

# Perceptions of Risk in Disability Services



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# This Presentation...

- ✓ **Presents findings of a recently concluded PhD research which examined how risk is perceived, experienced, and approached in social care practice and in disability services in particular**
- ✓ **It briefly outlines the background & the methods informing this research**
- ✓ **It presents insights into how risk is assessed and managed in day-to-day practice and the challenges faced by service users, social care workers and managers in managing day-to-day risks**
- ✓ **Finally, by outlining the findings of this study, this presentation demonstrates how different risk interpretations can influence the quality of social care provision & how an understanding of risk via first-hand experiences and perceptions of social care workers, service managers and service users can become a valuable tool in developing more coherent policies in disability services**



## **Kaila (Social Care Worker)...**

*“It's all about covering your ass. It's all about protecting, protecting, protecting. That's all we do all day long. And that's being facilitated by our legislation and by our laws...Choice is a buzz word, it's a nice word, but when I am working with a service user...if they make a choice are the repercussions of that choice on me? That's what we are thinking when we are working.”*



**Vulnerability**

**Health & Wellbeing**

**Litigation**

**Wise/Unwise choices**

**Independence**

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**Risk**

**Capacity**

**Protection**

**Positive Risks Taking**

**Human & Statutory Rights**

**Consequences**



**Accountability**

**Choice**

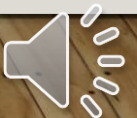
**Duty of care**

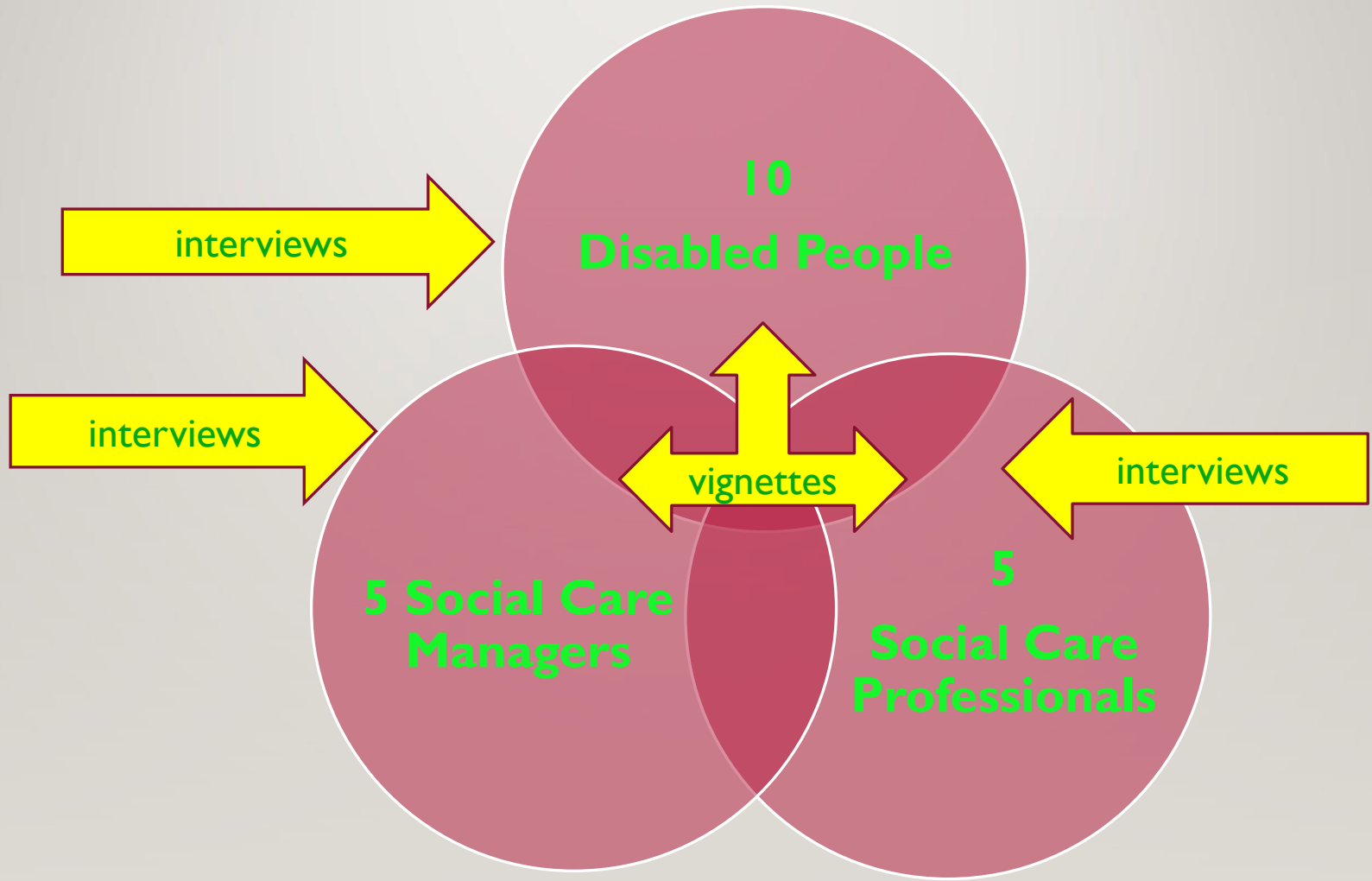
**Autonomy**

**Non of your business...**

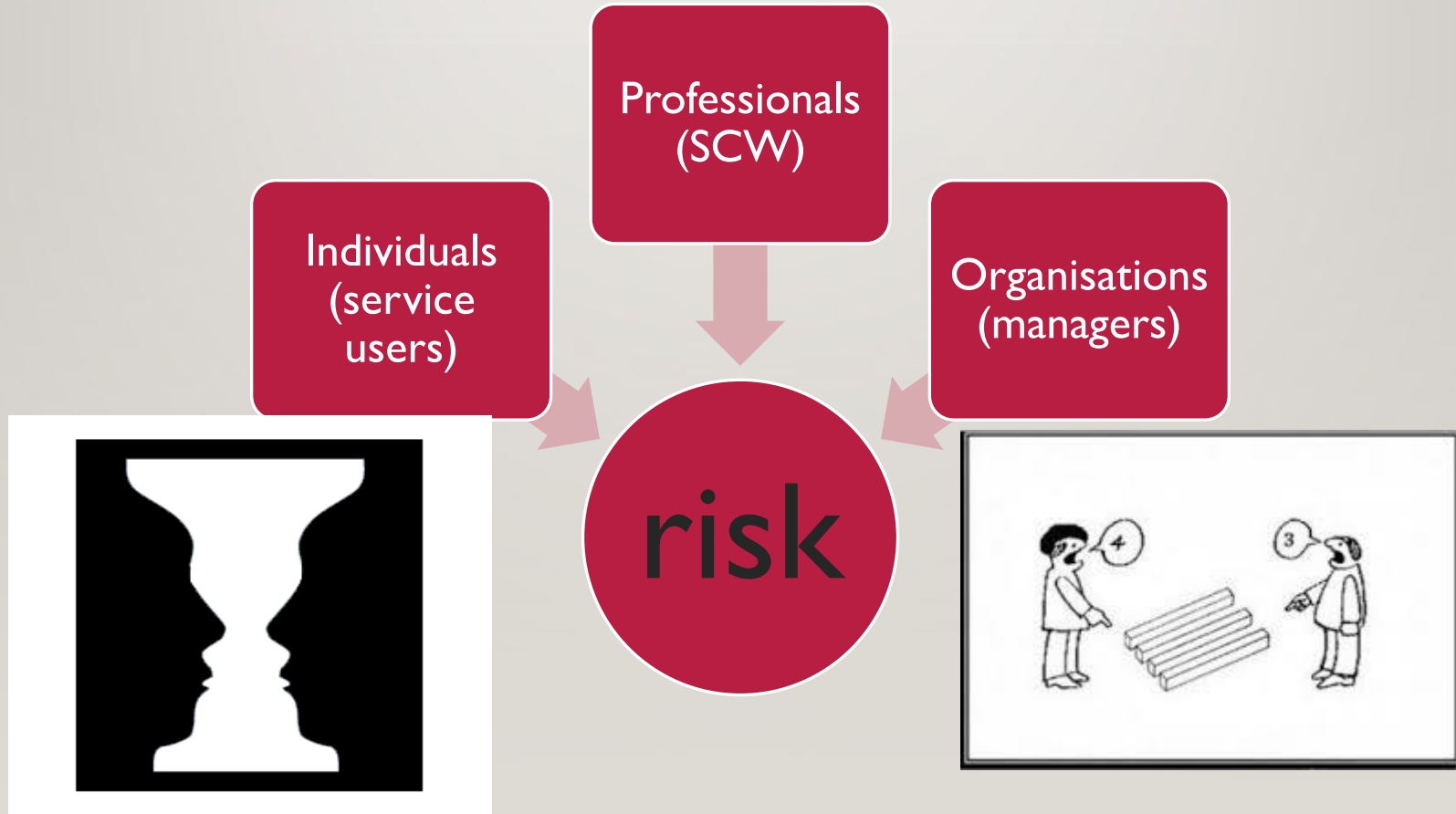
**BALANCE???**

**HIQA/Regulations**





## Different perspectives of risk...



## 3 Vignettes – hypothetical service user ‘Bernie’:



Smoking in  
bed



Showering  
alone /  
unsteady  
feet



Not  
following  
SLT  
recommend  
ations of a  
'safe diet'



# 'RISK SOCIETY' IN SOCIAL CARE

RISK AVOIDANCE IN SOCIAL CARE...

FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES, BLAMING AND ACCOUNTABILITY...

...RISK AVERSIVE CULTURE

“THE NARRATIVE OF RISK IS A NARRATIVE OF IRONY...WITH WHICH THE HIGHLY DEVELOPED INSTITUTIONS OF MODERN SOCIETY...ATTEMPT TO ANTICIPATE WHAT CANNOT BE ANTICIPATED”  
(BECK, 2006, P. 329)

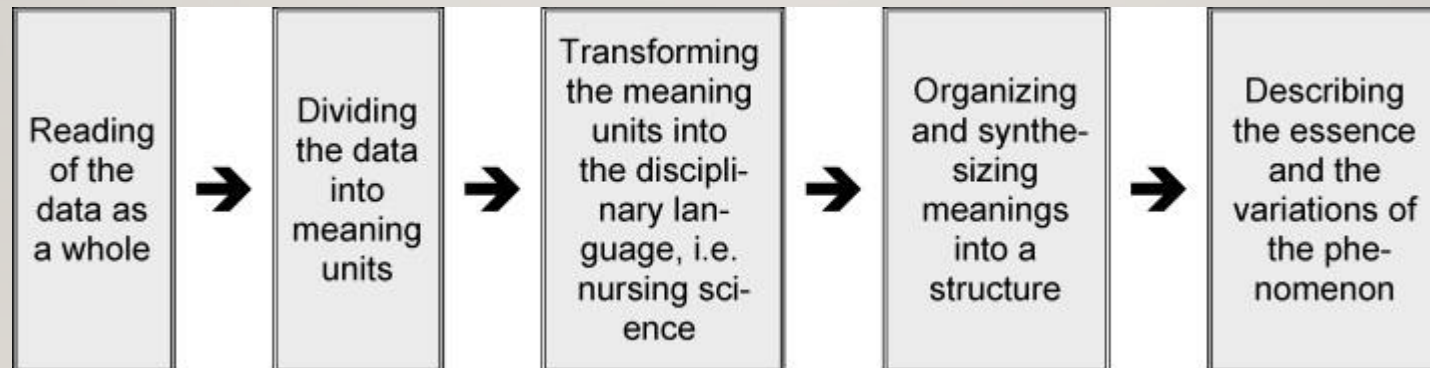
Often in order to protect from danger and risk...liberties are being limited (Beck, 2006)





## Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method of analysis...

...aims to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by a human through the identification of essential themes...



(GIORGI, 2010; A. GIORGI, B. GIORGI, MORLEY, 2017)



## The essential themes of risk in disability services are:

- 1) A perception that disabled people are especially vulnerable and should take fewer risks than non-disabled people, which was most often expressed through the notion that the same activity is riskier if a person is disabled.
- 2) A lack of clarity and understanding around how to manage competing demands such as duty of care, safety, independence and the right to take risks and make choices.
- 3) Fear of potential liability resulting in services becoming preoccupied with the management of risk and risk assessments, which imposes a bureaucratic burden as staff and services seek to cover their backs.
- 4) The subjective nature of risk assessment and the management of risk that was influenced by factors including conflicting views amongst social care workers and managers, competing demands, fear of liability, and by the perception that service users are particularly vulnerable and therefore need more protection.



**Risk related decisions are made by risk managers, whereas the consequences of these decisions are endured by distanced recipients (Beck, 2011).**

**Risk assessment-scientific constituent**

**Risk management-political component**

- **Risk Assessment – Service Managers**
- **Risk Management – Social Care Practitioners**
- **Risk Regulation – HIQA**
- **Risk Communication – With Service User ???**

But it's my risk!



*Honestly, it's all about insurance and covering the organisation's back. So, I don't necessarily think that the risk assessments are always there to protect the person as opposed to protecting the organisations against being sued (Jane, Manager).*



## **Implications for service users and for social care:**

It is abundantly clear that how risk is perceived and consequently approached in practice can influence service users autonomy and independence. As such, there is a clear connection between service users' ability to live an autonomous life and social care practitioners' competence to support them in achieving this goal. Disabled people want to engage in positive risk-taking, they want to make choices around risks, they even want to take risks and make mistakes, but the findings here show that service user risk-taking remains limited, and their involvement in decision-making around risk is almost always lacking. Service users choices are bounded by what services deem safe options.



## What can we do to change this?

1. Listen to the service user who is the expert of their own choices & risks
2. Professional development – Human Rights, Legal Capacity Training
3. Include service users in the assessment of risk
4. Do not be afraid to challenge and educate your colleagues/managers
5. Distinguish between what you think is the right thing to do & what the service user chooses to do





THANK  
YOU

