

Perceptions of Professionalisation in Social Care Work in Ireland: A Workers Advisory Group Study

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Collaborators: Workers Advisory Group, Social Care Ireland.

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Aim and Objectives:

To examine how social care workers perceive their profession is viewed by organisations, other professions, unions, the State, the public, and other social care workers. In addition, this research explored social care workers' expectations around registration.

Design/Methods:

This project included an online survey (n=360) that examined social care workers views around perceptions of professionalisation. In addition, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with social care workers, leaders and managers.

Public Patient Involvement:

The Workers Advisory Group members collaborated on the development of the topic and the design of the survey and the interview schedule that was developed from the survey findings.

Results:

Social care work remains largely invisible to the public and the multiplicity of titles, a legacy of hiring unqualified staff, role ambiguity and a glass ceiling of social care leaders and few career pathways within the profession result in social care work being seen as little more than a stepping stone to another profession by many within the profession. Indeed, no less than half of respondents felt that this was the case. In part, this was attributable to perceptions of inadequate pay and conditions, particularly in the private sector, the responsibility of managing too many risks in practice, insufficient numbers of staff, and generally poor perceptions by other professions of social care work. The findings around the extent of the view of social care work as a transitory profession and as largely a means to another profession are clearly worrying, especially against the backdrop of the introduction of registration and regulation for social care workers. Unsurprisingly perhaps given the study's findings, social care workers are generally optimistic that the implementation of registration and regulation will contribute to resolving many of these issues. However, many of the underlying issues are more industrial relations in nature than regulatory and thus the extent of the optimism may be misplaced.

Dissemination:

The results were disseminated at the Social Care Ireland annual conference in Carlow in April 2023. Following on from this a number of online presentations of the results were conducted with social care workers and social care provider organisations. The report on the project findings is available on the Social Care Ireland webpage, as well as through the ARAN repository at the University of Galway - <https://researchrepository.universityofgalway.ie/entities/publication/1b69ea88-9dca-482b-85f3-755cdbeb8f9b>

Knowledge Translation:

The report has been of benefit to informing the strategic aims of the Workers Advisory Group and the findings are clearly of interest to those working in social care, as the report has been downloaded over 1,200 times from the ARAN repository at the University of Galway.