



Measuring Well-being in Welsh Social Work

A Research Report by

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Abstract

Following increasing awareness of the problems associated with poor working conditions (Ravalier, 2019; Ravalier et al., 2020) in British social work, a survey was carried out to measure feelings of well-being specifically within the context of social work in Wales.

An online survey involving 61 items was distributed to participants over four days. The return rate was disappointingly low at 6.11%.

The results indicated considerable dissatisfaction relating to various aspects of well-being and a range of problems that need to be addressed. The potential significance of the results is commented on and the challenges faced by employers of social workers in Wales are discussed.

Introduction

Concern over mounting work pressures on social workers and the harmful effects of stress led the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the Social Workers Union (SWU) to commission research into the working conditions experienced by social workers (Ravalier, 2019; Ravalier et al., 2020). This research gave rise to significant concerns about the unrealistic expectations placed on social workers within a context of increasing demand and decreasing resources. Consequently, a well-being and working conditions toolkit was developed to help social workers manage and remain safe in such demanding circumstances (Ravalier and Allen, 2020).

While this was clearly a step in the right direction, more work was needed in order to have a firmer foundation of understanding on which to build ameliorative measures. The decision was therefore made to undertake further research on the same themes, while also focusing specifically on a well-defined subset of UK social workers. Social workers employed in Wales were chosen for this sample, largely as a reflection of the growing distinctiveness of Welsh social policy following devolution in general and the impact of the landmark legislation, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

With its emphasis on community involvement and co-production, the Act reflects in some ways a move away from the dominance of neoliberal thinking in England (Gwilym and Williams, 2021). We were interested to see, amongst other things, whether this social policy shift made a difference in terms of well-being and working conditions as compared with the picture emerging from the wider UK research.

As Thompson and McGowan (2020) acknowledge, social work is by its very nature a demanding and pressurised profession, but it does not have to be stressful – that is

there is scope for keeping pressures within manageable limits that do not lead to health-affecting stress. This will depend, of course, on social workers being provided with adequate support and being able to operate within a context of suitable working conditions.

A key part of this research, therefore, is seeking to clarify the adequacy or otherwise of the support and working conditions available for social workers within Wales.

The issue of stress in social work is not new. For example, the work of Collins (2020) has been raising issues about the excessive demands being placed on social workers for many years, and he was not the first to do so.

Stress, understood as an absence of well-being, continues to be a major concern, despite the number of times it has been identified as a significant problem. A central part of the rationale for undertaking this research was to focus on the issues specifically in a Welsh context and to add to the overall growing knowledge base around well-being and/or its absence as a factor in shaping the life experience of social work personnel.

Method

The proprietary LUME Well-being Data System was administered via email. The system involves 61 statements spread across 12 categories, meaning and emotionality; autonomy and control; recognition and rewards; progression and development; tools and resources; measurement; workload and expectations; appraisal and supervision; teamwork and communication;

leadership; equality and respect; and health and well-being support.

Participants were asked to record the extent of their agreement, ranging from 1, strong disagreement, to 6, strong agreement. Each section also had a facility for adding comments.

The emails were sent to all BASW Cymru members, 1,228 in total, over a four-day period. That is, 3 of the 12 sections were covered on each day. A reminder was sent on the fifth day.

As all the statements were phrased in positive terms (for example, 'I am satisfied that ...'), the lower the score, the greater the degree of dissatisfaction. The scores and associated comments were then carefully analysed in the context of earlier relevant research.

The LUME system automatically logs and collates the responses, assigning them to one of three categories: Red: for scores of 1.99 or less; Amber: for scores between 2 and 3.99 and Green: for scores of 4 or above. Green indicates a positive result and, while there is always room for improvement in any aspect of workplace well-being provision, a Green category rating suggests that the organisation concerned is doing a basically good job of making employee wellness a reality, rather than just an aspiration.

Amber suggests more of a 'mixed bag', a combination of positive and negative elements. It tells us that some things are working well, while there are also problematic areas that need attention. Red indicates areas of considerable concern. For scores to be so low means that there is considerable dissatisfaction around the particular area(s) concerned. While these are broad categorisations, they can be helpful in giving an overview of which aspects of well-being management are being managed well and which need attention. They are not intended to be used in a rigid or hard and fast way, simply as a useful general guide.

In keeping with a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, the surveys and associated email communications were bilingual in English and Welsh.

Results

Tables 1 to 12 below present the scores for each of the 12 elements of the Lume data system.

Table 1 - Meaning and emotionality

I find my work meaningful and engaging	Green	4.4
My work enables me to grow as a person	Green	4.1
My work makes me feel I am making a difference	Green	4.1
My work is emotionally satisfying	Amber	3.9
The emotional atmosphere in the workplace is healthy	Amber	3.5

Table 2 - Autonomy and control

I have enough autonomy and control to complete my work	Green	4.1
I have sufficient flexibility and control over what work I do	Amber	3.6
It is possible to influence the control of how work is done	Amber	3.7

Leaders accurately recognise situations when they should make decisions themselves and when individuals should have the autonomy to make decisions themselves

Amber 3.3

Table 3 - Recognition and reward

I am adequately rewarded financially for my work

Amber 3.4

I receive appropriate personal and professional recognition for my work

Amber 3.3

I am rewarded based on my effort using my capabilities, rather than just on deliverables, outcomes or outputs

Amber 3.0

Overall, I am valued as an employee

Amber 3.4

Table 4 - Progression and development

There are opportunities for me to progress in my career

Amber 2.9

There are opportunities to develop my capabilities

Amber 3.4

Deepening and extending my role capability is seen as of equal importance to upward progression

Amber 3.2

Learning and development for my future in the organisation are actively encouraged and supported

Amber 3.3

Appropriate learning opportunities and resources are provided

Amber 3.3

Table 5 - Tools and resources

I have access to the appropriate tools and technologies I need to work effectively

Amber 2.4

I have access to appropriate training and support for the tools and technologies I use

Amber 2.1

I have access to the financial resources I need to work effectively

Red 1.9

Cost effectiveness is appropriately balanced with quality and working on the right thing

Red 1.9

Resources are not allocated based on achieving specific outputs or deliverables that then restrict us from working on the right things

Amber 2.0

My physical working environment enables me to do my best work

Red 1.9

Table 6 - Measurement

Evaluation of me and my work is fair and appropriate

Amber 2.2

The evaluation process for my performance is clear and transparent

Red 1.9

I can influence how my performance is measured	Red	1.9
I am evaluated based on my effort and capabilities, rather than just my deliverables, outputs or outcomes	Amber	2.0
Goals and targets do not cause conflicting competition between people or teams	Red	1.9
The organisation correctly measures performance towards achieving the right customer outcomes	Red	1.8

Table 7 - Workload and expectations

The quality and difficulty of the work I am expected to do are reasonable	Amber	2.3
The pace and variety of my work are appropriate	Amber	2.1
My workload enables me to have a healthy work-life balance	Red	1.8
What is expected of me in terms of my work is made clear to me	Amber	2.0

Table 8 - Appraisal and supervision

The feedback I receive from my manager helps me create valuable work	Amber	2.0
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The feedback I receive from my manager helps me learn and develop

Red 1.9

The feedback I receive from my manager is appropriately frequent

Red 1.8

Policies and procedures are clear

Amber 2.0

Policy guidelines are not unduly restrictive or rigid

Red 1.9

Staff have the opportunity with management to influence policies and procedures

Red 1.6

Table 9 - Teamwork and communication

I am happy with the level of trust and open communication in the team

Amber 3.4

I feel comfortable in raising a difference of opinion

Amber 3.5

I am happy with the level of support and cooperation in the team

Amber 3.4

Access to information is communicated in a relevant and timely way

Amber 3.2

Staff are consulted on important matters
Amber 2.9

Work is visible and well aligned with other teams to avoid duplication or conflict
Amber 2.7

Table 10 - Leadership

The organisation has clear goals and a genuine strategy to serve the customer
Amber 3.5

I am committed to following the strategic direction of the organisation
Amber 3.6

It is clear how the goals we are working on as a team contribute to the overall organisational strategy
Amber 3.3

Leaders communicate in an inspirational way and foster trust and respect
Amber 2.9

Leaders encourage creative thinking and challenging the status quo
Amber 2.7

Table 11 - Equality and respect

There is a clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion
Amber 2.2

The work atmosphere and how I am treated feel inclusive and support diversity and fairness
Amber 2.2

I am confident that any concerns about discrimination are/
would be dealt with appropriately

Amber 2.1

Hierarchy within the organisation does not impact my feeling
of self-worth

Red 1.9

Bullying or harassment are not tolerated and are dealt with
appropriately

Amber 2.0

Table 12 - Health and well-being support

I am happy with the support that is available for absence such
as bereavement and sickness

Amber 2.1

Quality of life is supported through support for physical and
mental well-being

Red 1.9

The organisation supports staff through their difficulties in
and outside of work

Red 1.7

Well-being initiatives and programmes are used and are effective

Red 1.8

In total, the response scores fell into the three categories as
follows:

RED 15
AMBER 42
GREEN 4

There was a total of 221 comments made across the 12 sections.
We shall make reference below in the Discussion section to some
of the ones we felt were of significance in light of the overall
'messages' from the data collected.

Discussion

We must first set our discussion in the context of the very low level of response. We therefore need to regard any lessons we might try to learn from the research as indicative, rather than in any sense definitive.

It is interesting to speculate as to whether the low response could in part be a reflection of the issues being investigated. That is:

to what extent might the low response rate be due to the concerns about the very conditions of work overload that prompted the study in the first place?

It is also significant that the survey was undertaken during the pandemic when a number of surveys were being conducted by various organisations, potentially contributing to survey overload.

However, given the consistency of scoring across the 12 sections, we are none the less able to note a set of messages that reinforce what earlier research had established.

Meaning and emotionality

The development of the concept of spiritual intelligence (Zohar and Marshall, 2000) that became popular in the early years of the 21st century drew attention to the importance of meaning making in the workplace and established the notion of employee engagement and satisfaction being associated with how meaningful or otherwise the work is.

Similarly, the popularity of the concept of emotional intelligence (Murphy, 2006) drew attention to the role of emotion in the workplace (Bolton, 2005; Finch and Aranda-Mena, 2020). Work is a fundamental part of human experience and has major consequences in terms of health, well-being and identity. Workplaces can play both positive and negative roles in terms of employees' emotional well-being and thus potentially their mental health.

It is for these reasons that this section enquires about matters relating to meaning and emotionality. The overall average score for this section was 4.0, with the full range of responses (1-6) being in evidence. The breadth of the range suggests varying experiences in this regard, ranging from low satisfaction to high.

Comments acknowledged that the work can be emotionally draining. Reference was also made to the additional pressures brought about by home working in response to the pandemic.

Given the nature of social work as a caring profession geared towards empowerment and social justice, it is not surprising that the scores for meaning and emotionality should be positive on average (that is, within the Green range). It is concerning, though, that while the overall average was positive, some of the individual responses were in the Red range, indicating that there were some areas of dissatisfaction.

In view of how demanding social work is,

the need to ensure that employees are finding their work meaningful and emotionally satisfying is a particularly pressing one.

If such matters are not being handled effectively, the result can be health-affecting levels of stress (Thompson, 2019).

Autonomy and control

It has long been recognised that having a sense of autonomy and control is important in terms of employee engagement and the avoidance of stress (Huq, 2017). These are therefore important issues when it comes to job satisfaction, engagement and productivity. We see them as particularly important in terms of the professional nature of social work and the fact that the complexities involved make a direct command and control approach to workflow management unworkable in view of the judgement calls that need to be made on a day-to-day basis.

The overall average for this section was 3.7, which is towards the high end of Amber, which is not unduly concerning. However, the responses covered the full range from 1 to 6, meaning that some individual scores were in Red. This suggests that some people are being denied a sufficient degree of autonomy and control to function as effective professionals or to achieve a positive level of well-being.

Comments were largely critical of poor or non-responsive management that had the effect of undermining autonomy and control.

Recognition and rewards

It perhaps goes without saying that recognition and rewards are an important basis of motivation and contributor to satisfaction and well-being.

The overall average for this section was 3.3, within the Amber range. However, once again, the individual scores ranged from 1 to 6, revealing once more that some people were dissatisfied to a considerable extent.

“I’m currently having a problem with my work base and my boss commented that they aren’t willing to compromise as if I left they would be able to replace me. This did not make me feel valued.”

Another comment was “There are no rewards sometimes not even a well done” and further one was: “Biding my time till retirement or redundancy”.

One person commented that they did feel valued, again reflecting the varied responses across the sample. The overall tenor, though, was firmly negative.

Progression and development

Opportunities for professional development and a career path can play a significant part in shaping people’s satisfaction and thus affect their level of engagement and well-being.

The overall average here was 3.2 within the Amber range, but the pattern of the individual responses covering the full range of 1 to 6 was again apparent.

The comments were largely negative - for example:

“Mae diffyg amser a llwyth achosion uchel yn golygu ei bod hi’n anodd rhoi amser i adlewyrchu ar fy ngwaith a datblygu ymhellach.”

[The lack of time and a high caseload mean that it is hard to give time to reflecting on my work and developing further.]

and:

“Increasingly functional approach to training with little space for individual professional development”

The lack of time for reflection is particularly concerning

in view of the serious responsibilities that accompany social work decision making. Without a clear focus on reflective practice, there is a danger that responses will be largely automatic and habitualised and therefore potentially very dangerous.

Tools and resources

A lack of access to the necessary tools and resources will not only reduce productivity and effectiveness, but also has the strong potential to lower morale and create tensions due to the frustration generated.

The overall average for this section was 2.1, within the Amber range, but very close to Red. Again, the full range of individual responses was from 1 to 6, indicating some people highly satisfied, while others were highly dissatisfied. No doubt part of this situation was the impact of many years of austerity and cuts in public services funding, even though the Welsh Government has not engaged with neoliberalism as fully as the UK Government at Westminster (Gwilym and Williams, 2021).

The theme of the additional pressures of working from home re-emerged here. What emerges, therefore, is a picture of concern about tools and resources, currently being made worse by the consequences of changes in working practices brought about by the pandemic.

Measurement

Making the best use of limited resources to produce optimal outcomes depends to a certain extent on having reliable measurement of key variables, such as performance.

For the first time, the overall average in this section was in the Red category at 1.9. This strongly suggests that there are significant problems in this regard. Again, the individual responses covered the full range from 1 to 6, showing variations across settings.

This would seem to suggest that there are concerns relating to how performance management operates. One respondent even rejected the whole idea of measurement, describing it as ‘neoliberalist rubbish’. Using appropriate measures in a constructive way would therefore appear to be something that is not being well managed or well understood.

We shall return to this point below when we discuss appraisal and supervision.

Workload and expectations

Excessive workloads can create stress which, as a result of its debilitating effects, can create a vicious circle in which employees are less well able to manage their workload (Thompson, 2019). Making sure that workloads and associated expectations are realistic and manageable is therefore an important part of good management practice and a major contributor to well-being.

The overall average here was 2.1, in the Amber range but very close to Red. This fits with previous research that indicated workloads were often problematic and a significant source of concern. This is very concerning, as work overload is not only detrimental to the individual’s health and well-being, but also potentially a basis for dangerous practice – for example, as a result of rushing, an increased error rate and certain important tasks not getting done.

The range for individual responses was from 1 to 6, although there was no score of 4.0 or above for the statement: ‘The quality and difficulty of the work I am expected to do are reasonable’.

The comments again reflect a problematic situation that has been made worse by the pandemic.

Appraisal and supervision

The role of supervision and appraisal in ensuring safe practice and on-going development has long been recognised (Hawkins and McMahon, 2020). It is part of the philosophy of human resource management to recognise that an organisation's most important resource is its human resource, its people. Appraisal and supervision are seen as important ways of helping employees achieve optimal outcomes and maximum development.

It was therefore disappointing to note that the overall average for this section was in the Red category at 1.9. Combined with the low scores noted earlier in relating to measuring performance, there is a strong likelihood that there are problems over the extent of support social workers receive from processes of supervision and appraisal.

Opportunities to empower employees to fulfil their potential are being missed.

There were many negative comments about this, as captured by the following telling remark: "What feedback? Conversations with managers are usually only when they want something".

When we combine concerns about appraisal and supervision with the concerns about performance measurement mentioned earlier, a worrying picture emerges in which it seems that ways of supporting staff to not only survive, but actually thrive are, for the most part, not being capitalised upon. This is likely to be highly detrimental to employee well-being in both the short and long term.

Teamwork and communication

Issues of teamwork and effective communication are, of course, central to not only organisational effectiveness, but also well-being. If these aspects of an organisation are not working well, the scope for major problems for both employers and employees is very high indeed.

The overall average for this aspect was 3.2, within the Amber range, with individual responses covering the full range from 1 to 6. This average is not unduly problematic in itself, but it does suggest that there is significant room for improvement in relation to these issues. This was reinforced by the comments which are predominantly negative and critical.

Given the great potential of teamwork and effective communication to promote well-being and positive outcomes, the apparent failure to take opportunities for developing much more effective working practices is disappointing.

Leadership

Effective leadership involves establishing clarity about what the organisation is trying to achieve, creating what is known as a vision. Leadership also involves creating a culture that motivates people to achieve that vision, with the result that everyone benefits (Schein, 2017).

Leadership will also be highly significant in terms of well-being, in so far as poor or non-existent leadership can lower morale, create unnecessary tensions and serve as a block to job satisfaction. How effective leadership is will therefore be very significant.

The ‘mixed bag’ result here is captured by two very different comments.

Contrast:

“It is not clear what senior leaders actually do”

with:

“Recently a new service manager has been more engaging than ever before in collecting comments and thoughts from frontline staff and teams which could make a real difference to fit the needs of our service.”

Good leadership practice does exist, it would seem, but is far from universal

Equality and respect

Of course, in a social work context where equality, respect and dignity are central to the professional value base, it would be reasonable to expect high scores in relation to this section. However, in reality the overall average, at 2.1, was only very slightly beyond the upper limit of the Red range. This can therefore be seen as an area of significant concern. It suggests

that there is a fundamental mismatch between the professional basis of social work and what is happening in actual practice. This is particularly disappointing given the centrality of equality and respect to the social work ethos.

What was particularly concerning was the references in the comments to what appears to be a culture of bullying, as the following two remarks indicate:

“I witnessed the chief executive officer bullying – i.e. shouting and slamming the table – when challenged by one of the elder social work managers”

“Staff have to feel safe in raising issues of bullying. With my organisation there is a significant lack of trust which impacts honesty and good working relationships”

There were other concerns too about equality and dignity:

“This is a major issue and the reason why I am leaving my current position”

“I do not feel that social workers are respected in my organisation”

It would seem, therefore, that the situation is far from ideal, despite the strong emphasis in social work on equality and respect.

Health and well-being support

A major part of the rationale for undertaking this research was the growing recognition that: (i) health and well-being issues are fundamental to organisational effectiveness at the macro level and the quality of life of individuals at the micro level (Van Veldhoven and Peccei, 2015); and (ii) a combination of factors (not least austerity and neoliberalism – Mendoza, 2015) has contributed to serious threats to employees’ health and well-being (Thompson and McGowan, 2020). This section is therefore at the heart of the basis of this investigation.

Consequently, it was disappointing to note that the overall average was 2.0, at the very bottom of the Amber range, suggesting that all is far from well in this regard.

Despite the low scores, the comments were mainly positive, some indicating clear efforts to promote health and well-being. However, one comment suggested that there might be problems with how such initiatives are implemented in practice:

“Well-being services are available and are encouraged. However they can be seen as a quick fix rather than addressing the root cause”

This reflects a concern recognised in the employee wellness literature, namely that ameliorative efforts can often be superficial and even tokenistic, failing to adopt a more holistic approach (Cederström and Spicer, 2015; Howarth and Hart, 2012).

Four key themes

In considering our conclusion and recommendations, it is important to bear in mind that, on the one hand, the survey sample was disappointingly small, but, on the other, the issues that emerge are largely consistent with earlier research on similar themes.

While there is much that could be drawn out from a close statistical analysis, we focus here on four main issues (or sets of issues): quality of management; quality of leadership; workload expectations; and system overload.

Quality of management

Three factors lead us to identify the quality of management as a significant issue. First, there are the low scores in some key areas, as mentioned earlier that strongly suggest there is considerable room for improvement in terms of some aspects of management practice. Second, the fact that so many scores showed a range from 1 to 6 indicates that some people were very dissatisfied with the issues in question. Third, although there were some positive remarks, the predominant tone of comments was negative and critical and often referenced what were perceived as management failings.

Rath and Harter (2010) highlight the significance of positive management support and its impact on engagement:

The most disengaged group of workers we have ever studied are those who have a manager who is not paying attention. If your manager ignores you, there is a 40% chance that you will be actively disengaged or filled with hostility about your job. If our manager is at least paying attention – even if he [sic] is focusing on your weaknesses – the chances of you being actively disengaged go down to 22%, But if your manager is primarily focusing on your strengths, the chance of your being actively disengaged is just 1%, or 1 in 100.

(p. 26)

Arguably, improved engagement is likely to lead to improved well-being as a result of higher rates of job satisfaction, less alienation and more meaningful work.

There would therefore be much to be gained from improving the level of management skills, particularly in terms of people management (Thompson, 2013).

Standards of management practice will, of course, vary from organisation to organisation and within any given organisation. Much will depend on level and quality of training and extent of experience. Another factor will be the quality and quantity of support that managers get from their own line manager.

What is particularly important is to seek to break the vicious circle in which staff feeling insufficiently supported struggle to get by and thereby create greater needs for management support and, in turn, the need for greater support puts additional pressures on managers.

Quality of leadership

Management and leadership are closely related, but also quite distinct in some ways. In particular, there is a close relationship between leadership and the shaping of organizational culture to create environments where employees are motivated to work towards achieving the organisation's goals in line with its vision. In social work terms, this involves ensuring that practices are consistent with social work values and the role of social work in the wider social policy context of personal social services.

The overall picture that emerges is one where there are various concerns that can be linked to leadership (for example, the references to a culture of bullying), but relatively little to suggest the existence of supportive, nurturing cultures that will promote well-being.

The quality of management will depend on, amongst other things, the quality of leadership in terms of the ability of leaders to create a motivating vision and a culture that supports people in achieving that vision.

In times of excessive pressures, losing sight of any such vision becomes much easier, and low-morale cultures that wear people down rather than boost them become much more likely to evolve.

Workload expectations

Concerns about work overload were a significant part of the rationale for undertaking this research. Unsurprisingly, therefore, what emerges from this study, despite its low response rate, is a picture of immense levels of pressure on social workers that are proving problematic for very many people (this is also perhaps part of the reason for the low response rate).

Knowingly giving an employee more work than they can reasonably cope with is potentially an instance of bullying

in the sense that it can be seen as setting people up to fail, thereby undermining their dignity. Being unaware that staff are overloaded is indicative of poor management. Therefore, either way, work overload is not a situation that should be tolerated. It exposes social workers to the risk of a higher level of (potentially very costly) mistakes, health-affecting stress that leads to higher levels of sickness absence, less learning and creativity and a higher likelihood of staff turnover. In addition, Thompson and McGowan (2020) argue that overloaded staff actually achieve less than employees who have a more safely manageable workload.

The common tacit assumption that workloads can be allowed to keep increasing needs to be challenged, in so far as it contributes to a further vicious circle in which unrealistic workloads lead to lower levels of quality and quantity of work.

The issue of work overload can also be linked to management and leadership. Pushing people beyond a manageable workload (or allowing them to push themselves to do so) needs to be recognised as counterproductive, as work overload will lead to a wide range of problems.

System overload

As social work professionals, we should be well aware of individualising problems and failing to look more holistically at the situation. It is therefore essential that we consider the wider system. The picture that emerges from this study and the wider literature is one of an overloaded, over-pressurised system. In a context of neoliberalism and austerity.

We should perhaps not be surprised by this, given the attendant reduction in public spending that has a doubly negative effect on social work, in so far as it involves reducing supply while demand is increasing (due to increased poverty and associated problems).

While the issues around an apparent skills deficit in relation to management and leadership are important in their own right, they need to be understood in the context an overloaded system. For example, a manager who is well suited to managing people in less pressurised circumstances may be out of his or her depth in circumstances of immense pressure and associated demands and challenges. Hannan (2021), writing about the Royal Society of Arts's approach to well-being, captures the point well:

For us, wellbeing means the ability of individuals to lead a good life. However, for this vision to be realised, we believe we must see wellbeing as a systemic issue, which can be impacted by a range of complex factors, including both objective circumstance and subjective sense of security and happiness. The distribution of wellbeing is unequal, not just from individual to individual but because of systemic and structural inequalities.

(pp. 37-8)

Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the limitations of a low response rate, there is sufficient 'fit' between the results of this research and the picture painted by other studies in the same general area of well-being and stress in social work for us to give some degree of credence to the messages emerging from the investigation.

Each of the four themes identified raises major concerns. Social work plays an important role in making our society a safe, fair and humane society, with such work involving great pressures and challenges.

Without adequate support, working conditions, management and leadership, there is a very real danger that practice will be not only ineffective, but actually positively harmful to both citizens and practitioners. This means that, when it comes to employee wellness, the stakes are high and are thus worthy of serious consideration.

By way of conclusion, we offer five main recommendations, one each in relation to the four themes plus a general one.

Recommendation 1

There are no easy answers when it comes to improving standards of management. However, we would recommend that ways of enhancing the quality of management be explored as fully as possible.

Recommendation 2

Exploring ways of improving management quality is not enough on its own. Similar efforts to improve leadership also need to be made. The two can be seen to be interrelated, in the sense that the more effective leadership becomes, the easier effective management becomes.

Recommendation 3

A significant challenge for managers is the development of collective strategies for processing workload and keeping it within manageable limits, which may at times involve making difficult decisions about what will and will not get done. Our recommendation is therefore for a much stronger emphasis

on collective strategies, rather than allowing so much pressure to rest on the shoulders of individuals.

Recommendation 4

While social work personnel – both practitioners and managers – have no direct control over the wider social policy agenda or system, there is an important role for professional organisations and unions to continue to press for significant reform in order to create a more effective, safer and less destructive system.

Recommendation 5

Finally, we recommend that research work in this area continue, given the number and range of complex factors involved and the high price of the current unsatisfactory situation continuing unabated.

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