of doing it well. This aligns with the findings in the scoping review, Ahern et al. (2017) noting that those with outside work interests and hobbies experiencing greater wellbeing at work too. This is an interesting point when considering evidence for the bidirectional influence of the Job Demands–Resources model (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) and this will be explored further in Chapter 10.

Example questions:

What would increase your feelings of wellbeing?

What changes would you most like to see?

Indicative responses:

"My Work life balance is better, I have more time to do other things apart from the job and this makes me feel that I am enjoying it more and doing it better." (Participant 5).

"Feeling more positive, generally things are working as they should be, like I am getting things done, I have what I need and there are people supporting me when I need it" (Participant 4).

7.5.6 Additional comment

Although not included in a theme, the comment below was important to be noted because it evidenced the impact of what was happening when this participant was experiencing a feeling of wellbeing, this prompting feelings of being inspired, creativity and having space to think about how to do the job well. This confirms the importance for employers of social workers to promote and support the maintenance of wellbeing for social workers, it not only supports positive individual feelings but has an impact on

the output of work specifically in considering taking on responsibility as well as supportive positive outcomes for families.

"When I am in a good space and feel supported, I am Inspired to take on some responsibility and be more creative, you know having ideas about how to do my work well" (Participant 2).

7.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of focus group 1, which built upon and further developed the results from the semi structured interviews, in generating both similar themes such as support, opportunity and making a difference and introducing further sub themes such as the importance of seeing change when issues were raised and that opportunity to share knowledge and experience with others was experienced positively.

Chapter 8: Results Triangulation of the data from the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1

8.1 Introduction

As explored in Chapter 3, there are different types of triangulation, each having a specific purpose in the research process. Applying different theories to one set of data is theoretical triangulation, this provides for a wider understanding about how the data is interpreted and can add to a multi factorial understanding of what is being looked at (Farmer et al., 2006). Data triangulation involves using data from different times, people, and contexts to explore whether the findings are consistent or provide evidence of difference and methodological triangulation is the process of bringing together data where different methods to answer the same research question have been used, qualitative and quantitative for example. As detailed in Chapter 4.7.1 data triangulation was used to support both the credibility and validity of the findings in the empirical studies, through providing a holistic picture of experiences and perspectives of participants (Noble & Heal, 2019). This chapter presents the triangulated results of the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1.

8.2 Triangulation protocol stages 1 and 2

Having developed the triangulation protocol as detailed in Chapter 4.7, the first stage of the process was to sort the data. The second stage of the process was to code the data sets, noting agreement, partial agreement, silence and dissonance and these stages and the results of these stages are presented in the table below.

Table 14

Triangulation of results of scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1

Scoping review	Semi structured interviews	Focus group 1	Convergence coding
Wellbeing	**Wellbeing** Being seen as a person Emotions	**Wellbeing**	Agreement
	Practical Things Comfortable space Equipment and working systems Opportunity to eat and drink Being together in an office		Silence
Support Colleagues Line Manager Senior Manager	**Support** Colleagues Line Manager Senior Manager Media / Societal perception Modelling	**Support** Seeing change	Agreement
Personal Satisfaction	**Personal Satisfaction** Feeling acknowledged Appreciation / Celebration Self-efficacy	**Personal Satisfaction** Appreciation	Agreement
Opportunity	**Opportunity** Path of progression Building knowledge and skill	**Opportunity** Sharing knowledge and experience Path of progression Building knowledge and skill – expert training	Agreement
	Making a Difference Positive outcomes for families Meaningful work	**Making a Difference** Positive outcomes	Agreement / silence

8.3 Convergence assessment

In considering the assessment of the degree of convergence between the data sets, there were four areas of agreement, no areas of dissonance or disagreement and no areas of partial agreement. There was one area with two data sets assessed as in agreement with the third silent and one area generated in only one data set and the other two silent.

In considering the areas of agreement firstly, support was found to be an important theme across the three data sets, with colleague, team and senior management support identified. Similarly, personal satisfaction and opportunity were identified across the three data sets, with examples of training, building skill and knowledge and being appreciated and acknowledged. Wellbeing was present in each data set, with examples provided in the semi structured interviews and focus group 1. There was one area where there was agreement from two data sets and silence from another, making a difference, and one area where only semi structured interviews generated the theme of practical things, renamed as practical working conditions.

In considering the reasons for these differences, each stage, whilst aligned with and contributing to the overall research question, had different sub questions. This provided, therefore for different perspectives (Flick et al., 2011) and reflected different stages of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle. In understanding the silence about practical things or working conditions, firstly, this was not identified as one of the key issues in the scoping review, however it is interesting that Jeyasingham's (2016) study noted understanding what places and spaces social workers needed and the impact of this as a future research opportunity. Similarly, as will be seen in Chapter 9, this was not generated as a theme in focus group 2. The semi structured interviews research questions specifically provide opportunity for practical things to be explored and discussed more readily, with interview questions focusing on what is already happening as well as what could be different moving forward, stages 1 and 2 of the Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Practical things, or working conditions, as the theme was renamed, is identified as a key issue of concern for social workers and discussed earlier in this study in Chapter 2 (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018) with issues of IT Systems and administrative tasks identified as examples. It is therefore posited that this silence is not significant but in the context of the wider literature and other stages of data collection.

O'Caithan et al. (2010) consider that silence is likely to be expected because of the different aspects of examining a phenomenon and it is posited that this is likely the case for the silence evidenced in the scoping review for making a difference. This was generated as a theme in both the semi structured interviews and focus group 1, where the research questions for these stages and questions used in the interview and focus group 1 provide more readily for this to be explored, the questions used in both stages aligning with the constructivist approach of the study and stages 1,2 and 3 of the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle. Importantly, that this was not evident in the scoping review indicates that this is a new finding and therefore contributes to the generation of new knowledge about what social workers are saying and experiencing as important.

8.4 Completeness assessment

In considering whether the studies as a whole address the research question, this will be discussed in depth in Chapter 10. However, in summary, the triangulation of the results from the three data sets is assessed as addressing the research question in full. There are areas of silence in the assessment, which of course could potentially indicate gaps in data gathering or areas that have not been explored fully (Denzin, 2015) however in these studies, it is posited that the areas of silence are accounted for through the position of each stage in the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle and the specific questions for each stage providing opportunity for full narrative responses. Importantly, the data gathered from each complemented the others, demonstrating the credibility and validity of the results, that the results sufficiently reflected accurately and fully what the participants shared.

The full triangulated results presented in the table below.

Table 15

Triangulated results

Main theme	Sub theme
Wellbeing	Being seen as a person
	Emotions
Practical Things	Comfortable space
	Equipment and working systems
	Opportunity to eat and drink
	Being together in an office

Support	Colleagues
	Line Manager
	Senior Manager
	Media / Societal perception
	Modelling
	Seeing change
Personal Satisfaction	Feeling acknowledged
	Appreciation / Celebration
	Self-efficacy
	Expertise being recognised
Opportunity	Path of progression
	Building knowledge and skill – expert training
	Sharing knowledge and experience
Making a Difference	Positive outcomes for families
	Meaningful work

8.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the triangulated results from the scoping review, the semi structured interviews and focus group 1 together. The final table in this section of the chapter presents the themes generated across the data sets and provides the foundation for moving forward to focus group 2 and the further design of the intervention. Each of the generated themes represents a facet of what participants presented as contributing to their wellbeing at work.

Chapter 9: Results Focus group 2

9.1 Introduction

The triangulated results of the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1 are presented in Chapter 8, beginning with participants' self-definition of well-being and followed by the different facets of what participants presented about what it meant to experience wellbeing at work. In summary, the first was that of practical things, including working equipment, office space and opportunities to meet with one another. Second was support, how people experienced and saw support in and for their work, considering their peer group and team, line management, higher level management and wider society and the media perception. The third facet was personal satisfaction, identifying the importance of feeling acknowledged, their good work being appreciated and celebrated and having a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy in the role. This also included an acceptance of the social work role, that at times it includes working with those in crisis and difficulty and the impact of this kind of work and human interaction. Fourthly, opportunity to progress in learning and skill development and having opportunities to work with others to support their learning too was found to be an important aspect of experiencing wellbeing and lastly, making a difference, specifically undertaking work that has meaning and depth to support provision of positive outcomes for families. These facets together formed what the social workers described as an overall self-definition of wellbeing and what contributed to this.

Discussion in both semi structured interviews and focus group 1 considered that the practical working conditions were fundamental, that is if these were not in place or were experienced as problematic, it was more difficult to then consider feeling supported by those responsible for providing this, more challenging to feel satisfaction in the role, consider training opportunities and feel like the work was making a difference. These results were triangulated, and are presented in Chapter 8, and provided for the opportunity in focus group 2 to further the design of an intervention through an additional question. The procedures for recruitment of the focus group 2 were the same for the semi structured interviews and focus group 1.

9.2 Demographic and descriptive statistics

There were six participants in the second focus group and included a range of age, employment length and sex. The age range of participants was from 24 to 49, with

length of employment ranging from one year to nine years. There were four female participants and two male participants. These participants did not take part in the semi structured interviews or focus group 1. The table below presents these statistics.

Table 16

Demographic information for participants in focus group 2

Age	N	Employment length	N	Sex	N
21-30	2	1-3 years	2	Female	4
31-40	3	3-5-years	2	Male	2
41-50	1	5-10 years	2		

9.3 Focus group details

The focus group lasted 51 minutes. Handwritten notes were taken by the researcher and participants in addition used post it notes on flip chart paper to share their thoughts and record them in their own words. An audio recording was made and this was then transcribed digitally. A photo taken of each flip chart page and then destroyed once transcribed. The sheets contained no details of participants.

Each participant was provided with an Information Sheet (Appendix 4) prior to the focus group taking place and a Consent Form (Appendix 5), which confirmed the details of the study, how their information would be used and stored and how they could withdraw from the group at any stage during the focus group or following the group but prior to the data being analysed. The Consent Form also confirmed that their participation in the was voluntary and confidential, and that information shared in the group would not be shared with their employer. At the outset of the focus group, this was reiterated, and ground rules discussed together and agreed. These included keeping information shared in the focus group confidential to the focus group unless harm or risk of harm was identified, that listening to others and giving space to one another was important and that names would not be used in the report. The group knew each other already and therefore introductions were not necessary. After the focus group had ended, a Debrief Sheet was provided for all participants (Appendix 6).

9.4 Focus group schedule

Focus group 2 considered the development of an intervention, sitting wholly within Stage 4 of the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle, Destiny, and used the following questions as a basis for discussion;

1. Considering the themes generated from the responses in the interviews and focus group, what are the priorities when thinking about what is needed to experience wellbeing at work?

2. What is needed to support these priorities happening?

Each of the themes with sub themes generated from the triangulated data had been written onto small post it notes and a blank sheet of A1 paper provided for the group. These were presented to the group as facets that had been generated by the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1 as contributing to wellbeing at work. The group were asked to read through each as a starting point.

9.5 Results

The analysis of the results of focus group 2 is presented in this part of the chapter. Using thematic analysis, the method fully detailed in Chapter 4 Methods, the results were analysed and are presented in the table below and further discussed therein. The generated theme was the 'order of priorities' and six sub themes were also generated. Each are discussed below with an example of the most indicative responses.

Table 17

Themes generated in focus group 2

Main theme	Sub theme
The order of priorities	Agreement about an order
	Working conditions and practical things
	Support
	Personal satisfaction
	Opportunities
	Making a difference

9.5.1 Agreement about the presence of an order

The initial discussion evidenced that all participants agreed with the themes and that together these represented facets that contributed to wellbeing at work. None of the

participants identified any of the facets as incorrect or not applicable to them as individuals or to their work context. There was general agreement that all were important and had equal value and that there were some that were priorities and required first. There is a slight distinction, that all facets were considered to have value and be significant and impactful but there was agreement that there some took precedence over others in terms of being fulfilled:

"They are all are important" (Participant 1).

"Yes, I agree ,all important but are there aspects that are priorities" (Participant 3).

9.5.2 Priority 1 Working conditions

The first priority when considering wellbeing at work was identified by the group as being practical working conditions. Participant responses from the semi structured interviews indicated that 'practical things' were foundational, this could have been shared with the group to prompt discussion but it was further considered that this could have added influence to the group discussion rather than being a helpful observation. However, participants in this focus group shared that practical equipment was crucial and without this in place, the job was more difficult or indeed as described in the interviews, unable to be done. This is reflective of the responses in the semi structured interviews, that to provide the best opportunity for the job role to be performed and to experience feelings of wellbeing, there are fundamental prerequisites, for example a desk, chair, provision to make hot drinks and a laptop that works. Practical working conditions were set as the first priority.

"Well for me, I need a desk and a chair and a laptop that works, that is the starting point" (Participant 2).

"Without a laptop that works you can't do your job' (Participant 3).

"I agree, you need the basic things in place, I need a cup of coffee in the morning' (Participant 6).

9.5.3 Priority 2 Support

The theme of support was selected as the next discussion point by the group and this generated a similar thread of discussion evidenced in the triangulated data, about the importance of having people around who care, who offer help and that without this, it becomes more difficult to do the work. There was discussion about how the job was

difficult, with job demands such as caseload and administrative tasks identified as hard. Having people around who knew this and experienced the same kind of situations and pressures was experienced as valuable and acted as a resource to mitigate the impact of these kind of demands. Support was therefore considered the next priority after practical working conditions, identifying particularly the value of close support of team colleagues and line managers (Bedford, 2024).

> *"I mean, there's support from managers, those right at the top, but most importantly, there's support from your team. This needs to be in place next, it is much harder to do the job each day if you don't have that" (Participant 2).*

> *"Surely it's a foundation isn't it, you can't do this job as an island?' (Participant 5).*

> *"Yes I agree, this comes next I think because that's the most important support, who you have around you each day, your team and manager.' (Participant 4).*

9.5.4 Priority 3 Personal satisfaction

The group initially discussed the connectedness of personal satisfaction and opportunity, considering the link between having opportunity for progression and training and this leading to a sense of feeling satisfied about the progress and development being made in the role. However, this led to further thought that personal satisfaction was probably linked to a feeling about the nature of the job rather than opportunity and that feeling satisfied in the role as a whole was important, because if this was not being experienced, then employees would probably leave. This was counter-balanced with a further point that if there were no training opportunities then this could prompt feelings of wanting to leave also. This discussion reflected the subjective and individual experiences of what it means to feel satisfied, that for some participants personal satisfaction was experienced as having opportunity and for others it was a more holistic picture of the job as a whole. Undoubtedly, feeling satisfied, in whatever form this is experienced is important (Evans & Young, 2017) and this is experienced as being different from feeling happy (Kun & Gadanecz, 2015; McGonagle, 2015). Whilst feeling happy is most often associated with a more subjective hedonistic transient feeling, personal satisfaction may be more aligned with the eudemonic aspects as well, in relating this to social work specifically, a home visit that required a different approach to the one planned could generate feelings of momentary unhappiness, but this may

not impact the overall sense of being satisfied in the role. The group therefore agreed personal satisfaction as the next priority.

"For me, feeling I am content and satisfied in my role is important, not necessarily happy all of the time because sometimes it is hard, but generally that I like my job. This needs to be in place next because if people don't find ways to feel this then they will leave ' (Participant 4).

"Yes I think the same, satisfaction is the overall feeling I have, there are some days that are more difficult than others and some situations of course and if I didn't have this I would be looking elsewhere. We need to know what this means for different people to help them get there" (Participant 1).

9.5.5 Priority 4 Opportunity

Opportunity for training and development was discussed at length in the semi structured interviews and focus group 1, with discussion about knowing the pathway for career progression, this not necessarily being linear, skill building and sharing expertise. This was discussed further in focus group 2:

"I'd like to be clearer about the options moving forward, not that I don't like my job but what else is out there, particularly if you don't want to be a manager?" (Participant 3)

In discussing the place of this as a priority, participants considered that it was difficult to feel in a place where there was space to think about training and development when the demands of the job, caseload, paperwork, feeling unsupported, were high, that the day to day process of being in work left little time to consider other aspects. Conversely, if opportunities were not able to be thought about, feelings of being invested in and valued were impacted and consequently feelings of wellbeing. Opportunity was therefore placed as the next priority, 4:

"Being told options for what you could do is important, you get a sense that people are interested in you and what you bring" (Participant 2).

"It's harder to think about this though when the other things are in place, so when you have an emergency come up and you have to cancel training. You need your manager and team to cover it and give you the time to go" (Participant 4).

9.5.6 Priority 5 Making a difference

Participants discussed that this is the goal of the social work role, that making a difference to children and their families was their motivation for joining the profession, that knowing a situation was safer and better because of something they had done. This aligns with findings of Social Work England (2024) about the reasons given for people joining the profession. In thinking about why this was priority 5, discussion took place about how it is easier to feel that this is being achieved if all of the other things are in place and conversely that if the other aspects are not in place, that it becomes far more difficult to make a difference or feel that a difference is being made. In the context of the Job Demands-Resources model, this certainly aligns with demands leading to more difficult feelings and challenges, adding perhaps to stress and despondency. However if the demands are mitigated against through the different aspects being provided for, this is expressed as positive and more likely to generate feelings of wellbeing at work (Bakker 2015).

> *"I think this is the goal and it needs all the other things in place to get there'. (Participant 6).*

> *"This is why I came into the job, because I wanted to help, I want to do something worthwhile that helps make a difference to what life is like for someone in a good way" (Participant 2).*

9.5.7 Prioritisation of themes

The priority of the themes was therefore agreed in discussion and the post it notes depicted this visually. This is represented in table form below:

Table 18

Agreed priorities of themes

1. Practical working conditions
2. Support
3. Personal satisfaction
4. Opportunity
5. Making a difference

Using the hierarchical template as explored in Chapter 4, Method, the prioritisation of the themes was detailed in pictorial form below.

Figure 6

Pictorial representation of the themes and their order

Making a difference

Opportunity

Personal satisfaction

Support

Working conditions
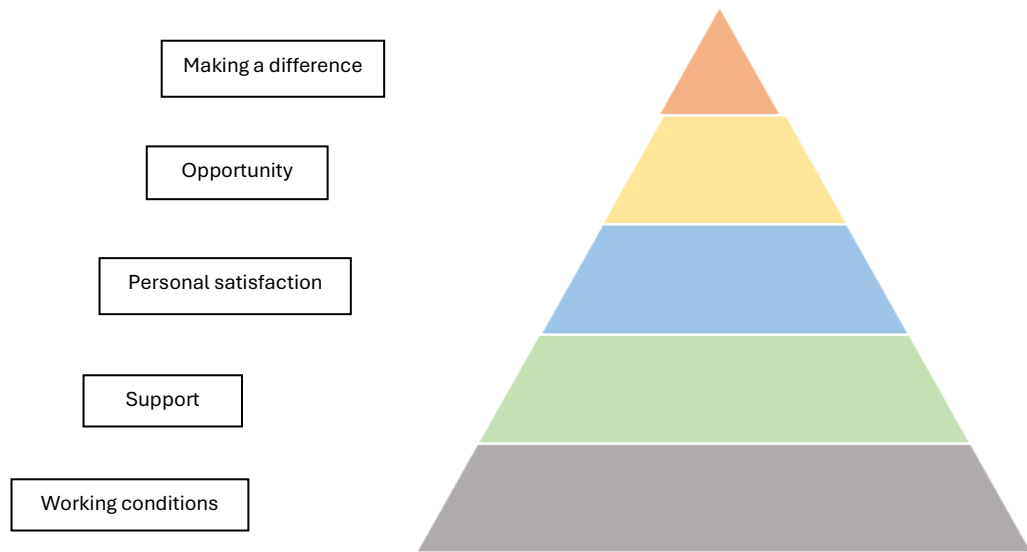
9.6. Design of the intervention

Prioritising the facets was an important process, generating useful discussion amongst the group about what is happening when things are working well, however the prioritisation of the facets did not in itself develop an intervention, or address the second research question for the focus groups in considering the ways that this could be built upon. This required further discussion by the group and a focus on the second question as follows:

"What is needed to support these priorities happening?"

9.6.1 The overall design

The group discussed how the intervention could be designed following the prioritisation of the facets. Ideas were shared about the use of the pictorial representation of the prioritised facets and that there could be questions attached to each facet to be used in discussion between employers and employees in their role;

"Each section could be a discussion point, so you could ask questions about working conditions, like what people need" (Participant 4).

"Yes they could be really wide and general questions, because the answers could be really different for different people even though there are the same themes" (Participant 1).

This was an important point, as it reflected the constructivist approach of the study and the importance of understanding lived experience when considering supportive interventions, as well as considering the demands of the role and the factors to mitigate these and the resources that could be in place to promote wellbeing. In considering the stress and motivational processes of the Job Demands–Resources model, this is an important point, that the processes for each are different and could require different things.

9.6.2 Generation of questions

In prompting a further step in the design, it was suggested by the researcher that the group could come up with some indicative questions using the same style of Appreciative Inquiry as used thus far to evidence their discussion and thoughts about the kind of prompts that they would find helpful if this was something being used by and with them. Participants agreed that this would be a useful approach and one participant began the discussion with suggestions about the first question needed;

> *"I'd like to be asked what I needed, so right at the beginning for someone to ask what it was I needed equipment wise' (Participant 3).*

This was supported by another participant, confirming that this would be important, particularly if there were specific things needed, like a specific kind of desk or chair, or software. The researcher proposed the following questions and presented these to the group:

What equipment do you need to do your job role?

Are there any specific requirements or adjustments required?

The participants agreed, however added 'for you' at the end considering that this highlighted the individual aspect of the question. A practical question was proposed about reporting faults by Participant 5 and a question about this was added. Moving on to consider other subthemes that had been discussed as part of wellbeing from the semi structured interviews and focus group 1, the researcher put to the group whether a question about work environment and workload should be provided for in this section. Participant 5 suggested that the question needed to not provide the answer in the question and this needed to be neutral, suggesting:

> *"Where could you work and who would be with you?"*

Participant 3 agreed that a wide question would be positive but that this needed to take account that it was not necessarily a wish list. The researcher suggested:

"Where can you best work and with who?"

In considering workload more specifically, Participant 1 suggested following with the same style of questioning:

"How best can we talk about workload?"

The development of the first set of questions and this discussion about their style prompted further suggestions from the group about the wording of the questions moving forward, that they needed to be open questions to generate a discussion and that they needed to be framed and phrased in a positive way. The participants entered into a wider discussion across the facets, proposing ideas about questions that would be useful and what facet they would be best suited under, for example, Participant 1 suggested a question which would ask directly about what was needed from a manager and this was added under 'Support'. Further, Participant 2 suggested that a question about how success could be celebrated would fit well under 'Personal Satisfaction' and Participant 4 added a question to ask specifically about what training would be helpful and interesting. This process of discussion continued with suggestions for questions being presented and each facet having a number of questions linked with it and these are presented in the table below.

This process represented a collaborative approach and one that aligned with Appreciative Inquiry, Bushe (2013) comments that the approach was designed for staff, providing for opportunity to talk with one another, focus on the positive aspects of the role so that this could be built upon.

Table 19

Example questions for the Intervention

Theme	Example Questions
Working conditions	What equipment do you need to do your job role?
	Do you know to ask or to report a fault or new requirement?
	Are there any special requirements or adjustments required for you?

	Where can you best work and with who?
	How should we talk about workload together?
Support	What can be in place with your team so that you feel supported?
	What do you need from your manager?
	How will you access information about strategy and senior management?
	How does media perception impact you and how can we talk about this?
Personal satisfaction	This job is hard sometimes, how will we best know how to support you?
	How do you like good work to be acknowledged and celebrated?
	What do you need to feel autonomous in your role?
Opportunity	What skills and knowledge would you like to develop?
	Have you ideas about how you could do this?
	What are you interested in?
Making a difference	Tell me a time you have felt that you were making a difference, what was happening for you?

In summarising the focus group 2 and the work they had undertaken, it was suggested that an introductory narrative could be helpful to set the context for the intervention and set out its provisions for supporting wellbeing at work. The researcher therefore drafted the following for discussion in the group and wrote this on flip chart paper:

"I will have the best opportunity to experience the greatest wellbeing in my job role when I have the working equipment I need and opportunity to work alongside others, when I feel supported by my team, my manager and higher level management and there is a realistic representation of my role in society. I will be accepting that my role includes times of distress and challenge, there will also be times of celebration and appreciation of my work. I will have opportunities to acquire new skills and

knowledge, engage with learning I am interested in and share my expertise with others. These will enable me to have the best opportunity to undertake meaningful work and work with families to achieve positive outcomes."

The whole group viewed the text, and with one participant (2) taking the pen, small amendments were made to the wording, in one participant's words

"…to make it more social worky" (Participant 3).

The changes were made by the participant using the pen suggesting a small change and the other participants agreeing. The agreed narrative was as follows:

"I will have the best chance of experiencing wellbeing in my job role when I have all the working equipment I need and opportunity to work alongside others, when I feel well supported by my team, manager and senior management and that my role is represented accurately and fairly in society. I will be accepting that my role includes times of distress and challenge, there will also be times of celebration and appreciation of my work. I will have opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge, engage with learning and training I am interested in and share my expertise with others. These will enable me to have the best opportunity to undertake work that is important and means something and work with families to achieve positive outcomes."

The group congratulated each other with 'well done' and the session ended. Whilst this could be viewed as primarily a report of the sequence of events in the focus group, this provided indication that the group considered that they had achieved something, together. This is positioned well in the Appreciative Inquiry approach, which celebrates that involvement of individuals coming together to collaborate and co-create (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). In considering whether presenting one narrative detracts from the intervention itself reflecting a constructivist approach, this is an area that could be explored in further research of course. However, the focus group reflected a range of participants and built on the data from the previous three studies, therefore reflective of a wider group. It is posited that the use of language is broad enough to reflect a constructivist and individual perspective. Considering the role of the researcher in this process, certainly from a reflexive position, an understanding of shared language, processes and experiences, as well as challenges and frustrations, enabled a deep and nuanced understanding of the data across the four studies. In this study

specifically, this insider position enabled the co-creation of an intervention that represented the stories and experiences shared and was able to be situated in the context of the organisation.

9.7 The intervention

The intervention is the visual presentation of the facets in hierarchical order, with questions for each facet and space for discussion and provides the mechanism for wellbeing to be explored using a constructivist approach and in line with the positive nature of Appreciative Inquiry. This co-designed intervention is presented in full below and represents the facets of wellbeing as presented in the triangulated results of the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus group 1 and represents the process of co-design through the prioritisation of the facets and development of questions for each facet to provide opportunity for discussion between employer and employee. The intervention includes the narrative agreed in focus group 2 and provides space for dates and personal details as well as review dates to be added if required.

Figure 7

Design of the Intervention

Supporting wellbeing at work

To have the greatest opportunity to experience wellbeing in your job role, you require the working equipment you need and opportunity to work alongside others, to feel supported by your team, your manager and higher level management. The social work role includes times of distress and challenge as well as times of celebration and appreciation of your work. You will have opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge, engage with learning you are interested in and share your expertise with others. This will enable you to have the best opportunity to undertake meaningful work and work with families to achieve positive outcomes.

This tool can support conversations between you and you manager / supervisor to support your wellbeing in your social work role. The picture below represents the important aspects that can contribute to your wellbeing at work and there are sample questions that can help begin your conversations. This can be reviewed at intervals that suit you.
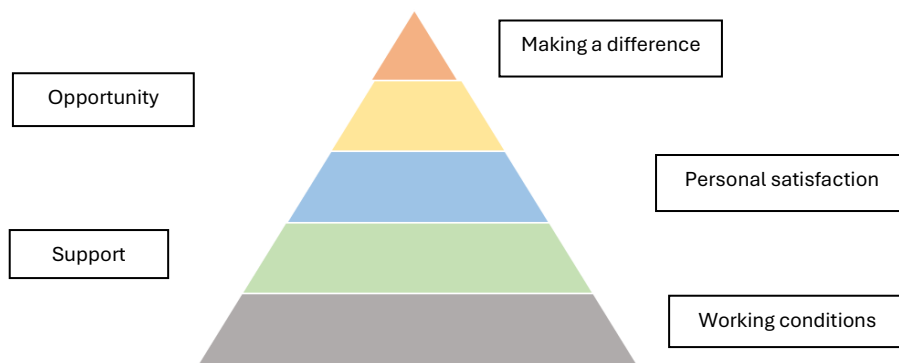
This form is being completed by _____ (name) and

_____ _____(name) on _____ _____(date) and will

be reviewed again on _____ (date).

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Working conditions
What equipment do you need to do your job role?
Do you know to ask or to report a fault or new requirement?
Are there any special requirements or adjustments required for you?
Where can you best work and with who?
How should we talk about workload together?
Support
What can be in place with your team so that you feel supported?
What do you need from your manager?
How will you access information about strategy and senior management?
How does media perception impact you and how can we talk about this?
Personal satisfaction
This job is hard sometimes, how will we best know how to support you?
How do you like good work to be acknowledged and celebrated?
What do you need to feel autonomous in your role?
Opportunity
What skills and knowledge would you like to develop?
Have you ideas about how you could do this?
What are you interested in?
Making a difference
Tell me a time you have felt that you were making a difference, what was happening for you?
How can we support this happening again?
Are there other important factors to us to talk about?

9.8 Summary

This part of the chapter presented the results of focus group 2 and the final design of the intervention. Responses and discussions in this focus group evidenced that the

spirit of Appreciative Inquiry was present, with forward facing discussions which led to a collaborative approach in moving from generated themes to a practical intervention that could be used to promote individual wellbeing at work.

Chapter 10: Discussion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the key findings of this thesis, explain the findings of each stage of data collection, consider the findings in the context of the literature and the subsequent development of the intervention. The findings will be considered in the context of the theoretical framework before an analysis of strengths and limitations and recommendations.

The research question for this thesis was whether Appreciative Inquiry could be used to co-design an intervention that could support social worker self-reported wellbeing. This thesis presents four studies which contributed to the co-designed intervention which provides a mechanism to enable a constructivist approach to a structured evidenced based discussion about what will provide the best opportunity to experience wellbeing at work. Appreciative Inquiry was utilised as an approach to provide for a positive frame for the studies and a focus on a preferred future and how this could be facilitated, holding in mind the requirements of the statutory role and organisational context. The scoping review explored the broad material available about previously implemented interventions and their outcomes, which contributed to the design of the interview and focus group questions. The semi structured interviews and focus groups built on this, taking an iterative approach within the cycle of Appreciative Inquiry. The successful co-design of the intervention demonstrates the fulfilment of the research question, that using Appreciative Inquiry enabled participants to engage in the research process towards a common aim of supporting change to improve wellbeing at work.

10.2 Presentation of the key findings

10.2.1 Key findings

This thesis comprised of four stages of data collection (four studies). Chapters 5, 6,7,8, and 9 present the data and results for each stage and the triangulated results. The overall key findings were:

- Themes representing job resources were present across the data. These were working conditions, support, opportunity for training and development and personal satisfaction and were positively associated with experiencing wellbeing at work.

- The demands of the role, such as amount of work, faulty equipment, impact of managerial support and nature of the job role were reflected across the data. These impacted negatively on experiencing wellbeing at work.

- The job demand of negative emotional impact could be mitigated against by feelings of job satisfaction, making a difference and support.

- Wellbeing was found across the data to consist of a number of facets; practical working conditions, support, opportunity, personal satisfaction and making a difference and these could be hierarchically ordered and formed the foundation of the co-design of the intervention.

These findings broadly reflect the wider research regarding social worker wellbeing and the factors that both influence and are impactful on this (Kinman & Grant, 2011; Ravalier et al., 2020; McFadden et al., 2021). The findings align with the Job Demands–Resources Model, with resources clearly identified and some indication that what could be identified as a demand in some roles is seen as inherently rewarding. Importantly, the ordering of the facets and the development of this into an intervention is a key finding of this thesis and is new and novel. Whilst the wider literature evidences approaches to wellbeing and evidence of intervention over time, as detailed in the scoping review, Chapter 5, Results, the co-production of an intervention rather than provision of an intervention is important. The intervention acknowledges the subjective experiences of social workers in the context of their organisation (Kinman & Grant, 2011) and through not being prescriptive in a one size fits all approach, provides an excellent opportunity to co-produce opportunities at work for greater wellbeing.

10.2.2 Review of the findings in relation to the Job Demands – Resource Model

Finding 1 Resources

Job resources were identified through the themes across all of the data collected within this thesis; working conditions, support, opportunity for training and development and personal satisfaction and these were positively associated with experiencing wellbeing at work. These findings align with wider workplace studies, with Douglas et al. (2023) finding that wellbeing was supported by staff support, feelings of making a difference to others and the opportunity for growth. Similarly, Lutke Lanfer et al. (2021) found that resources such as co-worker support, feedback and development were positively associated with wellbeing. Interestingly Lutke Lanfer et al. (2021) also considered the physical workspace, finding this to be impactful but in the context of other demands.

This was not supported in this study, which found practical working conditions to be foundational in supporting wellbeing. Tesi et al. (2018) found that personal satisfaction positively impacted feelings of wellbeing for social workers and this was supported in this study, with this being impacted by work being acknowledged and celebrated, contributing to feelings of making a difference. McFadden et al. (2021) highlights the resource of support for social workers, and this is also highlighted by Wood et al. (2010) as crucial. Wood et al. (2010) also consider that low demands positively impacted wellbeing, this is not fully supported by these findings, that some demands were seen as inherent in the social work role and conversely contributed to feelings of making a difference. Opportunities for training as a resource aligned with findings by Cook et al. (2020), considering pathways for progression and skill development contributed to wellbeing at work.

Finding 2 Demands

The demands of the social work role, such as workload, equipment that does not work, and the impact of a perceived lack of managerial support were found to impact negatively on experiencing wellbeing at work. These findings align with wider research about the impact of demands of the job role in wider workplaces. Lutke Lanfer et al (2021) found that prevalent demands were quantity of work, emotional demands and physical work environment, Douglas et al. (2024) and Claes et al. (2023) concur, that demands such as these are experienced as impactful for employee wellbeing. Certainly, the job demands for social workers are well established (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018), including working conditions, workload, administrative tasks, the findings here concur with extensive literature base.

Moreover, the findings add to knowledge about the impact that these demands can have on individual employees. For example, IT systems working properly were often seen as foundational for being able to complete the social work task. Whilst there is evidence that some level of demand can serve as a motivator for some employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), it is crucial to consider the nature of the demand, the resources available and how this is individually experienced. This is described by Bakker et al. (2023) as person x situation, that is the interaction of the individual resources and characteristics of employees with their work environment, both demands and resources. This view posits that employees who have higher personal resources, such as higher levels of resilience may experience the demands differently to those who

have lower personal resources to draw upon. Bakker & Demerouti (2017) found that public service motivation could play a role in mitigating the negative impact of demands because of the altruistic value of desiring to help and support others. However, considering the compelling evidence base of social workers experiencing stress (Ravalier, 2018; Maddock, 2024) the ability for social workers to take an active role in developing and maintaining both personal resources and developing opportunity for job crafting when negatively impacted could be compromised. The importance of these findings is represented in the development of the intervention, which takes into account individual experience and provides for consideration about personal resources.

Finding 3 Mitigation against emotional impact

The four studies within this thesis demonstrate that the social work role is inherently rewarding and worthwhile, and at the same time it is experienced as challenging and difficult. This is supported by studies by Rose and Palattiyll (2019) and Almond (2014), who found that the emotional demands of the job were 'inherent', giving great job satisfaction and this could co-exist with the impact of the work on individual wellbeing. This also aligns with studies considering other public sector professions, for example Fleury et al. (2017) found that in challenging circumstances mental health professionals are highly committed to their job and the 2019 Government led study into teacher wellbeing found the same, that teachers reported a commitment to the role at the same time as reporting high levels of workplace stress (GOV.UK., 2019).

There was evidence across the data of the positive impact of resources in mitigating the negative impact of the emotional demands of the role. Firstly, in considering the theme of job satisfaction, this aligns with Bakker (2015) who comments that public servants enter their chosen profession often with a compassionate calling, and that this can mitigate against some of the demands of the role because dealing with these demands serves a 'higher goal of helping others' (p 727). Naming this 'public service motivation' Bakker (2015) considers that employees engaged in front facing work were at times less impacted by demands. This is further supported in wider workplace studies, for example by Liu et al. (2017), that a sense of engaging in worthwhile work could act as a buffer to negative impact and certainly this aligns with the theme across the studies of 'Making a Difference'.

The experience of support, identified as a resource across the studies, was found to mitigate the negative impact of the emotional demands of the role, aligning with similar studies considering workplace wellbeing. Using the Job Demands–Resources model, both Claes et al. (2023) and Douglas et al. (2024) found that the support of a close team and management support were cited as a resource and Wood et al. (2011) and McFadden et al. (2022) concur with this, finding this positively impactful on wellbeing in the context of a difficult and challenging work environment.

Finding 4 – Definition of wellbeing and hierarchical order

Across the four studies, wellbeing was found to consist of a number of facets, presented in the themes as practical working conditions, support, opportunity, personal satisfaction and making a difference. A key finding was that these could be hierarchically ordered, with the foundation being practical working conditions. Whilst the definition of wellbeing being mutli-faceted is not new or novel, it does present the constructed picture of reality held by the participants about their role and how they experience it, therefore an original definition. It is posited that by presenting the job resources represented by the themes in a hierarchical order, this enabled the co-design of the intervention. This is supported by wider workplace studies, for example Claes et al. (2022) who found that wellbeing interventions that considered different components such as training and development, supportive relationships and the work environment were likely to be more impactful.

10.2.3 Review of the findings of the first study – scoping review

The first study conducted in this thesis was a scoping review which aimed to to identify all the available quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods literature about interventions that have been used to improve the wellbeing of social work staff and their effectiveness. The study specific research questions were:

- What interventions have been used to investigate wellbeing for social work staff?
- What tools were used to measure wellbeing?
- How were these interventions experienced?
- Do the studies identify barriers to effectiveness and implementation?

Finding 1 Resources

The results highlighted how participants considered their own role in maintaining wellbeing and across this study is the consideration about the role of the organisation and the role of the individual and the complex nature of how this is worked out. Noted in Chapter 2, employers certainly have a responsibility to their employees however Social Work England (2024) promotes the importance of social workers 'claiming time to attend to their wellbeing' as an important part of professional practice. It is likely that research considering the potential barriers to this would be useful moving forward (Douglas et al., 2024).

Finding 2 Demands

In considering demands, an interesting point was the potential disconnect between social workers and senior management. The scoping review studies highlighted the possible role of the line manager in terms of providing support and supervision and possibly mediating between front line staff and senior management as being key. This finding aligns with McFadden et al. (2023), indicating that management and leadership could be experienced as a demand and a resource. This is also reflective of the wider literature about organisations, particularly in considering structure and how employees experience communication and a sense of being able to contribute and be heard (Heyden et al., 2020). Kinman and Grant (2011) discuss the importance of wellbeing interventions being developed on an organisational level rather than solely individual and certainly this highlights the importance of the individual social worker not being seen in isolation but in the context of their team, their service and their wider organisation.

Finding 3 Mitigation against emotional impact

The emotional impact of social work was acknowledged across the studies. reflecting the literature, that although social work is a rewarding profession, the demands of the nature of the work can impact wellbeing (Maddock, 2024; Tehrani et al., 2020). The role that support plays in mitigating the emotional impact as well as the impact of poor working conditions, is well documented, for example Ravailer et al. (2020) found that where managerial support was not experienced, wellbeing decreased and feelings of frustration were present and that presence of peer colleague support could act as 'a buffer' (Ravalier, 2023, p1). Interestingly, the results of the scoping review evidenced a narrative of some acceptance about the nature of the social work role, and that not only was the emotional impact accepted but that the nature of the role could

contribute to feelings of job satisfaction and reward. This aligns with Bakker and Demerouti (2017) considered that those who were actively wanting to make the world a better place often chose a career in public services, and wanted to 'do good' for individuals and communities (p 723) and indeed this was found to mitigate against the impact of the impairment process.

Finding 4 Definition of wellbeing and hierarchical order

The nine identified studies as detailed in Chapter 5.6 reflected previous social work participation in previous interventions and research, therefore setting the scene well, through drawing on what was already known to be the experiences of social workers and the likely factors important to experiencing wellbeing at work. The key facets presented were peer, line and senior management support, opportunities for training and the emotional impact of the role and managing this.

10.2.3.1 Summary

The scoping review highlighted a number of important aspects to consider further, particularly the experience of the nature of the role and job satisfaction. Importantly, the scoping review identified that there were just nine studies undertaken and it is therefore posited that this study therefore makes an important contribution to this small evidence base regarding participatory intervention design to support social worker wellbeing.

10.2.4 Review of the findings of the second study – semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews provided opportunity to hear and gain understanding about the lived experiences of the participants in relation to wellbeing at work. The study specific research questions were:

- What do social workers identify as working well for them?
- Are there ways that this could be built on further and if so, how?

Finding 1 Resources

The data from the semi structured interviews identified a number of resources available. The finding that practical things and practical working conditions contributed to wellbeing aligns with the wealth of research about the impact of poor working conditions for social workers (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018, Ravailer, 2023). Matters such as having working equipment, tea and coffee and cutlery were all voiced as important, and it is likely that as well as these practical issues making an inherent difference, they

could convey also a sense of being valued by the organization, echoed by WWCSC (2023) .

Opportunity for training and development were found to contribute to wellbeing, supporting the results of the scoping review and again offering opportunity for promotion and progression, as well as developing competency and skill that enables practitioners to better undertake the social work role (Ferguson, 2020, p20) in order to make a difference. These findings concur with research focused on motivation for social workers to join the profession as well as reasons why practitioners remain in the role (Social Work England, 2023). Evans and Huxley (2009) and Searle and Patent (2013) found that opportunities for professional support and training opportunities were key, and this was strongly presented by participants in the semi structured interviews.

Finding 2 Demands

Job demands such as administrative load and the balance between this and direct time was families was explored, and this certainly adds to the well known existing literature (Ravalier et al., 2020). Feeling valued at work is a key determinant of how employees feel about their work overall and can contribute to productivity and wellbeing, not only because of the emotional response this generates but also this provides for actions and behaviours that could create or add to resources to mitigate the experience of the demands (Tims & Bakker, 2016).

Support from colleagues and managers was largely presented as positive and important and the disconnect between staff and senior management cited in the scoping review was evidenced in the interviews too. There was evidence that there was some understanding of the different role senior managers had and this meant they could not always be present, but also discussion about wanting to feel heard and connected. However aside from their physical presence, the responses did not indicate how this could happen. McFadden et al. (2022) found that clear and regular communication from senior management was received positively, and it is likely that this would be beneficial.

Finding 3 Mitigation against emotional impact

In considering support experienced in teams, Chapter 6.5.3, this finding is supportive of other such studies. For example Biggart et al. (2017) and Cook et al. (2020) found support helped with managing emotions, feeling safe and a belief that work could be effective and meaningful and that practitioners who believed support was

available experienced feeling more confident, were able to work co-operatively and autonomously. This is supported in wider workplace literature, for example Liu et al. (2025) found that acceptance and belonging in the team was experienced as contributing to wellbeing. Support from team members, colleagues and senior management was identified in the studies explored in the scoping review, with 'in the moment' opportunity for connection and sharing of experience valued (Jeyasingham, 2016), offers of practical support (Evans & Huxley, 2009), line management arrangements that took account of the person as a whole (Ahern, 2017) and positive communication from senior management (Rose & Palattiyll, 2019).

The complex role of team support would be interesting to consider further, as through the discussion about support and modelling there was a narrative about belonging, feeling cared for but that this could come with unsaid expectations about what behaviours are usually seen to experience this, Whilst in the moment this could be experienced as helpful and caring, it could provide a long term cultural narrative about the nature of the job in terms of what it means to do it well in terms of time dedicated to it. This is supported by Grande et al. (2024, p2) in thinking about emotional contagion, finding that team narratives were influential on wellbeing. Cook et al. (2020) (2024) consider that whilst there are wider wellbeing studies that highlight the importance of teams, the evidence base regarding teams specifically is limited and it is posited therefore that this could be an important area for future research.

Finding 4 Definition of wellbeing and hierarchical order

A key finding in this stage was the constructed definition of wellbeing by social workers and the facets that contributed to this. This was fundamental because understanding these factors would provide for a greater opportunity for the design of an intervention that addressed important things (Carter & Andersen, 2023). Wellbeing was described as being seen as a whole person and as having an emotional element, with participants considering that there are a number of important facets both objective, working conditions, paths to progression for example and subjective, for example personal satisfaction and aligns with wellbeing literature such as McNaught (2011) and with previous studies for example Ravalier et al. (2020) about the nature of wellbeing at work.

10.2.4.1 Summary

In summary, the findings from the semi structured interviews align with wider literature, that aspects of wellbeing include both subjective and objective factors, and importantly, objective factors are also subjectively experienced, and secondly that the aspects identified are largely reflective of what is already known about the impact of practical things, support, training and altruistic reasons for entering and remaining in the role.

10.2.5 Review of the findings from the third study – focus group 1

The results for the third study are presented in full in Chapter 7. The study specific research questions were as follows:

- What do social workers identify as working well for them?
- Are there ways that this could be built on further and if so, how?

Finding 1 Resources

Discussion focused on resources such as opportunity and the positive sense that feeling invested in and developing knowledge, skill and expertise generated was evident in this focus group and as detailed above, aligns with literature. Specific training and development opportunities were discussed, with both a desire for the path to progression to be clearly mapped out as well as increasing depth of knowledge which would impact practice. Commitment to professional development is a requirement of registration with Social Work England, however there was no evidence in the focus group that the desire to have opportunity and provision to training and development was specifically because of this, rather reflecting a desire to learn more so that the job could be done better. This aligns with wider workplace studies, Claes et al. (2023) finding that job resources which included opportunity for development and skill building was aligned with the motivational process and this is further supported by McFadden et al. (2022) that this is positively associated with wellbeing.

Social workers reported that recognition of what they brought to the role in terms of skills and experience was valuable. This linked with there being opportunity to share these skills and experiences with other practitioners to develop them, the example being given of the positive feelings generated when seeing growth and development in the role. This is indeed supported by other studies, such as Fleury et al. (2017 and Liu et al. (2025) where having competencies recognised and utilised contributed to both job satisfaction and wellbeing. Trevithick (2014) found that creating

positive opportunities for peer learning and specifically opportunities to learn from others practice experiences was valuable for both the person sharing the experience and the person hearing about it.

Finding 2 – Demands

The distinction between doing social work and administrative tasks was further explored, with participants presenting that social work was outworked by being physically present with a family. This is an important point, previous studies such as Ravalier and Boichat (2018) and Ravalier et al. (2021) found that the amount of administrative work had a negative impact on wellbeing. However, a narrative that separates the administrative work from 'social work' could fail to take account of quality assurance requirements, timeliness and an overall adherence to law and policy. This is supported by studies and subsequent practical suggestions by BASW (2012) and Pascoe et al. (2023) about system changes including effective use of IT and pre-population of data to reduce replication of tasks.

The focus group considered what support from senior management would be experienced as, generating discussion about physical presence but also seeing something happen, a change, based on feedback they had given or an issue that had been raised, reflective of McFadden et al. (2022) and Claes et al. (2022) with leadership being experienced as both a resource and demand. In addition, the effectiveness of 'You said, we did' approach used across many work and educational sectors (Kinsella & Kaye, 2022) highlights the importance of this process for employees. There are likely to be matters that cannot be changed in line with feedback given or issues raised perhaps due to budgetary constraints. What is identified as needed are clearer communication methods coupled with transparency about unpopular and unwanted decisions and this aligns with previous research findings, for example Ravalier et al. (2020) and Pithouse et al. (2019). In addition, Liu et al. (2017) found that inclusive leadership where employees were seen as individuals and enabled to contribute, and where the narrative of 'do things with people, not to people' (p 542) was embraced contributed to greater wellbeing.

Finding 3 Mitigation against emotional impact

The experience of practical help was discussed as positively impacting wellbeing, along with the experience of being heard. This was particularly linked to seeing some-

thing different as a result of this. Feelings of job satisfaction were presented as important and this aligns with studies such as Douglas et al. (2024) finding that making a difference to others was influential.

Finding 4 Definition of wellbeing and hierarchical order

Data gathered in focus group 1 was largely aligned with the data gathered in the semi structured interviews, however discussion in focus group 1 supported the generating of a further sub themes of the recognition of existing experience, sharing knowledge and experience and support being conceptualised by seeing changes happen in line with feedback given. These are novel findings, extending the knowledge base about what was already known from the scoping review and the semi structured interviews.

10.2.5.1 Summary

The findings in focus group 1 align with wider literature, that the demands of the role such as administrative tasks taking away from time spent with a family, had a negative impact on wellbeing and that resources such as recognition of skill and knowledge and opportunity for development were resources which had a positive impact.

10.2.6 Review of the findings from the fourth study - focus group 2

The specific research question for focus group 2 was aligned with the final stage of the Appreciative Inquiry Cycle, Destiny, with the research question as follows:

- Can the data gathered in the previous stages be used in the design of an intervention and if so, what would this look like?

Finding 1 Resources

Discussion in the focus group centred for a time on Opportunity and Personal Satisfaction, this is reflective of other studies, with factors such as acknowledgement of work, autonomy (Kinman & Grant, 2011), opportunity to develop (Searle & Patent, 2013) and acknowledgement and feedback (Evans & Huxley) cited as valuable. This aligns with the Job Demands–Resources model considering that autonomy is crucial in contributing to the motivational process. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) found that employees who perceived they have control and self-efficacy over their role can feel a greater motivation.

In considering the development of the intervention in the context of the evidence base, the scoping review found limited evidence of previous interventions in social

work settings; these included a wellbeing app, opportunity for training, financial rewards (Ravalier et al., 2021) and Grande et al. (2024) finding opportunity in other sectors including gym memberships, resilience training and mindfulness apps as having little impact overall. Grande et al. (2024) and Fleming (2018) found that prescriptive interventions that target the majority of employees in a setting are highly unlikely to have the same impact for everyone and conversely could lead to negative impacts on an individual and team if found unhelpful by a few individuals (Grande et al., 2024; Fleming, 2018). The co-design of this intervention took account of this, that whilst the overall themes generated across the four studies were the same, the intervention provides for engagement with each facet on an individual level.

Finding 2 Demands

Across the four studies organisational context is considered in various ways, firstly in the scoping review Antonopolou et al. (2017), Rose and Palattiyll (2019) and Evans and Huxley (2009) found that organisational context to be a key contributor to feelings of wellbeing, identifying the practice and culture of the organisation presenting challenges to feelings of wellbeing. Both the semi structured interviews and focus group 1 evidenced strong feelings about senior management, their visibility and communication and the constraints around this. Whilst context varies between organisations that employ social workers, those operating under statutory processes will all have policy and procedure, and budgetary considerations, that provide for the social work role to be undertaken. Previous studies, such as McFadden et al. (2019), Owens et al. (2023) and Bakker and Demerouti (2017) found that a strategic approach to wellbeing in a proactive rather than crisis led way which saw employees nested in teams, nested in organisations was crucial in order to be effective. In addition, these studies posited that further knowledge was required to further inform how employers could build and maintain working environments that provided for positive wellbeing of social work staff. Engaging employees in the co-design of an intervention presents an important opportunity for employers to understand better what employees individually and as a group require and Liu et al. (2017) found a positive impact on wellbeing where contributions were welcomed. This is reflected in this study, indeed, the use of Appreciative Inquiry in three of these studies enabled a collaborative approach. This is a further important finding and provides the comprehensive answer to the overall research question about whether Appreciative Inquiry would be an effective approach to intervention design.

Finding 3 Mitigation against emotional impact

The supportive team environment was again discussed in focus group 2, this running as a thread throughout the four studies. The job resource of close collegiate support that was cited as being valued and experienced as contributing to feelings of wellbeing and certainly, this aligns with similar studies, where team support was found to generate satisfaction and reported wellbeing amongst employees (Liu et al., 2024; Fleury et al., 2017). This also concurs with the findings of the scoping review, where in the moment peer support provided opportunity for reflection and discussion and to decompress (Ahern et al., 2017). This facet was placed above that of practical working conditions, evidencing that this support is not only important, arguably already known in wider literature, but that it is fundamental aspect of being able to have the best opportunity of the other facets being fulfilled. Wood et al. (2011) and McFadden et al. (2022) also found this as a resource and it is argued that this could be influenced by the need to belong, to access help and support (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and as Maddock (2024) suggests, the process of developing identity as a professional social worker by aligning with this group.

Whilst the importance of working with those in need of safety and support in a trauma informed way is gaining much needed attention and action, certainly the impact of secondary trauma on professionals such as social workers is also recognised and often deemed as an occupational hazard of 'knowing, facing and caring' (Saakvitne & Pearlmann, 1996 in Community Care Inform, n.d). The value of having supportive people who understand and recognise the specific social work demands, dealing with desperate crisis, loss, and hurt and offering informed empathy is reflected in studies by Jeyasingham (2016) and Evans and Huxley (2009). The findings here align with this and with studies by Kinman and Grant (2011), Terhani (2020), Claes et al. (2023) with this resource not only contributing to the motivational process but mitigating against the impact of demands.

Finding 4 Definition of wellbeing and hierarchical order

Participants agreed there was a hierarchy in considering facets of wellbeing, that the facets could be ordered in terms of what needed to be in place as a foundation in order for there to be the best opportunity for other facets to be fulfilled. In considering working conditions being a priority, this aligns with the significant research regarding the importance of working conditions (Ravalier et al., 2021), the benefits of providing tea

and coffee in the workplace (WWCSW, 2022) and the findings of Lutke Lanfer et al. (2021) and Jeyasingham (2016) about workspace. Fleury et al. (2017) found that creating conditions that are favourable, with the prerequisites of basic equipment, crucial to self-reported wellbeing at work and the results of this study concur. The finding in this study that practical working conditions was experienced as a foundation for other facets of wellbeing to be met is novel and significant.

10.2.6.1 Summary

To summarise, focus group 2 co-designed the intervention as presented in Chapter 9.7. The findings in focus group 2 were reflective of the wider literature focusing on social work wellbeing and aligned with the triangulated findings of the semi structured interviews and focus group 1.

10.3 Review of the theoretical framework and methodological approach

This study took a constructivist approach with the epistemological and ontological positions that knowledge about the human experience and what is real is socially constructed through interaction and experience. This influenced the use of qualitative methodology for which the rationale is discussed in full in Chapter 3, with consideration for the suitability of qualitative methods and the critique and challenge, specifically considering quality, reliability and validity. This thesis drew on the Job–Demands Resources model as an approach to exploring wellbeing at work and Appreciative Inquiry as a research approach, placing value on participation and co-design of an intervention. Reviewing the methodological approach and theoretical framework is vital in understanding whether these were the most suitable for the studies in this thesis and for the research question being investigated.

10.3.1 Review of the theoretical framework

10.3.1.1 Job Demands–Resources

As detailed in Chapter 2, the Job Demands-Resources Model underpinned how wellbeing was approached in this thesis. The review of the approach in relation to the specific findings is detailed above and this section will review the approach in relation to the theoretical framework. The Job Demands–Resources model is used widely in wellbeing research and found to be reliable (Lutke Lanfer et al., 2021). This model provided for exploration of the demands and resources present in the social work role, how they were experienced and the relationship between what was a demand and what was identified as a resource, as represented in the themes.

Important to hold in mind is that there are fluctuations in job demands and the resources available and this could be day to day or even situation to situation (Bakker et al., 2023). For social work specifically this could be a resource that is limited due to financial restrictions that prevent support being provided in a way desired by a social worker or an experience of being shouted at by a family member or even a day when the computer systems holding case file information is not working. On these days, the demands could be experienced as many and the resources are few. Kahn (1990, in Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) considered that this is the in the moment ebbs and flows of different days and Bakker and Demerouti (2017) found that it is the experience of this over time rather than in the moment that contributes to the negative experience of demands which impact the impairment process. This provides an interesting possibility for future longitudinal research.

10.3.1.2 Constructivist approach

The findings of this study support a constructivist approach to wellbeing and to intervention design, finding that wellbeing is a dynamic concept experienced and constructed by individuals and collectively in the context of what is happening to them and around them. The triangulated findings of this study indicate that wellbeing for social workers is multi-faceted and that for social workers to have the best opportunity to experience wellbeing at work, there should be consideration of how each facet could be fulfilled. Specifically, the triangulated data evidenced that practical working conditions, support, opportunity, personal satisfaction and making a difference all contributed to wellbeing at work but how these facets were experienced and what was required by individuals could be different, supporting the presence of multiple subjective experiences of reality, aligned with research undertaken by Clark et al. (2023).

The constructivist approach is further supported through the co-design of the intervention, where there was opportunity for new and shared knowledge to be constructed together. This aligns with Fillingham et al. (2023) who found that co-design, when effective, has the possibility to enhance positive outcomes and the findings here support this. Importantly, the constructivist approach provided for the opportunity to understand better that what one person experienced as a demand may not be experienced in the same way by another and what might mitigate the impact of a demand for one person may not mitigate it for another. Whilst there was agreement about the

themes across the studies, the intervention design provided for this possibility and opportunity.

10.3.1.3 Appreciative Inquiry

In considering Appreciative Inquiry as a collaborative approach to intervention design, as detailed in Chapter 3, Bushe (2013) comments that the approach was designed for staff to use together, talk with one another and focus on the positive aspects of the role in order that what is going well can be shared and built upon, providing staff with confidence about moving forward. It is noted that the studies did not provide for any formal evaluation of how participants experienced the process, so it is not possible to make clear findings about the experience or effectiveness of collaboration from the perspective of the participants. However, engagement from participants across the three empirical studies was high, this is evidenced from the of responses given and the depth of these responses, presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 9. The participants in focus group 2 worked together through discussion to contribute to the co-design of the intervention, detailed in full in Chapter 9. Co-design fostered a collaborative approach to the design of an intervention, promoting the inclusion of different perspectives and ideas which could lead to greater effectiveness and a sense of ownership. In considering this in social work practice, co-production and design are considered to bridge the division between the professional person and those in need of care and support and is readily used in service design and provision (SCIE, 2020) and in this study provided similar opportunity for social workers.

This involves shifts of power (Research in Practice, 2020) and on reflecting further on the role of the researcher in this process, it is noted that focus group 2 involved some direction and suggestion. Inherent in human interaction is the presence of emotions and engaging with participants and the research process is not exempt from this. Whilst the position of insider researcher has the benefit of shared context and empathy for experiences, it is imperative for the researcher to reflect on their own identity and take a reflexive position (Vella-Broderick et al., 2023). Vella-Broderick et al. (2023) considers there is evidence to suggest participants value ideas from the researcher in co-design and that regardless of the outcome of the study, participation could in itself provide wellbeing benefits, for example communication, problem solving skills, a sense of autonomy and competence. As detailed above, this aspect of the process was not tested and findings cannot be made in this respect, however it is

hoped that the process was experienced by participants in this way and that it enabled what Hammersley (2000) describes as a slowing down of thinking and reflection about patterns of most often and taken for granted thinking.

10.3.2 Review of the methodological approach

10.3.2.1 Qualitative approach

As explored in detail in Chapter 3, the constructivist approach is heavily aligned with qualitative research methods. This study used the qualitative methods of semi structured interviews and focus groups to provide for the researcher to gather data that reflected the depth and breadth of participant experience. This study had a small sample size overall and aimed to provide a rich understanding and interpretation of the experience and story of participants. On reviewing the qualitative methods used, it is posited that these methods were the best fit in gathering data which contributed to the co-design of the intervention. Importantly, the qualitative methods allowed for the experience of both job demands and resources to be explored in depth. This method is well established in social work research and wider research considering wellbeing, with examples from the scoping review Ahern et al. (2016) and Jeyasingham (2016) and in wider studies, for example Biggart et al. (2017) using qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews to gather data about experience and impact.

In considering issues of trustworthiness in the qualitative research, Rose and Johnson (2020) consider the importance of the alignment between the research question, the data collection methods and analysis. The overall research question in this thesis was to explore the co-design of an intervention using Appreciative Inquiry, and the qualitative methods to gather data and reflexive thematic analysis provided for rich and nuanced to emerge, with the researcher adopting a reflexive and iterative position.

10.3.2.2 Triangulation

The results of the scoping review, semi structured interviews and focus groups were triangulated and used in the fourth study and final stage of data collection; focus group 2 and the design of the intervention. Whilst acknowledging that the research questions for each stage of data collection were slightly different, these study specific questions were all representative of the overall research question for this thesis and the objectives therein. In considering the rationale for why the results from focus group 2 were not triangulated in the same way, using the same process, it is argued that the design

and presentation of the intervention in Chapter 9.7 as a whole comprehensively represents the holistic results of the four studies. The data from each study were analysed, capturing and providing for a unique perspective and picture of reality (Kaiser et al., 2020) and in triangulating these presented the possibility of understanding and working with a number of different perspectives of understanding reality (Santos et al., 2020). Denzin (2015) considers that things can only be known through their representations and the use of triangulation aligns entirely with the constructivist approach of this study and the epistemological position that knowledge about reality and the human experience is socially constructed rather than objectively real and specific to the context and participants being studied. Rather than the different stages of data collection and study specific research questions being seen as problematic, it is posited that combining these methodological approaches and the empirical results entirely add authenticity, rigour, breadth, and a rich complexity (Denzin, 2015) to this thesis.

Triangulation itself is not without criticism. Silverman (1985, in Kaiser et al., 2020) considered that if it is maintained that knowing and understanding is situation unique and situation specific, it could be problematic to bring together data in this way because the exact circumstances will not be repeated. Patton (1980, in Kaiser et al., 2020) adds to this stating 'comparison will seldom lead to a single consistent picture – it is best not to expect everything to turn out the same' (p331). Whilst the studies in this thesis did not use both quantitative and qualitative methods, Tashakkori & Teddile (2003) consider 'incompatibility thesis' (p14) raising caution about what they describe as the differences inherent in the philosophies underlying different methodological approaches in presenting results which are consistent and objective. However, in considering this in the context of this thesis, it was not the intention or aim to provide an objective picture of reality, this would have been more aligned to a positivist approach. Saukko (2003, in Kaiser et al., 2015) advocates for 'holding creative tension where there is no intention of arriving at a final correct enlightened view' (p31). This is reflected in this thesis, where the intervention designed does not present a final correct enlightened view about how to solve all of the challenges faced by social workers and improve their wellbeing at work. The intervention however is reflective of the rich depth of data gathered across the four studies, with space and opportunity for individual perspectives to be represented and opportunity for individual needs and experiences to be provided for.

10.4 Evaluation of strengths and limitations

This section of this final chapter will consider the strengths across the thesis, considering firstly, and most importantly, the novel contribution made. The potential limitations and mitigations will be discussed.

10.4.1 Strength 1 - Novel contribution

Most importantly, the strengths of this thesis lie in the significant contribution the empirical studies make to the knowledge about what supports social worker wellbeing and this has the potential to inform, influence and impact policy and practice. The scoping review identified how little evidence was currently available about previous interventions and established key issues that had been identified in previous studies informing the development of the questions used in the semi structured interviews and focus groups. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, this scoping review sought to provide a context and dialogue with the field (Aveyard, 2014) and this thesis enriches therefore the limited evidence base through the presentation and analysis of the data and provides important recommendations about future research as discussed below in section10.5.

This study addresses a critical gap between the existing extensive research focusing on the reasons social workers leave or consider leaving their roles and the strategies required to support their wellbeing. The findings in this thesis offer new insights into what social workers report they need at work to enhance and improve their wellbeing. Therefore, this study presents a clear opportunity to inform both practice and policy for individuals and organisations that employ social workers. Importantly, Appreciative Inquiry introduces a unique and novel approach to research and intervention design. Through focusing on strength rather than deficit, this fully collaborative method enables the design of an intervention based on existing strengths and proven effective practice.

The novel contributions in this thesis are that the facets of wellbeing can be placed into a hierarchical order to provide a structure for what social workers say is required to have the best opportunity to experience wellbeing at work, with basic requirements for practical working conditions as a foundation, followed by a supportive team and organisational environment, a holistic sense of satisfaction in the role, opportunity for development and career progression and feeling that the role being undertaken is making a difference to those using the service. Moreover, the hierarchical

order provided the foundation for the co-design of the intervention; providing a mechanism to enable a constructivist approach to a structured evidenced based discussion about what will provide the best opportunity to experience wellbeing at work.

10.4.2 Strength 2 - Qualitative methods

To highlight the overall strength and suitability of qualitative methods for this study and their effectiveness in data gathering, the scoping review and both the semi structured interviews and focus groups contributed to the development of a comprehensive picture of the depth and breadth of experience of social workers, what sense they made of their role, what worked well and how this could be built upon. The question design, drawing on the results of the scoping review and further tested through the pilot study, provided opportunity for participants to reflectively tell their story and contribute to thinking about the future. Similarly, it is posited that the use of Appreciative Inquiry entirely suited the collaborative and forward facing approach of the study, supporting engagement at each stage of the data collection and fostering a shared vision about the future. The findings, the intervention, support the use of Appreciative Inquiry as a valuable approach to co-production in the workplace, inspiring positivity and creativity and moving away from criticism and deficit-based narratives (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

10.4.3 Strength 3 - Role of the researcher

In considering further the role of the researcher, as discussed in Chapter 3.5, it is acknowledged that the researcher could have been perceived to be in a position of power in the organisation as their employed role was manager. There could have been what Fleming (2018) terms 'complicit coercion' (p. 313), that is unsaid pressure for participants to take part due to the role of the researcher and what Murphy (2023) considers 'a blurring of roles' (p.10), that is the researcher holding numerous roles simultaneously, impacting on data collection. It is asserted that the researcher was able to manage potential blurring of roles through the research design, specifically adopting a methodology that provided for data collection in set times and spaces, giving a boundary to the role of researcher. This differs from other methodologies, for example ethnography, where data collection could have included observation, diaries, logs and records data over time and in different spaces. In reflecting on the experience of participants of having a manager as researcher, it is acknowledged that this could have potentially impacted their feelings about their ability to decline the offer to participate as well as impacting what they shared (Fleming, 2018.; Murphy, 2023).

As discussed in Chapter 3.5, it is asserted that potential feelings of having to participate were managed through providing a clear opt in requirement for participation, an Information Sheet, (Appendix 4), Consent Form (Appendix 5) and Debrief Sheet (Appendix 6) and this information being verbally reiterated throughout data collection. However, whilst therefore providing the right conditions, there is of course greater nuance in the perception of the researchers role by the participants in the context of ongoing relationships and employment arrangements. This is acknowledged, however asserted that this did not unduly impact data collection or have a negative impact on participants. The rich depth of data and co-production of the intervention evidences an openness to share experience and work collaboratively and it is noted that not all of the service is represented in the pool of participants. It is accepted that whilst there is ad hoc feedback present in focus group 2, Chapter 9.6.2, it would have been interesting to gather participant feedback on their experience of the process more formally.

It is already discussed in Chapter 3 that as an Insider researcher, neutrality of position would not be achieved, but moreover was not desired because of the experience of the researcher is valued in terms of understanding the context, use of language and building trust with participants. It is acknowledged that being in a similar role as the participants, there were aspects of their experiences that resonated with the researcher. Reflexive thematic analysis provided for a positive framing of this, and an ongoing dialogue with the data and where this position was noted to have value and integral to the process as well all the analysis of data (Braun & Clarke, 2022), providing opportunity for depth of understanding of the nuanced information being shared.

10.4.4 Potential limitation and mitigation 1 - Appreciative Inquiry

A limitation of the Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to research, specifically front facing research, could be argued to be the positiveness of its position. This is considered in more depth in Chapter 3, however, to summarise here, the approach sought to explore what was working well to see how this could be built on. The context provided in the literature about social work wellbeing and the subsequent rationale for this study could give rise to questions about whether this study provided opportunity to consider the challenges of the social work role, the demands, and what this would mean for participants if space was not provided for this. It could be argued that this

could lead to frustration perhaps that participants had not been 'heard'. This is a balance in a number of ways, the role of the researcher being key. Firstly, the role of the researcher is of course to gather data, but this is undertaken in the context of a face to face connection between two people in the semi structured interviews and with a group of people in the focus groups. In thinking about semi structured interviews first, there is a balance to be sought in gathering data whilst building rapport, a sense of interest about what was being shared but also giving a direction through the use of the questions in terms of timing, knowing when to move on, when to push further, all the time considering a focus on positive experiences or what positive experiences could be, whilst maintaining attentiveness when participants are sharing what they have experienced as hard without appearing dismissive.

This is also evidenced in the focus groups, where the role of the researcher is to facilitate contributions through supporting the articulation of all viewpoints whilst drawing attention and direction to the focus of the study. This can require skill from the facilitator in a group setting with differing opinions to allow space for each other or people sharing the same opinions which can lead to a group direction away from the study. It was also the role of the facilitator in this study to recognise and deal with discussions that began to focus on negativity without giving cause for frustration as this would likely to mean participants would shut down and withdraw, feeling that their contribution was not needed or wanted. This was addressed in part at the outset of the semi structured interviews and both focus groups, where the study was outlined in the Information Sheet and verbally at the beginning of each session enabling participants to be aware of the focus and the likely direction of the questions and discussions. Skills developed by the researcher in social work practice, communication, mediation, listening, summarising for example (Trevithick, 2011) enabled the researcher to play an active role in managing discussion, reading cues to enable meaningful contributions. Through the use of reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher remained flexible and open to the data as key themes and sub themes were generated.

In considering the limitations to co-design in this study, the title of social worker is protected and to use the title requires registration with Social Work England following the successful completion of a professionally regulated course (Social Work England, 2024). All organisations have policy and procedures, and statutory agencies have duties that they must employ social workers to fulfil. This potentially could lead

to a sense that participation in a study such as this will have limited implications moving forward because there are legal and policy boundaries governing the role that cannot be changed (Needham, 2013). This was accounted for in the studies through the question design, presented in a way that took account for this rather than presenting this as a limitation for creativity and ideas, ensuring that there were parameters and that they were clear from the outset (Hannibal & Martkikke, 2019), detailed in Chapter 4.5.2. It is posited therefore that the research approach provided opportunity to work collaboratively and without such engagement, the intervention designed could have 'missed the mark' (Vella-Broderick et al., 2023, p841).

10.4.5 Potential limitation and mitigation 2 - Scope

The overall topic of this study, social worker wellbeing, has been the subject of extensive research to date. This is evidenced in Chapter 5, the results of the scoping review, where the initial literature search of the terms returned over 10,500 results. An initial limitation therefore is that is has been impossible to take account of each theory, model and research finding regarding social worker wellbeing. It has been possible however to consider and draw on those that best fit with the ontological and epistemological positions detailed in Chapter 3, that is the constructivist nature of knowledge and understanding through qualitative research with those with lived experience. Further coupled with data gathered through the scoping review about what was already known about social work wellbeing and what had already been implemented in terms of interventions, this informed how data was collected specifically question design and subsequently how this was thought about and analysed.

Importantly, this study did not seek to add to the existing literature regarding the definition of wellbeing. Whilst drawing on the premise that wellbeing is multi-faceted (McNaught, 2011), with both subjective and objective aspects, in line with the ontological and epistemological positions of social construction, this study sought to explore experience of wellbeing and meaning through individual and group discussion. This was achieved through asking a question at the outset of the semi structured interviews to allow for participants to consider their experience of this, 'when you think about wellbeing, what does this mean to you?' The style of this question was important in this study, because it provided for self-report to be explored at an early stage, considering that what wellbeing meant to individual participants would vary. It therefore

follows that the design of the intervention would equally need to provide for these different definitions and experiences.

10.4.6 Potential limitation and mitigation 3 - Scale

This study was small scale, limited to one area with a relatively small pool of participants. There were 9 participants in the semi structured interviews and 11 participants in the focus groups. Participants only took part in one stage of data collection and therefore the total number of participants was 20, just over two thirds of the employees in the service. It is asserted that this number of participants gave opportunity for rich and deep data to be gathered through the interviews and focus groups. Furthermore the alignment of themes across the stages of data collection, as evidenced in the triangulation of data (Chapter 8) and co-design of the intervention (Chapter 9), demonstrates that these findings provide an accurate and representative picture of social workers experiences. It is right to consider that this is representative of a tiny proportion of qualified social workers in the UK, which in November 2023 was reported by the regulatory body, Social Work England, to be over 100,000 (Social Work England, 2023). In considering therefore the transferability of the findings and the intervention design, that is whether this can be applied to other social work settings and contexts or indeed social workers, it is useful to return to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p44 in Nowell et al., 2017). Noting that their writing was in the context of considering trustworthiness in naturalistic research (p43), it sets out that trustworthiness of research is dependent on four factors, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, in Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability specifically is dependent on the researcher taking responsibility for providing thick description in order that those reading the findings can judge the transferability of the findings in their own setting (Nowell et al., 2017). It is considered the project design, in terms of interview and focus group questions, drew on the findings of the scoping review which reflected previous studies with social worker participants. Additionally, Chapter 4, Method, gives in depth detail about how the studies were conducted and with who. The statistical and contextual information provided in Chapter 3.8 contributes to a thick and detailed description. This strengthens the assertion that the findings could be transferable to other settings, as this positions the area in which data collection took place into the wider national context which reflects similar settings nationwide. The design of the intervention is constructivist in nature, considering individual experience and need, therefore adaptable

depending on the context of where it is used and the status of the employee. However, it could be more prudent, so that the intervention is fully reflective of the team or organisation, that the process of data collection and intervention co-design is repeated so that the lived experience is reflected accurately and represented in the intervention. It is posited that the methods in this thesis are descriptive and full, providing for this process to be followed well.

10.4.7 Potential limitation and mitigation 4 - Implementation

This study did not put the intervention into practice and therefore its effectiveness in supporting self-reported wellbeing has not been tested. However, it is noted that this was not the aim of the study and importantly, the process of discussion allowed for a focus on wellbeing and self-definition, a step back and a slowing down of the thought processes from the focus of day to day work. As such, although not tested, there could have been a value in the process for participants, the experience of being heard, their views valued and recorded and having opportunity to share together in a preferred future discussion and how this could be realised (McGonagle, 2015; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

One difference with the findings of the interviews and the literature such as Ravalier et al. (2020), is that this literature places an emphasis on developing a sense of personal and professional responsibility for wellbeing by individual social workers as well as managers and organisations. Focus group 2 framed the questions being asked from the perspective of the organisation, most likely the manager or supervisor towards the social worker, however, the Good Practice Toolkit (Ravalier et al., 2020) highlights the importance of developing personal and professional responsibility for wellbeing, particularly in thinking about self-reflection and self care. With this in mind, whilst it is considered that the intervention would most likely take the format of a conversation, this could be framed more explicitly. This is touched upon briefly above, with the constructivist approach providing for the dynamic process between the individual, their experience and context. However, although there is space for self-reflection and interaction, there could be a greater focus on what actions or behaviours individuals will adopt to better position themselves to experience wellbeing. Failure to do this may result in individuals considering that responsibility for their wellbeing is held entirely by their employer, this seems to be a short sighted approach in terms of self-reflection and responsibility. However, it is acknowledged that those experiencing high levels of

stress or burnout may indeed lack the ability, motivation or resources to employ self care strategies or indeed recognise that these are required.

10.5 Recommendations for future research

It is posited that this study provides new knowledge about the use of Appreciative Inquiry in the co-design and development an intervention to support social work wellbeing and provides an important contribution to the existing literature. The use of Appreciative Inquiry shifted the narrative that has been present in literature, albeit quite rightly, about the nature of the role, the challenges with recruitment and retention and working conditions. Whilst this study did not seek to minimise or challenge important research findings, this study adds to the discussion the possibility that change could be supported through using a strengths based participatory approach.

In considering opportunities for further research, it is posited that using the Appreciative Inquiry cycle and adopting Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to intervention design could provide for a collaborative and inclusive approach to organisational change and this is likely to be worthy of evaluation in terms of lasting improved outcomes.

An important outcome of this thesis is the co-design of the intervention to support self-reported wellbeing. The intervention drew on the themes generated in the data collection and provided for an individual approach to supporting wellbeing by the design of specific questions to consider individual experiences in the context of their organisation and what would help. There are research opportunities moving forward to establish the effectiveness of the intervention and possible adjustments or developments, this could include a small scale pilot study with social workers to test the intervention and further report on the outcomes.

10.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of the different stages of data collection and discussed these in the accepting limitations of this research, it is posited that the findings make a contribution to the knowledge base about the design of an intervention and make positive recommendations about the possibilities for future research context of wider literature and produced the overall findings of this study.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Scoping Review Protocol

<u>Background</u>

There is a wealth of research relating to staff wellbeing for public sector workers and in the last 15 years a growing literature base has considered staff wellbeing specifically for social workers. Staff wellbeing is an important topic for both employees and their employers (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018).

Working in organisations with high levels of difficult working conditions can have negative impacts on individual physiological and psychological health and wellbeing (Kinman & Grant, 2011; Ravalier, 2018). Organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, recruitment, retention and meeting business needs are likely to be poorer in organisations whose employees have poorer wellbeing. Furthermore, there is also a likely negative impact on service users who may be affected by changes of staff or poor service (Kiley et al.,2018; Truter, et al., 2017; Adamson et al., 2014).

Employers have responsibility in their duty of care for their employees (Unison 2014, Health and Safety Executive 2023) and a healthy workforce becomes a competitive advantage for employers (Grawitch et al., 2006) in both recruitment and retention, and therefore employers are willing to invest in strategies to increase staff wellbeing (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2012). Key studies undertaken by the British Association of Social Work (2018, 2023) report 40% of the social work workforce are considering leaving or planning to leave the profession and the current literature base evidences both organisational (e.g. hot desking) and individual factors (e.g. length of experience) that contribute to overall wellbeing and whether staff leave or remain in the profession (McFadden et al., 2014). The Health and Social Care sectors also consistently also have the highest levels of stress and mental health sickness absence when compared with other industries in the UK (Health and Safety Executive, 2019). There were an estimated 187,000 work related cases of ill health in 2019, 49% of these were stress, depression or anxiety and this is higher than other industries (Health and Safety Executive, 2019).

Work wellbeing strategies which aim to promote, maintain, and improve employee psychological health and wellbeing have increased in number and type since the 'Health, Work and Wellbeing' Government strategy in 2005 (Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and Health and Safety Executive 2005).

Physical activity can reduce the risk of stress and depression (NHS UK 2019) and studies such as that by Abdin et al., (2018) found physical activity such as yoga, walking or exercise was effective in improving staff wellbeing. Creative activities such as participative singing involving staff found the impact of singing on staff wellbeing potentially positive, recommending further study. (Steele & Foster, 2019; Skingley & Ross, 2018) Studies considering mindfulness techniques such as Roulston and Montgomery et al. (2016) noted positive changes in scores following a time limited mindfulness intervention.

This scoping review will identify what interventions have already been used and their effectiveness in improving social worker wellbeing at this time and identifying the existing research and pointing towards gaps (Peterson et al., 2016). The literature included will specifically relate to wellbeing interventions for social workers working in the UK to consider gaps in existing knowledge and highlight the importance of further research, as well as informing in greater detail the design of future interventions

Research objective

The objective of this scoping review is to identify the available quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods evidence about interventions that have been used to improve the wellbeing of social work staff and the effectiveness of these. The findings are intended to provide evidence to guide future research and inform future interventions.

Protocol design

The methods for this study are based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) and additions by Leval et al. (2010) scoping review methodology and will use the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) checklist.,. The method details six different stages;

- identifying the research question
- identifying relevant studies
- selecting studies

- charting the data

- collating, summarising and reporting the results

- consulting with relevant stakeholders (optional and not used in this study)

The PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018) contains 20 essential reporting items and 2 optional items for inclusion. The checklist will be used alongside the above method (Appendix 2) to ensure consistency and rigor.

Research questions

The research questions for this scoping review are:

- What interventions have been used to increase self-reported wellbeing for social work staff?

- What tools were used to measure wellbeing?

- How were the interventions experienced??

- Do the studies identify barriers to effectiveness?

Identifying relevant studies

This study is interested in the experience of social workers employed in the UK. This review will therefore consider qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies in order answer the above review research questions.

The following databases will be searched for both published and unpublished studies: PsychArticles, PubMed Central, Science Direct, PsycINFO, Web of Science and Google Scholar.

Initial search terms and their combinations will be as follows:

Wellbeing	Intervention	Social worker
Well-being	Activity	Local authority
Resilie*	Programme	Council
Self care	Support	social work
Mental health	Occupational health	
Happiness	Retention	
Stress*		

Absenteeism

Presenteeism

The search may identify further keywords relevant to the topic to be included and it is therefore proposed that an initial limited search using 2/3 databases is undertaken to identify any additional key words. Following this, a full search of all of the identified databases will be undertaken using all the identified keywords. A further 'by hand' search of the reference lists of identified articles to identify any additional relevant studies that have not already been identified. This follows the three-stage approach as outlined by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Aromataris & Munn, 2017),

Selecting studies

For studies to be included in the review, they are required to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Studies relating to qualified social workers employed in local authority social work positions
- Studies that investigate interventions that have been implemented to increase wellbeing for social work staff

Studies identified by the search will be reviewed by 2 researchers, initially looking at the title and abstract to establish if the article appears to meet the eligibility criteria. These studies will then be reviewed in full to ensure criteria is met.

Duplicate studies will be removed and studies removed at this stage noted.

Extracting and charting the data

The data will then be extracted from eligible studies and charted in a spreadsheet (Appendix 3). This will firstly include specific details about the article; source, title, author and date. The spreadsheet will secondly detail data relating to the research question; setting, design, intervention, measures used, findings and recommendations. A draft spreadsheet will be piloted on several articles to establish whether appropriate data is being charted to ensure the research questions are answered.

<u>Reporting the results</u>

The results will be reported in a narrative report. The narrative report will bring together the information gained from the studies and any identified themes that are generated from the data.

The report will also address any gaps identified and note recommendations from the studies regarding future actions.

<u>Limitations</u>

This is a scoping review with the aim of collating and synthesizing existing literature there will be no quality assessment of the articles included in this review.

Appendix 2 Prisma Reporting Checklist for Scoping Reviews

SECTION	ITEM	PRISMA-ScR CHECKLIST ITEM	REPORTED ON PAGE
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a scoping review.	48
ABSTRACT			
Structured summary	2	Provide a structured summary that includes (as applicable): background, objectives, eligibility criteria, sources of evidence, charting methods, results, and conclusions that relate to the review questions and objectives.	48
INTRODUCTION			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known. Explain why the review questions/objectives lend themselves to a scoping review approach.	49
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of the questions and objectives being addressed with reference to their key elements (e.g., population or participants, concepts, and context) or other relevant key elements used to conceptualize the review questions and/or objectives.	49
METHODS			
Protocol and registration	5	Indicate whether a review protocol exists; state if and where it can be accessed (e.g., a Web address); and if available, provide registration information, including the registration number.	Appendix 1
Eligibility criteria	6	Specify characteristics of the sources of evidence used as eligibility criteria (e.g., years considered, language, and publication status), and provide a rationale.	50-51
Information sources*	7	Describe all information sources in the search (e.g., databases with dates of coverage and contact with authors to identify additional sources), as well as the date the most recent search was executed.	51-52 Appendix 3
Search	8	Present the full electronic search strategy for at least 1 database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.	Appendix 1 Appendix 3
Selection of sources of evidence†	9	State the process for selecting sources of evidence (i.e., screening and eligibility) included in the scoping review.	49. 50-51

SECTION	ITEM	PRISMA-ScR CHECKLIST ITEM	REPORTED ON PAGE
Data charting process‡	10	Describe the methods of charting data from the included sources of evidence (e.g., calibrated forms or forms that have been tested by the team before their use, and whether data charting was done independently or in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.	Appendix 2 78
Data items	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought and any assumptions and simplifications made.	49-50 Appendix 2
Critical appraisal of individual sources of evidence§	12	If done, provide a rationale for conducting a critical appraisal of included sources of evidence; describe the methods used and how this information was used in any data synthesis (if appropriate).	n/a
Synthesis of results	13	Describe the methods of handling and summarizing the data that were charted.	78-80
RESULTS			
Selection of sources of evidence	14	Give numbers of sources of evidence screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with reasons for exclusions at each stage, ideally using a flow diagram.	78-80
Characteristics of sources of evidence	15	For each source of evidence, present characteristics for which data were charted and provide the citations.	84-88
Critical appraisal within sources of evidence	16	If done, present data on critical appraisal of included sources of evidence (see item 12).	n/a
Results of individual sources of evidence	17	For each included source of evidence, present the relevant data that were charted that relate to the review questions and objectives.	84-88 Appendix 2
Synthesis of results	18	Summarize and/or present the charting results as they relate to the review questions and objectives.	84-88
DISCUSSION			
Summary of evidence	19	Summarize the main results (including an overview of concepts, themes, and types of evidence available), link to the review questions and objectives, and consider the relevance to key groups.	88-97
Limitations	20	Discuss the limitations of the scoping review process.	97

SECTION	ITEM	PRISMA-ScR CHECKLIST ITEM	REPORTED ON PAGE
Conclusions	21	Provide a general interpretation of the results with respect to the review questions and objectives, as well as potential implications and/or next steps.	88-97
FUNDING			
Funding	22	Describe sources of funding for the included sources of evidence, as well as sources of funding for the scoping review. Describe the role of the funders of the scoping review.	n/a

Appendix 3 Studies Charted in Scoping Review

Key

- Organisational intervention – permanent – Pink 9
- Not included, did not meet criteria – Green 14
- Article comment – no measures – Yellow 6

Author/s	Year	Title	Source	Research setting	Design and measures	Key findings	Recommendations	Include?
Ahern, E. C., Sadler, L. H., Lamb, M. E., & Gariglietti, G. M.	(2017)	Wellbeing of profession-als working with sus-pected victims of child sexual exploitation	*Child Abuse Re-view, 26*(2), 130-140. doi:10.1002/car. 2439	Local Authority	Exploration of interventions to manage wellbeing through in-terview 5 social workers in LA b structured interview	Informal and individ-ual support – having time off, peer support and out of work activi-ties	Preventative coping methods	Yes
Alford, W. K. , Malouff, J. M. & Osland, K. S..	(2005)	Written Emotional Ex-pression as a Coping Method in Child Protec-tive Services Officers.	International Journal of Stress Management, 12(2), 177–187					Not UK
Almond, T. J.	(2014).	Working with children and young people with harmful sexual behav-iours: Exploring impact	*Journal of Sex-ual Aggres-sion, 20*(3), 333-353.	Local Authority	Exploration of interventions to manage wellbeing through in-terview		Supervision, including outside clinical supervi-sion	Yes

		on practitioners and sources of support.	doi:10.1080/135 52600.2013.836 576		16 social workers in LA\n\nSemi structured interview			
Antonopoulou, P., Killian, M., & Forrester, D.	(2017).	Levels of stress and anxiety in child and family social work: Workers' perceptions of organizational structure, professional support and workplace opportunities in children's services in the UK.	*Children & Youth Services Review, 76*, 42-50. doi:10.1016/j.chi ldyouth.2017.02. 028	Local authority	193 across 5 authorities	Structural role of organisation and workers wellbeing and job satisfaction\n\n'Work enabling conditions' (priority, small team, high supervisor ratio, practical support'	Further research about the impact of less stressed workers and with families	Yes
Bae, J., Jennings, P. F., Hardeman, C. P., Kim, E., Lee, M., Littleton, T., & Saasa, S.	(2020).	Compassion satisfaction among social work practitioners: The role of Work–Life balance.	*Journal of Social Service Research, 46*(3), 320-330.					No – not UK

Biggart, L., Ward, E., Cook, L., Schofield, G.	(2017)	The team as a secure base, promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work	Children and Youth Services Review, 83, 119-130 doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth	8 local authorities	52 phone SSI Thematic analysis	Socio-affective needs (for care and protection) are met through sharing experiences with colleagues. Supervisors that have influence about availability of support	Further research about secure base teams and burnout Further training for managers about importance of socio-affective needs	Not intervention
Coffey, M., Dugdill, L., & Tattersall, A.	(2009)	Designing a stress management intervention in social services.	International Journal of Workplace Health Management,					No – study about the design of an intervention rather than evaluation of outcome
Evans, S., & Huxley, P.	(2009)	Factors associated with the recruitment and retention of social workers in Wales: Employer and employee perspectives.	Health & Social Care in the Community, 17(3), 254-266. doi:10.1111/j.1365-	Local Authority	Survey – demographic and free text	No evidence of effectiveness on recruitment / retention 'few initiatives or incentives appear to be associated with vacancy	Employers to promote value indicators – staff satisfaction. Listen to staff and act on concerns	Yes

			2524.2008.0081 8.x			/ turnover rates' Intention to leave – subjective feelings of job satisfaction / employer value and pay		
Gibson, M., & Iwaniec, D.	(2003)	An empirical study into the psychosocial reactions of staff working as helpers to those affected in the aftermath of two traumatic incidents.	*British Journal of Social Work, 33*(7), 851. doi:10.1093/bjsw/33.7.851	SW included in other staff groups (clergy, Police)	Semi structured interview Survey	Trauma re	Trauma training to prepare for further crisis responses	Not children's SW
Grant, L., Kinman, G., & Baker, S.	(2015)	Developing an "emotional curriculum" for social workers.	'Put on Your Own Oxygen Mask before Assisting Others': Social Work Educator...: Bath Spa Library (oclc.org)	Higher Education	Survey Semi structured interview		Importance of developing an evidence based emotional curriculum	Students

	(2021a).	Improving social worker wellbeing helps support families across the county	Right Vision Media	Local Authority children's services	UK SW Intervention but no measures	Press release about SW offering coaching – 'life changing'	No evaluation or measures	Article comment, no measures
Jeyasingham, D.	(2016)	Open spaces, supple bodies? considering the impact of agile working on social work office practices.	*Child & Family Social Work, 21*(2), 209-217. doi:10.1111/cfs.12130	2 Children's SW offices	Observation and interview	Office space as a valuable resource for discussion, reflection and collegiate support Staff are more inhibited and sapped of their sense of urgency	Greater understanding of what SW need in terms of space – how much time is mobile activity, how much time do they need to be still and in the same place, how much time do they need to be alone, with others, and observing others at work. Issue of 'residual practices'	Yes

Kinman, G., & Grant, L.	(2017a).	Building resilience in early-career social workers: Evaluating a multi-modal intervention.	*British Journal of Social Work, 47*(7), 1979.	Local Authority	UK SW			No – SW were in ASYE
Mensinga, J.	(2011)	The feeling of being a social worker: Including yoga as an embodied practice in social work education.	*Social Work Education, 30*(6), 650-662. doi:10.1080/026 15479.2011.586 562		SW			Not UK
Moriarty, J., Gillen, P., Mallett, J., Manthorpe, J., Schröder, H., & McFadden, P.	(2020)	Seeing the finish line? retirement perceptions and wellbeing among social workers.	*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(13), 4722.		Survey Interview	Multitude of influence factors that affect individuals perception and plans for later life employment	Caution and sensitivity in offering incentives and altering entitlements to retire	No intervention

Parry-Jones, B., Grant, G., McGrath, M., Caldock, K., Ramcharan, P., & Robinson, C. A.	(1998)	Stress and job satisfaction among social workers, community nurses and community psychiatric nurses: Implications for the care management model.	*Health & Social Care in the Community, 6*(4), 271-285. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2524.1998.00123.x	Adult services	Postal Survey			Not children's workforce
Pithouse, A., Brookfield, C., & Rees, A.	(2019)	Why are social workers in wales the 'happiest'? A conundrum explored.	*British Journal of Social Work, 49*(7), 1987-2006. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy119	Local Authority	Online Survey	Organisationally well immersed population, no invasive management		Yes
Puffett, N.	(2014)	*.Authorities Bring Out Cheque Book to Recruit and Keep Social Workers,*	CYP Now	Country wide local authorities	Article about recruitment and retention incentives across the country			Article comment no measures.

Ravalier, J. M.	(2019a)	Psycho-social working conditions and stress in UK social workers.	*British Journal of Social Work, 49*(2), 371-390.	Local Authority	Cross sectional survey Single open ended questions 1333 participants	High demands, low levels of control poor managerial support related to SW stress	Improvements in working conditions required	Not intervention
Ravalier, J. M., Wainwright, E., Smyth, N., Clabburn, O., Wegrzynek, P., & Loon, M.	(2020)	Co-creating and evaluating an app-based well-being intervention: The HOW (healthier outcomes at work) social work project.	*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(23), 8730.	Local Authority	PAR – focus groups, SSI and steering groups MSIT GHQ-12	Co-created initiatives have the potential to improve working conditions for frontline workers	Exploration of a broadened app -incorporating psychoeducational components and improving peer support	Yes
Ravalier, J., Wainwright, E., Clabburn, O., Loon, M., & Smyth, N.	(2020)	Working conditions and wellbeing in UK social workers.	*Journal of Social Work, ,* 1468017320949361.	7 LA, 676 SW	SW UK	Working conditions scored better than previous studies - Demands, relationships with service users, peers and managers		Not intervention

193

						and change communication were main difficulties cited		
Rose, S., & Palattiyil, G.	(2020)	Surviving or thriving? enhancing the emotional resilience of social workers in their organisational settings.	*Journal of Social Work, 20*(1), 23-42. doi:10.1177/146 8017318793614	Local authority team = Scotland	13 SW Semi structured interviews	Multiple challenges to personal resilience, for SW to thrive factors than undermine resilience should be resolved	Recommendations about peer relationships, informal support and structured opportunities for professional development	Yes
Scourfield, J., Maxwell, N., Venn, L., Carpenter, J., Stepanova, E., & Smith, R.	(2020)	Social work fast track programmes: Tracking retention and progression: Interim report, July 2020.		UK SW employed via Step up or Frontline pathways	Questionaries – Frontline Survey to Step up		Too early to provide holistic analysis	Too early to provide outcome
Searle, R. H., & Patent, V.	(2013a)	Recruitment, retention and role slumping in child protection: The	*British Journal of Social Work, 43*(6), 1111-1129	Local Authority	Focus groups Survey 'desk top' research of documents	Programmes assisting in retention and recruitment of staff	Further focus required on push factors	Yes

		evaluation of in-service training initiatives.						
Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J., & White, M.	(2007)	Depression in the profession: Social workers' experiences and perceptions.	*British Journal of Social Work, 37*(2), 281-298	Local Authority	500 survey 50 interviews	Identifies that work plays a part in depression, high demands, lack of control and boundaries	Exploration of strategies that could support retention – quality and availability of supervision, flexibility in hours, attention to the limits and boundaries of the tasks and awareness of mental il health	No intervention
Community care								
2019 April	2019	Zero agency staff position down to focus on staff wellbeing, says newly 'outstanding' council's DCS		SW staff – North Tyneside		IT system Practice Framework (SoS) Discount at gyms		Article comment no measures

June	2019	A 3 month career break stopped me quitting				3 month career break	Self report of being re-freshed	Article comment no measures
July	2019	Access to free high quality tea and coffee		SW staff, Kent, and Sandwell	Randomised buildings	Free tea and coffee supplies	Sense of being valued, building community as people made drinks to-gether	SW staff in-cluded ASYE
Nov	2019	How this council is creating a safe sup-portive environment for children's social workers		Hampshire	Resilience and mindfulness training, counselling, supervi-sion	One example of an agency worker be-coming permanent		Article comment no measures

Appendix 4 Information Sheet

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<u>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET</u>

</div>

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet. Its purpose is to tell you about this research study, why it is being conducted and what will be expected of you if you give your consent to participate in a face to face interview.

This study is being conducted at Bath Spa University by Claire Yates and all questions should be directed to her in the first instance, contact details at the end of this sheet.

<div align="center">

<u>Background and purpose of this study</u>

</div>

Key studies undertaken by the British Association of Social Work (2017, 2018) report 40% of the social work workforce are considering leaving or planning to leave the profession and the current literature base evidences both organisational and individual factors that contribute to overall wellbeing and whether staff leave or remain. Health and Social Care sectors consistently report the highest levels of stress and mental health sickness absence in the UK.

The overall aim of this study is to explore whether a co-designed intervention can improve the self- reported wellbeing of social work staff,

<div align="center">

<u>Who can participate?</u>

</div>

To participate in this study, you must be a qualified social worker, or work in a team employing social workers, employed by a local authority and to participate in the interviews, not be in your assessed and supported year of employment (ASYE).

<div align="center">

<u>Being interviewed</u>

</div>

You will be interviewed by Claire Yates, who is undertaking this study. She will contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and venue. The interview will consist of a number of pre planned questions and opportunity to discuss your experiences more generally.

You will be asked to read through the information sheet again and if you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming you understand what

the study is about and giving your informed consent to participate and for your data to be used.

Timescale

Face to face interviews will take place between November 2021 to January 2022. It is anticipated that these interviews will last for up to an hour.

Feedback

You will not receive any feedback following your individual completion in the study, however you will be provided with debrief information regarding the nature of the study and support resources. The full study will be available after June 2023.

Taking part in a focus group

The focus group will be led by Claire Yates. She will contact you to discuss dates, times, and a venue for the focus group. You will meet with up to 5 other participants and be asked for your ideas about interventions that could be used to support positive wellbeing in the workplace.

You will be asked to read through the information sheet again and if you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming you understand what the study is about and give your informed consent to take part and for your data to be used.

Timescale for this study

The focus groups will take place between January 2022 to February 2022 and last no longer than 90 minutes.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, GDPR requirements and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Claire Yates and study Supervisors Professor Ravalier and Dr Wainwright.

The study does not require personal details to be included that will enable individuals to be identified.

If you participate in the focus group, you are required to keep information and attendance of other participants in the group confidential.

Specific information regarding GDPR

Bath Spa University is the sponsor for this study based in the United Kingdom. We will be using information from you in order to undertake this study and will act as the data controller for this study. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. We will not keep any personally identifiable information about you. Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will not keep the information about you that we have already obtained. Individual data will not be able to be withdrawn once analysis of the data has started, therefore the cut off for withdrawal will be 12 weeks after the end of the last focus group being completed. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally identifiable information possible. You can find out more about how we use your information by contacting the research team.

Dissemination of results

Results of the complete study will be shared firstly in the form of doctoral thesis.

Should the study be subsequently published in part or whole, it will be available as a journal article and online.

Deciding whether to participate

You do not have to participate in this study, participation is entirely voluntary. The information you share will be anonymous and your personal details and individual responses to questions will not be given to your employer and your participation does not form part of any process relating to your status as an employee.

Your organisation has agreed that you can participate in this study during work time. Your participation will help provide a picture of staff wellbeing and how this can be improved.

Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact Claire Yates. This study will involve questions relating to your personal wellbeing, if you are concerned about the personal impact of these types of questions, please do not take part. If you participate in this study and then become concerned, please withdraw. There are organisations who are available to support you if required.

Any questions?

Please contact Claire Yates or supervisors Professor Ravalier and Dr Wainwright.

Contact details:

Claire Yates	********@bathspa.ac.uk
Professor Ravalier	**********@bathspa.ac.uk
Dr Wainwright	**********@bathspa.ac.uk

Appendix 5 Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study

Exploring a co-designed intervention to improve self-reported social work staff wellbeing

Activity for which consent is sought: FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW ☐

                                        FOCUS GROUP ☐

(PLEASE TICK)

Name of Researcher: Claire Yates

The overall aim of this project is to explore whether interventions can improve the self-reported wellbeing of social work staff, which interventions are effective, and the challenges in these being effective.

1.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet ☐ for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2.   I confirm I am not experiencing a stress related illness. ☐

3.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free ☐ to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. I understand that once analysis of the data has begun, it will not be possible for my individual data to be removed.

4.   I understand that any personal information that I provide to the ☐ researchers will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that

my data will be stored electronically through audio recording if I have taken part in interview or focus group, through handwritten and electronic notes. I am aware of the arrangements for the storage, access and destruction of these records. I also confirm that I will not reveal information regarding other participants if I am part of a focus group or intervention.

5.   I agree to take part in the above study as detailed below:

Please indicate the following:

I agree to participate: ▉

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature
(if different from researcher)

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Copies: 1 for participant
              1 for researcher

Appendix 6 Debrief Sheet

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

Thank you for taking part in this study.

This study is exploring social work wellbeing, acknowledging that social work is challenging role which can cause stress and burnout for staff. Your contribution has helped us know about your experiences day to day and has helped us think about interventions that could be in place to increase your wellbeing about work.

Some of the topics you have talked about may have had an emotional impact on your so If you were affected by the issues raised in this study, you may find the following information helpful:

MIND, the mental health charity www.mind.org.uk 03000 123 3393, text 86463

Samaritans, www.samaritans.org 116 123

Release the Pressure 0800 1070160

THANK YOU

References

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