



Social Work Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (SWIPA) research network

Network information and news bulletin – No. 3 December 2024

Welcome back to SWIPA research network news

Welcome to the third SWIPA research network bulletin which provides highlights from our recent symposium and plans for 2025. Please feel free to share with your networks and encourage anyone interested who has not already signed up to our mailing list to do so.



SWIPA Inaugural Symposium

Making a difference in and creating new knowledge for social work through IPA

The inaugural symposium from the Social Work and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Research Network was held on 11th October 2024.

"Really enjoyable, range of excellent speakers, very motivational. Looking forward to learning more in the future, having now been introduced to the approach. Thank you to everyone involved in making this event possible."

Symposium Participant, October 2024

The event was opened by Dr Lisa Morriss (Editor, *Qualitative Social Work*) who continues to highlight the importance of the network for promoting robust IPA studies in the field.

"I am glad that I have found a network at last that shares my interest in using IPA and the evolving development of IPA. There is a strong sense of the growth of this community and it is exciting!"

Symposium participant, October 2024

An overview of Social Work and IPA

Professor Sarah Vicary (The Open University) provided one of the two keynote addresses outlining the trajectory of IPA as a methodology, fit with social work (see Figure 1) and looking to the future.

Social work and IPA: a good 'fit'

Social Work approach	IPA approach
Starts where the person is	Starts where the person is
Balance between having empathy whilst maintaining a critical stance	Balance between having empathy whilst maintaining a critical stance
Takes place where the person is, (although arguably increasingly online)	Takes place where the person is, (although arguably increasingly online)
Values-driven. Upholding respect for the dignity, expertise and viewpoint of others	Values-driven. Upholding respect for the dignity, expertise and viewpoint of others

Figure 1 Slide detail from Sarah Vicary's presentation

"IPA is a really good fit with SW dependent upon your research aim and Question"

Symposium participant, October 2024

Ziggy Stardust, extraordinary jobs and a professional learning ecosystem

Dr Gillian Ferguson (The Open University) followed with a further keynote address exploring the power and potential of IPA research for transforming thinking and practice in social work organisations.

Gillian considered how the holistic model for IPA social work studies (Vicary and Ferguson, 2024) integrated a pathway to real world impact within carefully designed studies.

Gillian used an example from her research, shown in Figure 2, which outlined how evidence from the lived experience of social workers' learning in the workplace had engaged social workers and employers in Scotland.

What is the structure and texture of lived experience?

sights, sounds, smells, taste, touch

commitment to the unique and individual social workers

Learning experiences as a complex web

Journey of the self

Navigating landscape and place

Navigating tasks

Learning through the body

Learning through others

Practices and conceptions of learning

Learning by chance

'When David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust'

Reconceptualising workplace learning for social workers

Gillian Ferguson¹

Abstract: This article draws on social workers' experiences of and meaning of these lived and striking metaphors. That reconceptualising workplace learning is woven from connected them place, navigating tasks, learn practices and conceptions of it will show the complexity of so these can foster effective work needs valued beyond rhetoric; it reasserts the importance of direct professional learning solution.

Keywords: workplace learning; professional learning; profession

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Date of first (online) publication: [redacted]

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The importance of workplace learning for social workers

NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKER SUPPORTED YEAR IN SCOTLAND

Figure 2 Slide detail from Gillian Ferguson's presentation




Research presentations

The event shared fantastic research examples across SWIPA network members.

-  Every picture tells a story: Combining interpretative phenomenological analysis with visual research
Dr Angie Bartoli, Nottingham Trent University
-  "Managing Emotions and Occupational Demands: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Child Exploitation Support Workers"
Sarah Mason, University of Derby
-  'Everything is fear based'; Mothers with experience of addiction, child removal and support services
Dr Lynda Russell, University of Glasgow
-  'Hidden in full view'
Mary Neligan, University College Cork
-  Values Development in Transitioning Spaces: An IPA exploration of the final placement experiences for MA social work students
Dr Nikki Blundell, Liverpool Hope University

Poster presentations

We also had a fantastic series of Poster presentations. Each presenter had a maximum of two minutes to provide a spotlight on their study:

-  I am a social worker: I can't bracket or do double hermeneutics
Professor Clare Stone, Lancaster University
-  Social Work Education and Training: Preparation for working with fathers who perpetuate domestically abusive behaviours.
Charlene Chalmers, University of Edinburgh
-  Dementia, Faith, and Implications for Social Work Practice
Dr Tamara Horsburgh, University of Strathclyde
-  Experiences of Social Work Mental Capacity Assessment: A study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
Clare Brown, Lancaster University
-  Understanding how people stay in child and family social work roles – a work in progress
Lindsay Giddings, The Open University
-  'What social and demographic factors influence how professionals and families construct their understanding of child neglect?'
Frances Gunn, University of Stirling
-  Challenge and Complexity of Working with Fathers with Mental Health Problems during the Safeguarding Process
Kim Tran, University of Hertfordshire

Hearing from researchers across diverse geographic locations, practice/service settings and study areas was inspiring. Presentations sessions were chaired by network members Dr Angie Bartoli, Kathryn Baker, Andrew Barnett and Alexander Kemp. Participants were also invited to contribute ideas for the development of the SWIPA network.

"Increased awareness of the rich variety of IPA studies across SW and the opportunities for support and shared knowledge"

Symposium participant, October 2024

We will feature information and details about these research studies in subsequent bulletins. A research focus on Sarah Mason's study is featured at the end of this bulletin.

"Really enjoyed getting to hear about other people's research. It was particularly good to have such a wide variety of speakers at different stages of their research - it helped to foster a real sense of community and it felt like an encouraging space."

Symposium participant, Oct 2024



SWIPA presentations and events

SWIPA at The Open University

Sarah and Gillian have presented within the Open University research events on the holistic model for IPA in November 2024 attracting interest from colleagues across disciplines in furthering the use of IPA. Gillian and Sarah will also be running a presentation in April 2025 as part of Clinical Research Skills within The Open University as part of a seminar series. Gillian will be running IPA training for Postgraduate Researchers within The Open University in early 2025.

Forthcoming presentations and events

SWIPA first birthday celebration conversation

We will be hosting a birthday celebration on **Tuesday 18th March 2025** to mark the first year since the launch of SWIPA. We are welcoming back Professor Jonathan Smith to celebrate with us. He will be taking part in our continuing conversation about the power and potential of IPA in social work and reflecting on how SWIPA has progressed. More details and a link to join us will be circulated to network members in early 2025.

Symposium 2025

Following the success of our 2024 inaugural symposium we are delighted to announce that we will be planning to run an event on **Friday 10th October 2025**. Please put the date in your diaries, call for abstracts and booking details to follow. We are also keen to hear from any network members who are interested in being part of the organising group for the symposium.

Summer workshops 2025

Sarah and Gillian will be offering a further two free, focused workshops on social work and IPA research in 2025. These will provide a participative space to explore the holistic model for social work IPA (Vicary and Ferguson, 2024), support planning and review of active research projects. Spaces are very limited on these workshops and further details along with the application process will be circulated in February 2025.

Summer 2025 Edinburgh workshop: Designing, doing and reviewing IPA social work research in person The Open University in Scotland: Thursday 26th June 2025

Summer 2025 Milton Keynes workshop: Designing, doing and reviewing IPA social work research in person The Open University: Milton Keynes Campus: Thursday 17th July 2025

British Association of Social Work (BASW) session

Gillian and Sarah are running a session on IPA for social work through BASW in July 2025, dates and details are being confirmed and will be circulated to network members.

IPA in Munich 2025

A successful abstract *Introducing a holistic model for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in social work practice and research* was made to The European Social Work Research Association annual conference, the [European Conference for Social Work Research](#) which takes place between 12 and 14 March 2025 in Munich. Professor Sarah Vicary will be presenting the paper.



Publications

Qualitative Social Work Special Issue and editorial

We have been in conversation with the editors of the Journal [Qualitative Social Work](#) who are interested in hosting a special issue on IPA in social work. Our initial thoughts are that this issue should be based around the theme *The Power of IPA*

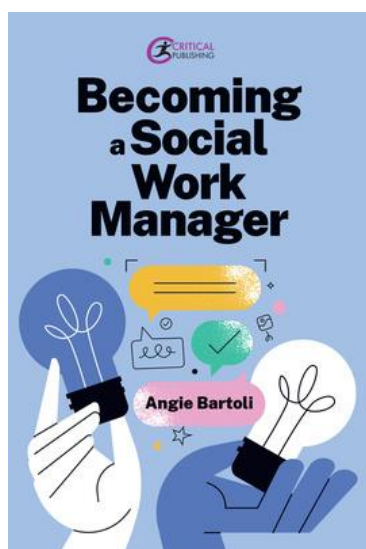
in social work. Please do share any other thoughts. Sarah and Gillian will put out a call for abstracts in 2025.

In addition, Sarah and Gillian have been approached to consider writing a guest editorial for the same Journal to discuss IPA including some of the misconceptions that exist. Professor Jonathan Smith has agreed to co-author this piece with us.

Encyclopedia of Social Work

Sarah and Gillian have now submitted their entry to a forthcoming book *Elgar Encyclopedia of Social Work* entitled Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Social Work Research. We await feedback from the editors and hope to see its publication in 2025.

Becoming a Social Work Manager

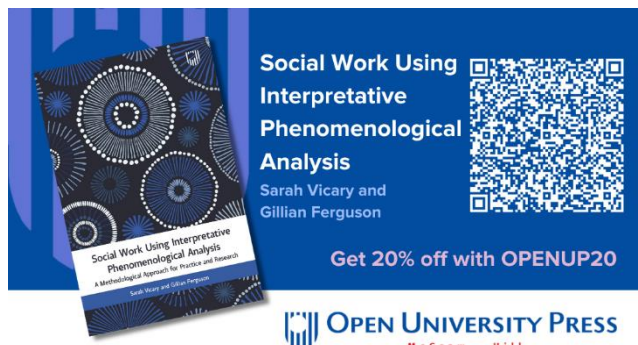


This book by Dr Angie Bartoli from Critical Publishing is inspired by her IPA research into the experiences of newly promoted social work managers. [Critical Publishing | Becoming a Social Work Manager, By Angie Bartoli](#)

A podcast is also available in which Angie discusses her research and book [The Path to Leadership: Angie – The Social Work Pivot – Apple Podcasts](#).

Social Work Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

A publisher's discount code is still available for this text by Sarah and Gillian.



Please let us know if you are involved in any forthcoming presentations, publications or events relating to social work and IPA if you would like us to share this with the network members
swiparesearch@open.ac.uk.

Managing Emotions and Occupational Demands: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Child Exploitation Support Workers

Sarah Mason and Dr Carrie Childs

The development of IPA in social work is important as it gives voice to participants whose lived experiences may have been overlooked in the past. Additionally, it is important to capture the subjective experiences of the social workforce, including those employed in the third sector, to expose their lived experiences and to reform practice-informed research and its application. One of IPA's philosophical positions is that it is idiographic, which aligns well with the ethical principles of social work such as a person-centred, holistic approach. Furthermore, IPAs commitment to a hermeneutic and reflexive methodology ensures that participants' voices are authentically represented. This research contributes to current knowledge about the everyday practices of third-sector child exploitation support workers and exposes real-world complexities experienced by these participants.

Protecting children from criminal and sexual exploitation is a priority for safeguarding teams across the globe. Supporting children who are at risk of exploitation is a demanding role with high staff turnover. Experiences of third-sector child exploitation support workers, commissioned to deliver interventions to safeguard children from exploitation, have been neglected. This study presents an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of semi-structured interviews of eight child exploitation support workers employed by a service in England. Three experiential group themes were developed that captured the emotional and occupational complexities of their experiences performing their role.

'Costs and Rewards of Emotional Labour' depicted how emotions were managed to meet the requirements of the role. 'Navigating Autonomy: The Double-Edged Sword of Empowerment and Loneliness' highlighted unique perceptions of autonomous working. "'We are in really vulnerable situations at times": Exploring Perceptions of Risk' demonstrated how, collectively, participants felt vulnerable to risks when carrying out their role. The study provides insight that these third-sector employees face similar challenges as the regulated workforce and that it is crucial that policymakers and senior managers develop safety and system improvements to increase employees' perceived and actual safety and well-being.

Mason., S and Childs., C (2024) Managing emotions and occupational demands: A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of child exploitation support workers, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 2024;; bcae173, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcae173>

Please get in touch with us if you would like to share a precis of your research. We look forward to a great SWIPA 2025.



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