IASW Social Work During Covid-19 Ongoing Survey

Second Report: Phase One Easing Lockdown Restrictions

(19th May – 8th June)

Background and Introduction

This is the second report on the IASW Social Work During Covid-19 Ongoing Survey and presents the findings on the data collected during the first phase of Reopening Ireland/Easing Lockdown Restrictions (19th May – 8th June). Data collection was structured in waves, each mapped onto the phases for Reopening Ireland/Easing Lockdown Restrictions.

PHASE	TIME PERIOD	SURVEY RESPONSES
Lockdown	12th May - 18th May	148
Phase one easing lockdown restrictions	**19th May - 8th June**	**204**
Phase two easing lockdown restrictions	9th June - 29th June	104

204 responses were received, with social workers in Children and Families being the largest group of respondents, comprising 34% of responses. This report presents the key findings from the survey data in respect of the total 204 responses, before summarising the data from responses to each question. Information on those who participated in the survey can be found at the end of the report.

KEY FINDINGS

Social workers had more worries as Ireland began Phase 1 of Easing Lockdown Restrictions than they experienced during lockdown.

- The biggest worry for social workers was **how to provide an adequate social work service**. Forty-six per cent said this was a worry for them, an increase from 33% during the last phase of data collection.
- There was also an increase in the number who **worried for themselves and their families**, from 16% to 21%.
- Thirty-three per cent said they were **worried about their clients**, a small decrease from 36% in the last phase.

'Ensuring that safety issues do not impact in a detrimental way on social work practice or how we work with families and the quality of service provided.'

The challenges for social workers had also increased.
- Fifty-three per cent highlighted the challenges of restricted face to face contact or the challenges of remote/online working, up from 45% during lockdown, many describing how these ways of working have limitations which impacted on capacity to work effectively with clients.
- During lockdown, 30% identified issues with the response and support provided by their employer (lack of resources, poor support and guidance). This figure has remained the same.
- The challenges associated with new work practices remained a significant issue despite a small decrease from 40% to 36%.

'Social work is based on relationships with clients and so wearing masks, keeping social distance and limited interactions when addressing sensitive issues is very difficult.'

Social workers were provided with either the same or less support from their employers than they were during lockdown. Respondents were given a list of resources that may be needed to work at home (mobile phone, laptop, guidance for online work, etc.) and asked to indicate which resources their employer had provided. Social workers were provided with either the same or less support from their employers than they said were provided during lockdown, the biggest decline in supports were guidance/protocols for working online. There was one exception – while no one said their employer provided childcare in the lockdown sample, 5% of the current sample said their employer provided childcare. It is of note that when survey participants were asked for other comments, 22% of those who commented asked for childcare supports.

'Some staff with no childcare arrangements were afforded the opportunity to work from home – they had to use up their annual leave and work weekends to accommodate. Shocking. The impact on the team has been quite significant as we felt very unsupported and people just feel so demoralised at this point.'

Lack of IT resources remained an issue for social workers with 27% specifically requesting these resources, when asked what one thing their employer could do to support them. Twenty-five per cent of requests related to **additional and improved supports** which included organisational support for staff, for teamwork and support around issues such as flexible and remote work practices,

professional supervision, childcare and management of workload demands. Eleven per cent asked that social work is valued and social workers trusted.

> *'Ensure adequate provision of IT. I have staff waiting on laptops and phones for more time than is reasonable. This prevents them from carrying out their duties in an efficient manner.'*

There was **little change to where respondents were located while working** with 65% working from home and 16% referring to a mix of work locations. Five per cent said they had been redeployed, same as during lockdown.

Key Learning and Best Practice

Thirty-four per cent gave examples related to **contact and connection with clients**, up from 24% in the lockdown sample. The number who gave examples of **technology-related learning remained unchanged** (33%). While respondents referred to being creative and innovative, this phase of data collection received practical **examples of how social workers adapted and innovated to meet the needs of service users**, examples including a Zoom parent and toddler group and setting up a day respite facility.

> *'Setting up of a day respite facility for a family in crisis after much advocating and knocking on the door of Senior Managers… if there is a will, there is a way.'*

Queries

There was an 18% **increase in respondents' queries about practice related issues** (45% of total queries) such as the loss of direct work with clients and safe work practices. A new theme emerged whereby 20% of queries related to the **organisation/agency/employer response** to a range of issues (e.g., student placements, inconsistent work practices across teams and within agencies).

> *'The emotional impact on children of loss of touch with families. Our observations are less effective by using technology only. It has to be combined with face to face as well.'*

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOU EXPERIENCING?

97% (198 responses)

> **The challenges for social workers have increased compared to lockdown.**
>
> - Fifty-three per cent highlighted the challenges of restricted face to face contact or the challenges of remote/online working, up from 45% during lockdown, many describing how these ways of working have limitations which impacted on capacity to work effectively with clients.
>
> - The challenges associated with new work practices remained a significant issue despite a small decrease from 40% to 36%.
>
> - During lockdown, 30% identified issues with the response and support provided by their employer (lack of resources, poor support and guidance). This figure has remained the same.

The centrality of relationships in social work practice emerged as a strong theme as social workers described the challenges of working remotely with clients or having restricted face to face contact with clients. Social workers also highlighted the challenges associated with changes to their role and workplace as they engaged with clients in new ways, delivered services within public health restrictions and managed the personal impact of Covid-19. They also referenced the challenges brought about by some employer responses, particularly in relation to the provision of resources, support and guidance. Overall, the proportion of social workers experiencing challenges have increased compared to lockdown.

Challenges for Direct Work

The impact of lockdown restrictions on direct work emerged as a strong theme. Fifty-three per cent of the responses highlighted the challenges of restricted face to face contact with clients, or the challenges of working with clients remotely, via phone or technology. Social workers repeatedly referred to the challenges of working without meeting people face to face, or of meeting clients while restricted by PPE and social distancing. The absence of, and restrictions on, direct work with service users was described as having a negative impact on key social work tasks: building relationships through connection and contact with clients; home visits; providing appropriate support and completing assessments. Sole reliance on phone/technology to communicate with clients was identified as problematic.

Connection and Contact with Clients

Nineteen per cent highlighted the impact of restricted direct work on their ability to connect with their clients. Social workers described difficulties in accessing, engaging, communicating and building relationships with clients while working within public health restrictions. Contact by phone and similar technology was found to have limited effectiveness in supporting connection with clients. Connection was also challenging for social workers when they used PPE or engaged in social distancing with clients.

> *'We are expected to assess people and hear young people's views remotely when so much of what we do needs face to face communication'*

> *'Completing majority of work via telephone which results in challenges in meaningfully engaging patients, in particular young people.'*

> *'Lack of face to face contact with clients does not allow a relationship to form. Harder to gain trust and complete an assessment.'*

> *'Relying on telephone assessments, much harder to establish rapport which is vital to SW assessments.'*

> *'It is very difficult to do therapeutic work with people with an intellectual disability over the telephone and many do not have access to telecommunication platforms. In this area of work, you often need visual communication aids and depend on non-verbal communication as much as verbal.'*

> *'Having to distance oneself from patients and families has impacted on practice, e.g. not being able to sympathise and shake hands with families when a patient dies, having to social distance during conversations with patients and families. Wearing PPE such as masks is also a very difficult aspect of the work and a huge barrier in relationship building with patients and families.'*

> *'Social work is based on relationships with clients and so wearing masks, keeping social distance and limited interactions when addressing sensitive issues is very difficult.'*

> *'Not being able to connect with people face to face is a challenge. Connection is vital for mental health and well-being*.'

Home Visits

The impact of restrictions on direct work during home visits was identified as a challenge by 11% of responses.

'Not being able to do home visits to the very vulnerable clients – many are living alone and can only communicate through sign language. Many are elderly and cannot use technology therefore video calls are not an option.'

'Sometimes a phone call is not enough to support a carer. I have two families that would benefit more from a visit.'

Providing Support and Completing Assessments

Nine per cent of responses highlighted the impact of restricted direct work on their ability to support people or provide interventions. A small number of respondents mentioned the impact on assessments.

'Unable to continue to support many of my clients.'

'Lack of face to face contact with clients in both office and home setting and its impact on the quality of assessments and services to the clients.'

'Not being able to see people and do the one to one work we were doing.'

Accessing Supports and Services

A further 8% experienced challenges accessing supports and services needed by clients.

'Difficulties accessing normal services for clients (PHN [Public Health Nurse], community therapies, day centres) admissions to nursing homes stalled.'

'Lack of support services available for children and young people other than virtual services.'

'Parents saying they cannot cope and looking for supports but adequate supports not available.'

Challenges of New Work Practices

Thirty-six per cent referenced challenges associated with new work practices, the challenges associated with remote working being the main challenge. Challenges associated with remote working included the impact on teams, in terms of connection and relationships, adapting to use of technology and juggling work / life responsibilities.

Impact on Teams

'I miss my colleagues, sharing work experiences, being able to ask questions, small talk, joking.'

'The lack of face to face contact with social work colleagues is now beginning to impact... on the quality of relationships'

'Isolation from the team.'

Adapting to Use of Technology

> *'A complete change of working – everything has become remote working, by teleconferencing.'*
>
> *'The challenges of the rapid change to technology.'*
>
> *'Fulfilling our roles and responsibilities in new ways, e.g. meetings through Zoom and calls.'*

Work/Life Balance

> *'Emotional – achieving work / life balance, difficult to create a boundary.'*
>
> *'Not being able to separate work and personal life when it is all happening in one space.'*
>
> *'Work from home and the challenges that this poses.'*

A small number experienced challenges associated with safe work practices, while other responses referred to a general sense of adapting or managing change in their role and workplace.

> *'Working while social distancing.'*
>
> *'Working in full PPE is tiring and uncomfortable.'*
>
> *'Ensuring our organisation is managing infection control while not being too restrictive on service users.'*

Challenges Presented by Employer Response

Thirty per cent highlighted challenges associated with the response from their employer with 16% referencing a lack of practical resources such as technology, software, equipment and PPE required to carry out their role & 13% referencing lack of support in terms of guidance, communication, trust or value placed on their role by the agency.

Lack of Technology & Resources

> *'No access to scan minutes of meetings to admin support which I had been doing and this made a huge difference to my efficiency.'*
>
> *'A lack of practical support in working from home including office equipment and computer needs.'*
>
> *'Technology is old and software is out of date.'*
>
> *'Safety – when visit required to home there has not been PPE ordered specifically for social work and I have funded my own or borrowed it.'*

Lack of Support, Guidance, Communication and Value for Social Work

> *'Unsupported by management/organisation. Left to fend for ourselves. Staff morale at lowest ever. Had to buy own PPE/scrubs. Let down by agency.'*

> *'We were not provided with scrubs. Social distancing within the office did not happen. Twelve people in the office. Some people requested to work from home but were not permitted. Difficult circumstances working in a small office, going to the wards, coming back into the office. We felt very isolated and alone and very undervalued at this time as we were still keeping the service going under very challenging and difficult circumstances.'*

> *'I am getting very little support from management – if I mentioned how I struggle with school/child care/work balance, I have been told to use annual leave. That is challenging given that this has been going on for so long'*

> *'I have been asked to provide a weekly log detailing the location, type and outcomes of my work. This surveillance of my work on top of caring for children at home has been stressful.'*

Challenges in Personal Life

Thirteen per cent referenced challenges associated with managing childcare and 10% referenced impact on their physical, mental health and general well- being.

Childcare

> *'I am so tired, I have two school going children who both need extra support with homework and this is a huge pressure and very challenging. Trying to juggle child care and work on top of it is impossible. I practically end up working from 7am to 7pm doing school work, lunches and play in between work. It is exhausting and it feels like I am not getting to do any of it properly.'*

> *'A day of juggling work and children and usually still have to work at night.'*

Impact on Physical and Mental Health

> *'I think the work can be more tiring at times due to the additional stress brought about by Covid.'*

> *'As I work on my own, I have found it very isolating, the changes in routine..coping with stress.'*

> *'Mental and physical exhaustion.'*

> *'Challenges in keeping up personal morale.'*

WHAT ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT?

95% (194 responses)

> **Social workers had more worries during this phase of data collection than during lockdown.**
>
> - The biggest worry for social workers was **how to provide an adequate social work service**. 46% of respondents said this was a worry for them, an increase from 33% during lockdown.
>
> - Thirty-three per cent said they were **worried about their clients**, a small decrease from 36% in the last phase.
>
> - There was also an increase in the number who **worried for themselves and their families**, from 16% to 21%.

Worry about Providing a Social Work Service

Forty-six per cent worried about the complexities involved in providing a quality social work service in light of restrictions and reduced services. Social workers expressed concerns about ongoing and future quality services (12%), how to offer a safe service (10%), the limitations of remote work (9%), including assessment & interventions. Social workers also worried about a variety of issues arising within their workplace which impacted upon their colleagues and upon the social work role.

> *'The uncertainty of knowing how to plan case work beyond a week at a time while awaiting direction on lockdown,'*
>
> *'Influx of clients with unmet needs… challenges that will present when face to face interactions resume and the limits and strains this may place on work.'*
>
> *'Huge emphasis on food parcels being delivered to families and the concern that we go back to a charity model of feeding. This has the danger of creating dependency and does not address the underlying causes of the needs for providing food.'*
>
> *'Adhering to social distancing when the basis of social work practice is in relationship building.'*
>
> *'Not adequately reaching families in crisis now due to fewer home visits and face to face contacts.'*
>
> *'How much longer our engagements with vulnerable children and their families can be sustained without face to face regular meetings.'*
>
> *'Clients deteriorating and the service not knowing due to limited face to face contact.'*
>
> *'I am worried that we cannot assess risk properly in these circumstances.'*

'Working remotely is still no replacement for face to face meetings in terms of relationship building, assessment work, etc.'

Worries about Workplace

Thirteen per cent worried about the lack of support and guidance provided by their employer with a number of social workers highlighting low staff morale, poor support and a lack of appreciation for the social work role within their organisation.

'Staff morale is very low at this time, feeling undervalued and forgotten.'

'Staff well-being, we have lost a number of service users to Covid and impact this had had… not enough organisational acknowledgement of same.'

'Evidence that MDT input has been sidelined with consultants making a lot of decisions without consultations from other disciplines'

Worry about Children, Families and Individuals

Thirty-three per cent worried about clients. These worries included concerns about clients and their families as they experienced life under lockdown with reduced supports. Key worries focused on increased risk and harm, mental health, coping in light of service closures, grief and distress, carer stress and the limitations of telehealth.

'Excessive drinking in homes is impacting families. Risk of domestic violence escalated, child neglect escalated.'

'Vulnerable people been taken advantage of financially and the long-term impact of this.'

'Young people at risk and being drawn into holding, distributing and dealing drugs, influenced by unknown adults within communities.'

'Children who are further isolated and away from supports and children who are cocooning with their potential abusers or stressed parents.'

'Impact of restrictions on child mental health, carers and parents.'

'Emotional well-being, i.e. parent limited visiting NICU [Neonatal Intensive Care Unit].'

'Children not seen by any professionals. Children unable to access supports and medical care or fun/social activities.'

'I am worried about the lack of support services to offer people who are really stranded at home'.

'Clients leaving prison with fewer supports than previously available.'

'The inappropriate placement of children as a result of the reduced capacity of foster placements, i.e. the placement of children in residential settings where they would be more appropriately placed in families.'

'The impact of this situation and how complicated grief will impact on families in their grief and bereavement response.'

'Families overburdened by caring responsibilities, no break for carers.'

'While telehealth is exciting, I am concerned about the people who will be left behind *because they do not have the resources to support them to learn about these solutions.'*

'Difficulties of telemedicine with older people.'

Worry about Self and Own Family

Twenty-one per cent expressed worry about themselves and their families, living with uncertainty and the emotional, physical and mental health toll of the pandemic and the possibility of contracting Covid-19.

'I feel sometimes that I do more work than normal. This impacts on me in a number of ways, it causes me stress, exhaustion and guilt for my children.'

I am worried that I'm going to burn out.

'I am worried how long I will be able to keep this up.'

'I am worried about taking care of my well-being and mental health in the midst of these new pressures.'

'When my own personal life might return to normal so that I can visit my own family?'

'I am also worried about being an asymptomatic spreader working in a community setting and the guilt/impact of me possibly passing this to my family.'

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE/KEY LEARNING

86% (166 responses)

> Thirty-four per cent gave examples related to **contact and connection with clients**, up from 24% in the lockdown sample.
>
> The number who gave examples of **technology-related learning** remained unchanged (33%).
>
> While respondents referred to being creative and innovative, this phase of data collection received practical **examples of how social workers adapted and innovated to meet the needs of service users**, examples including a Zoom parent and toddler group and setting up a day respite facility.

Responses to this question differed from the responses received during lockdown in that social workers provided more examples of best practice/key learning, demonstrating a shift from simple references to being 'creative and innovative' to being able to describe what that intervention was. Similar themes emerged: use of technology; communication & contact skills; teamwork and creativity & adaptability. A small number referred to their learning about the value of self care.

Contact and Connection with Clients

Thirty-four per cent gave examples of learning relating to contact and connection with clients, a 10% increase from the previous phase of data collection. Sixteen per cent of responses highlighted the development of communication skills in person-centred communication. The importance of maintaining connections through regular, proactive contact was a focus and a small number emphasised learning from connecting with clients in new ways such as socially distanced visits and thinking creatively about contact.

> *'The importance of checking in with families regularly during this time, how much parents value this contact and support.'*
>
> *'Returned to heightened awareness of core communication skills with patients and families, listening, rapport, reframing, pacing on telephone.'*
>
> *'It is possible to offer interventions to some families remotely. I have posted out programme content to parents and then discussed via phone. This works well in some cases.'*
>
> *'The creativity of frontline staff in establishing links with clients when home visits and usual methods of assessment have become restricted.'*
>
> *'Socially distanced visits in parks are working really well along with video calls.'*

''There is an opportunity here for Social Work to address the psychosocial and mental health impact by meeting service users for walking meetings or outdoors in their gardens/parks within limits of confidentiality.'

Use of Technology

Thirty-three per cent of responses highlighted the learning associated with the use of technology and communication applications, for example, supporting meetings and professional teamwork. 14% highlighted the specific benefits of technology in their work with clients to communicate, provide individual support and groupwork.

'Having Microsoft Teams and becoming more used to it for team meetings.'

'Conducted small parent groups via Microsoft Teams – still a learning curve.'

'The use of technology for some children is working better for some of them and is increasing their participation in care planning meetings and other key meetings.'

Creativity and Adaptability

Seventeen per cent identified creativity and adaptability in their role as a key learning during this phase. Responses referred to flexible, creative and adaptive ways of working with clients.

'I ran a Zoom parent and toddler group last week for the first time. It was very different but the parents feedback was how much they really enjoyed seeing each other.'

'The value of not only developing generic resources but instead creating resource packs attuned to individual families/children. We have got a fantastic response from these.'

'Staff support initiative launched by Medical Social Work Dept.'

'Setting up of a day respite facility for a family in crisis after much advocating and knocking on the door of Senior Managers… if there is a will, there is a way'

Teamwork

Teamwork was give as a positive example by 20%, while 10% described learning or best practice examples in relation to interagency collaboration.

'Excellent team working and cross discipline working has gone on. People have come together and worked really well. My hope is the culture of the HSE will retain this approach.'

'Outside the workspace colleagues are going above and beyond to support each other and keep a sense of team spirit'

'Sharing of resources between agencies and teams that might be helpful for families has been excellent.'

Self-Care

A small number described their learning about self-care.

> *'Self- care has been important as I try to journey through the feeling of pandemic burnout.'*

> *'Allowing time for self -care as the emotional demands on workers are doubled'.*

QUERIES ABOUT COVID-19 AND SOCIAL WORK

60% (123 responses)

There was an 18% **increase in respondents' queries about practice related issues** (45% of total queries) such as the loss of direct work with clients and safe work practices.

A new theme emerged whereby 20% of queries related to the

organisation/agency/employer response to a range of issues (e.g., student placements, inconsistent work practices across teams/agencies).

Fifteen per cent of queries related to the social work profession and the role of social work at organisational and national level.

Practice Queries

Forty-five per cent of responses were queries related to social work practice, highlighting social worker's questions about the loss of direct work with clients (16%) and safe work practices (15%). There was an 18% increase in queries about social work practice compared to lockdown. These queries mainly related to working with clients without direct contact and providing a social work service within safe work practices. Other responses highlighted queries about the impact of restrictions on clients and implications for future practice.

> *'The emotional impact on children of loss of touch with families. Our observations are less effective by using technology only. It has to be combined with face to face as well.'*
> *'When will it be safe to take clients in our cars?'*
> *'Will our social work role change with the continued presence of Covid in our communities?'*
> *'Impact of Covid-19 on people living with domestic violence/child to parent violence – how can we safely offer them support and guidance?'*
> *'Will PPE be issued to social workers to facilitate home visits?'*

Agency Queries

Twenty per cent of responses were queries about agency response, a new theme to emerge from this phase of data collection. Social workers had a range of queries including queries on planning for student placements, about planning processes, inconsistencies in responses across agencies and requests for guidance.

> *'Very concerned about how students are going to be supported to go on placement in the current climate, this needs to be addressed promptly to help with planning.'*
>
> *'There is a huge difference between what different team leaders and areas are allowing their teams to do.'*
>
> *'Very mixed messages to social work staff. It was okay for hospital social work staff to go into wards but community social workers did not have to visit clients at home/hospital. It appeared there was different values placed on different teams.'*

Queries about the Social Work Profession

Fifteen per cent of queries related to the social work profession and the role of social work at organisational and national level.

> *'Why are social workers not being included at a strategic level nationally in the planning of responses to Covid in the areas of healthcare, housing and social protection? Social workers are in the front line witnessing first hand the impact of health, social and economic policy on service users and families and support them directly .. we are well placed to contribute to strategic planning at a national level as are service user and family representatives.'*
>
> *'Why isn't social work at the table nationally in the psychosocial response and also in local governance models?'*
>
> *'The importance of continuing to fund social work and recognising the paramount role they have played during the pandemic.'*
>
> *'Are swabbing duties considered to be outside the scope of practice of Social Work in Primary Care?'*
>
> *'What is the experience of social workers in other Disability settings/Section 38 agencies? Have you been redeployed despite social work need?'*
>
> *'More clarity about social workers carrying out risk assessments outside their range of expertise (absence of medical/public health input).'*
>
> *'How can the role of social work be promoted as an ongoing psychosocial support as the long term impact of the pandemic becomes apparent?'*

WHAT ONE THING COULD YOUR ORGANISATION DO TO BETTER SUPPORT YOUR WORK IN A LOCKDOWN SITUATION?

90% (185 responses)

> **Lack of IT resources remained an issue** for social workers with 27% specifically requesting IT resources.
>
> Twenty-five per cent of requests related to **additional and improved supports** for social workers. These supports included requests for organisational support to check in with staff, support teamwork and to provide support around issues such as flexible and remote work practices, professional supervision, childcare and management of workload demands.
>
> Eleven per cent asked that social work is valued and social workers trusted.

Twenty-seven per cent of responses requested **technology resources** in terms of equipment and software, additional training and support and online access to files. Resources requested related to IT, such as video conferencing technology, software, remote access to files, wifi connectivity, laptops and phones.

> *'Ensure adequate provision of IT. I have staff waiting on laptops and phones for more time than is reasonable. This prevents them from carrying out their duties in an efficient manner.'*

Twenty-five per cent of responses related to **additional supports**, almost double from 13% during lockdown. These supports included requests for organisational support to check in with staff and support teamwork and to provide support around issues such as flexible and remote work practices, supervision, childcare and managing workload demands.

> *'I feel that staff would benefit from at least one video call per week from line manager on an individual basis just to check in and perhaps have an open discussion about their welfare.'*
>
> *'Improve communication with staff. More empathy and understanding.'*
>
> *'Provide clinical supervision. Extended access to counselling services post the lockdown.'*
>
> *'Communicate better in a less dictatorial/authoritative way.'*
>
> *'Allow work from home for at least one day per week. Work from home currently not permitted therefore using up much annual leave due to limited childcare availability.'*
>
> *'The issue of no childcare and push to be in work has been cruel and exhausting, especially if a single parent with no access to family support.'*

Sixteen per cent of responses requested clear, concise, **guidance, information and effective communication from employers**.

> *'Better communication regarding the decisions made relating to Covid-19 restrictions in order to be able to implement them.'*
>
> *'Clarity around reasonable work load/tasks when working from home every second day.'*
>
> *'Give us clearer advice and direction about work practices and what we can do – guidance and road map have been vague.'*
>
> *'Have fair and clear guidelines and rules that are the same for everyone.'*
>
> *'Updates as to what services are up and running and what services are not, or are operating with skeleton staff. It would save time trying to pursue services that are not active.'*

Eight per cent requested additional organisational support around **safe work practices**.

Eleven per cent asked that **social work is valued and trusted**. The key messages are to

- Recognise the role and contribution of social workers
- Acknowledge the toll and impact of work during the pandemic on social workers
- Include social work in planning and management process
- Trust social workers working from home and avoid micromanagement.

> *'Stop auditing and checking how I work… there is enough pressure applying to our area of work right now without even more reporting upwards on templates looking for data we have never been asked for before now.'*
>
> *'To not implement activity diaries at home. I have a busy caseload that continues to be demanding and these diaries add to my workload and promotes distrust.''*
>
> *'Trust social workers to do their job. No micro management of work. It devalues the professional.'*
>
> *'See social workers as the problem solvers and solution finders we are.'*
>
> *'Recognise our skills in supporting patients and families through change rather than retreating to a solely medical and nursing bias.'*

SUPPORTS PROVIDED BY EMPLOYERS

Respondents were given a list of resources needed to work at home (mobile phone, laptop, guidance for online work, etc.) and asked to indicate which resources their employer had provided. **Social workers were provided with either the same or less support from their employers than they said were provided during lockdown, the biggest fall off in supports being guidance/protocols for**

working online. There was one exception – while no one said their employer provided childcare in the lockdown sample, 5% of the Phase 1 Easing Lockdown sample said their employer provided childcare.

Employer Provided Resources	12th May – 18th May	19th May - 8th June
Good wifi connection	44.93%	45.5%
Laptop or desktop computer	72.46%	69.79%
Mobile phone	75.36%	76.04%
Appropriate work station	40.37%	37.75%
Guidance/Protocols for working from home	71.91%	70.45%
Guidance/protocol for working online	72.83%	66.18%
Necessary software to do your job	71.68%	67.15%
Childcare	0%	5%

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

43% (89 responses)

Thirty-six per cent of responses related to supports required to assist social workers: 28% related to resources to support social work; 22% raised the issue of childcare supports; 20% of responses related to IT requirements to facilitate effective work; 10% commented on the work and role of the IASW and 10% commented on issues related to social work profession and practice.

Supports

> '*Managing own work while my children have been out of school has been challenging, more recognition from employer would have been supportive.*'
> '*The issue of childcare for frontline workers has been very stressful and nothing has been done throughout this pandemic.*'
> '*Some staff with no childcare arrangements were afforded the opportunity to work from home – they had to use up their annual leave and work weekends to accommodate. Shocking. The impact on the team has been quite significant as we felt very unsupported and people just feel so demoralised at this point.*'

'Childcare and working from home is a huge issue for many, particularly given that social work is a female dominated profession.'

'Trust that I am doing my work from Senior Management team.'

'I feel I need further support from management. We are expected to just get on with it. Our working lives have been totally transformed. Everyone has other things going on that impinge on our work lives even more as we are working from home.'

Resources

'I don't have a smart phone to stay in touch with service users.'

'No access to printer, scanner or paper files.'

'More staff need access to devices so that we can connect on line.'

'I work for Tusla in an old psychiatric hospital. The existing problem of poor buildings not fit for purpose has become heightened now. We now need urgently to change this for the health and well-being of social workers and those that have to attend here.'

'I had to buy a desk and office chair myself as working from my kitchen table was impacting on my back, neck and wrists.'

Social Work Profession

'I hope collectively as a body of social workers we can come up with good working guidance and suggestions for ourselves working remotely, working on online platforms, working at separate locations from the families we work with, also that as a body of social workers we highlight how adversely affected vulnerable people are in crisis situation such as the one we are experiencing at the moment.'

'My key message and the key message from the IASW should be to continue to the core support and assessment work by social work through home visits. We assess systems and environments, we cannot be ethical in our practice without such necessary contact.'

'I would like to think that I will be acknowledged for the service that I have provided during this service but I know I have yet to hear in media circles the service social workers are providing at this time. As always the discussion is focused on what the doctors and nurses are doing at this difficult time.'

IASW

'We need some organisation to really start to advocate for our profession through the unions, the work place, Coru and in the media. We need a more vocal communication

department in the IASW for social workers and not just for Tusla. Please don't just do a survey and not help us.'

'Thank you to the IASW for the information/training links. It's very useful.'

'It is great that the IASW are carrying this out, the Irish perspective is so important and vastly different to the UK especially re death, wakes, funerals, bereavements etc.'

THE RESPONDENTS

204 responses were received. The largest group identified as working within Children & Family services. The *Other* category was chosen by 31% of respondents which comprised Hospital/Medical social work (20), Disability (14), Primary Care (9), and Academia (4) in the main. 15% of responses identified as working within Mental Health, 16% within Adult Services and 2% within Criminal Justice

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Adult services	16.18%	33
Children and Families	34.31%	70
Mental Health	15.69%	32
Criminal Justice	2.45%	5
Other (please specify)	31.37%	64
TOTAL		204

Dublin had the largest number of respondents (34%), followed by Cork (12%), Galway (9%) and Wicklow (6%).

Respondents were asked what best describes their primary role. Most (55%) described themselves as experienced social workers, the second largest group (17%) as managers.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Student social worker	0.00%	0
Newly qualified social worker	5.42%	11
Experienced social worker	55.17%	112
Social work supervisor	7.39%	15
Manager	16.75%	34
Academic	2.96%	6
Independent social worker	3.45%	7
Other	8.87%	18
TOTAL		203

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