Fee Woodgate BSc Hons

EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF FRONTLINE STAFF WORKING IN THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SECURE ESTATE

Section A: What are the experiences of non-clinical staff working in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people? A thematic synthesis.

Word Count: 7278 (638)

Section B: "It's going to be hard but it's worth it in the end": Residential care workers' experiences of working in welfare secure children's homes.

Word Count: 7994 (1219)

Overall Word Count: 15,272 (1857)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Canterbury Christ Church University for the degree of
Doctor of Clinical Psychology

FEBRUARY 2024

SALOMONS INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY
CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY

Acknowledgements

Tamara and Romana, thank you for holding my hand throughout and believing in me when I didn’t. I couldn’t have asked for better supervisors.

My friends and especially Tom, thank you for your patience and love.

Everyone in the recruitment process who supported me, thank you for being open and spreading the word. It wouldn’t have been possible without you.

Participants, thank you so much for sharing your stories with me. I hope I have done them justice.

Everyone who has worked, and continues to work, in CYPSE, thank you. You, your voice and your work are so appreciated.

Summary of the Major Research Project

Section A

Section A is a thematic synthesis of ten studies exploring the experiences of non-clinical staff working in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people. Findings allude to the complex and often difficult nature of working in the juvenile justice system. The following themes are discussed: Emotional Involvement of the Job, Importance of Relationships, Navigating Individual Differences and Effectiveness of the Institution. The strengths and limitations of the review are discussed, and implications for clinical and research directions are explored.

Section B

Section B is an empirical study exploring the experiences of residential staff working in welfare secure children's homes (SCHs). Data from 11 semi-structured interviews with residential care workers are analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Results demonstrate the complexity of working in welfare SCHs and the influential role of staff social and cultural context in staff experience and how they relate to the young people. The following main themes were developed: Navigating the Work's Complexities, Importance of Connection, Moments of Reward and Support: Precious but Precarious. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed. Implications for clinical and research directions are also explored.

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Section A: Literature Review

What are the experiences of non-clinical staff working in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people? A thematic synthesis.

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Abstract

Across the world, young people are detained in secure accommodation following criminal charge or remand. Young people in these settings can present with high risk, high harm and high vulnerability. The staff that work with them are required to support their emotional needs while enforcing security. Previous research has shown how emotionally challenging this work can be for frontline staff, with high risks of secondary trauma and burnout. This can result in high levels of staff turnover, impacting quality of care.

This narrative review aimed to answer the question: *what are the experiences of non-clinical staff of working in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people?* Utilising a systematic literature search, data were analysed from ten qualitative papers. Using thematic synthesis, the following themes were derived: *Emotional Involvement of the Job*, *Importance of Relationships*, *Navigating Individual Differences* and *Effectiveness of the Institution*. Staff highlighted the unpredictability of the work; the importance of working together for young people; the challenges of navigating differences in staff approach and young people's characteristics; and the uncertainty of the usefulness of the institution. Results emphasise the complex and often difficult nature of working in the juvenile justice system and the high level of emotional labour required to manage this. This review is one of the first to explore non-clinical staff experience, adding to current understanding of working in these settings and emphasising the complexity of this work.

Support in the form of clinical supervision, compassionate leadership and reflective practice are suggested to enable the exploration of the emotional demand and social defences unconsciously implemented to manage these challenges. Future research could explore staff experience across secure accommodation for young people, exploring where there are similarities and differences in staff experience and what support is therefore needed.

Keyword(s): Staff experience, secure accommodation, youth justice, burnout

Introduction

Forensic Settings

In England and Wales, young people under the age of 18 in contact with the justice system can be accommodated in a range of secure settings that tend to fall in the Children and Young People's Secure Estate (CYPSE). Those found guilty of a criminal offence or who have received a remand order can be accommodated in Young Offender Institutions (YOI), Secure Training Centres (STC) or Secure Children's Homes (SCH) (Rose, 2014). Amongst the 750 young people accommodated in the CYPSE in 2020, 75.3% are accommodated in YOIs, 14.3% in STCs and 10.4% in SCHs (Youth Custody Service, 2020). Often, these institutions have onsite facilities for care, health and education (Rose, 2014). Other similar settings are present internationally, such as youth correctional facilities and detention centres (Underwood & Washington, 2016). In the USA, 36,479 youth were accommodated in juvenile justice facilities in 2019, with most young people being held in detention centres than other facilities (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2023). In Australia, 4,350 young people were detained during 2021-22 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023).

The Service Users

Young people placed in forensic settings generally present with "high risk, high harm, high vulnerability" (NHS England, 2023) and high complexity. The criminal justice system has historically found an overrepresentation of young people aged 10-21 with unmet mental health needs (Fazel et al., 2008). Violence is often present in these institutions, with approximately 2,400 assaults by young people in YOIs between March 2018 and March 2019 (Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, 2020). While this data does not outline the number of assaults against service users or staff, in the year ending March 2022, 64% of assaults were child on child (GOV.UK, 2023).

Young people in the CYPSE have higher substance misuse than the average population, have had disrupted education (Rose, 2014) and have often experienced caregiver neglect, trauma, and separation (Goldson, 2002). Attachment theory proposes these experiences can interfere with the young person's ability to securely attach to their caregiver (Bowlby, 1969) and can result in young people feeling unsure, mistrustful, and controlling (Schofield & Beek, 2005). These young people are frequently unhelpfully and inappropriately labelled (Taylor et al., 2018), with dominant narratives of being violent (Andersson, 2019) yet vulnerable (Ellis, 2016; Goldson, 2002).

The Staff

Within the CYPSE, integrated multi-disciplinary teams including mental health practitioners' support young people with mental health needs (Taylor et al., 2018). Day-to-day staff, often titled "prison officers" or "operational frontline workers" provide 24-hour care (Abrams & Anderson-Nathe, 2012) and are required to support young people's rehabilitation and enforce security (Inderbitzin, 2007). Frontline staff are greatly impacted by the stresses of this primary task (Menzies, 1960). They are often required to regulate their emotions to fulfil the expectations of their role (Mann, 2005). This is referred to as emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979) and has been noted in caring professions particularly (Badolamenti et al., 2017; Mann, 2005). This process adds to how emotionally challenging working in a secure environment can be, as highlighted in previous research (Andersson, 2019; Ellis & Curtis, 2020; Goldson, 2002).

To manage the intense emotional demand in the organisation, the system creates unconscious, social defences to protect against difficulties, e.g., anxiety, guilt, and uncertainty (Menzies, 1960). Defences may include mechanical routines and creating psychological distance from clients (Menzies, 1960). Staff may also unconsciously split off

intolerable experiences, projecting it into something else such as a staff member/client (Mercer, 2008). This can limit the ability to think abstractly and creatively, leading to a paranoid-schizoid system (Halton, 1994) where the organisation is overwhelmed like its clients (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008).

Due to the complex needs of young people detained in these settings, and the impact of engaging in social defences, staff are at risk of vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue (Ireland & Huxley, 2018; Menzies, 1960). These terms, used interchangeably within the literature, all describe the negative impacts of extensive contact with traumatised individuals such as increased negative affect and altered cognitions (Macfarlane, 2020). Without sufficient support, this can lead to short and long-term physical and emotional impacts such as burnout and high staff turnover (Macfarlane, 2020; Neuman & Gamble, 1995). High staff turnover has been found to influence quality of care for service users, and impact staff experience, through multiple mechanisms including lack of continuity of care, increased workload for remaining staff and increased number of inexperienced staff (Staw, 1980).

Research has also emphasised the importance of support from, and relationships built with, prison officers to prisoner mental health (Liebling et al, 1999), however this has predominantly been in adult settings. Nonetheless, it is recognised that staff in these settings play a highly influential role in the care and wellbeing of children and young people (Taylor et al., 2018). In the UK, the SECURE STAIRS framework highlighted the need for staff training and support to help embed trauma-informed, whole-system approaches for young people across the CYPSE (Taylor et al., 2018). It emphasised day-to-day staff members as central in developing relationships and an environment to support change, and encouraged a collaborative approach to goal setting and formulation that could drive whole-system interventions (Taylor et al., 2018). The full acronym is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

SECURE STAIRS Acronym

S	Staff with skill sets appropriate to the interventions needed
E	Emotionally resilient staff able to remain child-centred in the face of challenging behaviour
C	Cared for staff: supervision and support
U	Understanding across the establishment of child development, attachment, trauma & other key theories
R	Reflective system, able to consider impact of trauma at all levels
E	'Every Interaction Matters'- a whole system approach
S	Scoping covering presenting problems, who the key players are in the young person's 'home' life and what change is wanted by whom
T	Targets agreed with all – "your time here matters"
A	Activators of young person's difficulties, reaching targets identified
I	Interventions developed at multiple levels (those delivered by frontline carers to those provided by specialist departments) address those activators
R	Review of movement towards targets regularly undertaken and used to evaluate and revise plans as necessary
S	Sustainability planning considered from the outset

Additionally, SECURE STAIRS recognised the potential for high level of emotional response when working with "complex and traumatised young people" that can lead to silo-working and inter-professional conflict, unconsciously replaying trauma and chaos the young people may have experienced previously (Taylor et al., 2018). A recent evaluation of the implementation of SECURE STAIRS found that reductions in silo-working, and an increase in supportive practice for staff, increased staff wellbeing. However, high staff turnover

impeded young people's development of relational security and issues in staffing levels made implementation more challenging.

Data on day-to-day staff experience within secure accommodation remains sparse, especially for forensic settings. The SECURE STAIRS evaluation, for example, included data from across the CYPSE (Anna Freud Centre, 2022), including young people placed in secure care for welfare rather than criminal justice reasons. These young people may have differing needs (Rose, 2014), the settings may have been at different stages of implementation of SECURE STAIRS, and may differ in size (Anna Freud Centre, 2022), therefore altering staff experience.

As such, further research is needed to explore staff experience of working with young people in secure forensic settings specifically, and could extend beyond UK-based settings, to better understand the experiences of operational staff working in these environments.

Aims

This review sought to explore staff experience in secure accommodation, according to current literature. This narrative review used a systematic literature search with the aim of exploring: *What are the experiences of non-clinical staff of working in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people?* It is hoped that this review can draw together current research in this area to develop an overarching understanding of staff experience to help better support, and retain, frontline staff to provide high quality care for service users.

Method

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were selected based on the eligibility criteria listed in Table 2. Whether the study's primary focus was on staff experience was understood from reading the study aims,

participant selection and framing of results, and whether these prioritised the exploration of staff experience through self-report measures. Studies utilising mixed methods were included if qualitative data on staff experience was reported. Quantitative studies were excluded.

Clinical settings were understood as settings whose primary aim was to treat or manage a mental health difficulty. Therefore, settings such as forensic inpatient units were excluded. Non-clinical staff were understood as staff who were not clinically trained and qualified to deliver evidenced based treatments within their role in the organisation. Additionally, they were understood to work daily with the young people, providing "direct care" including "daily supervision" and "rehabilitation efforts" (Galardi & Settersten, 2018, p. 202).

As research in this area is sparse, this review incorporates international studies to allow for a wider understanding of staff experience in secure accommodation. The World Health Organisation (2019) defines "young people" as aged 10-24. However, in some American states, young people can be held in a juvenile facility between the ages of 12 and 25 (Galardi & Settersten, 2018). Due to this, the term "young people" refers to individuals aged 10-25.

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Young people services, up to age of 25	Adult services
Forensic settings	Non-justice settings (i.e. welfare, residential care)
Justice settings	Clinical settings (e.g. psychiatric settings)
Both secure and community settings	Only community-based settings
	Clinical staff (i.e. nurses, psychologists)
Mixed method approaches if including qualitative data on staff experience	Purely quantitative studies
Inclusion of qualitative data on staff experience with young people	Primary focus not on staff experience of working in secure
English language	
Peer reviewed journals	

Literature Search

The online databases Web of Science, ASSIA, PsycInfo and Medline were searched up to 7th October 2022 (Figure 1). Studies were identified using the search terms and Boolean operators displayed in Table 3. The terms were chosen through an iterative process by examining search terms used in reviews relevant to this area and including terms featured in key papers during the search. Studies were also filtered for English language and peer reviewed journals.

Table 3

Search Terms Used

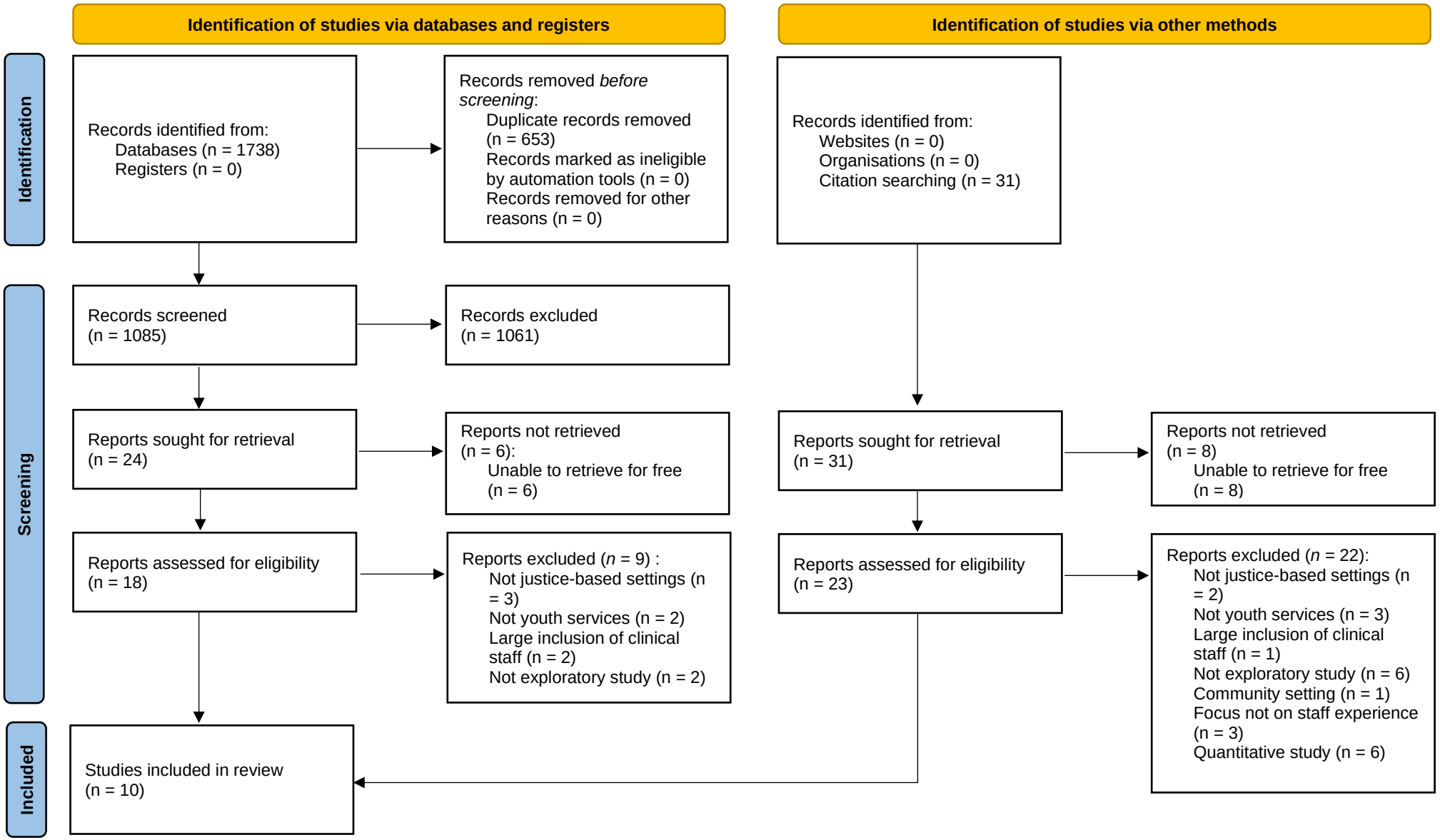
Specific Search Terms
(officer OR staff OR worker OR non$clinical) AND (young OR child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR teen* OR p$ediatric*) AND (forensic OR secure OR prison OR justice) AND (qualitative OR experien* OR interview* OR narrative* OR phenomenolog* OR thematic OR "grounded theory" OR "focus group*" OR "content analysis" OR ethnolog* OR perspective*)

Study Selection

In total, 1738 papers were identified via databases. Duplicates (*n*=653) were removed. The titles and abstracts of remaining papers (*n*=1085) were screened against the eligibility criteria. Twenty-four reports were sought for retrieval; six papers were excluded as they were not freely available through university licensing. Eighteen full-text studies were assessed for eligibility against the same criteria. A hand search of potentially relevant papers referenced in the included studies resulted in 23 studies that were also screened against the eligibility criteria. The search resulted in a final selection of 10 studies. See Figure 1 for further details of the study selection process.

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram (Page et al., 2021)



Quality Appraisal

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) qualitative checklist was used to critique the selected studies. This is a commonly used tool for qualitative evidence synthesis (Flemming & Noyes, 2021) that allows for qualitative appraisal of research rather than quantitative scores. Using an overall quality score has been critiqued as unhelpful; with arbitrary cut-off scores in interpretation and neglect of subtleties in strengths and weaknesses across studies (Tod et al., 2022). While the CASP is recommended for novice researchers, it does not consider publication bias (Purssell, 2020) or clarify whether quality issues are due to reporting or methodology (Long et al., 2020). The researcher went through each study individually, applying each CASP question in turn to help appraise quality.

Synthesis Method

Selected studies were synthesised using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Thematic synthesis is a form of qualitative evidence synthesis that utilises methods from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to develop overall themes from individual study findings (Flemming & Noyes, 2021). It is frequently used to explore peoples' experiences (Flemming & Noyes, 2021), can be used to produce results that are directly applicable, and allows researchers to "go beyond" the primary data to construct a new interpretation unlike other qualitative methods such as narrative synthesis (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009).

Thomas and Harden's (2008) three steps of thematic synthesis were followed. The entire paper was read initially to understand the context, familiarise oneself with the data and undertake quality appraisal. The result sections of the included studies were then read and coded line by line (extract in Appendix A), with codes organised into potential subthemes and discussed in supervision. Subthemes were organised into larger themes that captured a

particular aspect of these subthemes. Quotes from the papers' results sections, including direct participant quotes were used to illustrate the themes.

Quality checks included discussion in supervision of coding and emerging themes, as well as wider discussions on researcher reflexivity and position. This allowed the researcher to explore their position and check the credibility of the review (Elliot et al., 1999). Further consideration of reflexivity is included below.

Reflexivity

Considering the likely subjective influence of the researcher on the review (Sandelowski, 2008), Glenton et al. (2022) propose that researchers should address reflexivity in qualitative evidence synthesis. Therefore, the researcher engaged in their own interview exploring their experiences of working in a SCH (see section B), which allowed reflection on the researcher's expectations of the CYPSE based on their perception of the complexity of the setting and the work.

The researcher acknowledges their position as new to systematic literature reviews, and as someone who has worked in the CYPSE previously, where they had witnessed challenges in the organisation impacting on staff, including themselves. Therefore, it is likely that their narrative would influence how they synthesised the data, such as an expectation of the complexity of the setting and the work, and challenges supporting young people with complex needs.

To help manage these influences, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance throughout. They utilised supervision to discuss their thoughts and experiences during searching, synthesis and discussion, as well as engaging in a reflective diary (Appendix B).

Results

Selected Studies

Ten papers were eligible for inclusion in this review and details of these are included in Table 4. Studies will be summarised, synthesised thematically and critiqued.

Summary and Quality Assessment of Included Studies

Appendix C outlines how the CASP checklist was applied to each study. Below a summary and methodological critique is offered, organised by sections of the checklist.

Aims and Study Design

All studies used qualitative research designs, which were deemed appropriate for in-depth exploration of staff experience of varying aspects of working in secure accommodation. However, only four studies explicitly justified their choice of design (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Frost et al., 2022; Inderbitzin, 2006; Tarrant & Torn, 2021) while all ten studies clearly stated the research aims.

Sample and Recruitment

Included studies were conducted in America (*n*=4), England (*n*=4), Canada (*n*=1) and Australia (*n*=1). Most studies took place in prisons (*n*=3) or correctional facilities (*n*=6) for young people. These differed in age range, including young people as young as 12 (Paterson-Young, 2022) and as old as 25 (Frost et al., 2021).

Participants were predominately staff working in these settings, with studies from Inderbitzin (2006) and Tarrant and Torn (2021) also including young people. One study included staff from a community youth justice service (Paterson-Young, 2022).

Staff roles and titles differed but were often described as involving spending a lot of time with the service users (Galardi & Settersten, 2018). The most common job title was "prison officer" (*n*=3). Time working in the setting ranged from one month (Paterson-Young, 2022) to 35 years (Galardi & Settersten, 2018). Most participants were male, White or Caucasian (if ethnicity was recorded), and where recorded, age ranged from 20 (Frost et al., 2021) to 63 (Galardi & Settersten, 2018).

All studies described their sample and utilised appropriate research strategies for the population. However, one study did not outline their sampling strategy fully (Tarrant & Torn, 2021). Some studies did not thoroughly record demographic information, excluding details such as ethnicity (Frost et al., 2021; Oostermeijer et al., 2022; Patterson-Young, 2022; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021; Tarrant & Torn, 2021), amount of time working in the settings (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021) and age (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Kinsella et al., 2021; Paterson-Young, 2022; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021; Salyers et al., 2015; Tarrant & Torn, 2021). As Inderbitzin (2006) conducted an ethnographic study, demographic information of participants was sparse. There was also under-representation of staff from ethnically minoritised backgrounds and female staff members, suggesting more could be done to recruit participants from these groups.

Table 4

Summary of Included Studies

	Study	Setting	Design	Aim(s)	Methods	Sample	Analysis	Key Findings
1	Ali & Phipps (2020)	Young Offender's Institution, England	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	Evaluate the mental health service provision for young people using the perspectives of prison officers (PO)	Semi-structured, individual interviews	5 prison officers - 4 males, 1 female - 4 White-British, 1 Black-African - Other demographics not recorded	Thematic analysis	1. Participants had little experience or information around the process of referrals to the health and wellbeing team. 2. Participants had little knowledge of the interventions undertaken but spoke highly of the impact on young people. 3. Participants wanted more collaboration and involvement with the health and wellbeing team as they thought this could be beneficial for all. 4. The importance of feedback, communication and knowledge around the health and wellbeing within the setting and how this needed improvement
2	Frost et al., (2021)	Residential assessment and treatment offender personality disorder service in a prison for young adults, England	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	1. Explore prison officers' understanding of care and how this understanding has developed 2. Investigate how prison officers demonstrate care 3. consider what support prison officers might	Semi-structured, individual interviews	12 prison officers - 8 male, 4 female - Age banding range between 20-25 and 51-60 - Length of service between 1 year 2 months and 29 years	Grounded theory	1. Need to be cared for in order to care effectively for others; relationships between service users and officers, the lack of care perceived for the officers' wellbeing, societal attitudes and relationship with and to the service were all important within this. 2. Caring for service users can impact officers positively and intensely, but they can also feel disconnected and desensitised. Caring for service users and building relationships with them was

				need in providing care				seen to promote safety for staff and service users. 3. Officers' personal childhood and life experience shaped their approach to care and emotional management
3	Galardi & Settersten (2018)	Youth Correctional Facility, United States of America	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	(1) How do staff characterize incarcerated boys and girls? (2) Do staff have similar, or different, views of boys and girls? (3) Do the perceptions of male and female youth vary by staff gender?	Semi-structured, individual interviews	58 "living unit staff" - 41 male, 17 female - Age range 26-63 - 42 White or Caucasian, 7 Hispanic or Latino, 3 Black or African American, 6 Native American or Pacific Islander - Number of years at youth authority range 1-35	Thematic analysis	1. Social expectations for gendered presentations may be reproduced by unit staff's behaviour and beliefs. 2. Staff experience boys and girls differently in the youth correctional facility (in terms of interactions with staff, general descriptors and conflict with their peers)
4	Inderbitzin (2006)	Juvenile correctional facility, United States of America	Qualitative, ethnographic study	To get an inside view of the "deep end" of juvenile corrections to better understand the handling of	Ethnography (observation, conversation, field notes)	20 inmates, 12 staff members. Demographics not recorded	Not specified	1. Staff perception was that the majority of their problem children came from troubled families. 2. Staff were worried that many of the boys were in danger of institutionalisation.

				serious delinquents and to evaluate the utility of juvenile correctional facilities				3. Staff faced unique challenges and persistent problems every day. It was a job that required a great deal of energy and some flexibility as they never knew quite what the day would bring. 4. Different styles and philosophies of individual staff members made it more or less pleasant for them to work together. 5. Daily interactions between staff and residents were generally tempered by good-natured humour and teasing. 6. Many members of staff seemed to go above and beyond their official duties to help the kids
5	Kinsella et al., (2021)	Juvenile prisons, United States of America	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	Explore juvenile corrections officers' views on youth and perceptions of procedural justice	Semi-structured, individual interviews	41 corrections officers from 3 juvenile facilities - 26 male, 15 female - 21 White, 18 African American - Years working in youth facilities <1-24 years	Theme based approach that was unspecified	1. Staff saw many strengths in young people but were concerned about the negative influence of their environment outside of the facility. 2. Biases based on race, rural vs urban status and moral character were present while many staff also spoke through a trauma informed discourse. 3. Give respect, get respect with the young people. 4. Trust of the young people was minimal, and had to be earned. It was not consistent with their role of ensuring safety in the facility. 5. Fairness was viewed differently between staff members
6	Oostermeijer et al., (2022)	Youth Justice	Qualitative, semi-	Investigate youth custodial staff's views on and	Semi-structured,	26 youth justice workers	Thematic analysis	1. Smaller units would be better. 2. There is not enough quiet and private spaces for young people.

		facility, Australia	structured interviews	approaches to establishing relationships with young people while maintaining safety and security	individual interviews	- 14 male, 12 female - Aged between 25 and 58 years - Length of service between 8 months and 28 years		3. Communal areas contribute to more positive opportunities. 4. Outside and green space is helpful for privacy and calming young people down. 5. There's a lack of distinction between different types of young people and their individual needs. 6. The layout of the units can result in further incidents when movement is hindered
7	Paterson-Young (2022)	Secure Training Centre and Youth Justice Service, England	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	Explore staff's perceptions of the purpose and direction of Secure Training Centres	Semi-structured, individual interviews	15 Secure Training Centre staff members - 4 male, 11 female - Service length between 1 month and over 8 years - Other demographics not recorded	Thematic analysis	1. Participants were unsure on the purpose of Secure Training Centres and felt this had been lost and the values no longer aligned with the young people involved. 2. Staff were sceptical around the effectiveness of Secure Training Centres. 3. There are limited resources available which impact interventions for young people and create stress for staff
8	Perry & Ricciardelli (2021)	Provincial prisons and remand centres, Canada	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	Explore emotional labour undertaken by correctional officers working with incarcerated youth	Semi-structured, individual interviews	40 correctional officers - 19 male, 21 female - Other demographics not recorded	Not specified	1. Spatial layouts of prisons result in interactions between staff and young people are viewed by multiple others. 2. Unpredictability is reported as a defining characteristic of the job. 3. Managing unpredictability requires considerable emotional management in staff including avoiding emotional displays.

								4. Many staff reported occupational burnout due to repeated exposure to high-needs youth. 5. Opportunities to earn moral wages are contextualised by structural limitations
9	Salyers et al., (2015)	Juvenile detention centres, United States of America	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	Explore how juvenile probation officers define and experience burnout, how it may affect the clients they work with, and strategies they use to manage burnout	Semi-structured, individual interviews	26 juvenile probation officers - 12 males, 14 female - 23 White, 2 Black, 1 Biracial - Years working in juvenile justice ranged from 6-34 years	Theme based approach that was unspecified	1. Staff defined burnout as feeling overwhelmed and less caring about their job. 2. Participants felt that burnout could impact the quality of care young people received although some didn't feel that burnout did affect the young people. 3. Staff spoke about the importance of having support, time away and factors outside of work for managing burnout. 4. A quarter of the staff at time of interview reported feeling burnt out
10	Tarrant & Torn (2021)	Male Youth Offending Institute, England	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	Explore role of custodial context in shaping empathy, including the potential impact of relationships, environmental factors and culture	Semi-structured, individual interviews	3 prison officers - 3 male - Time worked on the unit between 2 and 6 years - No other demographics recorded	Thematic analysis	1. Empathy was seen as a reciprocal process and can be used to achieve goals. 2. Building rapport, trust and seeing people as "human" enables empathetic relationships. 3. Investment in the work and young people was affected by experience of assault, the physical environment, lack of financial investment and feeling uncared for. 4. Participants "did" empathy by recognising and sharing emotions, attempting to understand young people's perspectives and caring towards them.

Data Collection

All but one study utilised semi-structured, individual interviews. Inderbitzin (2006) is the only study to use ethnographic methods, collecting data from informal conversation, observation, and detailed field notes. All studies collected data in ways that were congruent with the research aims, design and chosen methodology. Detail on the data collection procedure varied, with some studies including interview schedules (Galardi & Settersten, 2018), example questions (Frost et al., 2021; Kinsella et al., 2021; Paterson-Young, 2022; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021), topic areas (Inderbitzin, 2006; Oostermeijer et al., 2022; Salyers et al., 2015), or general interview information such as interview length (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Tarrant & Torn, 2021).

Researcher Reflexivity

Only three studies included an explicit consideration of the relationship between researcher and participants in their published papers (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Frost et al., 2022; Tarrant & Torn, 2021), with Tarrant and Torn (2021) including a section exploring the "impact of the researcher". This is concerning as, in general, reflexivity is important in determining trustworthiness in qualitative research (Teh & Lek, 2018), exploring credibility of the findings (Berger, 2015), and acknowledges the influence of the researcher's own biases during the research process (Dodgson, 2019). Additionally, it is important when considering the influential role of power within secure accommodation (Fish, 2018) and how individual differences in researcher approach can influence how power is experienced in the relationship with participants (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2008).

Ethical Considerations

All but four studies (Galardi & Settersten, 2018; Inderbitzin, 2006; Kinsella et al., 2021; Salyers et al., 2015) gave statements on ethical considerations. Tarrant and Torn (2021) outlined the ethical procedures they considered, but many studies did not explore this further than stating ethics approval. Emotional impact on staff sharing their experience was not discussed in the papers.

Data Analysis

Most studies analysed their data using primarily thematic analysis (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Galardi & Settersten, 2018; Oostermeijer et al., 2022; Paterson-Young, 2022; Tarrant & Torn, 2021), with one study using grounded theory (Frost et al., 2021). Data analysis was predominately described in-depth, with the analysis process clearly outlined and sufficient data provided to support findings. However, Perry and Ricciardellis (2021) and Inderbitzin (2006) did not clearly outline their analysis, and Kinsella et al (2021) and Salyers et al (2015) both used theme-based approaches that were not specified. Following analysis, all studies presented clear statements of their findings.

Consideration of Implications

All studies appeared to provide valuable research into the area, with some implications for practice discussed and suggestions for further research. Reflection on the studies' possible limitations was lacking in four studies (Frost et al., 2022; Galardi & Settersten, 2018; Kinsella et al., 2021; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021), with the remaining six offering varying degrees of consideration of personal critique.

Thematic Synthesis

The thematic synthesis of study findings resulted in four overall themes: *Emotional Involvement of the Job, Importance of Relationships, Navigating Individual Differences* and *Effectiveness of the Institution*. Each includes subthemes, as listed in Table 5. Each theme and subthemes will be discussed in turn.

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes from Thematic Synthesis

Themes and Subthemes
1. Emotional Involvement of the Job
2. Importance of Relationships
2.1 Building relationships with service users
2.2 Working together for service users
2.2 Feeling supported
3. Navigating Individual Differences
3.1 Service user characteristics
3.2 Influence of personal experiences
4. Effectiveness of the Institution
4.1 Lack of resources
4.2 Restrictive physical environment

1. Emotional Involvement of the Job

Four studies alluded to the emotional nature of the job (Frost et al., 2021; Inderbitzin, 2006; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021; Salyers et al., 2015), including multiple reports of burnout in staff (Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021; Salyers et al., 2015):

> *"I am dreading going to work every day, ... Because, I mean, this job is terrible… it really is awful... But then occasionally a couple times a year I will be depressed at the idea of even going in there, honestly. I mean, I am definitely not depressed, but definitely on Sunday nights I, like, hate my job…"* (Salyers et al., 2015, p9).

Some participants stated that *"unpredictability"* was a *"defining characteristic of the job"*, which therefore required *"considerable"* management of staff emotion (Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021, p1034). Inderbitzin (2006) reported:

> *The Blue cottage staff faced unique challenges and persistent problems every day when they came into work. Working with incarcerated teenage boys proved to be frustrating, dangerous, often amusing, and occasionally rewarding. It was a job that required a great deal of energy and some flexibility, as the staff never knew quite what the day would bring*. (Inderbitzin, 2006, p439).

Participants alluded to disconnecting from their emotions to manage the distressing experiences at work:

> *"… that thick skin, sometimes you do question yourself, are you becoming a monster?... I feel as if sometimes my emotions have just been sizzled out, I've got no emotions" (Billy)* (Frost et al., 2021, p48).

> *"I've started to notice over the last couple of years, I'm not numbing myself but … I'm trying to numb my thoughts and emotions more. And I've been doing it automatically, trying not to feel… I'm extremely sensitive, this environment does it to you. But as a professional, I kind of become desensitized in some ways."* (Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021, p1035).

Despite the emotional challenges, participants also highlighted how caring for service users could positively impact staff members' feelings about their job, and that their work was meaningful:

> *"I love doing the interventions and I feel lucky to be on here [OPD Pathway service] and to be doing all this stuff that I know I wouldn't get to do anywhere else" (Ashley)* (Frost et al., 2021, p 47).

> *"I like my job, I really do. I like coming to work, I like feeling that hoping. That I've given somebody a brick in their foundation somewhere along the way. That I've made them feel good about themselves, even for a little while. That I might have given them some sort of support. Some sort of a positive spot in their life...*" (Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021, p1036).

2. Importance of Relationships

Participants in six studies spoke about relational aspects of the work that were important to their experiences and referred to relationships with service users and colleagues (Ali & Phipps, 2020; Frost et al., 2021; Inderbitzin, 2006; Kinsella et al., 2021; Salyers et al., 2015; Tarrant & Torn, 2021).

2.1. Building Relationships with Service Users. Managing relationships with service users included reciprocation of respect (Kinsella et al., 2021), empathy and care (Tarrant & Torn, 2021). Trust had to be *"earned"* and was not *"consistent"* with keeping the environment safe (Kinsella et al., 2021) but was important for building relationships that would be therapeutic for service users who may have had *"troubled"* backgrounds:

> *"They are let down quite a number of times and I'm not one for making excuses but I think if (.) the quality is there, the time is there and you make someone feel … they're not just another person. That they're actually there to be listened to." (Craig, p.7, lines 255-258)* (Tarrant & Torn, 2021, p11).

> *"… they've built up like I say that element of trust and that rapport... And they'll come and speak to you if they have a problem without you know feeling a little bit inhibited to do so." (Tony, p.2, lines 44-48)* (Tarrant & Torn, 2021, p11).

However, role conflict of being both corrections officers and therapeutic parents could be challenging when building and maintaining relationships with service users, causing difficulty for staff (Indebitzin, 2006).

2.2. Working Together for Service Users. Relationships with colleagues were highlighted as important in the research. Staff shared their desire to be included with the health and wellbeing team in one setting (Ali & Phipps, 2020) as they thought this could be beneficial for both staff and young people. There was a belief that communication around this team was important but needed improvement:

> *"[...] they should involve us more coz if I'm here for 10 hours I spend more time with the lads [...] if they get us more involved [...] they tell us what signs to look out for you could pick things up from the first stage [...]." (Participant 3)* (Ali & Phipps, 2020, p7)

> *"No I've never [...] been told anything about it it's pretty hush hush as I said so I think they like to keep their own things to themselves and not disclose too much [...] I*

> *don't wanna know the details of everything just little bits and pieces that would help me talk to the boy on the landing and y'know try and help them if I can." (Participant 5)* (Ali & Phipps, 2020, p8).

2.3. Feeling Supported. Multiple studies shared findings around the importance of support from colleagues and the institution (Frost et al., 2021; Inderbitzin, 2006; Salyers et al., 2015; Tarrant & Torn, 2021):

> *The two of them watched each other's backs and looked out for each other, telling the other to go home when he was sick or when a shift dragged on past its scheduled hours* (Inderbitzin, 2006, p441).

Participants described how feeling *"uncared for"* could impact how invested staff felt in the care they showed towards service users (Tarrant & Torn, 2021). Having spaces that felt supportive were important to enable staff to effectively care for service users in the long-term (Frost et al., 2021):

> *"I was off for five weeks and nobody phoned me. I had to phone them up and say I'm depressed. Help me. And people were like I don't really know what to do here to help you. Here's a helpline, ring that. It's like you know and you expect me to come into work and show empathy towards the boys… when you don't even know how to show it to me." (Paul, p.7, lines 234-238)* (Tarrant & Torn, 2021, p11).

> *"This service is good because you've got reflection spaces and supervision spaces . . . I think without that you would just burn-out so quick" (Alex)* (Frost et al., 2021).

3. Navigating Individual Differences

Studies highlighted differences between staff in their beliefs and approaches, such as different perceptions of what was *"fair"* (Kinsella et al., 2021), and differences in how young people were experienced by staff.

3.1. Service User Characteristics. Participants described the importance, yet lack of, appreciation of the individual needs of the young people in the setting (Oostermeijer et al., 2022). Two studies included how staff may treat service users differently due to their personal characteristics such as gender (Galardi & Settersten, 2018) and race (Kinsella et al., 2021).

One participant explained that they felt they could be more directive to boys because they would have to *"deal with the backup after our conversation"* with the girls (Galardi & Settersten, 2018, p204):

> *"... I'm pretty straightforward with these guys about stuff [...] if I feel like this is what the issue is, I'm going to tell you that's what the issue is, here's why you're having a hard time..." (LeBron)* (Galardi & Settersten, 2018, p204)

Another participant spoke of the risk of accusations from female service users of sexual misconduct from staff. This caused staff to be more *"cautious"* and *"guarded"* in interactions with female service users, and heightened staff anxiety, with some male members of staff refusing to work in the girls' facility (Galardi & Settersten, 2018):

> *"There's so much that you can get in trouble for as a guy working with females (George)."* (Galardi & Settersten, 2018, p205)

3.2. Influence of Personal Experiences. The personal experiences of participants were said to shape how they approached their work, in particular aspects of care and emotional management (Frost et al., 2021). This included their upbringing, general life experience and previous work experience:

> *"I probably felt a lot of comfort and a lot of inspiration from that [care from Mum] so that's what's guided me. How I was . . . cared for, I suppose I've tried to duplicate" (Jamie)* (Frost et al., 2021, p49)

> *His military background may have influenced the approach he took with the job and his interactions with the young inmates* (Inderbitzin, 2006, p441).

The differences in staff approaches could be challenging when trying to work as an integrated team:

> *The different styles and philosophies of individual staff members made it more or less pleasant for them to work together. There was camaraderie and respect among the staff, generally, but friction between co-workers occasionally surfaced, making the job much more difficult at those times.* (Inderbitzin, 2006, p441).

4. Effectiveness of the Institution

The perceived limitations of the effectiveness of the institutions were discussed in five studies (Inderbitzin, 2006; Kinsella et al., 2021; Oostermeijer at al., 2022; Paterson-Young, 2022; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021; Tarrant & Torn, 2021). Some staff members were concerned about the limits of their effectiveness due to the negative influence of the service users' environment outside of the unit (Paterson-Young, 2022):

> *"Ok, you can come here and put all the interventions into the world, and they could reap the most amounts from this centre, but if this stuff isn't continued in the community, then they haven't got a hope in hell. Because if they come here… they spend six months getting all this support and stuff then go out and they don't have anything … then literally all the work that has been done can potentially be undone in half the amount of time." (Pat – Staff Member)* (Paterson-Young, 2022, p360)

The purpose of these institutions was questioned, with some participants unclear and some feeling the purposes were outdated and no longer appropriate (Paterson-Young, 2022).

> "*I think some of the values need to change sometimes … Seven years ago, we mostly had 13- and 14-year-olds, but now we have 16-, 17-, and 15-year-olds and I think we need to change with the times." (Ella – Staff Member)* (Paterson-Young, 2022, p358).

> *"Things have moved [since 1998] forward but unfortunately [the principles and rules] haven't moved with it and changed enough to deal with the young people we are dealing with now …" (Pat – Staff Member)* (Paterson-Young, 2022, p358)

Additionally, some staff members were concerned that service users might be at risk of *"institutionalisation"* as the secure setting provided the *"first real structure and consistency"* that many service users would have known and this could be very appealing to young people (Inderbitzin, 2006, p438).

4.1. Lack of Resources. Lack of resources and investment in the institution was seen to negatively impact what therapeutic involvement staff could have with service users. (Tarrant & Torn, 2021). Perry and Ricciardelli's (2021) findings spoke of *"structural*

limitations" such as institutional rules impacting staff's ability to support service users how they would hope to, leaving them powerless:

> "*I had a young guy hang himself in front of me one day… We're not allowed to go in until something actually happens. And so he stepped off his table, I had to wait a couple seconds and then I went in and held him up and cut him down."* (Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021, p1034).

Participants shared their views that limited available resources, such as psychological input for service users, created frustration for staff as they did not feel the institution was as useful as it had the potential to be (Patterson-Young, 2022):

> *"There aren't enough staff offering psychology interventions and I don't think there is enough time …Yes, education is a priority but how can a young person that doesn't understand themselves learn anything else." (Karen – Staff Member)* (Paterson-Young, 2022, p357)

> *"... we are really tight on resources for psychology ... I think if we had more people on the team then there would be a lot more that we could do with the young people…" (Sam – Staff Member)* (Paterson-Young, 2022, p357)

4.2. Restrictive Physical Environment. Three studies included findings alluding to the impact of the settings' physical environment on their experience (Oostermeijer et al., 2022; Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021; Tarrant & Torn, 2021). These explained how the physical layout would result in interactions being viewed by others (Perry & Ricciardelli, 2021), and could result in additional incidents when service users become more frustrated at waiting or sharing staff time and attention (Oostermeijer et al., 2022):

> *"Because there's so much movement across the site, I might be over at [unit], the girls are waiting to go to a program, and then a code happens on another unit across the other side, code happens, all movement ceases. [...] which you know like I said can cause incidents in itself and that you're waiting all the time [...] young people and staff both get frustrated with it." —Staff member #13.* (Oostermeijer et al., 2022, p233).

Staff reflected on the importance of open spaces and communal areas for positive outcomes for young people, as the restrictive element of the environment could be challenging when service users were distressed. It was thought that smaller and more private spaces could help staff provide the support service users needed to regulate their emotions (Oostermeijer et al., 2022):

> *"So you know like this environment sometimes isn't all that helpful in ways to de-escalate. Like a simple go outside and have a walk, you know go outside and get some fresh air, on some of the units that's not as simple as just being able to do that." —Staff member #2.* (Oostermeijer et al., 2022, p232).

Summary of Review Findings

Synthesis of the included studies highlighted the high level of emotional involvement required while working in these settings. Relationships with service users and colleagues are extremely important in shaping how staff can feel about their job and their wellbeing. Experiences of being included in different aspects of service user care and feeling supported by colleagues and the institution were beneficial in staff feeling involved and appreciated in work. The individual differences in service user characteristics and staff's personal experiences shaped how staff related to those groups. Finally, the effectiveness of the

institution could impact staff experience as limited resources and restrictive physical environment could shape how much staff were able to do therapeutically for the young people.

Utilising the CASP as a quality assessment tool, the included studies were overall deemed to be high in quality as they were predominately clear in their aims, analysis method and findings. However, the studies lacked explicit reflection on potentially influential areas of the research process regarding the researchers and participants.

Firstly, the primary studies lacked researcher reflexivity, including the influence of their own position based on professional background and demographics on the research process. Secure settings can be highly traumatised and closed systems; it can be challenging to access these settings from the public sphere. As such, there was little reflection from researchers on the process of accessing these settings and the participants, and the impact that this may have had. Participants may not have felt able to be truly honest in their interviews depending on the context, such as being in the setting itself or speaking to someone deemed an outsider. Influential aspects of staff experience may be missing from this research as a result.

Secondly, the emotional impact of the research on participants was rarely considered. Previous research, and research in this review, has highlighted the emotional involvement of the work in these settings and how trauma is a frequent topic for both service users and the staff that care for them. Thus, it would be important to consider the impact of potentially difficult conversations on the participant themselves and the narrative they felt able to share in the interviews.

Discussion

This review aimed to explore the experiences of non-clinical staff working in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people. This thematic synthesis highlighted four main themes: *Emotional Involvement of the Job, Importance of Relationships, Navigating Individual Differences* and *Effectiveness of the Institution*. Each theme will be discussed in turn in the context of the wider literature.

Emotional Involvement of the Job

Staff highlighted how emotionally intense the job could be, including the necessity to manage their emotions in the distressing context of the work. This could result in experiences of burnout. This aligns with the concept of emotional labour: the requirement of managing feelings to fulfil a job (Hochschild, 1979). Literature has described emotional labour as "rampant" amongst correctional officers in the prison system (Crawley, 2004). Nylander et al. (2011) highlighted that prison officers' strategies around emotional labour can result in different forms of emotional strain such as alienation or exhaustion. Both were highlighted in the present review's results, with staff disconnecting but also experiencing burnout. Other research has also shown high burnout rates in frontline staff in the CYPSE's YOIs (Lane et al., 2023). These experiences can result in staff sickness (Kristensen et al., 2005), reduced job performance and poorer client safety (Garcia et al., 2019; Tawfik et al., 2019), overall impacting staff experience and quality of care (Lane et al., 2023). This finding adds to the existing understanding of the emotional demands of the work in forensic institutions; expanding the knowledge of non-clinical staff experience and highlighting how this experience is common despite differences in staff demographics.

Importance of Relationships

The role of relationships in staff experience was highly important with relationships between colleagues being influential in feeling included and supported, and relationships with service users important for client care. Other literature has discussed the importance of service user-staff relationship as they "influence action" for both staff and prisoner (Liebling et al., 1999, p72). Building these relationships enables prisoners to have a different experience of relationships as they historically may have been dysfunctional or destructive, as well as sustaining a safe regime in prison (Bennett & Shuker, 2010). Further, improved communication between staff can improve the organisational climate and reduce stress (Finney et al., 2013), and "caring" leadership with an emphasis on emotional safety can help manage the impacts of emotional labour (Newman et al., 2009).

These results suggested the beneficial nature of relationships, as emphasised by SECURE STAIRS' "whole-systems" approach that stresses the value of all relationships within the environment as contributors to change for young people (Taylor et al., 2018). However, research has also suggested potential risks with service user-staff relationships. In the CYPSE, relationships can be viewed as transactional, with risks of groomed young people experiencing similarities in their relational experience with staff (Jacob et al., 2023).

Navigating Individual Differences

Staff spoke of differences in how staff related to young people based on service user characteristics and their own personal experiences. Historically, prisoners have reported feeling racially victimised, insulted, assaulted, and being treated less fairly by prison officers based on their race (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2005). Prisoners have been found to be harassed by officers based on their sexual identity, with the differences in their presentation (masculine or feminine) shaping the response from staff (Davis & Shaylor,

2001). Additionally, “challenging behaviours” displayed by traumatised youth can elicit controlling responses from caregivers (Bath, 2008).

Literature has also highlighted the influence of lived experience on staff’s work approach. Tait (2011) found that prison officers’ own experience of trauma and how long they had worked in prison impacted their approach to care. Prison officers with a military background differed in their approach, with some adhering to a more “traditional” approach of punishment and some to a more “modern” approach of potential compassion, possibly dependent on whether they were in the military recently or not (Moran & Turner, 2022).

Effectiveness of the Institution

Results demonstrated staff’s difficulty and uncertainty around the institutions’ effectiveness in terms of its overall purpose, lack of resources available and a restrictive physical environment. These could be classified as latent conditions (Reason, 2016); factors that could be conducive for errors and can impact on staff and patient experiences. Research has highlighted the importance of consideration of facility design; demonstrating the impact on prisoner wellbeing (Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2022), and the link between physical environment and both staff and patient outcomes (Ulrich et al., 2004). However, this theme highlighted staff concerns regarding institutional purpose as well as physical design, which has been less prevalent in consideration of staff experience thus far.

Strengths and Limitations

This is the first thematic syntheses exploring the experiences of non-clinical staff in non-clinical forensic settings for young people. Results highlight similarities in experiences to other clinical professionals in areas such as emotional labour (Badolamenti et al., 2017; Mann, 2005) and social defences (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008; Menzies, 1960). This is

important to note when literature in these settings is sparse. Conducting a thematic synthesis allowed for the quality appraisal of each study and the identification of commonalities across the data to give weight to the proposed themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This review particularly demonstrates the emotional demand of working in these environments and adds to the understanding of staff experience, as well as highlighting institutional factors such as its effectiveness and limitations.

While it was possible to gain some insight into staff experiences, the literature sourced was limited in terms of its richness. Several papers had narrow aims, exploring staff's experience relating to service user gender (Galardi & Settersten, 2018), empathy (Tarrant & Torn, 2021), mental health services (Ali & Phipps, 2020) and physical environment (Oostermeijer et al., 2022). It was therefore difficult to explore staff experience in-depth. It is possible that key areas of staff experience are missing from this review's findings.

Utilising a systematic thematic synthesis allowed for a rigorous, in-depth review that connected themes arising from recent literature. Including international research allowed for a wider exploration of staff experience outside of just UK settings. However, this also reduces the application of these findings to specifically UK non-clinical forensic settings. The strict criteria utilised for this review may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant literature. However, not limiting the criteria to non-clinical institutions would have led to the inclusion of clinical settings such as forensic inpatient centres that may have different experiences due to the mental health needs of service users, and the possible availability of clinical support and supervision (Kilminster & Jolly, 2000).

Theoretical Implications

Findings demonstrated how important relationships were in the work; how complicated it could be to navigate individual differences in young people, the staff team and themselves; how the physical environment could be restrictive; and how emotionally involved the job could be. All findings suggest a high level of demand across multiple areas, with particular focus on the emotional labour involved for staff to regulate their emotions in a fundamentally unpredictable environment. As such, staff are more at risk of burnout and the institution at risk of high staff turnover (Macfarlane, 2020; Neuman & Gamble, 1995).

Results suggest staff may use social defences such as disconnecting from their emotions to protect against the unpredictability and emotional labour of working in these institutions (Menzies, 1960). Further, staff spoke to a need for improved communication and joint working. This could suggest the organisation was working in silo and engaging in automated processes that lack additional thought, characteristic of a paranoid-schizoid system (Halton, 1994) where there can be disempowerment at any level in the organisation. This highlights the importance for these institutions to implement "systems of listening, thinking and containment" at all levels to explore and process the complexity of the dynamics at play in the organisation (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008, p25).

Additionally, the importance of relationships with both colleagues and young people highlights how important attachment theory is for navigating relationships in this environment. When considering individual differences, individual staff members' own attachment systems could be activated by the complex needs of young people (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999), in turn placing more emotional demands on staff and placing them at further risk of secondary trauma and burnout (Ireland & Huxley, 2018; Lane et al., 2023). This is particularly poignant as staff may be drawn, unconsciously, to work in these systems

due to their own unresolved trauma histories, seeking to repair their experiences through repetition and reversal processes (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008).

Clinical Implications

This review highlighted the complexity and potential difficulty of staff working in non-clinical forensic settings. Reports from staff alluded to the importance of being connected and included in service user care. Research has demonstrated the fundamental nature of collaboration and cooperation in the multidisciplinary team in providing safe care for service users, and improving their outcomes (Clark, 1981). Finney et al. (2013) also found that improved communication between correctional officers and management lowered stress and improved the organisational environment. Therefore, efforts to improve communication and involvement of non-clinical staff in therapeutic work would be beneficial for the care of service users as well as the experience of staff members. This is also highlighted in the SECURE STAIRS' "whole-systems" approach (Taylor et al., 2018).

Relationships were important to staff experience, with both service users and colleagues, thus support around this would be beneficial. In-depth reflective supervision would be imperative for staff as it can support the management of emotionally intense aspects of the therapeutic work (Bridges, 1999). Furthermore, this provision could allow exploration of individual differences of staff members including, where appropriate, the influence of upbringing on their approach. A trusted supervisory relationship can assist in reducing experiences of burnout in staff (Lambert et al., 2012; Wallbank & Hatton, 2011), while "compassionate", "caring" leaders who provide a sense of emotional safety to their staff can help manage the demand of emotional labour (Newman et al., 2009).

Additional areas of support in these areas could include staff reflective practice and training, as they are beneficial in managing the impact of client needs (Oelofsen, 2012). As

individual difference in both staff approach and service user characteristic impacted experience, it would be beneficial for staff to have space to explore the assumptions and life experiences they bring to the work, as well as exploration of difference using structures such as the Social GRRRAAACCEEESSS (Burnham, 2012). It is imperative for institutions to implement "systems of listening, thinking and containment" (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008, p.25) throughout the organisation to help navigate the complexity of dynamics; examine the social defences used to manage the emotional demands of the work (Menzies, 1960); explore questions of institutional effectiveness; and nurture relationships between colleagues at all levels of the organisation. The SECURE STAIRS framework alluded to the importance of supporting staff to support service users in the CYPSE (Taylor et al., 2018). This review demonstrates the need for these ideas to continue and extend beyond the CYPSE.

Directions for Future Research

Literature exploring staff experience in-depth in juvenile justice settings is sparse. Further research should be conducted in this area to develop a greater understanding of staff experience. The limited research included in this review was deemed to be overall high in quality, however some studies failed to explicitly detail their method of analysis. It is important for future research to share this information to aid transparency, supporting the examination of the trustworthiness and applicability of the findings (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019).

This review alluded to how difficult the experience of working in young people's non-clinical forensic settings can be. The primary studies often failed to attend to the emotional involvement of the work, only touching on the complexity of building relationships with young people. Future research could explore this in more depth, for example, exploring staff's experiences of building relationships with young people and

having to navigate the role conflict of corrections officer and therapeutic parent. This could help develop understanding amongst staff, particularly considering high rates of burnout and staff turnover. Additionally, staff alluded to the influence of personal experience on how they approached their work and related to the young people, future research could explore staff's understanding of this with an aim of helping staff and systems to understand how these factors may influence the care provided.

This review drew on international research as well as numerous different non-clinical secure forensic settings. In the UK, the CYPSE includes STCs, YOIs and SCHs. There tends to be similarities in the needs of young people across these settings (Rose, 2014), with high levels of emotional labour from staff in secure accommodation (Andersson, 2019). Future research could explore the experience of staff in these different settings, including their experiences of managing relationships with complex young people. This could demonstrate the differences and similarities in challenges staff experience in these institutions and illuminate beneficial strategies used in individual settings that could be shared across the CYPSE and wider.

Conclusion

Research into the experience of non-clinical staff in secure, non-clinical forensic settings for young people suggests this work is complex and emotionally involved. Staff are required to navigate individual differences in staff and service users, and a multitude of restrictive institutional elements to conduct their work. Literature in this area remains sparse; it will be important to increase knowledge in this area and similar settings, exploring in-depth the experiences of staff. While research is limited, these findings highlight the importance of staff support to help protect against experiences of burnout and high staff turnover.

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Section B: Empirical Study

“It’s going to be hard but it’s worth it in the end”: Residential care workers’ experiences of working in welfare secure children’s homes.

Word Count: 7994 (1219)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Canterbury Christ Church University for the degree of
Doctor of Clinical Psychology

FEBRUARY 2024

SALOMONS INSTITUTE
CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Welfare secure children's homes (SCHs) are part of the Children and Young People's Secure Estate and accommodate children and young people who are deemed "high risk, high harm, high vulnerability". Residential staff are required to act as corporate and therapeutic parents, supporting development, and managing challenging presentations. Research has shown high emotional labour and increased risk of secondary trauma and burnout in staff. Despite this, there is very little research into staff experience.

This study aimed to explore the experiences of residential staff working in welfare SCHs. Using the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual residential staff across three welfare secure children's homes. Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis, four main themes were generated: *Navigating the Work's Complexities*, *Importance of Connection*, *Moments of Reward* and *Support: Precious but Precarious*.

Findings stress the importance of support for staff, with robust support structures suggested. Considering the influence of perceptions of the young people in shaping staff experience and how they relate to the young people, further exploration of these experiences is needed in supervision and training. Further research is needed to better understand staff experience, particularly in relation to staff difference such as staff gender, race, and mental health issues.

Keyword(s): Staff experience, CYPSE, secure accommodation, reflexive thematic analysis, BNIM

Introduction

Young people at risk in the community may be placed in secure accommodation if no other accommodation can manage these safety concerns (Goldson, 2002). There are currently three types of secure accommodation in the UK, collectively known as the Children and Young People's Secure Estate (CYPSE). These are Young Offender Institutes (YOIs), Secure Training Centres (STCs) and Secure Children's Homes (SCHs). Both YOIs and STCs provide secure accommodation for young people found guilty of a criminal offence or who have received a remand order (Rose, 2014), whereas young people within a SCH have been accommodated for a perceived welfare need under Section 25 of The Children Act (1989), and Section 119 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales), 2014. This legislation states that a secure order can only be given if the young person has a history of absconding and is likely to abscond from other accommodation; and/or is likely to come to significant harm if they do abscond; and/or is likely to harm themselves or others in non-secure accommodation (Williams et al., 2022). Young people aged 10-17 can be accommodated in SCHs, 12-17 in STCs and 15-18 in YOIs (Jacob et al., 2023).

In 2020, around 750 young people were accommodated across the CYPSE, with 75.3% residing in YOIs, 14.3% in STCs and 10.4% in SCHs (Youth Custody Service, 2020). The CYPSE have facilities onsite to support young people's care, health, and education (Rose, 2014). As such, a wide range of staff work in these settings such as frontline operational staff (previously known as "correctional" or "prison officers"), residential staff, education staff, physical healthcare, and mental health professionals (Lane et al., 2023). Frontline operational and residential staff require no formal set of qualifications but are responsible for the day-to-day care of young people (Abrams & Anderson-Nathe, 2012).

Young people residing in these settings are often categorised as "high risk, high harm, high vulnerability" (NHS England, 2023), with many experiencing caregiver neglect, trauma,

and separation (Goldson, 2002; Martin et al., 2022), higher than average substance misuse and disrupted education (Rose, 2014). Professionals have been known to refer to these young people as both “vulnerable” and “troublesome” simultaneously (Ellis, 2018), as well as “violent” (Andersson, 2019). Across the estate, there were 459 assaults between October and December 2022, including 232 assaults on staff (GOV.UK, 2023). The complex needs of these young people have often resulted in systems struggling to manage their care, leaving young people with poor experiences of being “passed between” services with inconsistent care (Taylor et al., 2018).

Between 2017 and 2021, NHS England led a project across the CYPSE that aimed to support trauma-informed care with a whole-systems approach (Taylor et al., 2018). This framework, SECURE STAIRS, centred day-to-day staff members as agents of change, recognising their importance in managing the environment and relational safety (Taylor et al., 2018). The roles of CYPSE staff are varied and complex. SCHs are required to balance a level of punishment with care and reform (Ellis, 2018), with staff having to negotiate physical distance while developing emotional closeness (Ellis & Curtis, 2020). As many young people in SCHs have experienced attachment difficulties, the relationships built with staff are crucial, with the relationship often being seen as therapeutic (Rose, 2014; Taylor et al., 2018). In the absence of other caregivers, residential staff often act as corporate and therapeutic parents (Schofield & Beek, 2005). In line with attachment theory, staff try to provide young people a secure base from where they can explore, learn, and play but return to safety if needed, in the hope they can develop healthier attachments for the future (Bowlby, 1969; Schofield & Beek, 2005). However, maltreated young people can be mistrustful and feel a need to control others (Schofield & Beek, 2005), often making it challenging for staff to remain steadfast throughout the young person’s distress (Macfarlane, 2020).

Research has alluded to how emotionally challenging working in secure accommodation can be (Andersson, 2019; Ellis & Curtis, 2020; Goldson, 2002; Lane et al., 2023), with a high demand of emotional labour particularly on residential staff (Andersson, 2019). Emotional labour is described as the management of feelings required to fulfil a job (Hochschild, 1979), where staff are expected to regulate their emotions during their interactions at work (including expressing or supressing certain responses) to achieve the organisation's aims.

Some young people's attachment difficulties can result in complex relationships with staff leading to push/pull dynamics or fixations, activating staff's own attachment systems and internal working models (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Due to the emotional impact of this, and other complex needs of those they care for, residential staff can be at risk of vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue (Ireland & Huxley, 2018), with these terms often being used interchangeably within literature (Macfarlane, 2020). Without sufficient support, this can lead to short and long-term physical and emotional impacts such as burnout and high staff turnover (Lane et al., 2023; Macfarlane, 2020; Neuman & Gamble, 1995). Indeed, 42.47% of CYPSE staff reported experiencing burnout at work (Anna Freud Centre, 2022). This can greatly impact on young people living in these environments who can view staff leaving as another rejection due to their attachment difficulties and lack of sense of safety (Macfarlane, 2020).

While research has highlighted the complexity of working in secure accommodation (Atkinson et al., 2023; Ellis & Curtis, 2020; Lane et al., 2023), literature within SCHs remains sparse, particularly regarding day-to-day staff experience. Considering the emotional toll on residential staff supporting young people continuously (Menzies, 1960), and the integrity of their role in accordance with SECURE STAIRS, it is crucial that staff experience of this work is explored in-depth. As such, this study aimed to explore the experiences of

residential staff working in SCHs to develop a greater understanding of this and how staff can be supported in this complex work.

The CYPSE is an amalgamation of complex settings that operate differently depending on the needs of the young people residing in them (Rose, 2014). As such, the training and experiences of staff members may differ depending on the setting. Thus, this project focused on staff from welfare only SCHs to allow for initial exploration of their experiences.

This project aimed to explore the following research questions: (a) What are the experiences of residential staff working in welfare SCHs? (b) What are staff experiences of working with complex children and young people in welfare SCHs? (c) What are staff experiences of the role of support in working in welfare SCHs?

Method

Design

The study used a qualitative design involving Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) of semi-structured interviews conducted using the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM). A qualitative design was deemed appropriate due to the exploratory nature of the research questions, the importance of gaining insight into the under-researched experiences of staff and providing staff an opportunity to share their experiences of working in a restrictive environment.

Narrative approaches, such as BNIM, aim to “give voice”, particularly to those who are socially excluded (Suárez-Ortega, 2013), as staff working in the CYPSE are seldom heard. Furthermore, narrative approaches acknowledge the social and collective nature of meaning-making (Davies & Gannon, 2006), allowing for awareness and consideration of the economic, social, political, institutional, and cultural contexts that shape people’s experience

(Suárez-Ortega, 2013). It can therefore explore and make visible narratives on the personal, cultural, institutional and community level (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000), which is especially relevant in closed environments such as the CYPSE.

BNIM is a narrative approach to interviewing that supports the gathering of rich data that can be used with other interpretative methods (Wengraf, 2006b). Similarly, RTA is a flexible approach regarding dataset size, composition and how data are gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and can, therefore, be applied to data collected using the BNIM (Agboli et al., 2020; Hadley, 2021; Knox et al., 2012).

RTA is an approach to data analysis that develops, analyses, and interprets patterns in datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It allows researchers to develop deeper understanding of datasets where they can tell analytic stories (Joy et al., 2023) about experiences, perspectives, practices, and behaviour (Clarke & Braun, 2017), which fits with the project's aim and research questions. It also makes visible, and reflects on, researcher position (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which is important when considering this researcher's own experience of SCHs.

A social constructionist perspective was taken, recognising that understanding is constructed and situated in context, fitting with the ideas of narrative approaches (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Suárez-Ortega, 2013), and acknowledging the influence of the researcher in research, as in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Recruitment

All six welfare SCHs in England were individually approached by the researcher via email and phone call. The research project was discussed with clinical psychologists and registered managers within the SCH to explore interest. Each SCH was consulted on how best to share the project with their residential staff. This included attending team meetings and sending emails including the recruitment materials (Appendix D). These were also posted on the researcher's Twitter and Facebook accounts.

A purposive sampling method was used as the focus was on residential staff who could speak in-depth about their experience. Participant inclusion criteria included any residential workers who were currently working in welfare only SCHs, or who had worked as such up to two years prior. There was no minimum amount of experience necessary for participation to allow for breadth of experience. All other staff working in the SCH were excluded, including mental health, education and management staff who had not worked as a residential care worker.

On expression of interest, participants were emailed the information sheet (Appendix E) and consent form (Appendix F) for their consideration. On their return, interviews were arranged based on participant preference of meeting online or face-to-face. All participants were offered a £10 voucher to thank them for their participation.

Participants

Eleven participants were recruited across three welfare SCHs. Nine participants were recruited through SCHs, while two participants were recruited through Facebook. See Table 1 for self-identified participant demographic information. To limit the possibility of identification, this information is presented at the group level. Most participants currently worked in the CYPSE (n=9), with two participants having left in the past two years. Length of time working in the CYPSE ranged from six months to 12 years. Participants predominately identified as White British (n=8). Six participants identified as female, five as male, and age ranged from 28 to 65 (M=42).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristic		***M (range)***	***N (%)***
Age (in years)		42 (28 – 65)	
Gender	Male		5 (45)
	Female		6 (55)
Ethnicity	White British		8 (73)
	White Scottish		1 (9)
	British		1 (9)
	Black British		1 (9)
Job title	Residential Support Worker		5 (45)
	Secure Care Worker		2 (18)
	Residential Childcare Worker		2 (18)
	Acting Deputy Manager		1 (9)
	Senior Secure Care Worker		1 (9)
Welfare Secure Children's Home	Home 1		4 (36)
	Home 2		4 (36)
	Home 3		3 (27)
Time working in welfare secure (in years)		3.5 (.5 – 12)	

Ethics

The study was granted ethical approval by the university's ethics committee (Appendix G). All participants provided informed consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded prior to interview. Participants could choose what they wanted to share in their narrative due to the open interview question and were told they could stop at any time. Following the interview, the researcher engaged in a verbal debrief before sharing the formal debrief sheet (Appendix H). This detailed possible support services as there was potential for emotive narratives.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews utilising the BNIM were conducted. This method places the power with the participant in how they wish to share their story (Wengraf, 2001), and allows exploration of how and why participants tell their narrative the way they do (Corbally & O'Neill, 2014), with less researcher influence than in other interview schedules (Bryman, 2008). This method of data collection has been used to facilitate the voice of groups on "the periphery of society" (Peta et al., 2018), and elicit "often supressed perspectives" (Wengraf, 2006b) that may be relevant within the closed culture of SCHs. BNIM has been used in varied research including disabled women's experiences of sexuality (Peta et al., 2018), and experiences of gay and lesbian older adults (Fenge & Jones, 2011). It has been found to be an effective method regardless of participants' educational, class and ethnic background (Roseneil, 2012).

Demographic information (Table 1) was obtained before the Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2006a) was asked. The interviewer asked the SQUIN (Appendix I) and engaged in active listening and notetaking, using the BNIM sheet (Appendix I) as a guide while the participant told their narrative. This is considered sub-

session one. Once the participants had indicated they had finished, the researcher used their notes to prompt narrative development during sub-session two. Here, the researcher asked for examples and further detail of topics that appeared important to the participant and relevant to the research questions (Wengraf, 2006b) (examples in Appendix J). To try to reduce researcher influence while exploring the research questions, the researcher approached topics in the order they were raised, using the participant's words (Wengraf, 2006b), and only asked open questions about experiences the participant had mentioned. Once the interview was completed, the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions before debriefing. The optional third sub-session was not utilised due to time constraints around accessing participants in restrictive environments while they were working. After the interview the researcher noted their reflections on the interview and context, both to construct narrative portraits and to examine any influences in the interview process.

Interviews took place face-to-face in the SCHs participants worked at (n=7), or virtually via Microsoft Teams (n=4), at the participants' request. All interviews (ranging from 50 to 90 minutes) were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with participants being allocated a pseudonym. Recordings were destroyed after transcription.

Data Analysis

Throughout analysis, a social-constructionist framework was used as this suggests how we perceive the world is based on the historical and cultural context (Burr & Dick, 2017), and the influence of social and interpersonal factors (Gergen, 1985). As such, knowledge is co-created, not discovered (Schwandt, 2003). This fits with narrative approaches' understanding that meaning is made collaboratively and is based on the context's complexities (Suárez-Ortega, 2013), and RTA's understanding of the influential role of the researcher and their position (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Considering the restrictive and

complex context of SCHs, a social-constructionist perspective allows critical exploration of the factors influencing staff and the researcher's influence in story construction during interview and analysis.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Data were analysed using RTA, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases (Table 2). The researcher familiarised themselves with the data through transcription, noting down initial ideas from the data (Appendix K), and creating narrative portraits for each participant (Appendix P). Transcripts were uploaded into NVivo-12 where data were coded using an inductive (data-driven) approach to develop both semantic and latent codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022) (see Appendix L and M). Four transcripts were double coded by supervisors. Codes were organised into initial themes, where a theme was conceptualised as "a pattern of shared meaning untied by a central idea" (Joy et al., 2023, p. 156). Various thematic maps were developed to explore ways of telling the analytic story of the dataset (Appendix N) and discussed with supervisors. Theme boundaries and names were refined over the iterative process of analysis (Appendix O).

Table 2

Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Phase	Title	Description
1	Familiarising yourself with the dataset	Immersion in the data through reading and re-reading data and starting to make notes about initial ideas
2	Coding	Systematically identifying and labelling segments of data that are potentially relevant, interesting or meaningful to research questions
3	Generating initial themes	Start identifying patterns meaning across the dataset by compiling clusters of codes that could share a core idea
4	Developing and reviewing themes	Checking initial themes make sense across the coded extracts and full dataset. Start considering relationship between themes
5	Refining, defining and naming themes	Themes are named and defined clearly, refining the boundaries of each theme and its story
6	Writing up	Analytic narrative and compelling data extracts are woven together to tell a story about the dataset that addresses the research question

Reflexivity

RTA positions researcher subjectivity and reflexivity as pivotal for successful RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022), where RTA of quality acknowledges the researcher's role in knowledge generation and the researcher "owns" their perspective (Elliot et al., 1999). As such, the researcher took part in their own interview using the same SQUIN prior to interviewing participants. This allowed the researcher to examine their narrative of working in a SCH and make more visible their own experiences that might shape how they engage with participant data. A personal narrative portrait was also constructed (Appendix Q). The

researcher kept a reflective diary (Appendix R) and engaged frequent reflection about the research process and personal impact during supervision throughout each stage.

Double coding, exploration of thematic maps and theme names in supervision, and frequent reflection throughout the research process helped to explore whether researcher experience was limiting engagement with the data, consider alternative views and meaning, and clarify researcher thinking (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Researcher Positionality

I acknowledge my position as a White British, cisgender woman who has worked as an Assistant Psychologist in a welfare SCH prior to my role as a trainee clinical psychologist. While at a welfare SCH, I witnessed the often difficult and challenging work undertaken at all levels of the institution. I felt protected from many of the risks due to my role and worked on a project to explore the wellbeing of staff within the setting as many of my interactions with staff highlighted experiences of hardship and an absence of support. I had very little interaction with other welfare SCHs and was curious as to what other homes, and staff experiences, were like.

I also acknowledge my position as someone who is passionate about sharing people's stories, especially in areas where those stories may not have been as heard, and considering the context in which those stories may have been constructed.

Narrative Portraits

Thematic methods have been criticised for overlooking context and individuality (Ayres et al., 2003). Thus, narrative portraits were constructed to make individual narratives visible (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020) and acknowledge the context of the interview and the relationship (Appendix P) which may have influenced the story shared at interview. This

method has been applied successfully to numerous qualitative methodologies (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020).

Results

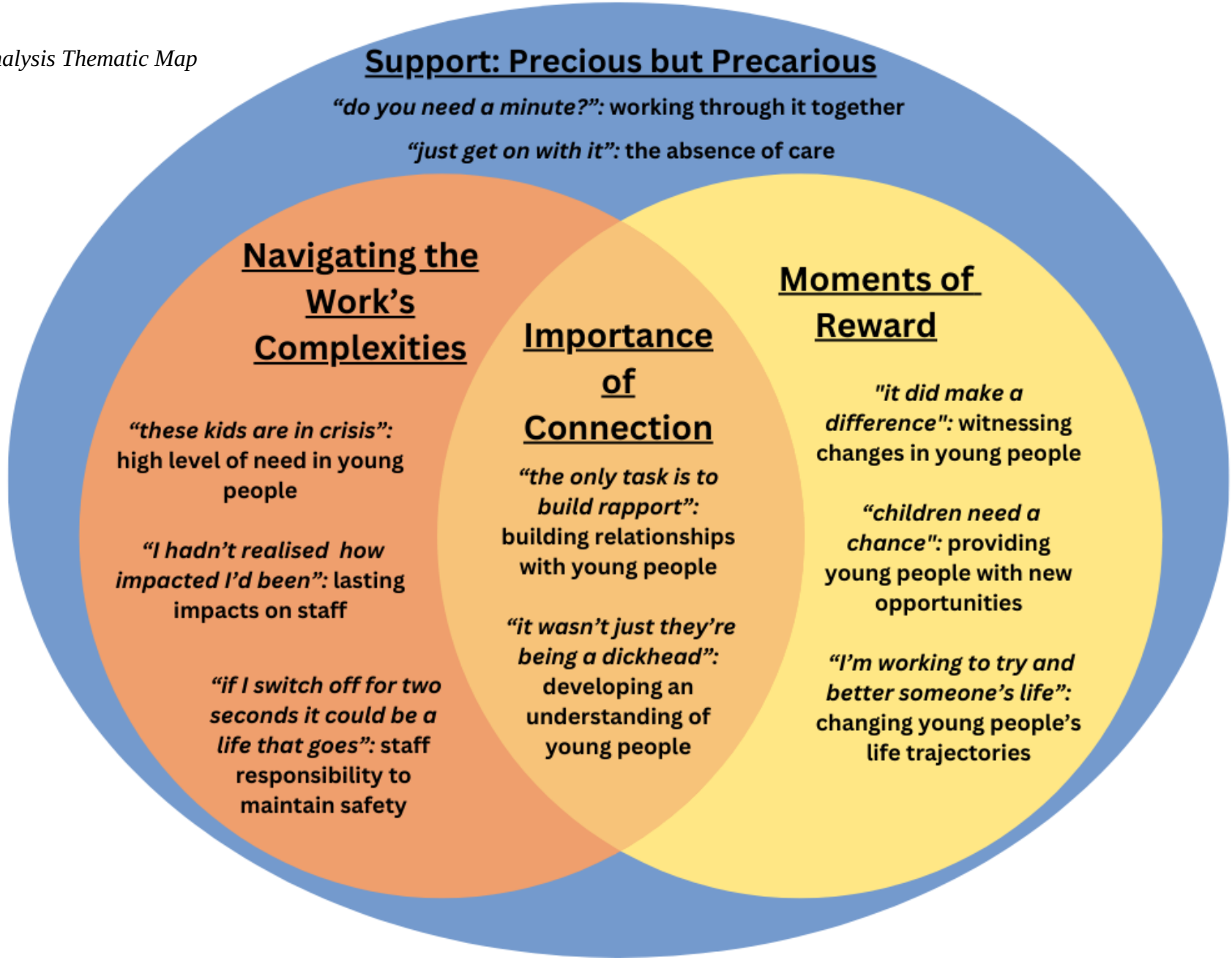
The group analysis resulted in four main themes: *Navigating the Work's Complexities*, *Importance of Connection*, *Moments of Reward* and *Support: Precious but Precarious*. These main themes and their subthemes (Figure 1) will be discussed in turn.

Navigating the Work's Complexities

Participants spoke of the difficulty and complexity of their work. This theme incorporates these experiences with the subthemes: *"These kids are in crisis": high level of need in young people, "I hadn't realised how impacted I'd been": lasting impacts on staff,* and *"If I switch off for two seconds it could be a life that goes": staff responsibility to maintain safety*.

Figure 1

Group Analysis Thematic Map



"These kids are in crisis": high level of need in young people

Staff described the high level of complexity and need present in the young people. Grace referred to some young people having *"severe attachment issues"*. Staff spoke of an awareness of the chaos the young people may have witnessed and how this had negatively impacted them:

> "*I think a lot of them have been moved around quite a few placements, so they might have gone from one care home to another. And I think they've possibly either not had the time to build those relationships" (Ellie)*

Phoebe spoke about how challenging it could be to manage the intense and competing needs of the young people:

> *"If you've got one really violent, you've got one really sexualised and you've got one mental health who smashes the unit up. That combination of young people, is just going to exhaust everybody."*

Young people were often described as "high risk", with numerous stories of self-harm and violence towards staff. These incidents were difficult for staff to manage, practically and emotionally, even for experienced staff members:

> *"I've seen it and heard it, every single form of self-harm. People think self-harm, "No one does that." Well they do. I've seen a kid put chilli sauce in their own eye" (Toby)*

> *"The violence we face from young people as well makes the job really tough ... I mean I've had… something like 38 assaults in 18 months" (Phoebe)*

"I hadn't realised how impacted I'd been": lasting impacts on staff

Staff shared the traumatic experiences they had encountered. Several female members of staff spoke of the impact of being involved in restraints:

"It was a really traumatic experience, like I can't imagine how it felt for the child, because it was traumatic for the staff involved as well" (Bella)

"It was also really difficult at that point to see these very vulnerable young people at times being restrained. And the impact that I could see that it was having on them was having an impact on me" (Hayley)

Staff spoke of navigating the competing demands of the institution to manage high risk behaviour and care for vulnerable young people. Expectations of staff to be involved in potentially harmful practices troubled staff, with Grace voicing her concern of *"retraumatising"* young people. Hayley shared a powerful personal theme of moral injury, with a deep unrest at the potential wrongdoing in staff practice:

"I just thought that was awful. And it felt like shit. And I was not happy at all about the way that it went down... I don't think it needed to happen. I don't think the restraint needed to happen" (Hayley)

Additionally, several staff members spoke of the lasting impacts of working with young people with high levels of distress where staff could be subject to acts of violence. This permeated their lives outside of work, including their sense of self and home lives:

"That really takes a toll on you. Mentally and physically. I've just had acupuncture on my shoulder today from an injury, where I was stuck in a corridor and my panic alarm failed" (Phoebe)

This theme was more present in the accounts of male staff members and may suggest gendered differences in how staff discuss the difficulties of the work and how it impacts them:

"It was like me emotions were very, very sensitive from the assault, and being ex-army, being a bloke… and having confidence in my ability was kind of shattered" (Craig)

"I think I can't remember how many relationships are destroyed from holding everything in and being too focused on here 'cause it's like, I didn't really care for anything on the outside" (Lewis)

The staff members who no longer worked in secure talked about needing *"years"* to *"process"* their experiences, finding themselves impacted in ways they did not anticipate. It appeared that time away from the institution gave them space to reflect on their experiences and recognise the work's impacts:

"A song played and it made me just go ugh and I felt like oh my gosh, and it was the song that just reminded me of being back there that I really reflected on, this was awful" (Hayley)

"… find myself being hyper vigilant, I found myself the other day picking staples out of a letter and [laughing] I was like, what are you doing [Grace]?" (Grace)

"If I switch off for two seconds it could be a life that goes": staff responsibility to maintain safety

The high level of threat, and the subsequent anxiety, within the institutions were present in staff accounts. Some spoke of being *"hypervigilant"* and *"on edge"* in the role, and having *"to be on the ball all of the time"*. During the interview, Ellie paused when we heard people walking past the room (Appendix N):

> *"You're always watching. When they think you're not watching, you're watching and when they think you're not listening, you're listening. […]. Seeing little changes, body changes, anything that's going to give away that they're going to strike out" (James)*

Hypervigilance also applied to the staff's own behaviour and managing young people's risk. Staff shared their fear of incidents of self-harm and violence, and how, to manage this threat and the anxiety that came with it, staff behaviour could become reactive.

> *"It's constantly in your mind- I think, this is going to be triggering, this is going to be triggering… And then I'd worry, about the cameras, even though we're not doing nothing wrong it's like 'What if I do, do something?'" (Bella)*

The discomfort with the level of incident avoidance was particularly prevalent in staff who had left:

> *"By the end I felt it was, you go straight in, there's no time to wait, you just go in and restrain" (Hayley)*

> *"There's sort of some shifts, you just felt like… the purpose of the shift was, let's get through this shift without an incident, and then it'll be a successful shift" (Grace)*

It felt difficult to balance reacting restrictively to an escalating situation and waiting too long to act. In their work, the consequences of mistakes could be as extreme as a fatality, which was alarming:

> *"I remember when I was on me nights… it take me forever to settle because I'd lie in bed like have I done my job right? … and it's like I was waiting for someone to call me and say "we've got a dead kid what have you done?"" (Lewis)*

In the high-pressure environment, where staff did not have time to think and threat and anxiety were rampant, staff expected to be blamed if something went wrong. This was especially relevant to staff who had seniority, and felt the pressure of responsibility:

> *"I can't say that I'm gonna come there and be a senior and lead a shift when I'm just too tired, because if a mistake's made, that's on me" (Phoebe)*

Importance of Connection

Staff talked about how forming connections with young people could help manage the work's challenges. However, building and navigating relationships with complex individuals posed its own difficulties. This theme incorporates the subthemes: *"The only task is to build rapport": building relationships with young people* and *"it wasn't just they're being a dickhead": developing understanding of the young person.*

"The only task is to build rapport": building relationships with young people

Relationship building was extremely important in staff's experiences. It was thought of as their main task and thus, much time and energy could be dedicated to navigating the challenges of trying to model a positive attachment figure. The nature of caring for young

people continuously meant staff had plentiful interaction with the young people, which could naturally grow rapport:

"We're kind of in the privileged position of, you know, seeing them most days" (Kate)

"They're there everyday that you're coming you're probably seeing these more than you go home and see people at home" (Lewis)

However, the young people often felt mistrustful of adults and especially professionals, which made relationship building more challenging, demanding time and energy from staff to challenge narratives of adults as unsafe:

"Then I was sat in that admissions room with her for six hours before she said a word to me. And I was just, I was adamant I was gonna [laughs] I was gonna get something" (Lewis)

"When young people come here, is just, you know, trying to convince them that we're not enemy" (Kate)

To build these relationships through a process of trust, staff highlighted the importance of being authentic and honest, bringing themselves to their work and using their own personal experiences to shape their interactions with young people:

"They see that you're a human being as well. You're not a robot. You're a human person" (James)

"Be honest with them. Be you, don't be something dif- Because the kids will see right through you like an x-ray" (James)

Staff shared the conflict between the dual-purpose of the institution in both caring for the young people and providing consequence for their behaviour. Similarly, the conflict between the vulnerable and violent aspects of the young people:

"It just felt like we were blurring the lines between I'm meant to be someone that she should be able to talk to and help her with, to then to have to come in and restrain her" (Hayley)

"After being headbutted in the face, was probably my thirty second assault by this one young person. I decided that I was going to report it to the police… which was really hard because you do build a relationship with these young people no matter what" (Phoebe)

Despite the challenges, multiple staff spoke about the attachments they formed to young people, and how they *"miss"* those that had left:

"I still keep in contact with her, she rings us probably about once or twice, three times a month… I look forward to hearing from her to be honest, I really do, because we did have a good relationship in the end" (Rob)

"I think so much still about the young people that I worked with... it's, definitely one of those jobs that sort of properly… get under your skin" (Grace)

"It wasn't just they're being a dickhead": developing understanding of the young person

Staff spoke about how developing an understanding of the young people and their stories was crucial in deconstructing the negative narratives that could be attached to them,

especially on paper. Grace described challenging behaviours as *"survival mechanisms"* and staff spoke about the *"incredibly sad"* things young people may have *"been through"*:

> *"You think, my God, in their short space of time on this earth they've been through hell" (James)*

Utilising formulation was transformative in gaining an understanding of the young people's stories, growing empathy, and holding compassion. This allowed staff to challenge societal narratives of young people in the CYPSE as "*violent*" or "*trouble*" that may have influenced their own perceptions of the young people, and the young people's views of themselves:

> *"Having spent that bit more time with him than some people in hearing more of his story and sort understanding, maybe some of his behaviour more like, I, I never found him, threatening in his presentation. But, you know, to other people he did, present like that" (Grace)*

> *"I like to see the child first see the young person because you can't make a judgment on what somebody's wrote down on a piece of paper... Besides, I don't know why they've done that. And I think that's the big difference now, as we see the young person behind the behaviour." (Lewis)*

Moments of Reward

Despite the hardships, staff spoke to the enjoyment and reward of the work. Many shared how they loved their job. This theme incorporates the subthemes: *"It did make a difference": witnessing changes in young people, "Children need a chance": providing*

young people with new opportunities and *"I'm working to try and better someone's life": changing young people's life trajectories*.

"It did make a difference": witnessing changes in young people

Recognising the changes in young people, however small, were important in staff experiences of success. The ability and frequency of witnessing these changes were influential in staff feeling the difficulties were manageable. This was especially present when staff could witness changes in previous service users, and could feed beliefs around the institution having benefits:

> *"He's been going out swimming, which is something you couldn't ever imagine him do, when in even three, four months ago you couldn't imagine him going out swimming in the community, because his risk's so high" (Bella)*

> *"There's some young people when they leave, and you think, I don't think feel like I've done anything for that young person. And then they call you back in two months' time and tell you how well they're doing. And you think, Oh, my God, it did make a difference." (Phoebe)*

"Children need a chance": providing young people with new opportunities

Acknowledging the difficulty young people may have faced, staff enjoyed providing young people with new and fun opportunities. Seeing the pleasure in young people was meaningful and brought joy. James and Grace spoke about offering opportunities that the young people may have *"never had":*

> *"So you make it fun for the kids because possibly their parents or the adults around them have never gave them that bit of fun…" (James)*

"Just developing like, a tiny little bit like, a sense of self even, and, and sort of like letting a, you know, facade slip slightly and being feeling that you could be yourself. And having the opportunity to sort of succeed, even if it's like, on a very sort of minimal level" (Grace)

"I'm working to try and better someone's life": changing young people's life trajectories

The possibility of genuine and meaningful change in a young person's life was powerful and felt the most rewarding part of the job. Being able to connect with the values basis of their job appeared pivotal for staff to hold on to the rewarding aspects of the work, throughout the challenges:

"The job feels like it has purpose. And actually, a lot of our young people... have gone on to have real success stories" (Phoebe)

"For me when we achieve good outcomes for the young people, it's the most rewarding thing, it's what we come to, to help. They ring up quite often keep us in the loop of with how they're getting on and things like that, which is really, really nice to hear" (Bella)

Support: Precious but Precarious

Permeating staff accounts was their experiences of support, or the lack of it. This theme wraps around all staff experiences, influencing how they related to the other aspects of the work. This theme incorporates the subthemes: *"Do you need a minute?"* and *"Just get on with it".*

"Do you need a minute?": working through it together

Support was seen as highly important to staff experience. The sense of togetherness with colleagues was powerful, especially when others outside of the organisation were unlikely to understand the uniqueness of the environment:

"The people in my team are brilliant, really supportive, always checking in to see how you're doing, "are you managing okay?"" (Ellie)

"The first time I got hurt in [secure unit]..., I remember sitting in the office, and … being comforting not like over the top or anything, but I suppose just like that, being comforted by people who you knew... like, knew how it felt" (Grace)

The experience of feeling supported by colleagues and managers was hugely impactful in staff feeling that, even when managing highly distressed young people, the work was manageable. Being given permission to take time to process their experiences and lessen the lasting negative impact on staff and their lives was significant:

"I guess it's keeping your game face on while you can in a moment and then having those safe spaces and debriefs and supervisions and stuff, so to reflect on that and not taking that kind of stuff home with ya is really key for me" (Bella)

"If we have an incident, everyone sort of gets a "you okay?... Anyone hurt? Everyone alright? Anyone need a minute? Anyone need to go and get a drink?"... there is a lot of care around the building for the staff as much as the young people" (Lewis)

Other important support structures were discussed such as support from psychology, practical team discussions, debriefs and reflective practice. The discussion of these structures

differed depending on the individual and the culture of the SCH, with some SCHs having more developed support structures and overarching therapeutic environments. Regardless, these were seen as beneficial in developing resilience, understanding, and feeling cared for:

> *"I just went boom, hit rock bottom and all that but then the bonuses of here is we have the psychologists that are here aren't just the kids they're for us" (Lewis)*

> *"We have debriefs more or less straightaway. "How do you feel? Do you feel okay? How did it happen? Could we have done something different?" What works better with him, could be different for somebody else" (Rob)*

Staff also spoke of the support they felt from their leadership teams as separate from the support received from residential care colleagues. Thus, the power leadership staff held appeared influential in the perceptions of support:

> *"I've always felt the door's wide open. I can go in for anything, if I've got an issue at home or what or an issue with work they're always approachable" (Rob)*

> *"I'd ask him a question and he'd say, "I empower you to make that decision," and I used to absolutely hate it. I rang you, I rang you for support, … But that really built my confidence in decision-making" (Bella)*

"Just get on with it": the absence of care

While experiences of positive support were influential to staff members, feeling unsupported and uncared for were similarly impactful on staff and how they viewed the work. This was particularly present in Hayley's experience (Appendix P), where she shared

the significant role feeling unsupported, by leadership in particular, played in her decision to leave:

> *"Whenever I was involved in any restraint, there was never discussion. There was never any debrief. There was never any "how you feeling after that, because that must have felt awful". It was just the expectation that this is part of your job role. This is what you do and back on" (Hayley)*

> *"If I'd had a bit more support, and they were willing to talk to me and willing to maybe go do you know what, we recognise that you've been battered a little bit and maybe you just need a little bit of time off, or to be away from the unit doing something else. I might have been able to go on for a little bit longer" (Hayley)*

While leadership's absence could result in feeling unsupported, the judgmental presence of leadership could also be damaging to staff wellbeing, with staff feeling criticised and undermined. Both Hayley and Phoebe's individual accounts included difficulty managing feelings of not being supported, and had a sense of burnout:

> *"I don't think I ever was praised or given good feedback around anything that I might have done at the time. And if I'd done something wrong, you'd be pulled up for it but not anything if they saw anything that you might have done right" (Hayley)*

> *"Then a manager will come down, and talk to them, and they'll overturn what you've done. And you think, what, what's the point? What was the point in all of that if you're just gonna... do that" (Phoebe)*

The experience of team cohesion was important in feeling supported. Conversely, feeling separate was difficult for staff and could result in the job feeling more exhausting and less enjoyable. For example, Craig talked about feeling *"lonely"* on his return to work when he did not feel integrated into his new team:

> *"no one's speaking to me… it was like I was kept on the out, I was outskirts of boundaries of the group"*.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of residential staff working in welfare SCHs. Utilising Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the following main themes were developed: *Navigating the Work's Complexities*, *Importance of Connection*, *Moments of Reward* and *Support: Precious but Precarious*. The themes were complex, co-existed and influenced each other; navigating complexities was imperative in how staff related to the other main themes. If staff's experience was of feeling supported, their experiences of connection and reward were greater, with the complexities not necessarily being less difficult but feeling more manageable. Whereas, if staff's experience was of feeling unsupported, the moments of connection and reward could not balance the complexities, and hardships felt less manageable.

Navigating the Work's Complexities

Staff spoke of the complexity and difficulty of working with young people who could be seen to be "in crisis". The intense level of responsibility, experiences of hypervigilance and fear of blame were discussed, in addition to the physical and psychological impacts of the work that could permeate staff's lives. This was particularly noticed by staff who had left and had time away where they could reflect. Results alluded to differences in how difficulties

were spoken about based on gender. Male staff tended to speak less about the emotional impact of navigating complexities, with female staff reflecting more on the impact on how they felt.

The difficulties detailed in staff accounts fit with already established ideas of the challenge of working with traumatised youth (Andersson, 2019; Ellis & Curtis, 2020; Goldson, 2002; Ireland & Huxley, 2018; Lane et al., 2023; Rose, 2014), with increased risk of burnout and secondary trauma resulting in high staff turnover (Ireland & Huxley, 2018; Lane et al., 2023; Macfarlane, 2020; Neuman & Gamble, 1995), and high levels of emotional labour in secure accommodation (Andersson, 2019; Ellis and Curtis, 2020). This study builds on this knowledge with rich examples of these difficulties evident in SCHs.

Staff were fearful of being blamed for mistakes and could appear averse to risk. Cultures of blame have been noted as prevalent in hierarchical, functional structures that have less employee involvement in decision-making (Khatri et al., 2009), which are often prevalent in SCHs. Working in organisations with anxiety-inducing tasks results in staff using social defences to defend against this anxiety such as detachment from feelings, ritual task performance, or avoiding confrontation (Menzies, 1960; Rose, 2014). Ellis' (2018) research also found risk aversion in staff, commenting on how this could impact their connection to both young people and staff. In such high-pressure environments, staff do what they can to protect themselves.

Importance of Connection

Forming connections, building relationships, and developing an understanding of young people's stories were important in staff experiences. This process could be both challenging and rewarding, amplifying the complexity of the work.

Research has recognised the importance of relationships with staff as opportunities for "pro-social role modelling" in shaping a young person's development, with young people themselves reflecting on the benefits of these relationships on their life (Rose, 2014). Developing an understanding of young people's stories can help shape these relationships with empathy and understanding (Rose, 2014) whilst also improving staff knowledge, confidence, and motivation with the treatment plan (McKeown et al., 2020). The opportunity to hear young people's stories through formulation challenged the dominant societal narratives of young people in secure accommodation as "violent" (Andersson, 2019; Ellis, 2016; Goldson, 2002), enabling staff to connect with the trauma young people experienced and how they learned to survive. These perceptions, and subsequent connection, helped shape the way staff understood the young people and how they related to them.

While relationships were important to the work, Ellis and Curtis (2020) found that staff utilised distancing strategies between themselves and young people to reduce reliance on them and the possibility of burnout. Rose (2014) also noted that staff could cut off from young people or develop relationships that blurred professional boundaries in response to the work's intensity. This amplifies the complexity of staff's role, the need to build meaningful relationships with the young people for their own job satisfaction as well as service user benefit, while also protecting themselves.

Moments of Reward

While the work could be difficult, experiencing rewarding aspects of the role were extremely important to staff, particularly as a reason to come back to work when things were tough. Staff spoke of being able to provide new experiences for young people with difficult pasts and seeing the value in trying to better their lives. While the work could be challenging, the group experience was it worth it even for the small changes they witnessed in young

people. This was amplified further when previous young people were in contact, and staff could see their lives having been changed for the better. Holding on to these successes was paramount in reassuring staff of their value.

The Anna Freud Centre's (2022) evaluation found that 89% of staff (strongly) agreed that they were enthusiastic about their job, despite the high stress and burnout reported. This has been noted in other forms of care work, where the "intrinsic satisfaction" of making a difference offset negative aspects of the job (Hebson et al., 2015). With the integration of SECURE STAIRS, staff reported feeling more empowered and cared for through supervision, training, and reflective practice (Anna Freud Centre, 2022). This stresses the need and benefit of these structures for staff wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Support: Precious but Precarious

Overarching staff experiences were their perceptions of (lack of) support. This was extremely influential in whether staff felt able to manage the particularly difficult aspects of the work. Support from colleagues was highly valued. Lack of support, particularly from leadership, was powerful in shaping staff's experiences, and appeared more prevalent in the accounts of staff who had left. As previously mentioned, current staff may defend against difficult experiences to help them cope (Addy et al., 2023; Dobson & Perry, 2019; Menzies, 1960; Rose, 2014), part of this may include denying their feelings of being unsupported or not recognising this. In an institution where young people can be labelled as violent, it may be hard to appear vulnerable. This may also be influenced by perceived societal stigma around vulnerability and mental health difficulties (Vidourek et al., 2014), reducing the likelihood of requesting support.

Previous research has shown the benefits of supportive environments for staff working with young people with complex needs (Anna Freud Centre, 2022; Taylor et al.,

2018), including the valued support of a more experienced colleague (Rose, 2014). Addy et al. (2023) highlighted the benefits of reflective practice within the CYPSE in improving staff confidence, their ability to reflect, and reducing their stress, whilst also enabling staff to bring awareness to their defences. Staff have also reported that supervision, training, and reflective practice are beneficial in feeling cared for and empowered in the CYPSE (Anna Freud Centre, 2022). This fits with SECURE STAIRS' aim of a "reflective system" with "skilled", "resilient" and "cared for" staff (Taylor et al., 2018) and suggests that these structures are also important in staff retention.

Staff accounts did not include the experience of supporting others and how this could be protective or depleting. This is curious as staff spoke of the connection with young people being both rewarding and complex. Staff were possibly focused on the primary task of caring for young people and did not consider the impact of supporting one another to realise this task. This could be a psychic defence of the system (Menzies, 1960). Staff have spoken of their need for each other and their humour to protect against hardships, so it may be difficult to acknowledge this interaction may be draining. While SECURE STAIRS emphasises a reflective "whole-system approach" (Taylor, 2018), the absence of reflection on the impact of providing support serves as a reminder that integration of this framework is varied and not yet substantive across SCHs and the wider CYPSE.

Dissemination

The study was shared in an oral presentation by the primary researcher at the European Congress of Psychology 2023. The researcher will also offer to share the findings with the participants, participating SCHs and wider CYPSE network, through oral presentation and written handouts. The project will be submitted for publication to Residential Treatment for Children & Youth.

Strengths and Limitations

This study is one of the first to explore, in-depth, the experiences of residential staff working in welfare SCHs, giving voice to a restricted and under-researched population. The inclusion of staff across multiple SCHs enabled exploration across SCHs, allowing differences in experiences to be shared. Further, the inclusion of staff who had left also allowed for exploration of different insights. By privileging the voices of residential staff, this study expanded on the current, sparse, knowledge of SCHs. Using the BNIM allowed unheard stories from hard to access settings to be told; participants responded well to the method, suggesting BNIM could be a beneficial method within closed cultures such as the CYPSE.

This research highlighted the struggles staff could face, particularly around their own health and wellbeing when working with young people with complex needs. The direct impact of staff's own experience of mental health difficulties had not been evidenced before. Additionally, this study highlighted how social narratives of the young people in secure accommodation influenced how staff perceived and related to them, especially in their experiences of threat, fear and how it impacted on their health. Most importantly, this study demonstrated that there is not a single story but a complex compilation interacting to make up the experiences of staff in welfare SCHs. Thus, this paper presents a holistic view of staff experience that can be used to inform what staff support could look like in these settings.

Due to the sampling method, it is possible that participants may have had particular experiences they wanted to share. As such, more subjugated narratives may be missing from this study. Additionally, interviews often took place in the participant's workplace at their request. Therefore, the stories constructed may be different to if they took place outside of those conditions as narratives are shaped by the context (Shotter, 1993). Participants who had

left shared accounts of their trauma responses, and the time taken to process their experiences, especially due to the frequent lack of space and time to reflect while working. Current staff may feel unable to share subjugated narratives due to fear, lack of space to process, or application of social defences.

Theoretical Implications

Results suggest residential workers are required to consider numerous aspects of attachment theory while working in the CYPSE, as their own personal experiences are activated, and the task of connection is paramount albeit challenging due to young people's complex needs. Further, the process of connection could be more complex, considering staff may have been unconsciously drawn to this work due to their own unresolved experiences with trauma and their unconscious desire to repair this through repetition and reversal processes (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008). This could lead to increased emotional impact on staff and risk of burnout, stressing the need for the organisation to hold space for staff to explore and process the dynamics at play within the system (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008). This is also evidenced by the importance of staff experiencing support.

The experiences of difficulties highlight the level of emotional demand on staff when supporting young people with complex needs and the emotional labour required to fulfil the primary task of continuous care. Staff spoke of the high levels of threat and anxiety operating in the system and realising how impacted they had been by the work only after they left. Staff noted how they could end up "reactive", unable to engage in creative thought characteristic of a paranoid-schizoid system (Halton, 1994) where the organisation is overwhelmed (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008). These factors suggest the utilisation, unconsciously, of social defences to manage the intense emotions within the system (Menzies, 1960). Menzies (1960) also suggested that a discrepancy between the system's collective defences (the social

defences) and the individual's own defences could lead to a breakdown in relationship with the system. Thus, participants who left may have experienced a distancing between their own way of managing the emotional impact of the work, and the social defences, leaving after a repair was not possible.

Clinical Implications

The present study highlights the pivotal role of staff support in managing the difficult elements of working in the CYPSE, celebrating successes, and forming beneficial connections with young people. Using reflective practice, formulation, and trauma-informed training in the CYPSE has helped staff feel more confident in their work (Addy et al., 2023; Atkinson et al., 2023), and a trusted supervisory relationship can help to reduce burnout (Lambert et al., 2012; Wallbank & Hatton, 2011). Compassionate leadership has been influential in staff feeling emotionally safe and able to manage the demands of emotional labour (Newman et al., 2009). While this study focuses on the experience of residential staff, leadership staff engaging in their own reflective practice may help to foster the "reflective system" that SECURE STAIRS aims for (Taylor et al., 2018) by modelling the importance of these practices and exploring their own experiences. It is also important that these practices are available for all staff, including leadership, as disempowerment and social defences can be present at all levels in the institution and paranoid-schizoid systems can prevent thinking regardless of position (Halton, 1994; Menzies, 1960).

Additionally, it is essential that comprehensive support is available to staff considering the influence of staff's personal life experiences on their perceptions of the work, the young people, and feelings of being able to manage. This is especially important when the young people are highly vulnerable with complex needs; staff themselves are at risk of physical and

psychological harm; and staff may be unconsciously enacting trauma patterns due to their own histories (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008).

Whilst established training has explored trauma-informed practice in secure settings as part of SECURE STAIRS (Atkinson et al., 2023; Farooq et al., 2021), this research suggests training which explores, embeds, and deconstructs dominant socio-cultural narratives around young people in secure accommodation (such as young people as violent) is needed as these narratives influence how staff relate to the young people. This implies that while SECURE STAIRS was an important beginning in the implementation of formulation-driven, trauma-informed approaches, it has overlooked how influential socio-cultural narratives are in staff constructing perceptions of the young people and the work. Further support and compassionate challenge is needed in this area and could be provided by clinical psychologists, supporting the reflective development of staff and the organisation. Now that the implementation of SECURE STAIRS has concluded, this study raises the question, who is reviewing and holding the CYPSE accountable for the ongoing development of essential staff support and exploration of influential narratives?

The structure of the institution must enable "systems of listening, thinking and containment" (Aiyegbusi & Tuck, 2008, p.25) by accounting for engagement in these essential practices. For example, staffing levels need to account for individuals taking time away from young people to attend reflective practice and formulation sessions. To enable exploration of narratives within the institution and themselves, and consideration of their own experiences, staff need time and space factored into their work.

Directions for Future Research

Findings suggested there may be gender differences in staff perceptions of the work's difficulties. Future research could explore the role of gender in shaping staff stories of

difficulties, and the dominant societal narratives. For example, whether societal narratives of masculinity influence staff's perceptions of the emotional impact of challenging aspects of the work such as physical restraint.

This study has alluded to staff's own personal life experiences influencing their stories of working in the CYPSE and relating to the young people. Further research could explore staff's own experience of mental health difficulties and adverse childhood experiences, as this is likely to shape the way they relate to vulnerable and complex young people. It is important to understand this further to help support staff and ensure quality of care.

Finally, exploring experiences of other types of staff working in SCHs could help to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of staff who may have different professional training and support systems as a result (such as psychologists with their own clinical supervision), and may hold more power in the institution.

Conclusion

This is the first study to explore, in-depth, the lived experiences of residential staff working in the CYPSE. Staff shared how forming connections with young people can be challenging but is beneficial to challenging their previous attachments and helping to understand them. Amongst other aspects of the work, these relationships can be rewarding, and help staff to see the work's value. The role of support was hugely influential in how staff experienced the SCH. Therefore, it is imperative that systems support staff through formulation, reflective practice, supervision, and training exploring not only trauma-informed care and attachment but dominant societal narratives that influence how staff relate to the young people in their care. This can help foster a reflective culture and enable staff to feel cared for, in accordance with SECURE STAIRS (Taylor et al., 2018). However, further

research is needed to develop our understanding of working across the CYPSE, and how staff's individual contexts may influence their experiences.

While residential staff's work can be extremely challenging, the reward of the positive moments of change and connection are powerful aspects of reassurance that their work holds value in benefiting a young person's life and the hardships are "worth it in the end".

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Section C: Appendices

Appendix A: Coding Extract

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Appendix B: Reflective Diary Extracts

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Appendix C: Quality Appraisal of included studies using the CASP Qualitative Checklist

	Study	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	How valuable is the research?
1	Ali & Phipps (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Offers novel insight. Inclusion of implications for practice and directions for future research
2	Frost et al., (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Includes direction for future research, offers valuable insights, does not reflect on limitations

3	Galardi & Settersten (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Implications for policy and practice, not explicitly discussing limitations, first study to explicitly ask about gender differences
4	Inderbitzin (2006)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Valuable insight into staff experience through less intrusive means, does not link to practice or offer discussion of limitations
5	Kinsella et al., (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Some implication for practice
6	Oostermeijer et al., (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Implications for practice and thought

										on future research
7	Paterson-Young (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Valuable insights around perceived purpose, implications for practice
8	Perry & Ricciardelli (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	No	Yes, ethics approval gained	No, analysis was not clearly outlined	Yes	Implications for practice and thought on future research
9	Salyers et al., (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Increasing knowledge in limited research pool, implication to practice directly from findings
10	Tarrant & Torn (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, although sampling not discussed fully	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Application and implications for practice, highlighting areas for future research.

	Findings valuably discussed in an applicable manner

Appendix D: Recruitment Materials

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Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet

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Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

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Appendix G: Ethics Approval

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Appendix H: Participant Debrief Sheet

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Appendix I: BNIM Notepad

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Appendix J: Using the Notepad

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Appendix K: Initial Ideas from Familiarisation

1. Threat and fear
    a. High stakes
    b. Hypervigilance
    c. Blame
    d. Risk avoidance
    e. Violence

2. Support and lack of support

3. Shifting ideas
    a. First impressions changing
    b. Societal narratives

4. Understanding of young people
    a. Trauma history
    b. Relationship building
    c. Complex needs

5. Restrictive environment
    a. Physical aspects
    b. Rules

6. Meaningful job
    a. Witnessing changes
    b. Providing different opportunities

7. Emotionally draining
    a. Intensity

8. Certain type of person can work in secure
    a. Physical characteristics
    b. Shift pattern

9. Personal experience
    a. Mental health
    b. Life events

Appendix L: Coded Transcript Extracts

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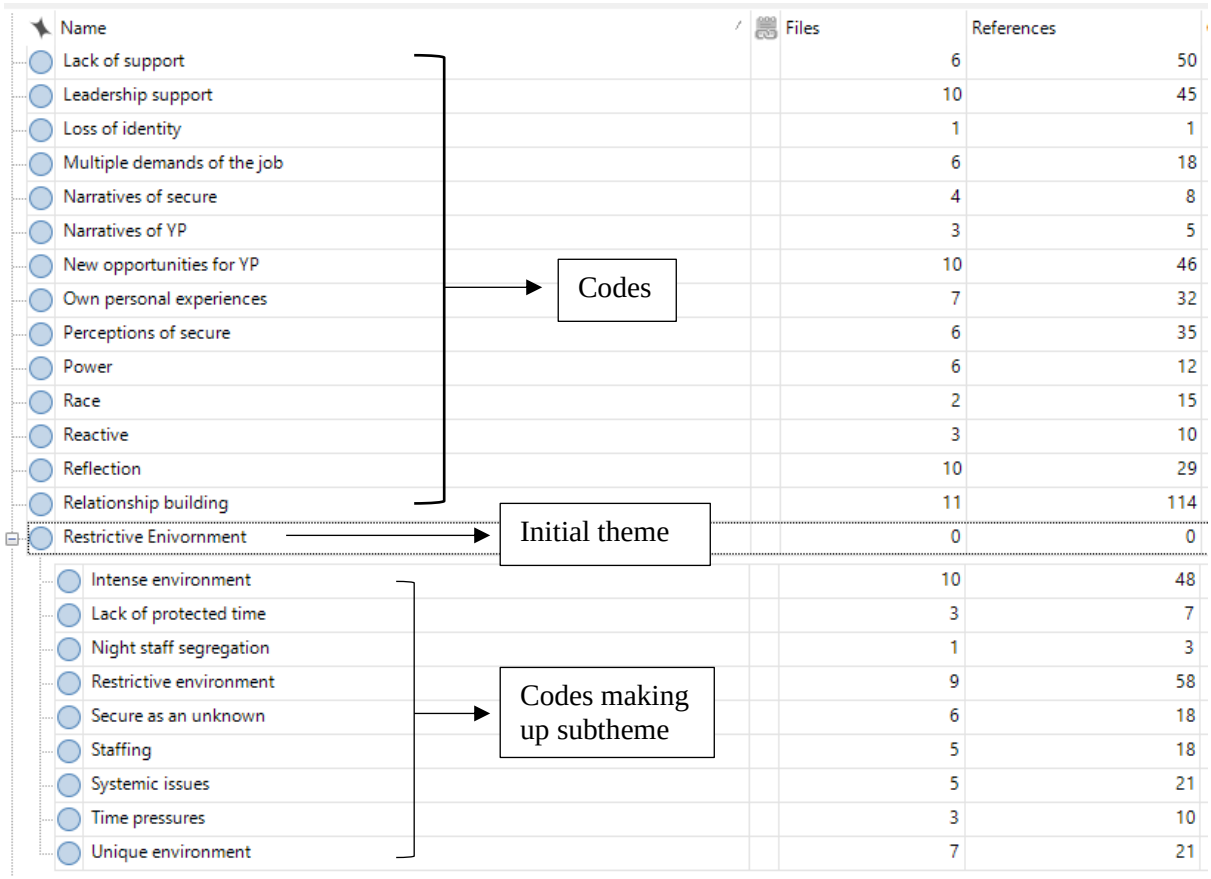
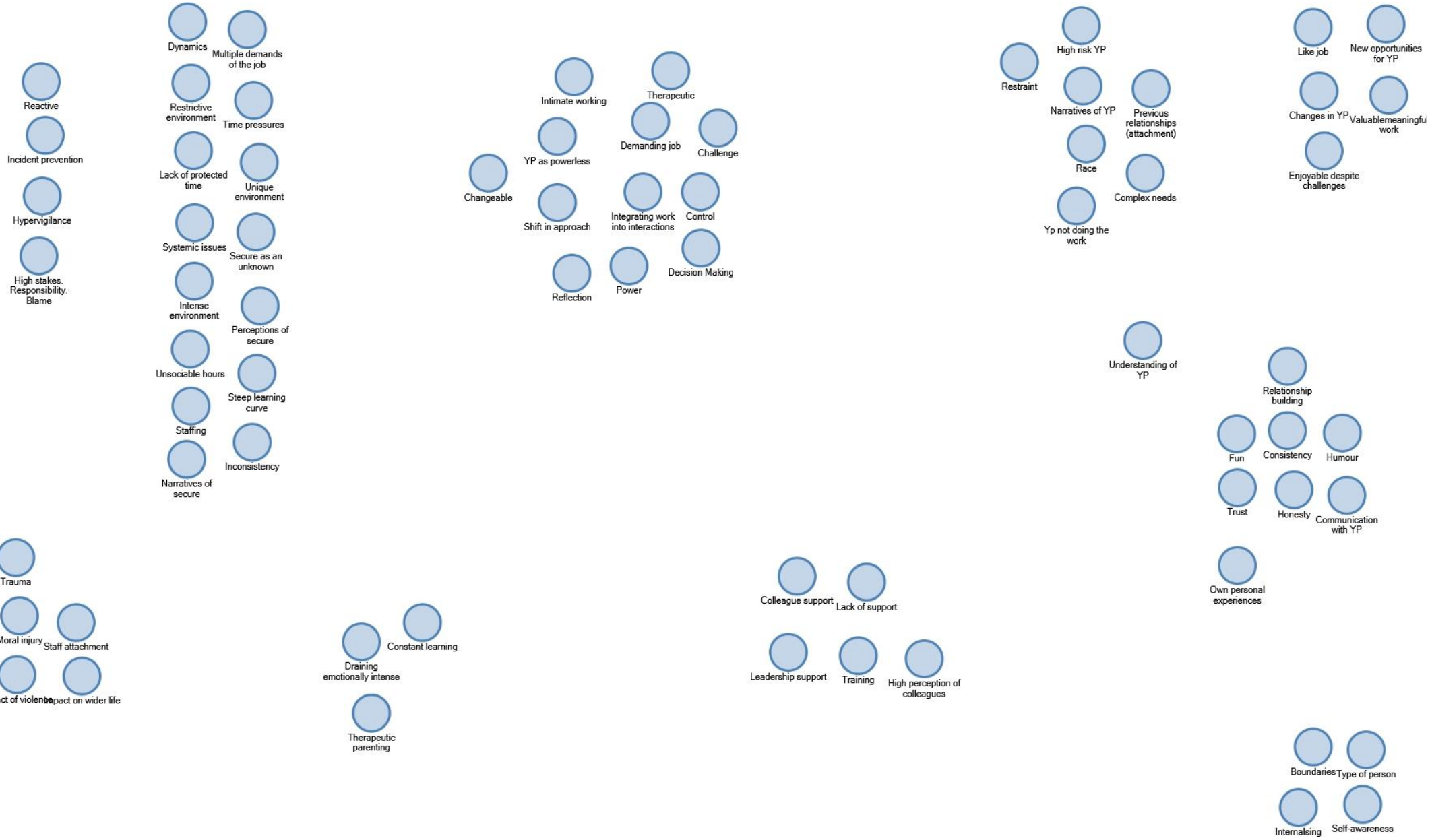
Appendix M: Theme Generation and Development

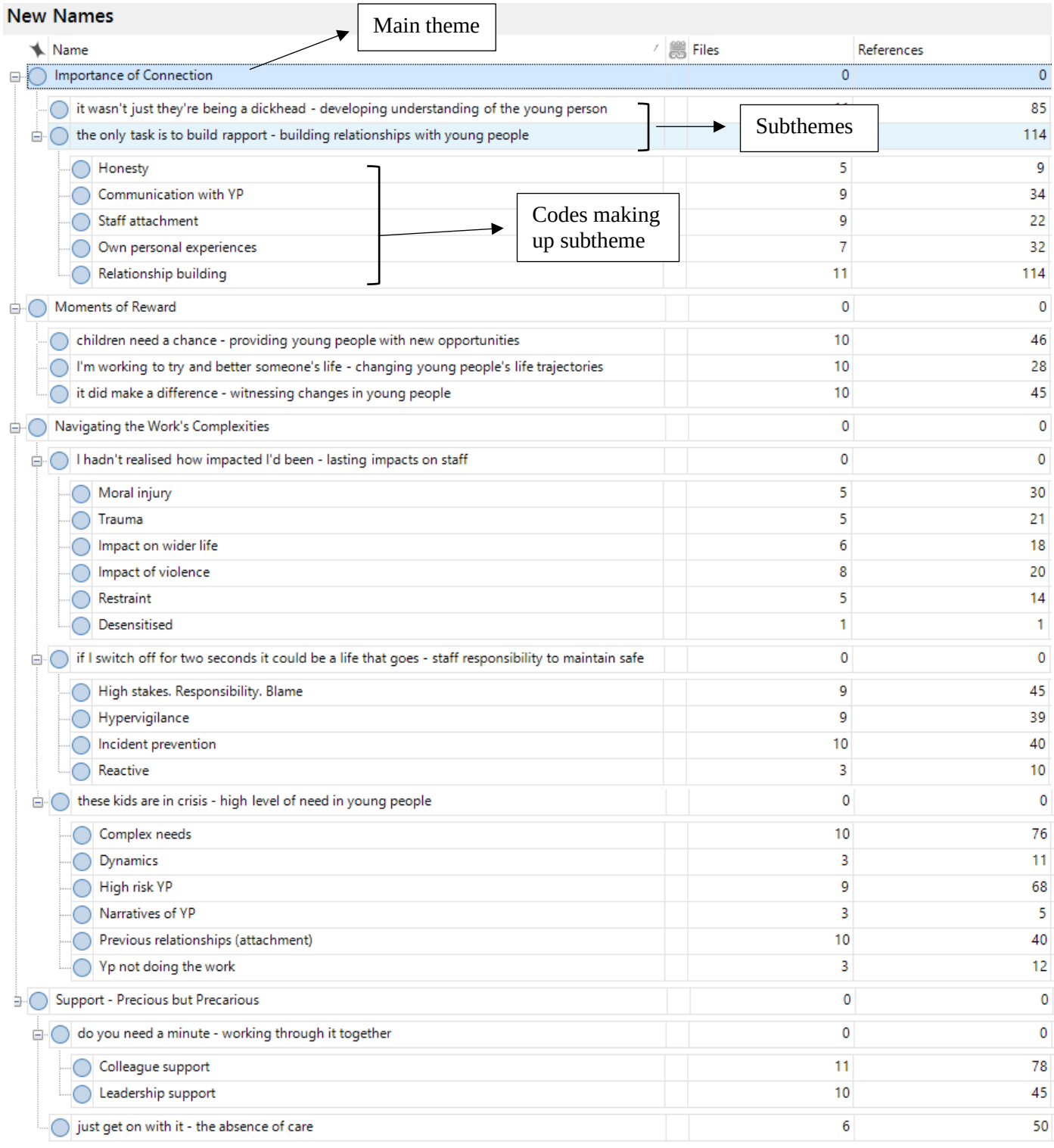
Starting to organise codes into potential themes



Grouping codes together to explore possible themes.

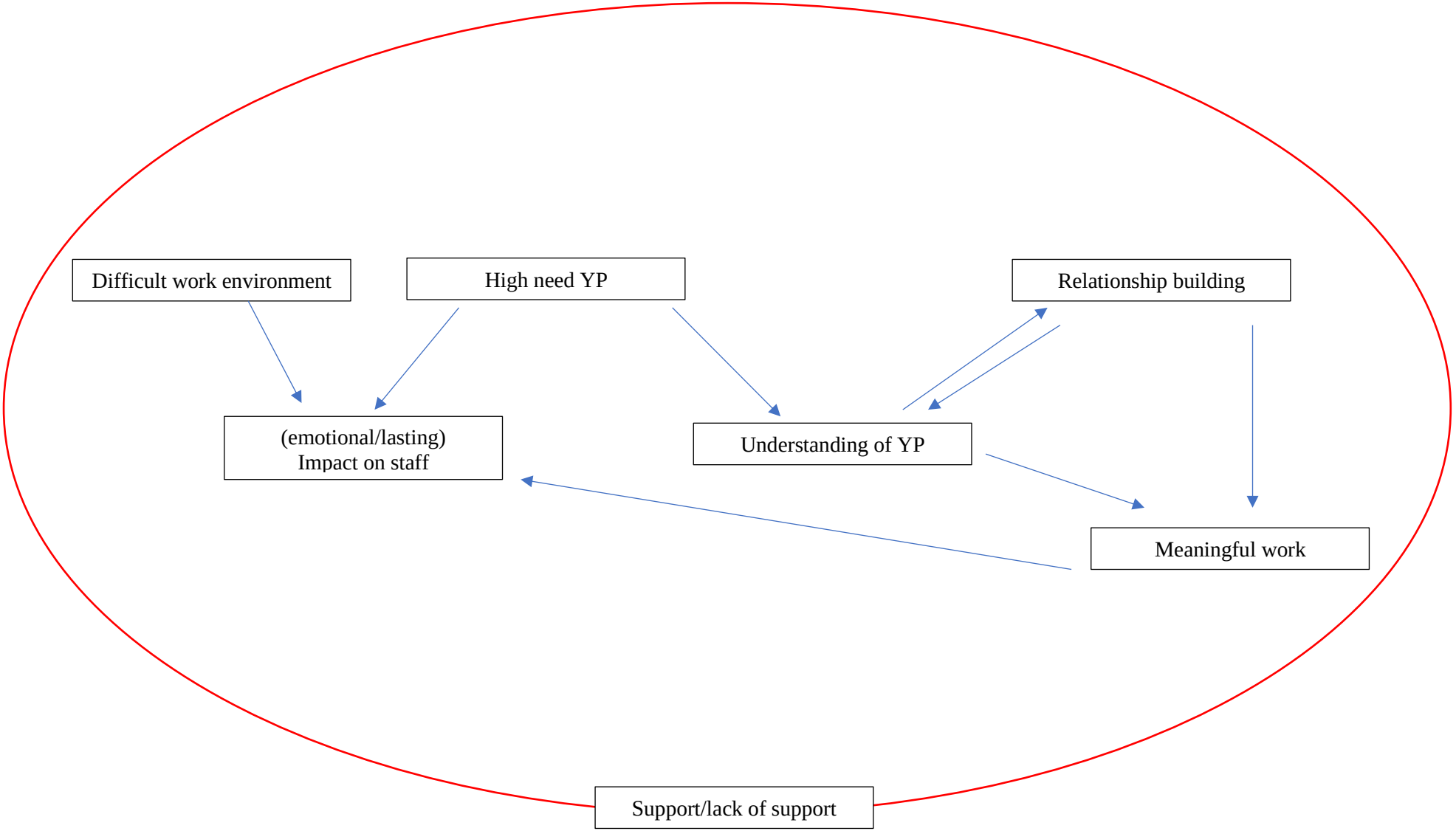


Finalised organisation of themes and subthemes

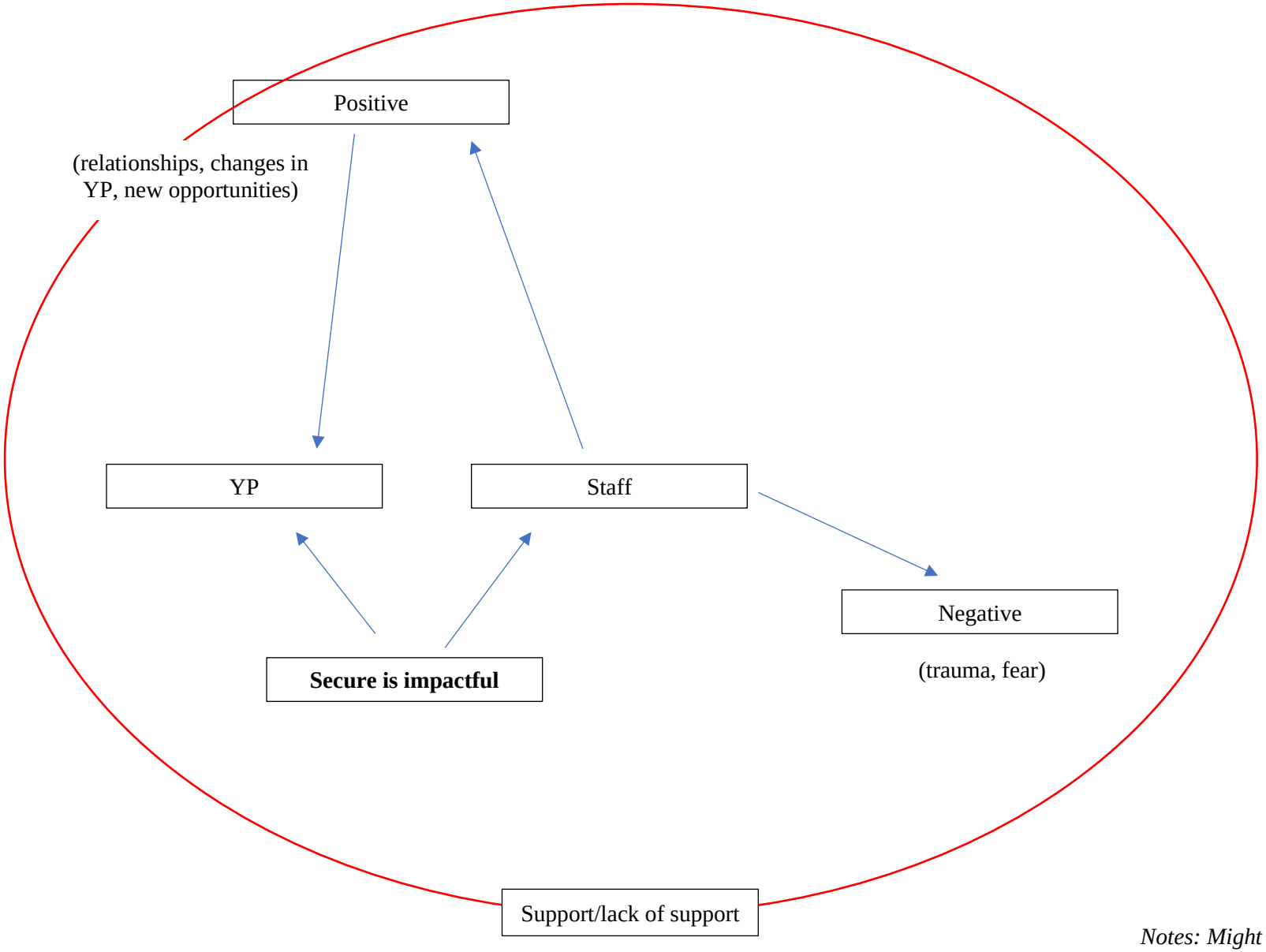


Name	Files	References
Importance of Connection	0	0
it wasn't just they're being a dickhead - developing understanding of the young person		85
the only task is to build rapport - building relationships with young people		114
Honesty	5	9
Communication with YP	9	34
Staff attachment	9	22
Own personal experiences	7	32
Relationship building	11	114
Moments of Reward	0	0
children need a chance - providing young people with new opportunities	10	46
I'm working to try and better someone's life - changing young people's life trajectories	10	28
it did make a difference - witnessing changes in young people	10	45
Navigating the Work's Complexities	0	0
I hadn't realised how impacted I'd been - lasting impacts on staff	0	0
Moral injury	5	30
Trauma	5	21
Impact on wider life	6	18
Impact of violence	8	20
Restraint	5	14
Desensitised	1	1
if I switch off for two seconds it could be a life that goes - staff responsibility to maintain safe	0	0
High stakes. Responsibility. Blame	9	45
Hypervigilance	9	39
Incident prevention	10	40
Reactive	3	10
these kids are in crisis - high level of need in young people	0	0
Complex needs	10	76
Dynamics	3	11
High risk YP	9	68
Narratives of YP	3	5
Previous relationships (attachment)	10	40
Yp not doing the work	3	12
Support - Precious but Precarious	0	0
do you need a minute - working through it together	0	0
Colleague support	11	78
Leadership support	10	45
just get on with it - the absence of care	6	50

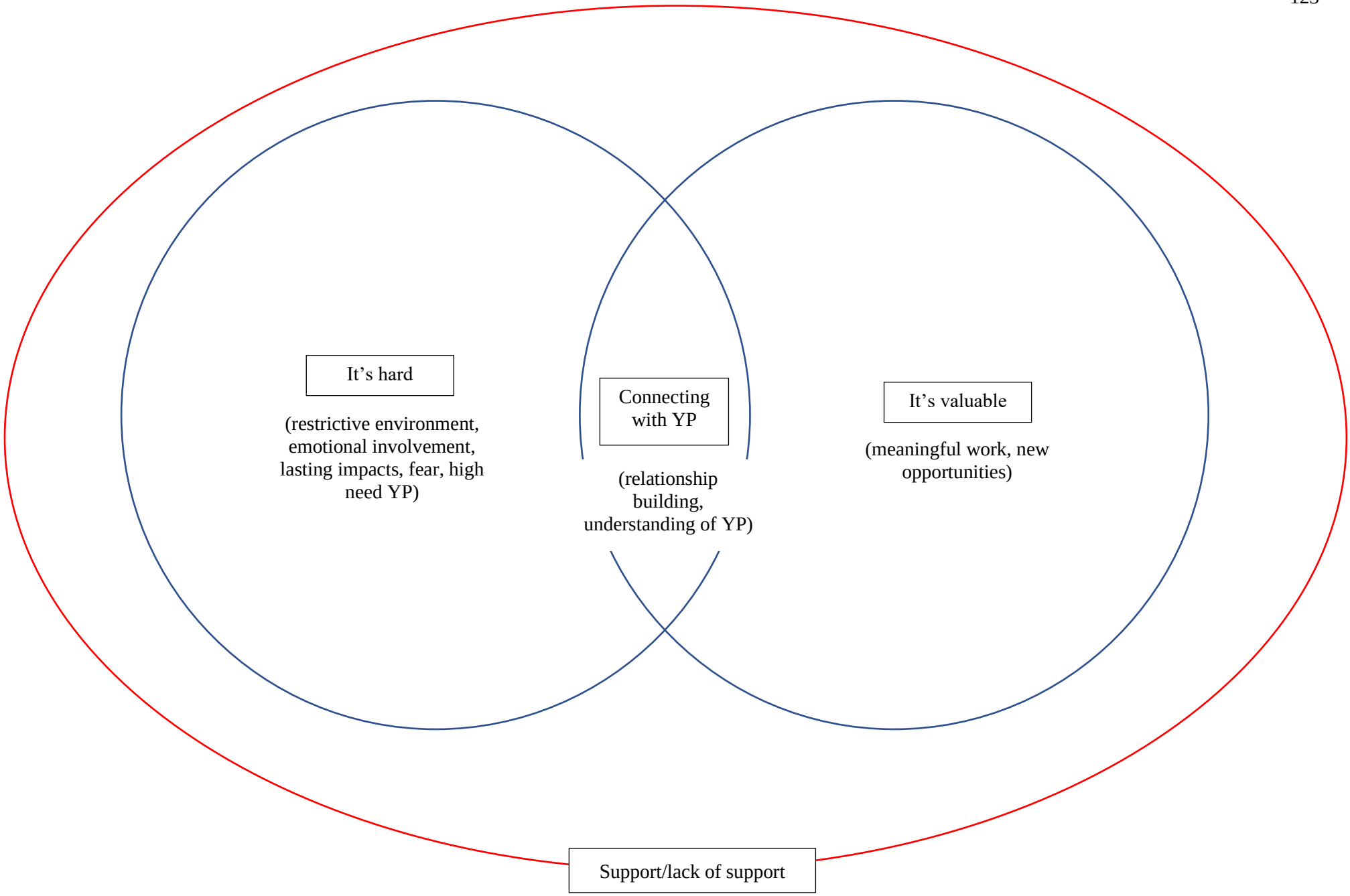
Appendix N: Thematic Map Ideas



Notes: Feels a bit messy

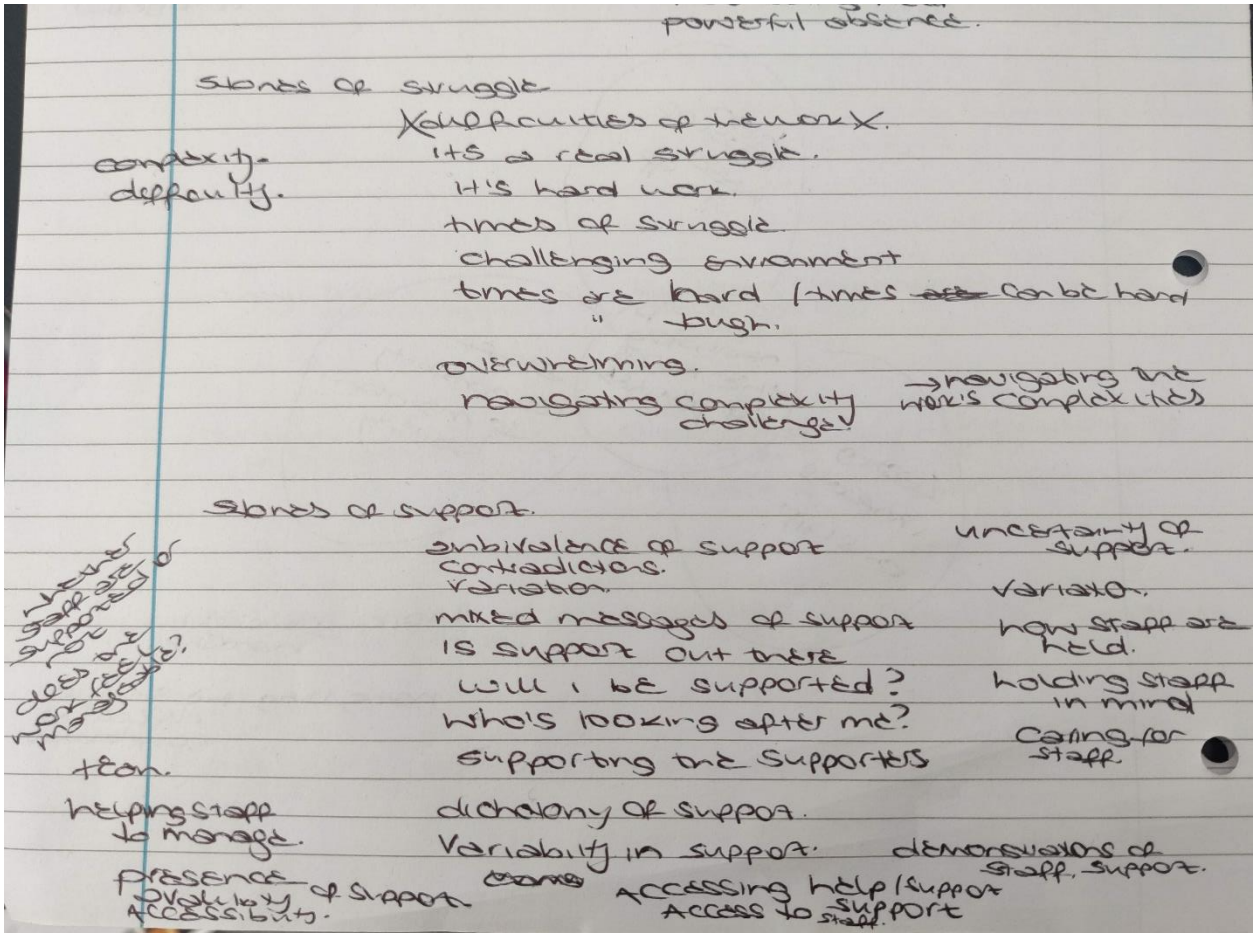


Notes: Might be missing the restrictive environment theme that I want to include



Notes: Think this is my favourite at the moment

Appendix O: Refining Theme Names



Appendix P: Participant Narrative Portraits

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Appendix Q: Researcher Narrative Portrait

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Appendix R: Researcher Reflective Diary Extracts

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Appendix S: End of Study Report

Dear Ethics Panel,

Thank you for proving feedback and approval on my project on 23rd November 2021. I have now completed my research exploring the experiences of staff working in the Children and Young People's Secure Estate. Below is a summary of my project.

Considering the sparsity of research exploring staff experience of working in the Children and Young People's Secure Estate (CYPSE), this project aimed to explore the experiences of residential staff working in welfare secure children's homes (SCHs). Eleven residential staff members across three welfare SCHs shared their experiences of working in this environment through individual interviews.

Four main themes were developed from the data: Navigating the Work's Complexities, Importance of Connection, Moments of Reward and Support: Precious but Precarious. These main themes highlighted how difficult working with young people with complex and high needs could be. The environment could be stressful with a high level of responsibility and staff could find themselves impacted in ways they did not anticipate. It was both challenging and rewarding to build relationships and understanding with the young people but it was important to hear young people's stories and challenge dominant narratives of them as violent and troublesome. Staff found reward in witnessing changes in the young people, being able to provide them positive opportunities, and in appreciation for the value of their role in benefiting an individual's life. The experience of support, or lack of, was pivotal in influencing staff's perception of being able to manage the difficult aspects of the work. When staff felt supported, the complexities were more manageable.

Results suggest that the work can be highly challenging, with staff at risk of secondary trauma and burnout. The structures of support for staff, such as reflective practice, formulation and training, are extremely important for managing these risks and supporting staff retention. Results also suggest that staff's own experiences, their context, and dominant socio-cultural narratives, are influential in shaping staff experiences and how they relate to the young people in their care.

The project highlighted implications for both future research and clinical practice. In terms of research, further exploration of staff experience is necessary to better understand this area. This could include exploration of the role of staff gender, ethnicity and personal life experience in shaping their experiences in the CYPSE. Clinical implications include the need for supervision and training to explore and deconstruct dominant narratives that can influence how staff relate to the young people. Additionally, continued robust support structures for staff are paramount in managing the complex and emotionally demanding work.

Yours Sincerely,

Fee Woodgate

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Appendix T: Journal Instructions for Authors

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