



Reclaiming Resilience- Voices from the Frontline

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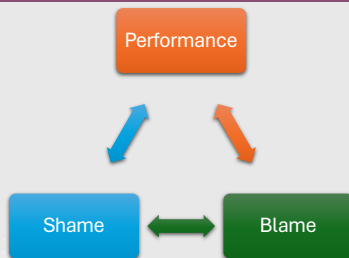
Resilience, Advocacy and Wellbeing- **RAW**

Reclaiming Resilience through solidarity, organisational and individual action- Action research with 'Women of a certain age' at Bournemouth University.



- In June 2022 Tilia Lenz and Dr Rejoice Chipuriro facilitated an action research session (Susman and Evered 1978; Watkins et al. 2019) with 18 students to conceptualize and subsequently **Reclaim Resilience!** All participants were in leadership roles in Health and Social Care, seeking to learn more about RAW. The topic was important to them in practice, despite or because of the inequalities they were exposed to.
- **Women 'of a certain age'** are discriminated against in their personal and professional lives. This study found that they internalised blame and shame around their perceived performance as leaders in health and social care settings. Collective critical analysis, through action research, showed the impact of societal, cultural and organisational targets on individual's resilience, advocacy and wellbeing.
- **RAW is a Continues Professional Development (CPD)** unit at Bournemouth University. The unit forms part of the Masters pathway for 'leading and developing services' and is aimed at **managers in health and social care settings**, such as senior nurses, Social Workers, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

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The 'stress-baseline'- We win!

- Social Workers have higher levels of stress compared with the general population and are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress compared to similar occupational groups. (Jones et al. 2022).
- Organisational cultures and the perception of the profession in society, government and media appear to have an impact the level of stress experienced by practitioners.

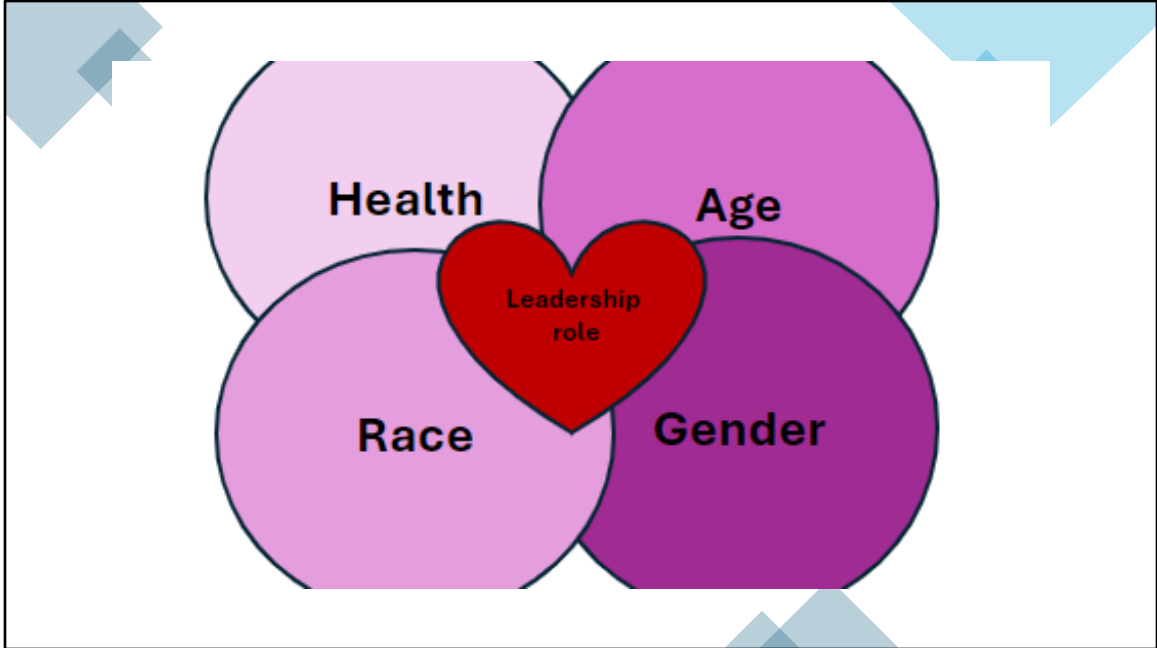


Being a social worker I was very interested in the stress levels that my profession experiences which is somewhat mirrored by other allied professionals however social workers still have higher stress levels compared to the general population and experience higher levels of psychological distress compared to similar occupational groups like nurses.

The RAW unit was taught at the tail-end of pandemic in June 2022 and participants were still in a space where they were deeply effected by the global crisis. Kowal et al. (2020) found that women, parents, single adults, young people and those in challenging socio-economic positions were significantly more effected.

We found that organizational cultures and the perception of the profession in society government and the media appear to have an impact on the levels of stressed experience by practitioners whilst this is particularly true for social work this is also mirrored by the allied professions.

Our participants told us about their psychological and physical stress symptoms they experienced and how those impacted on their personal and professional lives. The symptoms of stress were impacting holistically on them and during the discussions our participants realized that they had shared experiences of stress trauma and vicarious trauma.



Intersectionality of health, age, race and gender is what our participants focussed upon.

They wanted to lead from the heart, show empathy and be good leaders.

The realisation that some of their challenges and struggles in personal and professional lives came from this intersectionality made them examine RAW from a different perspective.

They reflected on their personal circumstances as woman with caring responsibilities and 'of a certain age' - meaning 30s and 50s. Whilst the women were employed in England, half were of black or ethnic global majority and/or had an international background.

We conclude that those who are less likely to be discriminated against, due to gender, age, health, race and so on, do not find the topic of RAW relevant to them. **Percentage of staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from staff in last 12 months by gender, ethnicity and profession (NHS 2024)**

In fact it is those in positions of power, who create the narrative that individuals are

not '**resilient enough**' and question performance as Galpin (2019) considers. The themes we identified through the action research were clearly gendered, pointing out women's health issues during the stages of menopause and the complexities for women with a migration or ethnic global majority background. It signified the inequality of gender and background of our participants within their perceived positions of power in their leadership roles. The group challenged the **politicisation of the term resilience** through their reflective contributions, stories and shared experiences (Phillips and Bunda 2018) of prejudice due to gender, health and race.

Women' issues:

The absence of men in the 5 cohorts taught leaves us with the question why RAW is not relevant to them. Is it because there are just less men employed in Health and Social Care? This is indeed the fact: NHS (Garratt 2024) and Social Work England (SWE 2023) data shows that the majority of the workforce are female: 88% of nurses and 82.9 % of Social Workers.

However leadership roles within the professions are held by men nationally and globally (WHO 2019), with only 25% of decision making and governance roles held by women. Gauci et al. (2022, p.1743) argue "While there has been a major emphasis on reducing gender imbalances in leadership in the global health workforce in recent years, many organisations are not equipped to foster the leadership potential of women".

Intersectionality: In 2022, BME women (27.7%) were most likely to have experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from other staff in the last 12 months, a trend that has been evident since at least 2015. This trend was especially evident for BME women in general management (30.5%), medical and dental (32.6%), and registered nursing and midwifery (30.7%).

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Some of you may know Clare in the Community by Harry Venning- The artist agreed to work with me on a visual representation of my research findings from the RAW unit.

The Tightrope represents our decision making in practice, it is a balancing act, it is tricky and requires a lot of practice and bravery to even get on the rope, knowing the risk of falling or failure.

The unicycle was actually a bicycle, but nearly 20 years of austerity measures have halved our resources.

This has required us to develop different skills to perform our job- we have to rely on our core and had to build a lot of strengths there in order to keep going. The core is a representation of our professional values and ethics.

The clown costume represents the uniform that we may wear at work, the role that we play, the position that we hold. The participants told us about their imposter syndrome, the worry to be found out as their role was too big for them, they felt the shoes they had to fill were too big for them! They were performing rather than practicing.

Clare is juggling all the competing demands on her and you can see that Self care is the ball that gets dropped. I am told that when you juggle, you have a rhythm that needs to be maintained to keep the balls going, once one is dropped, the rhythm is

interrupted and the risk of becoming unbalanced increases significantly. You will notice, there is no audience here for Clare to applaud her for her great skill. That's because it is Friday today- Clare and my participants only got appreciated and clapped on Thursdays- otherwise the hard work remain invisible and taken for granted.

**Reclaiming
Resilience
through
solidarity,
organisational
and individual
action: a recipe
for performance.**

**An Appreciative
Inquiry**



Trust and open communication were the main themes that the participants shared with the Authors as a ‘recipe for performance’ in professional settings. Individual’s RAW was significantly impacted by organisational cultures, and even though they were leaders, they felt they only had a limited influence on this. Advocacy towards self and others increased when performance measures were perceived to be fair and to support best practice.

Wellbeing was managed by “a balance between home and work” (Participant H) and flexible work arrangements support this. Senior Leaders needed to communicate that they trust staff to do their job well.

Resilience was claimed by the participants by reflecting on the competing roles they held in their personal and professional lives. They shared their lived experiences of stress and trauma and found strength and growth through the AI process. Being listened to, being seen and acknowledged was pertinent to the sense making within the group.

Where next? Recommendations

Performance means to “make progress” (Participant D) and to achieve positive outcomes. Providing ‘professional safety nets’ through compassionate organisational structures would support this and enable staff to be in “Control of my thoughts, feelings and workload.” (Participant A). To increase resilience, staff need to “Feel calm

and motivated at work. Feel calm and motivated at home.” (Participant B). Authentic managers who communicate open and honestly will create work environments based on trust and commitment. Staff want to be valued and celebrate successes.

And Wellbeing? “It means Happiness” (Participant X)

Limitations:

Where are the men? When will they be heard?

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