

Perceptions of Professionalisation in Social Care Work in Ireland: A Workers Advisory Group Study

Principal Investigator: [Dr Martin Power, University of Galway, Ireland](#)

Researcher: [Dr Saintuya Dashdondog, University of Galway, Ireland](#)

Collaborator: [The Workers Advisory Group of Social Care Ireland.](#)

Background

Professionalisation and regulation of social care workers in Ireland differs in many ways from the professionalisation of other professions. Ireland introduced a multi-professional Health and Social Care Professionals regulatory body – CORU, which currently regulates over 20,000 professionals across a variety of professions. In November 2023 a register is set to open for social care workers, which will introduce regulation of the profession for the first time. However, unlike other professions that CORU have registered, social care work has no prior system of regulation/accreditation. In addition, a multiplicity of job titles abound, with organisations commonly dictating titles, roles and responsibilities, as well as progression and career pathways. Progression and career pathways are limited at best and this contributes too many social care workers leaving the profession for other professions and roles with higher status and better pay and conditions. In part this is because the title that will become a protected title, social care worker, was manufactured to represent a distinct, but diverse group of professionals.

Aim and Objectives

To examine how social care workers perceive their profession is viewed by organisations, other professions, unions, the State, the public, and other social care workers. In addition, this research explores social care workers expectations around registration.

Design and Methods

This study was developed and conducted in collaboration with the Workers Advisory Group of Social Care Ireland. Phase one was a survey (n=360), which examined respondents views of how social care work and workers are perceived by their organisations, by other professions, the State, and the public, as well as by those within the profession itself. Phase two involved follow up interviews (n=12), which examined these topics in greater depth.

Findings

Social care work might best be described as the near invisible profession. While organisations and immediate managers were felt to have a decent understanding, this did not translate to higher levels of management, other professions, the State, or the public, with the public felt to be almost completely unaware of social care work and workers. In large part this can be attributed to the very limited opportunities for progression, with few social care managers in organisations and social care leader often the only advancement option and the limit on advancement within the profession. As a consequence, social care work was viewed by many as a stepping stone to another role or profession, and few felt unions had been active around progression or other issues of relevance to social care workers. No doubt views were shaped by such experiences, as there was an optimistic view that registration would lead to greater awareness of the profession, as well as improvements in status, pay and conditions.

Dissemination

The preliminary findings have been presented at a number of talks (both online and in-person) and a workshop with members of the Workers Advisory Group is scheduled for the Social Care Ireland conference in late March 2023. The report on the study is available at – <http://hdl.handle.net/10379/17395>

Knowledge Translation

The findings of the study have informed and will continue to inform the Workers Advisory Group's strategic aims. In addition, the study's open access accessibility on the University of Galway's Aran repository makes it available as a resource for those working in social care work.