



Cost of Living Cost of Learning

Financial Challenges for Student Social Workers in Northern Ireland



CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE THE SOCIAL WORK STUDENT INCENTIVE SCHEME

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

BASW
Northern Ireland

The professional association for
social work and social workers

SWU Social
Workers
Union

Data Collection



DATA WAS COLLECTED VIA
ONLINE SURVEY FROM 25
JANUARY – 19 FEBRUARY
2024



STUDENTS ON RELEVANT
COURSES WERE INVITED TO
TAKE PART



302 ELIGIBLE RESPONSES
WERE SUBMITTED

Headline findings

- Social work students in Northern Ireland are facing a financial crisis.
- Approximately three-quarters of respondents (73%) are unable to make ends meet or struggling to do so.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities are suffering even more acutely.
- The situation is so severe that almost a quarter (23%) are considering leaving their studies.
- More than half (55%) of respondents state the student incentive scheme should be increased by at least £3,000 per year
- Almost 6 out of ten respondents (58%) state the travel allowance would need to increase by at least £500 to cover the travel costs associated with practice placements (65% for carers).

Reflections on how financial stress is impacting students

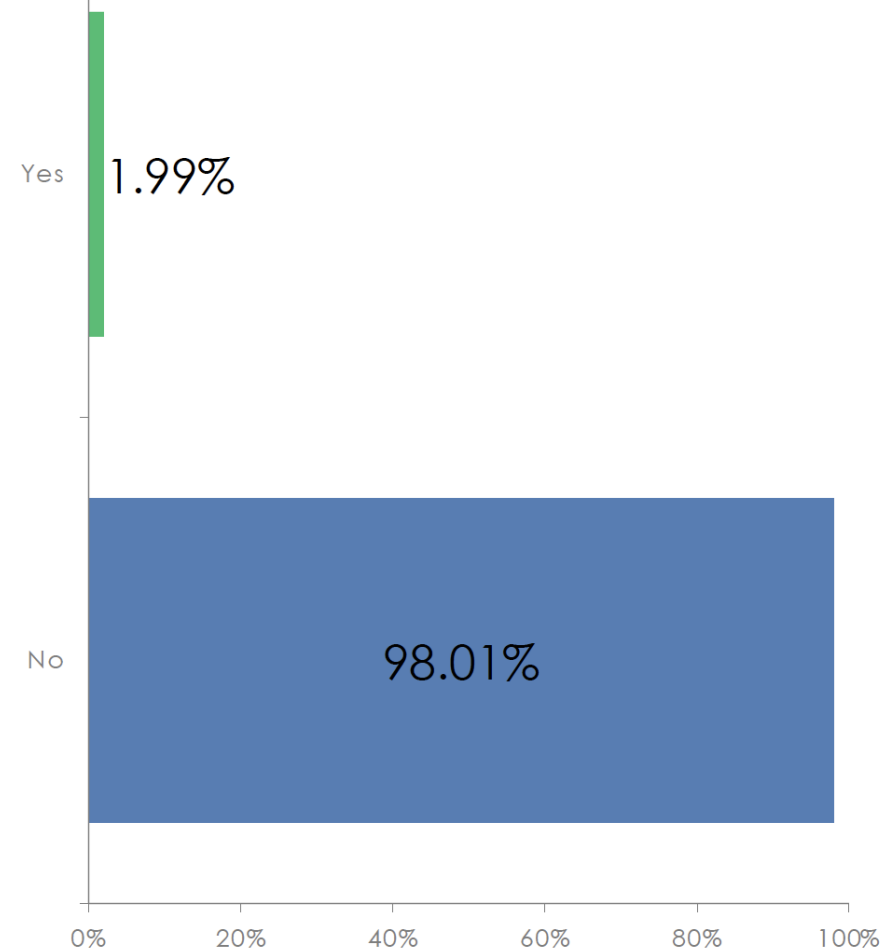
“During placement especially, I cannot have an additional job due to the high level of work needed to be completed. I therefore cannot afford to socialise or do any of my hobbies which I would usually do to help my mental health, e.g. reading, yoga etc as I had to cancel memberships. I also found my life very dystopian due to the lack of happiness and pressure to work, study and sleep on repeat.”

“Currently I am working 2/4 shifts each week on top of studying to try and feed my children and keep us afloat. I’m exhausted and what I can’t understand is in class we are taught about empathy, reflection, self-care, mental health and yet none of what is taught in class is reflected by the money that is handed to us. It is very deflating”.





Q15: Is the annual payment of £4,000 sufficient to meet the costs associated with completing the Degree in Social Work?



The Next Step

- Cost of Living Cost of Learning Study
- Aims to supplement the BASW NI survey findings by gathering qualitative data on the student experience of financial hardship
- 3 focus groups with students from QUB and UU
- Saturation point reached
- One more focus group planned – tutors
- Conceptualised - as participatory action research



The PAR Cycle

RATIONALE –
methodology directly
aligned with professional
social work values that
promote rights, social
justice and
empowerment.



ACTION (establishing
relationships, common
agreement on the issues,
setting common goals,
collaborative decision
making)

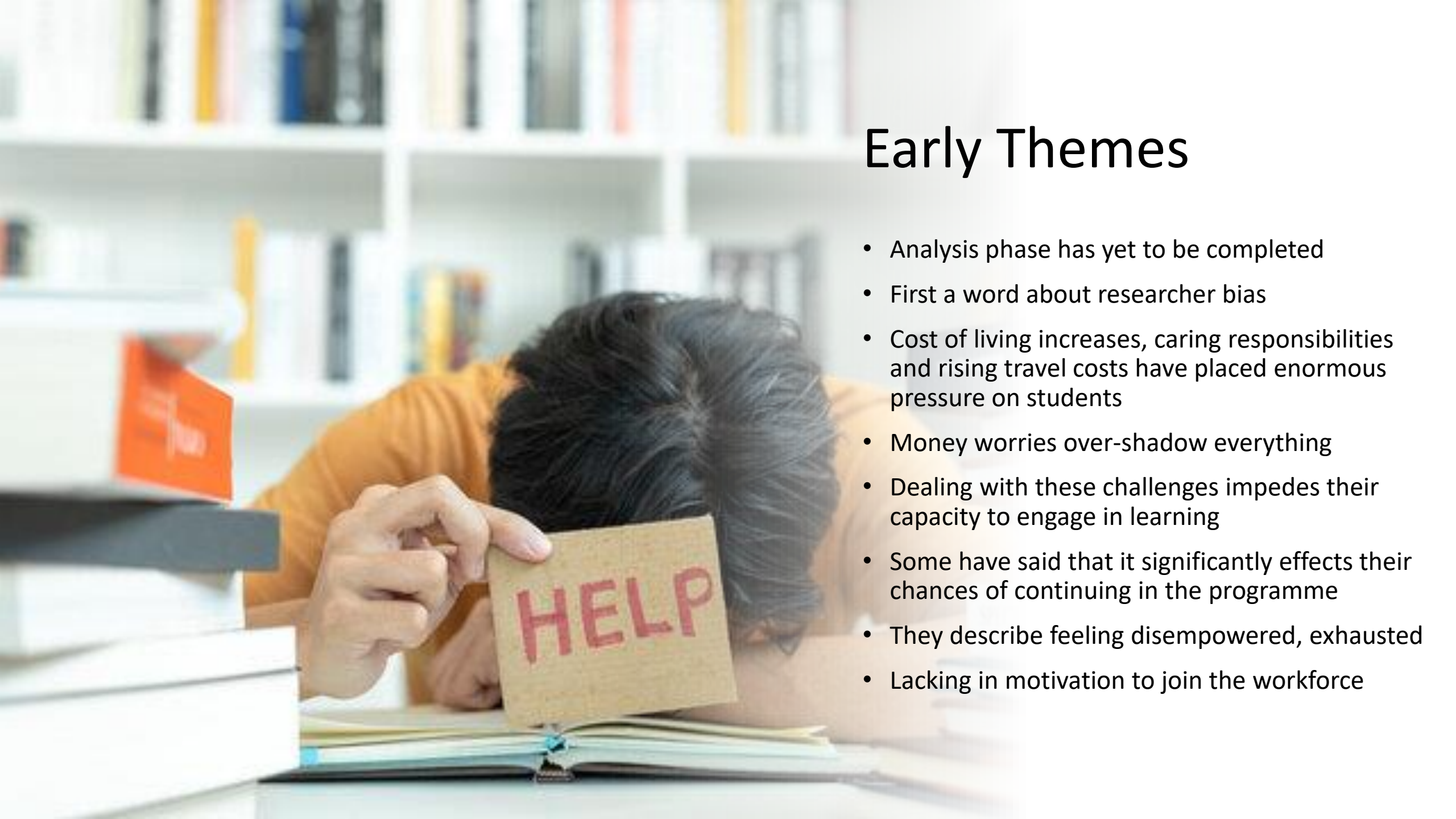


REFLECTION
(collaboratively analyse
findings, reflective
discussion of implications,
establish future goals).



PLANNING (research
design, methods, ethics,
time scales, wider
engagement with
stakeholders),





Early Themes

- Analysis phase has yet to be completed
- First a word about researcher bias
- Cost of living increases, caring responsibilities and rising travel costs have placed enormous pressure on students
- Money worries over-shadow everything
- Dealing with these challenges impedes their capacity to engage in learning
- Some have said that it significantly effects their chances of continuing in the programme
- They describe feeling disempowered, exhausted
- Lacking in motivation to join the workforce

To Conclude:

- Harsh reality - students who are unable to complete their degrees will be unable to enter the workforce
- If the social work profession is serious about addressing the current workforce crisis, then our future social workers need to be heard
- Need for system level change - A collective leadership approach in engaging with students will be important in terms of workforce planning and addressing the immediate issues
- Ensuring that our students enter the workforce feeling prepared, cared for and supported

