

Morale and mindfulness: can they help people working in social work and social care?

Jo Moriarty



Outline

Why these concepts are important

Definitions

What does research tell us?

Discussion

Morale

Morale is an everyday term that is doesn't have a single agreed definition:

- the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand
- a sense of common purpose with respect to a group
- the level of individual psychological well-being based on such factors as a sense of purpose and confidence in the future

Can be used to describe individuals or organisations

(Kessler et al,2021)

https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/155788101/Kessler_et_al_2021_Morale_in_the_NHS_Workforce.pdf



Multiple layers

‘The morale concept [has been] dismembered...
portioned off and subsumed into terms such as
job satisfaction, job involvement, organisational
commitment and group cohesion’

(Hardy, 2009)

Why does morale matter?

Impact upon organisation

Impact upon sickness and absence
Impact upon recruitment and retention
Impact upon productivity and aims of service

Impact upon individuals

Impact upon health and wellbeing
Exit from the profession

Impact on people using services and carers

This is the hardest one to measure. Usually indicated through waiting lists or regulatory reports and inquiries

"Unacceptable levels of pressure on social work teams will end up costing lives," union says

A new survey says that social workers are at breaking point with half at risk of quitting.

14/06/22

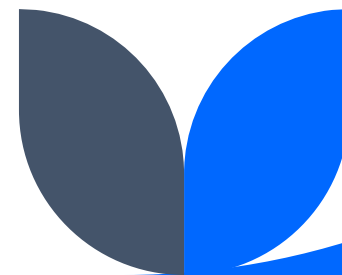


<https://www.socialworktoday.co.uk/News/%22Unacceptable-levels-of-pressure-on-social-work-teams-will-end-up-costing-lives%2C%E2%80%9D-union-says>

Factors intrinsic to social work

Ideally we would have studies comparing different occupational groups but

- Social workers are involved in difficult situations, for example child protection, detention under the Mental Health Act, decisions about capacity
 - Often involved in difficult situations, such as giving bad news (example)



Factors extrinsic to social work

But what is key is that this can never account for all work related stress or poor morale. Otherwise we would see the same levels of stress in every team

- Extrinsic factors include:
 - Workload
 - Inadequate support
 - Lack of training and development
 - Pay is complicated as don't have national pay scales which would make it easier to compare
 - Job control and autonomy

These are consistent across different types of organisation and occupation

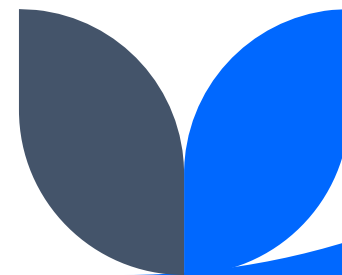


What can we take from this?

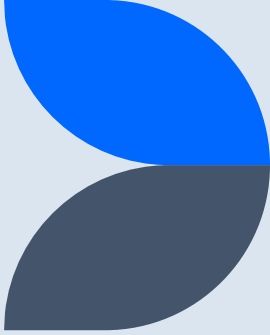
The positive is that we can take steps to improve morale and increase job satisfaction

Very few longitudinal studies in social work

- Need studies that actually compare job retention, job satisfaction and wellbeing
- But can look at what happens when make changes
- 'Opportunistic' studies possible e.g. impact of COVID-19 (Neill et al, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits2040026>)



Organisational Factors, Job Satisfaction and Intention to Leave Among Newly Qualified Social Workers in England




Articles

Organisational Factors, Job Satisfaction and Intention to Leave Among Newly Qualified Social Workers in England

Shereen Hussein , Jo Moriarty, Martin Stevens, Endellion Sharpe & Jill Manthorpe

Pages 381-396 | Published online: 19 Jun 2013

 Download citation

 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2013.806467>

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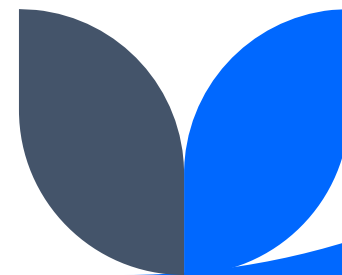
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Abstract

Into the Workforce

Followed up newly qualified social workers as they entered their first 6 months of employment and asked about job satisfaction and intention to leave:

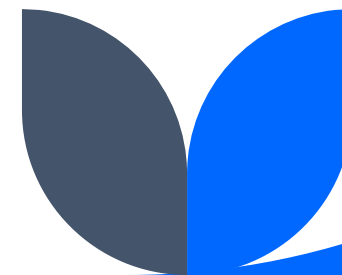
- Job engagement, putting values into practice, and feeling well prepared by qualifying programme influenced job satisfaction
- Not being in a supportive team and working in private/voluntary sector influenced intention to leave



‘Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others’: social work educators’ perspectives on an ‘emotional curriculum’

‘I think that students should be helped to recognise that their emotional wellbeing is important. I mean, I was reminded of this when I was flying on holiday last week, and they say ‘if you’ve got to put on an oxygen mask, get your own secured first before you help anyone else with theirs’. I think you could apply that kind of logic to working in the caring professions. If you’re not caring for yourself, you’re not going to be able to care for other people’

(Social work educator in study looking at helping student social workers to be emotionally resilient, Grant et al, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu066>)



Does mindfulness help?

Mindfulness in social work education and practice

Insight 56

By [Pearse McCusker](#)

Published on **8 Jul 2020**
18 min read (4863 words)

Key points

- Mindfulness is shown to help social work students and social workers reduce stress and enhance self-care, compassion and well-being. The current evidence has limitations, but the research base is growing.
- Mindfulness can help increase awareness of thoughts, feelings and behaviours and engender change in sense of self and wider appreciation of life.

<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/mindfulness-social-work-education-and-practice>

What is mindfulness? (McCusker, 2020)

Mindfulness is typically defined as the act of being present in each moment. John Kabat-Zinn (1994, p4), who is credited with kick-starting the mindfulness movement in the West, describes it as:

... paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally

Mindfulness means being aware of what's happening *now* and staying there with an attitude of acceptance. It is argued this practice of cultivating awareness enables people to become more familiar with their *ways of being*: their thought processes and habits, how they experience and react to emotions and physical sensations, and how these influence their behaviour and daily lives (Teasdale and Chaskalson, 2011)

Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts are taking over and realise that thoughts are simply 'mental events' that do not have to control us
(Williams 2018)



McCusker concludes....

Evidence base is limited but growing

Consistent with social work values

Can help some social workers but not all

Will not cure wider structural problems such as excessive workloads



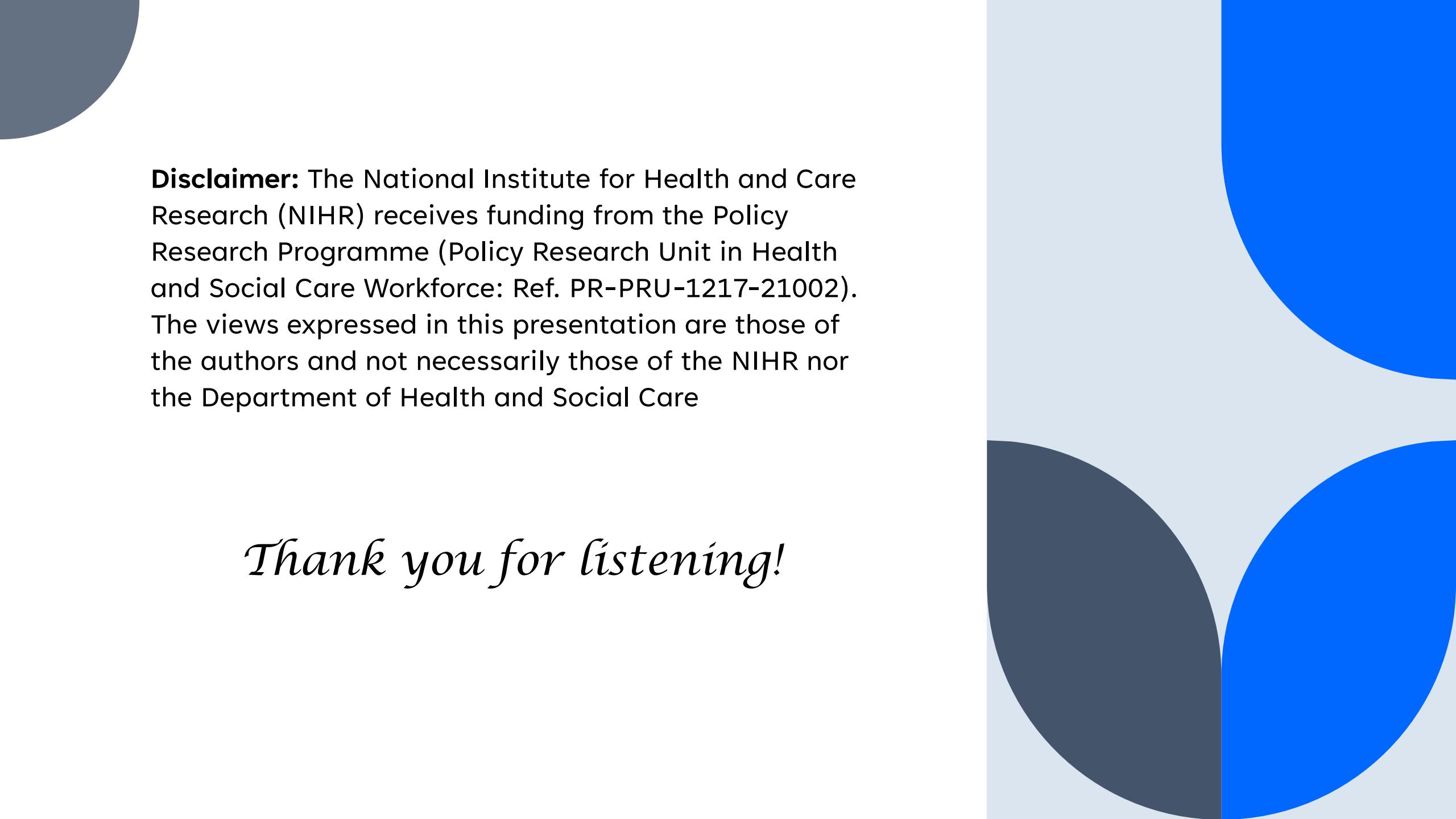
Key messages

Importance of modifiable factors

Importance of values

Finding practical ways that help

Concerns about workloads – who is regularly working many more hours than they should be?



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Thank you for listening!