

Why do Service Users and Carers Complain about Family and Child Care Social Workers?

Lessons Learned from Complaints to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (2006-2015)

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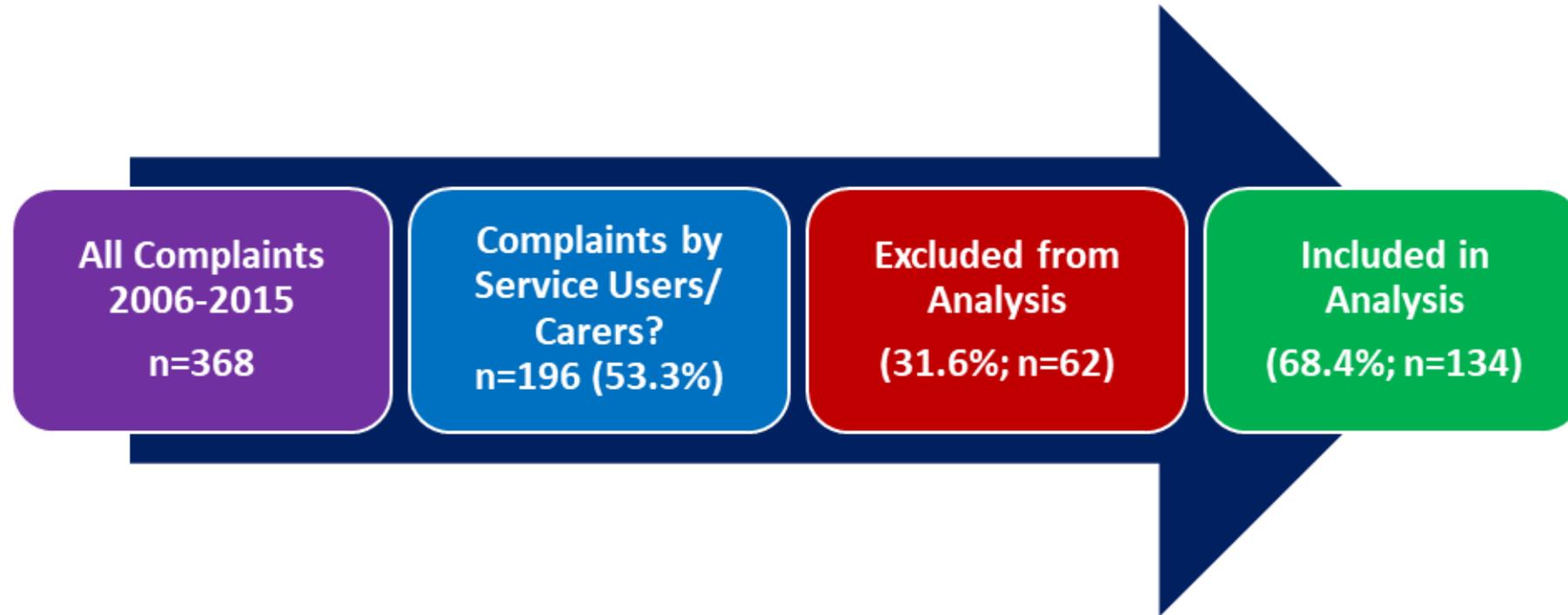
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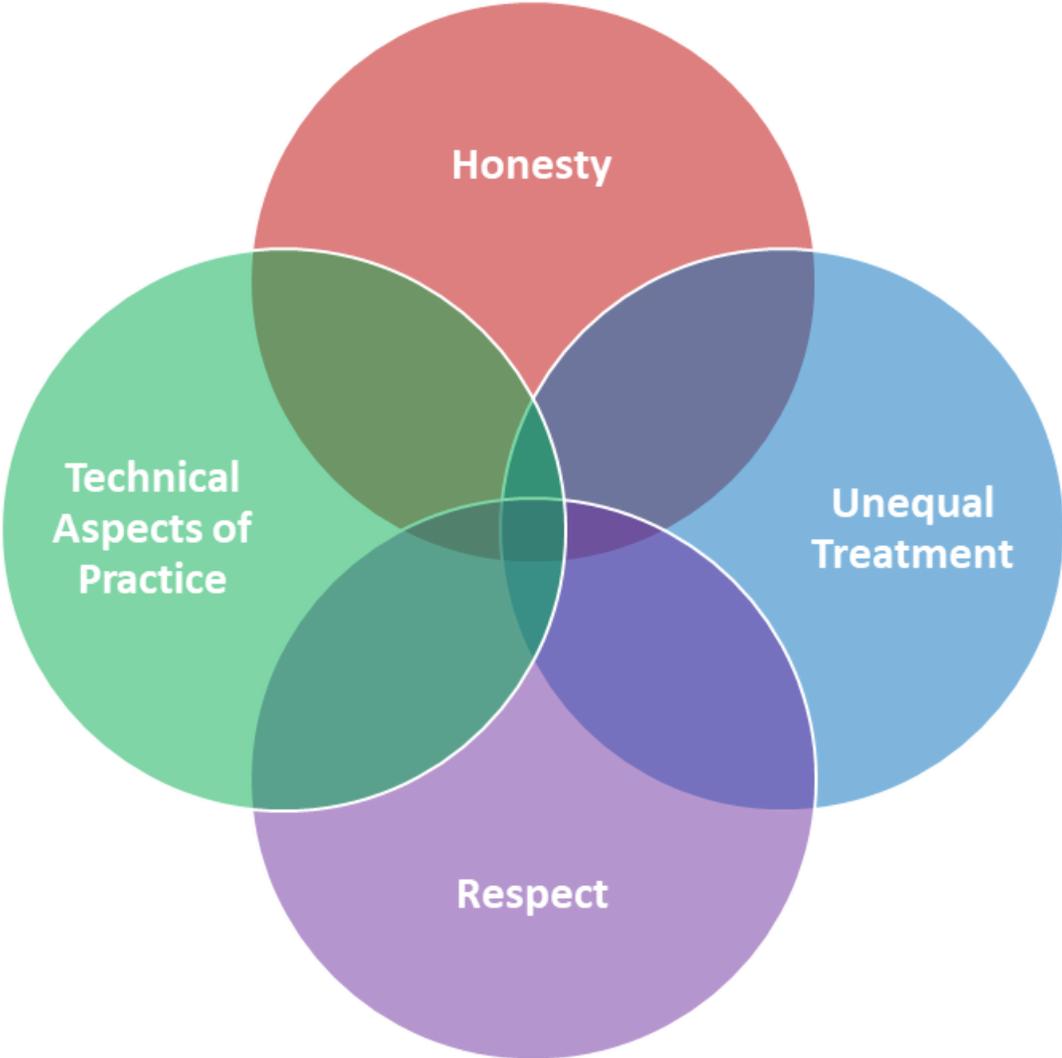
(PART OF BASW)

Methodology



91% (n=122) of the Social Workers in the sample were employed in Family and Child Care services

The Nature of Complaints



Honesty

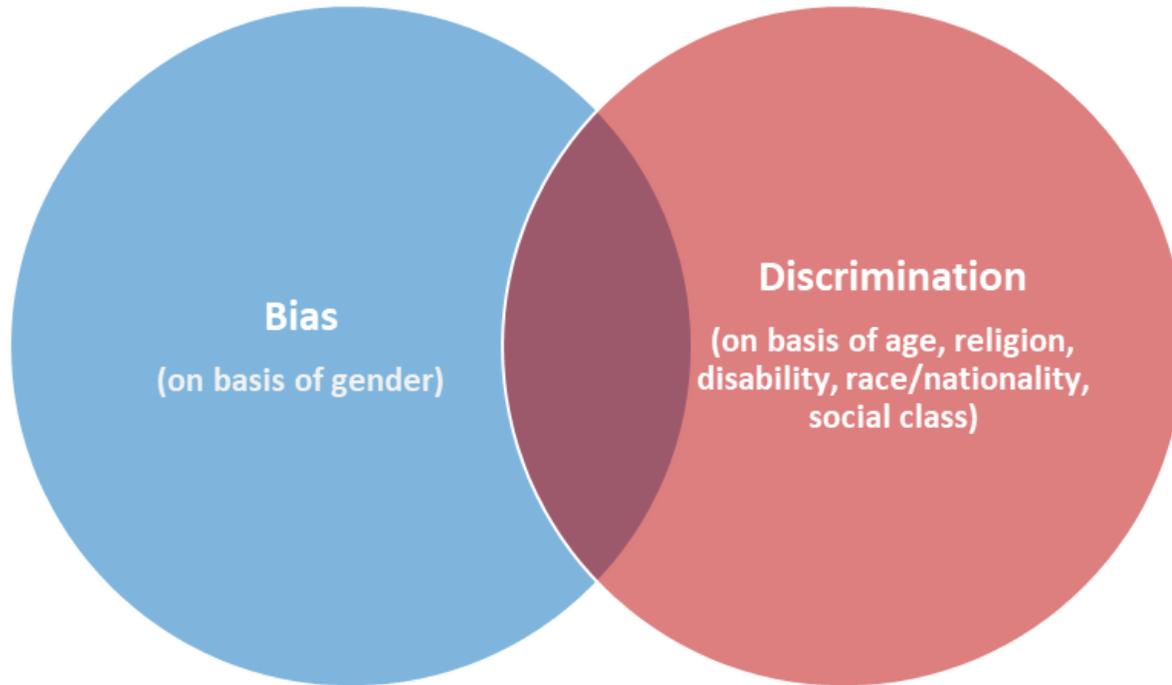


Allegation that [registrant] wrote a report which was 'based on lies, inaccuracies and a one-sided report that did not find any positive aspect... Biased reporting, unsubstantiated claims and lies. (Extract from NISCC Record).

[Complainant] alleges that that the above-named social workers have lied during a child protection case in which he was involved and have subsequently lied to ensure a cover-up of the facts... (Letter to Trust Complaints Manager).

...[registrant] behaved duplicitously by failing to advise me of events fully and accurately, by misleading and misinforming me about what was taking place, and by withholding information from me which I had a right to know. (Quote from Complainant).

Unequal Treatment



Her practice towards me was prejudiced...It became clear to me that [registrant] had lost all objectivity in her management of the case and took [father's] side. (Quote from Mother)

Allegation that registrant discriminated against service user/was dismissive of her during a home visit - allegation is that she was discriminated against on the basis of her nationality and because English is not her first language. (Extract from NISCC Record).

Respect (Attitudes and Behaviours)

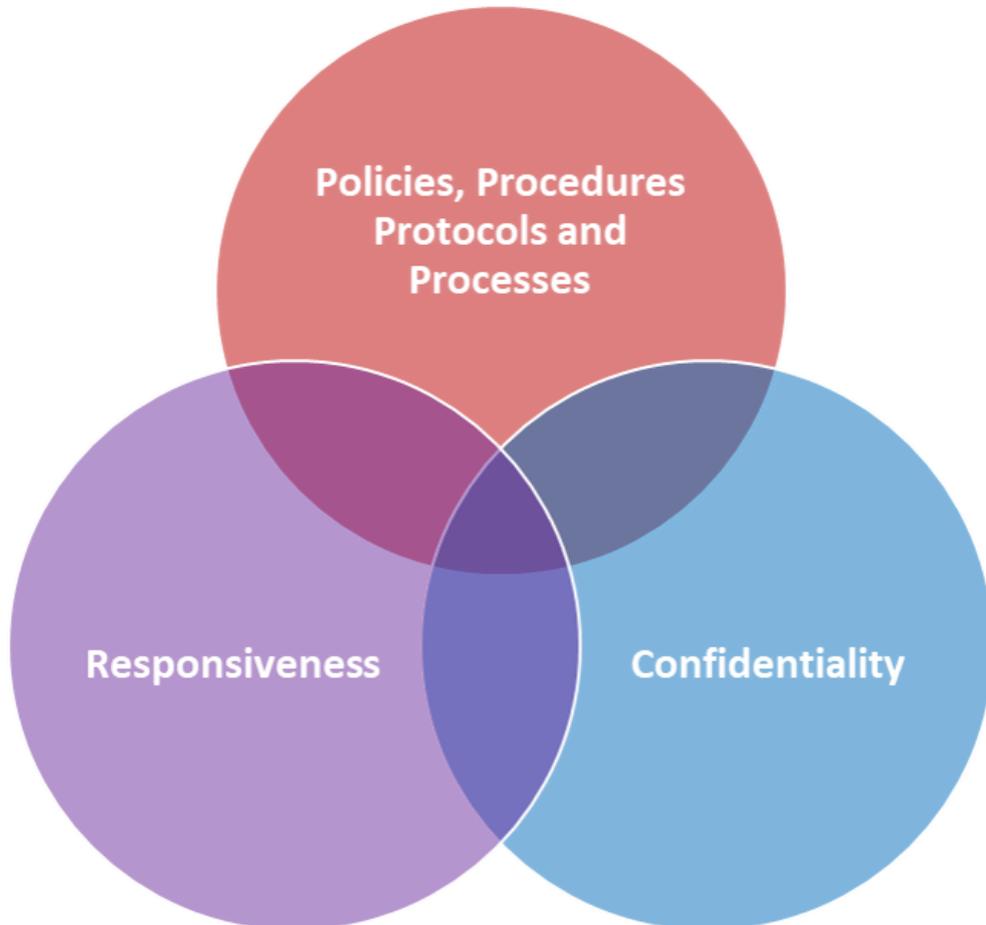
Dismissive/"Not listened to" (43)	Threatening (31)
Rude (13)	Aggressive (22)
Condescending (9)	Bullying (16)
Negative (7)	Intimidating (13)
"Looked down on" (6)	Abusive (9)
Patronising (5)	Insulting (9)
Abrupt (4)	Disrespectful (8)
Unsupportive (4)	Harassing (7)
Discourteous (3)	Hostile (7)
Flippant (3)	"Talked/shouted over" (5)
Judgmental (2)	Bad language (3)
Nasty (2)	Confrontational (3)
"Treated with derision" (2)	Heavy-handed (3)
Undermining (2)	Offensive (3)
Arrogant (1)	Belittled (2)
Contemptuous (1)	Irate (2)
Hurtful (1)	Abrasive (1)
Stern (1)	Antagonistic (1)
"Talked down to" (1)	Derogatory (1)
Uncaring (1)	Objectionable (1)
Unpleasant (1)	Overbearing (1)

Complainant alleges that registrant's conduct amounted to threats and bullying...Alleged that registrant made threats that [the two younger children] would be removed if complainant did not agree to [eldest child] being voluntarily accommodated and if she did not stop making complaints about Social Services. (Extract from NISCC Record).

I feel like he looks down on my family; as if we were something he has stepped on. (Quote from 14-year-old Girl).

[Registrant] talked over me while I was trying to explain...She did not listen to my concerns...This is not only rude but also did not pay attention to my opinions or concerns. (Quote from Mother).

Technical Aspects of Practice

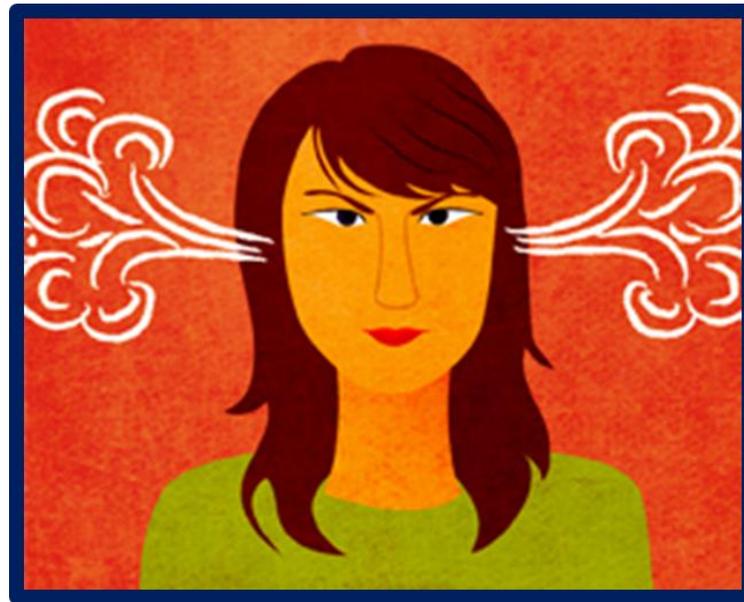


...[complainant] alleges that you have misrepresented [her] in reports you have written, and also that you have breached her confidentiality by disclosing her medical history to her brother-in-law, a school vice principal, and in reports which her ex-partner had sight of. (Letter to Registrant).

I was never able to get in contact with [social worker]. She was never available when I called and when I left a message she never returned my calls...On the very few occasions she did take my call she was very abrupt...She gave the impression she didn't want to hear what I was saying. (Quote from Mother).

The complaint relates to your alleged decision to exclude [complainant] from a case conference and make decisions/recommendations in his absence. [Complainant] alleges that you acted outside agreed policy and procedures. (Letter to Registrant).

Hurt and Anger



The Context of Complaints

Stress

...At the time of the referral, [social work team] were under significant pressure due to staffing deficits and [registrant] may not always have been available to take [complainant's] calls but she is clear that she did subsequently reply to her. Despite these staffing difficulties, it is clear that [registrant] allocated the case in a timely manner. (Letter from Trust Senior Manager).

Pressure

...the relationship between [staff] and [father] in particular has been fraught, with some staff members feeling intimidated...the tone of the communications from [father] were antagonistic and scathing and in some instances made personal attacks on individual staff members... What was highly evident however was that some staff perceive [father] as intimidating, aggressive and threatening. (Independent Review Report).

This complaint is in context of a highly complex child protection case...relations between the Trust and the family were fraught and characterised by a marked lack of cooperation with Social Services in respect of the safeguarding plan. (Letter from Trust Senior Manager).

The Context of Complaints

Opaqueness

[Head of Service] felt that it had not been explained thoroughly to [mother] what the Social Service role would be during her pathway with them and felt this could have been done better. (Extract from Note of Meeting).

...I had no clue, nothing was ever explained. No one had sat down with me and gone through anything. I feel like I was left completely in the dark as to what was going on. (Quote from Mother).

Invisibility

Unfortunately, this type of complaint is extremely difficult to substantiate as it is a case of one person's word against another's. (Letter to Complainant).

The matter was investigated and the complaint was not upheld.

Lost

[Registrant] was adamant that she had correctly recorded the conversation she had with [complainant], however, [complainant] continues to challenge this. It is therefore not possible, given [complainant] and [registrant] were the only two people involved in the meeting, to confirm which version of events is accurate. (Letter from Trust Senior Manager).

Factors That Can 'SPOIL' A Relationship



Conclusion

In order to promote relationships in social work practice, how can we...

1. Support social workers working in stressful and pressurised environments?
2. Support service users who may feel lost in an opaque and invisible system?

