

**Workforce Burnout and Resilience in the NHS and Social Care**

**Health and Social Care Select Committee Inquiry**

**Written evidence from the British Association of Social Workers**

**1. About BASW**

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK, with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. With over 20,000 members, we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, while also securing the well-being of social workers working in all health and social care settings.

BASW is a membership organisation that provides services to its members including professional development, networking, advice and representation, and being their national voice on policy matters.

Social workers are key to the delivery of legislation that deals with the most vulnerable in our society such as child and adult safeguarding, mental capacity, compulsory treatment of people with severe mental health issues, community care for the most frail and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

**2. Key points**

- Dr Jermaine Ravalier, a Reader in Work and Wellbeing for Bath Spa University, carried out an independent report on 'UK Social Workers: Working Conditions and Wellbeing', supported by the British Association of Social Workers.
- Dr Ravalier's research interests are in organizational and health psychology, with a focus on how the workplace can be improved in order to help maintain positive mental health and prevent work-related mental health sickness and absence. His work assesses elements of the workplace which may lead to mental health issues in employees and implementing/evaluating interventions to this end.
- Findings (Section 5) concluded that 52% of UK social workers intend to leave the profession within 18 months due to burn out, increasing to 55% for social workers working specifically in children's services.
- Recommendations (Section 6) include introducing a focus on improving the amount of demands experienced by social workers as a first phase approach because this would subsequently improve stress and make individuals less likely to leave the job.

**3. UK Social Workers: Working Conditions and Wellbeing**

The 2017 'UK Social Workers: Working Conditions and Wellbeing' report by Dr Jermaine M Ravalier had the objective of identifying what working conditions are like for UK social workers, and the influence that these have on stress. The report was commissioned by BASW and the Social Workers Union (SWU) but independently produced by Dr Ravalier.

Dr Ravalier's research was the first to look solely at the wellbeing of social workers, and a standout finding was that 52% of UK social workers intend to leave the profession within 18 months due to burn out, increasing to 55% for social workers working specifically in children's services.

Over 1200 social workers participated and overwhelmingly named the same triggers for this burn out: unmanageable caseloads, not enough resources to deal with them effectively and too little professional support in the workplace.

#### **4. Aims of the research**

The aims Dr Ravalier had for this research were:

1. To investigate stress levels in UK social workers
2. To investigate differences in stress experienced by social workers in different job roles
3. To investigate the 'working conditions' faced by UK social workers
4. To demonstrate how satisfied social workers are with their role, and how many people are seeking to leave the role in the next 12 months, and the level of presenteeism in the job role
5. To demonstrate how the working conditions that social workers are exposed to influence stress, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and presenteeism.

#### **5. Findings**

Through his research, Dr Ravalier found that working conditions for social workers across the UK, irrespective of job role, were extremely poor. The demand that individuals had on their time was consistency found to be related to increased levels of stress, intentions to leave the job, job satisfaction, and presenteeism.

The influence of ethnicity and having a disability was also investigated. Social workers who are non-white and British described that this often allowed them to take a different perspective to their role in social work and have a greater understanding of the influence of the different cultures of service users. However, respondents also described that there was a culture of institutional racism, which played against non-white employees. Respondents who were social workers with a disability described a lack of understanding from management and colleagues with their organization, and others also described a lack of reasonable adjustments for their disability at work.

The evidence collected through this research demonstrates that without improving the caseload and administrative demands of the role, a large proportion of social workers may leave the role across the next 18 months.

The results show that for most job roles working conditions are in a completely unacceptable level. The Health and Safety Executive suggest that should the working conditions measured in this study be at unacceptable levels for too long of a time period, then ill mental and/or physical health can occur.

Five main themes emerged from the research, with the most frequently discussed theme being the amount of work that was required of social workers. Workload, including having too many cases or cases of too high a complexity, and paperwork/administrative duties were the two biggest issues here.

Respondents also wanted more managerial support in order to provide more support when social workers felt that they needed it.

#### **6. Recommendations**

Dr Ravalier's report demonstrates that social workers across the UK are exposed to high levels of negative working conditions, and that these conditions are significantly influencing the role that they do.

There needs to be a consistent and systematic focus on improvement of working conditions for those in the social care sector across the UK.

The report suggests that there needs to be a focus on improving the amount of demands experienced by social workers as a first phase approach because this would subsequently improve stress and make individuals less likely to leave the job.

By having a system of case allocation which more clearly considers both the number of cases allocated as well as the complexity of these cases would reduce workload.

There also needs to be a greater respect and understanding of the role, including improvement of the material working conditions of those in the role. Workers need to be given greater credit and positive support for the job that they do. This would mean that social workers would not be working under a culture of blame as readily, and thus reducing stress from that perspective. It may also mean that social workers would be allowed greater freedom for flexible working, as well as provided with adequate resources for the job role which they perform.

Institutional racism needs further investigation, as does the issue of social workers who have disabilities facing difficulties due to a lack of understanding from management.

## **7. Further evidence:**

BASW recommends that the Health and Social Care Select Committee call Dr Jermaine Ravalier and the British Association of Social Workers as oral evidence witnesses at future stages of this inquiry, to provide expertise and sector-leading opinion on the wellbeing of social workers.

## References:

Ravalier J and Boichat C (2018) *UK Social Workers: Working Conditions and Wellbeing*. Birmingham: BASW.

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