

# Managing the transition: the 'mixed bag' for transnational social workers in the UK

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- The views expressed are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent that of the funder.

# The Crossing Borders project

- Allen and Liz are members of the Crossing Borders research team, University of Auckland
- We are all members of the Research on Workforce Mobility Network (RoWM) hosted by King's College London and led by Shereen

## The Crossing Borders project

- has so far included:
  - an analysis of registration data for those NZ social workers with overseas social work qualifications;
  - a NZ based survey and focus groups;
  - a small qualitative study of 10 NZ qualified social workers practising in the UK and Ireland;
  - 'Coming home' a survey of those who have returned to practise in NZ after working overseas
  - This UK based survey and interviews of employers and colleagues of non-UK qualified social workers in the UK
  - A survey in Australia

# Policy and practice context

- Ongoing recruitment difficulties for social work in the United Kingdom (UK)
- A number of initiatives addressing this:
  - ❖ Step up to social work
  - ❖ Frontline social work
- Changes in immigration policies
- Newly-qualified social workers have difficulty finding employment despite high vacancy rates (Holmes et al, 2013)

## **Survey of non-UK qualified social workers**

- Open to all non-British non-UK qualified social workers
- Pre-coded and open ended questions
- Those who have secured employment in the UK or are still searching for social work job here
- Small number of respondents so far (n=32 but complete responses from 21)
- Illustrative emerging findings

## Who responded to our survey

- 14 currently employed in social work in the UK; 4 seeking work; 3 previously held social work jobs in the UK
- Arrived from a variety of countries but mostly from countries with historical ties with the UK or from within Europe (See table overleaf)
- 65% female and the vast majority under the age of 40 with 80% arrived to the UK more than 4 years prior to the survey
- 37% came to the UK with a definite job
- Internet searches were a major source of gaining knowledge about the UK followed by friends and family

**Table 1: Respondent nationalities ( $n=21$ )**

	N	%
American	3	14.3
Australian	3	14.3
Australian, British	1	4.8
British Indian	1	4.8
Indian	2	9.5
British/ Pakistani (dual)	1	4.8
Canadian	1	4.8
Canadian and Dutch	1	4.8
Romanian and Canadian	1	4.8
German	2	9.5
Polish	1	4.8
Portuguese	1	4.8
Spanish	1	4.8
Ghanaian	1	4.8
Zambian	1	4.8
Total	21	100





# Induction

- Only 4 out of the 14 currently employed social workers indicated that their first UK employer offered them any sort of training or induction: of these, 2 indicated that the induction prepared them 'a little bit'; 1 'pretty well'; and 1 'very well'.
- None had received any induction or training specifically tailored to international social workers: as a result, no responses were collected for the specific questions regarding training in the specific areas of:
  - Legal & policy context
  - Cultural diversity
  - Nature of social work in the UK
  - OSH

## Availability of on-job training

- Only one participant indicated that the availability of on-going training and support in their position was poor.
- Two-thirds of those who responded to the question rated the availability of on-going training/support as good or excellent.
- No participants rated the quality of that on-going support as poor; rather, three-quarters of respondents indicated it was 'OK' or 'Good', and a quarter said it was excellent.

# Diversity of training

- I organise the training and development for social workers and provide a great programme (however, due to capacity issues, few social workers can take it up!)
- 
- I was sent for ASW / AMHP training after three years of working in Mental Health services and I have the opportunity to do any training I wish to do for my practice.
- 
- I had a good supervisor and buddy, who were very supportive of me and understanding my background and limitations. They helped me a lot in getting a grip of the work.

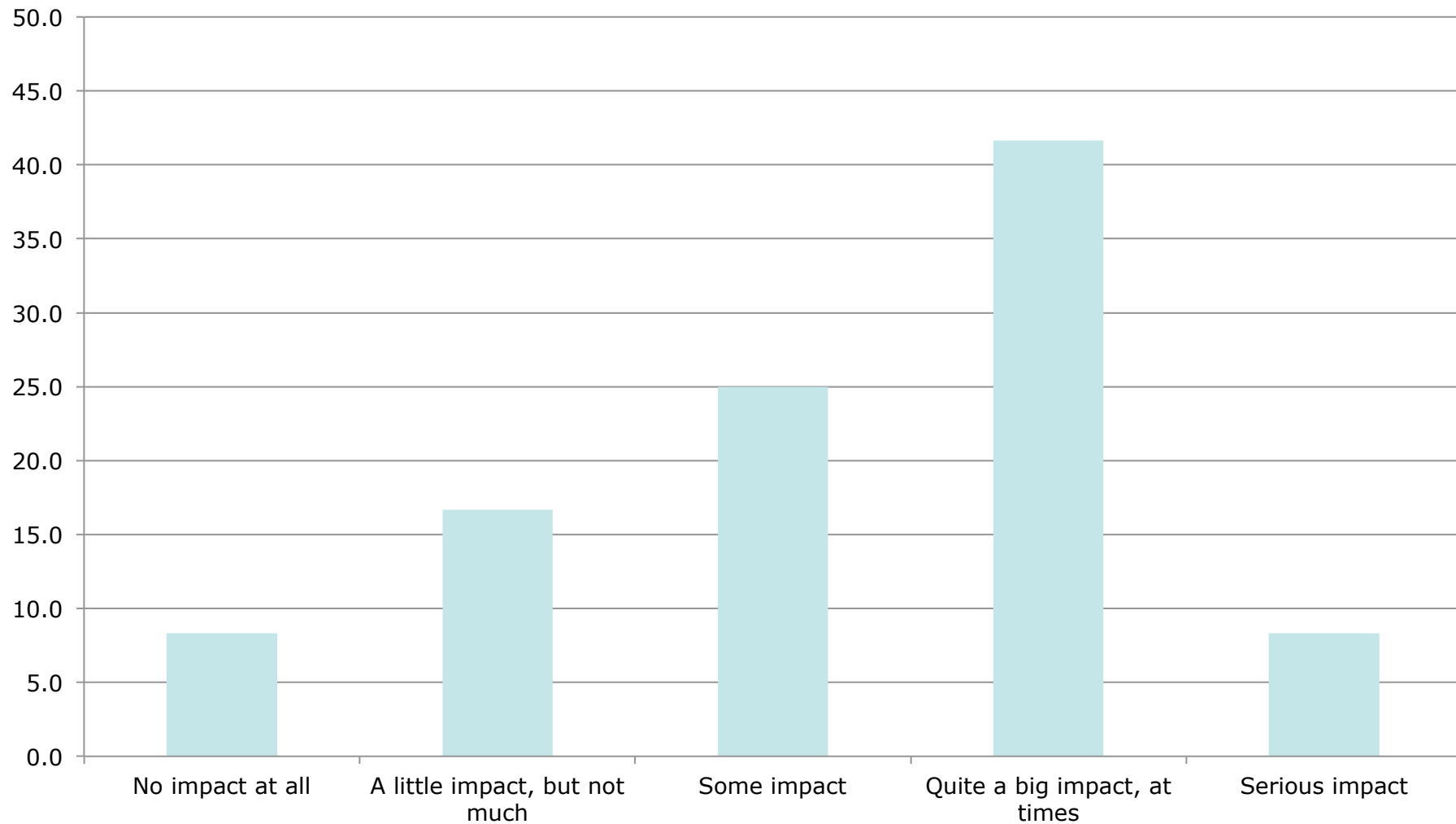
## Workplace cultures- Mistreatment

- Very few of those working in their *first* job in social care experienced any form of mistreatment (when it happened it is from users not employers or co-workers)
- Out of those who changed jobs- the prevalence of ever experiencing mistreatment is much higher
  - ❖ Probably a major cause of changing jobs in the first place
  - ❖ *Try and challenge managers. Made decision to leave the organisations. (Australia, Female, 40 years)*

## But also ..

- Some people are able to handle such situations:  
*Remained calm, tried to diffuse the situations, was clear about the consequences of such behaviour & reported it to the police. It did not impact on my to a great extent in regards to my emotions & wellbeing.*  
(Canada, female, 35 years)
- For others, it takes time to build confidence:  
*First few years tolerated [mistreatment], but now I am able to be assertive and respond appropriately.*  
(India, male, 43 years)

# Stress spill over



## **Issues related to managing stress- open ended question**

- Line manager role
- Working from home and work-life balance
- Stress is inherent to the job
- Personal life is affected when difficult decisions had to be taken at work (e.g. removing children from their families)
- May change profession !! Or become a foster parent
- Let own family know what to expect with a stressful job .
- Medication needed
- Depression

# Open comments

- I would like to see greater recognition of social worker's experience when they are being considered for employment.
- I do not feel that a migrant social worker's skill set gained through experience is valued in the way that it should be.
- I think that internationally qualified social workers need an induction programme and that will help them to get a job and practice here confidently. Like nurses .... adaptation courses for 6 months
- “its unfair that I have spent 4 years in care work to be able to get references which have never helped. when I volunteered I was made to make tea and drive people around for months till I gave up . BASW has failed a lot of foreign social workers. It never helped me at all.”



## **A plea from the heart...**

- More intervention; improved therapeutic skills and less paperwork that no-one reads and that becomes irrelevant within a short period of time as families move on and situations change sometimes quite drastically.

## Where to from here

- Clear international issues about induction and the “wastage” of international social workers – needs advocacy
- We would like to extend the survey to increase the number of respondents

Please see these sites for more info and publications

- <https://crossingbordersnz.wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/scwru/res/rowm/index.aspx>