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**The Placement Experience of Western Sydney University
Social Work Students with Physical Disabilities**

by

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Dedication

The development of this thesis has been inspired in part by my own placement experience and journey as a social worker with a physical disability, as well as the stories of peers of mine with a physical disability who have experienced the benefits and challenges of participating in a social work placement.

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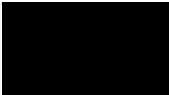
Finally, I thank all of the participants who contributed to this study, your views and experiences will make a significant contribution towards improving the social work placement experience for current and future students with physical disabilities.

Declarations

I acknowledge the contribution of the Graduate Research School in awarding me the Master of Research (Stage 2) Scholarship to help cover the costs associated with my research.

Statement of Authentication

I Elie El-Khoury Antonios, certify that the work contained in this thesis is to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signature _____


Date 21/10/2019

Ethics Approval

The study was approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee, H13037 on the 7th of December 2018. An amendment to the study was approved on the 24th of January 2019.

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Abbreviations

AASW:	Australian Association of Social Workers
AWEAS:	Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards
CRPD:	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
NSECHR:	National Statement on Human Research Ethics

Glossary of Terms

Dasein: A key concept in Martin Heidegger's Interpretive Phenomenology which means 'being in the world'. It focuses on understanding and interpreting how humans act, behave and make sense of the world around them.

Direct Disability Discrimination: Discriminating against people with a disability by treating them unfavourably compared to someone without a disability in a similar or identical situation.

Disability Discrimination: The unequal and unfavourable treatment of a person with a disability by denying them access to the same opportunities as someone without a disability.

Disability Inclusion: Focuses on improving access to social and employment opportunities for people with disabilities

Field Education: The term used to describe the placement component of social work education and is referred to as the 'signature pedagogy of social work'.

Heidegger's Interpretive Phenomenology: A phenomenological approach that seeks to interpret the lived experience of research participants by encouraging the researcher to build a connection with participants' through reflecting on and sharing their own experience of the research topic.

Inclusion: Ensuring equal access to employment, education and health for all people in society.

Indirect Direct Disability Discrimination: An unfair disadvantage by those with a disability due to the regulations, policies or practices of an organisation or institution.

Medical Model of Disability: A model that solely considers the medical and biological factors associated with a disability.

Phenomenology: A methodology that describes and interprets the lived and subjective experiences of individuals in relation to the research topic being investigated.

Physical Disability: An impairment that restricts people's mobility and daily functioning.

Placement: A practical learning opportunity completed by students in their degree to gain the work experience, skills and knowledge required to become professional practitioners in their field.

Placement Integration Plan: A Western Sydney University document that details the adjustments that a student with a disability requires for placement.

Practice Confidence: Refers to social work students' level of self-efficacy and confidence to apply their skills and knowledge in practice situations.

Reflexivity: Understanding how the assumptions, biases, thoughts and feelings of the researcher impact on the research process.

Self-awareness: Refers to social work students' recognition and understanding of how their unspoken, biases, thoughts and feelings, and their interactions with others impact on their practice.

Self-Stigmatisation: The process of individuals who are stigmatised devaluing themselves by accepting the negative stigma and labels placed upon them.

Social Model of Disability: A model that focuses on how people with disabilities experience discrimination and disadvantage due to the structures of society.

Socio-Political Model of Disability: A model that explores how broad political and institutional factors, including attitudes, legislation and government policy oppress and discriminate against people with disabilities.

Stigmatisation: The stereotyping, labelling, marginalisation and exclusion of individuals who are perceived as being different and not aligned with the accepted social norms of society.

Use of Self: Describes social work students' understanding of how their personal circumstances and assumptions about others and the world affect their professional identity and decision making in practice.

Abstract

To obtain a social work degree in Australia, students must complete 1000 hours of placement. Students with physical disabilities however face barriers on placement but little literature exists on this or how placement affects students' professional social work development.

This phenomenological study investigated the placement experience of Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities. An online survey, semi-structured interviews and the theoretical framework of the socio-political model of disability, helped find that participants encountered inaccessible placement environments, negative assumptions about their needs and capabilities and a reluctance to implement reasonable adjustments, which reduced their practice confidence and sense of professional identity. Through placement, participants also reported an increased skill set, more resilience and a greater interest in different social work practice areas. These findings generate new understandings in this under-researched area, to inform placement agency practices on promoting disability inclusion and helping students become confident social workers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background: The Opportunity of Placement

Two years ago, I found myself in a noisy, oily, industrious hospital car park where I was about to attend my first day of placement. When I chose to pursue a social work degree at Western Sydney University, the opportunity to complete placement and gain a hands-on understanding of real-life social work practice greatly appealed to me. As a student with a physical disability I felt that going on placement would enhance my career prospects in social work. I also thought it would provide me with an opportunity to breakdown some of the stereotypes and barriers associated with physical disability. I was equally aware that due to my physical disability, placement agencies had to accommodate for my needs. Little did I know or realise at the time, that factors such as attitudes, resources, policies, practices and legislation around disability would have such a profound impact on the capacity of placement organisations to accommodate me and provide me with the most appropriate learning opportunities to build my confidence and skills as an emerging social worker. Such critical reflection on my placement experience is significant because social work education has always emphasised the importance of critically reflecting on how social workers' beliefs, experiences and views impact upon their practice (Blakemore & Agllias 2018; Crisp 2019).

I however, was not the only student who had to confront these issues. Several peers with physical disabilities and impairments have spoken of the barriers and challenges they have faced during placement which has affected their career opportunities and professional development in the social work field. For these reasons, I wanted to use this thesis to explore the placement experience of other Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities, particularly the challenges they faced while on placement.

1.2 Research Gap

In my development of this study I identified a significant gap in the literature on the specific barriers that social work students with physical disabilities face on placement. Instead, the literature has more generally focused on students with various disabilities, particularly negative attitudes, disclosure of disability and the impact of these on professional identity formation and career prospects for students (Cunnah 2015; Gibson 2012). Whilst there is definite overlap in some of the barriers that students with physical and non-physical disabilities face such as negative attitudes and identity formation, the lack of literature on the challenges faced exclusively by those with physical disabilities on placement, including access and mobility restrictions, makes it difficult for placement organisations to appropriately accommodate for the specific needs of these students.

Additionally, I noted that current literature provides little insight on how placement hinders or enriches students' practice confidence and professional social work identity, as well as how students with physical disabilities can develop and demonstrate a range of skills and strengths on placement. I found that social work literature pays inadequate attention to how social work students with a disability are treated more as service users in need, rather than being recognised as capable social work practitioners.

In considering these gaps, my own placement experience and the voices of my peers I felt it was imperative to explore this research area. This is particularly important for placement agencies to be better equipped to meet the needs of students with physical disabilities and support them to become confident social workers who contribute meaningfully to society.

1.3 Research Aims, Question and Objectives

This study was designed with two aims. Firstly, to investigate the placement experience of Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities. Secondly, to explore how the placement experience affected these student's development as emerging social workers.

To understand the aims of this research, the following research question was developed: 'How do Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities experience placement, and is placement helpful in building their confidence to enter the field'?

To address this question and achieve the aims of this research, the study had three specific objectives:

- 1) To identify and explore the barriers and challenges that social work students with physical disabilities face on placement.
- 2) To highlight the skills and strengths that students with physical disabilities can gain on placement.
- 3) To evaluate the impact of placement on students' identity, practice confidence and professional development.

1.4 Parameters of the Research

The study sought the participation of Bachelor of Social Work and Masters of Social Work Qualifying students from Western Sydney University, who identified having a physical disability or impairment and who were currently completing or had completed a placement. The study also included recent Western Sydney University social work graduates with physical disabilities. Students with non-physical disabilities or those from other universities and higher education institutions were not considered for this study. As stated previously, the choice to only focus on students with physical disabilities was made to address the lack of literature about their challenges and experiences on placement. This decision was further influenced by the limited timeframe that the research had to be conducted in and also because

of my familiarity with and experience of the placement process at Western Sydney University.

1.5 Overview of Methodological Approach

This study was designed with a phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological methodology facilitates a deep exploration of how participants reflect on and conceptualise their lived experiences in relation to the research issue being investigated (Quinney, Dwyer & Chapman 2016). The study incorporated Martin Heidegger's interpretive phenomenological approach to explicate the lived experience of the research participants (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar & Dowling 2016). Heidegger's approach helped explore participants placement experience and to extract meaning from these experiences for their professional social work identity. By designing and conducting this research phenomenologically, I was able to elicit in detail the views of participants on the challenges they faced on placement and the impact of their placement experience for their professional social work development. It also enabled me to reflect on my own thoughts, experiences and feelings about social work placements throughout the research process.

Complementing the phenomenological design of this study was the theoretical framework of the socio-political model of disability. The socio-political model of disability focuses on how the attitudes, policies, practices and regulations of institutions and wider society oppress, marginalise and discriminate against people with disabilities or impairments (Ryan 2011). Incorporating this theoretical framework helped to identify structural barriers and challenges that impact on student's placement experience such as negative attitudes around disability, disability discrimination legislation and the implications of government initiatives such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme on the availability and resources of placement agencies.

Data was collected through a multi-method approach. This consisted of an online Qualtrics survey and then through semi-structured face-to-face interviews which provided more in-depth, thick, descriptive information about participants' placement experience.

1.6 Significance of the Research

An increased number of students with disabilities are entering higher education. In 2018 54,265 students with disabilities enrolled in universities across Australia (Universities Australia 2019). Therefore, this research is necessary because it will contribute towards generating new literature on the barriers faced by social work students with disabilities on placement. This in turn supports Western Sydney University's focus on access to work integrated learning and collaborating effectively with placement organisations (Western Sydney University 2018a). Identifying and exploring the barriers and challenges that students with a physical disability face on placement, will make placement agencies more aware of the issues these students may encounter on placement. By increasing their awareness of these challenges, placement agencies can be better prepared to support students to succeed on placement and become confident social work practitioners. In doing this, placement organisations can support ongoing efforts to achieve disability inclusion and increase access to social and employment opportunities for people with disabilities under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Ruhindwa, Randall & Cartmel 2016).

1.7 Thesis Structure

After this chapter, the thesis is divided up into six more chapters:

Chapter 2- Reviews the literature in relation to definitions of physical disability, the International and Australian legal framework around disability, the placement allocation process, the role of placement in social work, barriers and challenges encountered on placement, skills strengths gained on placement and finally, the impact of placement on students' confidence, professional development and identity.

Chapter 3- Provides a detailed explanation of the methodology and design of this study, including a justification for choosing the phenomenological methodology, specifically Heidegger's interpretive phenomenological approach, and the theoretical framework socio-political model of disability.

Chapter 4- Explains and justifies the methods of data collection and analysis. The chapter begins by describing the participant recruitment process including the strategies used to promote the study and outlines the ethical considerations made regarding the wellbeing of participants during the study. It also explains the sampling strategy employed, criterion sampling. It then introduces the methods of data collection namely an online survey and semi-structured interviews.

This chapter is then divided into two sections. The first section deals with collection and analysis of survey data, including the rationale behind using online surveys designed through Qualtrics software and the reasons for using descriptive statistics analysis including frequency analysis to analyse the survey responses. In the second section, the choice to use semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to collect data will be justified. This will include an exploration of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step method for conducting thematic analysis.

Finally, the chapter identifies and explains the limitations of the methodology and study itself, particularly the difficulty in recruiting more current students and inviting students from other universities as well as staff members from placement agencies to participate in the study due to time constraints. The limitations also touch on the difficulty in generalising the research findings due to the subjective and interpretivist nature of phenomenological research.

Chapter 5- Describes the findings of the survey and interviews. This chapter begins by stating how many survey responses were received and then details the frequency distribution for each survey question. The chapter then explores the themes uncovered in the semi-structured interviews, including quotes and insights from each interview participant.

Chapter 6- Discusses these findings with relevant links made to existing literature on mobility and access issues within the placement environment, negative attitudes and assumptions about physical disability and the reasons for why reasonable adjustments may not be implemented within placement organisations. It also highlights the skills and strengths participants gained on placement and evaluates how participants' placement experience impacted on their practice confidence, professional identity and development.

Chapter 7- Concludes this thesis by discussing the broader implications of these findings for social work students, social work field education and work-integrated learning at Western Sydney University, placement agencies and wider efforts to promote disability inclusion in society. It will also advise on future directions to take with this research, including collecting insights from students with physical disabilities in cognate fields as well as from placement agency staff themselves.

2. Literature Review

This literature review focuses exclusively on the placement experience of students with a disability. The review firstly defines and locates physical disability within the medical and socio-political models of disability. It then explores the domestic and international legal framework around disability, the role of placement in social work and the barriers and challenges in the placement allocation process and experience for students with physical disabilities. Finally, the review covers skills and strengths gained on placement and the impact of placement on students' practice confidence, professional identity and development.

2.1 Defining Physical Disability within the Medical and Socio-Political Models of Disability

Physical disability is defined as an impairment which restricts people's mobility and daily functioning (Janssen, Heymsfield & Ross 2002). This definition reflects the medical model of disability, which focuses only on the biological and medical aspects of a person's disability (Soffer & Chew 2015). Article 1 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) challenges the medical definition of disability, by proposing that disability is a product of the interaction between people with long-term impairment, including physical impairment and the barriers which restrict their full and equal participation with others in society (Kayess & French 2008). Similarly, the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) Scope of Social Work Practice Disability document (2016) explains how disability emerges from the impact of the processes and structures of society on people with impairments. The definitions of disability from the AASW (2016) and the CRPD align with the socio-political model of disability. The socio-political model of disability proposes that people with disabilities experience hardship and discrimination due the physical, social and cultural characteristics of their environment (Scotch 2000). Harlan Hahn (1993), a key contributor to the socio-political model of disability, explains that this model focuses on how the attitudes and practices of society and institutions affect the way people with disabilities interact with others and build a sense of identity.

2.2 Legal Framework around Disability

The literature describes the International and Australian legal framework that underpins disability. The CRPD confirms that people with disabilities should enjoy their fundamental human rights and freedoms (Bigby 2014). Additionally, Principle Four of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals stipulates that there should be equitable access to education and lifelong learning for all people (Wall 2017). As a member and signatory to the CRPD, Australia introduced the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) to prohibit disability discrimination by stipulating that reasonable adjustments must be implemented to accommodate for people with disabilities at university, on placement and in the workplace (Bigby 2014; Rankin et al. 2010). The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth) were implemented under the *1992 Disability Discrimination Act* (Cth) to ensure that students with disabilities access learning and training opportunities free from discrimination (Dickson 2006). Furthermore, the *Disability Access to Premises Standards 2010* (Cth) were established under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) to assist with providing equitable, cost-effective and achievable access to buildings and facilities for people with disabilities (Bigby 2014).

2.3 Placement in Social Work

Placement is a practical learning opportunity completed by students in their degree to help them gain work experience in their field (Western Sydney University 2017b). According to the Western Sydney University Bachelor of Social Work handbook (2018b), placements are designed to give students the opportunity to enhance their practical social work skills and gain the knowledge required to become an effective practitioner in the field. On placement, students will generally be engaged in direct face-to-face work with clients in a clinical and non-clinical setting (Bogo 2015). However, students may also participate in research-based placements, where they learn how to design and carry out research projects, translate theory and research methods into practice and enhance their leadership and project management skills (Hewson, Walsh & Bradshaw 2010). The recommended format for the completion of placement is specified within the Australian Social Work Education Accreditation Standards (AWEAS). In the social work degree, a professionally supervised and authorised placement is

a requirement to be eligible to be a member of the AASW (AASW 2012). Students complete two placements totalling a minimum 1,000 hours of structured full-time work within an organisation (AASW 2012). 400 hours of placement are completed in the third year of the Bachelor of Social Work and the first year of the Masters of Social Work (Qualifying) course. 600 hours are completed in the final year of the Bachelor of Social Work and Masters of Social Work (Qualifying) programs (Western Sydney University 2018b). The placement component of the social work degree is referred to as 'field education'. Field education is described as the 'signature of pedagogy in social work', because students have opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge in real life situations, critically reflect on their practice and conceptualise practice situations using different theories and interventions (Wayne, Raskin & Bogo, 2010, p. 330). The required working hours and days for placement can be modified and adjusted for students with disabilities who may have difficulty managing and coping with a five-day full-time work block (AASW 2012).

2.4 Placement Allocation Process

Placement allocation at Western Sydney University occurs through students with disabilities collaborating with the University's disability advisor and their School's placement coordinator to discuss and implement adjustments for the placement (Western Sydney University 2017a). These adjustments are documented into a placement integration plan. The placement integration plan ensures that risk to the student is minimised on placement by detailing all of the necessary adjustments they require (Western Sydney University 2019). This placement integration plan is applicable to all Western Sydney University students who are enrolled in degrees that offer placement (Western Sydney University 2017a). Western Sydney University has a legal obligation to ensure these adjustments are provided during the student's placement (Western Sydney University 2019). The student, disability advisor, school placement coordinator and the hosting placement agency are all responsible for ensuring that these adjustments are implemented during the placement. The school placement coordinator oversees and monitors this process (Western Sydney University 2017b; Western Sydney University 2019).

The placement allocation approach adopted by Western Sydney University aligns with the recommendation of British researchers Wray et al. (2005) who explain that at the heart of the placement experience, there is an engaged and collaborative process, from pre-allocation to positive conclusion. To provide a positive placement experience it is necessary for placement agencies and universities to collaborate with each other to support the needs students with physical disabilities (Zuchowski et al. 2018).

However, the effectiveness of the placement allocation process is hindered by several issues. Firstly, placement organisations may have limited information about students' needs before the placement commences (Barron, Phillips & Stalker 1996). This may be further perpetuated by the reluctance of students to disclose details regarding their disability out of fear not being allocated a placement (Barron, Phillips & Stalker 1996). Hearn, Short and Healy (2014) confirm this finding, explaining that some placements are not offered to students with disabilities because assumptions are made about their capability to perform the role of a social worker, without getting to know the student's needs and goals first. Placement staff have identified difficulties in accommodating for students' disabilities due to increased workloads, expectations and resource constraints (Zuchowski et al. 2018). Budgeting and funding limitations have also hindered the capacity of placement agencies to accommodate for students' needs (Barron, Phillips & Stalker 1996). For example, Green and Mears (2014) explain how the National Disability Insurance Scheme has contributed to not-for-profit organisations receiving less government funding, which in turn has restricted their service provision and subsequent need to take students on placement.

2.5 Barriers Encountered on Placement

Students encounter barriers during placement which can negatively impact upon practice, their confidence and professional identity (Barron, Phillips & Stalker 1996; Cunnah 2015). Barron, Phillips and Stalker (1996) argue that students with physical disabilities have difficulty in accessing the built environment of placement agencies because the facilities and buildings within these placement agencies are not suitable for students with mobility issues. Jackson (2018) contends, explaining how an ongoing legacy of the medical model of disability has been that the majority of infrastructure and facilities can only be accessed by

people without a disability. From a socio-political lens, the inability for people with disability to access these buildings and facilities contributes to the disadvantage and exclusion they face in everyday society.

Students with disabilities may struggle to deal with the demands of placement due to concerns about failing to meet placement expectations and being seen as incompetent (Barron, Phillips & Stalker 1996). Dove and Skinner (2010) explain students who experience health related-issues are at a greater risk of not completing their placement. Students with disabilities also experience challenges due to the tendency of some placement and university staff to only focus on the student's disability, rather than addressing barriers towards accessing a placement (Hill & Roger 2016).

Students with disabilities endure stigma and discrimination from colleagues and other students on placement and they fear not being accepted or embraced on placement because of this (Barron, Phillips & Stalker 1996; Hearn, Short & Healy 2014). Stigmatisation occurs through the stereotyping, labelling, marginalisation and exclusion of individuals who are perceived as being different and not aligned with the accepted social norms of society (Stangl et al. 2019). Cunnah's (2015) research on social work placements and the disabled identity, highlights that students with disabilities are stigmatised on placement by being labelled as dangerous, unable to work and unable to contribute fully to society. The prevalence of stigma in the placement environment presents the risk of students with a disability constructing their sense of identity and self-worth according to these negative labels (Hearn, Short & Healy 2014; Cunnah 2015). This process is known as self-stigmatisation, whereby individuals who are stigmatised devalue themselves by accepting the negative beliefs and assumptions made about them (Stangl et al. 2019).

The stigmatisation of social work students with a disability also contributes to the discrimination they face on placement (Hearn, Short & Healy 2014). In the Australian context, disability discrimination is defined as the unequal and unfavourable treatment of a person with a disability by denying them access to the same opportunities as someone without a disability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019). There is direct and indirect discrimination against a person with a disability. Direct discrimination occurs when a person

with a disability is treated unfavourably compared to someone without a disability in a similar or identical situation (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014). A simple example is denying the opportunity for a student to access a placement opportunity on the basis of their disability (Hearn, Short & Healy 2014). Indirect discrimination occurs when the regulations, policies or practices of an organisation or institution unfairly disadvantage someone with a disability, for example, not providing ramp access into a building or a facility for a wheelchair user (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014). Therefore, discrimination is embedded in the systems, physical environment, practices, policies and attitudes of placement agencies (Cunnah 2015). The fear of being discriminated against, means that students with disabilities feel the need to conform to the standards and norms of the placement organisation they are working for (Cunnah 2015).

Students with disabilities also experience patronising behaviour by others towards them. Patronising those with a disability devalues them by creating the expectation that they will achieve less than others and shifts the focus away from the structural causes of physical disability and impairment (Grue 2016). Wang et al. (2015) argue that patronising people with disabilities makes them feel that they are incompetent, incapable of looking after themselves and means they receive often unnecessary assistance. Having to deal with these attitudes from placement agency staff reflects their lack of understanding about appropriately interacting with students with disabilities (Wray et al. 2005). This lack of understanding has emerged from the limited attention given to disability within social work, social work research and education (Bigby, Tilbury & Hughes 2018). The negative interactions that these students experience on placement can create feelings of low self-worth and isolation, which increases the risk of developing mental health issues (Tough, Siegrist & Fekete 2017; Temple & Kelaher 2018).

The AASW Code of Ethics (2010) seek to ensure that people with disabilities are treated with respect and without stigma and discrimination. Section 3.1 of the AASW Code of Ethics (2010) outlines the principle of Respect for Persons', which stipulates that people's dignity and inherent self-worth should be respected at all times. The AASW Scope of Social Work Practice Disability document (2016), emphasises that social workers should empower people with disabilities to help them achieve their goals and uphold their inherent right to dignity and

self-determination. Despite the positive intentions of the AASW Code of Ethics (2010) and the Scope of Social Work Practice Disability document (2016), their principles primarily apply to service users including those with a disability. These guidelines do not consider the notion that people with disabilities are not just service users in need, but they too can become confident and successful social work practitioners. Failing to recognise a person with a disability as a professional practitioner, stems from a long-held assumption that workers in the health sector need to possess characteristics such as strength and power (French 1988). Instead workers with a disability are perceived as being weak and their qualities and attributes are overlooked and discredited (Goffman 1986). On placement, students with a disability need to recognise and manage their dual identities as service users and service providers (Kiesel, DeZelar & Lightfood 2018).

Students with a disability are also made to feel like they are a burden on placement (Wray et al. 2005). Due to this, students will often not ask for adjustments during the placement as this can reinforce or remind them of the limitations they encounter due to their physical disability (Moloney et al. 2018). For example, students with a physical disability experience fatigue and difficulty completing manual tasks (Lindsay et al. 2019a). Consequently, they may require accommodations including assistive technology and modification of placement tasks and hours (Padkapayeva et al. 2017). Encountering negative attitudes towards disability on placement can also reduce students' confidence, create a feeling of inadequacy and make it difficult to fulfil placement requirements (Georgiou, Espahbodi & De Souza 2012). Hearn, Short and Healy (2014) discuss how students may be placed in the disability sector out of convenience, which narrows their learning opportunities, understanding of different forms of social work practice and hinders their career prospects. Healy et al. (2015) argue that it is better to avoid placing students with disabilities in disability-specific organisations in order to maximise learning and career opportunities in the mainstream social work field. Further, in a professional context it is important to display a positive attitude towards people with disabilities (Lynch et al. 2019).

2.6 Strengths Gained on Placement

Despite the barriers and challenges faced by students with physical disabilities on placement, they can still develop and demonstrate key skills and strengths. If students are supported on placement, they can enhance and showcase their strengths such as being able to effectively collaborate with others (White, Morales, & Wright III 2014). Hearn Short and Healy (2014) found in their research that once students with disabilities became comfortable in their placement environment, their confidence increased because they realised, they were doing the same work as their peers even though they had different needs that needed to be accommodated for. Students confidence also increased through setting and achieving placement goals which enabled them to identify and recognise their capabilities. By participating in a workplace environment, students with disabilities learn how to stand up and advocate for themselves (Lindsay et al. 2019b). As a result, students can become more resilient, adapt to different situations and develop their problem-solving skills (Hemy et al. 2015). Through placement, students can demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm, motivation and a strong set of social work values to help them succeed in the field (Welch, Lerpiniere & Young 2014). They can also bring a strong understanding of how different agencies collaborate with each other to support service users (Welch, Lerpiniere & Young 2014). By participating on placement, students gain experience knowledge, new skills, greater professional development opportunities and exposure to the working environment (Georgiou, Espahbodi & De Souza, 2012). Students can also develop their report writing and assessment skills to assist with their readiness to enter the professional social work field (Grant, Sheridan & Webb 2017). Therefore, it is important for social work and placement educators to create an environment where students recognise and reflect on their skills, strengths and values in practice (Copeland & Oliphant 2014).

2.7 Impact of Placement on Students' Practice Confidence, Identity & Professional Development

The literature explores how placement impacts upon social work students' practice confidence, professional identity and development. Practice confidence refers to students' level of self-efficacy and confidence in being able to utilise and apply their skills knowledge in different social work practice situations. (Bogo et al. 2016). Building students practice confidence helps to ease their concerns about whether they can provide quality service delivery as a professional social worker. (Williamson et al. 2010). While on placement students may experience difficulty in applying social work knowledge and skills in real-life situations, which can reduce their self-belief and confidence to become professional social workers (Joubert 2017). Consequently, students need to be provided with learning opportunities on placement to build their practice confidence and foster a positive sense of professional identity (Williamson et al. 2010). Jackson (2017) identifies different ways in which students can boost their practice confidence and professional identity on placement. Firstly, students can gain a better understanding of the expectations, roles and responsibilities of workers in social work organisations, by observing and imitating how professionals carry out their work and behave. In addition, students can share and gain knowledge from placement agency staff and build their professional networks. Students also learn how to operate as a professional social worker within the placement agency's work culture, values and beliefs, which may differ from their own personal values and beliefs. This allows students to question and form their own views about how the placement agency operates and the values they adhere to. Jackson (2017) argues that this critically reflexive process forms a central aspect of students' professional identity formation.

The relationship between students and their placement supervisor also affects the development of their practice confidence and professional identity. Section 5.5.1 (m) of the AASW Code of Ethics emphasises that placement supervisors are responsible for ensuring that supervision and training is safe and appropriate for students with disabilities (AASW 2010). Supervisors contribute towards building confidence in social work students by assessing their competence in practice and giving feedback on areas of improvement (Furness 2004). This helps students develop their professional judgement, practice skills and capacity

for self-reflection. (Kourgiantakis, Sewell & Bogo 2019). However, tension within the supervisor-student relationship can restrict a student's ability to develop their professional identity and practice confidence (Dove & Skinner 2010). Time constraints and conflicts of values and opinions can make the student-supervisor relationship difficult, which means that students may not have the opportunity to reflect on their practice experience and learning in supervision (Loos & Kostecki 2018).

On placement, supervisors are also responsible for helping students reflect on their practice and develop their 'use of self' when dealing with a variety of practice situations (Chinnery & Beddoe 2011). Use of self refers to social work students' understanding of how their own personal circumstances and assumptions about others and the world impact upon their identity as social workers and decision making in practice situations (Chinnery & Beddoe 2011). The concept of self-awareness is another important aspect of social work education (Blakemore & Agllias 2018). It focuses on the ability for students to understand and recognise how their unspoken thoughts and feelings, as well as their behaviours and interactions with others impact upon their decision making in practice (Blakemore & Agllias 2018). Understanding the concepts of use of self and self-awareness is important in helping students become confident and robust practitioners who are aware of their values and who possess advanced critical thinking and analytical skills (Cree et al. 2018). Furthermore, Beddoe (2019) argues that supervisors should help to students develop critical analysis skills in order to reinforce their professional identity as social workers and to understand the impact of policies on the wellbeing of others. This is important because supervisors have a responsibility for creating a safe space to allow students to reflect on their practice and understand how the social work values of human rights and social justice are applied in the placement organisation (Waugh 2019).

Placement affects the identity and professional development of students with both visible and hidden disabilities (Cunnah 2015). Students with a disability develop a sense of identity based on previous and current experiences (Cunnah 2015). A student's sense of identity is formed around how they see themselves and how they are judged by others (Cunnah 2015). Particularly, the focus on physical appearance in the workplace and wider society has made it difficult for students to celebrate their personal identity on placement due to the fear of not

fitting in with others (Morris cited in Cunnah 2015). This fear is re-produced through negative discourses that construct students with disabilities as being 'different' to students without a disability on placement (Bulk et al. 2017). Mik-Myer (2016) explains how the reluctance to identify and celebrate having a physical disability has been perpetrated by the discourse that it is problematic to talk about or explicitly mention the difference between workers with and without a physical disability when trying to promote disability inclusion in the workplace. Cunnah (2015) argues that those with a hidden disability have often been viewed as abnormal and unable to be productive members of society. Due to this, students with a hidden disability may not disclose their condition on placement which hinders their self and professional identity.

The decision to not disclose their hidden impairment affects access to employment opportunities post-university for these students. Therefore, promoting disability inclusion and succeeding at university and on placement, helps students with disabilities feel a sense of purpose, self-worth and in turn develop a positive professional identity (Cunnah 2015). Developing and expressing a positive sense of identity helps to challenge pervading ableist discourses in the workplace and in society that define disability as something that is negative and needs to be eliminated (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). The literature cited above highlights the impact of the placement environment on enabling students with disabilities to develop their practice confidence and professional social work identity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Phenomenology

In order to effectively capture and reflect on how participants experienced placement, the phenomenological methodology was most suitable for this study. This is because phenomenology focuses on describing the lived and subjective experiences of individuals in relation to the social problem being investigated (Finlay 2009). Specifically, it seeks to describe what participants have experienced and how they have experienced these things (Neubauer, Witkop & Varipo 2019). Phenomenology places emphasis on understanding people's experiences through asking broad open-ended questions to interpret how participants construct meaning about their experience (Smith & Osborn 2009). In relation to disability, phenomenological encourages participants to reflect on and discuss what it is like to live with a disability from their own perspective (Martiny 2015).

Adopting a phenomenological approach aligned with the interpretivist nature of social work practice which focuses on understanding the richness of human experience, challenging oppressive discourses and bringing the private issues faced by individuals into the public domain (Newberry 2012). As a result, I sought to conduct a phenomenological study that highlighted the need to promote more positive and inclusive attitudes and discourses about disability in placement agencies in order to help develop students practice confidence and professional identity.

The decision to design this study phenomenologically was influenced by my intention to explore the placement experience of each individual participant. I also wanted to choose specific aspects of the placement experience for participants to reflect on, including the supervisor-student relationship and the implications of not implementing reasonable adjustments in the placement organisation. In other studies, such as the one by Cunnah (2015), an emancipatory research paradigm was employed to explore the impact of social work placements on identity formation for students with a disability. The emancipatory research paradigm proposes that empowering people with disabilities involves understanding

and eliminating the socio-political oppression, exclusion and discrimination they face (Barnes 2008). For this to occur, the voice of participants with a disability needs to be heard throughout the research study (Barnes 2008). This means allowing participants to be involved in all aspects of the research process including the opportunity to contribute to formulating questions for data collection (Barnes 2008).

Despite the positive intentions of this paradigm and its relevance to my research topic, I chose to use phenomenology because I wanted to have control over designing the online survey and then formulating and modifying the interview questions to suit the unique circumstances and lived experience of each interview participant. Through this, I could still recognise and promote the voice of these participants in relation to challenges and socio-political factors that impacted on their placement experience. Additionally, emancipatory research has been criticised as a methodology that objectifies and focuses solely on groups in society who suffer from oppression (Danieli & Woodhams 2005). I utilised phenomenology because it is a methodology that is not simply limited to exploring the experience of minority or oppressed groups in society. Instead, it describes how all humans understand the world they operate in and how they create meaning about their experiences and interactions with others (Dowling 2007).

In Hearn, Short and Healy's (2014) study the cooperative inquiry approach was employed. This involved the researchers coming together to discuss and reflect on their thoughts and feelings about the placement experience. This approach however was not compatible with the purpose of my research. I wanted to explore the individual placement stories and insights of other students as the main focus of my research not simply my own experience or the challenges I faced. Therefore, I felt that designing my study phenomenologically would enable me to use my placement experience to establish a connection with the participants and then allow their voice and insights to drive the study.

3.2 Incorporating Heidegger's Interpretive Phenomenology

Employing the phenomenological methodology enabled me to reflect on and challenge my own thoughts and feelings regarding social work placements throughout the research process. This reflection aligns with Heidegger's interpretive phenomenological approach which proposes that researcher's prior experiences and pre-conceptions regarding the research topic emerge in each encounter with their participants (Newberry 2012). This is necessary because phenomenology encourages a process of reflexivity which is about understanding how a researcher's assumptions, biases, thoughts and feelings impact upon the research process (Quinney, Dwyer & Chapman 2016).

Under Heidegger's phenomenological approach, researchers are encouraged to create dialogue with the interview participants, share experiences and acknowledge their origins and personal background (Quinney, Dwyer & Chapman 2016). Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology focuses on the concept of 'Dasein', which means 'being in the world'. This refers to understanding and interpreting the way that humans act, behave and make sense of the world around them (Dowling 2007; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar & Dowling 2016; Quinney, Dwyer & Chapman 2016). As a result, I wanted to examine how participants made sense of what they experienced on placement and what this meant for their development as social workers. Additionally, I chose to incorporate Heidegger's phenomenological approach because unlike other phenomenological methods, such as those proposed by Husserl and Colazzi, Heidegger encourages the researcher to explore, reflect on and interpret their own life experiences and beliefs about the research topic being investigated in order to connect with research participants throughout the interview process (Dowling 2007; Tufford & Newman 2010).

Using Heidegger's phenomenological approach helped to address the aims, research question and objectives of the study, by enabling participants to reflect on their lived experience of placement around the barriers and challenges they encountered, the skills and strengths they developed and the impact of placement on their practice confidence, identity and professional development to enter the social work field. By creating dialogue with participants on these

issues, I reflected on the challenges I faced during my hospital placement and how these affected the development of my professional social work identity. For example, as a wheelchair user with Cerebral Palsy, I had difficulty completing large amounts of hand-written documentation, accessing bathrooms and different wards during my hospital placement. Because of these challenges I questioned whether my identity as a social work student with a physical disability meant that I would be denied access to the same learning opportunities as my peers on placement. I was interested to see if other students with a physical disability experienced similar challenges to me, or if they encountered other obstacles that did not emerge for me during my hospital placement.

3.3 Theoretical Framework: Choosing the Socio-Political Model of Disability Over the Social Model of Disability

To complement the phenomenological methodology, the theoretical framework of the socio-political model of disability was applied. The socio-political model of disability was chosen over the social model of disability for the following reason: the social model of disability emphasises that the structures of society oppress, disadvantage and discriminate against people with disabilities (Barnes 2012; Berghs et al. 2016). The socio-political model of disability however, takes this view further and emphasises that broader political and institutional factors such as institutional attitudes, practices and the implementation and understanding of government policy and legislation impacts upon how those with a disability operate in the structures of society (Kraus 2008).

For this reason, the study incorporated the socio-political model of disability to analyse the impact of government policies and legislation on placement agencies capacity and role in supporting students with physical disabilities. This model also helped to explore how students struggled on placement due to the anti-inclusive and restrictive attitudes and practices of placement organisations. Ryan's (2011) research on the clinical placement experience for nursing students with disabilities incorporated the socio-political model of disability to demonstrate how the barriers encountered by these students on placement emerged due to a lack of understanding by university and placement agency staff about their responsibilities under disability legislation to accommodate for students. Equally, Hughes, Corcoran and Slee

(2016) identified how students' needs may not be accommodated because placement staff are reluctant to go beyond their obligations under disability legislation.

The socio-political model of disability also focuses on how individuals and groups can use power to oppress and marginalise those with a disability (Owens 2015). The model further stresses that disability and discrimination are caused by the inability for a structured and rigid social environment to accommodate the needs and aspirations of those with an impairment (Hahn 1986). In the social work field, people with disabilities have traditionally been excluded and not valued as equal members of society (Stainton, Chenoweth & Bigby 2010). Additionally, the way social work practice operates is influenced by political and economic developments within the welfare system and in the tertiary system for social work students (Hyslop 2018). Combining phenomenological with the socio-political model of disability demonstrates how discrimination and oppression are ongoing aspect of the lives of people with disabilities (Patterson & Hughes 1999).

Therefore, it was more beneficial to use the socio-political model of disability over the social model because it highlighted how the barriers faced by social work students with physical disabilities on placement emerged from the oppressive and discriminatory attitudes, practices and policies of the placement agencies students were working in. This enabled me to analyse how these policies, practices and affected the emergence of participants professional identity and practice confidence on placement.

4. Methods of Data Collection & Analysis

4.1 Recruitment & Sampling of Participants

The study sought the participation of Western Sydney University Bachelor of Social Work and Masters of Social Work Qualifying students, who identified as having a physical disability and were currently completing or already had completed a placement. The study also included recent social work graduates with physical disabilities. The core similarity between these participant groups was that satisfactory field education placements are a requirement to practise as a social worker. Phenomenological research is based around criterion sampling where participants are recruited who meet a pre-determined criterion. Through this, researchers are able to explore each participant's own unique experience on the issue being investigated (Moser & Korstjens 2018). In my study, the pre-determined criteria for selecting participants was that they were social work students who had a physical disability and had participated or were participating in a placement.

To promote the study, an initial recruitment message was developed (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the research and inviting students to complete a short online survey. The recruitment text was then amended to include an invitation for recent graduates and an opportunity to participate in semi-structured interviews following the completion of the survey (see Appendix B). The amended recruitment text received Ethics Approval on January 24 2019.

Along with the recruitment text, a link to the survey and its participant information sheet (see Appendix C), were all uploaded to the Social Work Student Association Facebook pages, these being: Change Agents of Western Sydney and Social Work and Community Workers Western Sydney. The survey was also promoted on the Western Sydney University Disability Collective Facebook page. Recruiting participants through social media allows researchers to

reach and distribute information about their study to a wider range of potential participants that may not be accessible otherwise (Gelanis et al. 2017). Advertising the study through Facebook helped me to connect with students with physical disabilities that I had not previously met on campus or in my social work degree. It also enabled participants to ask any questions or discuss any requirements to assist with their participation in the study before giving consent. The study was also advertised on Western Sydney University's e-learning site, vUWS, via student email and through word of mouth.

For participants who agreed to be interviewed they were provided with a consent form and a separate participant information sheet (see Appendix D & E).

4.2 Methods of Data Collection

4.2.1 Survey

An online survey using Qualtrics was developed to collect data. Online survey software such as Qualtrics provide easily accessible survey development tools and assistance with the collation of survey data (Cummings, Kohn & Hulley, 2013). Distributing surveys online is a flexible, timely and cost-efficient method for collecting data (Ball 2019). This is because data collection can be conducted quickly, participants can be followed up via email and there is more confidentiality for participants when answering challenging or sensitive questions (Chang & Vowles 2013). Additionally, online surveys allow researchers to target their research to a specific audience or sample (Chang & Vowles 2013). As a result, distributing an online survey was helpful towards my study because I could focus my data collection on a specific group of participants who could answer questions about their experience on placement in a private and confidential environment.

The survey contained eight questions (see Appendix F) which collected information on respondent's year of study, the type of placements they had completed or were completing, the challenges encountered on placement, their level of preparedness for placement and their level of satisfaction with the placement experience.

Previous studies have tried to quantitatively measure the social and medical aspects of disability (McDermott & Turk 2011; McLaughlin & Kelly 2005). However, because the purpose of this

research was to explore the lived and subjective experience of students with a physical disability on placement, it was necessary to employ methods of data collection which captured the deep insights and reflections that participants with physical disabilities shared. Therefore, it was possible to use surveys to collect data for this phenomenological study because the surveys only provided an initial understanding of students' placement experience which was then expanded upon during the semi-structured interviews. Due to this, the study incorporated a multi-method approach which in contrast to a mixed methods approach, enables different methods to be used in the same study to suit any research methodology and is not just limited to combining qualitative and quantitative methods throughout the study (Hunter & Brewer 2015).

Originally, the survey was only going to be open for two weeks, however because of the difficulty in receiving an adequate number of responses, the survey remained open for approximately three months.

4.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the completion of the online survey, participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews of 30-35 minutes in duration. The interviews were held primarily on the Liverpool and South Parramatta campuses of Western Sydney University. For students who could not travel to or access these campuses, alternative arrangements had to be made such as conducting interviews using Zoom software or arranging to meet participants at another campus that was more accessible for them.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to their flexibility and versatility collecting in-depth, thick, descriptive data from a small sample of participants (Kallio et al. 2016; Young et al. 2018). This data could then be used to support or refute claims explored in existing literature about the topic being investigated (McIntosh & Morse 2015). Gathering thick, descriptive data is important because it enables the findings of the study to be transferable and generalisable for future studies (Anney 2014). Collecting data through interviews was beneficial because in phenomenological studies, interview data can be used to craft a narrative about how the research topic has impacted upon participants from their own point of view (Crowther et al. 2017). I was able to use the insights and experiences provided by the

interview participants to portray the different obstacles they faced and how they sought to overcome these during their placement. The story that I wanted to describe also reflected how many of these obstacles were perpetuated by the practices, attitudes and policies of the placement agencies themselves.

The rationale behind using semi-structured interviews as opposed to structured or unstructured interviews was that the interview guide could be modified to suit the experiences of individual participants (McIntosh & Morse 2015). Tailoring the interview guide for each participant was necessary because different types of physical disabilities and impairments generate a diverse and complex range of experiences and challenges for research participants (O'Day & Killeen 2002). The semi-structured interviews in this study explored the types of placements participants completed, the impact of their physical disability or impairment on their physical functioning during placement, the barriers and challenges they encountered, the strengths they gained and demonstrated, and how participants' placement experience affected their practice confidence, identity and professional development.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted through using two levels of questions. The first level of questions focus on key themes related to the research topic and the second level of questions follow up what participants have said during the interviews (Kallio et al. 2016). Interviewees were asked about the barriers and challenges they experienced on placement and then follow-up questions were posed to them about how they reacted to these challenges and what the impact of these issues were on their placement experience.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews employ open-ended questions using the words 'what,' 'how' and 'why' to elicit participants feelings, views and experiences on the research topic being investigated (Kallio et al. 2016). The use of open-ended questions facilitates a deeper exploration of the research (Adams 2015). The interview guide used in this study (see Appendix G) included broad open-ended questions about how negative experiences on placement affected a student's confidence to become a social worker and why students felt placement agencies were reluctant to accommodate for their needs. In concluding each interview, participants were asked what they would like to see done differently for future social work students with physical disabilities who participate in placement. Gathering this

information generated strategies to support new understandings about how placement agencies could better support students with physical disabilities to become confident social work practitioners. This aligns with the inductive approach of phenomenological research, which uses the data collected to generate new conclusions and understandings on the research topic (Reiter, Stewart & Bruce 2011).

4.2.3 Methods of Data Analysis

4.2.3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The survey responses were analysed through a basic descriptive statistics analysis. This involves making summaries, observations and general inferences about the data collected as a representation of a particular sample of people (Mathur & Kaushik 2014). In this study, the most frequent answer to each survey question was counted based on the number of times participants selected a particular response to a question. Analysing the survey findings in this way was necessary because a mixture of numerical variables such as the number of placements completed and non-numerical variables, types of challenges faced on placement were used to design the survey questions. By counting the number of times participants responded with a particular answer to a survey question, this helped to draw objective, general conclusions about their experience of the different aspects of placement.

4.2.3.2 Thematic Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model for conducting thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis provides researchers with a flexible method for analysing, interpreting and reporting on themes and patterns that emerge from the data collected. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model for thematic analysis was useful in this study as it clearly articulated what needed to be done at each stage of the analysis process. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model and their application to this study are broken down in the table below.

Table 1. Application of Braun and Clarke’s six-phase model for thematic analysis

Phase	Application to the study
1. Becoming Familiar with the data collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing data set (audio-recordings of interviews) on multiple occasions and searching for meanings.• Formulating written transcripts of the audio-recorded of interviews.• Reviewing transcripts with each interview participant
2. Initial Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coding any text in the transcripts that have meaning or significance to the research topic.• Utilising data driven coding (generating codes based solely on the data collected.)• Identifying semantic codes (explicitly stated words) and latent codes (interpretations of words)• Categorising codes into descriptive, analytical and interpretative codes• Developing a coding matrix
3. Identifying Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Categorising the codes into major themes and sub-themes
4. Reviewing Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deleting irrelevant themes or grouping two themes into one major theme.• Creating a thematic map all of the themes.
5. Defining and Naming Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refine the thematic map• Name and describe what the themes are about.
6. Final Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collate themes and analysis into final report

Table 1 outlines the process I engaged in to analyse the interview data I collected. In line with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model, the interviews were first audio-recorded via I-Phone and Dictaphone. Using a recording device enables the researcher to actively engage in the conversation with the interview participant, rather than being solely focused on writing down participants responses to the interview questions (Adams 2015). The audio-recordings were then transcribed and each transcript was emailed to each interview participant for review and approval. Allowing participants to review the information they provide improves the credibility of the research, because participants can determine if the data collected is an

accurate representation of their experiences (Anney 2014). I also kept a record of my field notes throughout the interview process and devised a study timeline to chart the progress of the study. According to Anney (2014) these strategies help to improve the validity and dependability of the data and research findings that are generated.

After the transcripts were approved by the participants, initial hand coding was conducted. In keeping with Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, semantic and latent codes were identified. Semantic being words explicitly stated by participants and latent being any implicit meanings contained in the information provided by participants that relates to the research topic. These codes were grouped into themes that related to barriers and challenges experienced on placement. To conceptualise and visually represent these codes and themes, a coding matrix and thematic map were developed (See Appendix H & I). The codes and themes generated from this study were based solely on the data that was collected which is known as data driven coding (Gibbs 2007). Because of the small sample size, coding was conducted manually as it was simpler and less time consuming to code four transcripts by hand, rather than using complex computing software.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for the design and conduct of this research was sought and obtained from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee, H13037 on the 7th of December 2018 (see Appendix J). The key ethical considerations of this study were upholding the wellbeing and welfare of participants in accordance with the National Statement on Human Research Ethics (NSECHR) (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018). Section 1.7 I of the NSECHR stipulates that researchers are responsible for ensuring the welfare of the research participants (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018). Respect for participants wellbeing was ensured by informing participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and could access free counselling services at Western Sydney University, as well as counselling support outside of the University. Providing access to these services aligned with Section 2.1 of the National Statement on minimising risks which states that mechanisms must be included in the research study to address potential harm or distress caused to participants (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018). The

only potential risks to emerge from participating in the study were around possible discomfort when relaying a negative experience, however this is a normal aspect of qualitative research and a negligible risk. According to section 2.1.7 of the National Statement on Human Research Ethics, a negligible is any foreseeable risk that presents no harm, discomfort and may only be an inconvenience (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018).

4.4 Limitations and Constraints

Several limitations and constraints affected the study's design and conduct. Because of the limited amount time provided to conduct the research and submit the thesis, it was decided to not seek students from outside the Western Sydney University student body. Similarly, due to time constraints, it was determined to not widen the research study to include experiences and input of placement agency staff. Additionally, some participants were unable to be present at either Liverpool or Parramatta South Campus due to a lack of accessible transport and access issues on campus.

It was difficult to achieve a larger response rate for the surveys and interviews because of the low number of social work students with a physical disability at Western Sydney University, excessive study loads and time constraints for students and a reluctance for those currently on placement to disclose information about their experience so far. This meant that the online survey remained open for much longer than expected, and also meant that only a small number of interview participants could explore their placement experience in-depth. As a result of these restrictions, the study was unable cover all the diverse challenges and experiences that social work students with physical disabilities face on placement. This hindered the generalisability and replicability of the research findings for future studies on the same topic. The use of phenomenology presented the risk of my own experiences and biases about the placement experience influencing the insights that participants shared and the subsequent conclusions drawn from the study.

To mitigate the impact of these limitations, I utilised Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology to enable me to use my placement experience to establish a connection with the research participants. I then used in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect detailed insights from participants and make these insights the main focus of the research. Also concerns with the

generalisability and replicability of the findings are common with the subjective and interpretivist nature of phenomenological research (Leung 2015). As mentioned previously, alternative arrangements were made to accommodate for participants who were unable to be present on campus to participate in the interviews.

5. Findings

5.1 Survey Findings

11 survey responses were received. Although this fell short of the 20 responses sought for ethical approval, it was still sufficient as many phenomenological studies involve working with a sample of less than 20 participants (Marshall 2013; Moser & Korstjens 2018). The survey was constructed in a such a way as to offer a range of responses to the respondent. The term ‘neutral’ in this instance is defined as being indecisive on how to answer the question or simply choosing not to share a specific view on the question that was being asked.

Table 2. Frequency distribution for Western Sydney University Social Work students enrolled course

1. Which degree have you completed or are currently completing?		
Course	Frequency (n)	%
Social Work	11	100
Master of Social Work Qualifying	0	0
Total	11	100

Participants from the Bachelor of Social Work degree only provided responses to the survey. No responses were recorded from the Master of Social Work Qualifying program.

Table 3. Frequency distribution for Western Sydney University Social Work students’ year of study

2. What year of study are you currently in?		
Year	Frequency (n)	%
1 st Year	0	0
2 nd Year	0	0
3 rd Year	3	30
4 th Year	3	30
Finished/Graduated	5	50
Other (Please specify)	0	0
Total	11	100

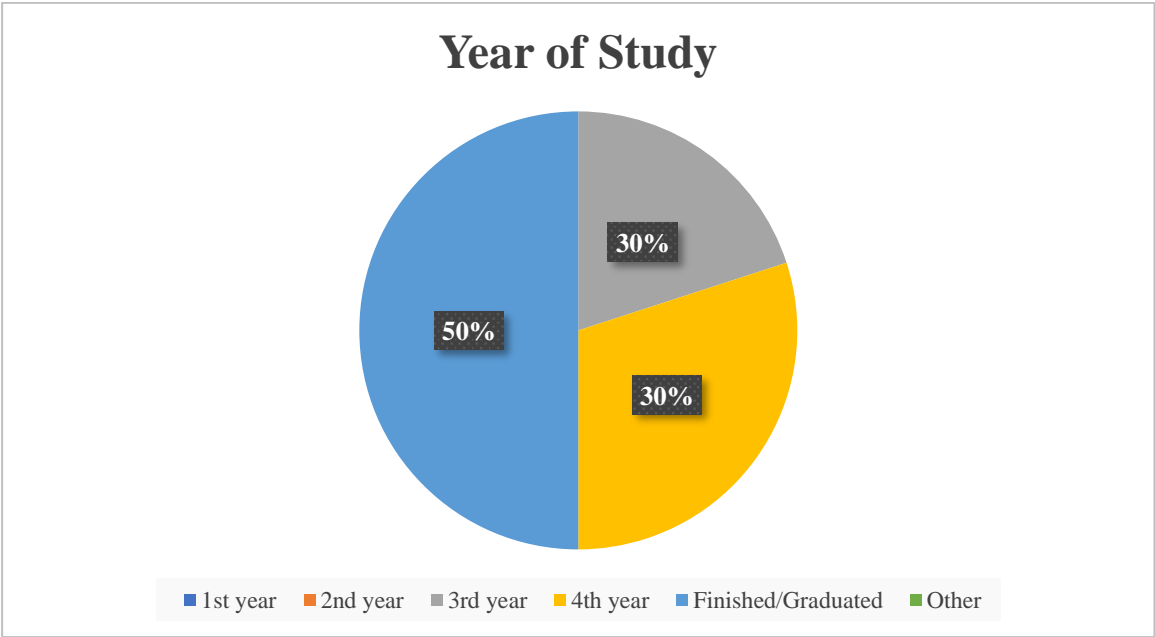


Figure 1. Western Sydney University Social Work students’ year of study

The highest response to this question (50%) came from participants who had either finished or graduated from their Bachelor of Social Work degree. The equal percentage of responses (30%) from 3rd and 4th year current students suggests they had either completed one placement or were currently on placement.

Table 4. Frequency distribution for Western Sydney University Social Work students' number of placements completed

3. How many social work placements have you completed? (Select as many options as applicable)		
Number of Placements Completed	Frequency (n)	%
1	4	33
2	6	50
Currently Completing 1 st placement	2	17
Currently completing 2 nd placement	0	0
Total	12	100

For question three, 12 responses were received because a respondent selected more than one answer. Similar to the findings in Table 3, Table 4 indicates that the highest frequency of responses to this question (50%) came from respondents who had completed both placements, suggesting they were either recent graduates or were awaiting their graduation. 33% of responses were from students who had already completed a placement.

Table 5. Frequency distribution for Western Sydney University Social Work students’ practice areas of interest

4. Which area of social work practice most interests or appeals to you? (Select as many options as applicable)		
Practice Areas	Frequency (n)	%
Hospital Social Work	6	26
Research/Policy	3	13
Disability	6	26
Child Protection	3	13
Domestic Violence	1	4
Community Based Social Work	4	17
Other (Please specify)	0	0
Total	23	100

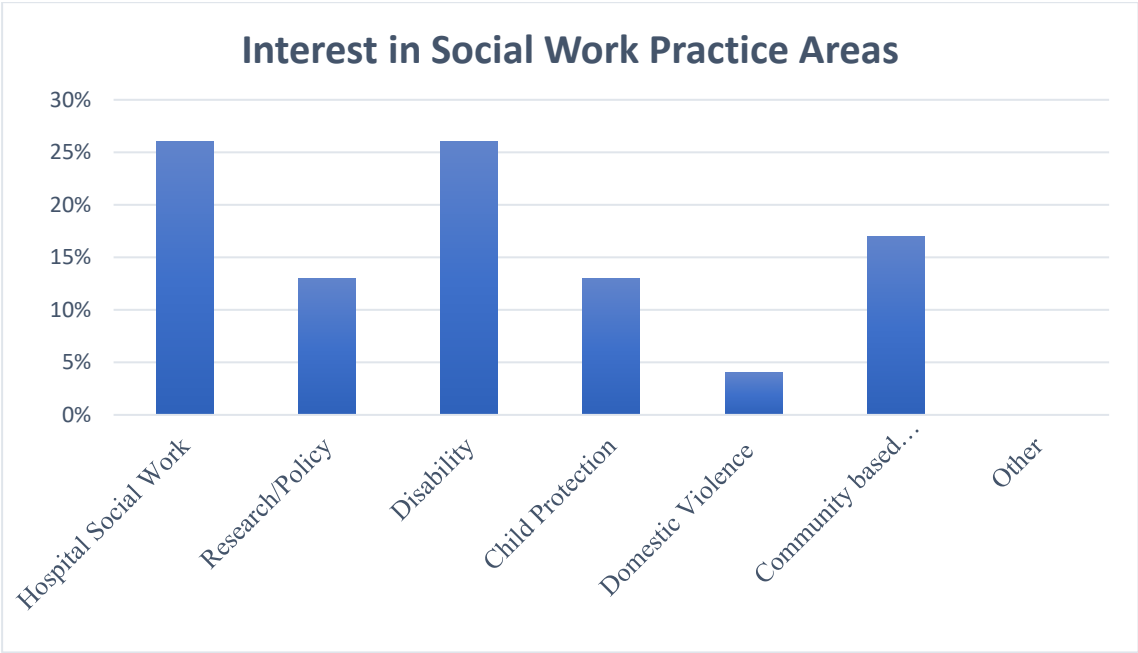


Figure 2. Western Sydney University Social Work students’ practice areas of interest

Question four received a total number of 23 responses because participants could select more than one practice area that they were interested in. Table 5 and Figure 2 illustrate that participants were mainly interested in entering either hospital social work (26%), disability (26%), followed by community based social work (17%). There was no opportunity in the

survey to explore reasons for these findings. However, these ideas were explored further in the interviews.

Table 6. Frequency distribution for Western Sydney University Social Work students’ level of preparedness for the placement experience

5. How prepared did you feel for the experience of going on placement and engaging in real life social work practice?		
Level of Preparedness	Frequency (n)	%
Very prepared	1	9
Prepared	7	63
Somewhat prepared	1	9
Neutral	2	18
Not prepared at all	0	0
Total	11	100

72% of survey respondents stated they either felt ‘Prepared’ (63%) or ‘Very Prepared’ (9%) for the experience of going on placement and engaging from real-life social work practice. 18% responded with ‘Neutral’ and 9% responded with ‘Somewhat Prepared’. These findings indicate that respondents generally felt prepared for the placement experience.

Table 7. Challenges experienced by Western Sydney University Social Work students with physical disabilities on placement

6. Which of the following challenges did you/do you experience on placement due to your physical disability/impairment? (Select as many options as applicable)		
Challenges	Frequency (n)	%
Restricted mobility	2	8
Difficulty accessing buildings and facilities	3	13
Travelling to and from placement	5	21
Completing several tasks in a short space of time or within a normal working day	6	25
Interacting with staff and clients	2	8
Other (Please Specify)	6	25
Total	24	100

Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Hearing instructions and clients' • 'Perceptions from staff that my walking frame was unsafe in the workplace' • 'Data entry' • 'Limited hours due to medical certificate, lack of access to adaptive equipment (sit stand desk, appropriate seating etc) fatigue from chronic pain' • 'Not allowing me appropriate rest breaks and allowing me to take my medication'

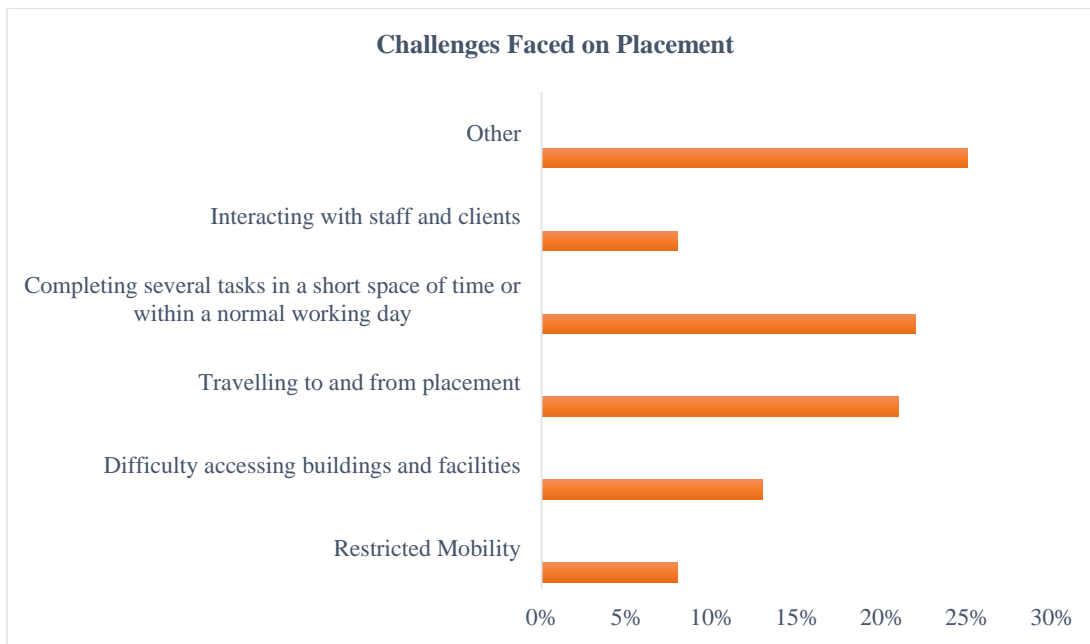


Figure 3. Challenges experienced by Western Sydney University Social Work Students with physical disabilities on placement.

Similar to question three, there were a significantly higher number of responses (24) because respondents could select multiple options from the list provided. According to Table 7 and Figure 3, the most frequent response was finding it challenging to complete tasks in a short space of time or in a normal working day (25%). 21% responded with difficulty being transported to and from placement, 13% with difficulty accessing buildings and facilities and 8% with restricted mobility.

Equally, 25% of responses came from the option of 'Other'. These challenges ranged from safety issues, interactions with clients and a lack of understanding about implementing reasonable adjustments. Barriers and challenges around mobility and the implementation of reasonable adjustments were explored further in the interviews.

7. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Table 8. Students level of agreement/disagreement with whether the placement they were allocated suited their practice interests

<i>The placement I was allocated suited my interest in a particular field of social work practice</i>		
Response	Frequency (n)	%
Strongly Agree	3	27
Agree	3	27
Neutral	4	36
Disagree	1	9
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	11	100

According to Table 8, the most frequent response (36%) came from respondents who selected 'Neutral'. However, 64% of respondents selected 'Strongly Agreed' (27%) or 'Agreed' (27%) when asked if the placement they were allocated suited their interests in a particular field of social work practice. These findings suggest that students were either largely satisfied with the practice area they were working within, or they were unsure about their feelings on the social work practice area that their placement agency operated in.

Table 9. Students level of agreement/disagreement with whether their needs related to their disability were considered when being allocated a placement.

<i>When being allocated a placement, my needs related to my disability were taken into consideration</i>		
Response	Frequency (n)	%
Strongly Agree	2	18
Agree	4	36
Neutral	3	27
Disagree	2	18
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	11	100

The highest frequency of responses (36%) came from survey respondents who ‘Agreed’ that their needs related to their disability were considered when they were allocated a placement. 27% responded with ‘Neutral’ and 18% selected ‘Disagree’ This could suggest that the University worked effectively with respondents to find a suitable placement for them.

Table 10. Students level of agreement/disagreement with the consideration of their needs related to their disability when being allocated a placement

<i>The placement agency I was working in were aware of my disability and took steps to accommodate me</i>		
Response	Frequency (n)	%
Strongly Agree	2	18
Agree	1	9
Neutral	2	18
Disagree	5	45
Strongly Disagree	1	9
Total	11	100

The most frequent response to this question was that survey participants ‘Disagreed’ (45%) that the placement agency they were at were aware of their needs and took measures to accommodate those. 18% responded with ‘Neutral’ or ‘Strongly Agreed’. This could imply that challenges were experienced on placement because respondents’ needs were not accommodated by the placement agency. This was further explored in the interviews.

Table 11. Students level of agreement/disagreement with whether they gained valuable social work skills, knowledge and experience despite the limitations of their physical disability

<i>Despite the limitations of my physical disability, I was still able to gain valuable social work skills, knowledge and experience during my placement</i>		
Response	Frequency (n)	%
Strongly Agree	3	27
Agree	4	36
Neutral	3	27
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	1	9
Total	11	100

The largest frequency of responses came from participants who ‘Agreed’ (36%) or ‘Strongly Agreed’ (27%) that they could gain valuable skills knowledge and experience on placement despite the limitations of their physical disability or impairment. 27% responded with ‘Neutral’. The high level of agreement with this statement could suggest that respondents were able to overcome the limitations of their physical disability to maximise their placement experience.

Table 12. Frequency distribution for Western Sydney University Social Work students' level of satisfaction with their placement experience

8. How satisfied were you/are you with your placement experience?		
Level of Satisfaction	Frequency (n)	%
Very satisfied	4	37
Satisfied	3	27
Neutral	2	18
Unsatisfied	0	0
Very unsatisfied	2	18
Total	11	100

According to Table 12, 64% of respondents were either 'Very satisfied' (37%) or 'Satisfied' (27%) with their placement experience. This may suggest that respondents could effectively manage the barriers and challenges they faced in order to have a satisfying placement experience

5.2 Interview Findings

Four interviews were conducted. Although this was short of the estimated target of five interviews, it was sufficient as phenomenological study requires less than ten interviews to be conducted (Moser & Korstjens 2018). Two of the interview participants had finished their social work degrees and were undertaking post-doctorate study, one participant was a current student and the other participant was awaiting graduation at the time their interview was conducted. Two participants chose to provide information under a pseudonym, whilst the other two participants were simply referred to as 'Participants X and Y' in the interview and analysis process.

Four major themes and four sub-themes emerged from the thematic analysis process. The four major themes identified were: significance of placement, barriers and challenges faced on placement, professional development, practice confidence and identity as well as skills and strengths gained on placement. Under the theme of barriers and challenges faced on placement, four sub-themes were identified, these were: inaccessible placement environment, negative attitudes and assumptions, reluctance to implement reasonable adjustments and response to these barriers and challenges.

5.2.1 Themes

5.2.1.1 Significance of Placement

All four interviewees were asked about the significance of placement to their social work studies. The first interview participant 'John', 'discussed how the chance to complete a placement in a hospital setting influenced his decision to choose social work over his initial preference of the community welfare degree:

It was actually a major deciding factor, when I was looking into going into University, I actually had the aim of going into community welfare, but when I went to an information session on the different courses, I found out that if I did social work, I would have the opportunity to work in a hospital setting which was my major aim at the time, so that influenced my decision and I entered the social work course.

John explained that due to his mobility restrictions, a hospital placement was more convenient for him and required less travelling to different locations.

I think it was just like for me it would have been easier in a sense because I would not have had to travel around like you would in a community job setting, so I would have gone into work, done what I needed to do and left at the end of the day. And I kind of liked the face-to-face counselling aspect of it as well, talking to people, hearing their stories just helping them with any difficulties in their lives just to try and make their lives easier.

Similarly, the second interview participant, 'Participant X' felt that placement gave them the opportunity to apply theory to practice, which would not have otherwise been possible:

I believe a placement enables us to have an experience that we would not have otherwise had in theory- by all means theory is great, but when we can apply theory to practice it sort of gives us a better understanding of you know, why, why we are doing what we are doing and gives us a real life understanding of what we are getting ourselves into.

The third interview participant, 'Catlin' felt that placement did not affect her decision to study social work as she already acquired significant employment experience in the field and wanted to attain a degree that related to her work:

Placement actually was not that important. I had worked as a disability advocate for approximately 14 years before returning to university to undertake my Bachelor of Social Work. As a result, I knew the community service sector, because the organisations I worked for were government funded. I worked for a non-government organisation which was a cross-disability advocacy organisation, meaning it supported anyone who identified as having disability. It was an organisation that provided multiple function services: it operated a service that received complaints about disability funded and operated services; it provided both individual advocacy service and systemic advocacy service.

Equally however, Catlin discussed how through her second placement at university, she realised that she did not align with the term 'social worker' because of its connotations to the medical model of disability and the belief that social work research and academia is becoming more business-like. Catlin explained how through her placement experiences she felt she did not need to identify with the title social worker to contribute to systemic change and be a role model for other students with physical disabilities:

I to this day do not identify as a professional social worker, I know that's really weird, I don't want to be a social worker, I actually don't want to be one. By social worker I mean somebody who has the title because that's usually connected to a hospital, and do I want to be connected to a medicalised system? Not necessarily, because the medical system traditionally sees people with disability as broken. I don't want to be a social work academic either and this is what I got from my second placement because the way academia is going, it is very much 'tick-a-box' and the ethos is increasingly becoming about moving people through the course to graduation rather than obtaining professional skills and knowledge. Academia has become a business.

I don't identify with the title social work, I like the idea behind it, the lobbying, the advocacy, the policy development, but do I need the title to go with that? For me to make a change, and this is what I learnt on my second placement, I need to be in the system. I am needed as a person with disability in academia or in any sector, because very little thought is given to people with disability without people actually mentioning disability. There was one student before me who did placement at University, they were able-bodied. I was the first student who had a disability to do placement at the University. I was able to do it, it opened the door for other people. I like being a role model for people everywhere I go. That is why I have worked really hard regardless of the title that I have had.

The final interviewee, Participant 'Y' was unsure of whether placement influenced their choice to study social work at university, however they mentioned a previous negative placement experience at TAFE and that they wanted to study social work to become a hospital social worker:

I didn't really think about it, I don't know, I guess I thought oh yeah this looks okay because I already did placement at TAFE and that was really terrible. To be a hospital social worker you have to have a social work degree. Hospital feels like home in a weird way, as long as I'm not a patient there, it just feels right for me. My partner works in a hospital, my mum works in a hospital, my grandmother did, everyone is hospital based in my family.

5.2.1.2 Barriers and Challenges Faced on Placement

5.2.1.2.1 Inaccessible Placement Environment

Contrary to its prevalence in the literature, only two out of the four interviewees described some difficulty accessing the built environment of placement agencies while on placement. John discussed how he experienced significant physical fatigue in having to walk between the Surgical and Emergency Departments to locate the only non-patient accessible toilet:

I was still going down to Emergency multiple times a day (five times a day), walking through the Department a day. By the end of the day I was pretty fatigued because the surgical ward was on the top level of the Hospital at the opposite end to what Emergency was. I would need to walk to an elevator, go up they were quite long walks.

Similarly, Participant Y discussed how the outdated design of buildings and facilities in the hospital they were completing their placement in, made it difficult for them to access the bathrooms in the social work department:

At the hospital, it's not really they're fault in a way, but the facilities in the buildings in hospital are so old that they're not really that accessible, it's not practical for me to walk from the social work office which is like 700 metres away to go back to the main office and the bathrooms are not that accessible either in the social work department.

Participant Y also spoke about experiencing pain due to walking long distances in their hospital placement with a prosthesis on, which made it difficult to access different departments to see their patients:

There would be days where I would have to take a day off because my legs were really sore, at the hospital it was more face-to-face contact, writing reports so I could do it, but it was just the walking that got me.

Participant Y reasoned that students with physical disabilities have difficulty accessing suitable placements, because little forward thinking is conducted around how accessible these placement organisations for someone with a physical impairment:

I think there's a lack of placements altogether, but then I think once you add in the criteria that you need it not be 50 billion kilometres away from the station and no stairs as well I think that narrows it down and I don't necessarily know if they really think in advance and think "hey we have this really accessible placement for someone with a disability should we give it to them? I think they think we have this placement, put someone in there.

5.2.1.2.2 Negative Attitudes and Assumptions

All four interviewees discussed the impact of negative attitudes and assumptions about their disability. These assumptions were perpetuated by either placement agency staff or other students who were on placement. John discussed how the Head of Social Work at the hospital decided that he would move to another ward they felt was better suited for him, without consulting John himself:

The Head of Social Work wanted to move me to the Aged care Unit, because in her words 'it was a slower environment that I would be better suited to'.

I was kind of pissed off to be honest it was my first day, I had not really been able to show what I could do, there was no sort of indication that my walker was a risk to Work Health Safety and just to be clear my supervisor was actually advocating for me to stay in the Emergency department, It was all coming from the top down.

That was just their assumption yeah, so my whole thing was I had zero interest in Aged care whatsoever, I did not want to work in aged care and I felt like they were kind of discriminating against me by saying it would be a slower environment that I would be better suited to, especially when they did not know me from a bar of soap, they did not know what my capabilities would be.

John also discussed how assumptions were made about his ability to handle the workload due to the nature of his physical disability:

Another concern on that placement, was actually whether I would be able to handle the workload, and the supervisors at the Hospital were not convinced I would be able to handle a full caseload, so their plan was actually for me to only have one or two cases at a time.

Participant X shared how their second placement agency reacted negatively to the requests for rest and toilet breaks and questioned if they were suited to working in that particular sector of social work:

When I approached them about it and sort of said like I need to have this break, they sort of said I don't think you're cut out for this job, very discriminative in a way, someone with your condition is not cut out for this job.

The supervisor that I was given questioned me and my ability to perform the role as a case worker, because I required the certain amount of rest breaks and their response to me asking about the rest breaks was sometimes we don't get a break, sometimes we have to eat whilst working, that's just the job, if you can't handle the job, then you are not cut out for the job, you should not do this job, maybe you are not appropriate for this job... it was something like that, so they just made the assumption that someone with health issues did not meet their needs for that role or would never be able to meet the needs to this role, without allowing me the chance to show them I could.

Participant X discussed how placement agencies need to become more aware of the needs of students with physical disabilities, instead of making ill-informed assumptions about their needs or their suitability for the placement:

I felt like they had no understanding or comprehension on it whatsoever, they just based it on their own personal assumptions, instead of being provided factual information from professionals, and from research and from actual individuals. And to give the individual time to show them what they are capable of.

Catlin discussed having to deal with negative assumptions when being allocated a placement:

To discuss first placement, I went here I am, here's my background, they automatically said to me, because I have Cerebral Palsy, 'why don't you go to the Cerebral Palsy Alliance because they will understand your disability'? My reply was, "No", because I live with disability. I do not want to work within the peak organisation for my disability. Additionally, I would know too many people there and it could potentially have been a conflict of interest for me because I had worked with clients supported by that organisation previously, so I said no. The automatic assumption was, this is easy because the organisation and its staff will understand what your disability is like and how it impacts on you. I said no.

Catlin also spoke about how she was often patronised by other staff on her first placement and seen as being 'inspirational porn':

My first placement was eventually at a government disability service provider. What I found really interesting in doing placement at this government organisation which catered primarily for people with intellectual disability, was that the majority of staff who were case managers spoke in a patronising tone. They talked slowly at me, saying 'Oh you are so inspirational for getting up every day and you come in here'. I was thinking, you are employed by a government disability organisation, you cater for people with disability, you respond to people with disability, and you are treating me just like one of your clients. You are not seeing me as one of your colleagues and that was really weird for me. I would be in the lunch room and they would be saying "You do so very well for the fact that you prepare your lunch every day and heat it up at work." I didn't see what the big deal was. They saw me and my actions as 'inspirational porn'. Every day I was a source of 'inspirational porn' for them. I thought if you treat me like this, how do you treat your actual clients?

Catlin discussed how during a home-visit with a client she was ridiculed, ignored and berated by her supervisor, who remarked to Catlin to remember that she was only a student with a disability:

One example of an interaction that sticks out to me was when we went to this house of a client; it was a sister looking after another sister and they were concerned when they aged or died what would happen to the sister with disability. My supervisor who was completing the face-to-face intake said, "The government agency cannot assist as the organisation is bankrupt." It could not be bankrupt because it is part of the New South Wales Government and Treasury would have a major issue with that statement. I spoke up and said, "No actually what is happening now is, there is a transition to the NDIS disability services are being primarily federally funded over state funded. My supervisor verbally berated me for correcting her statement. I did it because I knew my supervisor's statement was inaccurate. The supervisor said to me, "Remember you are the student and you have a disability." I will never forget that. I felt they expected me to be stupid or grateful for the position I had.

Catlin stressed that placement agencies need to shift their negative attitudes about disability in general. Instead they have to be patient with students who have a physical disability in order to help students get the best out of themselves on placement and to demonstrate their skills to future employers:

Placement agencies need to stop seeing disability as hard work and they need to stop seeing students as being hard work as well because we have skills and attributes that we can bring to the respective organisation because we currently studying we have current and new knowledge versus people who have been doing social work or community welfare work for several years. They may not have the human rights ethos that social workers or community workers have and I think the mixture between practice and theory is really important because people in agencies focus on the practice and getting things done.

Participant Y discussed how they endured assumptions being made about why they were on a hospital placement:

There was another student who said that I only got the placement because the hospital had to have one person with a disability, and they were a social work student as well. Before, the other student told me I only got this placement because I had a disability. I used to brush it off and then one day I just turned around and said “no you’re just jealous of me”.

Participant Y expressed that during their hospital placement, they received unnecessary patronising remarks from other staff and from their student peers:

Sometimes when I’m having a really bad day, someone will come up to me and say “good on you honey you’re an inspiration ” and I’ll just walk away because I don’t want to deal them right now and I think they walk away feeling really good from that because they like “oh I’ve gone up to this girl with no feet and I’ve made her day” and I’ll be like no you’ve made my day shit leave me alone.

My best friend did my placement with me and they would often say “do you need a break, do you need to sit down” and I said “no leave it, I’ll tell you if I need to sit”, they kept pushing and I turned around and said, “just stop I will tell you it’s my decision” and then they realised and said “oh ok”.

Participant Y explained that being patronised also occurred during their second placement, particularly when they had to travel to Adelaide:

Every time I would go somewhere, I would be asked “are you alright would you like to sit down?” And I was like I’m fine. When we went to Adelaide, I tried to stay away when I was in a bit of pain because I did not want people to think I couldn’t do it.

Participant Y added that being patronised and pitied made them feel worse about themselves:

It's not empathy, its pity, its sympathy. They literally feel so bad for me that they feel like they have to stop what they're doing, walk over to me and encourage me to keep getting out of bed every day, like what makes my life so miserable compared to yours? Nothing, leave me alone, you wouldn't go over to someone else and say that, it's just pity.

Participant Y also recalled being mistaken as a patient by a doctor during their hospital placement:

The kind of ignorance I actually got were from doctors who said "who is this patient why are you here?" And I was on a level where they amputate legs and I'm like I'm not a patient I'm a student.

Participant Y suggested that it was important for hospitals to change their way of thinking about people with disabilities from simply being 'sick patients' to potential workers as well:

The hospital is meant to accommodate for people who are sick, but that's the hard part I wasn't sick, I was working so I don't think they necessarily thought about that.

Participant Y also felt that that the Western Sydney University social work course should include a unit on how to interact effectively with people with a disability, in order to help reduce the negative stigma and attitudes students encountered on placement:

At Western Sydney University we need to have a unit on how to treat people with disability because we don't necessarily have that.

5.2.1.2.3 Reluctance to Implement Reasonable Adjustments

Three out of the four interview participants spoke about one of their placement organisation's reluctance to implement their reasonable adjustments required to complete their placement. John discussed how in his hospital placement, he was denied the opportunity to work in the Emergency Department due to Work, Health and Safety concerns about the use of his walking frame:

The major one I was interested in was the Emergency Department, so I put my name down for that and that got approved, so on my first day of placement, I had been shadowing my supervisor, seeing how they worked and I happened to just in passing meet the Head of Social Work at the hospital and that afternoon my supervisor was informed that the Head of Social Work had decided to take me out of the Emergency Department because my walking frame was apparently a risk to Occupational Health and Safety.

John felt a risk assessment of the use of his walking frame in the Emergency Department should have been completed before denying him the opportunity to complete his placement in there:

Actually give me a chance to prove myself in the Emergency Department, before shifting me out, that's not to say that I could not see their point of a possible risk to WHS but the point was I was never given a chance to find out for myself and I'm sure that before I went on placement, they would have done a risk assessment.

These issues also affected John's employment opportunities following the completion of his undergraduate degree:

Even though I knew I could do the job, going out after I graduated, I was faced with the same perceptions, when I was interviewing for jobs, because I applied for a number of hospital positions when I graduated, and I kept receiving the same feedback that my walking frame was a risk to workplace health and safety so they would not be able to hire me in that position.

In the second interview, Participant X discussed how prior to starting their second placement in a Child Protection organisation, they informed made the organisation aof their adjustments, these being rest and toilet breaks. However, the placement agency ignored Participant X's needs and refused to allow them to access these adjustments during the placement:

I had discussed with them [placement agency] my illness, what medication I was taking and what needed to be met, so in my care plan I needed them to allow me to have at least 45 minutes rest, access to a bathroom and as soon as I started my placement, they pretty much forgot or ignored that I needed to have at least 45 minutes rest to eat and drink and access the toilet.

Participant X discussed how the tasks and work schedule they were set by their second placement agency did not account for the rest and toilet breaks they required:

I would start my day, they would then say oh, this person's doing this you need to go with them, oh between this and this you're going to go with them and I would end up filling in my journal of my day and then I'd be literally, I'd come back to the office and then I'd be in the car with someone going somewhere or I would be going to do something at this place and they would send me to do some shopping for a client that they had and I felt like I was always on the go, go, go and the brief times I would go back into the office I would literally be running to the toilet.

This was in contrast to Participant X's first placement, where they spoke about how the placement agency were happy to accommodate for their needs and be flexible with their working hours:

Whenever I needed a rest break, so if I was in the office that day, they allowed me to have it whenever I pleased, I could go to the bathroom as many times as I needed, if I were to be on what we called field, travelling and that, if I needed to step out of a meeting for five or ten minutes they were okay with that, They gave me enough notice so I knew where we were going days before we would go to the location.

If I needed a day off, they were very accommodating, they would allow me to make-up that day in my own time, if I needed to come in late they would allow me to come in

late, and the same if I needed to leave earlier, they were very, very good with communication and at one point I needed a week off because of medical needs and obviously that delayed me finishing my placement but they accommodated me for that and gave me make up dates so I could finish my hours.

Catlin spoke about how during her first placement, the government agency she was placed in did not provide voice activation software to enable her to complete large amounts of typing:

The government organisation did not provide me voice-activated software. I had to type all notes manually and it took me a long time.

On the other hand, Participant Y spoke about how they were reluctant to disclose that they needed adjustments during their hospital placement, but stressed that the hospital they were at were very understanding towards their needs:

It was hard. I had a prosthesis that were not that well-fitting, everyone was super understanding. I didn't really ask for any accommodations to be honest, it was just like if I need to take a seat, just make sure there's a seat close to me, otherwise I'll sit on a patient's bed. I didn't really ask for anything else.

5.2.1.2.4 Response to these Barriers

Each participant discussed how they responded to the barriers they faced on placement.

John refused to work in the Aged Care ward, a meeting was called and it was determined that John would work in the Surgical ward:

What ended up happening after my supervisor told me this was their plan, I was called into a meeting with their supervisor, the Clinical Care Department, they told me this was happening and what not and I said well no it's not happening, I was told I was going to have this placement in the Emergency Department, there's no reason for me not to do this placement, but they would not budge, so in the end, at the end of that meeting, I had actually said that's fine I will just discontinue this placement all together, so I had every intention of leaving.

So after that I took about a week, in that time I was liaising with my placement coordinator at the University, so I went with them into the meeting with all the bosses at the Hospital, and it was compromised that instead I would go onto the Surgical ward which had a lot of similar cases to Emergency, but it was not such a high paced environment, so I was happy enough with that compromise, so that's what we ended up doing.

Participant X alerted the placement agency about their needs and provided them with written evidence of their medication, however these were ignored and ridiculed, eventually leading to Participant X withdrawing from the placement:

So I came in one day and they basically questioned my medication I had provided already a specialist letter to state I was on this medication, and that I just had a major surgery and it was prescribed to me in my recovery plan, they were aware of this medication. They also had a letter from my GP and from the disability support team at the University and they had been spoken to about the medication and they basically said to my face you were taking medication that we gave people who are weening off drugs and then they called me a drug user. I felt like they had no right to tell me this, it was not their place to place this judgement on me without trying to gain a bit more

insight and factual information, that I was being monitored by a GP, a specialist I just had surgery I was taking the required dosages, I had proven, I'd shown them, they just made assumptions on me.

Catlin decided to continue on with the placement to complete the required placement hours:

The most important thing to me was completing the placement hours, so I did them. I found information sessions to attend and I did that in an effort to maintain my sanity.

Participant Y discussed calling out hospital staff on their prejudices including the doctor who thought they were a patient:

Call them out on it. They'll be like "oh wow you did that" and I'll be like why did you think I couldn't do that? Because I have no feet? And then I'll just watch them laugh.

I said to them seriously I know you work with amputees but after they leave you, they do have a life. And the doctor went quiet and never said anything like that again.

Participant Y also spoke about initiating a firm exchange with the student who questioned them about why were allocated the hospital placement:

It took for me to put my foot down and say that's enough I'm sick of your shit, you're not going to talk to me like that anymore and then they were like "oh crap ok", but before that I was a little bit petty with comebacks, you know I'd say "well no I only got this placement because I'm smarter than you, but then I just took enough and said "get outside we're talking about this now" and then it seemed to be okay.

5.2.1.3 Professional Development, Practice Confidence and Identity

Each participant spoke about how their placement experience had impacted on their professional social work development and identity.

John discussed how during his hospital placement, he challenged the assumptions hospital social work staff about his ability and provided he could perform the role of a social worker:

By the end of the placement they were leaving me loads [that covered] for both social workers on the surgical wards on days when my supervisors were not available, so I was acting as a social worker for sixty beds, so I coped with that fine, so that sort of dispelled any assumptions that because I had Cerebral Palsy I would not be able to cope compared to someone who did not have a physical disability.

Participant X spoke about how excelling in their first placement, gave them the belief and confidence to work towards becoming a professional social worker and helped them develop skills in advocacy, leadership and public speaking:

Advocating for any sort of group was a fantastic experience, I felt it helped me gained leadership qualities and feel confident in my role and able to speak out and engage with communities that would have otherwise not had experiences with, I used to have a fear of public speaking and I lacked confidence in that department and my placement worked on that skill with me and encouraged me along the way, they sent me to a public speaking workshop and paired me up with a community organiser who would regularly speak at events and working alongside her I began to put my skills I learnt into my studies.

I felt empowered by my experience, I felt they tapped into undeveloped skills that I felt I had not had any chance to develop during my theory, I felt they enhanced my ability and my confidence and faith in myself to step out and be a good quality social worker.

This was contrasted with the second placement, where Participant X felt disempowered, labelled and unsafe:

I felt disheartened, I felt unsafe being there, that they were making assumptions of me and talking about me in a derogatory manner, they were not valuing me as an individual, they were just labelling me and I felt very disrespected and disregarded in terms of just being a human being and being treated with respect and equality.

Participant X discussed how the difficulties with having their needs met, made them fearful that this would also occur once they began working in the field. Participant X also reflected on how their negative placement experience contradicted the perception of what was taught in social work, particularly, around being open minded and displaying empathy:

It makes me more scared and fearful because I felt like even with all the things that were in place and had been discussed prior, they were fully aware of all my health issues and medication and surgery what I needed to be met, they still acted this way towards me regardless of being aware of all of it and the fact that there was no understanding or respect in terms of me as an individual, I felt they were very close minded and very discriminative, I chose social work because we as people are open minded, understanding and empathise with a lot of minorities, we are non-biased we sit on the fence, but I felt that this kind of social work was not at all what I was taught, and it was a rude awakening.

Participant X further expressed that this negative placement experience, dissuaded them from wanting to work in Child Protection:

My second placement experience disheartened me towards moving towards that field, it was very much a setback in my confidence, mentality, and my Uni degree. It made me feel worthless and experience exclusion, because of this placement I'm no longer wanting to pursue that because of that terrible experience that I had, they are not who I thought they would be, nor would I want to turn into the staff there later down the track.

Catlin discussed how her first placement negatively impacted on her perception of herself and on her identity as a social worker. Catlin contrasted this to her employment experience at a non-government organisation where she was able to learn about other disability-types that were different to her own:

It made me feel like I was only my disability and that is all they saw, they did not see the other things I had to offer, my other skills and knowledge. When I was employed, the reason I liked working at the non-government organisation was because it was a cross-disability organisation and I liked developing knowledge of how to deal with other types of disability, because I can only relate to my own experience, so I liked the whole experience of being able to learn about other disability-types.

Catlin also spoke about the negative experience she had during her first placement, left her feeling depressed and made her question why she wanted to be a social worker:

The first placement was absolute hell for me. I became quite depressed thinking “Why would I want to be a social worker when I am being treated like this?”.

However, in her second placement at Western Sydney University, Catlin said she felt her disability was advantageous and that this helped to change Catlin’s perception of herself and her disability:

The second placement was at the University. I helped facilitate events such as a community welfare, social work symposium. I did some research about how social workers engaged around the topic of disability, sexuality and that fed into my Honours research. What was found was there was an absence of sexuality and disability content within the social work curriculum offered by the University. There is a lack of disability content. Disability is skimmed over as a topic. Given that the NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme] had just commenced roll-out, disability was becoming a more important topic and I did some research around that. I helped with the organisation of events and I had the opportunity to present a lecture about the disability sector. What I found really amazing were people attending the lecture really engaged in the content because I was a person with disability. I went from having this

really shitty experience where I felt that being a person with a disability was a negative thing, to going on the second placement where my disability was advantageous. So that was good.

Participant Y discussed how prior to becoming an amputee they were perceived as being able to achieve anything they wanted, but once they lost their legs, they were patronised because of limitations of their disability:

When I lost my legs, before that it was “you can do anything, you can be whoever you want to be”, now it’s like “should you really be doing that? Take a break”.

In discussing why students with disabilities experience difficulty on placement, Participant Y suggested that this occurs because placement agencies often have a preconceived idea of the type of student they would like to have on placement, which does not allow those with a disability to express their uniqueness and individuality in a professional social work context:

I think they have an idea they want me to fill, I think they have a role they want me to fill and I don’t think it leaves much room for being me if that’s what I’m trying to say.

Participant Y spoke about how by completing their placement, they proved to other students and people they should not be doubted because of their physical limitations:

I didn’t want to be doubted, I didn’t want them to be like “oh well they need X, Y, Z, don’t give them this case or don’t put them on that ward” I wanted to show I could do everything and better than the other three able-bodied social work students, just treat me the same. I’m sick of people doubting me, I know what I can do, I know that I’m good, not just in the social work world, I’m pretty awesome and I’m just sick of people thinking because you have no feet you can’t do certain things. It makes me angry but then it makes me want to work harder because I’m going to show that I’m not this, I’m the best social worker you have ever seen.

5.2.1.4 Skills and Strengths Gained on Placement

Participants spoke about developing and gaining both clinical social work skills such as assessments, interventions, advocating for clients and more non-clinical skills like self-advocacy, resilience and leadership while on placement

Through his placement experience John developed resilience and an ability to advocate for himself:

I learnt not to take bullshit from people who think they're in positions of power. No one can really comment on someone's abilities except for the person themselves, and I guess I learnt how resilient I could be and that I could actually overcome that adversity that could get in the way and I did really push to want to move forward in that field, because even with all those challenges I enjoyed the work I was doing so much.

John also discussed how through his first placement at a disability organisation, he gained a greater understanding of how a social worker is very involved in behind the scenes, administrative tasks, rather than simply applying theory and supporting clients:

I did not have too much of an idea of what the practical end of that would be at that stage, it was all just theoretical like supporting clients through their needs and meeting agency targets, things like that.

I realised it was a lot more involved than what I had anticipated. In the context of my first placement it was at a Disability organisation in the Carer Supports Department, I was running the Department with my supervisor, I would go to different things, I would go to four or five meetings per day, going back into the office and doing paperwork and I would also help with support groups for carers all in one day so yeah it was really full on.

Participant X discussed how through completing their first placement at a community based social justice and advocacy organisation, they came to enjoy the non-clinical aspect of social work:

At first no, I had no interest in community welfare sides of things and I was leaning toward more clinical based practice, however the organisation and the people grew on me and I grew to love my placement by the end of it, I did not want to say goodbye, I very much enjoy social justice and what it stands for and Social justice was very much this organisation so there was a lot of advocacy for minority groups in community organisations.

Participant X also explained that throughout their first placement they gained skills in advocacy and leadership and thrived in a supportive environment:

Advocating for any sort of group was a fantastic experience, I felt it helped me gained leadership qualities and feel confident in my role and able to speak out and engage with communities that would have otherwise not had experiences with, I used to have a fear of public speaking and I lacked confidence in that department and my placement worked on that skill with me and encouraged me along the way, they sent me to a public speaking workshop and paired me up with a community organiser who would regularly speak at events and working alongside her I began to put my skills I learnt into my studies.

I felt empowered by my experience, I felt they tapped into undeveloped skills that I felt I had not had any chance to develop during my theory, I felt they enhanced my ability and my confidence and faith in myself to step out and be a good quality social worker.

Because there was a big question mark over my health at that point and not being able to identify what I was suffering from, the fact that when I approached them about these health concerns, they were very understanding, empathetic, very accommodating, the communication lines were strong and that they wanted me to be able to succeed in my placement and they were willing to do anything to do that. I feel that because they were working with a lot of minority groups, they had a better

understanding of I guess things that can hold people back and they did not want to see me fail and they did everything they could in their power to help me flourish in the organisation regardless of the things that were holding me back.

Catlin discussed how in her first placement she was offered a casual place at the organisation due to the quality of her work:

The Team Leader actually offered me a job at the end of placement as a casual case manager and said “You are extremely competent, I would hire you any day.” I did not take the offer up because I wanted to finish placement, do my Honours and then go on to PhD, so I had a pathway.

Catlin also discussed how during her first placement, visitors from Western Sydney University acknowledged the work she was putting in and the incompetence of her supervisor:

The visitors from the University said to me, “Just do what you need to do in the way of hours and try to engage as much as possible out in the community.” I walked the visitors to the lift at the conclusion of the mid-placement review. The funny thing was whilst I was walking the mid-placement visitors to the lift they said, “It must be really hard when you are smarter than your supervisor?” My response was, “Yes, it is”.

Finally, Participant Y spoke about how they developed their skills in case work and psychosocial assessment during their hospital placement. Participant Y also mentioned how they were able to move past the patronising remarks made by others in order to have a positive placement experience:

It was a wonderful placement, it was fantastic, it was everything I could have hoped for. I got a lot of knowledge, I built up a lot of skills in counselling, psychosocial assessments, I made a lot of good connections, I helped with a few studies.

I think it was really good because I made it good, I could have gotten shitty when someone said sit down but I was like “no just keep going, just don’t say anything right now, just show them you can do it”.

Participant Y also spoke about how their second placement at university, they were able to enlighten their supervisors about new ways to support and work with people with disabilities:

The second placement at University it was really easy, my supervisors were really chilled, one of my supervisors said that I had taught them so much about working with people with disabilities that they had never even thought about before.

6. Discussion

6.1 Discussion of Findings

The survey and interview findings present conflicting conclusions about participants' placement experience. The survey responses indicate that the majority of respondents were satisfied with their placement experience. The interviews on the other hand, provide a raw and detailed account of the challenges and difficulties that participants encountered on placement and also explore the strategies that the interview participants used to overcome these challenges and gain the most out of their placement experience. The discrepancy between the survey and interview findings could be attributed to the reluctance of survey participants currently on placement to disclose negative experiences. This may be due to a fear of being identified during the research process and facing sanctions by their placement agency for criticising them. Such fear reflects the tensions outlined by Dove and Skinner (2010) and Loos and Kostecki (2018) about the relationship between students with disabilities and placement agency staff and supervisors. This discrepancy could also reflect how the majority of interview participants with the exception of Participant X, had completed both their placements and were no longer associated with the placement agencies in which they were working. Consequently, these participants may have felt more comfortable to talk about negative experiences they had during their time on placement, compared to students currently on placement.

Despite this evident difference, the survey and interview findings help to achieve the aims and objectives of the study. The findings identify and explore the key barriers and challenges that participants with physical disabilities experienced on placement around access and mobility in the placement environment, negative attitudes and assumptions, the lack of reasonable adjustments and a loss of confidence to become confident social work practitioners. They also highlight the skills and strengths that participants could gain on placement and explore how the placement experience affected the emergence of participants' social work identity and professional development.

In order to understand how participants experienced placement, it was necessary to first unpack the significance of placement to their engagement with social work education. Participants such as John and Participant Y discussed how their choice to study social work was influenced by their desire to become hospital social workers, which meant that they needed to complete a hospital placement. Participant X discussed how placement gave them the opportunity to link theory to practice in a real-life setting that would not be possible without working in a social work organisation. Conversely, Catlin wanted to use placement as an opportunity to explore her interest in the research and policy areas of social work. These insights link to the purpose of placement in field education which is to provide opportunities for students to apply their social work skills and knowledge in real-life practice situations (Wayne, Raskin & Bogo 2010; Western Sydney University 2018b).

The survey and interviews identified barriers around mobility and access to buildings, which was an issue widely explored in the literature. Interview participants such as John and Participant Y spoke about experiencing fatigue from walking long distances to get to different departments in the hospital and finding it difficult to locate non-patient accessible bathrooms. As John explained, he was of the view that working in a single location in a hospital would help to reduce the impact of his mobility restrictions during his placement.

In my own experience, I also naively assumed that working in a hospital would help to compensate for my mobility and travel restrictions. However, similar to John and Participant Y, I faced access and mobility issues within the hospital itself. As suggested by Participant Y in their interview, these access issues may have occurred due to the hospital not being designed for workers with a disability, which reflects the ongoing legacy and implications of the traditional medical model of disability (Jackson 2018). It also reinforces the lack of consideration given to the discourse that people with a disability can be productive members of society (Cunnah 2015; French 1988).

Contrary to the survey findings and some of the literature cited earlier, negative attitudes and assumptions about students' needs emerged as a much bigger issue for students with physical disabilities on placement. Participants either spoke about dealing with attitudes and assumptions from placement agency staff or other students on placement, which had a

detrimental impact on their confidence, self-worth and identity as emerging social work practitioners. Catlin highlighted that due to the nature of her condition it was automatically assumed that it was better for her to be placed in a disability organisation that catered for her disability. This type of assumption aligns with the findings of Hearn, Short and Healy (2014) who identified a perception that it is more convenient to place students with disabilities in organisations that cater for people with disabilities. As discussed, both by Hearn, Short and Healy (2014) and Healy et al. (2015), it is beneficial to avoid simply placing these students in disability specific organisations as this narrows their learning and career opportunities in the social work field.

Some interview participants, namely Catlin and Participant Y spoke about being patronised on placement. In Catlin's situation, she felt that placement agency staff viewed her as 'inspirational porn' and felt as though she was only defined by her disability. Catlin's perception that she was viewed as 'inspirational porn', devalues someone with disability by creating the expectation that they will achieve less than others, and shifts the focus away from the structural causes of physical disability and impairment (Grue 2016). Additionally, patronising people with disabilities makes them feel incompetent and means that they often receive unnecessary assistance (Wang et al. 2015). This type of treatment reflects a key aspect of the socio-political model of disability, which is how the attitudes and practices of people can marginalise and exclude those with a disability (Scotch 2000). It also highlights the lack of recognition given to those with a disability in the social work profession (Stainton, Chenoweth & Bigby 2010).

In Participant Y's experience, they were patronised by hospital staff, including doctors who thought they were a patient, which evoked a firm reaction from Participant Y. The assumption made by the doctor that Participant Y was a patient, was a similar occurrence for me in my hospital placement. Nurses in the hospital ward that I was working in, would often incorrectly assume that I was the patient for which they were assigned to care. I would respond by informing them that I was the student social worker assigned to assist patients in their ward. Such an experience reinforces a medicalised understanding of disability, where people with a disability are perceived as being in need of support and care, rather than being empowered and treated as professional practitioners (Cunnah 2015; French 1988).

The failure to recognise and treat social workers with a disability as professional practitioners is something that has been overlooked in the AASW Code of Ethics (2010) and the AASW Scope of Social Work Practice Disability document (2016). The lack of recognition of social work practitioners with a physical disability in the field, reinforces the negative stigma and labels associated with disability, which negatively impacts on the development of students' self and professional identity (Cunnah 2015). It also reinforces how students with a disability must recognise and manage dual identities on placement as service users and service providers (Kiesel, DeZelar & Lightfoot 2018).

The negative attitudes and assumptions perpetuated on placement also affected the implementation of reasonable adjustments for students with physical disabilities. A large proportion of survey participants disagreed that the placement agency was aware of their needs and took steps to accommodate them. Almost all of the interview participants discussed how the adjustments they had requested were ignored, not provided or used as a justification to restrict their learning opportunities on placement.

In some cases, the regulations and policies enforced by placement agencies, limited the opportunity to implement these adjustments and were a form of indirect disability discrimination. For example, John was denied the opportunity to work in the Emergency Department due to presumed Work, Health and Safety risks associated with the use of his walking frame. Catlin was not provided with voice-activation software to complete written tasks in her first placement. Participant X was not allowed to have rest and toilet breaks during their second placement, as this was not a practice accepted by their placement organisation and was subsequently ridiculed by the placement agency because of this. Each of these incidents highlight an important part of the socio-political model of disability, whereby groups or individuals in positions of power oppress and undermine the efforts of people with disabilities to be productive in society by not providing them with the support they need (Kraus 2008; Owens 2015).

During my hospital placement, I was restricted to only working in wards that had an electronic documentation system. Without electronic documentation, it would have been difficult for me to document my assessments of patients in a short space time. Because of this

restriction, I was unable to gain social work experience and clinical skills in other departments of the hospital. Failing to allow participants to access their necessary adjustments reinforces the challenges they experience around fatigue, mobility and completing manual tasks due to having a physical disability (Janssen, Heymsfield & Ross 2002; Lindsay et al. 2019). Most significantly, these issues reflect ongoing concerns in the literature around placement agency staff being unable to respect and meet the needs of each student and violating their legal requirements under domestic and international disability legislation to accommodate for these students (Dickson 2006; Ryan 2011).

In gathering these insights and reflecting on my own placement experience within this process, I could align with Heidegger's phenomenological position that throughout the interview process, the researcher can build a connection and rapport with interview participants through discussing shared experiences regarding the topic being investigated (Dowling 2007; Tufford & Newman 2010).

This study also reinforced the issues raised in the literature about the detrimental effect of challenging and difficult placement experiences on student's practice confidence, professional identity and development (Cunnah 2015). The difficulties participants experienced in having their needs met, meant they began to significantly doubt their ability to perform the role. Interview participants identified that their placement supervisors and other staff made ill-informed, generalised assumptions about their suitability for a particular placement. This left them feeling angry and at odds with their beliefs about the inclusive and accepting nature of social work practice. For instance, Participant X revealed that during their second placement, the placement agency questioned their need for medication and labelled them a 'drug user' because of this. Ascribing a label such as this, increases the risk of self-stigmatisation which contributes to a negative sense of self and professional identity (Stangl et al. 2019). Additionally, making generalised assumptions about students' needs creates an unsafe and unproductive placement experience and demonstrates a lack of understanding by placement agencies about treating students with disabilities as the 'experts' of their needs and supports (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016).

The ill-informed assumptions made by some of the placement supervisors, reinforced negative and ableist discourses about disability and difference in the workplace by making participants uncomfortable to talk about their diverse needs and express their sense of individuality. Such an experience hinders the development of a positive sense of self and professional identity (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Mik-Myer 2016). For example, Catlin recounted how she was reminded by her supervisor to remember that she ‘was a student with the disability’. Such an exchange creates an unhealthy power imbalance where the student with disability is constructed as being subordinate to their manager or supervisor (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). This type of situation also demonstrates how a lack of trust, knowledge and differences in personal and professional values can make the student-supervisor relationship difficult (Loos & KostECKI 2018).

By the same token, these experiences forced participants to reconsider and challenge some of their preconceived ideas about the way social work operates in a professional context, which is a key part of the placement experience (Jackson 2017). Due to this, the study highlighted how supervisors and field educators in these placement organisations need to create a safe space to help students recognise different social, economic and political constraints that impact on human rights and social justice in the field (Waugh 2019). Instead, the difficulties experienced by the participants put some of them at risk of not completing their placement, an issue explored by Dove and Skinner (2010) and led to feelings of depression and worthlessness for some participants. These feelings align with literature’s discussion on the contribution of negative social interactions to low-self-worth and isolation which increases the risk of people with physical disabilities presenting with mental health issues (Temple & Kelaher 2018; Tough, Siegrist & Fekete 2017).

The issues highlighted in the above paragraphs directly contradict the practice guidelines set out in AASW Code of Ethics (2010) on creating a safe supervision and training environment for students on placement. From the placement stories of the participants, it is evident that these guidelines were largely absent or not applied during their placement. From a socio-political standpoint, the failure of individuals in positions of authority to enforce these principles in their placement agency, highlights their lack of understanding about their role under these guidelines to support students learning (Ryan 2011). Holding placement agencies,

particularly supervisors to account for students learning, is an aspect that has been explored widely in the literature and the AASW (AASW 2010; Chinnery & Beddoe 2011; Ryan 2011; Waugh 2019; Williamson et al. 2010). The lack of knowledge and understanding from placement agencies about how to accommodate students with physical disabilities reflects the limited attention given to educational issues in social work and disability research (Bigby, Tilbury & Hughes 2018). It also reinforces the need to educate placement organisations on how to communicate and effectively support students with disabilities (Moyle 2016). The limited acknowledgment given to disability in social work education also aligns with the views of some interview participants, that more emphasis on interacting with people with disability needs to be integrated into the social work course at Western Sydney University.

Despite the challenges and barriers encountered by students, the study confirmed that participants believed that they had gained important social work skills and strengths on placements. Over half of the survey respondents reported that they still gained valuable social work skills despite the limitations of their physical disability. Interview participants expressed that they developed key clinical social work skills on placement and formed a greater interest in working in different social work practice areas. Being able to develop social work skills and strengths on placement aligns with the findings of literature cited earlier (Grant, Sheridan & Webb 2017; Hearn, Short & Healy 2014; Welch, Lerpiniere & Young 2014; White, Morales, & Wright III 2014).

When placed in supportive placement environments such as Western Sydney University, Catlin and Participant Y felt they could use their lived experience of disability to their advantage and educate students and supervisors on how to accommodate for students with a physical disability. Using one's lived experience of disability to educate and upskill others assists in challenging the exclusion and oppression they may face and building a positive sense of identity by positioning themselves as the 'expert' about their needs and capabilities (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016; Moyle 2016).

The interview findings highlighted how through going on placement, most participants believed they became more resilient and could stand up and advocate for themselves. Being able to self-advocate is helpful towards succeeding in the workplace with a physical disability

(Lindsay et al. 2019b). Self-advocacy was powerfully evident in how participants described responding to the assumptions made about their needs, the lack of recognition of legal responsibilities to provide reasonable adjustments and the need to recognise the voices of students with a physical disability in developing a professional identity.

The findings also revealed that participants developed a greater interest in different social work practice areas. The data collected in the surveys and interviews indicated the majority of participants wanted to work within direct social work practice with clients in a hospital or disability-based setting. John and Participant X discussed how prior to going on placement, they simply conceptualised social work practice as being about supporting clients and applying theory to practice. This type of understanding reflects the assumption that social work practice primarily involves working face-to-face with service users (Bogo 2015).

However, through participating on placement, interview participants felt they were able to develop a greater interest and understanding of the indirect aspects of social work such as completing administrative tasks, participating in meetings and assisting with research projects. Completing these tasks enhanced the professional development of these participants by making them more informed about the direct and indirect facets of social work.

These findings highlight how social work students with physical disabilities experience placement with the barriers and challenges they face and strive to overcome. These barriers and challenges can hinder students' practice confidence, professional identity and development. However, by responding to these barriers and challenges students can develop and demonstrate social work and self-advocacy skills, which assists with building a positive sense of identity to help enter the social work field. The findings illustrate that when placement agencies foster a supportive and inclusive working environment, students can build their practice confidence, challenge negative discourses about disability and form positive sense of self and professional identity.

Therefore, the discussion of the barriers and challenges participants faced on placement and how they responded to these challenges provides placement agencies with an insight into the importance of treating, interacting with and assisting future students with physical disabilities appropriately on placement.

7. Implications & Conclusion

7.1 Implications for Further Research

The findings identified and discussed in this research study can help to re-focus efforts on making placement agencies more accountable for meeting and responding to the disability access needs and requirements of Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities. The study found that students with physical disabilities not only encountered mobility and access issues on placement but also had to face and respond to negative attitudes and assumptions about the nature of their disability and the type of adjustments and supports they required. Additionally, the study highlighted that a shift in thinking needs to occur where social work students with a physical disability begin to be treated and recognised as emerging professional practitioners, instead of being automatically perceived as service users. The research findings are not conclusive as to what field education supervisors believe to be the reasons for why these limitations are being placed on students with a disability. This is an area for further research to help placement agencies become more aware of the visible and invisible barriers associated with a physical disability and to challenge their prejudices around taking students with physical disabilities on placement. Embracing the opportunity to work with these students will help reinforce the importance of inclusion in workplaces and in wider in society, which is about ensuring there is equal access to employment, education and health for all people (Gooding, Anderson & McVilly 2017).

Effectively supporting and nurturing students with physical disabilities helps to promote disability inclusion. Under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, disability inclusion in Australia has focused on improving access to social and employment opportunities for people with disabilities (Ruhindwa, Randall & Cartmel 2016). Due to this, placement agencies must work around the needs of these students and collaborate with university placement staff to ensure students with physical disabilities are accommodated for. This will enable students to maximise their learning and

professional development opportunities on placement. These aspects are central to Western Sydney University's social work field education and their approach to work-integrated learning (Western Sydney University 2018a; Western Sydney University 2018b).

In the positive placement experiences shared by some participants, it was clear that their placement organisations embraced their needs, implemented any reasonable adjustments required and created a supportive working environment for participants. As explored by Cunnah (2015), supporting students to thrive and succeed on placement helps to break down difficulties they encounter in accessing employment opportunities post-university, feeling included in society and developing a positive professional and self-identity.

The findings generated from this study will provide much needed clarity in the literature on the specific barriers and challenges that emerging social workers with physical disabilities face compared to practitioners without a physical disability.

To build on these findings, it would be important to collect the insights of placement agency staff and supervisors on their knowledge and experience in supporting students with physical disabilities. It would be necessary to ask placement agency staff about the challenges and restrictions they face when trying to accommodate for students including policy and resource constraints. The views and experiences of students with physical disabilities from different higher education institutions and cognate fields such as teaching, nursing, community welfare and psychology should be collected and analysed to explore if these barriers occur across various disciplines that have field placement. Through this, both placement organisation staff and the students themselves can advise on practical ways to address the issues identified in this study and improve the placement experience across multiple degrees. Further, it would be beneficial to explore the impact of placement on students' employment opportunities post-university, to determine whether the barriers and challenges they encounter on placement have an ongoing effect on their progression in the social work field.

7.2 Conclusion

This research study investigated the experience of Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities on placement. It also explored how the placement experience affected student's development as emerging social workers. To conceptualise the aims of this research, the study sought to answer the question of how Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities experienced placement, and whether placement was helpful towards building their confidence to enter the social work field. The study addressed this question and these research aims by identifying and exploring the barriers and challenges students with physical disabilities faced on placement, highlighting the skills and strengths gained through placement and then evaluating impact of the placement experience on students practice confidence, identity and professional development.

Through the integration of Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology, the socio-political model of disability, an online survey and semi-structured interviews, the study found that participants not only encountered access and mobility issues in the placement environment, but more significantly negative attitudes and assumptions about disability emerged as a much bigger concern and issue on placement. Equally, the research findings highlighted that by going on placement participants believed that they were able to increase their social work skill set, build resilience and a capacity for self-advocacy and develop a greater interest in working in different social work practice areas. Through these positive outcomes, participants felt their confidence increased to be able to enter and succeed in the social work field.

However, the types of barriers and challenges that participants experienced on placement were often perpetuated by socio-political factors such as restrictive placement agency policies, anti-inclusive attitudes and practices, as well as the inaccessible design of buildings and facilities. Additionally, they were caused by the failure of placement organisations to comply with their responsibilities under disability legislation to implement reasonable adjustments and adequately support students. This in turn hindered participants sense of professional identity and practice confidence to become social workers. The conduct of placement agency supervisors and staff in some of the accounts given by the participants, contradicted their responsibilities to create a safe space for training and supervision.

Therefore, the experiences of participants in this study can serve as an important reminder to practice educators and placement supervisors to comply with their legislative and practice obligations and collaborate closely with these students to meet their needs.

As more students with physical disabilities choose to study social work at a tertiary level, it is imperative that universities and placement agencies are able to accommodate for their needs. The insights gathered from this research will assist with this process by generating literature on the specific barriers that students with a physical disability face on placement.

The study has highlighted how placement is beneficial in helping to develop students into confident social work practitioners. To ensure that students with a physical disability also have the same opportunity to develop their practice confidence and professional identity, the barriers and challenges identified through this research need to be removed by placement agencies. Part of this will involve identifying practical ways to help placement agency staff challenge their negative attitudes and assumptions about physical disability and instead work around the needs of these students. It also means building on worked in participants positive placement experiences and creating practical strategies from this. Further, it will be important to investigate how to address these barriers so that they do not hinder students' employment opportunities in the social work field. This research has demonstrated that through accommodating and supporting the needs of students with physical disabilities, placement agencies can help them develop into confident social work practitioners who contribute meaningfully to society.

As I wheeled myself into the hospital and made my way to one of the wards, the noise, clutter and smell of the carpark was replaced with the frantic sight of nurses' doctors and social workers working together to assist patients. Without completing my hospital placement, I would not have been exposed to the demands of real-life social work practice. Along with the stories of my peers, my experience in a hospital placement formed a significant part of my interest in this research area. It is my intention that this research will help make a positive difference to the placement experience for current and future social work students with a physical disability.

Appendices

Appendix A: Initial Recruitment Text

Dear Western Sydney University Social Work Students,

My name is Elie and I am Master of Research Student, who is currently working on a study as part of the thesis component of my course. This study will investigate the placement experience of social work students at Western Sydney University who identify as having a physical disability or impairment. I am being supervised on this study by Doctor Justine O'Sullivan and Rosemary Qummouh from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology.

If possible, I would greatly appreciate if students who have a physical disability could complete a short survey which can be accessed by clicking the link below this message. All survey responses will be kept confidential.

Please find attached a participant information sheet.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Kind regards,
Elie El-Khoury Antonios
17995548

Appendix B: Amended Recruitment Text

Dear Western Sydney University Social Work students and recent graduates,

My name is Elie and I am Master of Research Student, who is currently working on a study as part of the thesis component of my course. This study will investigate the placement experience of social work students at Western Sydney University who identify as having a physical disability or impairment. I am being supervised on this study by Doctor Justine O'Sullivan and Rosemary Qummouh from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology.

If possible, I would greatly appreciate if students and recent graduates who have a physical disability could complete a short survey which can be accessed by clicking the link below this message. All survey responses will be kept confidential. After completing the survey, students are invited to participate in face-to-face interviews about their placement experience. For those students interested in being interviewed, they can simply email me (address below) to discuss further details about the interview.

Please find attached a participant information sheet for the survey.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,
Kind regards,

Elie El-Khoury Antonios

Email: 17995548@student.westernsydney.edu.au

Appendix C: Survey Participant Information Sheet

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Participant Information Sheet – Interview

Study Title: The Placement Experience of Western Sydney University Social Work Students with Physical Disabilities

Study Summary: This study investigates the placement experience of Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities, by exploring barriers they face on placement and how it affects their identity, practice confidence and understanding of being social worker.

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Elie El-Khoury Antonios, Master of Research Student in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology under the supervision of Dr Justine O'Sullivan and Rosemary Qummouh, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Western Sydney University.

How is the study being paid for? The study is being sponsored by the School of Social Sciences and Psychology

What will I be asked to do?

You will be invited to participate in a face-to-face semi structured interview about your placement experience

How much of my time will I need to give?

The interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes in duration

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?

Through participating in this interview, you will be able to contribute towards generating new knowledge in this research area as well as enhancing efforts to promote disability inclusion in employment contexts and in the wider community. Your participation will also help to better equip placement agencies in helping students with physical disabilities to become confident social workers who can contribute meaningfully to society.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?

There is a minimal risk of discomfort to participants if they are relaying a negative experience on placement, but that is a normal aspect of qualitative research. The benefits of being heard far

outweigh this negligible risk. Should students experience discomfort or distress, they will be referred to Western Sydney University Student Counselling service which is free for students. For recent graduates. For recent graduates' who experience discomfort or distress they can access the following free counselling services:

Beyondblue: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Ph: 1300 22 4636

Headspace: <https://headspace.org.au/>

Contact information: <https://headspace.org.au/contact-us/>

Ph: 13 11 14

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?

The findings of the research will be published in a written thesis with the possibility of publication in a Social Work journal.

Please be assured that only the Chief Investigator will have access to the raw data you provide. To maintain confidentiality, any data that is collected will be de-identified and your responses will remain anonymous, you are also welcome to choose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Your information will only be identified if you give permission for this to occur.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?

No, your data will be used for other related studies for an extended period of time, for example for post-doctorate research on this topic area. The minimum retention period for data collection is five years.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason

If you do choose to withdraw, any information that you have supplied will not be used and destroyed

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by *providing* them with the Chief Investigator's contact details. They can contact the Chief Investigator to discuss their participation in the research study and obtain a copy of the information sheet.

What if I require further information?

Please contact Elie El-Khoury Antonios, Chief Investigator or Dr Justine O'Sullivan, Principal supervisor if you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

Elie El-Khoury Antonios Chief Investigator

Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

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Consent Form

Study Title: The Placement Experience of Western Sydney University Social Work Students with Physical Disabilities

I hereby consent to participate in the above named research study.

I acknowledge that:

- I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the study with the researcher/s
- The procedures required for the study and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to:

- Participating in an interview*
- Having my information audio recorded and transcribed*

Data publication, reuse and storage

This study seeks consent for the data provided to be used in any other studies in the future.

To make reuse of the data possible it will be stored under Western Sydney University's Open Access Policy.

I understand that in relation to publication of the data

my involvement is confidential and the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

- the researchers intend to make the non-identified data from this study available for other research studies
- I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.**

Signed:

Name:

Date:

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University. The ethics reference number is: H13037

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix E: Interview Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet – Interview

Study Title: The Placement Experience of Western Sydney University Social Work Students with Physical Disabilities

Study Summary: This study investigates the placement experience of Western Sydney University social work students with physical disabilities, by exploring barriers they face on placement and how it affects their identity, practice confidence and understanding of being social worker.

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Elie El-Khoury Antonios, Master of Research Student in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology under the supervision of Dr Justine O'Sullivan and Rosemary Qummouh, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Western Sydney University.

How is the study being paid for? The study is being sponsored by the School of Social Sciences and Psychology

What will I be asked to do?

You will be invited to participate in a face-to-face semi structured interview about your placement experience

How much of my time will I need to give?

The interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes in duration

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?

Through participating in this interview, you will be able to contribute towards generating new knowledge in this research area as well as enhancing efforts to promote disability inclusion in employment contexts and in the wider community. Your participation will also help to better equip placement agencies in helping students with physical disabilities to become confident social workers who can contribute meaningfully to society.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?

There is a minimal risk of discomfort to participants if they are relaying a negative experience on placement, but that is a normal aspect of qualitative research. The benefits of being heard far outweigh this negligible risk. Should students experience discomfort or distress, they will be referred to Western Sydney University Student Counselling service which is free for students. For recent graduates. For recent graduates' who experience discomfort or distress they can access the following free counselling services:

Beyondblue: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Ph: 1300 22 4636

Headspace: <https://headspace.org.au/>

Contact information: <https://headspace.org.au/>

Lifeline: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Ph: 13 11 14

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?

The findings of the research will be published in a written thesis with the possibility of publication in a Social Work journal.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?

No, your data will be used for other related studies for an extended period of time, for example for post-doctorate research on this topic area. The minimum retention period for data collection is five years.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason

If you do choose to withdraw, any information that you have supplied will not be used and destroyed

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the Chief Investigator's contact details. They can contact the Chief Investigator to discuss their participation in the research study and obtain a copy of the information sheet.

What if I require further information?

Please contact Elie El-Khoury Antonios, Chief Investigator or Dr Justine O'Sullivan, Principal supervisor if you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

Elie El-Khoury Antonios Chief Investigator

Email: 17995548@student.westernsydney.edu.au

Justine O'Sullivan Principal Supervisor

Email: j.osullivan@westernsydney.edu.au

Ph: 0297726156

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval Number is H13037.

Appendix F: Survey Questions

Thank you for participating in this research. Proceeding with this survey is an indication that you have read the Information Sheet and have consented to participate.

<p>1. Which degree have you completed or are currently completing?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor of Social Work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Master of Social Work (Qualifying)</p>
<p>2. What year of study are you currently in?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1st year</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2nd year</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3rd year</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4th year</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Finished/Graduated</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify)</p>
<p>3. How many social work placements have you completed? (Select as many options as applicable)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Currently competing 1st placement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Currently completing 2nd placement</p>
<p>4. Which area of social work practice most interests or appeals to you? (Select as many options as applicable)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hospital social work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Research/Policy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disability</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Child/Protection</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Community based social work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify)</p>

5. How prepared did you feel for the experience of going on placement and engaging in real life social work practice?

Very Prepared	Prepared	Neutral	Somewhat prepared	Not prepared at all
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6. Which of the following challenges did you/do you experience on placement due to your physical disability/impairment? (Select as many options as applicable)

- Restricted mobility
- Difficulty accessing buildings and facilities
- Travelling to and from placement
- Completing several tasks in a short space of time or within a normal working day
- Interacting with staff and clients
- Other (Please specify)

7. How much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

The placement I was allocated suited my interest in a particular field of social work practice

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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When being allocated a placement, my needs related to my disability were taken into consideration

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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The placement agency I was working in were aware of my disability and took steps to accommodate me

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Despite the limitations of my physical disability, I was still able to gain valuable social work skills, knowledge and experience during my placement

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	----------------	-----------------	--------------------------

8. How satisfied were you/are you with your placement experience?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
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Appendix G: Interview Guide

1. Which degree have you completed or are currently completing?

- Bachelor of Social Work
- Master of Social Work (Qualifying)

2. How many social work placements have you completed?

- 1
- 2
- Currently competing 1st placement
- Currently completing 2nd placement

3. How important was the opportunity of going on placement towards your decision to choose to study social work? Why was it important or not?

4. Prior to going on placement, how did you conceptualise or understand what the role of a social worker was?

Prompts: Someone who helps others, advocates for change and social justice, addresses disadvantage in the community

5. Which area/s of social work practice most interest or appeal to you and why?

Prompts:

- Hospital social work
- Research/Policy
- Disability
- Child/Protection
- Domestic violence
- Community based social work

6. Were the placement/s you participated in aligned with any of your interested practice areas? If they were, how did this affect your placement experience and learning opportunities and if they were not, how did this impact on your experience of real-life social work practice?

7. How were you feeling prior to beginning your placement?

8. In what ways has your disability affected your daily life, your experience of studying social work and more particularly interacting with different stakeholders in a workplace environment?

9. What challenges did you encounter during your placement?
10. How many of those challenges were related to or caused by the nature of your physical disability/impairment?
11. How did you deal with those challenges and what did you learn from these experiences?
12. How receptive was the placement agency towards your particular circumstances?
Prompts: Did the placement agency accommodate you why or why not?
13. How supported did you feel from your placement supervisor, other students and staff during your placement?
14. What do you feel could have been done differently to improve your placement experience?
15. Any final comments about your placement experience?

Appendix J: Ethics Approval Letter

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REDI Reference: H13037
Risk Rating: Low 1 - LNR

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

7 December 2018
Doctor Justine O'Sullivan
School of Social Sciences and Psychology

Dear Justine,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved your research proposal H13037 "The Placement Experience of Western Sydney University Social Work Students with Physical Disabilities", until 7 October 2019 with the provision of a progress report annually if over 12 months and a final report on completion.

In providing this approval the HREC determined that the proposal meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

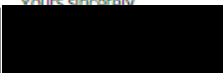
This protocol covers the following researchers:
Rosemary Qummuoh, Justine O'Sullivan, Eile Antonios

Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority
6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.
7. Project specific conditions:
There are no specific conditions applicable.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au as this email address is closely monitored.

Yours sincerely,


Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee

University of Western Sydney
ABN 63 014 9881 438308 Provider No. 00912K
Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

Appendix H: Coding Matrix

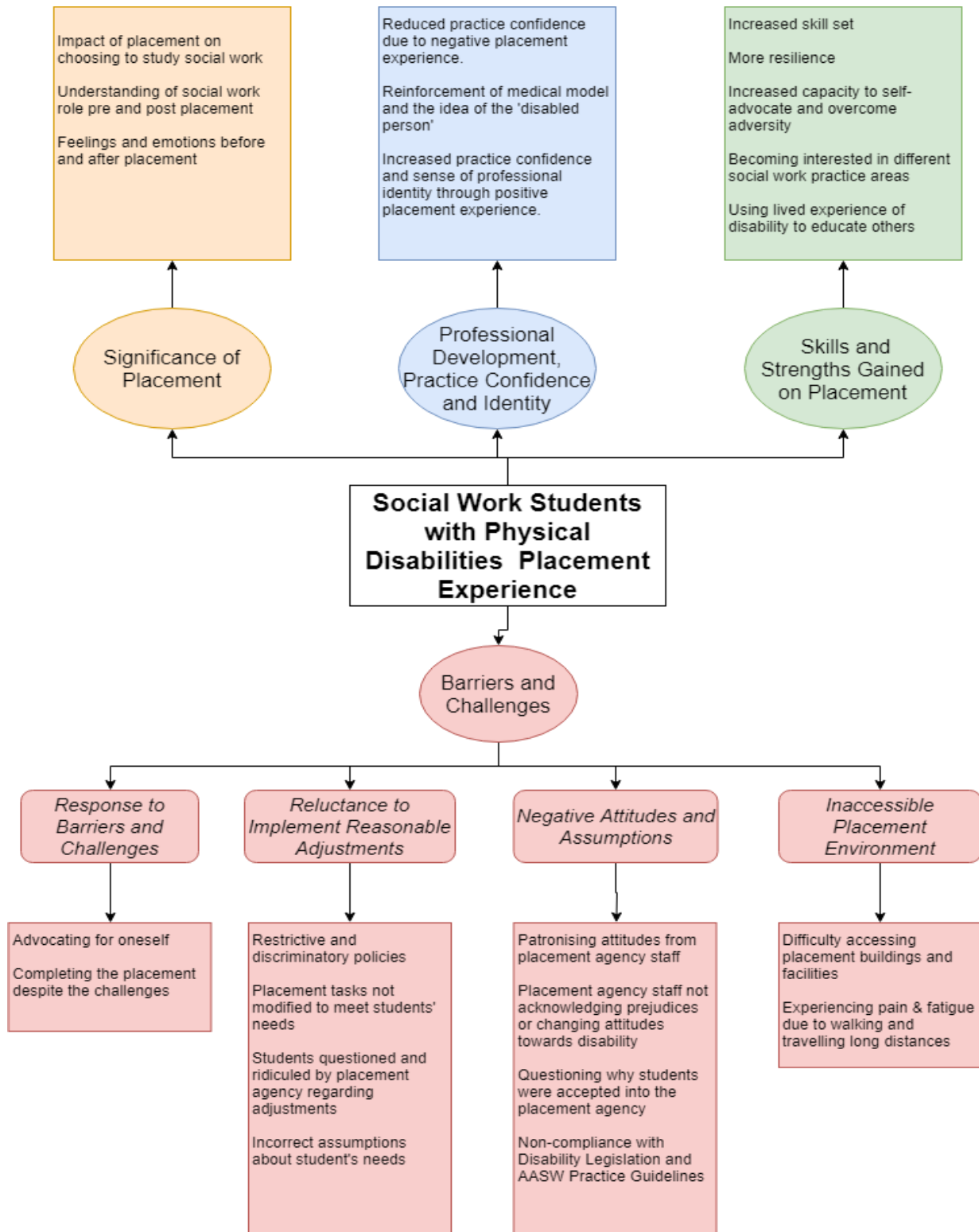
Initial code	Notes	Theme
Opportunity of Placement in social work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of placement in choosing to study social work • Understanding of the social work role pre and post placement- Applying theory into practice, advocating for social change 	Influence of Placement
Feelings Before & After Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions/mindset of students before and after going on placement • Changes in mindset, emotions/feelings between 1st and 2nd placement 	
Mobility & Access to the placement environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty accessing placement buildings and facilities • Experiencing pain & fatigue from walking and travelling long distances. 	Barriers and Challenges faced on placement Sub-Themes: ❖ <i>Inaccessible Placement Environment</i> ❖ <i>Negative Attitudes and Assumptions</i>
Assumptions & Attitudes about Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative approach towards student's disability by placement agency staff • Patronising attitudes towards students- being seen as 'inspirational porn' • Questioning why students were allocated particular placements • Not following AASW guidelines on creating a safe space for supervision • Promoting more positive and inclusive attitudes towards disability from placement 	

	<p>organisations- trying to stop seeing disability as hard work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not including content about interacting with people with disabilities in Western Sydney University social work course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Reluctance to Implement Reasonable Adjustments</i>
Reasonable Adjustments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustments not implemented or provided during the placement due to discriminatory, restrictive policies/regulations & ill-informed assumptions • Placement work plan not being modified to compensate for difficulties in completing several tasks in a short timeframe • Students questioned and ridiculed by placement agency on the adjustments they needed • Lack of adjustments putting student's health at risk and capacity to complete the placement. • Creating fear about disclosing needs to future employers • Placement agencies needing to work around the needs of students and embrace disability • Properly assessing students' needs before the placement begins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Reluctance to Implement Reasonable Adjustments</i> ❖ <i>Response to these Barriers and Challenges</i>

Reaction to these Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students either threatening to or withdrawing from the placement • Students calling out prejudices and advocating for themselves • Getting the on with the placement and completing it without the adjustments 	
The Impact of Placement on Student's Professional Development, Identity, Practice Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling disheartened to become a social worker due to negative placement experiences • Needing to fit a certain mould, not being allowed to be themselves • Losing confidence to become a successful social worker. • Reflecting on both positive and negative placement experiences and the impact of these on professional identity and development. • Increase in practice confidence and develop of a through positive placement experiences and development of a less negative of personal and professional identity 	Professional Development, Practice Confidence and Identity
Disability as Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only being seen as a 'disabled' person/student • Feeling as if the medical model of disability is reinforced in hospital social work 	
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling worthless and at times depressed due to placement experiences 	

<p>Skills and Strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining skills in self-advocacy, leadership, social work assessments and interventions • Becoming interested in different social work practice areas • Being recognised by placement agency staff for contributions • Educating placement agency staff about disability inclusion 	<p>Skills and Strengths Gained on Placement</p>
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Appendix I: Thematic Map



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