

Shame: The monster under the social worker's bed – We know it's there, but no one can see it.

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1. Social Workers

Why do people become social workers?

Some of the most common reasons for people entering the profession in the UK include:

- To help others 34%
- Challenging/rewarding career 13%
- Their own life experiences 6%
- Career opportunities 6%
- Fight social injustices/protection of others 4%
- Work with like-minded people 2%



2. Social Workers' Identity

Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory suggests people tend to classify themselves in various categories, which relate to different values.

People identify which group they belong to, based on the identity membership of that group would give them. This would suggest that social workers identify themselves as people who help others.



3. The Monster under the bed

Shame – the monster under the bed

Shame is one of our most basic emotions, and it can be very destructive.

It drives a person to hide an aspect of themselves to avoid rejection from those around them. There are two sides to shame:

- Social Shame – “I’ve broken a social norm and will be judged negatively”
- Moral Shame – “There’s something wrong with me as a person”



4. Why is the Monster there?

Stigma from poor mental health

Stigma is comprised of three elements:

- Stereotypes
- Prejudice
- Discrimination

Clinical definitions such as stress, anxiety, and depression, can help ‘other’ individuals and thus create an us-and-them attitude that threatens a person’s professional identity.

Mental health professionals are no less susceptible to stigmatising beliefs than the general public.

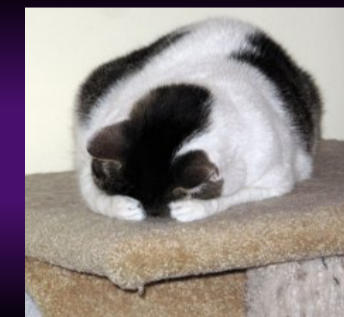


5. How did it get there?

Stress in social work

Social work is stressful and social workers have above-average levels of stress. Some of the issues that make it stressful include:

- Poor staffing levels
- High caseloads
- Verbal abuse and potential violence
- Feelings of having no voice in the workplace
- Tight and unrealistic time constraints
- Poor organisational support
- Being subject to intense public and political scrutiny
- Dealing with the high pressures of the job while living and working in a climate/society that does not tolerate mistakes by social workers
- Negative media coverage of social workers
- Spending time managing the financial side of care management
- Budget cuts and lack of resources
- Low morale
- Lack of appreciation



6. Why can no one else see it?

Shame is hidden in the research

People are driven to hide their shameful characteristics. The act of asking for help leaves would leave someone open to being labelled, feeling humiliated by being the exposure and being perceived negatively or less positively by their team. This may explain why there is little in the way of research on social worker’s experiences of shame.

Additionally, some researchers suggest this issue may be difficult to identify and could be hidden in the data of other studies. Symptoms of shame may be misidentified for example, www.Thesaurus.com provides 40 alternative words for shame, which are



7. How can we deal with it?

The next steps...

My PhD explores social workers’ experiences of shame concerning poor mental health.

I am taking a phenomenological approach to explore social worker’s experiences, using arts-based methods of data-gathering. Participants will attend a workshop about shame and use arts-based methods to produce an image that represents the experience of shame from poor mental health. This will contribute to our understanding and knowledge of this topic.

In turn, this will make the monster less scary, and we can deal with it much more effectively.

