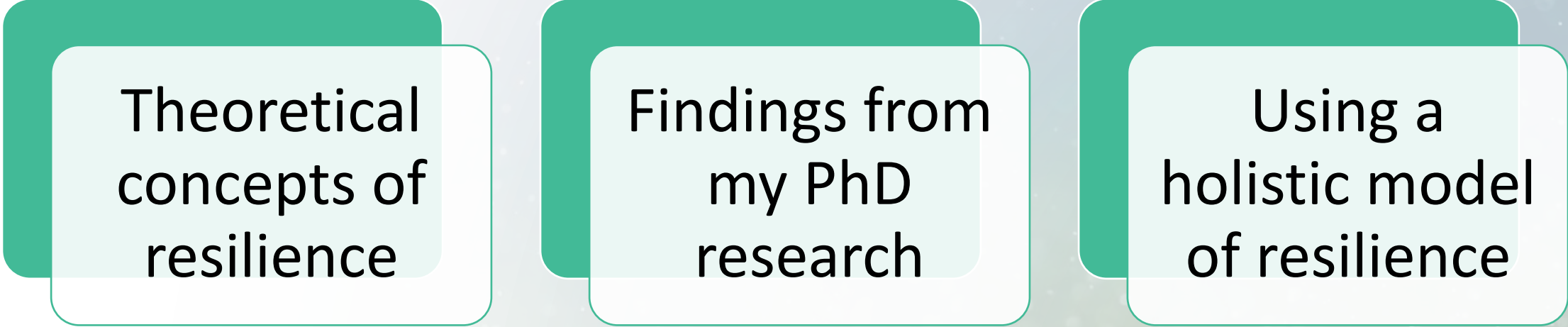




# Topping up the Tank: Enhancing the Emotional Resilience of Social Workers

Sarah Rose  
October 2022

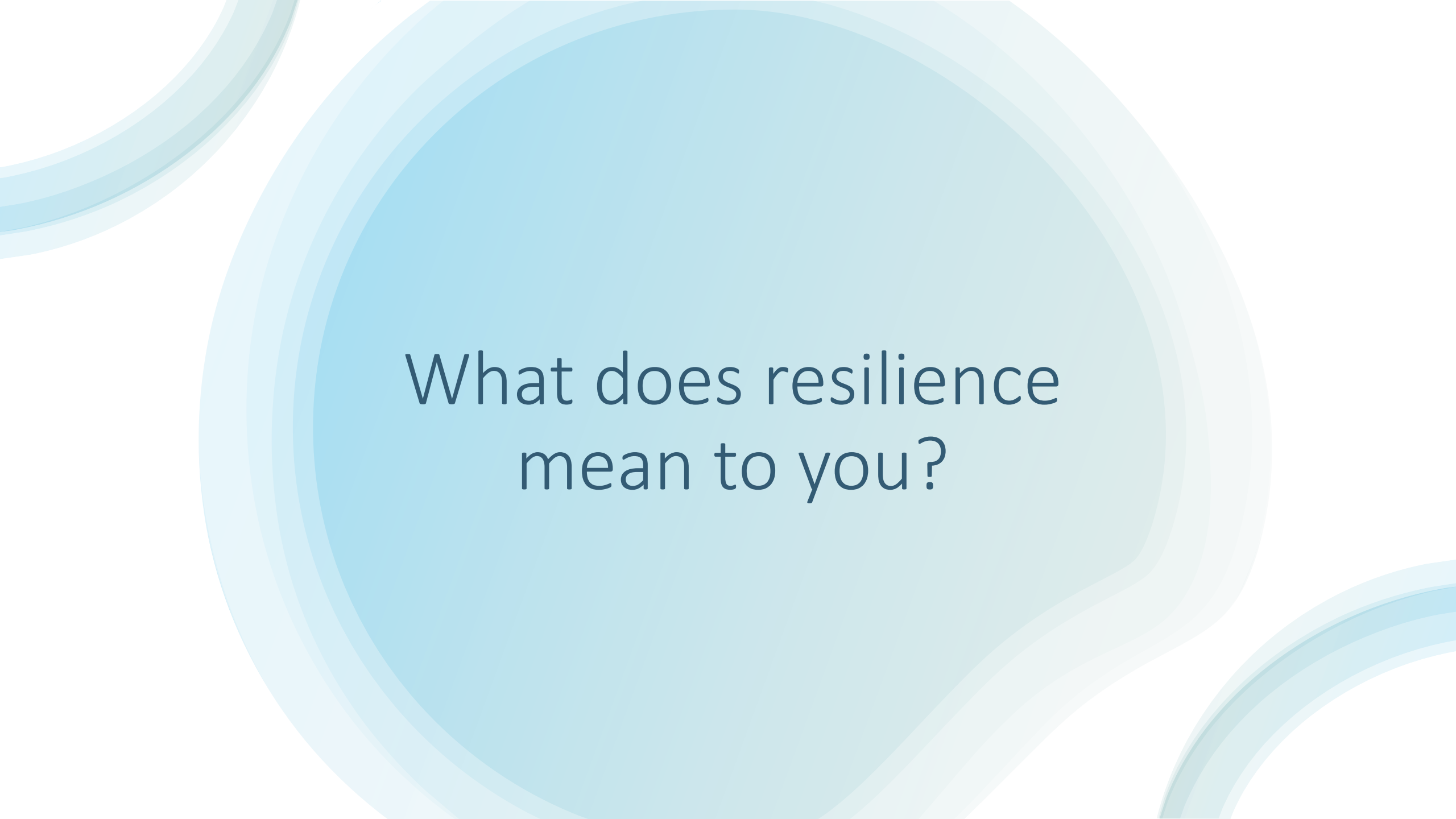
# Overview of the Workshop



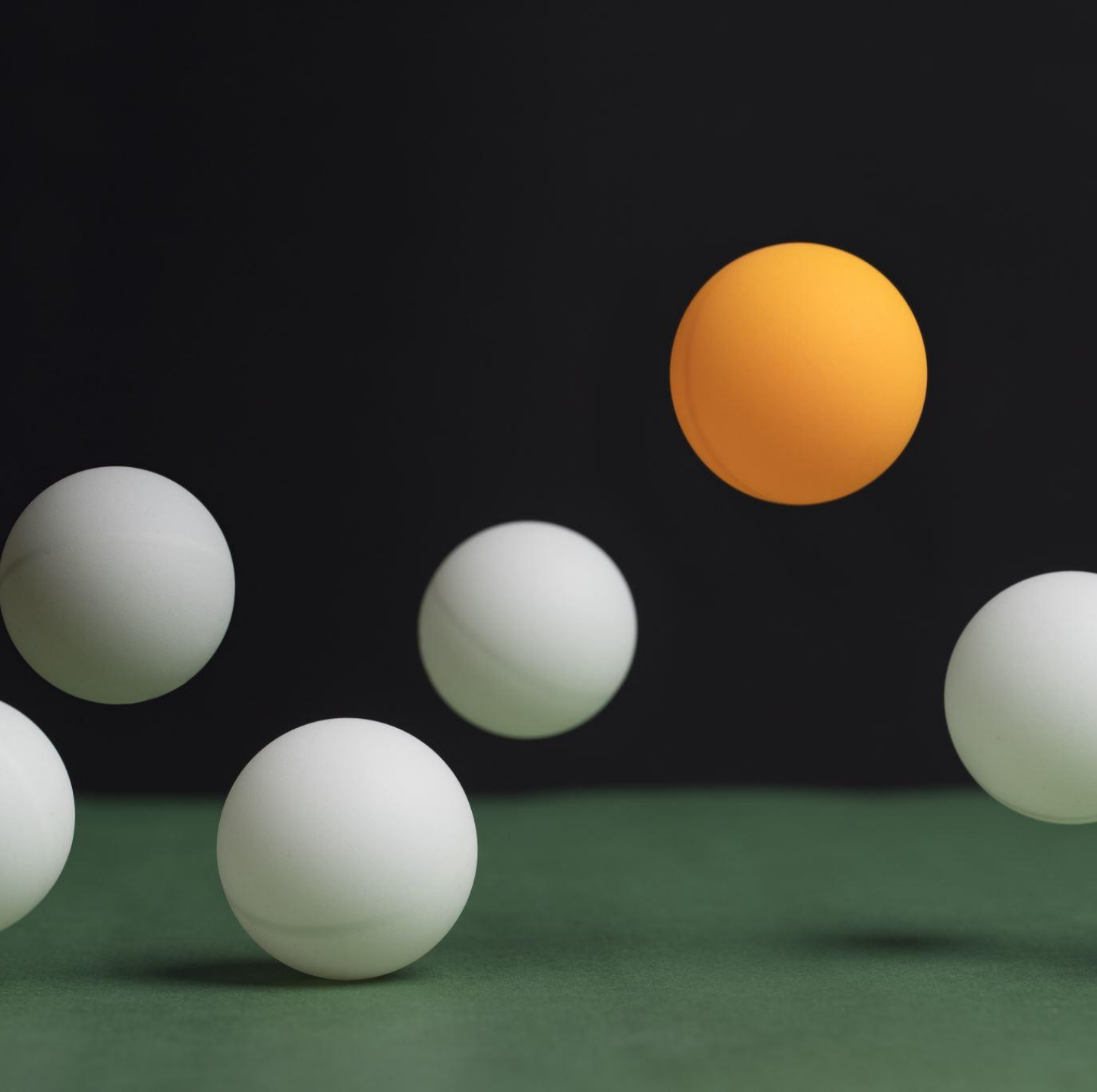
Theoretical  
concepts of  
resilience

Findings from  
my PhD  
research

Using a  
holistic model  
of resilience



What does resilience  
mean to you?



# Concepts of Resilience

- Coping with adversity
- Multi-dimensional
- Maintaining emotional equilibrium (Bonanno, 2004)
- Bouncing back – recovering after a short-lived downturn (Fletcher & Sarker, 2013)
- Bouncing back and beyond – thriving and flourishing (Youssef & Luthans, 2007)
- The ‘psychological immune system’ (Gilbert et al., 1998)



# Characteristics of Resilience (Grant and Kinman, 2013)

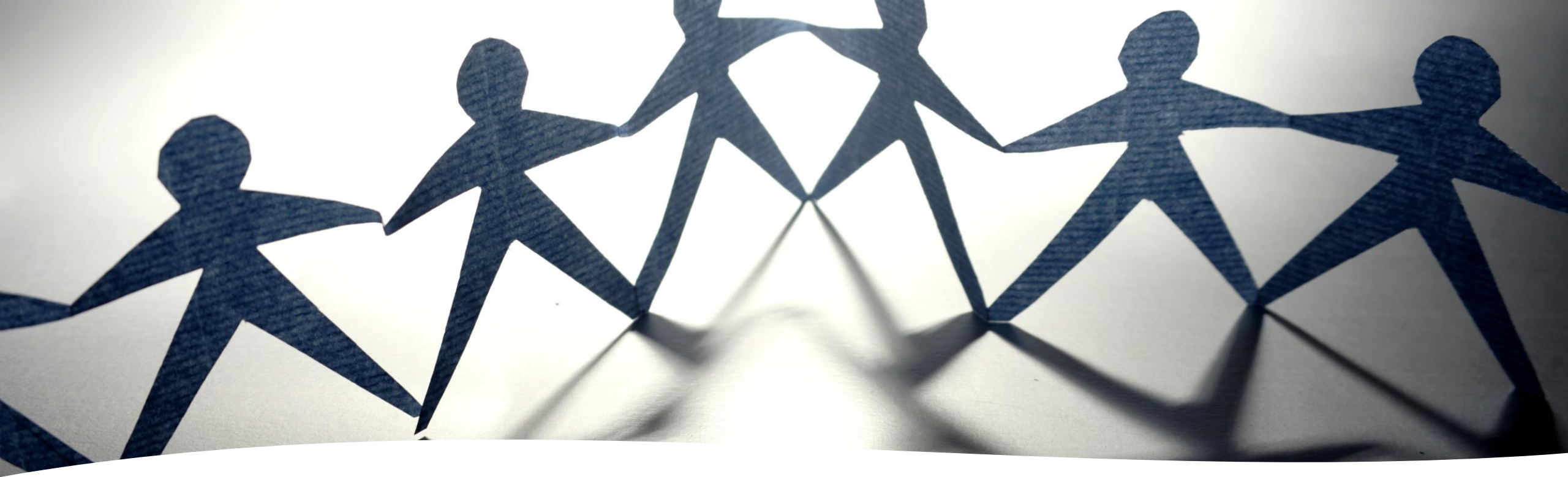
- Self-efficacy and self-esteem
- Enthusiasm, optimism and hope
- Openness to experience
- A positive self-concept and a strong sense of identity
- A high degree of autonomy
- Self-awareness and emotional literacy
- Critical thinking skills
- The ability to set limits
- Well-developed social skills and social confidence to develop effective relationships
- Flexibility and adaptability, drawing on a wide range of coping strategies
- Creative problem solving and planning skills
- The ability to identify and draw on internal and external resources
- Successful adaptation to change
- Persistence in the face of challenges, setbacks and adversity
- A sense of purpose and the ability to derive a sense of meaning from difficulties and challenges
- The ability to learn from experience
- The capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions
- An orientation towards the future
- A sense of humour



# The Resourced Individual

“The problem with Cinderella stories is that they make success seem to be all about the personal qualities of exceptional people. They epitomize the myth of the exceptional individual and conveniently overlook the deficits in the environment that surround their protagonists. The heroes and heroines look so beautiful, talented and self-assured that we forget about the supports that help them escape terrible situations. The story of the resourced individual is hidden in the footnotes”

(Ungar, 2018, p.16-17)



## Ecological and 'systems' perspectives

- Ecological and 'systems' perspectives recognise the interrelationship between a person and their social environment, taking into account both personal agency and external social structures which may contribute towards adversity, resilience and wellbeing (Ungar, 2018)
- Critiques of 'neoliberalist' notions of resilience that place responsibility on individuals to manage the impact of social issues (Garrett, 2015; Neocleous, 2013)
- Social justice approaches to resilience including activism and collective action (Hart et al., 2016)



# My Research

- Topic - the emotional resilience of social workers in local authority adult services in Scotland
- Motivation – professional background in adult social work
- Interviews with 28 social workers and 8 social work managers / diary entries completed by the social workers
- Social constructionist perspective – exploring how social workers conceptualise resilience in the context of their role
- Creation of a holistic framework of resilience





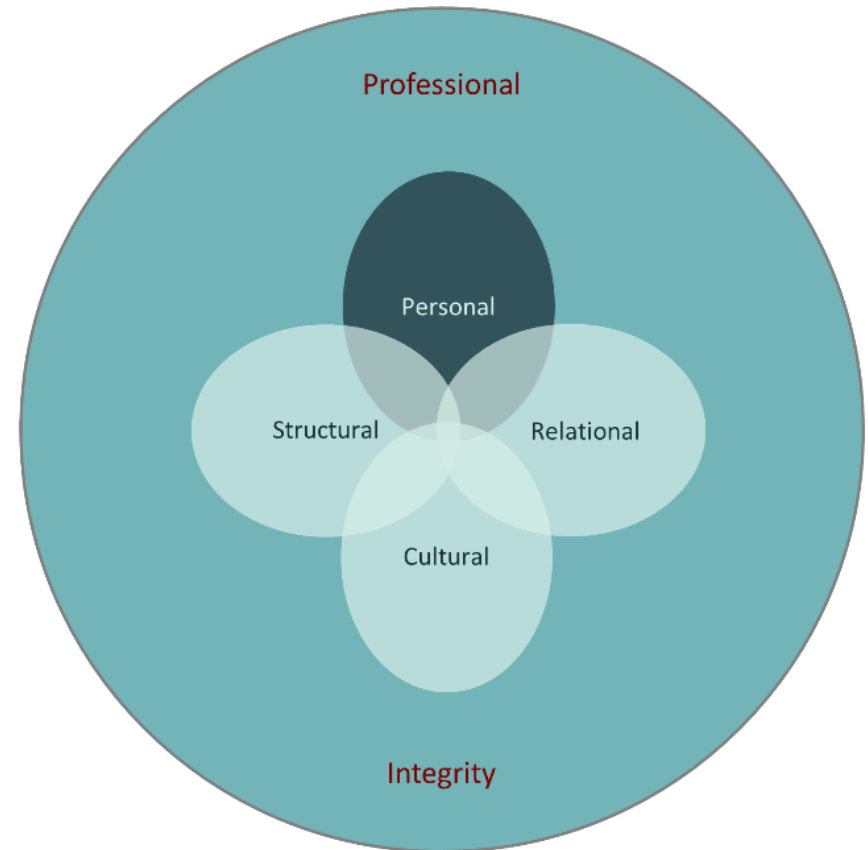
# A Holistic Framework of Resilience



- Adaptation of Thompson's PCS model of anti-oppressive practice (2006)
- PCS - personal, cultural and structural factors
- Additional 'relational domain' to reflect the prominence of relationships as a factor in both adversity and resilience
- Importance of professional integrity as a factor underpinning the four domains

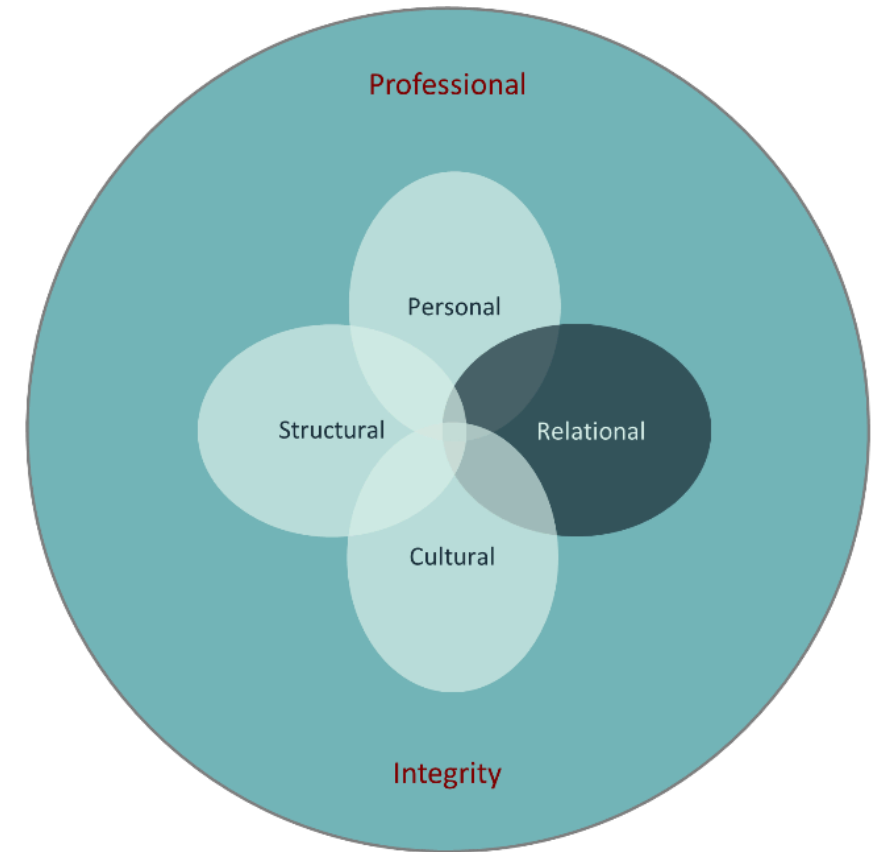
# The Personal Domain

- Skills and knowledge: Feeling equipped and competent, professional development opportunities, taking on a 'champion' role
- Emotional intelligence: Self-awareness and self-management
- Perspective and attitude: Hopeful realism, manageable self-expectation and self-compassion
- Personal and professional self: The interplay between work and home life
- Embodied health: Sleep, nutrition, exercise, mind/body practices such as yoga and meditation



# The Relational Domain

- Relationships with service users: Job satisfaction, relationship-based practice, empathy, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma
- Relationships with peers: Mutual support and understanding, friendship and camaraderie
- Relationships with managers: Guidance, supervision, accessibility, trust and blame
- Relationships with multidisciplinary professionals: Collaboration, conflict, role confusion and expectations





# Small Group Discussion

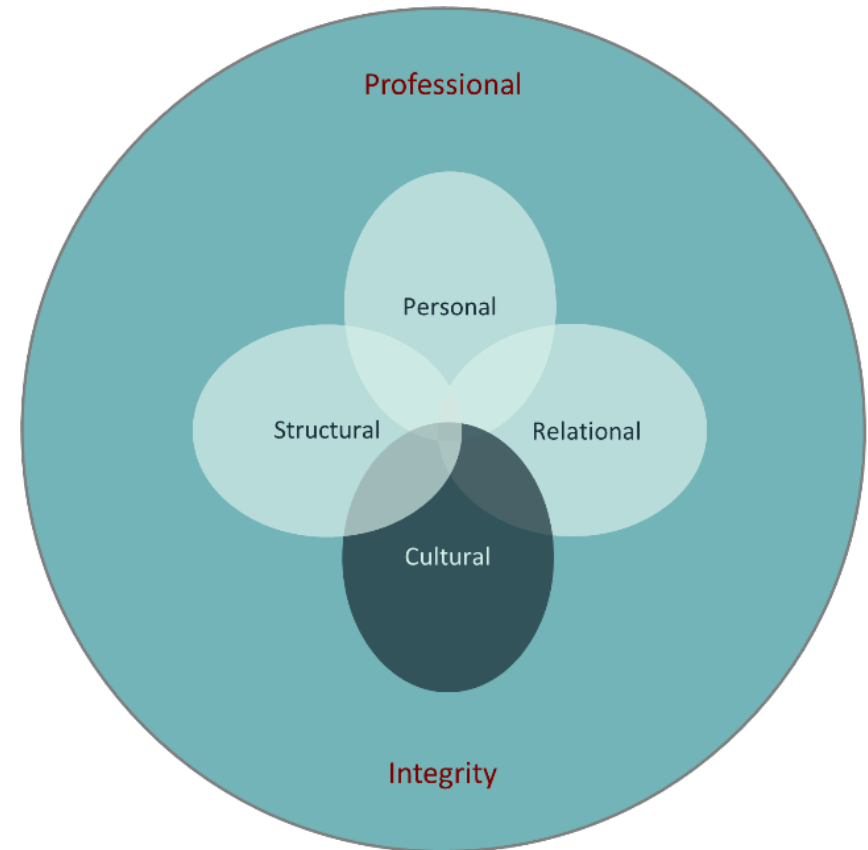
Reflect on some of the themes discussed in the Personal and Relational domains:

- Which themes resonate with your own experiences?
- On the basis of these themes, what might help you and your team to build resilience?



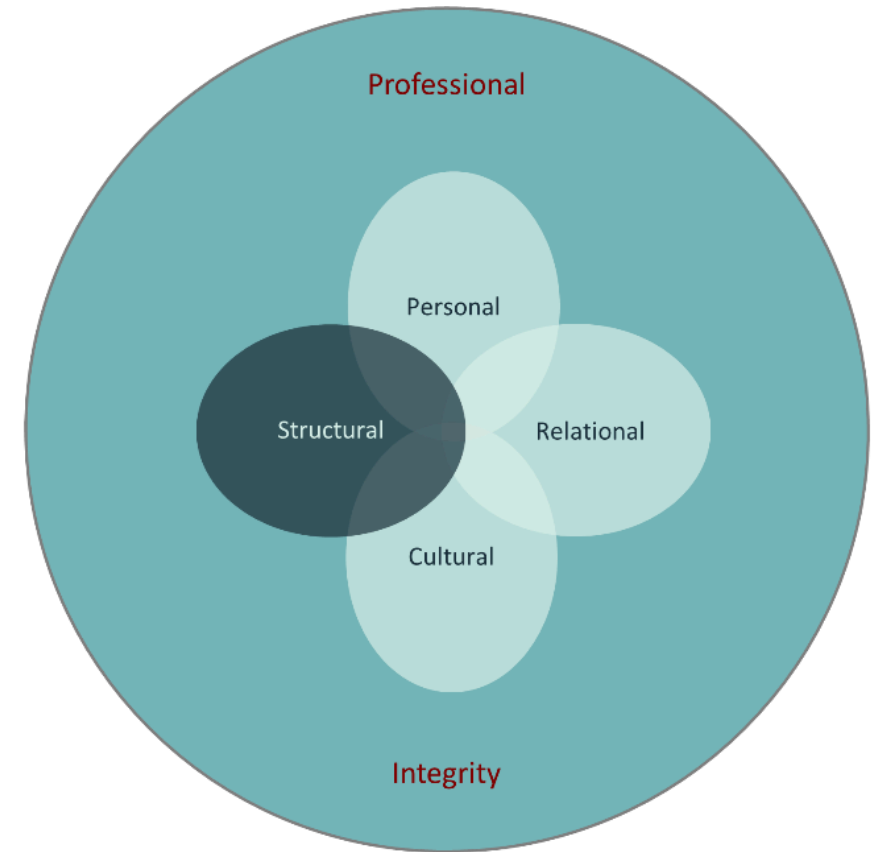
# The Cultural Domain

- Humans and robots: Moving from managerialism and bureaucracy to a culture of humanity and personalisation
- Creativity and rigidity: Increasing the scope for creative, innovative and responsive practice, sharing accountability and addressing blame cultures
- Emotion and professionalism: Understanding the influence of emotions in decision-making, providing forums for open emotional expression and managing emotional contagion
- Professional identity: Developing a distinct and positive identity for social work and feeling valued



# The Structural Domain

- Policy, procedure and resources: Streamlining bureaucracy, enacting policies ethically and increasing resources
- Organisational change: Managing and communicating restructure and role change, adequate consultation with staff
- Workload: Allocation of reasonable workloads with scope for sufficient breaks
- Supervision and guidance: provision of good quality supervision with a trusted person, balancing autonomy and direction
- Wellbeing strategies: Benefits of wellbeing strategies but not as a 'sticking plaster' for more fundamental organisational issues







# Resilience and Professional Integrity

Resilience strategies may not be effective when they conflict with:

- Commitment to effective social work practice in the best interests of service users
- Commitment to a core social work value base





# Small Group Discussion

Reflect on some of the themes discussed in the Cultural and Structural domains and in relation to professional integrity:

- Which themes resonate with your own experiences?
- On the basis of these themes, what might help you and your team to build resilience?



A photograph of a classroom setting. In the foreground, a person's arm is extended upwards with their hand open, palm facing forward. Behind them, several other hands are also raised in the air, though they are out of focus. The background is a solid green chalkboard. The text "Feedback and Questions" is overlaid in the center of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

Feedback and Questions

## Useful links

Shaping Social Workers' Identity: An All-Ireland Study October 2020

[Shaping Social Workers' Identity](#)

Social Work Scotland Report May 2022

[Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers - Social Work Scotland](#)

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