



**Perceptions around
professionalisation in
social care work in Ireland**


SCI

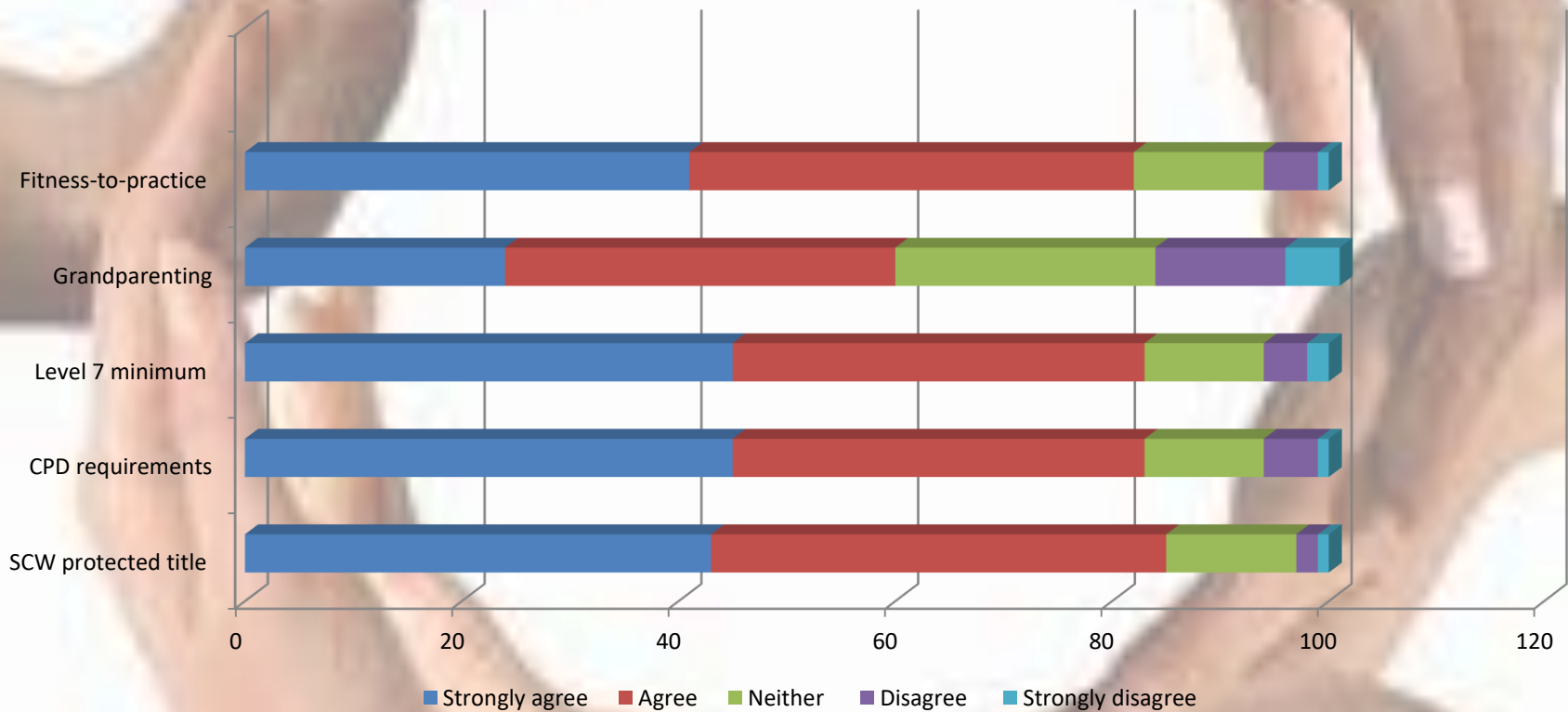
A Workers Advisory Group study

Dr Martin Power and Dr Saintuya Dashdondog.

<https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/handle/10379/17395>

A little recent history.

Registration awareness study (n= 726). Levels of awareness.



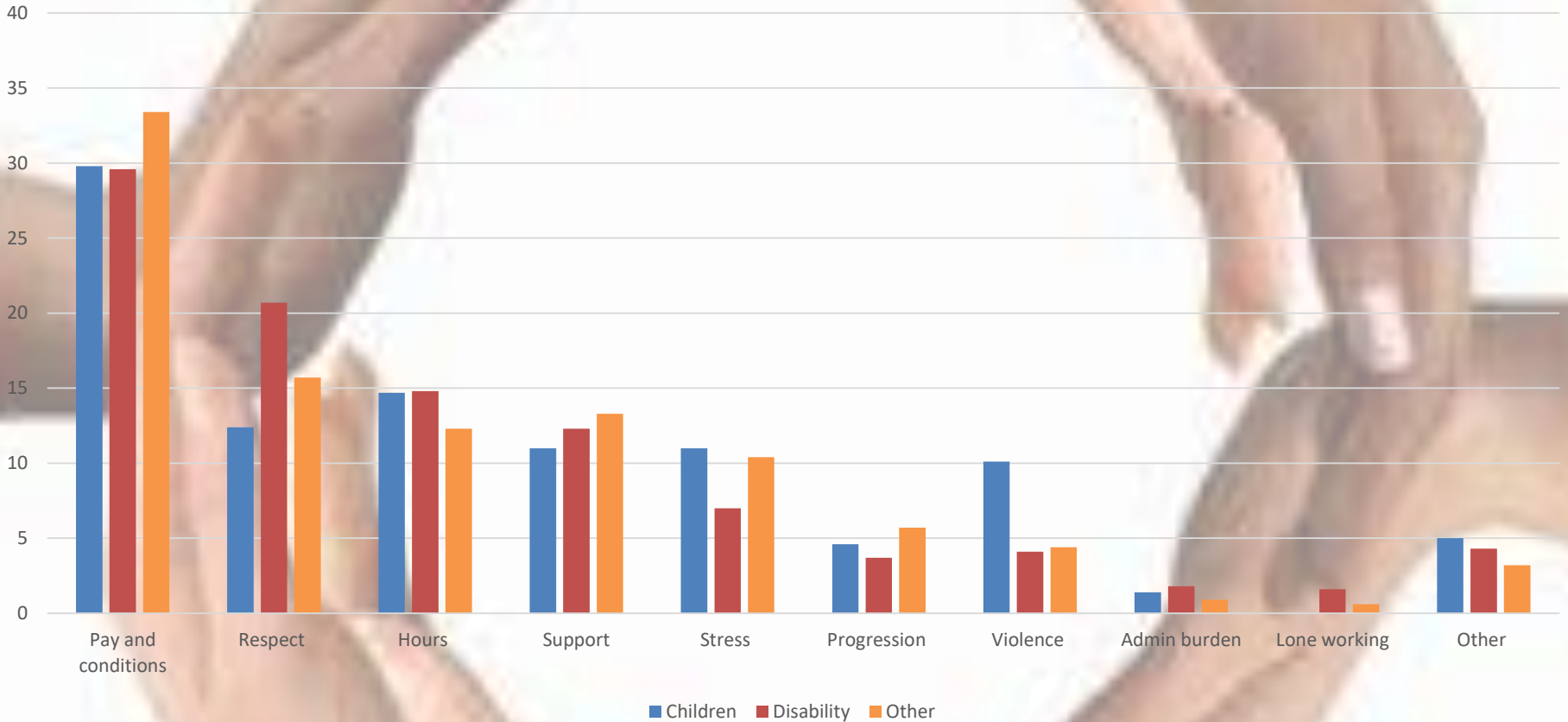
Power, M., & D’Arcy, P. (2108). Statutory registration awareness amongst social care workers.

Themes from interviews (n=16).

1. Information and registration - Length of time registration has been discussed and absence of a specific date, and conflicting information and lack of information.
2. Workplace relations - Job titles and multiple titles, lack of boundaries between roles and responsibilities, absence of social care staff at management levels.
2. Working in social care versus being a social care worker: Registration opportunity or burden - Experience of regulation, grandparenting, localisation of experience, isolation and fragmentation.

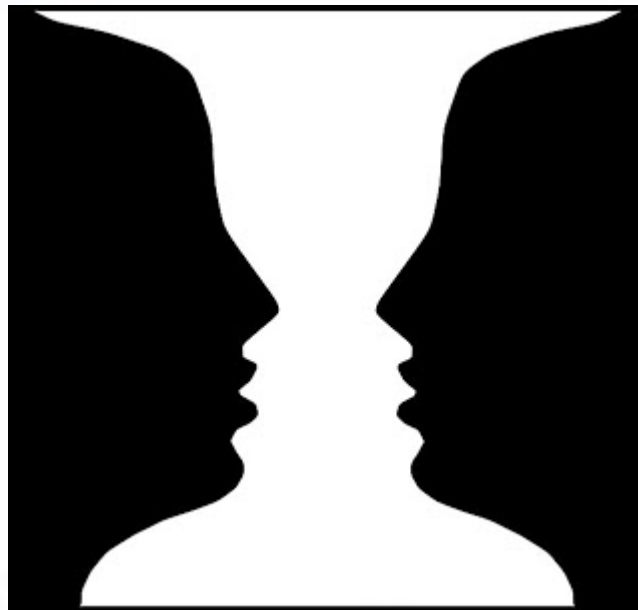
“we’re told to be a shift leader, you can only be a shift leader if you are a social care worker with a minimum level seven degree...But then they’re also told... if you’re not a social care worker and you’re on the sleepover you’re still the shift leader. But then we’re told that even though you may not be a social care worker, the social care worker is always the shift leader (5 SCW).”

Recruitment and retention (n= 557).



Power, M., & Burke, C. (2021). Recruitment and retention in social care work in Ireland.

Perceptions of social care work and professionalisation in Ireland: A Workers Advisory Group study.



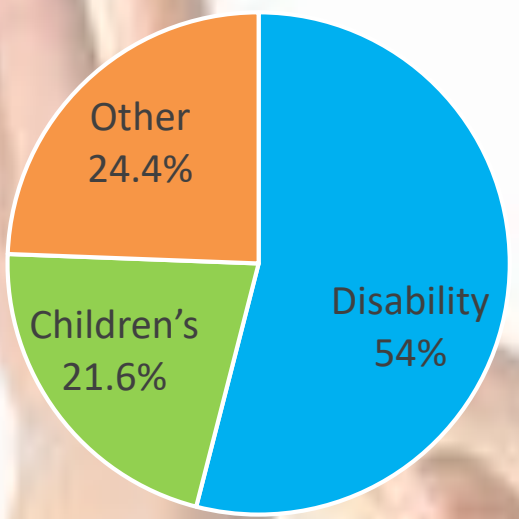
<http://www.brandstoryonline.com/see-face-vase-image/>

Online survey via MS forms for 3 weeks in November 2021.
Total of 360 responses (n=360).
Tick box options or Likert scales for questions.
Follow up interviews – 12 phone/online interviews, most participants very experienced. Public sector 6/voluntary 4/community 2.

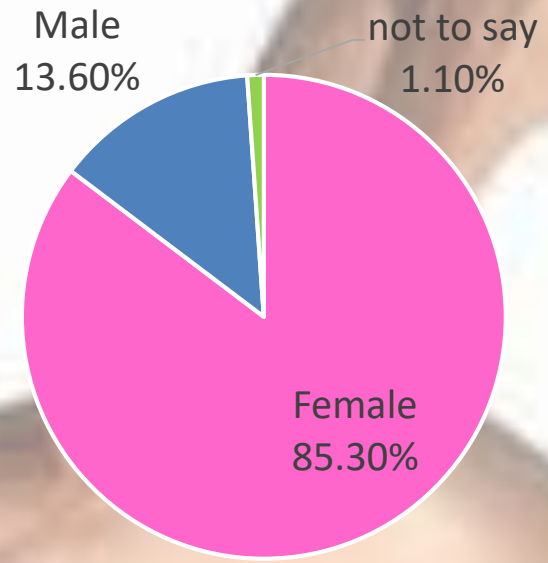
Sections.

- Organisational perceptions of social care work.
- Others (ie. state, public, other professions, unions) and social care workers perceptions of social care work.
- Social care workers perceptions of registration.

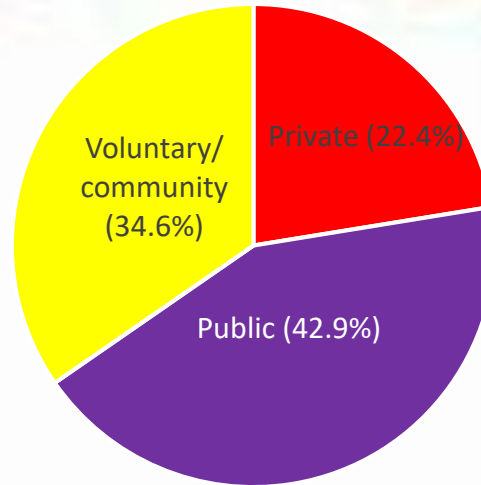
Sector



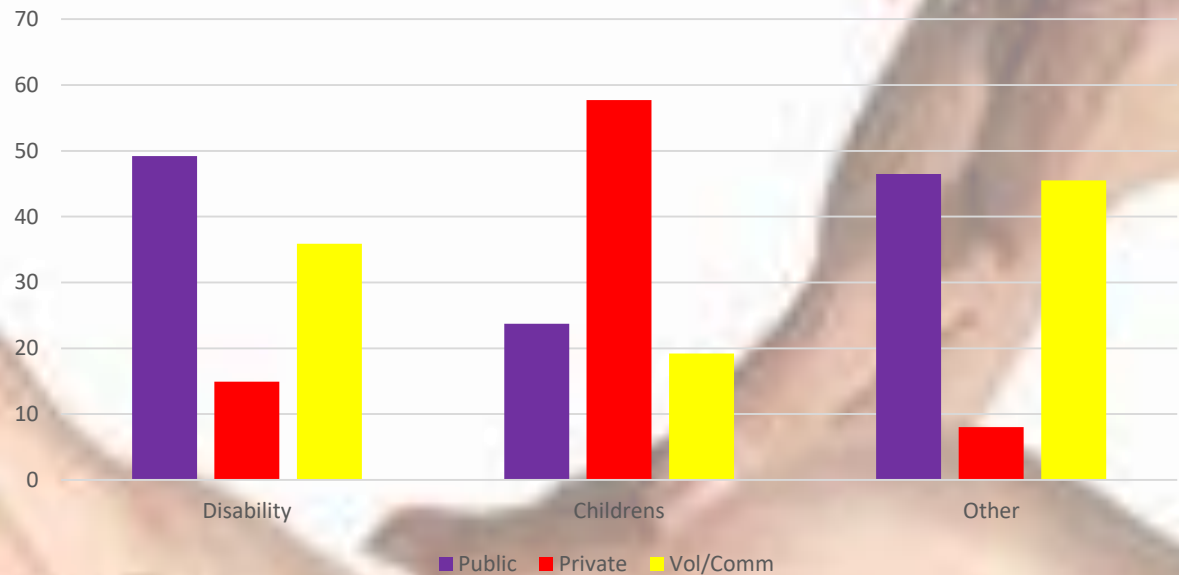
Gender

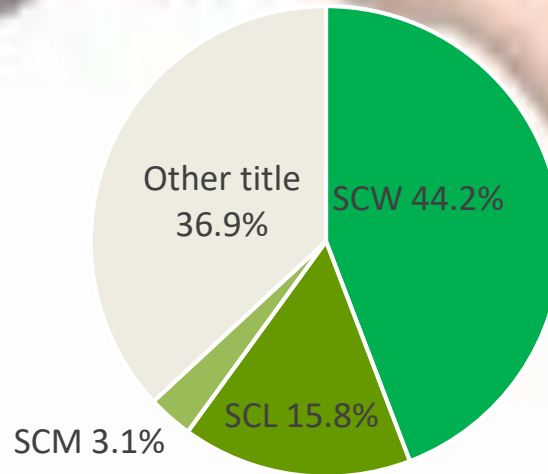


Organisation types.



Type of organisation by sector.



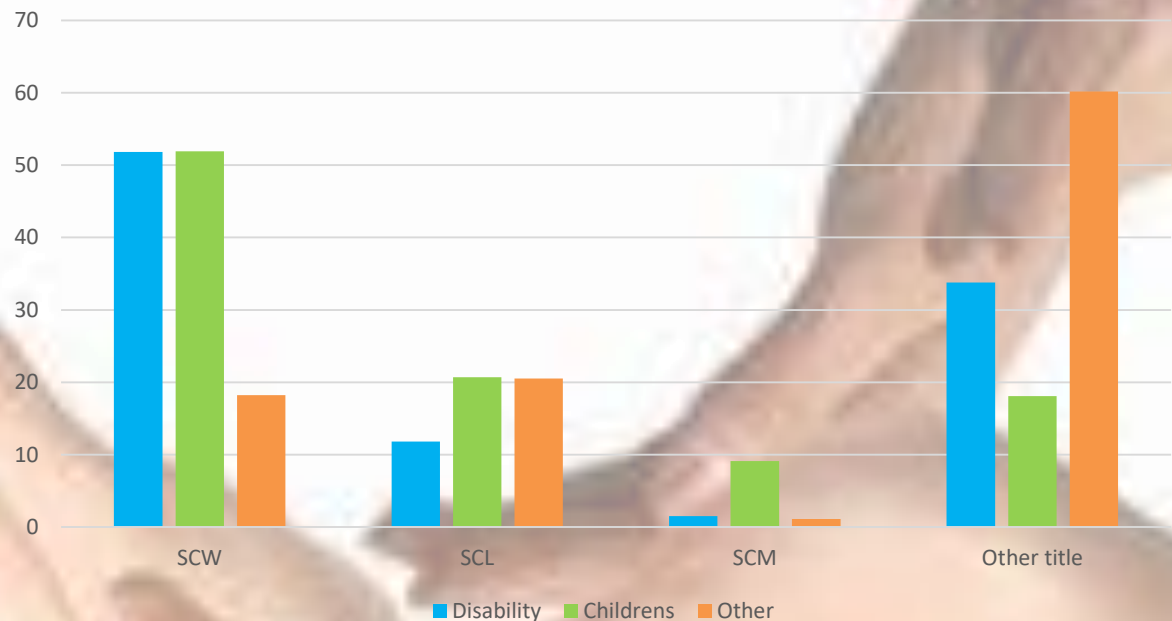


Job title.

SCW – social care worker.

SCL – social care leader.

SCM – social care manager.



Summary of perceptions of organisations.

There are role models for many, managers have a decent understanding of social care work and are generally supportive, with supervision and line management most often by a social worker/leader or manager, and organisations often support engagement in education and training. At the same time, organisations are less good at promoting social care work and unions are seen as largely ineffective on social care worker issues.

The use of the professional title is common but not standard, and roles and responsibilities are often ambiguous, while progression pathways and opportunities continue to be an significant issue.

These factors can help to explain why social care work is still often seen as a vocation rather than a profession, which is likely shaped by views that wages do not reflect the demands of the job, particularly as social care workers feel there are far too many risks to have to manage, and often with insufficient staff numbers. Thus, staff turnover is a challenge in many organisations.

“a lot of services now, still are employing social care workers but they’re called project workers, frontline workers, family support workers, etc. I think there’s always a confusion between titles...So it’s very much organisation-centred whether there’s a defined developmental ladder (Na08).”

“I’m a social care leader at the top of my scale probably for the last 15 years. So I’m not going to get promoted, I’m not going to further, my financial prospects, because I’m literally at the top at where I am and I don’t see a way out of it. (Ah20).”

“it's generally like the money has a lot to do with it, the pay has a lot to do with it, I think there isn't really any way to progress in social care...if you're working for one of the private social care, you know, that's not a HSE funded one, like your salary is very low, you know. And then, if you want to buy a house, or you want to have, the only thing you can do is kind of get out of it and go to something like HSE, you know, as a disability officer, or whatever (Nh20).”

Summary of perceptions of social care work (others and social care workers).

Other professionals often do not have a good understanding of social care work and tend not to value the input of social care workers in the same way as that of other professions.

The public have little awareness of social care work and social care workers consistently have to explain what social care work is, and thus as with organisations the public are felt to view social care work more as a vocation than a profession.

Social care workers are proud of the work they do and many work with social care workers they feel they can look up to. At the same time, social care workers feel a lot of their colleagues in social care view it more as a job than a profession and also as a lesser profession, with many perceived to view social care as primarily a stepping stone to another profession. Hence, there is a divided sense of professional identity amongst social care workers, which is likely not helped by the fact that there are often limited opportunities to engage with social care workers from beyond their organisation.

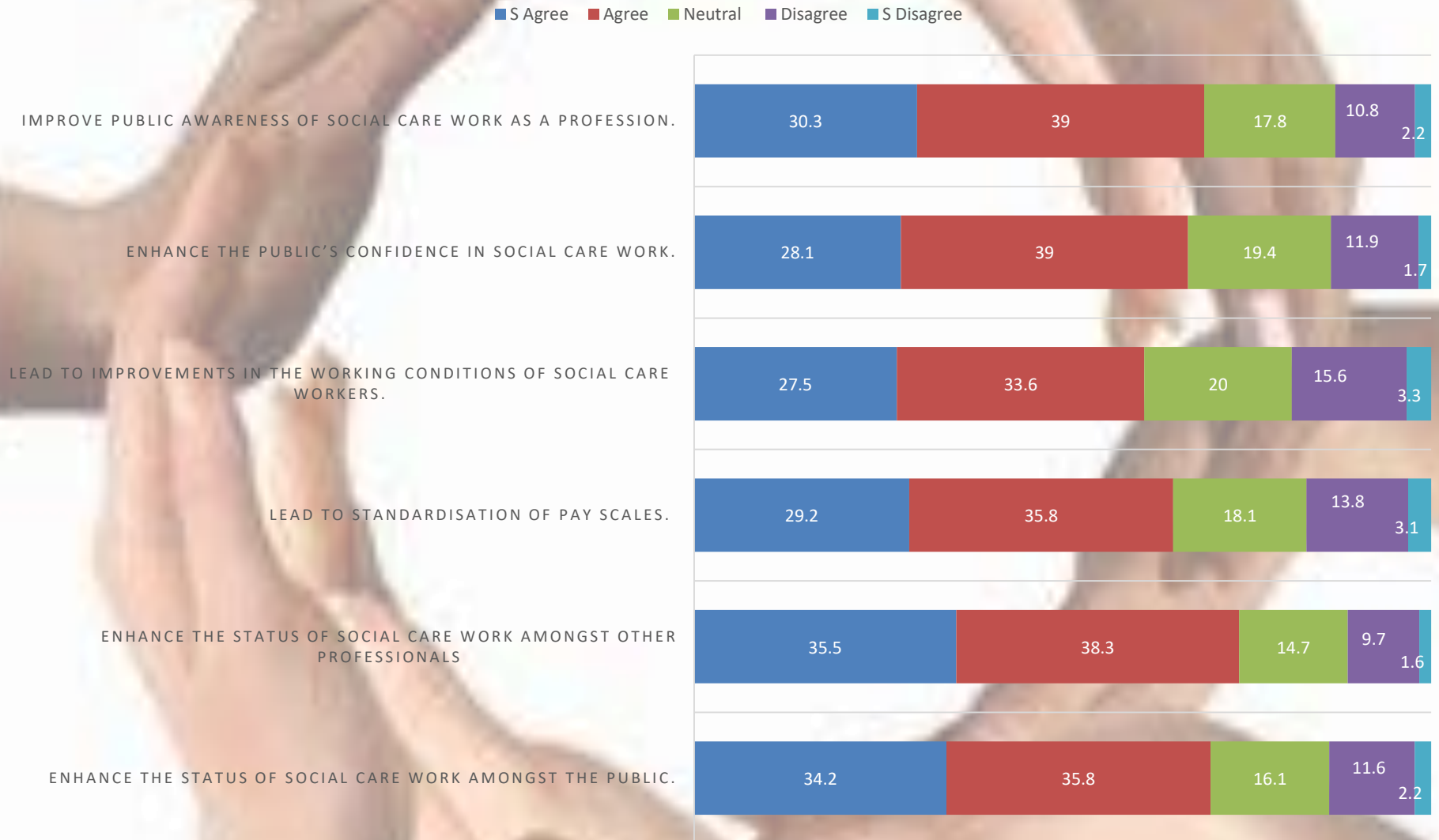
“I think my colleagues feel the same way as I do. We often talk about it, they often come away from meetings shaking their head and come back to me...I know they are highly qualified, I know they are well experienced, and still, to this very day, they have a lack of confidence going into the interdisciplinary teams because of the way they are treated (Ne28).”

“I don't think the public know what it is really. Like all my family and friends, you know, 'So you're going to be a social worker?' And I was like, 'No'. 'So you're going to be taking children off their parents?' 'No'. Like, and then it's either one extreme or the other. And then they think it's healthcare assistant. So like, there's really no knowledge (He18).”

“they feel like it's maybe a beginner's job, do you know what I mean, like a stepping stone job, they do social care for a few years and then they go and get their masters and get a proper job like a social worker, as an advocate or a solicitor...the job is kind of like the frontline or the person work is for people who are straight out of college and if they stay in that, if they've grown as much as they can, then there's something wrong with them if they want to stay in that line of work (Le01).”

Perceptions of registration.

I think that the introduction of a register by CORU for social care workers will –



“I think that the introduction of registration is a good thing in that the profession is defined, so I think overall in that regard people would be happy about that, you know. That’s similar to an OT or language and speech and social work, they are all registered with CORU automatically and I suppose people may feel a bit more confident if there is a specific registration policy there for social care workers (Hn31).”

“hopefully it [registration] will stop that occurring, of people coming in the door calling themselves social care workers who are actually not. Apart from that I would hope that it will give us a ranking like nursing, teaching and all those professions, social work, that have those registrations (Ah20).”

“as a registered profession, you would expect to have a more robust wage kind of system (Le01).”

“I think there will be, obviously there's going to be outcry about CPD, and costs associated with registration and, you know, insurance, like practice insurance and that kind of thing (Nh20).”

“I think the downside of this [registration] is that, unfortunately, false accusations or, or complaints, etc., etc., will have a pathway, which I think is one good thing. But on another side, you have to employ your own support (Ae13).”

Obstacles to professionalisation (Williams & Lalor, 2001).

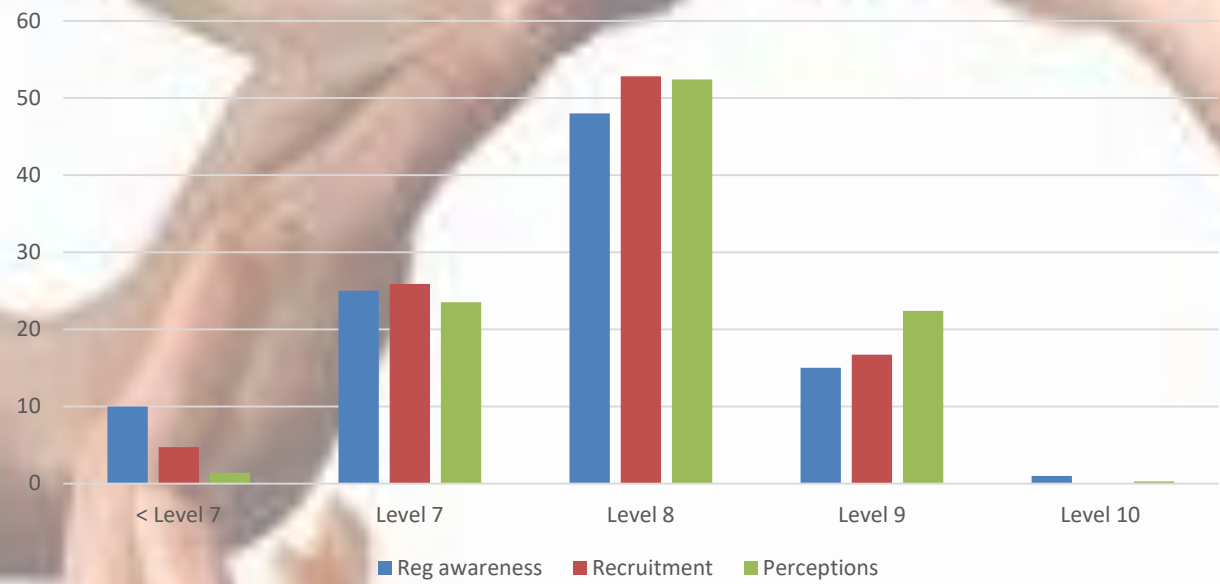
Lack of a register and regulation.

Recruitment of unqualified staff/ education and training.

Multiplicity of titles.

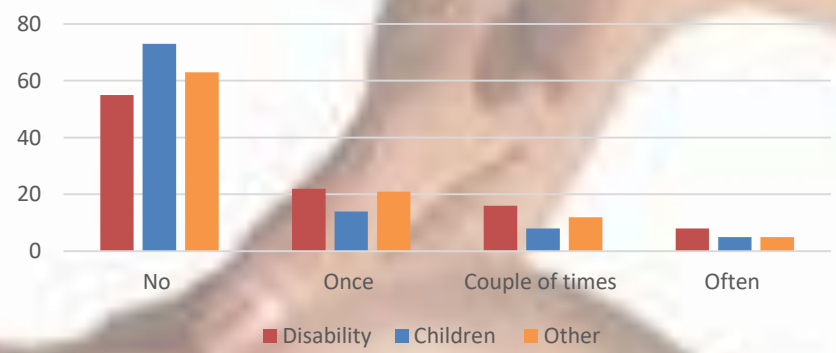
Pay and conditions.

Recruitment of unqualified staff/ education and training.



“on average 1 in every 3 (36%) respondents to this study had encountered this situation at least once and almost 1 in every 5 (18%) respondents had confronted it more often than once. Within the Disability sector in particular the practice seems to have been, and possibly still is, widespread, with almost half (45%) or respondents indicating that this had happened to them at least once.” (Power & Burke, 2021, p. 10).

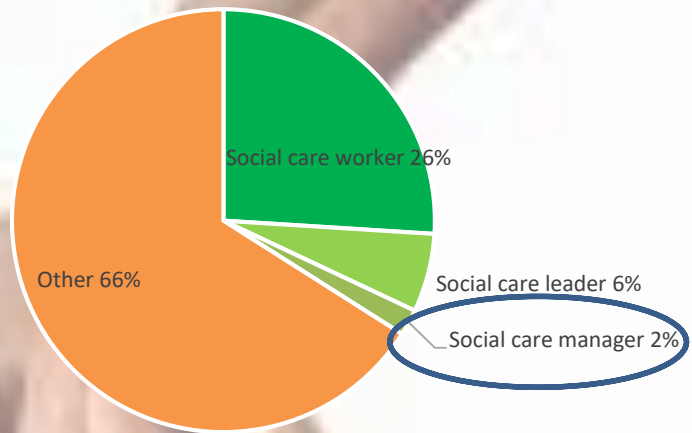
Extent of experience of being offered position other than social care worker by percentages per sector.



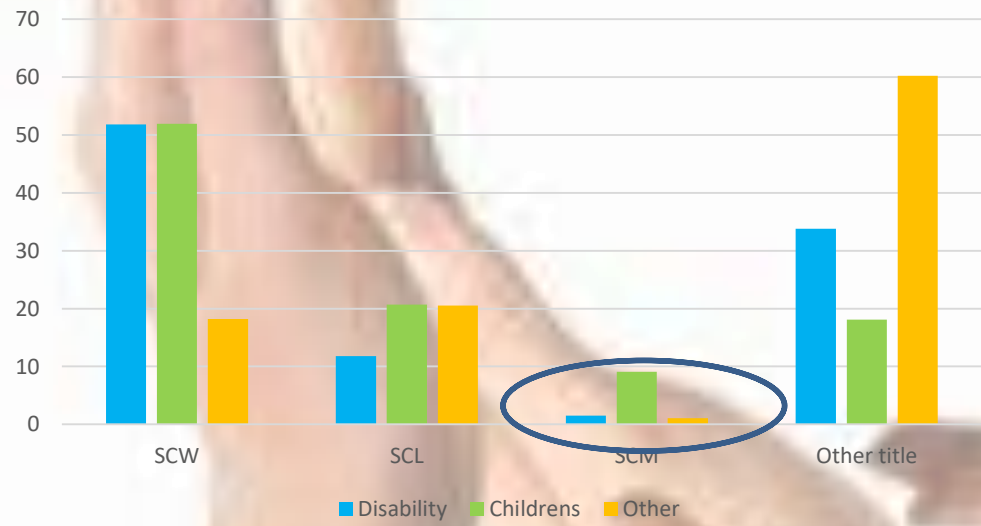
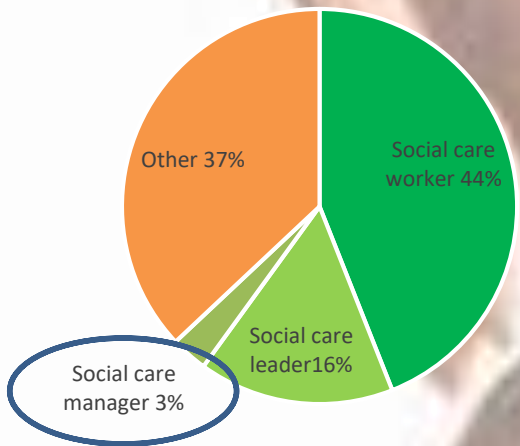
(Power & Burke, 2021).

Multiplicity of titles.

Registration awareness 2018 (n = 726).



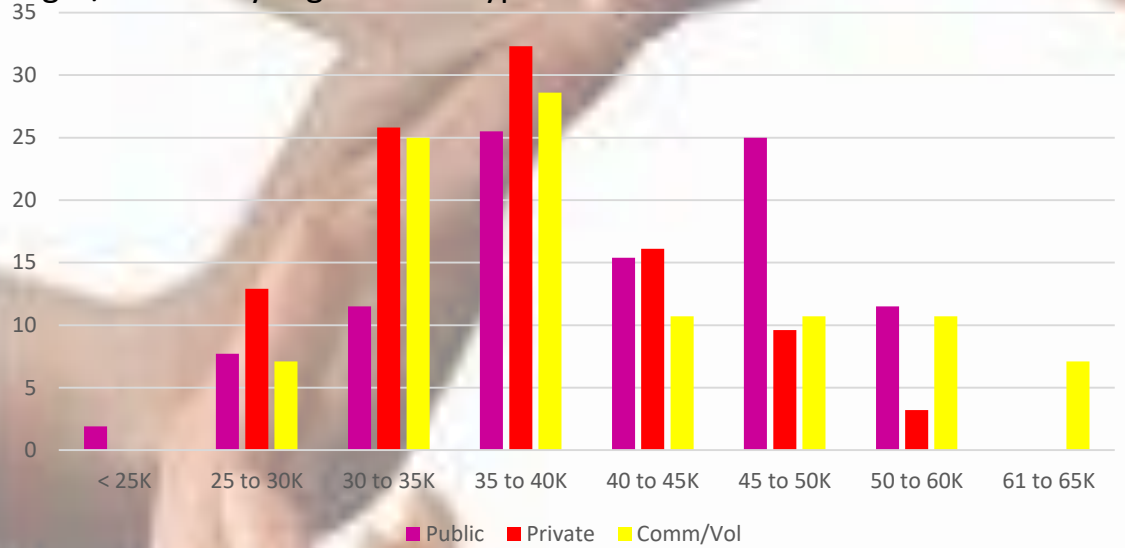
Perceptions and professionalisation 2022 (n=360).



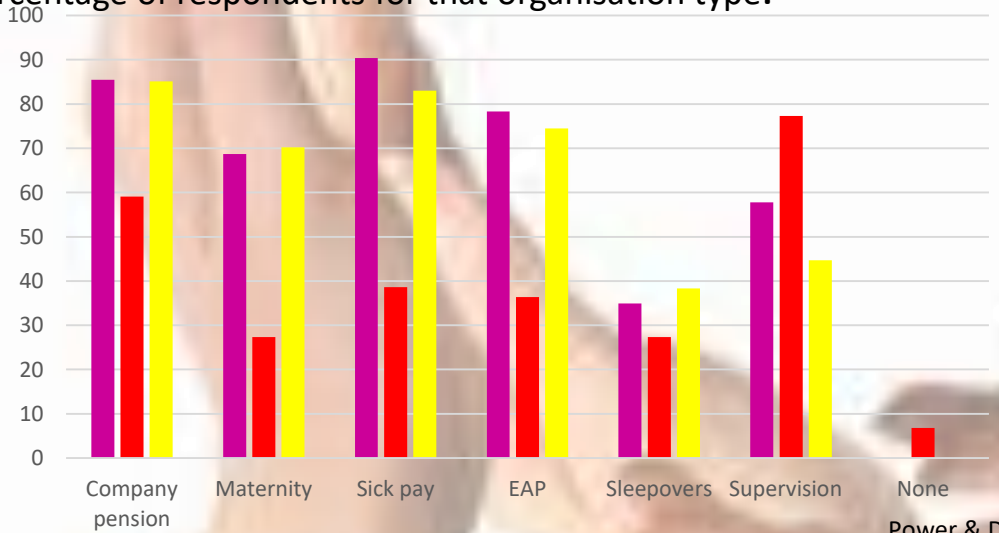
Lack of progression opportunities within social care work.

Pay and conditions.

Wages/salaries by organisation type for those with the title social care worker, in full-time permanent positions (n=111).



Conditions of employment by organisation type for social care workers, leaders and managers combined (n = 174), as a percentage of respondents for that organisation type.



Too many risks.
Staff shortages.

Legacy of unqualified/qualified.

Role ambiguity.

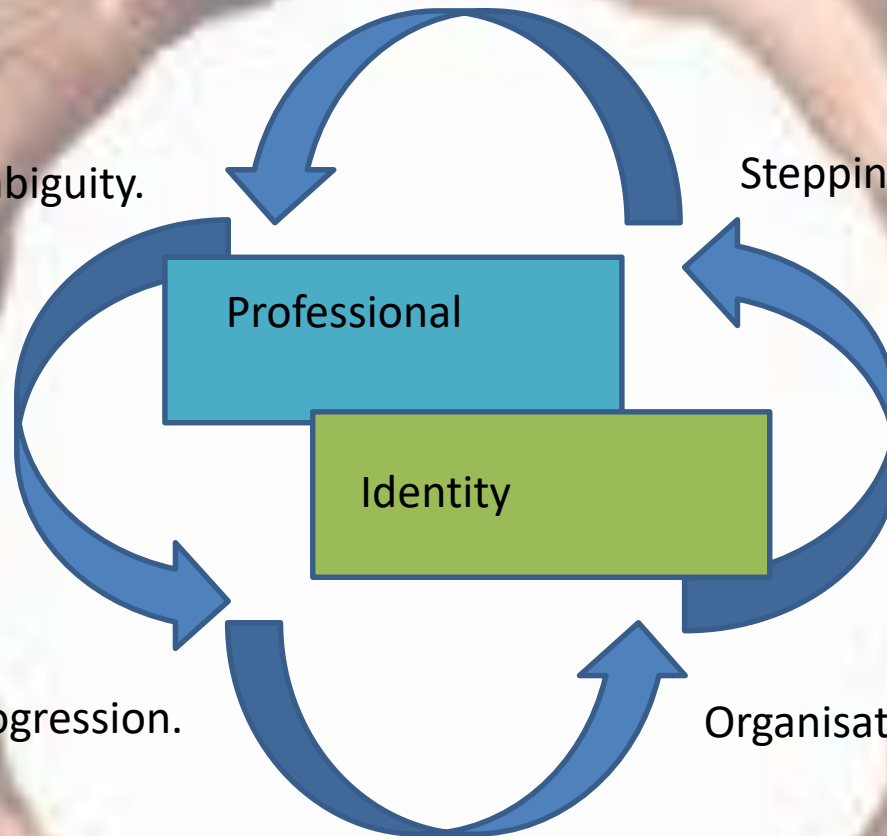
Stepping stone.

Multiplicity of titles.

Union inactivity.

Lack of progression.

Organisation vs profession.



THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ME TO ENGAGE WITH SOCIAL CARE WORKERS OTHER THAN THOSE I WORK REGULARLY WITH.



