

POST-DOCTORAL SCOPING STUDY EXERCISE UNDERTAKEN AUGUST- SEPTEMBER 2025

The Research and Evidence Partnership established by the Social Care Council (NISCC), to support the Strategic Social Work and Social Care agenda was interested in exploring the level of doctoral research activity undertaken by social work students in the region and beyond. This exercise conducted in August - September 2025 and provides a regional overview of doctoral activity for social work relevant to Northern Ireland. It contributes to the strategic research agenda underway which aims to ensure that social work and social care reflects sustainable evidence-based policy and practices. The wider strategic agenda includes the development of a new social care research strategy, priority setting and seeking out funding opportunities.

Criteria for participation

Participation related to those whose doctoral study is ongoing and those who received their award between 2020-2025. We are pleased with the support received from our research networks, partners and contacts to conduct this survey.

Overview

- Thirty-four responses were received from social workers.
- A PowerPoint presentation needs to be read in conjunction within this paper.
- This paper presents the diverse range of topics being studied.

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THEME AND TITLES OF PROJECTS

Service users' involvement/ experiences/perceptions

Staff/experiences/perceptions

Retention in the workforce

Approaches and interventions

Adult Safeguarding

Advocacy

Application of Theory/ Practice

Equalities/ inequalities/ diversity

Experiential learning /training / technology

Education studies

Legislative frameworks

PRECISE TITLES OF DOCTORAL STUDIES ACROSS ADULTS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND CROSS CUTTING.

Adult Service Areas	Children's Service Areas	Cross Cutting across workforce –including digital and technology
Navigating Difficult Conversations: Exploring- the Experiences of Community-Based Social Workers in Adult Services within a Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland.	Implementing Trauma-Informed Care in Early Intervention Services for Psychosis.	What is the impact of vicarious trauma on the well-being and career trajectories of social workers, and which support strategies are most effective in mitigating its effects across varying levels of professional experience within social work organizations?
The Professional perceptions of the social work role with adult vulnerable witnesses in Northern Ireland.	How working with children and families experiencing adversity and trauma has been influenced by neoliberalism. Key themes - vicarious/secondary trauma; role of self-care in working with adversity and trauma; motivation to social work.	Factors that support social work retention in adults services. A systematic narrative review explored retention across children's and adult services and identified organisational, personal and structural factors that support retention. The qualitative research will focus on factors that support social work retention in adult services."
Service User Involvement in the Criminal Justice Social Work: the theory, the practice and the 'real world' challenges - Criminal justice and mental health. Social support, trauma and mental wellbeing experiences of imprisoned men in Northern Ireland.	Children and young people's participation in child protection social work decision-making in Northern Ireland. The perspectives of professionals.	The topic area is social work workforce retention; the title is: "Mental health social work - Online mental health peer support for young people"
Adult safeguarding inequalities in Northern Ireland.	Narratives of early career child welfare social workers in Northern Ireland". Social work- advocacy - Exploring the experiences of looked after Children and Young People who have had an advocate.	An exploration of how Forum Theatre can be used to support trainee social workers' resilience
Self-directed support and adult social care in Northern Ireland.	Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, enhancing understanding to reduce recidivism - criminal justice practitioner.	Social anxiety in the autistic community - using immersive technology to support autistic individuals in their social anxiety.

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Mental health stigma and Arts-based interventions.	Post adoption with adults - Exploring the lived experience of mothers whose children were adopted under closed adoption in Northern Ireland between 1967 and 1987.	Assessing the role of digital technologies in supporting communication between health professionals and adults living with obesity and mental health issues.
Exploring the real-world impact of implementing a single legal framework for both mental health and capacity - to support effective, rights-based decision-making in Northern Ireland.	Narratives of early career child welfare social workers in Northern Ireland. Applied study of Recognition theory in a children's Home.	Technology and mental health - particularly the implementation of an intervention – Is Virtual Reality and Post-Traumatic Stress - Exploring the Feasibility and Acceptability of Low-Cost Virtual Reality and 360 Video to Treat PTSD?
	Social Support for Migrant Parents of Children with Disabilities in Northern Ireland." Key words -Disability, Migrant/Displacement, Social Support, Children, Parenting, and Culture.	Service User Involvement in Criminal Justice Social Work, the theory, the practice and the 'real world' challenges.
	Deafness – "Identification and Support for Deaf plus Children and Young People in Northern Ireland. To include risk and implications of misdiagnosis and/or failure to diagnose and recommendations for assessment of common conditions".	Social workers' perspectives on relationship-based practice: A mixed methods study of frontline practice in Northern Ireland. This focused on the impacts of bureaucracy and managerialism on relationship-based practice.

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	Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences, factors of multiple exclusion and chronic homelessness within single adults living in homeless hostels across Northern Ireland.	
	Social Work - "Improving support for care-experienced young mothers in Northern Ireland."	
	Sexual health and young people in Northern Ireland - Applied study of Recognition theory in a children's Home.	
	The effectiveness of Personal Education Plans in supporting the education of children in care.	
	What are the barriers and enablers to educational success for children and young people in residential care in Northern Ireland?	

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Adult Service Areas

Children's Service Areas

Cross Cutting across workforce – including digital and technology

Post Primary Education and Social Work
- Investigating How School Based Social
Work Impacts the Wellbeing of Post
Primary School Aged Young People at
Risk of Statutory Social Work
Intervention in Northern Ireland"

Prevention and Early Intervention in
Psychosis - The development, feasibility,
and acceptability of a secondary-level
school-based psychosis prevention
programme."

Residential childcare - Residential Staff's
Perspective on the Model of Attachment
Practice (MAP).