A narrative exploration of the lived experience of pastoral staff employed in social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) secondary schools to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of their work

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Glossary of acronyms

Within the special educational needs' literature, a wide array of acronyms and abbreviations are used. For clarity and consistency, those used in the original policy or study have been used in this thesis, as many reflect the context of the time.

ADHD- action deficit hyperactive disorder

ASD- autistic spectrum disorder

ODD-oppositional defiance disorder

SEN- special education needs

SENCo- special educational needs co-ordinator

SEND- special education needs and disabilities.

EBD- emotional and behavioural difficulties

BESD- behaviour, emotional and social difficulties

SEBD- social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties

SEMH- social, emotional, and mental health needs

SEMH School- schools for pupils with complex social, emotional, and mental health needs, which cannot be met in mainstream schools.

TA- Teaching Assistant

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore how the experiences of working in social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) secondary schools impacts the psychological wellbeing of pastoral staff. Psychological wellbeing is a complex concept, widely used in the literature, despite the absence of an agreed definition. Extant literature has predominantly focused on teachers and pastoral staff working with pupils with SEMH needs in mainstream schools. Whilst these studies provide insight, they do not explore the experiences of pastoral staff in SEMH secondary schools. Five participants, recruited from schools in the Northwest of England, took part in face-to-face narrative interviews, conducted via video conferencing. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. As narrative research can be complex, with themes often interwoven and conflicting within stories, a two-stage analytic approach was used. The first stage focused on each individual narrative, preserving it as a whole story. The second stage involved analysis across the five narratives, identifying common themes. Both stages used Fraser's (2004) seven stage approach, enabling long sections of narrative to be broken down into themes, whilst preserving the nuances within and across narratives. The first stage of analysis identified numerous themes specific to each participant, the second stage identified three themes common across the narratives: '*It's a struggle,*' '*My emotionally dirty work*' and '*Protecting myself'.* This is the first study to explore the psychological impact of working in SEMH secondary schools, from the perspective of pastoral staff. Findings extend the conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing, encompassing feeling good, functioning effectively and the role of coping mechanisms. Findings have policy and practice implications; defined professional standards, appropriate training, and tailored supervision. An 'ethos of

care' within SEMH schools could mitigate against the impact of struggles and work perceived as emotionally dirty.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the experiences of pastoral staff working in social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) secondary schools, in relation to the psychological impact of their work. In terms of research, some attention has been given to the educational experiences of pupils attending SEMH schools (Caslin, 2019; Cobbett, 2016; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019), with other studies concentrating on the experiences of teachers, working with pupils with SEMH needs in mainstream schools (Corcoran & Finney, 2013; Rose et al., 2019). Whilst these studies provide some insight into the experiences of pupils and teachers, they do not explore the experiences of those occupying pastoral roles in SEMH schools. During the research journey, it became apparent that the reader may have limited prior knowledge of SEMH schools, and pastoral roles within them. Acknowledging this, the remainder of this chapter articulates the background and context within which the study is situated. A brief history of the role of educational policy is offered. Whilst this review does not chart the entire history of special educational need (SEN) policies, it sets the statutory context within which SEMH schools operate. It also identifies the origins of some perceptions of causes of challenging behaviour, and a detailed discussion of the nature of the challenges experienced in schools. This research is focused on a specific group of people, who work in pastoral roles within SEMH secondary schools. The job titles and exact nature of these roles can vary between settings. Section 1.5 identifies the overarching similarities in responsibilities. Clarification of the main differences between teaching, teaching assistant and pastoral roles, is also offered. In the current study, the role responsibilities, rather than the job title, have defined a role as pastoral.

A novel conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing is offered in section 1.6. The concept combines elements of emotional reactions, impact on effective functioning and the utilisation of coping strategies. This takes account of the complex, multi-layered, and subjective nature of human experience in relation to psychological wellbeing. Situating these experiences within the wider research and policy landscape results in a greater understanding of factors that impact psychological wellbeing. This unique and new knowledge adds to the current understanding of a complex and under-researched topic.

1.2 Researcher positionality

My interest in human behaviour and experiences began many years ago, long before completing a master's degree in Applied Psychology in 1994. This interest has been employed in several professional roles. In 2016, I co-founded an Independent SEMH secondary school, for pupils with a range of complex needs. Most have been permanently excluded from schools, including pupil referral units. Pupils have a range of special educational needs and mental health difficulties, and the experience of significant childhood trauma is pervasive. Often pupils are unable to emotionally regulate, resulting in explosive behaviours. The school has a multi-disciplinary team, including pastoral staff. These are the 'front-line' workers, supporting pupils when their emotional needs are displayed through aggression, violence, or disturbing acts, such as self-harm (Cubeddu & MacKay, 2017; McLoughlin, 2010; Willis & Baines, 2018). This work requires emotional resilience, compassion, and empathy (Al-Ghabban, 2018; McLoughlin, 2010).

Reflexivity is acknowledged as being integral to qualitative research. It promotes transparency, giving the reader insight into how meanings have been negotiated and

ascribed, within the social context (Finlay & Gough, 2003). The influence that my feelings, experiences, and pre-conceived ideas had on the research process is acknowledged. It is part of the reflexive process, that I share with the reader, the personal context and philosophical perspectives that brought me to this research.

As discussed in more detail in section 3.4, ontologically, I align myself with social constructivism, as I view human development as being socially situated. This combined with an interpretivist epistemology leads me to understand knowledge as something that is constructed through interaction with others (Creswell, 2007). My axiological position recognises the values-based nature of social research. Taking an interpretivist approach, I recognise that the researcher cannot be separated from the research. Through reflexive practice, which is discussed throughout this thesis, the role my philosophical positions have played in the research process have been examined.

1.3 Educational perspectives of SEMH needs

Despite the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) acknowledging that children with emotional or behavioural difficulties often experience poor mental health, the latter did not feature as a dimension of SEND until 2014 (DfE, 2014a). Since then, the prevalence of SEMH difficulties has continued to increase within the pupil population. In 2021, 17.7% of children aged 11 to 16 years had a probable mental health difficulty, an increase from 12.6% since 2017 (NHS Digital, 2021). The last pre Covid-19 survey in 2017 reports that 8.1% of 5 to 19-year-olds had an emotional disorder, 4.6% a behavioural or conduct disorder, and almost 12% a hyperactivity disorder (NHS Digital, 2018). Deighton et al (2019) found that across 97 schools and 28,160 14 to 16-year-olds, 18.4% scored above the abnormal threshold for emotional symptoms, 18.5% for

conduct problems, and 25.3% for inattention/hyperactivity. Often these pupils find it difficult to comply with schools' behavioural expectations (Hibbin & Warin, 2020) and teachers, find it difficult, if not impossible, to meet their learning within mainstream classrooms (Hibbin & Warin 2020; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes 2013; Warnock, 2005). Consequently, the number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties being permanently excluded continues to rise (Done & Knowler, 2020; Thompson et al., 2021).

As school exclusion data for the academic year 2019-2020 has been impacted by school closures relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, caution is required when assessing recent trends in the data. What is apparent is that pupils with a SEND continue to have higher rates of permanent exclusion than pupils without a SEND. In the academic year 2019-2020, the exclusion rate for pupils with an Education, Health & Care plan (EHCP), was 0.1% of the overall pupil population, 0.2% for pupils with SEN support, and 0.04% for those without SEND. In line with previous years, the highest rates, 0.61%, are amongst those with SEMH as their primary SEND. Persistent, disruptive behaviour, a characteristic of conduct disorder, accounted for approximately 35% of permanent exclusions in 2019-2020 (DfE, 2021). Pupils who are unable to regulate their emotions, and who project their hurt on to staff through aggressive behaviour were most likely to be permanently excluded (Power & Taylor, 2020). As headteachers set the standard of expected behaviour (DfE, 2016), this may indicate their reduced tolerance of behaviours that are challenging (Parsons, 2018).

Many pupils attending SEMH schools have been permanently excluded from other settings, due to challenging behaviours (MacLeod et al., 2013). Within larger mainstream schools internalised behaviour such as avoidance, social withdrawal or

self-harm can often go unnoticed (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Gill et al., 2017). The pupils in SEMH schools therefore tend to display externalised behaviours, which present greater challenges in school environments (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). These pupils are often disaffected with education, with histories of aggression (MacLeod et al., 2013). This manifests in violence (Willis & Baines, 2018), anger, emotional intensity (Al-Ghabban, 2018), swearing (Stanforth & Rose, 2019) spitting, chair throwing and abuse (Gillies & Robinson, 2010), that is often linked to their SEMH needs (Graham, et al., 2019). Consequently, pastoral support is emotionally and physically demanding and can be dangerous (Cole, 2010; Middleton, 2018). Experiencing challenging behaviours over a sustained period can be a stressful, and sometimes negative experience (Willis & Baines, 2018).

People experience a range of emotional responses to these challenges. Some feel ambivalence towards pupils, especially those that oscillate between being overly clingy and dependent, to being aggressive and threatening (Gillies & Robinson, 2010; McLoughlin, 2010). Others are shocked or distressed by disclosures made by pupils (Edwards, 2016; Partridge, 2012), some can feel sadness that insufficient time is available to support pupils (Stoll & McLeod, 2020). These emotions can induce feelings of stress and helplessness (Willis & Baines, 2018). In their ethnographic study, Gillies and Robinson (2010) discuss how their own emotions fluctuated from sympathising with pupils, to feeling horrified by behaviours such as spitting and violence. Despite the literature describing these pupils as dangerous (Cobbett, 2016), angry (Edwards, 2016), aggressive (Gillies, 2011) and emotionally disturbed (Danforth, 2007), there is no agreement of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour (Armstrong, 2014; Carroll & Hurry, 2018). This may be due to the context in which behaviour occurs and the judgements of those involved (Graham & Harwood, 2011;

Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). Without a shared understanding of the nature of unwanted behaviours, it is difficult for staff to know the appropriate response (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019).

The causes of violent and aggressive pupil behaviour are widely explored in the literature (MacLeod, 2006; Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). Discourse within educational contexts often echoed a child deficit model, where the problem is firmly located within the pupil (Caslin, 2019; Hart 2013; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2020; Stanforth & Rose 2020). Caslin (2019) traces the antecedents of this perspective to the medical model of disability, which locates challenging or disruptive behaviour in the individual's psychopathological makeup. The origins of the medical model can be traced back to the Education Act (1921). The language is shocking to the modern-day reader. Children with special educational needs were described as "*blind, deaf, defective or epileptic*" (Part V). The local education authority had a duty of identifying children who were "*defective*" but not "*idiots or imbeciles…dull or backward*" (Part V, p34) and "*who could benefit from instruction … provided for defective children*" (p35). The Education Act (1944) cemented the medical model by introducing the term "*special education treatment*" (p33) and labelling pupils who were experiencing emotional difficulties as "*maladjusted*" (p33). The publication of the Warnock Report (1978) signalled a move away from such terminology. This largely arose from growing concerns about stigmatisation and the recognition that societal factors also played a part (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). Despite this shift, the most recent SEND Code, (DfE & DoH, 2015) uses the term 'mental health difficulty', implying acceptance of a medical model perspective that fails to acknowledge significant environmental factors (Caslin, 2019; Lehane, 2017).

How people respond to challenging behaviours can depend on what they perceive to be the cause. Situating fault for unacceptable behaviour can result in less compassionate responses from school staff (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019). MacLeod (2006) offers a perspective where pupils are viewed as "*bad*", "*mad*" or "*sad*" (p159). The '*bad*' perspective blames a deficit within the child for the unacceptable behaviour. The child's poor moral character being seen as the cause of oppositional or defiant behaviour (Danforth 2007; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019). The deficit model has the effect of shifting the focus of concern from the social environment to the individual (Caslin, 2019). "*Sad*" pupils are regarded as being victims of their environment or social situation (MacLeod, 2006). Stanforth and Rose (2020) named this perspective the "*social model of disability,*" (p1256). They suggest that the antecedent of challenging behaviour is society's failure to adapt to the needs of the child. The third perspective, "*mad*" reflects the medical model of disability (Norwich, 2014; Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Challenging behaviour is assumed to have an underlying psychopathology (Caslin, 2019). The child is often forgiven, being viewed as not responsible for their behaviour (MacLeod, 2006). Stanforth and Rose (2020) argue that both the social and medical models are oversimplistic and ignore multiple, often co-existing causes. Psycho-medical models of challenging behaviours do not take account of social factors or assign notions of agency to pupils. The complex causes of troubling behaviours can result in educators holding the conflicting views that pupils are responsible for their behaviour, whilst viewing them as incapable of making changes to conform to societal norms (MacLeod, 2006). Where school staff have sufficient knowledge of the child's specific context and environment, greater understanding of challenging behaviour was shown to the pupil (Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Recognising behaviour as a form of communication (Bennathan & Boxall 1996;

Warin, 2017) produced a more nuanced understanding of the underlying, and socially linked causes of challenging behaviour (Gillies, 2011; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis 2013; Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Attempting to understand the root causes of behaviours can avoid SEMH needs going unnoticed, misinterpreted, or misdiagnosed (Armstrong, 2018; Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Rae et. al., 2017). Where challenging behaviour is framed within the context of individual needs and difficulties, rather than as deliberate acts of defiance, a more compassionate school community can emerge (Al-Ghabban, 2018; Broomhead, 2016; Stanforth & Rose, 2020).

1.4 Labels and stigma

Labels are social constructs that exist in a specific cultural and situational context. They enable humans to make sense of their environment and share their experiences and understanding (Mowat, 2015). Much has been written about the positive and negative impact of ascribing labels to children with SEMH needs (Caslin, 2019; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021). Some pupils and parents welcome labels that flow from diagnosis, such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), as this can explain the perceived behavioural differences (Caslin, 2019: Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). Labels become problematic however, where they cause a person to be stigmatised or diminished (Goffman, 1963). Labels used in the SEMH context are often nebulous, inexact, and stigmatising (Broomhead, 2016; Norwich, 2014). School staff can have preconceived expectations that a pupil's behaviour will be difficult, defiant, or aggressive (Armstrong, 2014). Often a direct link is made between unwanted behaviour and the SEMH label, with little exploration of other potential causes (Broomhead, 2016; Caslin, 2019; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021; Sheffield & Morgan, 2017). Such labels can have serious implications for the pupil,

including school exclusion (Caslin, 2019; Hibbin & Warin, 2020). Kinderman et al. (2013) suggest that an account of the actual difficulties experienced by pupils is of greater value than a diagnostic label. This chimes with Armstrong (2018) who emphasised the importance of focusing on the difficulties pupils have in their day-to-day life, rather than on the condition itself.

When pupils adopt the characteristics assigned by labels, it can be stigmatising and become part of the identity by which they are defined (Broomhead, 2016; Caslin, 2019; Mowat 2015). Stigma, which Broomhead (2016) calls "*courtesy stigma*" (p61), can extend to staff working in SEMH schools. She attributes this to their relationships with pupils, illustrating the broader stigma and negative perception of SEMH needs in wider society. Analysis of government policy, stretching over decades, provides insight into how stigma has become engrained within the legislative fabric. The SEN code (DfE,1994) adopted an inflexible and coercive approach when considering the needs of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Gray & Noakes, 1998). The subsequent code (DfES, 2001) introduced "*behaviour, emotional and social development*" (BESD) as a SEN classification, with pupils being described as,

> "…withdrawn, or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive, and lack[ing] concentration: those with immature social skill; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs" (p.87).

The BESD classification was removed following a government consultation undertaken as part of the presentation of the Green Paper, "*Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special education needs and disability*" (DfE, 2011). The reference to 'behaviour' was deemed to be unhelpful, as behavioural difficulties of themselves are not indicative of a SEN (Norwich & Eaton, 2014). '*Behaviour*' has not been included as an aspect of SEN/D in subsequent codes (DfE, 2014; DfE & DoH, 2015). The SEMH

classification introduced in 2014 was not a direct replacement for BESD (DfE, 2014a). The data and analysis of these classifications are therefore not directly comparable. Given the passage of time, one may have expected the acronyms of EBD, BESD and SEBD to have become obsolete. However, while many researchers use the new SEMH classification in their work (Carroll & Hurry, 2018; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2020; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019; Syrnyk, 2018), this is not universal. Several scholars continue to use the EBD (Warin, 2017) and BESD descriptors (Sheffield & Morgan, 2017; Broomhead, 2016) long after these classifications were dispelled from policy documents. To complicate matters further, terms including BESD and SEMH, are often used interchangeably and further acronyms and terms such as SEBD (social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties) (Caslin 2019; Hibbin & Warin, 2020; Norwich & Eaton, 2015; Rae, et. al., 2017) and ESBD (emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties) (Burton & Goodman, 2011) are routinely used. Even critics of labelling, such as Caslin (2019), use the SEBD acronym, arguing it is part of general SEND discourse. Hibbin and Warin (2020) and Tellis-James and Fox (2016) argue that SEBD distinguishes behaviours that emanate from SEMH needs from other difficulties arising from these SEN/D's. The sustained focus on '*behaviour*', illustrates its enduring perceived relevance within education (Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021; Norwich & Eaton, 2015).

1.5 Pastoral roles

Since the introduction of the government's Every Child Matters Agenda (DfE, 2003), schools have been assigned greater responsibility for the pastoral care of pupils (Harris, 2006; Edmond & Price, 2009). Objections to teachers taking on caring and therapeutic roles (Ecclestone, 2011) included concerns about limited time available to

deal with welfare matters (Littlecott, et. al., 2018; Mackenzie, 2012), and feeling ill-equipped to support pupils' emotional wellbeing (Knightsmith, et al., 2014; Partridge, 2012). Consequently, the number of pastoral positions within schools increased (Andrews, 2006; Calvert, 2009).

The variety of job titles that have arisen for non-teaching roles can cause boundaries between different responsibilities to become blurred, making defining and differentiating between positions difficult (Calvert, 2009; Edmond & Price, 2009). Confusion can arise between teaching assistants and pastoral roles, as some teaching assistants perform some pastoral duties, such as managing behaviour (Clarke & Visser, 2019), running nurture groups (Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019) or responding to pupils' emotional crises (Partridge, 2012; Purdy, 2013). The primary duties undertaken by most teaching assistants is supporting teaching and learning, rather than pastoral responsibilities (Skipp & Hopwood,2019).

The current study explicitly acknowledges that teachers, teaching assistants and pastoral staff may have different experiences. The focus and expectations differ (Fitzsimmons et. al., 2019), as do the dominating anxieties experienced by different professions (Armstrong & Rustin, 2018). The research focus is, therefore, on staff who are employed in dedicated pastoral roles (Kelly, et al., 2020), spending most of their time supporting pupils' emotional wellbeing and personal safety (Partridge, 2012), and helping them to understand and articulate their feelings and emotions (Jones 2020). The emotional intensity of supporting pupils with SEMH needs is well documented in the literature (Edwards, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). However, Middleton (2018) argues that there remains a lack of

recognition, within schools, of the extent of the emotional and physical intensity inherent within the pastoral role.

1.6 Conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing

Although widely discussed in the literature, there is no agreed definition of psychological wellbeing. Many definitions focus on subjective well-being, which Diener (1984) suggests encompasses satisfaction with life, with high levels of positive affect, and low levels of negative affect. This hedonistic perspective does not explore the causes of subjective wellbeing (Anglim et al., 2020). Other conceptualisations of psychological wellbeing, such as Ryff's (1989) dimensions, relate to effective functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001) by drawing on eudaimonic perspectives. Within the literature there is widespread acceptance that the theoretical concept of psychological wellbeing is complex and multidimensional, involving an intricate interplay of emotions and effective functioning (Huppert, 2009; Quick & Henderson, 2016; Ryff, 1989; 2014). The current study offers a conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing that encompasses different perspectives. This combines the hedonic perspective of achieving personal happiness by avoiding pain (Carmeli, 2009), a eudaimonic perception that life is purposeful, being lived congruently and effectively (Ryan & Deci, 2001) and achievement of '*self-realisation*' (McLellan & Steward, 2015, p310). Together, these aspects enable people to feel good and function effectively (Huppert, 2009; Huppert & So, 2013; Tappolet & Rossi, 2014). A third, and unique element of this conceptualisation, examines the role of ego defence mechanisms, (Freud, 1894), in the experience of psychological wellbeing. An exploration of each of these concepts is now offered.

Emotions play a central role in psychological wellbeing (Huppert, 2009; Zeidner et. al., 2012). They are often experienced as transitory, intense feelings and reactions (Šimi´c et al., 2021). This often triggers behavioural and somatic responses to specific events (Gross, 2015). This enables people to anticipate and interpret complex and novel situations and apply prior learning in their response (Šimi´c et al., 2021). However, defining emotions is complex, due to their subjectivity and inter-relationship with other affective concepts, such as psychological preferences or moods (Schreiner et. al., 2021) and personality traits (Anglim, et al., 2020). As emotions stem from the activation of the individual's affective working memory and higher cognitive functioning, they are subjective and unique (Davidson & Irwin, 1999; Šimi´c et al, 2021). Within the concept of psychological wellbeing adopted in the current study, there is no expectation that people will feel good all the time, or that negative emotions such as sadness, fear or anxiety always have a negative impact on overall psychological wellbeing.

Emotional regulation forms an important aspect of subjective wellbeing. Conceptualised as an individual difference, it consists of two strategies, cognitive reappraisal, and suppression. The former changes the way an event is interpreted, and the latter inhibits behaviours associated with negative emotional responses (Katana et al., 2019; Gross, 2015). Gross (2015) argues that reappraisal tends to occur at the start of an emotional situation and suppression during the emotional experience. These strategies aim to reduce the intensity of the emotional response and can be improved via targeted interventions. Emotional arousal created in high-risk contexts can induce negative emotional responses in some people, whereas others actively embrace situations involving psychological danger (Hirschhorn & Horowitz, 2018). It is when the emotional responses erode resilience, the ability to recover

following stressful or traumatic events (Vaillant, 2011), or negative reactions persist over a long period, that psychological wellbeing can be adversely impacted (Huppert, 2009).

The second aspect of this conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing draws on Ryff's (1989) theoretical model of eudaimonic psychological wellbeing. The model consists of six core dimensions,

> "*self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth*" (p1071).

Although presented as distinct entities, these dimensions are often closely connected and overlapping (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy, are frequently interconnected (Carmeli et al., 2009). Environmental mastery reflects how people shape their physical, organisational, or emotional environments to suit their needs (Ryff, 2014). This holds relevance to the current study as schools are both physical and psychosocial environments (Willis et al., 2019). At a basic level staff must feel psychologically and physically safe and secure (Maslow, 1943). Moos' (1974) seminal conceptualisation of psychosocial environments has three key components: relationships, personal development and system maintenance and change. Building on this work, Malloy et al. (2015) added clear organisational expectations, and responsiveness to change as variables that affect employee wellbeing. There is a synergy between Ryff's (1989; 2014) dimensions and Moos' (1974) and Malloy et al.'s. (2015) conceptualisations. A supportive organisational environment, with clear and effective management and communication may reduce employee stress (Soloman & Thomas, 2013; Willis, et al., 2015), thus improve both the hedonistic and eudaimonic aspects of psychological wellbeing.

Many staff working with pupils with SEMH schools, are exposed to distressing trauma narratives (Edwards, 2016). Pastoral staff, fulfilling empathetic roles, may be at an even greater risk of experiencing vicarious distress and related psychopathology (McCormack & Adams, 2016). To understand an individual's experience of psychological wellbeing, it is necessary to explore the extent to which they believe their basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness have been met (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Autonomy can provide enhanced protection against emotional distress, as people live authentically, in harmony with their values (Ryff, 2014). Competence can be experienced as the feeling of freedom and control arising from the belief that one's actions have resulted in desired outcomes (Abraham et al., 2009). When a person acknowledges and accepts their strengths and limitations, they achieve self-acceptance and optimal functioning (Ryff, 1989; 2014). This reduces both personal (Ryff, 1989) and professional (Galvin et al., 2018) anxieties. Achieving goals (Abraham et al., 2009; Malloy, et al., 2015: Ryff, 1989) that are recognised beyond the individual (Maslow, 1943; Soloman & Thomas, 2013) can foster the belief that life itself is meaningful (Carmeli et al., 2009; Ryff, 2014). Positive relationships create a sense of belonging and connectedness, that satisfies a higher order of human need (Maslow, 1943; Soloman & Thomas, 2013). People formulate coping strategies that provide psychological protection from emotionally demanding aspects of work (Middleton, 2018; Willis & Baines, 2018). Those who experience life as purposeful, realise their potential and enjoy positive relationships, and exhibit a greater capacity for empathy (Ryff, 1989), an important quality for pastoral work (Rose et al., 2019). Engaging with challenges through Ryff's (1989) dimensions can be transformative, increasing psychological wellbeing through post-traumatic growth (McCormack & Adams, 2016).

The third aspect of the conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing considers the strategies people use when responding to difficult situations. Originating from Freud's work (1894), defence mechanisms are defined as unconscious mental processes that seek to protect the ego. Operating as coping strategies, they are distinct entities that serve to protect self-esteem, from the effect of stresses and trauma (Vaillant, 2011), activated by anxieties (Barros et al., 2020). Their purpose is to protect against negative emotions such as fear, envy, and resentment, that can overwhelm people (Hoggett, 2018). They can protect the ego by influencing how situations are interpreted, (Cramer, 2006; 2015). The more mature defences can reduce emotional discomfort, transform negative emotions into socially acceptable behaviours, and control, distressing emotional or cognitive components (Granieri, et al., 2017). As such they are considered significant in aiding understanding of psychological functioning (Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021).

Opinions differ on the number of defence mechanisms (Vaillant & Vaillant, 1992). There is more agreement that they exist on a continuum, from immature to mature, maladaptive to adaptive. Defence responses mature with age, with the more mature operating at a conscious level (Vaillant et al., 1996). Vaillant's (2000) hierarchy of defence mechanisms, See Table 1 illustrates the defence categories, mechanisms, and levels.

Hierarchy of Defence Mechanisms		
Defensive Category	Defence Mechanism	Defence Level
Psychotic Defences	Delusional projection, psychotic denial, and psychotic distortion.	Maladaptive
Immature Defences	Acting out, passive aggression, autistic fantasy, dissociation, and projection.	Relatively maladaptive
Intermediate (neurotic) Defences.	Displacement, isolation, rationalisation, reaction formation and repression.	Relatively adaptive
Mature Defences.	Altruism, sublimation, suppression, and humour.	Adaptative

Table 1 Adapted from Vaillant (2011).

The conceptualisation offered brings together several traditions in the study of psychological wellbeing. It acknowledges the complexity of situational and personal contexts. This is the first study to examine this topic, bringing all these perspectives together.

1.7 Research aim and objectives.

The aim of the study is to explore the lived experiences of pastoral staff employed in SEMH secondary schools to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of their work. The objectives are to,

- explore the individual perspectives of pastoral staff employed in SEMH secondary schools in relation to their experiences of psychological wellbeing,

- discover factors that participants perceive impact their psychological wellbeing, positively or negatively,

- explore concepts and theories which further the understanding of the participants' experiences,

- enhance current knowledge regarding policies and practices that support psychological wellbeing,

- add to the very limited body of academic research regarding the psychological wellbeing of pastoral staff employed in SEMH secondary schools.

To achieve the study's aim and objectives the existing literature in relation to schools providing education for pupils with SEMH needs, and particularly those who have a pastoral role within such environments, was reviewed and is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2. 1 Introduction

This chapter describes the process adopted in reviewing and evaluating the existing literature related to the research topic. A thorough and well-defined literature review strategy ensured that a structured approach was taken at all stages of the process. Critically reviewing the literature positioned the study within a wider body of work. It clarified the key concepts and identified gaps in the current knowledge base, providing the rationale and justification for the study (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2015).

2.2 Approach and methods

To give the reader confidence in the thoroughness of the literature search (Peters et al., 2015), a pre-defined search protocol using the population, experience and outcome (PEO) framework was adopted (Aveyard, 2018). Key search words, synonyms, and alternative terms, presented in Table 2 below, were selected from the research aim and objectives.

PEO Elements	Key words
P (Population)	((pastoral* OR Mentor* OR inclusion* OR behaviour* OR emotion* OR learning*))((semh* OR 'social emotional mental health' OR EBD* OR 'behaviour social emotion'* OR BESD, OR SEBD*))
E (Experience)	((experience* OR Views OR perception* OR attitude* OR perspective*))
O (Outcome)	((('psychological impact' OR wellbeing OR well-being OR wellbeing OR wellness or health OR 'positive affect' OR 'mental health'))

Table 2- key search words

Advanced search functions including MeSH terms and Boolean operators focused the search to the specific area of interest. 'OR' expanded the search by introducing

alternative key words (Brettle & Grant, 2004). Initial searches were limited to key words found in abstracts (Aveyard, 2018). As they should provide sufficient detail and information to describe the study's aims, method and results (Langdridge, 2004). As this approach returned no positive results parameters were expanded from 'abstract' to 'full text' to capture a broader range of articles. The search was limited to academic peer reviewed journals, written in English, and published in the last ten years, to access up to date information. Studies in countries outside of the UK were excluded, given the significant inter country differences in educational and special educational needs systems, policies, and approaches.

2.3 Databases

Education and psychology databases, Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), ProQuest Education, PsycINFO and Pro-Quest Health and Medical, were selected using the University of Salford's electronic library. These represented the disciplines most relevant to the study. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, hand sifting of journals was not possible, therefore an electronic sift of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, Education Review and Pastoral Care in Education journals was undertaken. These journals were selected from the 'cited' function of the University of Salford's electronic library search facility. Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed alerts were activated to ensure that any newly published papers were identified as part of the iterate approach to capturing relevant literature. Literature searches continued until the end of March 2022.

2.4 Search results

The flow diagram below, illustrates the approach followed to identify and select the studies. A detailed summary of the reasons for selection or rejection is offered in Appendix 1.

Identification

Papers identified through database searching (n=490)

Duplicate papers removed before screening: (n = 36)

Screening

Papers screened by title screen against inclusion criteria (n = 454)

Papers rejected after title read (n =432)

Papers screened by reading the abstract (n =22)

Papers excluded after reading the abstract (n =13)

Papers screened by reading full text (n=9)

Papers excluded after reading full text (n=6)

Included

Studies included from data base search (n=3)

Studies included from RSS feed (n=2)

Studies included from citations (n=4)

Papers included after (n=9)

Studies focused on wellbeing experiences of school staff working with pupils with SEMH needs

A summary of the context of the selected studies is offered in Table 3, below

School type		
SEMH	**General SEN/D**	**Mainstream**
Willis & Baines (2018); Fitzsimmons, et al. (2019); Rae et al. (2017)	Mackenzie (2012)	Edwards (2016); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012); Stoll & McLeod (2020)
Participants		
Pastoral only	**Pastoral and teachers**	**Teachers only**
Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012)	Mackenzie (2012); Stoll and McLeod (2020); Willis & Baines (2018)	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2019); Rae et al. (2017)
Methodological paradigm		
Qualitative	**Mixed Methods**	**Quantitative**
Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons, et al. (2019); Middleton (2018); Stoll & McLeod (2020) Willis & Baines (2018)	Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012)	

Table 3 summary of literature context

The only study involving pastoral staff based in a SEMH school, albeit a primary school, was Willis and Baines (2018). Significant differences between the roles of teachers and pastoral staff and between the working environments of mainstream schools and special SEMH provisions, were considered when assessing the relevance of the literature to the topic of interest. A full critique of these nine papers, is now offered.

2.5 Critiquing the research.

There is criticism that qualitative studies do not enjoy the same methodological rigour as quantitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015). To counter concerns about the trustworthiness of qualitative research, a method of critical appraisal that establishes its value is required (Crombie, 1996). A key consideration is the congruence between the cited methodology, ethics, research objectives, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In the current study, the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tool (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017), was used for the initial appraisal, followed by Law et al.'s (1998), Guidelines for Critical Review of Qualitative Studies, for the final synthesis. A summary of the critical appraisal is now offered, with more details, including the JBI scoring, located in Appendix 2.

2.5.1 Methodologies

All nine papers followed a qualitative paradigm, a summary is of the methodologies is offered in Table 4 below,

Summary of Methodologies			
IPA	Grounded theory	Narrative inquiry	Not stated
Fitzsimmons, et al. (2019); Partridge (2012); Stoll & McLeod (2020)	Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2019)	Middleton (2018)	Edwards (2016); Rae et al. (2017); Willis & Baines, (2018)

Table 4-summary of research methodologies

Except for Edwards (2016), Rae et al., (2017) and Willis and Baines (2018) who did not identify their research methodology, the methodological approaches were clear and justified. Edward's (2016) reference to an interpretivist paradigm is too imprecise,

as this encompasses a wide range, rather than a single paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Edwards (2016) and Rae et al., (2017) situate their philosophical perspective within social constructivism, Willis and Baines (2018) a constructivist approach underpinned by a relativist perception of reality. The absence of an identified methodology limited the opportunity to judge the rigour of these studies (Hyett, et al., 2014).

2.5.2 Sample

The most frequently used method was convenience sampling (Mackenzie, 2012; Middleton, 2018; Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). Fitzsimmons et al. (2019) and Stoll and McLeod (2020), chose a purposive sampling approach, selecting participants based upon the aims and objectives of their studies and the unique contribution participants would bring (Etikan, et al., 2016). As qualitative studies do not aim to generalise findings to wider populations, these sampling approaches were suitable. Middleton (2019) used purposeful sampling in the quantitative aspect of the study, resulting in 63 completed surveys. The qualitative element consisted of two participants, selected through convenience sampling. The six participants in Partridge's, (2012) study were selected by purposeful sampling.

The number of participants ranged from 44 (Mackenzie, 2012) to two (Middleton, 2018). Within the qualitative paradigm there is no definitive sample size (Cohen et al., 2011; Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). Although no paper justified the appropriateness of the sample size, all were appropriate to meet the research aims and objectives (Creswell, 2007).

2.5.3 Ethics

Edwards (2016), Mackenzie (2012), Partridge (2012), and Rae et al., (2017) make no reference to ethics approval or following ethical guidelines. University ethics approval was obtained by Fitzsimmons et al., (2019), Stoll and McLeod (2020) and Willis and Baines (2018). Fitzsimmons et al., (2019) also followed British Psychological Society (2014) ethical guidelines. Middleton (2018) and Middleton (2019) adhered to their own universities' ethics committee guidelines. Middleton (2019) also followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011), ethical guidelines. Middleton (2018) describes the ethical context of his study in relation to a social justice and human rights approach, underpinned by empathy and trust. Both Middleton (2018) and Middleton (2019) considered the value that their research held for the participants.

Fitzsimmons et al., (2019) and Willis and Baines' (2018), studies were conducted within the organisations where the first authors were employed. Neither paper addressed participant consent, confidentiality, or power dynamics. Participant bias is a concern in the studies of Middleton (2018), Rae et al.'s (2017) and Willis and Baines' (2018), as participants may have known the authors' views on the research topic. Rae et al.'s (2017) participants self-selected, raising the possibility that these may be people who hold firm views in relation to the research topic. Similarly, Willis and Baines' (2018) invitation extended to staff who were already part of the school's voluntary supervision group, rather than the wider staff team. These limitations are acknowledged by the authors.

2.5.4 Data collection

Five studies used face to face interviewing as the sole method of data collection, with interviews being audio recorded and then transcribed. Middleton (2019) and Partridge

(2012) conducted semi-structured interviews as part of a mixed methods approach. Adopting a life history approach, Mackenzie (2012) ran three focus groups with twenty-three participants. The ideas generated identified areas of interest that were subsequently explored via semi-structured interviews with twenty-one different participants. Middleton (2018) held three supervision sessions over the space of one year with two participants. The first sessions were recorded and transcribed. The participants reviewed the transcripts and, during the next two sessions, spoke about events they thought were important. Stoll and McLeod (2020) conducted two interviews, with each of their six participants. The first interview explored the participants' perceptions of supporting pupils with mental health difficulties, and the second used open-ended questions to further discuss the themes that had arisen. These interviews were scheduled to take place a couple of months apart. Due to time constraints, three of these second interviews were face-to face, the remaining three participants answered questions by email. The second stage was intended to explore emergent themes more deeply. The different data collection methods introduced concerns that the experiences of half of the participants were not as fully explored. The results section does not differentiate between the two groups, and therefore it is not possible to assess whether the differing methods affected the findings. This is a significant limitation.

The method of data collection was also problematic in Middleton (2018) and Willis and Baines' (2018) studies. Middleton's (2018) method was unique amongst the papers critiqued. Data was collected during supervision sessions facilitated by the author. At the participants' request, two of the three sessions involved both participants. The data collection approach is framed as collaborative, negotiated and co-constructed. It is justified based on transparency. The potential for introducing researcher and

participant bias, is not addressed. The ethical complexities arising from the inter-subjectivity of this method are touched upon, but not fully explored. Willis and Baines (2018) interviewed twelve staff from the school's group supervision initiative and the consultant who facilitated the sessions. Having introduced group supervision into the school, the first author recused himself from interviewing the participants, other than the supervision consultant. The potential inconsistencies in data collection, from different interviewers being involved, is not addressed. Triangulation of evidence is the justification for including an interview with the Consultant. Whether this interview adds value to the study is questionable. The potential of introducing researcher and participant bias, would seem to outweigh any benefits.

Middleton's (2019) study adopted a grounded theory methodology, using a mixed methods approach. A cross sectional survey collected quantitative data and semi-structured interviews qualitative data. Partridge's (2012) mixed methods approach consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The quantitative aspect involved a second interview where data was captured using repertory grids. This approach can be valuable where it explores how participants construct meaning (Burr et al., 2020). The justification for the approach was that it allowed the qualitative themes to be compared with descriptive quantitative themes. This method can produce less meaningful and reliable data, where twelve or fewer, elements are used to identify constructs (Heckmann & Bell, 2016). Partridge's (2012) study asked participants to consider just three elements. A further limitation of a mixed method approach is the sequential order of data collection. Bryman (2016) argues that this limits the possibility of achieving a unified process of data analysis.

2.5.5 Data Analysis methods

All the studies used elements of thematic analysis. Fitzsimmons et al. (2019) combined the analytical steps described Larkin and Thompson (2012) and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). The stages of this joint framework, however, are unclear and difficult to follow. Four subordinate themes are discussed in some detail, but the analytical process is not. Partridge (2012) and Stoll and McLeod (2020) followed Smith et al.'s (2009) thematic analysis guidance for IPA. In both papers, the data analysis presentation is clear. The themes identified are underpinned by theoretical concepts. Willis and Baines (2018) combined Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach with content analysis. Their analysis lacked interpretation, with data being presented in a descriptive manner, that does not fully address the research question. The visual format of the NVivo software used to identify themes may have limited the authors' interaction with the data (Maher et al., 2018). Edwards (2016) also used NVivo software analysis. In addition to the seven main themes and 51 sub-themes identified, detailed analysis is also offered. The themes are clearly presented and supported by a thematic map. Rae et al.'s (2017) content analysis approach offered flexibility and immersion in the data. Detailed analysis of the six major themes identified is offered. These were supported by a thematic map and quotations from participants. Middleton's (2018) narrative inquiry approach worked with the detail of language, words, statements, and signifiers to identify themes. This is consistent with her methodology.

Middleton's (2019) mixed methods approaches used a cross sectional survey and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis provided demographic information and statistical analysis of stressors. Qualitative thematic analysis identified five themes, fourteen risk factors and eleven protective factors. Given the relatively small

sample size, conclusion about causal relationships between variables, could not be made. This mixed methods approach is consistent with a grounded methodology and identifies emergent theory that protect against stress, burnout and attrition rates. Partridge's (2012) paper also identifies with a mixed methods approach. Although she used a repertory grid, associated with a quantitative approach, there is no evidence of quantitative analysis. Rather, data from the repertory grid, is analysed qualitatively, exploring how participant's understanding may assemble around issues. This approach complemented thematic analysis (Burr et al., 2020). However, the lack of qualitative analysis and the small sample size of six participants, raises questions of whether this study truly adopted a mixed methods approach.

2.5.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is crucial in all qualitative research to ensure transparency and quality (Fontana, 2004). The absence of any discussion of reflexivity in many papers is a flaw. Only Fitzsimmons et al. (2019), Rae et al. (2019) and Stoll and McLeod (2020) explicitly stated the role that reflexivity played during their study. Fitzsimmons et al. (2019) acknowledge that the first author's relationship with the participants may have influenced data collection and analysis, with the potential of introducing both researcher and participant bias. Evidence of external/objective support would have further enhanced her reflexivity. Rae et al., (2017) acknowledge that there are different methods of exploring data and that interpretation is subjective. The researchers are transparent about their support for supervision in schools and accept that their identity could have affected participants' responses. Although Stoll and McLeod (2020) state that the first author used reflexivity throughout the research process, no details are provided.

2.6 Theoretical frameworks

Following the critique of the nine papers, seven common themes, relating to aspects of psychological wellbeing, were identified (see Table 5):

Theme	Studies
Emotional Labour	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2017); Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012) Rae et al. (2017); Stoll & McLeod (2020)
Relational dynamics and attachment theory (connection and belonging).	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2019); Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019): Partridge (2012).
Understanding and managing emotions	Mackenzie 2012); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012)
Ethos of care- (self and organisational)	Fitzsimmons, et al. (2019); Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Rae et al. (2017); Willis & Baines (2018).
Resilience	Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019).
Reflective practice	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2019); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012); Rae et al. (2017); Willis and Baines (2018).
Being understood and valued	Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012.

Table 5 themes identified in the literature

The remainder of this chapter discusses these themes, situating them in the wider literature. This broader exploration provides a deeper theoretical perspective and framework from which to understand the psychological impact of emotionally challenging work.

2.6.1 Emotional labour

Except for Middleton (2018) and Willis and Baines (2018), all the papers critiqued discuss the significant level of emotional labour involved in educating children with SEMH needs. The conceptual framework of emotional labour emerged from Hochschild's (1983) seminal sociological study, "*The Managed Heart*". Observing airline cabin crew undertaking customer care duties she concluded that employers often exert some control over how their employees act in their professional setting. In exchange for financial recompense the employee is required to display emotions that comply with organisational expectations, rather than those that reflect their own feelings. This arises from the formal or informal "*feeling rules*" that define the emotions that employees are required to show (Hochschild, 1983 p50). These rules, which are built into the fabric of some occupations (Rustin, 2003), often discourage displays of negative emotions and responses (Mikolajczak et al., 2007).

Emotional labour has been conceptualised as "*surface acting, deep acting and suppression*" (Hochschild, 1983, p68). Surface acting involves hiding one's true feelings and faking emotions that are expected (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) without feeling those emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting is widely associated with poor psychological outcomes (Näring, et al., 2012). However, Bodenheimer and Shuster (2020) suggest that having the autonomy to engage in surface acting may enable people to emotionally detach from elements of their role they find difficult, thus protecting their sense of identity. It is when this autonomy is absent surface acting can have a negative psychological impact. Deep acting occurs when people are unaware that the emotions, they display are an '*act*' (Hochschild, 1983, p33). When deep acting, people respond in emotionally congruent ways, which may mitigate against the negative impacts of emotional labour, such as

stress and burnout (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020; Edwards, 2016; Mackenzie, 2012).

It may also increase wellbeing through the experience of joy (Burić, et al., 2019). What

begins as surface acting can develop into deep acting, where people make deliberate

efforts to modify their emotions, moving them from incongruent to congruent

(Mackenzie, 2012; Rae et al., 2017). Suppression, where reality is distorted to avoid

experiencing difficult emotions (Hochschild, 1983), may be less psychologically

harmful than surface acting (Kinman, 2008).

Since Hochschild's (1983) original work, the psychological literature has provided a

broader understanding of emotional labour across a diverse range of human service

occupations (Kinman, et al., 2011). This includes education, and other occupations

with an integral 'care' aspect. Those of relevance to the current study include criminal

justice (Phillips, et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2020), social care (Lavee & Strier, 2018;

Leeson, 2010; Parry et al., 2021; Winter, et al., 2018) and mental health and

therapeutic services (Colvin & Thompson, 2020; Foster & Smedley, 2019; Thompson

et al., 2018). Roles that are high in emotional labour tend to have significant customer

contact (Hochschild, 1983), in terms of time, intensity and frequency (Fouquereau, et

al., 2019). The extent of emotional labour experienced by pastoral staff in SEMH

secondary schools has not previously been examined. A discussion of the current

study's findings in relation to this concept, is offered in chapter 9.

2.6.2 Relational dynamics and attachment theory

Attachment theory is derived from Bowlby's (1969) seminal work. He contended that

children need a secure base with a primary caregiver if they are to thrive in life. In the

early months of infancy, babies cannot regulate their stress responses, so they seek

proximity to caregivers who respond to their stress (Cairns & Stanway, 2013; Kelly et.

al., 2020). The child's emotional wellbeing is directly affected by how well their caregivers are attuned to their physiological and emotional needs (Kelly et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2019) and how effectively they responded to meet those needs (Cubeddu & Mackay, 2017). From early positive interactions, a secure base begins to develop to which the child returns at times of need (Bowlby, 1988). The child and parent interaction creates a working model of relationships and different patterns of attachment (Hughes & Schlosser, 2014; Kelly et al, 2020). It is argued that securely attached children feel safe, build a positive self-image, and can regulate their emotions. The child's brain will develop in such a way that they become able to self-regulate. Where a child does not experience this secure attachment, their neural pathways do not develop in this way, and they find it difficult to manage their emotions and exercise impulse control (Cairns & Stanway, 2013). Children who have not built secure attachments, may develop a precarious notion of self and experience poorer emotional wellbeing (Bowlby, 1969; Harris, 2013).

Pupils in SEMH schools have often experienced insecure or ruptured attachments, caused by separation, loss, adverse childhood experiences or early trauma (Cairns & Stanway, 2013; Farouk, 2017; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). This can make emotional regulation difficult for some (Gillies, 2011; Kelly et al., 2020). The resultant behaviours such as fighting, swearing or violence, can be challenging and difficult for school staff to manage (Gillies, 2011; McLoughlin, 2010; Pirrie et. al., 2011; Willis & Baines, 2018).

Attachment theory provides the theoretical framework that underpins many school interventions, such as nurture groups (Boxall, 2002; Middleton, 2018; Rose et al., 2019) and trauma informed practices (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Attachment aware training can help school staff to understand the meaning of pupils' behaviour (Harlow,

2021) and assist in the regulation of their own emotional responses (Harlow, 2021; Kelly, et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2019). Training that emphasises the importance of relationships can improve pastoral staffs' understanding of their own emotional wellbeing (Partridge, 2012). Feeling emotionally nurtured and cared for, can help them to take matters less personally and to feel more empowered (Kelly, et. al., 2020).

Bion's (1959) psychodynamic concept of emotional containment originates from Klein's (1946) account of projective identification and is firmly positioned within relationship dynamic theory (Weightmans & Smithson, 2019). The mother contains the child' raw emotions, transforming them into emotions that the child can manage. This process involves the mother converting an emotional experience into cognitive activity (Bion, 1959). Receiving containment of anxiety from another person underpins mental stability (Segal, 1975), and is an essential aspect of effective relationships (Bion, 1962). The concept of containment has been subject to numerous interpretations. In the current study, it is viewed as a dynamic, relational process, rather than a physical phenomenon such as holding (Weightman & Smithson, 2019).

School staff's experience of emotional containment and attachment may affect their ability to emotionally contain pupils and themselves (Fitzsimmons, et al., 2019; Partridge, 2012). When facing challenging behaviour, people can avoid their own emotions and evoke defensive reactions, including projecting difficult feelings on to other parts of the system. Staff whose emotions are contained by colleagues or other professionals are more able to successfully contain pupils' emotions and anxieties (Partridge, 2012). Building trusting relationships with insecurely attached pupils can take significant time and commitment (Edwards, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Harlow, 2021). Positive relationships, that build a feeling of belonging, are important

ingredients for achieving overall wellbeing (Brady & Wilson, 2021). With the right approach schools can become secure bases, improving the emotional wellbeing of the whole school community (Harlow, 2021).

Critics of attachment theory claim that some underlying assumptions remain contested (Harlow, 2021) and it is too simplistic, and generic given that attachment is complex, with multiple aspects and variables (Rose et al., 2019). Many feminists object to the theory's conservative perspective, with responsibility for the child's secure attachment being located with the mother (Duschinsky et al., 2015). Others suggest the theory promotes a child-deficit model, pathologising behaviours whilst ignoring wider societal factors (Harlow, 2021; Hart, 2013; Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Duschinsky, et al. (2015) argue research should concentrate on attachment as a relational phenomenon. They argue too much emphasis is placed on "*insecure, avoidant, resistant/ambivalent*" (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970, p50) and '*disorganized/disoriented*' (Main & Solomon, 1986 p95) attachment categorisations. They state that classifications should be descriptors, rather than the focus of the study.

2.6.3 Understanding and managing emotions

Partridge (2012) argues that understanding and managing one's own emotions is central to providing protection against emotionally demanding work. Counselling skills can be used to understand and the manage emotional elements of work (Held, et al., 2019; Stoll & McLeod, 2020). When people are unable to understand difficult emotions, they cannot be processed and become internalised. This can cause psychological harm, including burnout (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019). However, Mackenzie (2012) found that some participants enjoyed the emotional, often stressful, aspects of working in a SEN school. This may suggest that personal attributes and

emotional characteristics play a role in the perception of emotions. Emotional characteristics such as resilience, empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, are often associated with elements of emotional intelligence (Middleton, 2019). The originators of the theoretical concept of emotional intelligence, Salovey and Mayer (1990), claim there is an association between aspects of emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing. Goleman (1995) argues that emotional intelligence provides a conceptual framework to repair the "*moral deficiency*" (p xii) of people who lack the willpower to manage their emotions. It is debateable whether people can be taught to exercise control over their emotions, or whether this would be desirable (Le Doux, 1998). Greater consensus in the literature, suggests that emotional self-regulation, rather than absolute control is both possible, and beneficial to emotional wellbeing (Rose, et al., 2019; Syrnyk, 2012). Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2016) report a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and subjective wellbeing in people who perceive, understand, and regulate their emotions. This may be because people with high levels of trait emotional intelligence are innately more competent in recognising and manging their own emotions, when confronted with emotionally difficult situations (Mikolajczak et al., 2007; Yin et al., 2013). They may also be able to separate themselves from the emotional aspects of their work (Kinman, et al., 2011a), which provides them with some protection against emotional burn-out and compassion fatigue (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017).

Adapted from Goleman's (1995) work on emotional intelligence; the social emotional aspects of the learning programme (SEAL) (DfES, 2005) was introduced into schools to help pupils to understand and manage their emotions (Gillies, 2011; Jones, 2020; Rae et al., 2017; Wiglesworth et al., 2012; Wood, 2020). Goleman's (1995) thinking has been further developed and modified. One iteration being emotional literacy,

defined as a person's ability to understand, manage, and react to their own emotions, whilst also appropriately responding to the emotions of others. This concept applies to individuals and organisations. Emotionally literate organisations understand that emotions impact all stakeholders, and actively promote the emotional and social well-being of all (Weare, 2010). Thus, one intention of SEAL was to acknowledge the interconnection between pupils and staff emotional wellbeing (Roffey, 2012), and improve it across the whole school community (Banerjee, 2014; DfES, 2005).

Critics of emotional learning initiatives argue that the concepts that underpin them are often ill-defined (Gillies, 2011) and imprecise (Craig, 2007). There is criticism of the absence of robust evidence that these programmes successfully develop emotional skills (Ecclestone & Hays, 2008). The higher workloads and lack of training created additional stress for some school staff (Craig, 2007; Graham, et al., 2011; Kidger et. al., 2016; Lang et. al., 2013). Teachers expressed anxiety in identifying clinical mental health difficulties, especially in withdrawn pupils, as this sat outside their expertise (Kidger, 2010; Timpson, 2019). In contrast, Banerjee et al. (2014) report that where SEAL outcomes became integrated into the culture of the whole school, staff became more able to cope with social and emotional work stresses.

2.6.4 Ethos of care

The literature suggests that there are clear expectations that school staff should care about their pupils (Fitzsimmons, et al., 2019: Mackenzie, 2012; Marshall, 2013; Osgood, 2010). Where these expectations come from is more difficult to identify. Mackenzie's (2012) study found that student teaching assistants held critical views of staff they felt were motivated by self-advancement and did not care about their pupils. This suggests that they view caring as a pre-requisite for working in SEN schools. This

viewpoint does not appear to show empathy, nor acknowledge the effort required to maintain care in environments where high levels of challenging or distressing behaviour are routinely experienced (Fitzsimmons, et al., 2019). Teachers, and other school staff, appear not only to believe they should care, but that their pupils should know they care (Marshall, 2013). If this approach is endemic within schools, this may impact the frequency of surface acting to present an illusion of caring (Hochschild, 1983). This may create additional stress.

The concept of care is multifaceted and often ill-defined (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). Defined from a feminist perspective, Tronto's (1993) conceptualisation of the ethics of care is wide ranging and inclusive. She acknowledges the interconnectedness of different aspects of life; bodies, selves, and environments, that all need to be nurtured to live the best life possible. In the current study a narrower conceptualisation of care is offered whereby the value placed on relationships, compassion and kind treatment of self and others is central. This more focused definition emphasises the importance assigned to the role of relationships. By acknowledging that people are both the receivers and givers of care (Warin, 2017), the interdependent nature of human experience is brought into sharper focus. It also presents care as a dynamic concept that ebbs and flows, depending on the situation and context. This is particularly important to the current research as it explicitly recognises that adults working in schools, also need to experience care and compassion.

The ability to show compassion is determined by the capacity to empathise, a skill that can be developed and improved with practice (Murray, 2018). Empathy is often presented in a positive light. Klimecki et al. (2013), however, caution that empaths may be overly susceptible to empathetic distress as they excessively identify with the pain

experienced by others. As such they argue against attempting to develop empathy through training, as this can increase negative neural responses. Rather they argue that training in compassion creates a positive response in parts of the brain linked to affirmation and reward and can play a significant role in mitigating emotional distress and preventing burnout.

The literature identifies the important role that self-care plays in supporting professionals to maintain their psychological wellbeing (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Solomon & Thomas, 2013). This can be achieved individually or by developing a sense of community and camaraderie between colleagues (Willis & Baines, 2018). An important aspect of self-care is the acknowledgement and management of difficult emotional responses that arise from working with pupils with challenging behaviour (Kearns & Hart 2017). Receiving recognition that the work can be difficult (Middleton, 2018), regular time away from work, and focusing on positive aspects of professional and personal life, can counterbalance work-related stresses (Knight, 2013; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Emotionally attuned individuals can experience an intense tension between prioritising self-care above care for others (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). This is potentially problematic for staff who are drawn to occupations where high levels of attunement and empathy are often found. In response, organisations can create an environment that support staff's emotional needs (Soloman & Thomas, 2013) by focusing on compassion, connectedness, and relationships (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021).

2.6.5 Emotional resilience

The existing literature highlights several factors that ameliorate the impact of emotionally demanding jobs (Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019). These include

personal characteristics of resilience, empathy, and self-awareness (Syrnyk, 2012) and the capacity for reflection and social confidence (Grant & Kinman, 2014). Philosophical convictions, such as compassion (Al-Ghabban, 2018) may provide some psychological protection, especially when aligned to personal intrinsic goals (Huppert, 2009). The ability to switch-off and detach from difficult emotional situations, supports psychological wellbeing, and may increase with experience (Bridger, et al., 2020; Edwards, 2016). This could be due to greater cynicism and less sympathy developing over time (Kinman, et al., 2011). Experienced staff may also adopt professional boundaries, between work and home, that insulate them from emotional aspects of their work (Kinman, et al., 2011; Mackenzie, 2012). Emotional resilience, a key element in maintaining staff wellbeing (Grant & Kinman, 2014), can develop when organisations place value on how they care for employees (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Synergy between individual and organisational values, and a strong belief that their work makes a positive difference to pupils, can help people to weather emotional challenges (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019).

2.6.6 Reflective practice

Drawing on psychodynamic approaches, particularly attachment theory (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Rae et al., 2017), reflective practice creates an emotionally contained, holding environment (Ogden, 2004; Winnicott, 1956). Examples from the literature include post-event reflection (Edwards, 2016), work discussion groups (Partridge, 2012), group supervision (Fitzsimmons, et al., 2019; Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018) one-to-one supervision (Middleton, 2018) and counselling (Partridge, 2012; Stoll & McLeod, 2020). Group supervision can build stronger, more supportive relationships between colleagues (Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018), as feelings and emotions are validated (Middleton, 2018; Willis & Baines, 2018). Discussing and

understanding the cause of pupils' challenging behaviour can mitigate against emotional stress and frustration (Mackenzie, 2012; Middleton, 2019). By helping people to process the emotions that incidents can trigger (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019) they can feel unburdened and emotionally contained (Mackenzie, 2012; Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017). The extent to which people benefit from reflective practices often relates to their own experiences of attachment (Kearns & Hart, 2017) and emotional containment (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Partridge, 2012).

2.6.7 Being valued and recognised

Feeling valued and understood can have a significant impact on wellbeing (Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019: Rae, et al., 2017). Pastoral staff who are not allocated planning time and receive no training or mentoring to prepare them for their role feel undervalued (Partridge, 2012). Many did not know when they had performed well or if they are approaching complex issues correctly (Partridge, 2012; Middleton, 2018). Professional recognition, being listened to by school leaders and making a difference to children's lives positively affects psychological wellbeing (Middleton, 2018; Rae et al., 2017).

It is important that school leaders value and recognise the challenges involved in pastoral support (Middleton, 2018; Roffey, 2012). This acknowledgement can take several forms; including a whole school culture where a positive value is placed on caring (Mackenzie, 2012), opportunities for emotional replenishment (Partridge, 2012) and investing in professional supervision (Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). These approaches send a message to pastoral staff that the school leadership values them, and their emotional wellbeing is important (Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019).

2.7 Summary of the chapter and conclusion

The literature search, which ran from September 2019 to March 2022, did not identify any studies that examine the psychological wellbeing of pastoral support staff working in SEMH secondary schools. Much of the literature examines teachers' experiences, within the context of supporting pupils with SEMH needs in mainstream school environments. Studies that examine wellbeing, do so from an emotional perspective (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019: Partridge, 2012: Middleton, 2018: Middleton, 2019; Stoll & McLeod, 2020), rather than the wider conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing offered in section 1.6. Of the nine papers selected, only Willis and Baines' (2018) situate their study in an SEMH school, albeit a primary school. The research focus is narrow, exploring experience of group supervision. Although none of the papers critiqued adequately address the focus of the current study, they helped to frame and contextualise it within theoretical approaches and concepts. This formed the academic basis from which the aim and objectives were explored. To locate the current study within the broader academic context, the findings identified in the critiqued literature have been explored in the wider literature. Extending, then synthesising the literature has uncovered the extent to which concepts are interconnected, with none sitting in complete isolation. This intricate web of theories and models, reflects the complexity involved in exploring, interpreting, and reporting human experience. From this understanding, the current study examined this under-researched topic, through the lens of psychological wellbeing, thus offering an important contribution to existent literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

From a historical perspective it can be argued that all research has emerged from the scientific tradition and that different approaches represent perspectives of the nature of science (Lieblich et al., 1998). The approaches adopted by the natural sciences are often credited with bringing credibility and respectability to research (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). Over time research paradigms, and different methodological approaches within those paradigms, have developed from philosophical positions that are specific to their individual epistemology. Since the 1970s qualitative methods have become more widespread and this has generated an ongoing debate about the relative value and appropriateness of quantitative and qualitative approaches within social science research (Wertz, 2011). The choice of a research paradigm must be congruent with the researchers' understanding of reality. Examining the ontological stance reveals appropriate methodological approaches that support the research's aims and objectives and reflect the researcher's epistemological standpoint (Mills et al., 2006). Thus, there is no correct way of exploring the social world (Holloway & Freshwater, 2005). The following discussion offers an exploration of the philosophical assumptions that define quantitative and qualitative research paradigms and enabled an appropriate methodology to be selected.

3.1 Quantitative Research

Philosophically, the quantitative research paradigm is aligned to positivism and post-positivism. Focusing on objective facts and empirical evidence, positivist researchers argue it is possible to discover universal causal relationships and absolute truths from one reality (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). The epistemological position supports the view that research methods found in the natural sciences can be applied

to the study of social reality (Bryman, 2016). Although many positivist researchers argue that social reality is quantifiable and knowable, some acknowledge the challenges inherent in reaching these positions (Bisel & Adame, 2017). This philosophical discomfort led to the development of the post-positivist perspective. Still retaining the belief that reality is objective, post-positivism diverges from positivism by adopting a critical realist approach, acknowledging the challenges that confront researchers in gaining access to social reality (Bryman, 2016). All quantitative research retains its interest in measuring specific phenomena, usually adopting a hypothetico-deductive approach to test pre-determined hypotheses (Langdridge & Hagger-Jones, 2013). From these measurements epistemological claims can be made about knowledge, with a degree of certainty that they can be replicated, and specific hypotheses and theories can be generalised across relevant populations.

3.2 Qualitative research

The non-positive, qualitative paradigm derives from the standpoint that there is no 'universal truth,' knowledge is relevant only in the context in which it occurred (Braun & Clarke, 2015). Originating from different disciplines there are a multitude of theoretical paradigms that claim to use qualitative methods and strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). What unites them is their interest in people's subjective experiences and how they make sense of, and understand, their social world. The approach acknowledges that researchers bring their own subjectivity to the research process, and it is within this context that data is generated (Bryman, 2016; Langdridge & Hagger-Jones, 2013; Silverman, 2017). Where quantitative methods have developed from a scientific tradition, qualitative methods have developed from several research traditions which seek to identify and theorise the different versions of reality that people

hold (Braun & Clarke, 2015). The multiple realities, constructed by individuals are acknowledged and seen as a strength of qualitative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The aim of qualitative research is to gain understanding of a topic from the participants' perspectives. Methods are utilised which allow patterns and theories to emerge from the data, from which a conceptual understanding can be generated (Bryman, 2016). Whilst the findings from qualitative studies can draw inferences that may be transferable, the highly contextualised and situational nature of qualitative research means it does not seek to be generalisable.

3.3 Comparing paradigms

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies are both concerned with answering a particular research question and doing so in a way that is open and transparent. (Bryman, 2016; Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013; Wertz et al., 2011). The methods used to collect, reduce, and analyse data differ. As quantitative studies seek to prove or refute a hypothesis, large sample sizes are needed. Qualitative studies use smaller samples, generating more data per participant. In quantitative research experiments, observation and surveys are often used to collect numerical, measurable data. Statistical analysis is used to distil information, usually after all the data has been collected. In qualitative studies, interviews and focus groups are the methods most frequently adopted. Qualitative research follows an iterative process of data analysis, often beginning before all data is collected, with themes and concepts emerging (Bryman, 2016). This approach enables the researcher to make sense of the data and assess how the findings relate to the wider research literature.

Demonstrating reliability and validity is often associated with quantitative studies. Qualitative research uses different ways to evaluate the quality of the research

(Lieblich et al. 1998; Lincoln & Guba 1994). Although qualitative studies do not aim to identify a measurable truth that can be replicated and generalised to wider populations, it is important that they demonstrate authenticity, in terms of broader relevance (Bryman, 2016). Many qualitative studies focus on trustworthiness and validation, rather than truth (Mishler, 1990). Trustworthiness is achieved when the research reflects the participant's reality and experience (Hollway, 1997). Validation is assessed by the contribution to the area of study and the credibility of claims made (Hammersley, 1992). The impact should go beyond the study itself; influencing theory, the research community (Lieblich, et al., 1998), participants or the reader (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016). The trustworthiness of the current study is demonstrated through the transparency of the interpretations offered.

3.4 Epistemology, ontology and axiology assumptions

As epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions present differently in quantitative and qualitative paradigms, the choice of methodology is usually influenced by the researcher's own assumptions (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). Understanding and locating these within methodological approaches and conceptual frameworks has formed an important part of the doctoral process. Each assumption has been considered.

3.4.1 Epistemological Position

The way knowledge is acquired underpins epistemological assumptions. From an epistemological position, neither realism, everything that is known is independent of the mind, or idealism, everything we know about the world is in the mind (Langdridge & Hagger-Jones, 2013) fully reflects my understanding of how people gain knowledge of the world. A more nuanced approach, where the emphasis lies in knowing about

social reality, from a combination of theoretical, tacit, and lived experience, is preferred (Warne & MacAndrew, 2007). Reality is understood as a social construct that is constantly negotiated and created. The individual's experience and interaction with the social world frames and creates multiple realities. Social reality, including culture, is emergent, in a constant state of change, as actors negotiate and re-define it (Bryman, 2016). What constitutes 'truth' is a fluid, situational concept that may only hold in a specific set of circumstances or at a particular point in time.

The inductive nature of qualitative research reflects an epistemological preference for generating findings from the data, in contrast to quantitative approaches where hypotheses are tested against observations, using a deductive process. By adopting an interpretivist epistemology, the importance of social reality to individuals has been foregrounded. Through reflexivity, conscious effort has been made to interpret the data from the perspective of each participant, whilst acknowledging the life experiences of the researcher can influence and impact on every aspect of the research process (Lieblich et al., 1998).

3.4.2 Ontological Position

I align myself with a social constructivist ontological position that identifies multiple realities and truths from which people understand and make sense of their subjective experiences (Creswell, 2009; Langdridge, 2013; Josselson, 2011a). From this people create meaning and order in their lives (Ricoeur, 1990). Given the co-constructive nature of narrative inquiry the narrator and researcher play integral roles in the research process (Lieblich et al. 1998), each holding their own account of social reality. Josselson (2011b) suggests that even the narrator's analysis and understanding of their experiences may change over time. The acceptance that social phenomena are

in a constant state of change and adaptation, sits comfortably within a social constructivist understanding of social reality. The role of the researcher as an active participant in the research process, is acknowledged in all aspects of the current study (Creswell, 2018; Lieblich et al., 1998).

3.4.3 Axiological Position

My axiological philosophical stance arises from my belief that research is not value free. As the researcher is an integral part of the research, interpretations are subjective. I accept there are often multiple possible interpretations of data. In acknowledging this world view, the reader has the transparency from which they can view and interpret the data analysis and discussion of findings that are offered. The implications for the current study, including the chosen methodology, are discussed throughout this thesis.

3.5 Choosing a paradigm

Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson's (2013) summary of the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Tables 6 & 7) assisted in the choice of a qualitative approach.

Quantitative Research	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Precise (measurement) Controlled (design) Makes claims about causation Has predictive power (can generalise findings based on findings in a particular setting)	May grossly oversimplify the complexity of human nature May not recognise or be explicit about the subjective nature of social science research May not recognise the individuality and autonomous nature of human beings

Table 6- advantages and disadvantages of quantitative research

Qualitative Research	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Recognises the subjective experience of participants Often produces unexpected insights about human nature through an open-ended approach Gives an 'insider' perspective on different social worlds Generally, does not impose a particular way of 'seeing' onto participants	Cannot apply traditional notions of validity and reliability to data Often not possible to make generalisations or predictions Needs justification, still not a widely accepted approach to psychological research Lack of replicability

Table 7 - advantages and disadvantages of quantitative research

Qualitative methodologies foreground lived experience. They explore how people interpret their social reality through examining their accounts of complex life events (Farouk, 2017). The qualitative paradigm is consistent with the extant literature, critiqued in chapter 2, and my epistemological, ontological, and axiological positions discussed in section 3.4.

3.6 Study design and methodological approach

Having chosen the qualitative research paradigm, the next stage involved selecting an appropriate methodology. Creswell's (2007) comparison of qualitative approaches, summarised in Table 8, assisted with this.

Foundational Considerations	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study	Phenomenology	Narrative Research
Research focus of approach	Developing theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting culture-sharing group	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case/ multiple cases	Understanding the essence of an experience	Exploring life of an individual
Unit of analysis	Studying a process, an action, or an interaction involving many individuals	Studying a group that share the same culture	Studying an event, program, activity, or more than one individual	Studying several individuals with a shared experience	Studying one or more individuals
Type of research problem best suited for approach	Grounding the theory in the views of the participants	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case/cases	Describing the essence of a lived phenomenon	Telling stories of individual experiences
Nature of disciplinary origins	Sociology	Anthropology and sociology	Psychology, law, political science, and medicine	Philosophy, psychology, and education	Humanities including anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology

Table 8- Comparison of qualitative approaches

Drawing on a range of philosophies, the boundaries and demarcation between qualitative methodologies is often blurred, with significant overlap, and commonalities amongst the major approaches (Wertz, 2011). Grounded theory, phenomenology and narrative inquiry methodologies were all adopted in the literature critiqued in chapter 2. The next section offers a summary of each approach and the appropriateness for the current study.

3.6.1 Grounded Theory

Drawing from sociology, Glaser and Strauss (1967), combined elements of positivism and pragmatism to create a qualitative methodology that sought to understand human behaviour through scientific approaches. From a context-free position and an objective and logical approach to data analysis, conceptual theories are generated (Chamaz, 2006). The aim being to discover theory, rather than to test hypothesis (Dey, 1999). Since this conceptualisation of grounded theory, there have been several modifications to the approach. Recent iterations have moved some distance from a positivist stance, by recognising the role of the researcher and narrator in the research process (Creswell, 2018).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) introduced a symbolic interactionist perspective, which addressed the meaning people give to events in their lives, from their perceptions of what constitutes truth. Chamaz (2000) further advanced this approach by introducing a constructivist perspective. Proponents of different variations of the methodology have often been in conflict due to different philosophical influences, data analysis and the development of theories (Chamaz & Liska-Belgrave, 2015; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The overall aim of grounded theory, however, remains the discovery of theory through identifying causal connections from across the data (Charmaz 2011; Creswell, 2018). Data collection and analysis are often conducted simultaneously, until data saturation is reached (Chamaz, 2006; 2011; Chamaz & Liska- Belgrave, 2015; Creswell, 2018). The focus on developing theory and the limited analysis of meaning is not in keeping with the aim, objectives and epistemology of the current study.

3.6.2 Ethnography

The roots of ethnography lie in anthropology and sociology. The length of time researchers spends in the field, observing patterns of behaviour of people who share a particular culture is a crucial aspect of this methodology (Creswell, 2018; Robson & McCartan, 2017). Some settings, such as SEMH secondary schools, are closed environments, not normally accessible to ethnographic researchers. It may have been possible to undertake this study at my place of work (Bryman, 2016). Considering the possible impact on the participants (Creswell, 2018) raised ethical concerns of power dynamics, informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Russell & Barley, 2020). Creswell (2018) also cautions that the quality of the data can be compromised where a researcher holds a senior position in the organisation. Accessing a different school, would be difficult, given the numerous gatekeepers and strict protocols. The restrictions due to Covid-19 also ruled out this approach.

3.6.3 Case Study

Whether case study research can rightly be categorised as a methodology is debated within the literature. Creswell (2018) and Yin (2003) argue it is, others disagree. Stake (2005), claims that a case study approach is a choice of *what* is studied, using whatever method is deemed appropriate, rather than being a methodology. Starman (2013) argues that case study research is a framework that encompasses different methods. What is agreed is that case study research explores one or more cases, where participants share the same culture (Creswell, 2018) and usually focuses on a single issue (Yin, 2003). Data is collected over an extended period and is extensive, often from multiple sources (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2003). Where there are several cases, each is analysed as a single entity, the knowledge gained building from the previous. The case study method may be appropriate where the context of the

research holds significance to the study (Yin, 2003). This applies to the current study. As outlined in Chapter 1, the importance of contextualising the study, within SEMH secondary schools, enabled the reader to understand the narratives (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016). However, the participants in the current study do not have a shared culture (Yin, 2003), as evidenced by their different roles and responsibilities within SEMH schools. The case study approach was therefore, rejected.

3.6.4 Phenomenology

Having developed from the hermeneutic philosophical tradition (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013; van Manen, 1990), phenomenological methodology is a broad term and now encompasses several philosophical traditions. In common, they all seek to understand a life experience that is shared by several people (Creswell, 2018). Through a process of unravelling meaning for participants, as it relates to everyday life, a deep understanding of the essence of a phenomenon is secured (Creswell, 2018; Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). Searching for meaning and common patterns and themes across the entire data set (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013), phenomenology offers a rich description of the phenomena of interest accessed through the lived experience of the participants (Finlay, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that phenomenological studies should involve between five and 25 participants. Data is often collected via semi-structured or open interviews, enabling participants to articulate aspects of their lived experience related to the phenomenon being studied (Figgou, 2015). Phenomenological analysis segments and dissects the data to identify themes within and between data sets. It describes the essence of a shared phenomenon where participants' shared view of the world is revealed (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Whilst phenomenologists view intersubjectivity as an essential ingredient in formulating a shared understanding of the world, opinions diverge about the role of the researcher. Some, following a more Husserl tradition, seek to set aside their own preconceived experiences to generate fresh perspectives, others see the role of the researcher as integral to the research process (Creswell, 2018). This latter standpoint necessitates an open, transparent, and reflexive approach which integrates the researcher into the research findings (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Although there was much to recommend a phenomenological approach for the current study, there were fundamental reasons why it was rejected. The phenomenology tradition requires the careful selection of participants, to ensure that they have sufficient homogeneity for the researcher to establish a commonality in experience (Creswell, 2018). The participants in the current study do not have a similar enough experience for this requirement to be achieved. The roles varied significantly in terms of day-to-day duties and level of responsibilities. The environments in which they worked are diverse, in structure, size, age and needs of the pupils, legislative frameworks and cultures. The second difficulty is the analytical approach which segments and dissects the data. This approach would impede efforts to interrogate and understand the meaning of a story, as a whole entity. For these reasons phenomenological approach was rejected.

3.6.5 Narrative Inquiry

Originating from a multi-disciplinary background, narrative inquiry is a methodology that draws insights from examining how people compose stories (Chase, 2018; Creswell, 2018). Through stories people create order, make sense of their lives, and convey their experiences to others (Josselson 2011a; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman

& Quinney, 2005; Ricoeur, 1990; Sarbin, 1986). It is a methodology which interrogates the context and meaning of the whole story, by drawing together diverse aspects of a person's life (Clandinin, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995). A narrative approach is suitable for research that seeks to understand individuals' life experience and how they evolve over time (Creswell, 2007; Czariawska, 2004). People become their own biographers, sharing aspects of their life stories that are important to them in a way that makes sense to them (Frank, 2002; Riessman,1993). During the research process the social realities perceived and constructed by the participants are uncovered and interpreted (Josselson, 2013; Sparkes, 2005).

Narratives are complex, formed from the interplay of identity and sense of self (Sparkes, 2005). Stories are context dependent, being constructed within cultural and social conventions (Zilber et al., 2008). As identities themselves are narratively constructed Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that narrative forms of analysis are well positioned to understand these complexities. Acknowledging the research relationship from which narratives are produced, and the social and cultural context in which the stories are situated, gives sense and meaning to a story (Josselson, 2013; Zilber et al., 2008). Contextualizing the narrative also opens the possibility for readers to relate to elements of the stories that may resonate with their own experiences (Gillies & Robinson, 2010) and enable those without prior knowledge of the topic to connect to the research (Tellis-James & Fox, 2016).

Narrative analysis considers a wide range of factors, including content, structure, language, and context that run through the whole narrative (Josselson, 2011a). Paying attention to linguistic features can reveal how language influences and constructs meaning for narrators, in terms of their social world (Orsati & Causton-Theoharis,

2013; Polkinghorne, 2005; Riessman, 1993). A strength of narrative inquiry is exploring subjective meaning across the whole story (Frost, 2009). Experience is understood through the meaning narrators give to the totality of their stories, including aspects that operate at the pre-conscious level (Creswell, 2018; Farouk, 2017). Keeping a story intact, creates the opportunity for unspoken patterns, such as plots (Josselson, 2011a; Sparkes, 2005), the role of significant actors, and wider historical or environmental perspectives, to emerge (Josselson, 2013; Zilber et al., 2008). A narrative inquiry approach was adopted in the current study as it is an appropriate methodology to unlock the richness of individual stories by gathering personal reflections from specific contexts (Mohajan, 2018).

3.7. Ethics

An Ethics approval was given by the University of Salford's Post-Graduate Research Ethics Panel, under reference HSR 1920-097 (Appendix 3). The ethics application was submitted in May 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the restrictions that were in place in relation to in person interviews, the approval authorised virtual interviewing only.

As the population of potential participants is relatively small, it is perhaps unsurprising that two people who were known to me answered the recruitment advertisement and became participants. Extra care was taken to protect the anonymity of these participants. Reflexivity has played a critical role in being self-aware and understanding the effect that my job in an SEMH secondary school, and familiarity with two participants, may have had on the research process (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). This is discussed throughout this thesis.

3.7.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The participant selection criteria are summarised in Table 9, below,

Inclusion	Exclusion
Employed in a pastoral role in an SEMH secondary school, for at least 1 year prior to the interview	Practising Teachers
Directly working with pupils for a minimum 18 hours per week	Volunteers
Aged 18+	Employed at the same school as the researcher
English speaking	

Table 9- Study inclusion and exclusion criteria

3.7.2 Consent

As suggested by McGarry (2016), the recruitment poster (Appendix 4) and participant information sheet (PIS) (Appendix 5) emphasised the voluntary nature of participation and desire to learn from participants. The participant invitation letter (Appendix 6), PIS (Appendix 5) and consent form (Appendix 7), explained what the research involved, and re-stated the voluntary nature. It was made clear that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point up to one week after the interview, with no consequences (Marshall et al., 2006). In these circumstances their data would be deleted. The PIS (Appendix 5) clearly detailed how data would be collected and used, and that confidentiality and anonymity would be protected. After 24 hours of receiving the PIS (Appendix 5) participants were emailed and asked if they wanted to continue. Some potential participants withdrew after showing initial interest. Others did not respond to emails. One follow-up email was sent. Where there was no response, participants' details were archived for four weeks after which time their data was permanently deleted. Where participants confirmed they wished to continue, a consent

form was emailed to them (Appendix 7). Due to Covid-19 restrictions participants signed and returned the consent form prior to the interview. These are stored on the University's One Drive, which is a password protected, secure system. Before each interview participants were asked if they had any questions. It was reiterated that they could pause or end the interview at any point. All participants confirmed they were happy to continue.

3.7.3 Risk

When distressing information is shared, qualitative research can expose participants and researchers to risk of psychological harm (Dickson-Swift, et. al., 2008). However, most participants can discuss difficult issues, and harmful reactions are rare (Draucker et. al., 2009). Distress is not necessarily synonymous with harm, and the decision to withdraw from the interview process must always be the participant's. For others to make such a decision could, of itself, be harmful (Forrester, 2010). To mitigate against potential harm, The University of Salford's Ethics Policy and The British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014; 2021) were followed throughout the research process and a risk assessment (Appendix 8) and a distress policy (Appendix 9) were in place. Participants were given contact details for support organisations, including the NHS 'Every Mind Matters' website, the Samaritans and MIND, should they decide they needed further support. Risks to the interviewer were mitigated by maintaining awareness of personal and professional boundaries and operating within the limits of professional competence. Although participants may experience the research process as therapeutic (Lakeman et al., 2013; Warne & McAndrew, 2010), research relationships are not synonymous with therapists/mentor/supervisor and client, but researcher and participant.

Reflexively, there was a potential risk that the position I hold within an SEMH school could create a hierarchical relationship within the research process. This could affect participants' decisions to take part, data collection and data analysis. I made efforts to create a non-hierarchical presence, by purposefully positioning myself as a researcher, rather than in my professional role (Rose & Glass, 2006). This involved articulating my role in the literature shared with the participants and restating it in the unrecorded pre-interview chat. I made conscious efforts to remain in the researcher role during the interviews. This is discussed more fully in the reflection section of each story (chapters 4,5,6,7 and 8).

3.8 Participant Recruitment

I emailed the recruitment posters (Appendix 4) to professional contacts, who disseminated it via staff notice boards and email. Potential participants were asked to contact me via my university email or telephone, to discuss their interest. A purposeful sampling strategy, with pre-selected criteria aimed to recruit participants able to address the research aim. Within qualitative research there is no universal agreement on what constitutes a suitable sample size or to cease data collection (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). The sample size depends on several factors including the research aims (Cohen et al., 2011). In their meta-analysis Vasileiou et. al. (2018) identifies data saturation as the most frequently cited justification of sample size. Whilst the origins of this approach are found in grounded theory, it can be used in other qualitative approaches, although it is not suitable for all studies (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). In a narrative inquiry the research aim is to achieve a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences (Boddy, 2016; Langdridge, 2004). Samples of one or two can be sufficient (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, a relatively small sample size was deemed

adequate for the current study. Initially this was estimated at 6-9 participants. The data generated from a larger sample would be unmanageable, given the time and resources available. The sufficiency of the data collected, was discussed through regular supervision. It was assessed based on new and rich understandings of the topic (Vasileiou, et al., 2018). When the data from five interviews had been collected, and two had been analysed, it became possible to conclude that sufficient richness, depth, and quality had been secured. The current study, therefore, involved five participants.

3.9 Data collection

Within the qualitative research paradigm, a variety of data collection methods are available; interviews and focus groups being the most frequent (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2018; Figgou, 2015). In the current study an in-depth interview method was selected, to explore emotion and meaning within individual stories. Narrative interviewing is flexible, acknowledging the importance of the research relationship in securing quality data (Josselson, 2013). A narrative interview protocol (Appendix 10) was designed to ensure that the interview was free flowing and adopted a conversational style (Riessman, 1993). Although video interview is considered to be only marginally inferior to face-to-face interviews (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021), there were concern that building rapport may be more difficult and distress less easy to identify and respond to. To mitigate against these potential issues, there was a 10/15-minute unrecorded chat immediately prior to each interview and a debrief at the end. Participants were advised that, with their consent, the interview would be audio-recorded and transcribed. It was clearly stated when the recording started and ended, as participants may not have had clear sight of the Dictaphone.

To settle each participant into the interview they were asked for some basis demographic data and then the following opening question,

> *"I am really interested to learn about you and the work that you do with children and young people in a SEMH school. Please tell me as much as possible about you and your setting?"*

This was to place the focus of the interview on the participants and for them to interpret and answer the question in a way that was meaningful to them. The remainder of the interview followed the interview protocol (Appendix 10) but were not ruled by it (Fraser, 2004). The narrators required very little prompting and the conversation flowed.

At the end of the interview, the unrecorded time was used to thank the participants, check on their wellbeing and establish if any support was needed, as per the Distress Policy (Appendix 9). During the post-interview debrief all the participants expressed their satisfaction with the research process. There were no requests for any further help or support. Immediately after the interview, an audio file was created, with a pseudonym, on the University One Drive account then uploaded to OUTSEC, a Salford University approved transcription service, via a secure, password protected portal. The recording on the Dictaphone was deleted. When the transcripts were received electronically from OUTSEC they were downloaded to the University's One Drive and any identifying features were removed. The recordings and transcripts were permanently deleted from OUTSEC's portal after 40 days. At all times GDPR (2018) requirements were adhered to.

3.10 Data Analysis Approach

Within qualitative research the aim is to make meaning from people's experience by providing analysis which goes beyond description (Josselson, 2013). There are numerous ways to analyse narrative data (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). Early

narrative inquiry models focussed on analysing the structure and form of stories, suggesting they consisted of a chronological sequence of events with a beginning, middle and end (Cortazzi, 2002; Josselson, 2011a; Labov & Waletzky 1972). The narrative plot was viewed as a historical account of the narrator's life events, encompassing form, content, and performance (Sparkes, 2011). However, the lives and experiences of narrators can become more known to the researcher by exploring personal stories as complete entities, and not merely a series of separately narrated events (Cortazzi, 2002; Josselson, 2011a; Riessman, 1993; Squire, 2008).

A holistic approach offers a valuable understanding of how narrators construct their experiences (Josselson, 2011a). Attending to the use of language, gives insight into the narrators' personal and societal relationships, and how they contextualise their stories (Riessman, 1993). This forms part of '*how'* the narrator shapes and organises their story, thus reflecting how they construct their experience (Sparkes, 2005). The "*structure, style and coherence*" of the story (Lieblich et al., 1998, p68) reveals as much about the narrator's experiences, perceptions, values, and identity as does the content. The distinction between content and form is often unclear, given the multiple layers and intricacy inherent in narrative inquiry (Lieblich et al., 1998). Josselson (2011a) argues that the content and narration, the "*told*" and the "*telling*" (p68), are of equal importance.

Data collected from narrative inquiries is often broad ranging, thus, identifying the focus of analysis can be challenging and potentially subject to researcher bias (Paley, 2016). One approach considered was thematic analysis, as it is a structured, adaptable, and flexible framework that is not tied to any individual theoretical perspective or interpretative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The formation of

themes is directed by, and explicitly reflects, the data, concepts and assumptions that underpin them (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, thematic analysis is commonly restricted to descriptive and explorative conclusions with limited attention being given to interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The concentration on bounded sections of text, can cause the analysis to become distant from the narrator's story (Riessman, 2008). The nature of themes in narrative research can be complex, as they are often interwoven and conflicting within the stories (Lieblich et al., 1998). The intersubjectivity of the research relationship should also be acknowledged (Josselson, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1988). This is what distinguishes analysis of narrative, from narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988). The current study used Fraser's seven step approach (2004) to create a structure, whilst also drawing on the work of Lieblich et al. (1998), Josselson (2011b; 2013), Riessman, (2008) and Zilber et al. (2008), to capture the richness of the data.

3.11 Data analysis process

An empathetic listening stance, open curiosity, and willingness to understand the narrators' experiences generated rich data from which in-depth analysis of meaning was possible (Josselson, 2013). Familiarity with the data aided the understanding of less obvious cues, both verbal and non-verbal. Details such as pauses, laughter, tone of voice and the flow of the story enabled inferences to be drawn and potential insights to be gained (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995). To ensure that the data analysis was theoretically consistent and coherent an approach based on Fraser's (2004) seven phase approach, was adopted. A summary of the stages is offered below.

3.11.1 Hearing stories, experiencing each other's emotions

Fraser (2004) suggests that researchers gain a sense of the narrative by reflecting on the narrators' body language and description of feelings. She recommends the use of a journal to record the emotions this evokes, during and straight after an interview, as they could affect future interpretations. These diary entries supported reflexivity and are captured in the reflections offered at the end of each narrator's chapter.

3.11.2 Transcribing the material

Transcription of interviews is essential for line-by-line analysis. In Fraser's (2004) second phase she suggests that researchers transcribe the interview, to immerse themselves in the data. Due to time constraints the interviews in the current study, were transcribed by an authorised third party. Once transcribed, the scripts were read for accuracy. Details identifying participants, or their setting, were anonymised or deleted. Given the specialist nature of the research area great care was taken to assess if participants could be identified from the wider content of their narrative. Airing on the side of caution, some details were changed, including one job title. The transcripts were securely filed and not revisited until all the interviews had been completed. This was to limit any influence on subsequent interviews.

3.11.3 Interpreting individual transcripts

The audio recordings of each interview were listened to several times, whilst simultaneously reading the transcripts. This was useful in becoming familiar with the data and noting verbal and non-verbal cues, such as pauses and laughter. Notes were written on the transcripts highlighting matters that may be of interest, such as inferences, the flow of the interview and any potential insights (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995). The subsequent listening and reading focused on understanding the unique

experience and capturing the participant's voice by asking myself "*what is this person trying to tell me, what do they want me to know*?" The approach taken was to consider the narrative in its entirety, before then coding to identify themes. Fraser (2004) identifies the difficulty placing extended sections of narratives into themes or plots. This was experienced in the current study. The stories were often not linear, participants returning to themes at different points of the interview.

Coding was inductively created by rigorously identifying features of the transcripts that held relevance to the research aim (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Points of interest were highlighted in different colours, with notes where appropriate. Where codes appeared to be similar or there was uncertainty whether to code, a cautious approach was taken, and each was coded separately. During the several re-reads, codes were added, deleted, and merged. Overcash (2003) suggests looking for themes that appear to hold meaning or relevance for the narrator through repetition or forceful delivery. Themes, patterns, and narrative links (Clarke et al., 2015) gave structure and focus to the analysis. Quotes from the text were copied and stored under themes headings. This process was repeated several times, with quotes being added and deleted as the themes were re-assessed.

13.11.4 Scanning across different domains of experience

The fourth phase of Fraser's (2004) approach suggests the researcher searches for narrators' domains of experience, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cultural. In the current study, the impact of relationships, with self and others, was identified as an important aspect of participants' stories. This provided context for their experiences and facilitated the exploration of the impact of wider social structures and organisational norms.

13.11.5 Linking the personal with the political

Fraser's (2004) fifth phase gives attention to the narrators' discourse. This included metaphor, colloquialisms, or jargon. Metaphor is an important aspect of human cognition and, may help some people to describe an event more easily, especially one that is emotionally painful (Müller et al., 2021). Within the current study several participants used metaphors. An aspect of the data analysis has been to examine the meaning that may lie behind this. The political context in which the participants work was also explored in relation to power dynamics, status, and cultural norms. The interpretations offered are supported by existing theories and concepts.

13.11.6 Commonalities among participants

Having established the emergent patterns in individual narratives sone commonalities between participants became apparent. This was worthy of further exploration. A more detailed discussion is offered in chapter 9.

13.11.7 Writing academic narratives about personal stories

A strength of narrative research lies in the uniqueness of the stories. It is therefore incumbent upon the researcher to ensure that themes adequately reflect the issues given prominence by the narrator (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes offered were reviewed to ensure they stood up to scrutiny. To stay true to the philosophy of narrative inquiry it is acknowledged that the analytical process is one of co-construction. There are multiple possible interpretations of a narrative, with the researcher creating a story of their own (Fraser, 2004). In the analysis a balance has been struck between data extracts and the interpretations offered (Clarke et al., 2015). Extracts from the interviews, were carefully selected to reassure the reader of the integrity of the analysis. Where appropriate, theoretical concepts were offered to achieve a deeper

level of analysis and situate the narrator's story within the wider literature. This ensured that the analysis was theoretically consistent and coherent.

The analytical approach taken in the current study, has respected the philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry. The framework used created a robust structure that captured the richness of individual experience (Fraser, 2004; Vance et al., 2015). It utilised the strengths of thematic analysis, whilst addressing the limitations of its descriptive framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), ensuring all aspects of the stories were examined (Lieblich et al., 1998). This approach acknowledged the complexity of undertaking qualitative research by analysing data from several different angles (Coffey & Atkinson,1996; Frost, 2009). Linguistics, overall messages, and the meaning narrators give to their stories (Farouk, 2017; Josselson, 2013) have received as much attention as content, structure, and performance (Figgou, 2015). Through reflexivity it is recognised that the relationship between the narrator and researcher is likely to have shaped what the participants disclosed and the nature and tone of the interview (Josselson, 2013). The synergy in experience, and shared social-historical context, between participants and researchers, can lead to both making assumptions about aspects of the narrative, that are unsupported by the data (Zilber et al., 2008). Reflexivity and transparency, supported by supervision, has mitigated against researcher bias, including interpreting the data (Josselson, 2013).

To ensure that the unique experience of each participant is preserved (Josselson, 2013), the next five chapters are dedicated to each individual story. The analysis and theoretical discussion are presented in the form of a running commentary. Quotations, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks, are offered in support of the interpretations. It is acknowledged that alternative interpretations may be equally valid,

and that knowledge is co-constructed and context specific (Russell & Barley, 2020). Although not a primary aim of the current study, a second level of analysis is offered, in chapter 9, that considered themes across the narratives. This increased the understanding of commonalities in experiences amongst participants. The exploration of meaning, interpretations and reflection offered seek to reassure the reader of the study's authenticity, rigour and trustworthiness. From this analysis, chapter 10 offers suggestions for further research, along with policy and practice recommendations.

Chapter 4: Dianne's Story

"You've just got to try and do what you can"

Describing herself as a white, female, aged 46 to 59 years old, Dianne has worked in a SEMH secondary school for over 10 years. Prior to that she was a carer for adults with learning difficulties. Dianne described her job as a *'support worker,'* whose duties fall within the pastoral definition used in this study. As this study aims to gain a better understanding of experience, the terms used by Dianne have been adopted throughout this analysis of her story.

The following themes emerged from the analysis, and are discussed in this chapter,

Theme one- '*Being overlooked'*

Theme two- '*Having no idea'*

Theme three- '*The Beginnings'*

Theme four- '*Education is important, but…'*

Theme five- '*Putting a face on'*

Theme Six- '*They know you care'*

4.1 Being overlooked

Dianne's first sentence, **"***Nice really to find somebody that has that interest"* (p2, line 29) seemed to confirm that the study held value for her. The words "*find*", and "*interest*" suggesting that she was keen for someone to understand, uncover or reveal how she was experiencing her work. This created the impression that she felt overlooked in some way. As I read and re-read the transcript I found my own internal voice saying

'*somebody, anybody, just somebody'* as I interpreted Dianne's words as an appeal for recognition. Dianne makes a direct comparison with teachers,

> *"… as a support worker… the majority of the time, you do get overlooked because you're not the teacher. You're just the extra body in the room as people look at you, you have very little impact on how things are done and how things are seen"* (p2, line 30).

Being "*overlooked,*" "*just the extra body*" and having "*little impact*" raises questions of how valued Dianne feels and what sense of agency she experiences (Bamberg, 1997). This appears to be in keeping with Middleton's (2018) findings, with Dianne feeling that her work is undervalued or misunderstood. This is in contrast to teachers, who have clearly defined roles, expectations, and career pathways (DfE, 2021; Ofsted, 2021), whereas pastoral workers do not (Burton & Goodman, 2011),

> "*There is nothing in place for support workers. Like, I say, there's a lot there for teachers but for support workers, it's kind of a case of you each support each other and you filter down how you practice and what works for you and hope that they get on board… There's no real standardisation of how a support role should look within a SEMH school"* (p5, line 183).

Dianne states that many support workers are employed by the school without an understanding of the pressures and stresses they will face. She refers to a *"mainstream mentality"* (p4, line 148), with staff being ill-prepared to deal with extreme behaviours,

> "*…told to 'f' off constantly and called names"* (p5, line 193),
>
> "*…. punched, head-butted, spat at, bitten, kicked…"* (p6, line 203),
>
> "*…they will pick a chair up and try and wrap it round your head…"* (p9, line 367).

despite this level of potential risk and abuse, Dianne believes support workers appear to be left to take care of each other. Dianne initially benefited from support from a close-knit team of colleagues,

"… it was a fantastic staff team that I walked into. They were extremely supportive" (p2, line 35).

She however, experienced a difference in the organisational support given to teachers compared to support staff. This could be interpreted as a reflection of the value the organisation, and wider society, place on a hierarchy of perceived skills. This is despite Dianne's appraisal of support work being more challenging than teaching,

"I was with the same class all day, every day…I've been able to see the difference between what the support worker has to do and what the teacher has to do…. the support worker has got to support them children, in six lessons, with six different teachers, under six different environments and still maintain a relationship. That's more stressful. There's no let-up" (Dianne, p8).

Dianne paints a picture of her work being relentless and intense. This is demonstrated when she talks about returning to class after she has been involved in an incident that became physical,

"… I'm back in class expected to support another nine children that are dysregulated when you've got your adrenalin pumping, you've not calmed yourself down from the situation, you've had no feedback. You've just gone from one situation straight back into another. I think that when it's happening, is extremely stressful. Because if you walk back into class and there's another situation going on, you're …still het up about the previous situation. So, there's not that much time to kind of regulate yourself sometimes and that can be very stressful" (p6, line 205).

There is no opportunity for Dianne to process her emotions. The organisation has no measures in place to support staff with this intense work nor any mechanisms to acknowledge the impact of these stressful events. This again could generate feelings of being undervalued,

"The organisation, I would say, didn't really have anything in place. Obviously, we have the end of day debriefs so there was an allocated time where we could kind of get things off our chest and destress about the day. But that's all it was. There were no strategies given, there was no advice given…It was just an offload at the end of the day, which helped, but then you had to go back into it the day after, just doing the same thing because there was no direction really" (Dianne, p9).

Dianne also suggests that support workers are given insufficient time to be available to the children when they need them. This could be interpreted as a lack of appreciation by the organisation of the importance of building and maintaining relationships with children with SEMH needs (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Rae et al., 2017).

> *"There were days where I would have a child coming knocking on my door, dysregulating because he'd not been able to see me that morning and this happened last night, and so on. And I used to sit there and think, ah. It's hard because you can't hit every child all at once. There's always going to be somebody that needs you and you're just not available. And that's stressful because you feel like I'm not doing my best and he needed me, and I wasn't there. I'm letting him down. I was over there doing that"* (p7, line 262).

Above Dianne articulates the weight of responsibility she experiences. When she cannot be available to the children, it causes her stress. Her feelings of inadequacy, and not being good enough come to the fore.

4.2 Having no idea

Dianne comments about the lack of suitability and knowledge of many support workers employed by the school,

> *"…all the way through there've been support workers that have come in that have not been suitable for that kind of environment…they've not got the basic streetwise knowledge… what's going on for the children… a lot of support staff that have not got the knowledge and understanding"* (p2, line 40).

Dianne privileges *"streetwise knowledge"* and understanding *"what's going on for the children."* One interpretation is that she values the very specific knowledge and understanding that she feels is needed by support workers to meet the complex needs of the children. She objects to the recruitment of staff she feels are unsuitable,

> *"…over the last six months we have had, I think, 11 new support workers start. Not one of them has worked in education before. Not one of them is trained in how to support teaching and learning in a classroom. Not one of them has got*

any idea or inkling of the type of children that they're supposed to be supporting" (p4, line 144).

This could indicate that Dianne believes that recruiting unsuitable support staff diminishes the importance of the role. It could also reflect the relatively low status given to support workers within the sector,

> **"***I kind of went with no qualifications within the education… I'm not the most academic of people and I'm more interested in the behaviour side of it, to me a degree in this environment means absolutely nothing"* (p3, line 101).

The dismissal of degrees as having no relevance "*in this environment*", by which it is assumed Dianne means SEMH schools, suggests that her views of "*streetwise knowledge*" as being more valuable than an academic degree for support workers. Many roles in SEMH schools require a degree, or post degree level qualification, such as teaching, speech and language therapists, educational and clinical psychologists. One interpretation is that Dianne views specific, practice-based qualifications, such as teaching assistant and therapeutic interventions, as more relevant for support work, which is why she,

> *"… got my TA3 and the* [name of intervention] *that I do now, is all about attuning and validating feelings"* (p3, line 102).

The intervention Dianne refers to supports pupils' innate ability and emotional intelligence (Yin et al., 2013). This appears to build on Dianne's interests and strengths,

> "*…I always had the ability to be able to see that a child was not quite right"* (p4, line 118)

Dianne sees understanding pupils' behaviours as important,

> *"… to understand where they're coming from and why they're acting and behaving in the way that they are"* (p2, line 57).

> *"There's always a reason for why they explode the way they do"* (p9, line 340).

The importance that Dianne appears to attach to understanding and interpreting complex behaviours appears to be a cause of stress for her,

> *"I think the lack of knowledge makes it even more stressful because you're interpreting behaviours … in the wrong context and in the wrong way"* (p5, line 190).

She suggests that schools may place unrealistic expectations on inexperienced support staffs' abilities to interpret behaviours and respond appropriately,

> *"…support staff that come into these environments extremely undertrained, expected to know how to deal and how to react to these kinds of behaviours"* (p10, line 400).

This suggests that Dianne believes support workers, including herself, are unprepared when they start their jobs. They have no appreciation of the pressures and stresses they are likely to encounter. They are placed in almost impossible situations, due to their limited experience in dealing with the challenges they will face. Lack of knowledge in managing challenging behaviour can create relational stress between colleagues (Mackenzie, 2012). Dianne states,

> *"…she'd only joined us recently…about three months, she just turned round very snappily and just said, 'well your voice is very annoying, so I suggest you be quiet now'. One, you don't blame and shame…you don't call children annoying. There were a lot of mistakes that were made…that just showed me that the people that we were employing had no idea of the concept of the kind of children and their needs that they're dealing with"* (p5, line 155).

Dianne may be using the defence mechanism of displacement (Vaillant, 2000). She may be experiencing dissatisfaction at the perceived low status and lack of value assigned to support workers by her school. It is relatively safer for Dianne to displace her unwanted emotions on to her colleague, rather than the school leaders. Dianne's feelings of irritation towards her colleague may reveal her fear of the consequences if interactions are not handled appropriately,

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"There's always a reason for why they explode the way they do. And when they do explode it can be quite violent" (p9, line 340).

It may also reflect feelings of inadequacy and a lack of training she experienced. Dianne acknowledges the challenges in training people how to assess and respond to complex behaviours,

"I don't know what training you can give for that, other than experience. It's a bit of a hard one but I think support and guidance would be beneficial to everybody (p10, line 403)*.*

This presents something of a conundrum. Dianne focuses on experiential learning yet is critical of support staff joining SEMH schools without experience. Dianne's own experiences would suggest that support staff can join SEMH schools and learn 'on the job'. When she joined her school, she had no previous experience working with children. The school was referred to as an EBD setting,

"…back then, with the EBD children, it was quite boisterous on a daily basis, quite physical on a daily basis" (p4, line 110).

The use of the term "*back then"* suggests the pupils' behaviours were more challenging in the past. However, there is nothing in Dianne's narrative to suggest that the behaviours she experiences today are different to when she joined the school 10 years ago. The labelling of EBD schools as *'behavioural schools,'* in wider educational discourse, may have influenced Dianne's perception of the behaviours of these children at an early point in her career. This interpretation is supported when she states,

"When I first started, the year sevens were six foot two and built like men. Whereas now they come in as little children that look like they're seven years old. So, if an altercation broke out between two-year sevens, it was like you were stood [sic] *in between two grown men. And you still have to physically intervene and obviously safeguard both of them as much as you could…"* (p4, line 131)*.*

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One interpretation is that Dianne perceived the children to be bigger because she was inexperienced and unused to being confronted by volatile and aggressive behaviours. She may now have more confidence in her ability to deal with these insults and threats, therefore seeing them as smaller in stature. This suggests that with experience, other support staff may also become more proficient in working with the pupils. Dianne acknowledges even experienced staff need to learn new skills,

> *"We had more and more autistic children join us. There was a total lack of knowledge throughout the school of what autism is, what traits they display, what behaviours they display… And again, lack of knowledge… training and understanding to* [sic] *inexperienced and unskilled staff, is massively needed in that area"* (p3, line 81).

However, her reference to "*inexperienced and unskilled staff*" serves as a further illustration of her frustration with the recruitment of staff who she believes are unsuitable.

4.3 The beginnings

Dianne states that she finds many aspects of her work and working environment stressful,

> *"… it is a very stressful environment on the whole …"* (p6, line 230).

Dianne's narrative offers a potential explanation of how her childhood experiences of feeling undervalued and misunderstood, have shaped her empathy, and understanding of pupils' behaviours, helping her to make sense of her emotional responses,

> *"It still triggers that feeling of not being good enough, not being accepted, understood. And I know that's exactly what them kids are feeling at the time when they're doing that. So, I just have a lot of empathy and sympathy"* (p9, line 347).

One interpretation can be made using elements of transactional analysis (Berne, 1958). Transactional analysis states that the treatment children receive from their families shape their future beliefs about themselves and others. Dianne talks about her experience supporting adults with "*challenging behaviour and learning disabilities*" (p3, line 89),

> "*I'd always empathised with the adults, because the conversations I had with them was about how misunderstood they were when they were children and how they were made to feel, like they were never going to amount to anything in society…It was quite saddening really to know that because of the way they were treated in their childhood, that it created such depression in adulthood*" (p3, line 90).

Through her conversations, Dianne has established a connection between their adverse experiences in childhood and poor mental health outcomes in adulthood. Communication continues to be important to Dianne as she strives to understand her pupils' behaviours,

> "*…it's about communicating with the child and finding out how they feel. What's making them react in the way they're reacting? What's the underlying issue going on?* (p10, line 385)**.**

Where there is misunderstanding or miscommunication Dianne seeks to repair this,

> "*…if there's been any misunderstandings or misinterpretations anywhere, just to try and clear it up*" (p9, line 352)*.*

In this sense, Dianne draws a comparison between her approach to supporting pupils mirroring aspects of her parenting style,

> "*…I'm, I'm a big believer on communication…So, I get my children to tell me everything and anything… And it doesn't matter what it is, we'll deal with it as long as we're dealing with it together… I've instilled that, you can tell me anything... communication is massive, I feel…*" (p9, line 376).

When giving examples from her personal life, such as raising her children, there is more emotion in Dianne's voice and stilted delivery. This suggests that she finds this

a difficult area to discuss and may potentially indicate unresolved issues. Some of those issues appear to arise from her childhood. She refers to her father calling her "*stupid*" and the impact this has had on her,

> *"…I think back to, don't get me wrong, I love my father to pieces, he was a good dad, but when me and my sister were younger, I have a thing about people calling children stupid. Dad used to turn round to us all the time and go, are you stupid? What did you do that for?" …still triggers that feeling of not being good enough, not being accepted, understood…"* (p9, line 343).

The impact of being called stupid seems profound and plays out in Dianne's current thinking and practise. If she believes a child is struggling in class, she pretends she does not understand so the teacher will explain again,

> *…if I knew that they'd not quite got what the teacher had asked them to do, I would then put my hand up and say, excuse me sir, I didn't quite get that, can you please explain it to me again. And I would put the eyes on me and the focus on me, but the child still got the information. … Miss will do this, and she'll take the pressure off…"* (p4, line 121).

One interpretation is that Dianne may be projecting her own experiences on to the children. This is supported where she is talking about her pupils but uses the first-person pronoun,

> *"…I feel embarrassed putting my hand up and asking that question again. So, to me, it's always been about coming down to their level, but being able to understand where they're coming from and why they're acting and behaving in the way that they are"* (p2, line 56).

Stating that,

> *"… my intentions would never be to blame, or shame, or make them feel in any way that they were inadequate"* (p9, line 350),

This suggests that this is an aspect of her own experiences that she would not wish to inflict on her pupils. Rather, Dianne appears to believe that she is providing a protective shield, deflecting attention away from the child, preventing them from feeling stupid, in the way her encounters with her father made her feel. To mitigate against a

potential threat to her self-worth and self-esteem, triggered by her childhood feelings of inadequacy, it is possible that Diane is using the psychoanalytical concept of defence mechanisms (Cramer, 2006; 2015; Di Giuseppe, et. al., 2021; Vaillant, 2000). Originating from the work of Freud (1923) and further developed by psychoanalysts including Klein (1961, 1975, 1984) and Berne (1958, 2016), they operate as unconscious psychological strategies, to shield the person from anxieties or psychological harm caused by difficult emotions, thoughts, or feelings. Although the concept of defence mechanisms originates from an unconscious interaction between patient and therapist, Freud (1923) acknowledged they are part of human relationships that exist outside of this context. Dianne's narrative indicates the presence of "*transference reactions*" (Berne, 1958 p735), where feelings emanating from events in childhood are transferred to situations in adulthood. Countertransference may be occurring as thoughts and feelings from the past are reactivated (Guest, et al., 2020; Little, 2016). Sitting neatly within a narrative approach, Berne (2016) suggests that narrators adapt their early life experiences and reactions in the form of a "*script"* (p97), often presented as separate acts from which the whole story is formed. These life scripts trap people in a cycle of childhood feelings and needs, being met by infantile inferences and decisions (Little, 2016). Within Dianne's narrative there are examples of projection, an immature, defence mechanism (Cramer, 2006; 2015; Di Giuseppe, et. al., 2021; Vaillant, 2000), operating at an unconscious level, with unwanted feelings and thoughts about the self being attributed to others (Klein, 1975). Dianne talks about the inadequacies of her colleagues, the misunderstood adults she cared for, and her emotional discomfort at the thought of children being embarrassed when they do not understand their lessons. All these reactions may arise from processing her own feelings.

4.4 Education is important, but…

Dianne shows a clear preference for understanding the children's behaviours, rather than focusing on education,

> *"So, when I started there, I kind of thought to myself, I wasn't really interested in the education side of it as such, I was more interested in understanding where the children were at, how they felt, how they felt that other people felt about them"* (p3, line 96).

This raises the question of whether Dianne experienced inner conflict between her own views of what the children needed to succeed and the requirements of a school, and wider educational system. Referring to other support workers she says,

> *"They're more focused…like mainstream schools on the academia of it. And yes, we're in education and yes, our main priority is to get them to progress, be fruitful within life and achieve whatever they set their mind to do. But fundamentally, the wellbeing and the mental health is not being prioritised as much as it should be because of it being an educational setting"* (p2, line 43).

Whilst agreeing that academic progress is important, she expresses her dissatisfaction that mental health is not prioritised because it is a school. Dianne links children's behaviours and emotional difficulties to wider societal or familial factors,

> *"… even now I face things that I wouldn't dream of…. I think there'll always be that be that* [pause] *shock element in it, because a lot of what you deal with, with the children that are in these schools is not normal. It's not normal life. They don't lead a normal life. Some of them are horrendous. The level of abuse and neglect it's horrendous"* (p10, line 409).

This is in line with MacLeod's (2006) concept of "*sad*" children, who are seen as victims of their environment or social factors. In her narrative, Dianne's refers to children in terms of their group identity, year group and SEND, rather than as individuals. This may be an unconscious defence mechanism to emotionally distance herself from individual children's difficult circumstances. Armstrong (2018) suggests that Klein's

concept of defence mechanisms should be extended to include the influence of social structures, including workplaces,

> *"…emotional experience of the organization as a whole is a function of the interrelations between task, structure, culture, and context (or environment)"* (Armstrong, 2018 p6).

Within these dimensions, individuals contribute to the overall emotional experience, through their personality traits and their beliefs. They are also affected by it. This expansion of Kleinian concepts, enables the consideration of whether Dianne is using projection, in response to the wider emotional landscape of the school. This resonates with what colleagues said to Dianne when she joined the school,

> "…*we're all individuals and we're bringing different thing of our own personalities to the plate but we're working on this overall structure so that we're all working along the same lines"* (p2, line 36).

There appears to be differing opinions within the school about the relative importance of supporting children's mental wellbeing compared to educational attainment,

> *"It's more of the mainstream mentality of, we're a school, we've got targets to hit and we're going to hit them. This is what we've got to do. The children need to be in class. They need to be learning. I agree with all of that, but there's a way of doing it"* (p4, line 148).

This could be interpreted as Dianne being critical of the school's approach as,

> "*Nobody addressed the reason why they didn't do what they were supposed to do in the first place"* (p4, line140).

This could indicate that Dianne feels frustrated with colleagues not taking the time or having the insight to try to understand the needs of these children. Dianne talks about ways of teaching children that she believes will improve their behaviour,

> "*Basic morals and respect is a massive thing…Because I feel that there's a lot of households that are dysregulated that have no respect for each other and show no respect. And a lot of behaviours are learnt behaviours, unfortunately,*

that are around them. I think, if you. [pause] *I've always seen part of my job, it is my job to challenge them challenging behaviours*" (p9, line 360).

Dianne values children being respectful and links this to the ability of pupils to emotionally regulate. What she sees as a deterioration in moral standards, she lays at the feet of families and wider societal changes,

> "…*over the years that I've worked there, society, as children, has changed*" (p4, line 131).

> "*I don't know whether that's just my generation of the way we were brought up and the fact you respect your elders, no matter what your elders are. Whether they're right or wrong, you respect them*" (p5, line 197).

Dianne places much of her narrative in a historical context. She hints at difficulties in her early life, suggesting,

> "…*My childhood, it was good, but it wasn't perfect. And there's behaviours in me that display the fight and flight mode sometimes, if certain triggers are hit… a lot of ways that I was brought up, back in the day, were* [sic] *normal*" (p9, line 370),

The concept of things being different in Dianne's childhood, is repeated when she reflects on the experiences of adults with learning difficulties,

> "*I know I'm going back to times when all this wasn't even looked into. They were just classed as naughty children*" (p3, line 95).

Dianne experienced the same failure to understand the antecedents of challenging behaviours in her school as she had experienced when caring for adult service users,

> "*Because we were an EBD school and there was no thought towards nurture or mental health, it was purely a punitive sanction system where the consequence was they got removed* [from the classroom]. *They either removed themselves or they got removed physically. There was very little reparative work done afterwards. They were just expected to come back to class and get on with the lesson. Nobody addressed the reason why they didn't do what they were supposed to do in the first place.*" (p4, line 136).

Although Dianne believes this has improved,

"*I think we've moved on massively in the way that the whole school looks at the children and that there are more mental health issues which produce these behaviours*" (p4, line 141)*,*

Her earlier comments are slightly contradictory to the above,

"*… the wellbeing and the mental health is not being prioritised as much as it should be because of it being an educational setting*" (p2, line 45).

This may suggest that Dianne believes there have been improvements in understanding the cause of behaviours, but being a school limits this, possibly due to the conflicting demands of learning and attainment. Dianne appears to support a nurturing approach to understanding behaviours. She forcefully states,

"*I'm in no way punitive within my approach with the children, but they do need boundaries and consequences … Not used and given to them in a punitive way…. there needs to be a fine balance between keeping boundaries and consequences, but not using it in a punitive way*" (p3, line 72).

Yet, earlier in her narrative she implies the opposite. She says that over the last 18 months to two years,

"*…They've now got to the point where they've totally taken away the behaviour system and the sanctions system. The children … all of them have felt like their structure has been taken away….it was their sanctuary; it was their security. They knew what was expected of them. They knew what the consequence for a behaviour was*" (p3, line 66).

There appears to conflict within Dianne's thinking. Whilst at one level she believes the system gave children structure and security she acknowledges that,

"*We had a sanctions system in place which, to some extent, worked with the majority of the children and not with the majority of the children, if that makes sense? A lot of underlying issues got missed because it was so structured and so regimented*" (Dianne, p3, line 62).

This can be interpreted as the sanctions system working on a superficial level, with Dianne acknowledging causes of many behaviours are being missed. The structures and boundaries are presented as benefiting pupils. However, Dianne's narrative may

reflect her need for order and structure, through which she may achieve a sense of safety.

4.5 Putting a face on

Dianne's describes engaging in emotional labour, by applying *"feeling rules"* (Hochschild, 1983, p50). These are organisational rules which dictate what emotions employees are expected to show in specific work situations (Edwards, 2016).

> *"Always in the forefront of my head, I'm thinking I've got to get back to class. There's another six lads in there that still need me to be there. I've still got to do my job. I've still got to focus,* [pause] *put on a face.* [pause]. *It takes a while for you to regulate back to a baseline. It's hard because you know that you have got to get back to class and you have got to still do your job. And you don't want to come across as like whatever's just gone on has affected you. You've got to stay neutral in a way and not kind of put what you're feeling on to the rest of the class when you go back"* (p8, line 313).

It does not appear that Dianne is suppressing her emotions to avoid feelings she finds difficult (Näring et al., 2006; 2012). Rather, she seems to be performing *"surface acting"* (Hochschild, 1983 p68) by disguising her true feelings and the emotions she is experiencing. This interpretation is supported by Dianne's response to being asked why she did not want the children to know how events impact her. She states that she, *"…should lead by example"* (Dianne, p11), which can be understood as role modelling how to emotionally self-regulate. She wants to protect the pupils,

> *"…these are vulnerable children that we're dealing with. They can't deal with their own emotions so to put my emotions on to them and expect them to be able to deal with that too, I think is a step too far"* (p8, line 329).

Hiding her emotions comes with a psychological cost to Dianne, as she finds it, *"extremely stressful"* (p6, line 207). Dianne would respond differently to a similar situation if she was at home,

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"I would be effing and jeffing and doing it completely different…and it's a natural reaction. But in a classroom, you can't do that and that's always at the forefront of your mind that you are at work" (p8, line 324).

This indicates that she does partake in surface acting at work. It is not possible to ascertain if Dianne engages in surface acting or suppression in the context of the current study. A reflexive consideration is that Dianne may have chosen to communicate her emotions in a way that adhered to feeling rules as she was aware of my professional background. It is also possible that Dianne is articulating feeling rules that operate across the SEMH school sector. In keeping with the concept of feeling rules, Dianne is comfortable showing emotions that are acceptable to the organisation,

> *"I've had some* [laughs] *of the toughest, aggressive lads in school – shall we say* [laughs] *come to me in the middle of the dining room and giving me a big hug. Bringing me cards and flowers and all the kids have looked and gone, oh my god! And it's me, tears flowing"* (p8, line 293).

Dianne's use of laughter may be her way of demonstrating the irony she sees in a situation where pupils who are labelled as "*aggressive*" show her affection and gratitude. As laughter is often viewed as a socially acceptable expression of emotion, Dianne may be using this mechanism to manage her discomfort and divert attention from the difficulties challenging behaviours can create (Stengel, 2014).

4.6 They know you care

There is little evidence in Dianne's narrative, that her school have measures in place to help her to cope with the emotional and physical intensity of her work. When asked how her work impacts her psychologically, she talks about emotional resilience and how this is shaped by personality and personal circumstances,

> "*… I think that depends on the kind of person you are and how strong you are and how together you are. Unfortunately,* [describes a personal trauma] *….at*

that time that I found work a lot more stressful. But that was only because I had my own personal issues to deal with at that time. I think if you're in a good frame of mind and you're feeling okay and you've not got a lot of pressures within your personal life, I think it's a lot easier for you to be able to rationalise what goes on. But, yeah, it is a very stressful environment on the whole really.it depends on the kind of person you are and how strong you are and how together you are…" (p6, line 233),

There are some contradictions in this aspect of Dianne's narrative. She says she found work stressful at the time of her trauma, because she had personal issues to deal with. The impression given is that she was able to cope at other times. Yet she states the environment generally is very stressful. This can be interpreted as Dianne experiencing the work environment as stressful, but she also views herself as emotionally resilient. She can deal with the day-to-day work stresses; it is only when she experiences significant personal trauma that the stress overwhelms her. Dianne does acknowledge she finds work stressful as, in the absence of organisational support, she has found her own way to destress,

"… at 45… you find the things that regulate you and calm you down… that without my [hobbies] and my social activities that I do, I wouldn't necessarily have an outlet anywhere else, to destress…" (p7, line 276).

Dianne identifies the elements necessary to experience pastoral work as rewarding,

"If somebody has the passion and the [pause] *will to understand what these kinds of schools are and what implications [sic] we actually have on these children, then it can be an extremely positive, rewarding job. Seeing them develop. If you've got a good support team staff around you, if you have that open relationship where you can talk"* (p10, line 390).

When asked about the positive impact on her psychological wellbeing Dianne relates this to her pupils doing well, and being recognised for the role she has played,

"Yeah, loads, loads. Just the feeling of being able [coughs]… *it chokes me up every year when the year 11s leave because I've always had them and supported them in year seven. And then kind of watched them go through the school still with them coming to me every now and again with their issues, or*

their problems. And the feeling that you get at the end when you have child come up to you and say, I just want to say thank you for everything that you've done, and you've made a difference and you really helped me in this really bad time that I was going through. Just comments like that just make it all worthwhile… I feel proud that I've been able to contribute to them feeling the way that they do" (p7, line 284).

This suggests that Dianne achieves a sense of purpose (Ryff, 1989; 2014) from her work, which may support her psychological wellbeing. Although Dianne says there are *"loads, loads"* of positive aspects, other than this one statement she does not give examples, and quickly counters the positive comments,

"*There's a lot of days where you get to the end and you kind of know that there's still a lot more could have been done and they're not still in a good place. That's another downside of it as well"* (p8, line 297).

Dianne self-comforts by saying,

"*But again,* [pause] *I always feel like the lads leave knowing that somebody's cared"* (p8, line 299).

This may indicate an inner conflict, between what Dianne wants to achieve and what is possible. The concern she shows for the children, wanting them to know *"that somebody's cared"* and her desire to understand behaviour and prioritise their mental health above education, is in keeping with the transactional analysis ego state of "*positive nurturing parent"* (Newell & Jeffery, 2002 p52). In this sense, Dianne's care can be viewed as loco parentis. Making the pupils' feel cared for appears to be the sole aspect of her job that positively impacts her psychological wellbeing.

4.7 Critical Reflection

Within this section a critical, reflexive analysis is offered capturing my feelings, responses, and reactions in relation to interviewing Dianne and hearing and analysing her story. The aim of this is to offer openness and transparency and provide the reader with greater insight into the analytic conclusions that have been reached.

Dianne was the first interviewee. I was in my home office and Dianne at her home as she was isolating due to Covid-19. The ethics approval stipulated that the interview must be conducted virtually. This was not my preferred method, and at the time I was unfamiliar with Microsoft Teams, the platform used. I was anxious if the audio recording, via a Dictaphone, would work and the sound be of sufficient quality. I had no anxieties about the interview process, but I was unsure how much prompting or intervention would be required, to ensure Dianne could talk freely about aspects of her story that were important to her, whilst meeting my research aim and objectives. I was acutely aware that I did not want to 'lead' her in any way. I felt that my experience of interviewing witnesses when working in the legal profession, would help. My concerns proved to be unfounded. Dianne spoke at length with very little need for prompting. Although this was how I had hoped the interview would go, when analysing Dianne's narrative there were some aspects that I would have liked to clarify or for her to expand upon. This is perhaps a limitation of conducting a single interview with a participant.

Dianne presented her story in quite a matter-of-fact way. Although there was very little emotion, her motivation to support pupils who had 'behavioural issues' was apparent. She expressed a desire to understand why the pupils behaved in particular ways. In this aspect we had a shared interest. However, Dianne's approach appeared to be more behaviourist (Skinner, 1985) where pupils can be taught rules, through a reward and punishment approach. This child deficit model does not reflect my own understanding or interpretation of the causes of many of these behaviours. Dianne also privileged supporting the pupils' mental wellbeing above their education. This is a theme that I hear regularly in my own work, and a view that I understand, but do not agree with. I view education as a gift for everyone. It is a core responsibility of SEMH schools to be creative in how they educate pupils who find elements of formal learning

difficult. At times these differences poked at my values. However, this did not translate into any adverse feelings towards Dianne, or how I analysed her story. In fact, I felt sympathy for her. She seemed quite isolated in her role and did not appear to have much support from her organisation. She repeatedly stated that she found her work stressful. This resonated with my experience of the stress experienced by some pastoral staff working in SEMH schools, especially in relation to aggressive or violent behaviour.

The skills that I learned as a legal interviewer and trauma informed practitioner were extremely helpful during this interview. I felt that Dianne trusted me, and that an empathetic, active listening approach was appropriate. As the interview was on Teams, I had the benefit of seeing my own reflection on screen and I was able to reassure myself that my non-verbal communication was appropriate. I felt that I encouraged Dianne to speak by using facial and head gestures, such as nodding. The amount and nature of information that Dianne shared I saw as testimony to her feeling comfortable with the interview and research process. It resulted in rich, nuanced data, that reflected her unique experience, and which added to a better understanding of this under-researched area. Within my research I do not aim to *be* the voice of my participants but seek to *give* voice to their experiences. Having her voice heard appeared to be very important to Dianne and was her motivation for participating. I was pleased that taking part in the research may have given Dianne the sense that she was being heard and that it therefore held value for her.

Chapter 5: Milly's Story

"I do find it very stressful"

Milly describes herself as a white female, aged between 18 and 25 years old. At the time of the interview, she had been employed by the school for around one year. She described her role as,

> "*I'm a mental … sorry, an emotional support worker, but more on the mental health side. I support the pastoral team*" (p2, line 45).

During analysis of Milly's interview, it became apparent that this slip of the tongue may reflect her relative comfort working with young people who she describes as having *"mental health issues."*

The themes identified in Milly's narrative are:

Theme One- '*My type of young person'*

Theme Two- '*Feeling unsafe'*

Theme Three- '*Planning in advance'*

Theme Four- '*A low status role'*

Theme Five- '*The stress of one-to-one work'*

Theme Six- '*Processing emotions'*

5.1 My type of young person

Milly describes the young people as having "*very complex needs"* (p2, line 43). She distinguishes between young people with social and emotional issues and those with mental health difficulties. She articulates a clear preference for working with the latter,

> *"For me, it's more the type of young person. I have a set type of young person that I prefer working with, and that's young people who may be struggling with their mental health and that's why they can't access mainstream education…They come in and you do a good lesson or intervention with them rewarding and enriching because you know that you're making a difference …"* (p4, line 131).

Milly compares the progress made by these pupils to those assessed as having social and emotional needs,

> *"Whereas the ones with more social and emotional difficulties, although they do make progress, it's a lot slower...day to day it's hard because you can't really see those changes day to day… Whereas with more mental health kids, you can see these changes and improvements happening a lot quicker"* (p4, line 138).

Milly appears to experience job satisfaction and a sense of purpose (Ryff, 1989, 2014) when the pupils can make progress. There are several possible interpretations that could explain Milly's position. It may reveal her own academic experiences of being judged on her educational progress and attainment. She may also be reflecting wider educational discourse, where progress is used as a measure of a school's success. Her comments that pupils with mental health needs *"… do want to access education, but they might struggle to"* (p4, line 134), indicates that she may be more sympathetic to their needs than those with social and emotional difficulties, as she believes the former group are trying. It could also reflect the stress that she experiences when encountering unpredictable and explosive behaviours of young people, who she identifies as having social and emotional difficulties,

> *"…it's kind of the unpredictable-ness of these young people* [those with social and emotional problems] *…They can explode and be violent or aggressive. For no reason a young person may call you an f'ing c' or other unpleasant names. So, it's kind of the unpredictable nature of these young people that is quite stressful"* (p5, line 154).

Milly's categorisation of pupils by 'social and emotional' or 'mental health' labels may stem from her interpretation of the behaviours that flow from these needs. She views

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pupils with social and emotional difficulties as more *"explosive", "volatile"* and *"unpredictable"* than those with mental health needs. Another interpretation is that she is reflecting a wider educational discourse where children with social and emotional difficulties, often referred to as behavioural difficulties, are stigmatised (Broomhead, 2016). Throughout her narrative Milly draws distinctions between pupils based on these labels.

She uses labels to define how stressful she finds their behaviours. The behaviour of those she describes as having social and emotional difficulties she finds the most challenging,

> *"…challenging behaviour is anything that's violent or angry. So, if a young person has an angry outburst and tries to throw a computer screen or a chair or threatens a staff member or threatens another young person, that they will hit them or things like that. Anything like that I would describe as challenging behaviour"* (p11, line 399).

Milly shows self-awareness when she explains that she finds working with young people who have mental health difficulties as less stressful,

> *"Some people might find their behaviours stressful, like self-harm or suicidal ideations. They are less volatile; I find this easier"* (p5, line 163).

This indicates that Milly is more impacted by threats to her physical safety, rather than harmful behaviours a young person directs towards themselves. Milly assigns different antecedents for the behaviours depending on whether she attributes these to social and emotional or mental health needs. When discussing the behaviours of pupils with social and emotional difficulties she states,

> *"…some have more social and emotional difficulties due to past trauma. So, we have a lot of, say, violence in the family or domestic abuse or drug use in the family, those kinds of young people present with quite challenging behaviours. Because a lot of them are quite angry as well, or they have anger management issues, just because they've not learnt how to regulate their emotions"* (p5, line 150).

Milly is giving a social model explanation of behaviour, where the person's past experiences, in this case the family situation, cause the person to be traumatised to the extent that they are prone to emotional dysregulation, resulting in aggressive outbursts. This perspective is in line with MacLeod's (2006) description of "*sad*" children; the cause of behaviours being attributed to experiences in early life, including insecure attachment to significant adults (Fitzsimmons, et. al., 2019). Milly also appears to ascribe to a pathological explanation of behaviour, indicative of MacLeod's (2006) 'mad' construct. This is indicated where she states,

> *"I do believe he's changing medication soon, so they do think that will improve him, but at the moment we have to air with caution"* (p7, line 229).

> *"… he has improved massively; I think due to his medication"* (p10, line 354).

Milly's comments may indicate that she sees explosive behaviours as something that can be '*improved*' by medication. She may be reassuring herself that even the most volatile behaviour can be reduced. Milly appears to perceive the underlying reasons for the behaviour as either societal or medical. However, she does not separate the person from the behaviour when she states, "*that will improve him*" and "*he has improved massively.*" Milly appears to be trying to make sense of her experiences. This is supported where she states,

> *"A lot of our young people have experienced past trauma, so we are a trauma informed provider, which means we understand they need a secure adult, and we understand the young people a lot better"* (p2, line 56).

The use of the generic personal pronoun, '*we'* may indicate that Milly is situating herself within a wider organisational context. Her use of '*trauma informed'* and '*understand*' may reflect the wider school discourse, of ably meeting the needs of the pupils. Milly may also be attempting to demonstrate her knowledge, to play down her relative inexperience.

5.2 Feeling unsafe

In terms of repetition and force (Overcash 2003), the theme of feeling physically unsafe is prominent in Milly's narrative,

> *"I could be put in the community with the highest risk young person, who I don't feel safe working with…"* (p7, line 243).

> "*I was actually the first staff member to go out to him, so I literally had no idea what I was going out to really. I couldn't even ask a colleague what he's like or anything…"* (p9, line 307).

The potential risks to staff safety do not appear to be at the forefront of the minds of those assigning staff to work with young people. No account seems to be taken of Milly's relative inexperience, she is *"… the least experience by quite a while"* (p18, line 660), or her small stature and ability to respond to any physical situations,

> *"I'm not the biggest person either, so if a young person does present with challenging behaviours and angry outbursts, there's not a lot I can do if it does get violent"* (p13, line 457).

Milly is not provided with information about the young person she is asked to work with, and she states,

> *"I did keep asking for a risk assessment for him"* (p9, line 311).

In doing this, Milly may be attempting to employ strategies, such as gathering information, as a coping strategy to reduce her anxiety and stress (Vaillant, 2011). However, having had sight of the risk assessment Milly states,

> *"…that kind of made me feel even worse because it showed violent behaviour, things like he shouldn't be left in a group, and he's been violent to staff before. So, in a way, reading that made me feel worse before I went out to him"* (p9, line 311).

Even though Milly has seen an assessment of the level of risk and history of violence she follows instructions and goes to work with this young person, on her own. This

may suggest that Milly lacks the confidence to enforce boundaries around her own safety (Lindqvist, et al., 2019). It may also indicate that she considers this is an expectation of her job role. Milly demonstrates her resourcefulness by seeking advice from colleagues and by trying to deal with situations as they occur. In the event she "*…couldn't even ask a colleague*" as no-one had worked with this young person before. Milly may be experiencing emotional strain from attempting to manage risk that she cannot remove (Beryl, et al., 2018). The willingness of the organisation to place her in situations that are potentially risky is further evidenced by an incident that she describes,

> *"… one time when I first started, I was assigned to take a young person out, and he was really challenging, so he kept trying to run away from me, he wouldn't hand in his lighter and kept trying to set things on fire in my car. He tried to break my wing mirror, he kept kicking the inside of my car, trying to break it…"* (p5, line 174).

Milly states that after working with this young person, she reported her concerns about the risk he posed and that she felt unsafe working alone with him,

> *"When I got back, I discussed that I didn't think that, that young person should be on his own with a staff member, I think he should have two members of staff with him out in the community"* (p10, line 338).

It is not clear from Milly's narrative, who she raised these concerns with,

> *"…I was listened to, so it was agreed that no member of staff going on their own to him after that. So, that was good, I was listened to.* [she felt] *…better, knowing that my risks were validated. Because I was thinking, 'Am I just being* [pause] *am I just complaining because this is the job? Am I just being* [pause]' *I don't know, I didn't want to come across as complaining about the job, but then when they looked at it after I'd flagged it and agreed, I guess that made me feel better that it wasn't me, it wasn't my fault that I didn't feel comfortable working with him"* (p10, line 340).

This can be interpreted as Milly seeking reassurance and needing her assessment of the risk to be *"validated"* by others. The pauses emphasise that she does not want to appear to be *"complaining."* She is searching for confirmation that *"it wasn't my fault"*.

Milly's inexperience and lack of self-confidence may have led to insecurities as she compares herself to colleagues,

> *"… it could just be my personality as well, because I do know other members of staff who are in a similar role and they love it, they love working with the more volatile young people and the ones who are challenging, they actually like that. And so, it must be just different people as well"* (p18, line 665).

Milly's reference to her personality may be evidence that she uses rationalisation (Cushman, 2020; Vaillant, 2011). By attributing her dislike of aspects of her work to her personality, over which she has no control, may protect self-esteem and self-concept, thus reducing anxieties. Milly appears to compare herself to others. Her perception that some do not view the risks as she does, causes her to doubt the accuracy of her evaluation, even when the risk assessment clearly states the risks. Milly also questions whether her emotional reaction is justified. Despite being reassured that she would not work alone with this pupil again Milly states,

> *"I never wanted to work with them again if I'm honest* [laughs]*…the day after that I was sent with him again… It's not like I wasn't listened to, it was just they hadn't had the meeting to discuss it and raise the funding for it to be 2:1 and things. So then, my colleague just volunteered to come. He could obviously see that I was distressed about it and came with me"* (p15, line 536).

Milly may be evoking a reaction formation defence mechanism (Di Giuseppe, et. al., 2021; Vaillant, 2011); unconsciously re-assuring herself that this event was not as threatening as it may appear (Knoll et al. 2016). This coping mechanism is often employed when there is a threat to the self, arising from the perception that others will view characteristics in a negative way. In Milly's case she feels fear when others apparently do not.

The nervous laughter may suggest that Milly is experiencing an uncomfortable moment in the interview. The laughter may be her attempt to divert attention from the discomfort that threatens the self (Stengel, 2014). The use of laughter whilst under

emotional stress, has been recorded in psychological experiments, including that of Milgram (1963), where some participants laughed whilst administering electric shocks to fellow human beings. Hollander (2015) argues that some of Milgram's participants may be using laughter as an implicit act of resistance through which they demonstrate their ability to cope with the stressful situation. In this sense, Milly may be attempting to make light of her reaction to a situation she found extremely stressful, whilst still being congruent to her true feelings.

Milly excuses her organisation, framing their actions as part of the process of securing extra funding. Her statement, *"it's not like I wasn't listened to"* could be interpretated as Milly again using reaction formation (Di Giuseppe et. al., 2021; Vaillant, 2011) as a coping mechanism. By unconsciously changing her perception of reality Milly aims to avoid the more hurtful explanation (Knoll et al. 2016) that she has not been listened to, her concerns have been disregarded or that she may have been judged as inadequate in some way. Milly describes her reaction,

> "*I felt sick to be honest, just panicky and … yeah, I felt sick* [when] *I was sent with him again…"* (p16, line 554).

To deal with the negative impact, Milly takes personal responsibility for finding solutions to avoid a repeat of this situation. This shows elements of her emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 2004), as she unconsciously converts her emotions into problem solving (Pellitteri, 2002),

> *"So, if say I got put with a young person who I really didn't feel comfortable working with, I could say to another staff member can we swap? And I'll work with that young person, and you work with this young person? Sometimes you can do that. So, my colleagues are supportive with that"* (p16, line 572).

The ad hoc and unpredictable nature of these arrangements relies on the availability and goodwill of colleagues to volunteer to accompany her or to *"swap"*. Where these

options are not possible, she is placed in a situation where she feels unsafe. Milly may be using conscious strategies to cope with these situations, by *"…voluntarily eliciting help from appropriate others"* (Vaillant 2011, p366). It may also demonstrate her conceptual understanding of self-efficacy, demonstrating that she understands the action necessary to achieve her goal (Bandura, 1977), in this case avoiding working in a way she feels unsafe. High levels of self-efficacy can enable people to cope with situations they find threatening (Vance et al., 2015). Being proactive may enable Milly to feel that she has some *"autonomy and environmental mastery"* (Ryff, 1989 p1071) giving her a sense of control over her work. When asked if she was unable to swap would she have worked with this young person alone, she replied *"yeah",* suggesting that she had little control or autonomy (Ryff, 1989; 2014). Milly appears to be pursuing avoidance rather than intrinsic goals. Ryan and Deci (2001) argue that pursuance of the former is associated with poorer psychological wellbeing outcomes, than the latter. This is supported by Huppert (2009) who asserts that the pursuit and attainment of intrinsic goals is positively associated with subjective wellbeing.

In-line with Milly's use of reaction formation (Di Giuseppe et al., 2021; Vaillant, 2011) she often downplays the risks of violent behaviour,

> *"Yeah, I mean, if you look at the statistics and how often violence happens at work, it's so rare, but yeah, thoughts aren't always rational are they? So, it was a worry…I was just constantly on edge really"* (p9, line 326).

Milly also asserts that the young people do not intend to cause injury,

> *"…young people have set off fire extinguishers, the foam ones, in staff members' faces I don't think it's aiming to hurt, it's kind of aiming to distract or erm …"* (p4, line 109).

> *"Yeah. One person, whose head was caught by the bin, did have to go to hospital to get a check over, and then he did slam the door on her, which ended up hurting her rib, but I do think that was more a case of wrong place, wrong time. I don't think he was aiming to hurt her with the door, I think that was just an angry outburst"* (p7, line 323).

Milly may be consciously trying to shape her perception of the risk she faces, by re-assuring herself that violent incidents at work are rare. Milly's own experiences indicate that this is not the case as she has experienced several violent events in her work. Another interpretation is that Milly 'normalises' these behaviours, as they occur frequently within the school,

> *"I know in mainstream education you might get sent out of a classroom for talking at the wrong time or definitely if you threw a pen at a teacher, and I think they'd be shocked by that, whereas with us, we don't even flinch at it, we just carry on. It's quite normal"* (p12, line 409).

5.3 Planning in advance

Milly's narrative suggests that her organisation has an unstructured, serendipitous approach to assigning staff to young people,

> *"…we'll come into school each day and be told which kid we're working with on that day. So, they might say '*[name] *you're working with this young person in the community today'…you just get assigned on the day"* (p5, line 168).

The responsibility for what to do with the young person and where to take them rests with the staff member allocated *"on the day"*. Milly stated that for *"three or four hours… I was on my own …"* (p9, line 333) in the community with a young person she had not met before. The uncertainty about which young people she will work with on any given day, and the lack of advance notice and structure appears to adversely affect Milly's psychological wellbeing,

> *"I don't work very well with lack of structure and not knowing, so I couldn't plan and prepare. Because some days I'll get messaged in the morning saying, 'Can you bring this certain young person in?' and so then I might be rushing because they live further away than I do, or something like … things like that. Whereas at least if I knew the day before I could know what time I needed to get up and get ready and set off for them"* (p10, line 363).

Milly worries when she is unable to prepare practically and emotionally,

"…I am kind of worried about the unknown, so there is nothing I can do in my mind to make it better, because I literally don't know which young person I am working with…. if it was planned in advance, days in advance, then at least I would know and then have time to prepare, ask people who knew the young person a bit better, for example, or more experienced staff what they would do" (p8, line 274).

Preparedness, which appears to be important to Milly, falls in to two categories, personal and emotional (Kranke et al., 2021). Personal preparedness involves practical, logistical planning. In Milly's case this involved, where to go with the young person, how to get there and what to do when she gets there. Mansfield et al. (2012) identify how practical preparedness, in the form of planning and being organised, leads to resilience. This ability to withstand adversity can improve and support psychological wellbeing (Di Giuseppe et al., 2021; Ryff, 2014). Milly attempts to be emotionally prepared by seeking guidance from more experienced colleagues and obtaining information, including risk assessments. The lack of planning and prior notice given to Milly, deprives her of the opportunity of adequately preparing herself for working with the young person. Kranke et al. (2021) identify four aspects of emotional preparedness*,*

"1) emotional anticipation; 2) being emotionally present on the job; 3) self-efficacy to withstand the disaster; and 4) worries about having to provide additional services outside one's scope of competence" (p.1).

Milly worries about being selected to work with high-risk young people. Having no opportunity to prepare and being asked to drive young people who have challenging behaviour,

"I do find it very stressful, and the thought of turning up to work and not knowing which young person I am working with each day does impact my sleep the night before. I do stress about it, because I could be put with the highest risk young person, who I don't feel safe working with on the day, so I've not planned anything to do with them or where to take them or anything like that. It's just on the day you're working with that young person today" (p7, line 240).

Milly anticipates that this work will be stressful. Her statement suggests that the responsibility of what "*to do with them or where to take them,*" rests with her. In some situations, not having the opportunity to plan adds to her level of stress, perhaps initiating feelings of being unsafe. On other occasions knowing who she will be working with also causes her distress,

> *"… if there's a situation …, where I feel like there isn't a resolution, there's not really anything I can do that will make me feel better…. If I knew I was going to be with that young person again, I'd be stressing all night.* (p17, line 617).

This may indicate the stress response that Milly experiences when operating outside her scope of competence (Kranke, et al., 2021). She may also be questioning her self-efficacy, doubting her ability to deal with challenging behaviour (Vance et al., 2015) and to "*withstand the disaster*" (Kranke et al., 2021, p252). This is supported where Milly states,

> *"…that was stressful, because she just wasn't getting back in my car, and I didn't know what to do. So, because I was still quite new as well and was on my own with her. So, I guess it's the unknown when you're out with a young person"* (p6, line 188).

Milly believes she is at,

> *"…. personal risk and when I don't know what* [pause] *feel like I won't know what to do. …As I say, I don't know what the young person is going to do"* (p18, line 639).

She offers suggestions how the school could support staff's psychological wellbeing,

> *"… the organisation, they could reduce the panic and anxiety by, say, doing set timetables, so you know which young person you're meant to work with and what you're doing with them, or even where you're going with them, so you don't have to think, 'Oh, I'm with that young person, where shall I take them? What shall I do with them for the full day?' or whatever. So, that would help"* (p16, line 585).

5.4 A low status role

There does not appear to be a formal mechanism, such as supervision, for Milly to discuss any aspects of her role. She appears to have conflicting and unresolved uncertainty about when it is acceptable for her to raise concerns on matters that directly affect her, including working with young people who are high risk and who she has never met before. Her self-doubt causes her to question herself,

> *"Am I just complaining because this is the job? Am I just being …?' I don't know, I didn't want to come across as complaining about the job"* (p10, line 344).

At some point the focus of Milly's work changed, although no discussion took place, and no explanation was given,

> *"So, I don't know if they've just realised that I am better suited to young people who need that psychological help"* (p13, line 459).

This lack of communication may reflect the lack of voice and influence that Milly is afforded. The absence of clearly defined responsibilities within pastoral and support roles (Burton & Goodman, 2011), and the relatively low status assigned to these jobs, may explain the lack of consideration given when allocating work. Milly states,

> *"…because my role's quite low down in the organisation, so I'm often driving …the young person rather than teaching or doing interventions. I am, like, the one that's taking them round, or if they're having a wobble, I'm the one that takes them out for a drive, things like that. So, I guess if you're a bit higher up, say a teacher, or you just do in-school interventions with them, I can imagine that's much less stressful"* (p18, line 647).

Milly clearly links how she views her status within the organisation to the sort of tasks she is asked to perform. She makes a direct comparison to teachers and those who "*just do in-school interventions,"* suggesting that her work is more stressful. There may be several reasons why Milly has reached this conclusion. She may perceive the teachers' work to be more structured and planned, they are not working with young

people who are "*having a wobble*" and their work is classroom based where there is support from the wider staff team. There is no evidence in Milly's narrative that suggests she received any training or support to prepare her for the work she is required to undertake. She does not appear to have any managerial support or opportunity for supportive reflection. To the contrary, her story is one of being left to her own devices. The allocation of work is not communicated effectively to Milly, suggesting a reactive organisational approach. In this instance there does not appear to be any consideration of the experience or needs of Milly in her role of support worker.

5.5 The stress of one-to-one work

Milly clearly identifies an aspect of her work that she finds to be particularly stressful,

> *"Personally, the bit that stresses me the most, or I find the most stressful, is when I work one-to-one with a young person"* (p3, line 91).

Milly provides an illustration,

> "*Some young people …we need to have our eyes on them all the time… following a young person around can be quite stressful for me, because I know they don't want to be followed…I do find that quite stressful…sometimes …. we've had things thrown at staff because they didn't want staff following them around the school…or they might abscond and run off site completely. So, I think that's quite stressful…"* (p3, line 92).

The stress that Milly describes may emanate from her empathy, as she interprets the feelings that the young person may have from being constantly followed. The use of the word *"you"* rather than '*they*' when she states, *"you don't always want to be followed"* may indicate that Milly unconsciously identifies with shared interpersonal characteristics of the young people (Marsh, 2018), in this case their age. Milly would not like to be followed in this way, so she understands the frustrations and the

responsive behaviours of the young people. For this reason, she may be uncomfortable being asked to perform this task.

Some of Milly's work takes place in the community, where she works on a one-to-one basis,

> *"Support staff such as myself,* [sic] *might go out to these young people and deliver interventions, or even education with them"* (p3, line 71).

> *"…it is stressful if you're in the community one-to-one …. I think that's probably the most stressful part of my job"* (p5, line 165).

Milly offers an example,

> *"… this young person isn't challenging per se, but … she refused to get back in the car and come back to school. So, that was very stressful for me… that was stressful because … I didn't know what to do, because I was still quite new as well and was on my own with her. So, I guess it's the unknown when you're out with a young person"* (p5, line 185).

This stress may be due to Milly's lack of experience and absence of strategies to use when a young person refuses to comply with her requests. It may also indicate the emotional toll of being constantly vigilant (Beryl, et al., 2018), especially as the sole responsibility lies with her,

> *"…I parked in a car park … I found out that it was cash only and I didn't have any cash on me…. the young person was starting to get angry because they didn't want to wait, so they were shouting at me. … I had to walk and find a cash machine…. I couldn't leave the young person in the car, so I had to bring them with me, so they were shouting and stropping. And it was raining as well. And then, the first cash machine we went to didn't work it was broken"* (p13, line 475).

One interpretation is that the lack of notice and information given to Milly deprived her of the opportunity to adequately prepare for the day, including having cash,

> *"… I just felt very alone with it because I was the adult in the situation… the young person had challenging behaviours and there were quite a lot of things that were outside of my control"* (p13, line 482).

Being the *'adult'* appeared to make Milly feel responsible for managing this situation. She described how she reacted to having such responsibility,

> *"Just panic, and then* [pause] *panic but trying to look calm for the young person and trying to be positive for the young person so that they will get out of the car and come with me. And then, thinking is there anyone I can ring for support on … So, I did ring the main* [name of school] *line, but nobody … couldn't really help me with it. So, I guess it's that feeling of being on your own with it"* (p14, line 487).

Milly appears to feel out of her depth. She is trying to *"look calm…to be positive."* She may be using feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983) to try to get the young person to comply with her requests and not to escalate the situation. She shows a resourceful nature by ringing the school to reach out for support, but no help is forth coming. Milly clearly articulates her relief when she finished working with this pupil,

> *"… I was thinking, 'Gosh, I can't wait to drop this young person off so I can breathe and relax'…. So then, I just took them home … and then just had a breath, just breathed"* (p14, line 501).

This aspect of Milly's narrative may depict the level of anxiety that she felt. Her reference to being able to *'breathe'* once she has dropped the young person off, demonstrates the relief that she felt. Breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps the body to relax, countering the negative stress responses (Chin & Kales, 2019). This event, however, is on Milly's mind as when she returns to school, she tells her colleagues about what happened,

> *"… And I went and told staff about it, other staff, and then they kind of turned it into a joke, you know, laughing at me, 'Oh, what a silly situation', and laughing about it. So, that helped, you know, just kind of making it more light-hearted"* (p14, line 507).

There are several interpretations that may explain the response that Milly received from colleagues. The use of laughter could be construed as belittling, as her concerns were not taken seriously. Milly experienced this reaction as being *'laughed at'*. The

colleagues may not have intended to be dismissive, though this may have been the result. Rather they may be relieving their own affective discomfort, rather than seeking to diminish Milly (Stengel, 2014). Whether the response really "*helped*" Milly is questionable. She again raised the matter at the end of day meeting, suggesting that for her the matter remained unresolved,

> *"… I did mention it at that meeting as well. But then, nobody else seemed to think it was a big deal really, which I guess helped. Because everyone was just thinking, 'Oh, that's not an issue, you dealt with it, you're back', whereas I would probably have ruminated on it and kept thinking about it. They were just thinking, 'Oh, that's nothing, that's just another day, things happen'"* (p14, line 518).

It may be that compared to other more volatile behaviours, the situation Milly describes was seen as "*silly,*" by colleagues, rather than stressful. Milly says, "*which I guess helped.*" This does not present as convincing. It may reflect Milly's struggle with the uncertainty of how to process the emotional impact this event had on her. Milly appears to use this situation as an opportunity for reflection,

> *"To be fair to them, their behaviours weren't actually that bad, they were just stropping and stressing at me about it, which I guess a lot of teenagers would if you told them they have to walk in the rain. But yeah, so maybe it was just my own internal stress. Because it could have been worse if I'd had a different young person"* (p14, line 511).

Milly's reflections repeat a pattern of reaction formation (Di Giuseppe et al., 2021; Vaillant, 2011) where she explains and reframes the seriousness of the situation, by saying it could have been much worse. She may use reaction formation to deny her feelings of dependency through asserting her autonomy (Granieri, et al., 2017); seeking to regulate her behaviour from within (Ryff, 2014). However, Milly questions whether she over-reacts due to her *"own internal stress."* This could suggest that Milly

does not enjoy autonomy and is influenced by what she perceives others will expect. This may indicate that Milly's self-esteem is low.

5.6 Processing emotions

The data analysis suggests that Milly finds much of her work stressful. Her narrative indicates emotional and somatic responses to these stressors (Carmeli, 2009). This manifests itself in disturbed sleep, low mood, and stress,

> "*…lack of sleep because I am worrying the night before. I come home and might snap at my family, I do talk to my parents about it, which helps. But yeah, generally it's just very stressful*" (p8, line 259).

> "*I feel quite down. So, sometimes I cry about it when I come home. So yeah, kind of low mood and stress really*" (p8, line 263).

Milly clearly articulates the impact that her work is having on her psychological wellbeing. A coping mechanism that she appears to adopt is to talk to her family. She also states that she "*snaps*" at them. The latter response may suggest that Milly is evoking the neurotic (intermediate) defence mechanism, displacement (Vaillant, 2000). She is redirecting difficult emotions from the source towards the less threatening environment of her family. This may suggest that she does not feel that her work provides a psychologically safe place to raise her concerns. The informal end of day staff meeting appears to focus on practice advice, rather than support to process difficult emotions,

> "*…we have a meet at the end of the day where we'd say anything that stressed us and discuss it with other staff members…. 'This happened, and I felt like I dealt with it really badly, what do you think I should do next time?' And then, other people in the meeting would all be supportive and say things like that happen, but this is what you can do etcetera. So, that helps*" (p12, line 442).

Milly seems to be describing a staff support group. In keeping with Stoll and McLeod's (2020) findings, the focus of this group appears to be problem solving, with any

emotional wellbeing occurring as a bye-product. Although Milly is prepared to discuss matters that stress her, and seeks guidance how to avoid similar events, she does not appear to share the emotional impact she experiences. Milly may be surface acting (Hochschild, 1983), hiding her true emotions, focusing on practice advice, rather than processing difficult emotions. She may fear being judged as being emotionally unable to cope with the work. Although these meetings do not appear to offer reflective space, they do provide Milly with advice that helps her to switch off, rather than,

> *"…still thinking about it, because you feel like it's been sorted and you know what you'll do next time* (p13, line 445).

Milly's only outlet for processing difficult emotions appears to be with her family,

> *"… going home and talking to my family is kind of the best thing that I do"* (p12, line 439).

There are aspects of Milly's work which appear to have a positive impact on her psychological wellbeing,

> "*Some days I can have good days and feel energised from it. If I am working with young people … and they're having a laugh and I can tell they're having a good time and it's improving their relationships…"* (p8, line 281).

One interpretation of Milly's comments is that her emotions are closely connected to, and affected by, the young people. When they appear happy *"having a laugh…having a good time"* Milly has a *"good day and feels energised."* Milly appears to experience job satisfaction when the young people make progress, including when they are *"improving their relationships."* The importance that Milly attaches to relationships may reflect her experience of the school's stated ethos,

> "*A lot of our young people have experienced past trauma, so we are a trauma informed provider"* (p2, line 56).

This approach emphasises the importance of supportive relationships (Luther & Mendes, 2020; Rose et al., 2019). Trauma informed practices can improve teachers' abilities to self-regulate and manage challenging situations where pupils are emotionally dysregulated (Rose et al., 2019). Milly may associate young people *"improving their relationships"* to improvement in their emotion regulation, reducing the possibility of the explosive behaviour that she finds difficult. Positive relationships with colleagues also appear to be important to Milly's sense of wellbeing,

> *"… the other staff are lovely and supportive, and you can have a laugh with them and de-stress at the end of the day with them"* (p8, line 285).

Milly also appears to have respect for her colleagues, both in terms of their knowledge and their values. This is illustrated when Milly talks about a physical intervention,

> *"I've only seen it once…a young person who went into crisis and was starting to punch staff members and threaten young people… It was done well… everybody was safe. The young person started to cry, and they were comforted. It was necessary but it was kind. Without those skilled staff it could've been very different. It was stressful, but they were so kind"* (p4, line 123).

Milly praises the skill of the staff calling their intervention "*necessary but was kind*", aligning herself with a compassion-based approach (Al-Ghabban, 2018). In this example, Milly's *"moral framework"* (Mohindra, 2020, p2) appears to be in harmony with her colleagues and the organisation. This can facilitate a sense of organisational belonging (Parry, et al. 2021). Operating in line with one's own values supports psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 2014) by achieving a state of emotional consonance, thus avoiding emotional conflict. Making a positive difference to young people's lives and seeing them make progress appears to be important to Milly. It is an aspect of her work which aligns with the *"purpose in life"* elements of Ryff's (1989, p1071) psychological wellbeing framework,

"…I know that I am making a positive difference to the young people. So yeah, that definitely helps… seeing that progress, so I know that I'm making a difference to them…because then I know my job has purpose, improving young people's lives" (p8, line 283).

5.7 Critical Reflection

The interview took place at 4pm. Milly had been visiting students at their homes, earlier in the day, and was finishing her work at home. Although this was a virtual meeting, I was struck by how small and young Milly appeared. I instantly thought that she was probably just a few years younger than my own daughters. I was consciously aware that this comparison could affect the interview.

Milly presented as an intelligent and articulate, yet inexperienced young woman, to who I instantly warmed. She was quite reserved, whilst being engaging and her narrative I found interesting and insightful. I was struck by the flow of the interview. Milly would respond to a question and then wait for the next one. Her approach was very structured with little toing and froing between topics. At times it felt more like an interview than a discussion. I wondered if this reflected her recent experience of interviews as a student or whether there was an aspect of deference. I was very conscious that the interview may be impacted by power dynamics. Especially as Milly appeared to be trying to fit into her professional environment and make sense of the work she was asked to do. At times she appeared to lack self-confidence, questioning herself as to whether elements that she found difficult were part of the job, and worrying that she was not doing her job well.

As the interview progressed, and Milly revealed more about the challenges that she had faced at work, I found myself becoming angry. This feeling increased during the several times I listened to the interview and read the transcript during the data analysis.

I was particularly affected by the level of personal risk that Milly appears to have been exposed to. She had little relevant experience and yet was working alone, in the community with pupils who had challenging and violent behaviour. Even after flagging up her concerns, she was scheduled to work with a student with whom she did not feel safe. The way that she tried to avoid this work and the anxiety that it provoked I found particularly difficult. I continue to feel a deep unease about Milly's situation. The combination of my role in a comparable school and being a mother to daughters of a similar age, influenced my view that Milly's experiences are totally unacceptable. I feel a sense of regret that I was unable to intervene or advise her of the protection and support she should expect. She ended her interview on a note of optimism that things were changing for her at work. This evoked cynicism in me. I felt that Milly was trying to reassure herself, a pattern apparent throughout her narrative. My hope is that being listened to, and having her experiences validated, may be of benefit to Milly.

Chapter 6: Gail's Story

"Such a toxic role"

Gail described herself as a white female, aged 36-45 years old. At the time of the interview Gail had been employed by the school for just under two years. The setting is co-educational, with pupils between the ages of 12 and 19. Gail described her job as a senior member of the safeguarding team. She had not worked at a school or in a safeguarding role previously. Gail presented as a person who really cared about children and was passionate about keeping pupils safe, but the accompanying responsibility seemed to weigh heavily on her, and at times appeared to be overwhelming.

The themes identified from the analysis of Gail's interview:

Theme One- '*Behavioural and safety challenges'*

Theme Two- '*Scary situations'*

Theme Three- *'Feeling responsible'*

Theme Four- *''Misunderstanding the role'*

Theme Five- '*Can't switch off'*

Theme Six- '*Always look calm'*

6.1 Behavioural and safety challenges

Gail describes how her school has "*…a really, really complex cohort of young people"* (p1, line 20). Despite working in a SEMH school, where all young people have EHC

plans, Gail identifies their complexities as predominantly emanating from familial and

societal circumstances, rather than diagnosed SEND needs,

> *"We've got a lot of safety and behavioural challenges… they might be in a risk situation at home because they're living with troubled families. And in a really toxic environment… they come into school and kind of* [pause] *they're quite angry …"* (p2, line 28).

> *"…it is a difficult role to keep, and keep yourself well, because of the stresses that come with the fact that we work with troubled young people. People don't expect what we face* [pause] *…There's always something going on in the children's lives…"* (p1, line 22)

Gail illustrates how this anger can manifest,

> *"… one of the extremes … went on for hours …. It was kind of almost* [pause] *I don't* [pause] *it's quite a strong thing to say, but it's kind of a hostage type situation when it gets to extremes, where you're at a standoff with certain young people who are so mentally distraught and traumatised* [pause] *they've …assaulted three staff members and a pupils…it's quite serious because the Police had to be called* [pause] *… that was one of the most frightening situations that we've had* [pause] *that was the worst one, that's the worst I've ever felt. I don't get frightened easily, but that was quite* [pause] *I remember that one* [laughs]" (p11, line 383).

Gail graphically describes how this felt like a high risk '*hostage type situation'*. Not only

was she experiencing the threat of violence, but three members of staff and a pupil

had been hurt. She suggested that she was frightened but avoided saying this. She

laughs at the end of the sentence. Gail may be using laughter to protect her ego from

feelings of powerlessness and incongruity (Stengel, 2014). Gail's sense of self may

be at stake, as her self-image of someone who is '*not usually frightened'*, is under

threat,

> *"I remember shaking, I remember shaking actually and having to control it. … it felt like an out-of-control situation. There were very competent staff members around…they tried to hold the young person who just overpowered everybody, he was so strong, … it was almost a kind of psychopathic outburst really, it was very scary. Yeah, very risky. But the history of that young person tells us why he would behave like that. … he's been so abused, and it's terrible, isn't it?"* (p11, line 397).

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The '*shaking*' that Gail describes may have been a stress reaction, caused by fear. When the amygdala is triggered, adrenaline is produced causing involuntary muscle movement, preparing the body for fight or flight (Burgdorf, & Panksepp, 2006; Panksepp, 2010). She does not labour on her own reaction to this event. Rather, Gail talks about the young person and the situation. This suggests that, despite her emotional and neurological responses, she continues to function effectively, calming the young person. It is only when another pupil gets involved that the matter erupts again. Gail appears to be using de-escalation techniques to emotionally contain the primal survival fears in herself and the other people present. Bion (1959) describes this as a process whereby the caregiver absorbs the child's experiences and anxieties and returns them to the child in a form that is more bearable for them. Gail's comments that she was "*having to control it*" and it "*felt like an out-of-control situation*" may also provide some insights into Gail's perception of environments being more threatening when she has little control over them (Fox & Stallworth, 2010). Gail's reflections of this event are that the pupil should not have been in the school building, presumably due to the risk,

> "*…he came in for a bit before this incident …he shouldn't have come in, the Head wanted him in*" (p13, line 457).

One interpretation of this is that Gail felt powerless to challenge the headteacher's ruling and this led her to perceive that she had little control over the whole situation, including the antecedents of the incident. Gail's presentation of her narrative suggests that she experienced limited autonomy. Where autonomous functioning is absent people can become more vulnerable to emotional distress (Ryff, 1989). This can create fear that impacts on their personal and professional lives (Galvin et al., 2018; Ryff, 1989).

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Despite Gail finding the situation *"very scary"* she does not appear to hold the pupil responsible for the incident. Her rationale appears to draw on a complex combination of factors that have caused this extreme and violent behaviour. Describing the pupil as "*mentally distraught and traumatised"* and the behaviour as a *"psychopathic outburst"* suggests a pathologising or medical model explanation. When Gail states, "*…he's been so abused …"* she reflects the social model, where there are multiple, co-existing causes of challenging behaviours, including environmental (Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Aligning Gail's description to McLeod's (2006) constructs of "*bad, mad and sad"* children there is evidence in her narrative that she views this pupil as both *"mad and sad."* There is no suggestion that she views him as *"bad."*

Gail provides another example of a pupil's troubling behaviour,

> "*He wants to be the alpha male. He tries to be in charge … if he's got someone to bounce off, kind of a peer that's equally as domineering, then it can be quite a bad day for the staff team… they might walk around and start ripping boards off, or start throwing things at peers and staff, threatening peers, talking down to staff, calling staff names,... booting the door… it's a classic kind of DV* [domestic violence] *case really, of trauma"* (p6, line 214).

Gail initially appears to be holding this pupil responsible for his behaviour citing his desire to be seen as an "*alpha male."* This could be interpreted as Gail seeing this pupil as *"bad"* or *"sad"*. However, her final comment "*it's a classic kind of DV case really, of trauma,"* indicates that she attributes his environment, and specifically his experiences of domestic violence, to explain his domineering and non-compliant behaviours. Situating the causes of challenging behaviour outside of the child may enable Gail to respond in a more compassionate way (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019). This may help her to contain her own emotions (Partridge, 2012) and continue to function effectively, even in the most testing of situations,

"There is sometimes damage to the … buildings, sometimes there is violence and sometimes staff get assaulted, peers get assaulted, there is constant verbal abuse. There's a lot of anger … and they can just explode. And sometimes there is no warning for it, they're really troubled and damaged children" (p6, line 189).

In her role, Gail attends multi-agency meetings in relation to child protection matters, where she is privy to troubling information,

"…I probably see the depth of it really more than people who just see the reaction. It's horrible seeing the reaction, it makes you feel anxious, but I think when you dig deep into that and listen to some of the stories and some of the stuff that … the external partners tell you…the stuff that's going on at home, that's even more upsetting because some it's really sad and harrowing to listen to…. really bad domestic violence…then that young person is not behaving in a positive way when he comes in, and it's no wonder because he's witnessing that. That affects you, [pause] *yeah, a lot""* (p6, line 195).

Hearing about children's experiences of witnessing domestic violence, supports Gail's empathetic approach to understanding their behaviours. However, the vivid details that are shared, may have a negative impact on her psychological wellbeing.

6.2 Scary situations

Gail works with pupils in several environments, the school building, the pupils' homes and in the community. She described a situation where she was the sole member of staff working with a pupil in the community,

"… I did hold someone and stopped him from going near the young person, because he was trying to assault him. But he was an adult. So, I stopped him, but that was probably quite a scary situation because I am thinking [pause] *you know, my heart's going, everything is sweating and I'm thinking if he gets hold of this kid, he's going to hurt him. Cos the kid was shouting at him, calling him names … and threatening to assault him. So, that was a pretty bad situation, at that point, for feeling a bit anxious"* (p3, line 79).

This physical altercation with a member of the public placed Gail in a potentially dangerous position. Not only could she have been physically injured she could have faced a complaint about her use of physical force to prevent the adult from assaulting

the pupil. Gail's use of the words *"probably",* in the sentence "…*that was probably quite a scary situation"* and "…*feeling a bit anxious"* could be interpreted as her trying to minimise or downplay the fear that she was feeling. She appears to be more comfortable relaying physical, rather than emotional responses, to what appears to be a very stressful situation. This interpretation is further supported when Gail states,

> *"I thought that the young person was going to get hurt. I wasn't really bothered about myself, I just thought, … I didn't really think about me, I wasn't scared of him, I was scared for the kid"* (p3, line 85).

Within Gail's narrative it appears important to her that she is not seen as someone who is frightened or concerned for her own safety, but only for the safety of the pupil. Gail may be using rationalisation (Vaillant, 2000). An aspect of this can include impression management (Cushman, 2020), where Gail presents an interpretation of events in a manner, she believes reflects her in a good light. There are also indications that a drama triangle (Karpman, 1968), an extension of transactional analysis (Berne, 1958;1961), is at play. This concept is built on the premise that people take the position of persecutor, victim and/or rescuer, to get their needs met without articulating exactly what those needs are (Lac & Donaldson, 2020). Some people may feel compelled to take the role of rescuer to avoid feelings of guilt. These conscious or unconscious actions originate from the person's goal of getting their psychological needs met. People can also fluctuate between these roles, sometimes during the same conflict situation. In this example, Gail may be enacting the role of the rescuer, with the pupil being the victim, and the member of the public the persecutor. Gail using force to prevent the adult hurting the pupil, demonstrates how these roles can change during confrontation. The adult becoming the victim, Gail the persecutor, and the pupil, who was threatening the adult, becoming Gail's rescuer. Gail described a situation where she was dealing with an imminent threat of violence and potential harm to a pupil in

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her care. The anxiety and fear that she felt may be an appropriate adaptive response to a threatening situation (Huppert, 2009). Social relationships, the giving and receiving of support, are essential in supporting psychological wellbeing. However, giving support may have the greater positive effect (Diener et al., 2010). Although Gail does not appear to receive support from within her organisation, the extent to which she provides this help to others may have a positive impact on her wellbeing.

6.3 Feeling responsible

Gail forcefully repeats the extent of the responsibility she feels for making sure that pupils and staff are safe. She describes being hyper-alert,

> *"… I am very aware. I am constantly thinking what's going to happen next. I get up and I go to work and think, 'What will happen today? Something might happen today'* (p3, line 96).

Despite being part of team, and having a manager herself, Gail speaks as if the whole responsibility of keeping everyone safe rests with her. She states,

> *"I feel responsible for the safety of all the staff and the young people, that's what I feel. And I feel that if anyone gets hurt* [*pause*] *I mean, I remember one of the staff members getting assaulted a few months ago by one of the young people, and I was really upset about that, it bothered me* [pause] *I just thought I probably could have done something more about it"* (p5, line 148).

This could suggest that Gail closely links her sense of responsibility to her own agency. Frith (2014) argues that the relationship between these two considerations can be heightened when an action also has a moral outcome. Regret can arise when a person believes a better result would have been achieved if a different decision had been made. One interpretation is that Gail's sense of responsibility is borne out of her fear that someone could be hurt. She may also be concerned about feelings of guilt if she makes a mistake or overlooks something, and someone gets harmed. This analysis is

supported when Gail describes an incident where a colleague was injured by a pupil. She expresses a sense of responsibility and regret,

> *"… she got assaulted, and I just thought I probably could have done something more about it. I probably should have stopped that young person coming into school. I was dead upset…. I took it home and I was dead upset. My husband was like, 'You don't need to be upset, it can happen', but yeah it bothered me."* (p5, line 153).

It could be interpreted that Gail's desire to protect others increases the amount of responsibility she feels. When asked if other staff support pupils with their emotional regulation Gail states,

> *"Yeah, there are. I suppose I take it on more because I think I have to do. It's a work in progress, that, isn't it?"* (p8, line 262).

Although Gail talks as if keeping everyone safe is her sole responsibility, there appears to be some acknowledgement that other staff also hold these obligations. Posing her statement as a question may suggest that Gail is looking for confirmation that this is a joint responsibility, although the phrasing of her statement may suggest some reticence to change.

The job title of safeguarding manager appears to carry significant meaning for Gail, which reinforces her perception that she must take responsibility,

> *"… 'safeguarding manager', makes me feel that I have to take that responsibility. And if you don't model that, they look up to you sometimes, to say what's the answer, please give me the answer. And they seek that all the time, staff and young people* (p8, line 272).

Gail's assessment is that other people, staff and pupils, constantly look to her for guidance and instructions. The use of the phrase, *"look up to you"* could suggest that Gail feels that she is higher in the hierarchy, therefore has a duty to lead in these matters. It may also suggest that Gail sees in others an element of neediness where she is being asked to make things okay. In Karpman's (1968) drama triangle a person

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occupying the rescuer role can view others as being incapable of fending for themselves (Lac & Donaldson, 2020). This is indicated in Gail's narrative where she speaks of her colleagues' inexperience and lack of confidence,

> *"…sometimes if their emotions are a bit heightened, they're a bit scared to make a decision, and they look for somebody who can help them to come to that decision. When they've not experienced anything like here… They might be anxious themselves because they've had a bad day… they're worried about that. That comes with confidence, doesn't it"* (p8, line 278).

Gail appears to be seeking affirmation of this view. She then distinguishes between the levels of decision making,

> *"… When I make decisions, I think that's somebody's life, that's somebody's safety or somebody's livelihood. But for them, they don't have to make that critical decision… I think they're bothered if they get into trouble at work if I'm honest. …they lean on me so much…"* (p8, line 293)

There appears to be some resentment that staff rely on her so much and that she has the responsibility for making critical judgements. Staff members appear to seek guidance from Gail on a range of issues extending beyond safeguarding,

> *"Sometimes it's other things, behavioural stuff. 'What are we doing about this? What are we doing about that kid? How do we do this'? So, it's not always safeguarding… to run your eye over a situation … kind of consulting... But that is a theme, that people do have to have the confidence to make decisions, so then that would alleviate pressure off me, saying, 'Yeah, do this, do that'"* (p9, line 325).

The way the staff team appear to routinely look to Gail to tell them what to do could suggest that they view her as their rescuer. Gail appears to have a hands-on approach to the wider aspects of decision making. She also seems to be involved in managing situations, especially volatile incidents, whenever and wherever they occur,

> *"There might be a fight breaking out and I will get a phone call to say that's happening, and I will have to go and intervene with that as well"* (p2, line 55).

> *"I think probably my strength is de-escalation…I suppose the answer is they call me because I'm safeguarding lead, you know, while this is happening"* (p4, line 127).

One interpretation of the above is Gail's management style and position may potentially have created disempowering relationships (Daiski, 2004), resulting in staff becoming reliant on her to make decisions. This may explain why Gail receives approximately *"90 calls a day"* (p9, line 316) from managers and staff.

6.4 Misunderstanding the role

Gail's narrative suggests that her school has not clearly defined her role, responsibilities, or the extent of her authority,

> *"I think that sometimes it gets misconstrued, what the role is, and that's part of the issue sometimes, that it's not ironed out enough* [pause] *it's just defining that role really"* (p4, line 137).

Several aspects of Gail's narrative illustrated the impact of this lack of clarity, including when she describes a particularly violent incident,

> *"…I probably should have put a stop to him coming in, but I didn't think I had the authority to do so at that point, you see. I've since found out that I do have the authority to do that if I'm not happy, but I didn't know that at the time, you see, so* [pause]. *Well, if we'd acted earlier and I had the authority that I've got now, I suppose I would have just said he's not coming in…list all the risks"* (p5, line 156).

The way Gail tells this part of her story presents almost as a soliloquy, where she is working through her position. Saying *"probably"* could indicate some uncertainty about the best approach. The use of "*should"* could be interpreted as her being self-critical. judging her actions as lacking. This is within a context where Gail's level of authority is unclear. There is confusion in this aspect of Gail's narrative. She appears to have "*found out"* that she has always had the mandate to assess the risk pupils pose. Yet she states, *"… [if] I had the authority that I've got now"* which suggests a change in

Gail's level of authority. After this incident she does appear to have become more assertive in relation to decision making,

> *"…we had a young person, and he was two-to-one, and there was a regression because he'd kind of threatened to jump someone with a knife. And I said, 'Well, he's not coming in if he's doing that', you know, because there was a planned attack for the next day, and we'd heard about it …"* (p7, line 246).

However, Gail appears to struggle to assert herself when she and the headteacher hold different viewpoints,

> *"… the head is so overpowering sometimes … he told us someone **had** to go and visit a pupil, … he was so keen… he wanted to send just one female* [member of staff], *and she was frightened of going … because he* [the pupil] *was so violent. I said we can't send her on her own, so I got instructed by the head to go instead, but at the time my manager said, 'You shouldn't really go it's not safe, because you were there, you were involved in it'. But there was no other staff member to physically go…he* [the head] *was pushing for a visit …I went to the care home on my own, their staff were there, and he exploded again …"* (p13, line 450).

Gail states several justifications why it is unsafe for her to visit the pupil. Nevertheless, she complies with the headteacher's instructions. There are different interpretations of Gail's actions, which may not be mutually exclusive. She may be playing the part of the rescuer (Karpman 1968), coming to the aid of her colleague whilst potentially putting herself in danger. She also directly relates her compliance to the headteacher's *"overpowering"* and *"forceful nature"* which is indicative of a power imbalance, and seemingly prevented her from challenging the instruction and standing her ground. When asked if she is now more assertive if asked to do something she does not agree with, she states,

> *"Yeah, oh yeah, I don't care…I will say what I think, me, now… But we have to challenge if we're not* [pause] *if we don't feel it's right… "* (p13, line 471).

This may indicate a growing self-confidence, or Gail may be attempting to present herself as more assertive than she really is. She offers no examples of when she has challenged the headteacher. This can be interpreted as Gail protecting her self-esteem and her self-perception of being emotionally strong. There are aspects of Gail's narrative that present as victim manifestations in a drama triangle (Karpman, 1968), with headteacher positioned as the persecutor. The use of *"I don't care"* suggests Gail may anticipate negative consequences from opposing the headteacher. Gail also appears to be compliant, when taken off-task,

> *"…you can come into work and* [headteacher] *will say, 'right, you're doing assessments and integration', or 'Now you're doing this', and it will be new things to your role. But then there's other stuff going on, so all that stuff still needs to be done, but it's like how do you do it all?"* (p4, line 138).

This can be interpreted as the headteacher's lack of knowledge or disregard of Gail's workload and work priorities. Psychological wellbeing can be negatively impacted by stress caused by high workloads and poor autonomy (Brady & Wilson, 2021) and being unprepared, due to shifting demands (Kranke et al., 2021). This can emotionally overwhelm people and cause them to function ineffectively (Huppert, 2009; Huppert & So, 2013; Tappolet & Rossi, 2014). It can also impact self-esteem and sense of purpose that arise from fulfilling important aspects of the role. The absence of professional standards for pastoral staff, means that there is no clear guidance in relation to role requirements. This leaves pastoral staff and headteachers negotiating and navigating their expectations and working relationships. This situation can be further complicated by relational dynamics. Gail appears to respect the headteacher, but has trouble challenging him, although she believes she should,

"…Yeah. I think it's difficult to do that when you respect someone as well though. It is difficult to do it, but yeah, I think you have to do it in this kind of job role, because if you don't then those things can happen… It doesn't matter if someone has [number] *years' experience, if you're seeing those cases and living those cases, you are going to know what is right"* (p14, line 281).

When assessing risk Gail appears to privilege her day-to-day knowledge of the pupils over the headteacher's many years of experience in education. This could suggest that she does not see the headteacher as a safeguarding specialist. Also, the headteacher is distant from events on the ground and her physical proximity to the pupils and staff perhaps place her in a better position to make professional judgements. However, Gail's narrative suggests that she has influence over the headteacher,

"We don't always agree, sometimes we don't agree, but then he [headteacher] *comes back the next day and goes, 'Oh, do you know what you said about that? Yeah, I think that should happen'"* (p13, line 484).

There is a recurring theme that Gail believes her abilities are superior to people in more senior positions. She criticises the deputy headteacher's post-incident briefing session,

"We had a bit of a post-briefing where we all talked about it, but it kind of got a bit heated … I do those post-incident briefings now, and I don't run them like that. I kind of run them in a way that we're here, we've all been in this situation today, and it isn't a blaming thing, this is actually helping. We make it better for next time. … that one was run by the Deputy Head, but she didn't really know what she was doing, to be honest. She didn't have a clue really" (p12, line 441).

Gail's assessment may accurately reflect her own capabilities, compared to those of the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Conversely it may be a way of Gail protecting her self-esteem, by enhancing her own level of competence, in comparison to others. This may be a defence against her feelings of vulnerability, arising from her relatively limited experience.

6.5 Can't switch off

Gail appears to find it difficult to emotionally switch off from work,

> *"…when I go home and I am still not switched off…"* (p2, line 67).

> *"Even when you have breaks where you're supposed to completely switch off – Christmas and New Year – you're still thinking, 'Is everybody okay? Are they alright? Are they having a nice time or a bad time?' You know, those kinds of thoughts that just come through your head"* (p4, line 116).

An absence of adequate rest and recovery from stressful work situations can have a negative impact on a person's wellbeing and general health (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Gail's inability to switch off is illustrated where she speaks about the aftermath of the *"…hostage type situation…"* (p11, line 375),

> *"It wasn't until I sat down at home that I just felt drained that day. Like a slump, you know, like* [pause] *but still wide awake. Drained but wide awake. My body felt tired, but my mind was not … you know, that's the issue isn't it, that your mind doesn't get tired?... I remember the staff who were involved in it texting me at the night saying thanks for today, because they felt it as well, they were quite stressed with it all. Because it was … it ended up being, from the beginning to the end, around three hours. They needed my support"* (p12, line 417).

Gail supported her colleagues, but does not think she received adequate support from her manager,

> *"…I just got a check-in with the manager really, but that's it… the manager … my manager was involved in the incident, so it was difficult because we were both there. So, at the time, I suppose getting support from him is difficult because he probably needed support at that time as well"* (p12, line 426).

It is possible that Gail benefited from text conversations with people who had shared the same frightening experience. It may have helped her to process difficult emotions. It is equally possible that by positioning herself as the rescuer, rather than the victim, she may be shielding her emotional vulnerabilities and projecting an image of emotional strength and resilience, something which appears to be important to her. Although she is available for other staff, Gail does not seem to expect her manager to

be available for her. She may view her manager as a victim of the incident and therefore incapable of providing her with support. However, there is no evidence that she reached out to anyone else, including the headteacher or deputy headteacher, for emotional support. It is conceivable that Gail does not feel that anyone can meet her needs. This analysis is supported by Gail stating that the deputy headteacher, *"…didn't have a clue really"* (p12, line 439) and that she finds the headteacher "*overpowering*" (p13, line 450). This may indicate the absence of a warm, empathetic, and supportive relationship, necessary to achieve emotional wellbeing (Weare, 2010).

Gail's acknowledges that she would benefit from support,

> *"…sometimes it's so busy you don't get that supervisory support that I think … someone in my role probably needs it more often than someone who's not doing as toxic a role. You know, it does feel like toxic stress sometimes, I can feel it building in me"* (p4, line 110).

Exactly what Gail means by *"supervisory support"* is not clear. Given her reference to her role being "*toxic*" she may mean reflective or clinical supervision, aimed at helping her to deal with the *"toxic stress"* that she experiences,

> *"…it's not a nice feeling, it's a really toxic stress that … before I worked here, I hadn't felt it to that level before. And I mean, personally, I've been through some stuff, but it is a different kind of stress here that you get… But you have to manage it because if you don't it will send your mental health through the floor really"* (p9, line 332).

Gail describes the stress in dynamic terms when she states that it is *"building in me."* The use of the word "*toxic*" may suggest that Gail experiences this stress as a build-up of poison within her system. There is a sense that at times this toxic stress feels like it may overwhelm her. Gail explains how she experiences stress somatically and emotionally (Carmeli, 2009),

> *"I get that adrenalin feeling in my stomach, where my heart is thumping quite fast"* (p2, line 66).

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"I sat down at home as I just felt drained that day…My body felt tired, but my mind was not …" (p12, line 417).

"…having anxiety in the pit of my stomach…" (p15, line 525).

Gail recognises that her response to stress can be to comfort eat. She states,

"… when I go home and I am still not switched off or … you know, I want to comfort eat to try and deal with that stress. I think that's my kind of way of dealing with things, … I am dealing with that now, doing a lot of things to try and help myself…" (p3, line 68).

Having targets and structure appears to help Gail deal with the stresses of her job.

She is making a conscious effort to focus on her health and wellbeing, and on positive

aspects of her life,

"…I've got some targets…I've set myself three little targets today, I have to hit them every day, and it's just to try and take my mind off this…I concentrate on doing something for me and not for this. And I've bought this journal, a mindfulness journal, and it gives you your achievements for the day and what you're grateful for…just try and reflect … look at what was really rubbish about today, but actually what was good. Because we look at the bad things and not … there are some good in the day, and when you look back and think, 'Actually, I'm still here, I'm well and healthy', that's a good thing. And, you know, other people aren't as lucky as that, are they?" (p10, line 338).

This aspect of Gail's narrative focuses on the protective factors that she has adopted.

This illustrates that she is aware of the negative impact that her work is having on her

psychological wellbeing. Gail has set herself targets to achieve each day. Approach,

rather than avoidance goals, are linked to better psychological wellbeing (Ryan & Deci,

2001). Gail also appears to use targets as a distraction from *"this,"* which is interpreted

as the stressful working environment. This may suggest she feels that work takes

something away from her that she attempts to redress by "*doing something for me.*"

6.6 Always look calm

Throughout Gail's narrative she stresses the importance of remaining calm,

"… my heart is thumping quite fast, but I try to stay really calm and not let anybody see that" (p.2, line 66).

"I just don't want it to be reflected on the pupils. If they think that…I'm not calm, that will make them more anxious, and I think you have to be calm. But it does affect you afterwards because we're human aren't we, and it has to?" (p3, line 74).

These quotations demonstrate Gail's emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). She does not appear to be using suppression to avoid difficult emotions (Näring et al., 2006; 2012), as she says that it affects her afterwards. This appears to be a deliberate action by Gail, to give the outward appearance of being calm. This suggests that she is "*surface acting*" (Hochschild, 1983 p68) and enacting "*feeling rules*" (Hochschild, 1983, p50). These are the emotions that an organisation wishes to elicit in another person (Edwards, 2016). Gail tries to prevent her pupils from becoming anxious by giving the impression of calm. She appears to believe that if she showed her real emotions of fear or anxiety, it could be harmful to the pupils. It is possible that this reflects the cultural expectation of Gail's school, or her profession more widely (Rustin, 2003). Schools emphasise the importance of pupils emotionally regulating and managing their emotions (Middleton, 2019; Rose, et al., 2019; Syrnyk, 2012). Thus, they expect staff to avoid displaying negative emotions and reactions (Mikolajczak et al., 2007).

6.7 Critical reflection

Gail was the third interviewee. I was looking forward to the interview and hearing the experiences of someone who was part of a pastoral management team. The interview took place at 11am and Gail was in an office at the school. Although she said she was alone, and she had earphones on, I was concerned that she may be overheard. I raised this prior to the recorded interview, and Gail reassured me this was not the

case. Gail talked freely and in what appeared to be a very transparent way. I was aware that I asked more questions and clarified more aspects of Gail's narrative than I had previously done with Dianne and Milly. Dianne had left very few pauses and Milly responded to a question and then waited for the next one. I noted I adapted my interviewing style in response to each participant, which I viewed as a strength. It also reflected the co-constructed nature of the study.

At times during the interview, I was very aware that my thoughts 'slipped' into solution mode. I believe that aspects of my professional training and experience could help Gail to become aware of some of her thoughts and behaviours that may compromise her psychological wellbeing. I thought that her propensity to be the rescuer, and the absence of some professional boundaries, placed her in potentially unsafe situations. I wanted to constructively challenge some of her thinking, particularly in relation to how she feels responsible for everyone and everything. Throughout most of the interview I was consciously reminding myself that I was a researcher, not a supervisor, and that I must stay in that role. I was interested to re-hear the interview and read the transcript to establish if I had achieved this. I reflected whether two questions I asked were leading or reflected my interpretations, rather than Gail's,

> "*So, are you more … am I understanding it right, are you more assertive with your … anybody who is senior to you, asking you to do things you don't think are right?"* (Elaine, p13, line 475).

> *"… there are going to be professional differences of opinion aren't there that need discussing?* (Elaine, p14, line 494).

Upon reflection, the first question summarised what Gail had said, the second however, may have verged on advice. I believe that my questions were appropriate within the context of a narrative inquiry approach, utilising empathetic listening and were within appropriate professional boundaries. I hope the latter question has

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encouraged Gail to reflect on how she deals with situations that cause her stress and anxiety.

I felt a concern for Gail. I wondered if she had sufficient experience to be employed in such an intense and demanding role. There were times within the interview that Gail appeared to be seeking my approval, may be because of my position and experience within SEMH schools,

> *"…it does affect you afterwards, because we're human, aren't we and it has to?"* (Gail, p3, line 74).

> "*That comes with confidence, doesn't it*?" (Gail, p8, 278).

I thought Gail appeared vulnerable, hiding behind a mask of strength she outwardly tried to portray. Throughout the interview Gail forcefully and frequently spoke about the negative features of her work. She only talked about positive aspects when I directly asked about this. I concluded that Gail's negative experiences outweighed the positive impact of her work.

At the end of the interview Gail stated,

> *"I've been honest about it for you, Elaine…I hope that's helped you"* (p15, line 527).

I viewed these comments with interest. At some level did she feel that some of these experiences are normally hidden, or not spoken about? Did Gail genuinely think she was helping me? Did she find some aspect of sharing her story to be therapeutic? I felt that she placed her trust in me. Being vulnerable was probably difficult for her.

During the interview I felt discomfort when hearing some of Gail's experiences. When analysing the interview transcript, I felt that the level of burden weighed heavily on Gail. I had a sense of regret that maybe some of my skills and knowledge could have

helped her to deal with the stressful situations and process some of her difficult emotions. I was sorry that our relationship was ending here.

Chapter 7: Steve's Story

"I was one of those kids"

Steve described himself as a white male, between 36-45 years old. His current role is a SEMH Practitioner. He works in a co-education SEMH school, catering for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. The school has capacity for 30 pupils, approximately 18 currently on its roll. He has been in this post for just over 3 months, having worked in SEMH schools for approximately nine years and with young people for over 25 years. As with previous interviews Steve's took place over Microsoft Teams. He was at home, with his child, who made occasional verbal appearances.

The themes identified in the analysis of Steve's interview are:

Theme One- '*This who I am*'

Theme Two- '*Why we do this work*'

Theme Three- '*Understanding what it's like*'

Theme Four- '*Resilience*'

Theme Five- '*Looking after myself*'

7.1 This is who I am

At the start of the interview, Steve was asked for some basic demographic information. When asked his gender he gave an extended reply,

> *"I am a white male from* [name of town] *… I am proud of being from* [name of town]. *I don't know why but I am proud of it. Yeah. I am a dad."* (p1, line 4).

In response to being asked his professional background he repeated the question and then stated, "*My professional background is a clown*" [laughs] (p1, line 15). Steve's answer meandered a little. This, along with his use of humour and laughter, could indicate that he was nervous. He went on to describe himself as an experienced youth worker, the last nine years being in educational settings. He did not describe himself as a SEMH Practitioner, as per his current job title. These opening remarks may indicate the importance to Steve of different aspects of his self-identity. The concept of self-identity is made up of a combination of social and personal identities (Haslam, 2004). Social identity emanates from the individual's knowledge that they belong to certain social groups whose membership holds some emotion and value for them (Tajfel, 1978), whilst self-awareness of their unique qualities forms their personal identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity may influence the individual's experience of stress and affect their self-esteem (Willis et al., 2019).

Throughout Steve's narrative he frames his identity in tangible ways, such as his demographic information, and intangible in terms of his experience and skills. This is illustrated when he talks about his role and the positive outcomes, comparing himself to teachers,

> "*It's mainly me in a crisis, at the minute due to, you know, staffing erm but to be honest the teachers can be good but they're in a classroom … plus maybe I've developed that relationship with that young person because of the role and probably because of my background and my skillset*" (p5, line 184).

Steve demonstrates his professional knowledge by using jargon and technical language such as,

> "*…using the DEAR model, describe, express, assert, reward. Using distraction techniques imagery… dialectical behavioural therapies… Distressed tolerance skills…*" (p6, line 201).

> "…*making the sessions far more interactive and kinaesthetic rather than… didactic…*" (p4, line 149).

One interpretation of these aspects of Steve's narrative is that he may be partaking in impression management. This is a process whereby the individual establishes a desirable representation of the self to be received positively by the audience (Goffman, 1959). Huisman et al. (2021) found that in one-to-one interviews, research participants often used information management to present themselves in a positive light. They identified people emphasising positive experiences, demonstrating their knowledge and skills, highlighting how they help others, and communicating their abilities and accomplishments to appear competent. These aspects are present in Steve's representation of himself as someone with valuable experience and knowledge,

> "… *my role is also to support the … teachers, the learning mentors and the teaching assistants to maybe best understand some of the complexities, some of the challenges that these young people might be facing every day so that we can create the right environment, the best environment that they can learn in, feel comfortable in and thrive in*" (p2, line 32).

Uziel (2010) reports that individuals with high impressive management scores show more creativity, positivity, pleasantness, self-control, and reduced anxiety in social situations than those with lower scores. This, he concludes, can preconsciously promote emotional stability. Steve's apparent desire to create a favourable impression and gain respect from others, including as a participant in this research, may be indicative of his self-esteem needs (Maslow, 1987). He presents multiple aspects of self, work and past in a positive light. This may indicate high levels of self-acceptance, personal growth, and positive relationships, all of which are aspects of psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; 2014). It may also suggest that he uses rationalisation as a defence mechanism, by influencing others to have a positive perception of him (Cushman, 2020).

Steve's self-identity is also revealed when he explicitly associates some aspects of his early life with his pupils' experiences,

> *"… I were* [sic] *one of them [sic] kids. I were* [sic] *one of them* [sic] *kids. Alright, I went to* [name of school] *… I only went to* [name of school] *…I went to church, and I only went to church I'll be honest because I got fed! … I thrived because there was football. Not academic but then still at night-time I was on the streets, getting into mischief"* (p10, line 409-414).

Steve's illustration of himself as a young person, draws some parallels with MacLeod's (2006) construct of "*sad*" children. He associates difficulties in his home life with getting into mischief in the evenings. The support he sought from the church is couched in terms of meeting his basic need for food (Maslow, 1943). It may also indicate a broader relational need. This interpretation is further supported where he states,

> *"I had a community that wrapped around, and I think back when we were growing up, we had a community that would be totally wrapped around us, they weren't always antisocial, and they would care for us, and we knew the ones* [pause] *and it's what I love about doing this kind of work …"* (p10, line 414).

Steve may associate connectedness with being cared for. As a child, he appears to have identified people in his community who would care for him, when his parents were unable to do so. The use of the term *'wrapped around'* suggests that Steve felt that this care was enveloping and immersive. This sense of care, connection and belonging may have been a protective factor in his early life. Steve may perceive an absence in community care and relationships in the lives of his pupils,

> *"We have got a number of young people who have got such erm… been through the care system so many times, attachment issues that they have got so many complex issues that they are themselves facing…"* (p2, line 41).

> *"…after Christmas, they'd had a tough time with family… family issues between erm two parents that they don't live with and they've been in care and then not being able to see their siblings and they've never been able to talk about it"* (p5, line 191-195).

Steve's framing of these experiences suggests that he is attuned to the relational challenges that many pupils face. This appears to influence Steve's appreciation of relationships. This interpretation is supported where he states,

> *"… I see it as a blessing to have had the time to spend with these young people. Because it's precious"* (p11, line 403).

There is a circular nature and spiritual flavour to the reciprocal way in which Steve frames, and associates, relationships with the giving and receiving of support,

> *"…kind of that loving support, nourishing support that we give out but then that we get back* (p6, line 235).

Steve's own attachment experiences may explain his acute awareness of connectedness and belonging, which is identified by Maslow (1943) as the third most important human need. The importance he gives to relationships and supporting pupils, may reflect the influence the church and community had on his perception of wellbeing and belonging in his childhood. This feeling of belonging being an essential component of psychological wellbeing, without which self-actualisation is not possible (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019). Steve may also be demonstrating a high degree of empathy, from which his compassion and desire to help pupils' flows. Gilbert (2017) suggests that together empathy and compassion can motivate people to try to alleviate psychological suffering in others. Klimecki et al. (2013) argue that empathy can carry psychological risk, as empaths may absorb the pain of others, making them susceptible to emotional distress. They maintain that compassion, combined with a high degree of autonomous functioning, may offer some protection against empathetic emotional distress. Steve's narrative provides evidence of elements of autonomous functioning when he states,

> *"…not just, expect other people to solve it for us which it comes back to that understanding ourselves and what our triggers are going to be"* (p6, line 224).

This suggests that Steve's self-determination, independence, self-evaluation, and ability to self-regulate behaviour (Ryff, 2014), enable him to function effectively (Huppert, 2009; Huppert & So, 2013; Tappolet & Rossi, 2014).

7.2 Why do we do this work

Throughout Steve's narrative there is a strong sense that he gains great satisfaction from his work. He believes that he can have a positive impact on young people's lives by helping them to change and live the best lives possible,

> *"…we do this is to make people's lives better and the simple thing is to give young people the best opportunity* (p8, line 307).

This could indicate that Steve is engaging in altruism. Beneath a conscious altruistic intention lies an unconscious self-serving motivation which can act as a mature defence mechanism (Vaillant, 2011). There are a range of altruistic acts. These can arise from genuine care and for the sole benefit of others, or for the sole benefit of the person performing the act (Sun, 2018). Steve associates his own life challenges with those of his pupils; by helping them, he may be helping himself to convert difficult experiences into positive action. This interpretation is supported where Steve talks about how his experiences have led him to value education,

> *"…education frees people… without education, and I might have dismissed it years ago going … I've gone away and learnt so much and you learn along your journey …knowing where these young people are and how challenging their life is. That can change and for me is the bit that I go,* [pause] *that's what I want to see, young people have the best life that they can have"* (p7, line 275).

This may demonstrate how Steve has a more mature and developed view of education and learning. This may have arisen from his work experience from which he now situates formal learning within a wider model of education. Additional to academic

progress and attainment, SEMH schools acknowledge the importance of supporting the whole child, beyond their educational outcomes,

> *"...you don't just deal with the education; you deal with the whole person. And that's what makes it special. And that's what makes it amazing because that's how that young person gets the chance to thrive and succeed because it is the whole person"* (p10, line 417).

Within mainstream schools there can be a tension between achieving academic attainment and pupil wellbeing (Armstrong, 2018; Lillicott, et al., 2018). This can place stress on school staff, who feel that pastoral work is not valued as highly as academia (Middleton, 2018). This can be framed as a misalignment in moral values. Steve's narrative suggests that his moral values are shared by his organisation. This alignment with Steve's intrinsic goals, and personal values, may support his psychological wellbeing by generating positive emotions (Huppert, 2009), a high level of self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989; 2014), and a feeling of being valued (Middleton, 2018; Mohindra, 2020).

Within the SEMH education system Steve identifies the importance of building positive relationships and attachment with pupils (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019),

> *"...you build such an attachment with the learners that making the difference to them makes a bigger difference to me"* (p8, line 389-390).

This reaffirms the interpretation, discussed in section 7.2, of the reciprocal nature of these relationships and the importance that belonging, and connectedness hold for Steve. He gains benefit from making a difference in pupils' lives. The use of the first-person singular pronoun and present tense verbs, suggests a psychological closeness to the subject matter, in this case the pupils (Mehl et al., 2004). An illustration of this is provided where Steve speaks of a time when a pupil wanted to share the Christmas mealtime with him,

> *"…at Christmas, we had a sit-down meal … and it was beautiful because I was dealing with a bit of a crisis that was going on and he* [a pupil] *wouldn't eat until I sat down with him. I sat down with him, and he went 'I wanted to have my dinner with you' and I was like 'oh, that's so nice' innit* [sic]*?"* (p3, line 84).

The pupil's explicit statement appears to make Steve feel good, function effectively and demonstrates purpose in his work life (Huppert, 2009; Huppert & So, 2013; Tappolet & Rossi, 2014). Achieving a sense of purpose appears to be central to Steve's perception of psychological wellbeing. Having a purpose in life can be experienced at a profound level, where life itself is experienced as meaningful (Carmeli et al., 2009; Ryff, 2014). Steve may connect a positive sense of identity with a sense of purpose. This interpretation is supported where Steve shares his observations of a colleague's behaviour,

> *"…*[he] *was amazing but then became a shell of himself and wandered around haunting corridors as opposed to the amazing practitioner that we knew he were* [sic]*. Yeah, which was a real challenge, and you know you try and speak and say, 'well what's bothering you' …? They were haunted…"* (p8, line 279).

Steve's use of metaphor, "*became a shell of himself*" could be interpreted as an emptiness, a loss of self and purpose,

> *"I think he also lost himself and lost his purpose and the reason. And when we lose a bit of that, we lose why we're doing this"* (p8, line 306).

The choice of a malevolent word such as, *"haunted"* may be Steve's articulation of the emotional intensity of the work. The use of "*haunting*" as an adjective can be interpreted as an act of contamination, where the colleague's difficulties are spread through the school corridors. The juxta positioning of the ethereal concept of haunt with the worldly,

> *"… part of being a human… part of their traits …"* (p8 line, 322),

may reflect Steve's conceptualisation of relationships as embodying both spirituality and human frailty. Steve may be expressing his own vulnerability when he states,

> *"Unfortunately, we don't sometimes* [talk], *do we? Take the pressure and then we go home with the pressure and then it impacts upon all of our lives and then we become a shell but then we've got to reflect on that"* (p8, line 322).

The use of the plural definite pronoun "*we*" can be interpreted as Steve anchoring his own experience to that of a colleague (Radden et al., 2007). Steve may be expressing concerns that he too may become a "*shell*". A common linguist response to trauma results in an increased use of plural pronouns (Mehl et al., 2004). Steve avoids describing the nature of these stresses and using the singular pronoun which would connect the impact of the pressures to him. There are several potential explanations for this. He may wish to avoid presenting himself as psychologically vulnerable. This may be due to his own expectations that, given his experience, he should be able to cope with the work pressures. Alternatively, framing the comments in an impersonal way may be a defence strategy to psychologically distance him from stresses, enabling him to avoid difficult emotions. Steve's suggestion that people bottle up their emotions suggests that he may experience difficulties in emotionally and cognitively processing traumatic events (Mehl et al., 2004). He appears to have self-awareness, as he identifies the importance of reflection. Steve's comment about becoming a *"shell"* may reveal his fear that the pressures of work may cause him to lose his sense of self and purpose. This may reveal a vulnerability within Steve that could indicate his resilience is not as secure as other aspects of his narrative may suggest.

7.3 Understanding what it's like

Steve's narrative demonstrates that some staff do not have a clear understanding of the day-to-day challenges encountered when working in SEMH schools. He stresses

the importance of ensuring that new recruits are fully appraised of the nature of the

challenges that they will face. This includes staff who have misconceptions from

previous experience of working in mainstream school settings,

> *"… when people come into SEMH… I think it's really important that we give them a real understanding of what it is going to be like with the young people because people come from mainstream going 'it's going to be easy'…and instantly, bang"* (p9, line 336).

> *"… having them clear expectations that actually you're going to have to face some of this and I kind of feel at* [name of setting] *we did that… sometimes people didn't realise what we were saying was going to be true"* (p9, line 352).

Steve illustrates this point when he states,

> *"…a young person swore at a new starter* [member of staff] *and they just went, 'I can't cope with that' and stormed off"* (p9 line 350).

Steve appears to accept these behaviours. This is evidenced by the matter-of-fact way

in which he describes some incidents,

> *"…this young person … goes into a real erm victim stance. … becomes quite withdrawn and then it comes through in a righteous anger … he's let it all build and build and build and then comes out in a massive volcano of righteous anger …"* (p2, line 63).

> *"…this young person can be quite volatile and usually involves a fire extinguisher and walking around the building for a bit while they were in crisis …"* (p6, line 208).

This may indicate that Steve has high levels of personal resilience and applies a non-

judgemental (Kearns & Hart, 2017), compassionate (Al-Ghabban, 2018) approach.

Steve demonstrates a high level of autonomy, environmental mastery and emotional

regulation when he depersonalises insults and unkind comments,

> *"I think possibly because I'm quite thick-skinned and don't take what these young people say personally because generally, we know it's not aimed at us. A couple of staff members that I work with at the minute are from mainstream, …everything a young person would say whether it would be a homophobic comment or a nasty comment, they would take as personally directed at them…*

> *So, I think erm that aspect can really be challenging when they're not used to this environment"* (p7, line 246).

Steve accepts these challenges as part and parcel of a pastoral role in a SEMH school. Where this is absent it may limit autonomy and environmental mastery, which can negatively impact psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; 2014). Steve acknowledges that this can be challenging for those not accustomed to the environment.

Steve's acceptance of his pupils' difficulties, and desire to understanding their lives may mitigate the effects of emotional distress that can arise from the emotionally taxing elements of pastoral work (Hanley, 2017; Klimecki et al., 2013; Nash, et al., 2016; Partridge, 2012). Steve's empathy appears to underpin his compassionate approach (Weare, 2010). This interpretation is supported where Steve states,

> "*I remember … a learning mentor who was so derogatory of our learners, and he used to break my heart because* [pause] *the young people wouldn't talk to them. They wouldn't spend any time with them so they would be like, well why don't they want to get to know me? And I'm like, 'have you thought about why'? Once we …opened up a conversation about, you know, what pupils' lives were like. And, at the end, this staff member was in tears because they said, they never realised"* (p9, line 372).

The use of the metaphor "*break my heart*" can be interpreted as a feeling of intense sadness at the approach adopted by the colleague. Steve associates this with a lack of understanding, and subsequently empathy and compassion. Steve appears to take on the role of facilitator, encouraging pupils to share their experiences, in the hope that the colleague will gain insight into their circumstances and therefore their behaviour. This suggests that Steve understands challenging behaviour as "*sad*" (MacLeod, 2006), arising from pupils' social circumstances; his perception of the root cause of challenging behaviour conceptually reflecting a social model of disability (Stanforth & Rose, 2020). To counter the adverse effects of the pupils' social circumstances Steve appears to value the formation of trusting relationships between

pupils and staff (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019). Securing positive relationships and a sense of connectedness can enhanced a sense of psychological wellbeing in pupils and staff (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Ryff, 2014). Developing these relationships requires staff to use appropriate methods of communication, especially with pupils who have complex needs and communication difficulties,

> *"They've* [the pupil] *got oppositional defiance disorder. We… you know, we might use the wrong communication method and they've just instantly gone. We've had that a few times and we've done a lot of training on how we offer feedback, … you know, one young person can be quite volatile and usually involves a fire extinguisher and walking around the building for a bit while they were in crisis"* (p6, line 198).

Steve's perception is that some teachers with mainstream school experience do not always have the knowledge and skills to appropriately deal with some of the challenges faced in SEMH schools. Steve states,

> *"…he* [the staff member] *is from a mainstream school and wanted it challenging there and then in the moment and he got quite aggressive whilst trying to challenge it or quite* [pause] *yeah, quite aggressive* [pause]. *He didn't know that moment wasn't the right time because his emotion was too much up there and that young person then wasn't going to listen …"* (p7, line 257).

Steve identifies the emotional intensity of working in SEMH schools,

> *"… they're used to being able to just disengage from that young person and hand it over to somebody else, well actually you can't when you're in a small SEMH setting."* (p7, line 247).

SEMH schools tends to be much smaller than maintained general SEN or mainstream schools (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). In these circumstances it is not possible for pastoral staff to extract themselves from challenging interactions with pupils. There is no-one else to take over. Steve's comments can be interpreted as his perception that staff working in mainstream schools do not experience this level of frequency and intensity. Middleton (2018) argues that there is a lack of acknowledgement of the

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extent of the emotional and physical intensity experienced by pastoral staff working with pupils with SEMH needs.

7.4 Resilience

Steve's narrative clearly identifies the importance of resilience in equipping staff to deal with the challenges faced in SEMH schools. The concept of resilience, which can be an internal or external human characteristic (Vance et al., 2015), reflects the ability to withstand adversity, including recovery from stressful events (Ryff, 2014; Vaillant, 2011). It is a psychological resource that is a component of optimal functioning (Di Giuseppe, et al., 2021; Eley, et. al., 2013). Steve has a clear understanding and self-awareness of what constitutes resilience when he states,

> *"… I think you've got to have both in this work and a personal resilience and not just, expect other people to solve it for us which it comes back to that understanding ourselves and what our triggers are going to be"* (p6, line 223).

By intrinsically situating the concept of resilience within the person, Steve may be reflecting internal locus of control, where he feels that he can influence the events that affect him (Rae, 2012). Steve describes two ways in which he achieves this. One using metaphor,

> "…*I'm quite thick-skinned and don't take what these young people say personally because generally, we know it's not aimed at us"* (p7, line 246).

The second using his knowledge and skills to disarm and therefore de-escalate,

> *"… I remember coming in and meeting* [name of pupil] *and I went 'you alright, mate?' and he went… his first words were 'fuck off'! And I went, 'well it's good to meet you as well, mate'! And he just turned and smirked"* (p9, line 346).

Steve appears to believe that his responses shape events. This indicates that Steve has high levels of resilience and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989:2014). It may also indicate the presence of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Mansfield et al., 2012) and

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empathy (Ryff, 1989), both of which can offer protection against emotional burn out (Vance et. al., 2015). This interpretation is supported when Steve states,

> *"…people don't care what you know until they know that you care. And I stand by that phrase that you've got to get to know that young person because they've had 20, 30, 40 professionals work with them and they want to know, actually why should they get to know you?"* (p9, line 357).

As discussed previously, in section 7.2, Steve's ability to empathise may be partially due to him sharing some experiences with the pupils. This may make him more perceptive to their pain (Marsh, 2018). Steve appears to offer a non-judgemental approach with acceptance and emotional attunement. He states,

> *"That cathartic process of actually talking it through with the young person, sharing the impact it's had on them and then actually trying to understand why the young person has said it and maybe felt it or thought it"* (p7, line 262-269).

> *"…… I mean every young person I've worked with would spot the trigger, the weakness and they'll go for it"* (p9, line 336).

Practicing compassion for self and others, develops and sustains psychological wellbeing (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021) and personal resilience (Klimecki, et al., 2013). Nourishing social interactions, that are built on respect, empathy and compassion can give a sense of belonging, where people feel valued and listened to (Weare, 2010). Steve values sharing concerns, feelings and worries with colleagues. He stresses how important this is and the negative consequences when these opportunities are not taken,

> *"… talking and chatting to people within your team, your colleagues. You're sharing how you feel. Don't keep it in because if you go home, it can become a bit of a disease inside you if you don't share it and, as we know, we've seen loads of our colleagues never talk about what was bothering them and then all of a sudden, they respond in different ways"* (p8, line 292-296).

> *"…we've got to then be willing to meet that and open up and talk about what it is that is bothering or that is going on for us"* (p8, line 302-313).

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Steve appears to be referring to informal peer support, which can be an effective coping mechanism against negative stress (Grant & Kinman, 2014; Vance, et al., 2015) and burnout (Chang, 2013). He also refers to formal support,

> *"…it's really important that you've got the right support mechanisms in there, supervision you know… even debriefs at the end of the day…* (p6, line 218).

Structured opportunities for staff to develop supportive social connections can help to improve resilience (Luther, 2015; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). This can help people to reflect on (Rae, et al., 2017) and contain their emotions (Partridge, 2012), manage stress, and feel psychologically supported. Steve's narrative suggests that he has experienced organisational cultures where such opportunities exist and that he gained benefit from them,

> *"…there can be a massive impact on our wellbeing … when you've got employers who, you know, understand that for support and… it's really important that you've got the right support mechanisms in there, supervision you know… even debriefs at the end of the day…we have a debrief at the end of every day, we get to talk about what's going on"* (p6, line 216).

Steve appears to take an active role in developing nourishing and supportive relationships, built on empathetic listening,

> *"… I spent quite a bit of time just listening and to let him offload. That's really important. That's where supervision really comes in and not supervision with an agenda sometimes. Supervision just as an encounter moment"* (p8, line 328).

The opportunity to *"offload"* as part of reflective practice, is a prominent feature in eight of the nine studies critiqued in chapter 2, (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019; Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017; Stoll & McLeod, 2020; Willis & Baines, 2018). The methods adopted to achieve this vary from counselling to supervision, the essence being to share experience of difficult situations and gain

support from the group. Steve appears to have benefited from formal support sessions at one school and debriefs at another,

> *"I remember* [name of previous setting] *having the* [name] *sessions at the end of the day were so useful, always available. I think we're a small team at* [name of setting] *where we have a debrief at the end of every day, but we get to talk about what's going on"* (p6, line 220).

This approach appears to assist Steve to process his feelings and emotions.

7.5 Looking after myself

One of the distinctive features of Steve's narrative is he seems to be at ease with who he is. He appears to be self-compassionate. Self-compassion can be integral to an emotional regulation strategy that maintains well-being and develops empathy (Neff, 2011; Stevens & Taber, 2021). The concept includes self-kindness, shared human experience and mindfulness (Neff, 2011). It relies on accepting one's current competences, abilities, and traits, and resisting being defined by adversity or failure. It enables people to see the suffering of others as part of human experience, preventing disconnection, labelling and judgement (Nelson, et al., 2017). This is demonstrated in Steve's narrative where he discusses his response to pupils' behaviours,

> *"They know they'd got you and they just keep winding you up. Whereas actually, learning to take a step back, to breathe, to work out why they were so emotional at that point, what annoyed them, what triggered them…"* (p7, line 261).

This suggests that Steve views life through the lens of common humanity. He acknowledges human frailty, from the perspective of understanding behaviours in a human context. Steve acknowledges that some of his colleagues may not have his experience, or insight when he states,

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"I think some of the challenges are [pause]*…we've had a number of mainstream teachers who we've been developing, and we've been learning together on that journey which has been fantastic and learning from the young people…it's being responsive to* [pause] *the needs of the kids and responsive as a school to what we are seeing on a day-to-day basis"* (p4, line 154)*.*

Steve's inclusive, non-judgemental view of learning as a collaborative journey suggests that he is kind to himself and understanding and supportive of others. However, when Steve recounts an example of judgemental practices by colleagues, he does not appear to respond empathetically,

"… I think the psychological aspect … where they assumed or put a judgment on that young person is far scarier than the actual physical fear of that young person hurting them. I don't know if the young people he worked with might have hurt them … but there are a lot of young people that are just in fear and panic and scared and they just want to be loved. … I see that as a blessing to have had the time to spend with these young people" (p10, line 397).

This suggests Steve adopted a rather blasé approach to the fear experienced by colleagues. Situations that a person perceives as risky, can activate a negative emotional response (Hirschhorn & Horowitz, 2018). The fear for that person is real and can create a physical and psychological stress response (Quick & Henderson, 2016). Steve acknowledges that he does not know if the threat of violence is likely to be, or has been, carried out. His compassion and understanding, in this situation, appear to be with the young people. This may suggest that Steve does not experience these events, which are common in SEMH schools, as stressful.

Steve describes the techniques he uses to support his psychological wellbeing,

"I use mindfulness …, it was something that was introduced to me in [location]*… then really enhanced at* [setting] *… mindfulness, you know* [pause] *mindfulness is key …for me personally, I use a lot of mindfulness"* (p7, line 283).

"Being outdoors for me is key … there's something in there, within me, that needs to be outside. So, I always go for the senses. Feel the air. Breathe in. Which is part of the mindfulness" (p7, line 290).

There is a real sense that Steve seeks autonomy (Ryff, 2014) and a feeling of being physically unrestricted. He frames this in terms of being *'outdoors'*, enjoying the physical freedom of running around. This, carefree, living in the moment, child-like reaction may be explained, at least partially, through the lens of transactional analysis, particularly the child-ego state, where a pattern of behaviour established in childhood, plays out in adulthood (Berne, 2016). His reference to breathing, as part of mindfulness, can be interpreted as the activation of his parasympathetic nervous system. This calms the body, reducing negative stress (Chin & Kales, 2019). Connection is an important aspect of Steve's narrative, connections with his senses, as well as social connections with his family and colleagues,

> *"I use a lot of… amazing time with my kids and my family"* (p7, line 288).

> *"… talking and chatting to people within your team, your colleagues"* (p8, line 292).

Steve takes a holistic view of psychological wellbeing. He shows self-awareness and self-compassion in times where he is not *"right"* psychologically,

> *"… psychological wellbeing for me is kind of like… it's everything we do because if we're not right here, then what we're projecting out isn't going to be right. So negatively it can drain us, it could be you know… equally it can nourish us and reinvigorate, and you know as well as we do some of the challenging days, we had…, they were some of the days that we came away from afterwards going wow! Not only did we survive that but look at what's flourishing from that"* (p6, line 236).

Steve recognises that projection, an ego defence mechanism, can cause unwanted feelings to be projected on to others (Klein, 1975; Partridge; 2012; Vaillant, 2000). Steve intrinsically connects his psychological wellbeing to his ability to support his pupils. This indicates that he creates a holding environment (Winnicott, 1956), in which pupils' emotions can be contained (Partridge, 2012). Although he acknowledges his

work can be emotionally draining (Cole, 2010; Middleton, 2019), he also describes it as *'nourishing'* and *'invigorating'*. Steve appears to gain great satisfaction from overcoming the *"challenging days."* His reflections on supporting pupils and overcoming adversity may suggest that he feels he is achieving his goals and fulfilling his purpose (Abraham et al., 2009; Ryff, 1989). This is an outcome that is associated with subjective wellbeing (Huppert, 2009). The positive view that Steve has of his work is emphasised by his repeated use of the word *"love"* when he states,

> *"…it's kind of the job where it's not a job is it? It's what I've done for 20 odd years, and I love supporting young people to make different choices…."* (p7, line 273).

> *I loved it and I still love it and that's why I do it, you know? Yeah, I loved my time at* [name of previous setting]. *The kids there"* (p11, line 406-407).

> *"I just love it* [pause] *it's amazing…it's the kids they're amazing"* (p11, line 430-431).

This may signify Steve's empathy and compassion but may also suggest a deeper connection in his work with the pupils (Marshall, 2013). It is also indicative of gratitude, which may be linked to his use of mindfulness. Love and gratitude are character traits that are linked to achieving life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004).

7.6 Critical Reflection

In many ways Steve's interview and data analysis presented the most challenges, as I knew Steve from a previous professional relationship. When he initially made contact, I was unsure if it was appropriate to include him as a participant. As a prior relationship was not part of my ethics exclusion criteria, I decided he had a right to participate. It was my responsibility to ensure that I did not lead the interview or allow prior knowledge to form part of the analysis or discussion. To this end I paid very close attention to what Steve said and how he said it. I was very aware that I may be 'filling

gaps' or drawing conclusions not supported by the data. I was very clear with myself that anything I had observed or thought about Steve and his work from the past was *my* experience and not his. I was also concerned with protecting Steve's anonymity. I have carefully considered information, including demographics, that could identify him. This was challenging at times as he made frequent reference to people we both knew and experiences that he believed we shared. This was also uncomfortable at times as I felt he was trying to draw me into his narrative. I wondered what his motives were, and this was a little unsettling.

At the time of the interview Steve had been working at his current school for a matter of months. He seemed keen to paint a positive picture of his contribution to the school's intervention work. He appeared to want me to see him as influential and popular in his setting. I felt, at times, that Steve was wearing a metaphorical mask. He used what appeared to be distraction techniques, including humour and obfuscation, where he would go off track. He also broke off momentarily when he had problems with his phone connection and to see to his young child. Steve made frequent references to his interpretation of our shared experiences. Often his recollections did not reflect mine. Aspects of his narrative appeared to seek affirmation, and this caused me to wonder whether our relationship had affected Steve's story. I was mindful of this when analysing his narrative and ensured that all interpretations were underpinned by the data. An integral aspect of qualitative research is that what people say, and how they say it, depends on who they are speaking to. It is also a strength that participants tell their story in a way that is meaningful to them. What Steve wanted to share and how he chose to do that was his prerogative, and his alone. This reflection was at the fore front of my mind throughout the data analysis and discussion processes.

Chapter 8: Chris's Story

"it's really hard"

Chris identified herself as a white British female aged 46-59. She works in a SEMH academy, for pupils between years two and 11. Chris works solely with secondary aged pupils. At the time of interview, she had worked in schools for approximately 25 years. Initially she was a teacher in a mainstream school. For the last 20 years she has worked in SEMH schools, 16 years being in her current setting. She has occupied a pastoral role for approximately 10 years. She describes her current role as having oversight of all the secondary school's pastoral provision. She manages a small team of pastoral support workers and works directly with pupils and their families. Chris was in her office at the school during the interview.

The themes identified from Chris' interview:

Theme One- *It's not normal*

Theme Two- *They're too risky*

Theme Three- *It's all they know*

Theme Four- *Connectedness*

Theme Five- *Emotional resilience*

Theme Six- *Undervalued and misunderstood*

Theme Seven- *The positives*

8.1 It's not normal

When asked to describe her school, Chris frames her answer in terms of pupil needs,

> "…*children who are dying of cancer right through to children who have been in the penal system as well. So, it's everything in between that basically*" (p2, line 50).

> "…*we have a lot of children who have been sectioned who have quite deep psychological issues, mental health issues, anxiety, things like that ... That is quite a big thing at the moment*" (p3, line 78).

She then describes the school environment in terms of the pupils' behaviours and how this is managed during the school day,

> "*Day to day, it's sort of quite quiet really for a school such as the referrals that we get, it's fairly quiet but then we just have every so often a real blow-up and we have to look at the demographics and the dynamics as well of the groups and kind of change them around. So, it's very fluid what children do and where they are …so it is quite fluid. There's not really a day-to-day routine type of thing, if that makes sense*" (p2, line56).

The way that Chris frames the school as being "*quite quiet…fairly quiet*" in the context of "…*the referrals we get…*" may indicate that she expects pupils attending SEMH schools to present with challenging or disruptive behaviours. A view that is reflected in the extant literature (MacLeod et al., 2013). A factor that may distinguish Chris's school, and account for the relative infrequency of "*blow-up's*", may lie in its approach to where and how the pupils' education provision is delivered. Almost all the 85, or so, pupils are taught "*virtually*" (p3, line 86) or "…*on part-time timetables…*" (p9, line 334),

> "…*there are a couple of forms that are specifically for children with deep emotional issues or medical conditions but generally pupils are taught in a group virtually*" (p3, line 86).

Chris explains the reasons for delivering education in this way,

> "…*it is a way of ensuring that children who can't manage in school get their education. It's a way of managing* [pause] *I don't like to say but managing budget sometimes so the children can get more teaching from the staff that we've got. Because you can put some on virtual for a couple of days a week say, and they are getting a lot more learning than they would if they were coming into centre because we don't have the resources really to do that. There's very few come in five days a week*" (p9, line 326).

The belief that the pupils "*can't manage in school*" could be echoing a child-deficit model, where the pupil is seen as being at fault (Caslin, 2019: Hart 2013; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2020; Stanforth & Rose 2020). This can result in pupils being 'othered' in terms of the school's behavioural expectations (Caslin, 2019). The school's approach appears to create sub-groups of 'othered' pupils, where some are able to spend, at least part of their time, in school and others are not. Chris acknowledges that these decisions are, at least in part, made for budgetary reasons. She appears to accept this and presents a pragmatic stance. Her justification being that pupils receive the best education that the school can provide. She explains that pupils are offered additional activities delivered by third party organisations,

> "…*we do try and make sure they all have something. So, we offer like fishing, gardening, small animal care, hair and beauty, bike mechanics so there's something for them to choose and they're either there one day or two days a week on that so it's not necessarily that they're just at home* [pause] *you know, as such they are offered that as well.*" (p9, line 334).

One interpretation of this section of Chris' narrative is that she is not totally comfortable with the school's approach. Emphasising that the staff "…*do try...*" may be her attempt to distance herself, and her colleagues, from a system that is inadequately funded. The phrasing "…*it's not necessarily that they're just at home…",* suggests that being at home may be a reality for some pupils, although she appears to want to emphasise that this is not the norm. The pause after this statement may further indicate her discomfort and suggests she is carefully considering her next comment. Chris may be attempting to protect herself against moral injury, which can elicit negative emotions such as guilt or shame (Held, et al., 2019).

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Chris describes how most of the thirty or so pupils, who attend the school buildings for part of the week, are unable to navigate aspects of emotional regulation during unstructured times in the school day,

> *"…they just cannot cope with unstructured time and that's when we were getting a lot of the problems. In fact, all behaviour issues, to be honest happen in unstructured time"* (p3, line 96).

She explains what can happen,

> *"General teenage behaviour really and pushing, shoving, a bit of argy bargy but then that* [pause] *because they can't control their emotions at all it can escalate really, really quickly as it did on Tuesday. There was just a bit of pushing and shoving in the playground rather than playing football … and suddenly they were fighting, and it can escalate quite quickly. That's when* [name of member of staff] *got hit in the face, broke her nose* [pause]*"* (p3, line 102).

This section of the narrative illustrates how Chris situates the blame for these unwanted behaviours within the pupil (Caslin, 2019), as they "*can't manage their emotions*". Framing the cause in terms of pupils' inadequacies may provide Chris with some psychological protection, as it shifts the burden of responsibility. It affords her the opportunity to form the view that the staff are doing their best to reduce these events and mitigate the risks during "unstructured time,"

> *"…we have to have a really high staff ratio on in unstructured times"* (p4, line 105).

> *"We've tried all ways… we've kind of got like a common room now …we've shortened the day quite a lot as in, they go home a bit earlier…. whatever we put in does cause trouble, so I think we just have to learn to be referees generally, especially in unstructured time"* (p4, line 111).

During unstructured times Chris appears to have less environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989; 2014) than during more structured lessons,

> *"In the lessons, they're generally pretty good. They're generally okay. They are in small groups but they're generally pretty good"* (p4, line 107).

> *"Classroom environment is the easier one to deal with, in my experience anyway."* (p10, line 379).

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This structure created in the classroom environment may give Chris a sense of safety and security. In this environment she has experienced the pupils' behaviour as less challenging, presenting a lower level of risk. She appears to view conflict during unstructured times as inevitable. She draws a clear distinction between the work of pastoral staff and teachers,

> *"…the teachers do the academic and if there's any other issues, they're referred to pastoral. It's a very different role, for want of a better word, very different* (p11, line 384).

Although she is required to deal with any behavioural incidents that do occur in the classroom this does not appear to cause her any anxieties,

> *"That doesn't play on my mind particularly. I get my… sort of my… deal with it, there you go back in. I know it's going to happen again the day after but hey ho, I've dealt with it*" (p11, line 396).

The incidents that happen in the classroom do not perturb Chris. She appears to easily contain the pupils' emotions,

> *"…we would take them out, trying to calm them down, take them into the zone, have a chat with them and try and get them back into class… and it does work to be honest"* (p11, line 391).

Chris's apparent comfort in these situations may reflect her years of experience and the frequency with which she is called. Achieving successful resolutions may indicate that Chris is able to emotionally regulate herself (Rose et al., 2019); a characteristic central to maintaining psychological well-being (Stevens & Taber, 2021).

8.2 They're too risky

Chris illustrates the challenges and complexity involved in educating pupils who exhibit aggressive or violent behaviour. It is the headteacher who assesses a pupil as being too risky to be educated within the school building,

"…he did a lot of things in school and attacked another student and injured a member of staff, damaged property etc …we'd seen what he was like and there was just no way that that could continue in school because [pause] *we couldn't restrain him, we couldn't hold him, we couldn't stop him if he wanted to do something like that and then what we were doing was setting ourselves up, if he did hurt somebody, really hurt somebody, you've done a risk assessment, you know what he's going to do and so we had no option but to put him on virtual learning"* (p9, line 315).

Chris understands the reasons for this approach and agrees with the stance that it would be unsafe to have this pupil in school. However, she is conflicted about the decision due to the pupil's home circumstances,

*"…father is very abusive, mum's a drug addict, alcohol issues, lots of issues, when he does come into school and he's very abusive to staff and he gets quite upset because we can't have him in school and I get it, but we can't leave him at home either so the headteacher will be like, but he's dangerous in school and yeah, I know that but he's **in** danger at home…. I get that he's dangerous, I do get that but* [pause] *he was in danger at home and that* [pause] *that's hard. That's really* [pause]*because you know that what you're doing at school is putting him in danger although you are protecting the other people in school, it's a really tough one, that is"* (p8, line 294).

Chris finds balancing the safety of other pupils and staff against the safety of this pupil *"really tough."* Although she understands this is not her decision, it is that of the headteacher, it nevertheless creates tension within her. The decision is framed as managing risk, it may also reflect an approach which uses social exclusion to punish those who breach the moral standards of the community (SimanTov-Nachlieli & Shnabel, 2013). Chris appears to perceive the pupil as both victim and perpetrator. Her relational proximity to a pupil who is simultaneously labelled "*dangerous*" and "*in danger*", creates ambivalent feelings that appear to trouble her (Edwards, 2016).

Some pupils present a risk to themselves. Chris worries about pupils who she feels will not cope when they leave her school,

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"I've got another young girl and I'm very worried about her because she is due to leave school this time. She's been with us since Year 8. … when I first went to see her, she'd been in the hospital with anorexia and other self-harm and she used to sit in the corner, she had a dressing gown on, picking at her skin really, really bad and last year, I just got her to the point where I was picking her up and taking her to Costa and she was doing really well. She's still doing really well … she's come on in leaps and bounds …and she's leaving us in a few months, and I don't know what's going to happen to her. Because who else is going to get involved with her like this, post-16, they're not… she's never been out of her house since Year 8, what makes them think she's going to get out of her house now to go to college?" (p13, line 493).

Chris appears to have developed a strong relationship with this pupil. Having worked with her for several years, she describes a breakthrough, where the pupil was "*doing really well.*" Chris's concerns arise from her perception that no suitable post-16 provision exists. This again demonstrates that Chris is working within an education system that she feels does not meet the needs of all young people with complex SEMH needs. This may create a sense of futility. Having achieved some success with the pupil, Chris will be unable to meet the goal of the pupil functioning more effectively in the world outside her home. Frustration in meeting intrinsic goals have been linked to poorer psychological wellbeing (Huppert, 2009). When making a difference to pupils' lives is fundamental to one's sense of purpose, circumstances that restrict this can negatively impact self-esteem.

8.3 It's all they know

Chris situates the origins of pupils' aggression in their adverse home and life circumstances. This reflects a social model of disability (Stanforth & Rose, 2020), or "*sad*" in terms of MacLeod's (2006) conceptualisation. Chris also expresses a sense of futility that pupils' experiences have exposed them to situations whereby they are not affected by seeing violence,

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"… I was talking to one of the lads who was involved in the incident on Tuesday [pause] …. we chatted about it and … I said it wasn't very nice what you saw, …if you want to talk anybody, …we're always here or you know, speak to your teacher, … and he just went 'yes, I see that every week'. And I was like, 'oh!' That really shocked me. I was like, you what? You know, if my children had seen that they would've been traumatised for weeks, but he was just like 'well I'm fine Miss, I see that all the time, you know?' And that's upsetting…" (p16, line 580).

Chris is shocked at the apparent blasé attitude of a pupil who witnessed such an incident,

"To think that these children, this is the norm for them. So, what are they going to do? They're going to have children and that's going to be the norm for their children and it's going to perpetuate and that gets to me…" (p16, line 589).

The pupils' reaction appears to have had a considerable impact on Chris,

"It affected me, and I didn't see it. I just heard about it, and I was like, I was sick to my stomach. I was like oh my god, is he alright? And it was like… he was just fine, fine. I was like oh god, I could have dealt with it more if he was like 'oh, it's horrible what I saw I hated it', and I could talk him through that and that to me would be a normal reaction, but that normal reaction was abnormal" (p16, line 597).

One interpretation is that Chris does not understand the pupil's desensitisation to violence, evidenced by an absence of emotional distress or cognitive disapproval (Mrug, et al., 2016). Chris seems to have anticipated a conversation where she would compassionately support and comfort the child. His rejection of this, because the incident had not impacted him, was unexpected and may have undermined Chris's sense of purpose. Describing his reaction as "*abnormal*" suggests it is at odds with her view that such incidents are serious and troubling,

"I think, please we need to break this somewhere along the line. We need to make it not normal for a woman of 60 to be hit and on the floor and suffer a broken nose and it not affect you…You know?" (p16, line 594).

"What they're experiencing and what they're seeing on a day-to-day basis is shocking, yeah. I can't change it, can I"? (p16, line 606).

This suggests that the social reality for some pupils is a cycle of violence and emotional desensitisation. Chris believes that this needs to change. Her use of the word "*please*"

can be interpreted as a plea for this change that is directed at some unnamed entity beyond herself. This may explain her statement "*I can't change it, can I?*" which suggests that she feels powerless to influence her pupils' home environments. This can lead to a sense of hopelessness and fear that can permeate beyond the particular experience. This, coupled with the emotional intensity of her work, appears to have shaped Chris's perception of the wider world,

> *"It's an intense job… Yeah, very much so. Very much so, yeah. And it makes you scared of the world sometimes because you see so many bad things and you just think… you know… like some days, it'll make me go home and I think God, I'm so lucky and I'm so happy for my boring life. I'm so happy that my children are okay and I'm so happy … then other times, I go home and think oh God, what is the world coming to and that makes me like a bit fearful and a bit anxious because I think God, these people, how they live and how they* [pause] *it's not nice"* (P15, line 572).

Chris may be experiencing emotional contamination, arising from her long-term exposure to the trauma narratives of her pupils. This can cause people to become less compassionate, and more anxious and fearful about the future and wider aspects of life (McCormack & Adams, 2016), in Chris's case *"the world".* Chris's statement, "*these people how they live and how they* [pause] *it's not nice*" may reflect wider societal fears of violence (Kleres, 2010). It may also indicate that Chris is experiencing a disgust reaction (le Grand, 2019) that forms part of the courtesy stigma and sense of blame, experienced by some parents of pupils with SEMH needs (Broomhead, 2013; 2016).

8.4 Connectedness

Throughout Chris's narrative she emphasised the value of connectedness and building relationships with pupils, and their families. One of Chris's usual practices is visiting them at home, getting to know them and their families, and taking them out to

community venues. Covid-19 restrictions on meeting in person has significantly affected this,

> *"…whenever we got a new child, I would always go out and see the family…work through what they wanted to do, have a chat with them and you kind of built up that relationship…"* (p7, line 234).

Pre-covid, staff would work in the community or at pupils' homes,

> *"We did use to offer work in the home as in, going out to the home, but we don't obviously with covid at the minute do that"* (p2, line 52).

> *"…in days gone by…everyday somebody would go out, take him out, take him to McDonalds, do a lesson, take him for a walk, do whatever and check on that environment but we can't do that…"* (p9, line 323).

During the pandemic all contact was via virtual learning and telephone. Chris perceives that these limitations have negatively impacted her ability to function effectively (Huppert, 2009; Quick & Henderson, 2016). This has had an adverse psychological impact,

> *"... you feel useless… whereas before* [the pandemic] *you could be a bit proactive and yeah, although things got you down, you could say, right well let's go do this, let's do that whereas now you tend to go home and you think,' do you know what?' that child is crying out for somebody to just go and see them, and I can't, I can't do it. You know… they just want somebody and normally that would be me…"* (p6, line 221).

Chris *"feels useless"* due to the current restrictions. This suggests that she is experiencing a loss of autonomy and environmental mastery. This may be impacting on her self-esteem and sense of purpose (Ryff, 1989; 2014). These are important elements that shape how people evaluate the self and can significantly influence the extent to which life is experienced as meaningful (Abraham, et al., 2009; Ryff, 1989). The phrase the "*child is crying out*" can be interpreted as Chris perceiving the pupil to be plaintively calling to someone to relieve their suffering. Chris is the person who would normally respond to this, and describes the impact this has on her,

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"…I'll go on home and think, I hope she's alright and I wonder if there's anything I can do whereas before I would just go and then I can see they're alright and I can have a chat with them and I can say what do you want me to do, and they trust me enough to do that. So, it does have a big impact I think when you're not allowed to go… I don't know… I don't know… "(p7, line 236).

This aspect of Chris's narrative may indicate how she processes her emotions, when she is away from the pupil. One interpretation is that she experiences feelings of guilt and regret that she is unable to be physically present with the pupil, as she would have been prior to the pandemic. Not being able to see for herself that the pupil is okay, appears to play on her mind. This is in keeping with Kim and Asbury's (2020) findings, where teachers worried about their vulnerable pupils. Chris's reference to trust suggests this forms the basis of her relationships with pupils. She may be expressing concern that this trust may be lost if she is not able to visit the child. Without this trust Chris does not feel she can achieve the best outcomes for the pupils. By way of illustration, Chris compares her relationship with a pupil who she supported pre-pandemic and one referred during the restrictions,

"…I would go out and see her you know, and I'd be like but because we've built up that relationship in the very beginning, she trusts the process that we're going through now whereas I've got another one who's in a very similar position, but she has only been referred during Covid, I can't go and see her. So, there's been no rapport built up, there's been no relationship built up, no trust or anything and it's really hard to communicate with them when it's just like this. You know, really hard" (p7, line 243).

Chris has confidence that the first pupil will reach out to her for support, when needed. She is troubled by the situation of the second pupil, where no relationship has been built, and she doubts this child will engage,

"It is upsetting, it's very upsetting and like with the young girl, I've just spoken about … I don't worry about her too much, I know that she's okay and that she'll speak to me, and we can have a little conversation whereas the other girl, I worry about her. Because I can't see her. I don't know anything about her…" (p7, line 251).

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Chris's concerns are echoed in the literature, where there is consensus that many pupils who attend SEMH schools have insecure attachments (Bowlby, 1963). This makes building trusting relationships difficult (Demiray & Bluck, 2014; Edwards, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Harlow, 2021), and can cause pupils to disengage with the school and adversely impact their sense of belonging (Graham, et al., 2019),

> "I've tried so hard to like message her and stuff and say, you know 'come on, are you ok? Let's have a chat, is there anything you're interested in?' and I get nothing back and that worries me" (p7, line 259).

A lack of reciprocity of the effort taken to try to build relationships with disengaged pupils can cause stress and frustration for school staff (Fitzsimmons, et al., 2019). Chris is finding this aspect of her role *"really hard"* (p8, line 270). The current restrictions prevent her building the necessary relationships. It also prevents Chris from working autonomously,

> *"… I'd rather hit something head on than be thinking what might be happening, type of thing so I think it's worse at the minute than it ever used to be"* (p7, line 228).

> *"…if something's head on, I can deal with it and rationalise it and do it and get on with it. If I'm imagining what's going on, then I can't"* (p9, line 347).

Chris benefits from being proactive and dealing with matters *"head on",* rather than pondering and wondering. It is the not knowing that causes her the most distress. Imagining how the pupils are coping, rather than knowing, causes her to worry,

> *"…the ones who I think are you sitting at home in the bedroom with your lights off and what you're doing? Are you okay? That's the one that gets to me"* (p11, line 399).

> *"If I could go and I saw them sat in the bedroom with the lights off, in the dark, could have a chat to them. I could deal with it, I could sort it out but when you can't do that, that's difficult"* (p11, line 403).

She uses stark imagery to describe a pupil sitting alone, *"in the dark".* One interpretation of this is that Chris views these children as isolated and struggling in

silence. She is very aware of the risks to pupils with internalised behaviours, such as social withdrawal and self-harm. Chris clearly believes that if she could physically be with these children, she could help them,

> *"Children in front of me I can deal with and external, aggressive behaviour definitely, I can deal with. It's the children with the psychosis, the children with the mental health issues, the children with self-harm issues that won't come into school. They're the ones that affect me…"* (p12, line 424).

The literature suggests that these are the types of behaviours that can be missed in school settings (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Gill et al., 2017), as externalised behaviours are often more visible and problematic within this environment (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019; Willis & Baines, 2018). Being unable to give pupils, with mental health issues, the care and attention they need weighs heavily on Chris's mind and appears to be incongruent with her values. Such incongruity may negatively impact her psychological wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; 2014). There may also be an element of moral injury, if Chris feels that she is failing to prevent harm occurring to pupils. This can cause psychological distress where it evokes negative emotions such as anger and guilt (Held, et al., 2019). Chris may be experiencing the global pandemic, over which she has no influence, as loss of control over her working environment, a significant reduction in autonomy, and poorer relationships with pupils. These elements are significant dimensions of psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; 2014). However, Chris does appear to have an optimistic view of the future,

> *"…hopefully, when this is all over that we will get back to how it was which we did visit them on a more regular basis which is what I'm looking forward to…"* (p5, line 152).

A return to the usual way of working, being able to deal with issues, rather than imagining what is going on, may reinstate her sense of purpose and connectedness. Thus, her psychological wellbeing may be better supported.

8.5 Emotional resilience

Chris appears to have high levels of emotional resilience (Vance et al., 2015). This psychological resource enables people to overcome adversity and emotionally bounce back from stressful events (Di Giuseppe, et al., 2021; Ryff, 2014; Vaillant, 2011). This can enable people to continue to function effectively (Eley, et. al., 2013). This interpretation is supported where Chris states,

> "*… I don't take things home as much as I did in the early days when I was first working here because I think you just get a bit* [pause] *not immune to it but* [pause] *you do get a bit like this is the norm, kind of thing. And that shocks me sometimes because I think God, you know… you forget what a normal teenager can be like sometimes because you've got this constantly, you know but* [pause] *I do manage*" (p7, line 266).

This aspect of Chris's narrative suggests that she has developed the capacity to be able to switch off from some potentially stressful elements of her work. An explanation of this evolution, may be that her experience enables her to create emotional boundaries between her home and work lives, affording her psychological protection (Kinman, et al., 2011a; Mackenzie, 2012). As discussed in section 2.6.3, this is in line with the extant literature (Edwards, 2016; Kinman, et al., 2011; Mackenzie, 2012). Another interpretation is that Chris is experiencing a level of compassion fatigue (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017), resulting in less sympathy for her pupils (Kinman, et al., 2011).

Framing the trauma experiences of her pupils as "*the norm*" may suggest that Chris is experiencing compassion fatigue. This can reduce empathy (Lemieux-Cumberlege & Taylor, 2019). Although Chris states she is "*shocked*" by this, it may be a method of psychological protection against the emotional intensity of her work, that she experiences as "*constant*". Chris tempers her statement by saying "*but* [pause] *I do manage*". The pause and choice of language may indicate that Chris is reassuring

herself that she is okay. However, "*managing*" suggests she may feel that she is coping rather than flourishing. There is evidence in the narrative that Chris also uses self-awareness to consciously switch-off from elements of her work that she finds to be emotionally difficult,

> *"… I* [pause] *kind of shove it to the back of my head now because if I thought about it, because if I think about the children I work with and what they are going through, I think it would really break me. So, I have kind of learned to put it to the back of my head and sometimes, that's really hard…"* (p8, line 276).

"Switching-off" and detaching from work can support mental well-being (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). This is an ability that has a strong correlation with aspects of resilience and psychological wellbeing (Kinman & Grant, 2014). Chris exposes her sense of vulnerability when she says she would *"break"* if she dwelled upon the life experiences of her pupils. This could be interpreted as Chris switching-off as an avoidance technique (Vaillant, 2011), framed as an avoidance goal. Avoidance goals are linked to poorer psychological wellbeing outcomes than approach goals (Ryan & Deci, 2001). There are some situations that Chris cannot avoid, such as the death of pupils. She describes how this has been a particularly difficult experience during covid 19:

> *"… in lockdown, we lost three children and that was really difficult, really difficult because again, normally I would go to the funeral and I would speak to the family and you would have a little bit of closure, be able to* [pause] *you know, really say something nice and you weren't allowed to do that so we lost three children who'd we worked with for a long time, and couldn't* [pause] *you know, couldn't pay any respect to them or the family or* [pause] *all we could do was send flowers and that [pause] that has a big impact. That does affect me for quite a few days … we've had children who've passed away before and yes, but I do deal with it in a sense, but I've always been able to have that closure whereas with these three, I couldn't and that was really difficult"* (p8, line 279).

Chris's desire for *"closure"* reflects the modernist paradigm of grief (Brunson, 2009), where the bereaved become detached from painful emotions (Huppert, 2009). Chris's goal of grieving appears to be, to move on and regain personal autonomy (Walter, 2007). Her frequent pauses and increased deliberations during this part of the

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interview demonstrate the difficulty she encountered recounting this aspect of her experience. She identifies that her usual resilience and ability to cope with these losses have been negatively impacted by the restrictions imposed due to Covid-19.

8.6 Undervalued and misunderstood

Chris believes there is a lack of understanding about the challenges faced when working in schools, especially schools for pupils with SEMH needs. She finds comments made in the wider community problematic,

> "… *the teacher bashing …has got me down quite a lot because it's made me realise that people in the wider world don't understand what we have to go through in school. They don't* [pause] *they think it's a doddle. They think it's 9 'til 2 with all these holidays and that we don't go through anything and that's been* [pause] *that's upset me quite a lot, actually"* (p16, line 610).

Given Chris' current job role, she appears to use the word "*teacher*" generically to include other staff, including herself. This may also reflect Chris's professional background as a former teacher, and the vernacular use of the phrase "*teacher bashing.*" The lack of appreciation of what the staff *"go through"* seems to have particularly upset Chris,

> "…*because **you** know, we do* [pause] *we work damn hard and we* [pause] ***you** know, we have a tough job and I don't think people realise that. Because my friend said to me, she said, 'well you must have been off for ages now' and I was like,' no I haven't been off at all. I've been working exactly the same as we were before except under more pressure,'* [laugh]!" (p17, line 616).

Special schools, did not close during the Covid-19 'lockdowns.' However, the number of staff at Chris's school who were authorised to visit pupils 'on the doorstep' was reduced significantly. Like mainstream school, special schools, had to quickly adapt their methods of teaching and support to online platforms. Little notice was given for this, which increased the level of uncertainty within all schools (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Chris experienced an increase in workload and pressures,

> "*Far more. Our job's been a lot, lot harder than it ever has been. But yeah, I cope!* [laugh]" (p17, 622).

Chris laughs after speaking of the increased work pressures. She may be using laughter to defend her ego by diverting attention away from the cause of stress and discomfort that threatens the self (Stengel, 2014). The increased work pressure is coupled with her frustration that people do not understanding the challenges she faces, especially those due to Covid-19 restrictions,

> "*… not visiting the pupils, that's had a massive impact… you can deal with the tidbits in front of you, it's the what if…. You know it's a reality that that child is self-harming or that child's been abused or that child's being beaten up or that child's taking drugs, you know that's a reality. And when they're in school in front of you, they're not doing all of that*" (p. 17, line 616).

Chris experiences a lack of understanding from people outside of the SEMH school arena,

> "*I think people not in this environment just don't get it. Don't get why you would be so, you know* [pause] *don't know* [pause] *so concerned about them because they're not your children, it's* [just] *your job. But you do get* [pause] *particularly in a smaller setting, you do get very* [pause] *you can't help but have some sort of feelings towards them of caring about what happens to them. You can't help that* "(p15, line 549).

Chris clearly demonstrates her empathy and care for pupils. This seems to be beyond the comprehension of those who see a distinction between caring for one's own and other people's children. Chris's assertion that she "*can't help*" being concerned about pupils is framed in a way that suggests this is beyond her control. In line with Mackenzie's (2012) findings, Chris may perceive caring as an essential aspect of her role,

> "*…you've got to care about them. You've got to care about what happens to them otherwise you wouldn't be able to do it, no. Definitely, not*" (p15, line, 556).

She concedes there have been times when she has not felt kindly towards a pupil,

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"…this might sound terrible because on a… I'm a human being and sometimes you get a child in front of you who you think, I just can't take to you, I just [pause] *you're not and I find that* [pause] *I find it very hard to then kind of communicate with them and try and help them because there's not that, you know* [pause] *I mean, I do but it's more difficult to do that than to do it for someone who you know, you really like, kind of care about type of thing. It's few and far between but there's been the odd occasion where I've thought I just don't like you! I just can't take to you! You're driving me mad! Haha"* (p15, line 559).

Prefacing her comments with "*this might sound terrible*" may indicate that Chris anticipates there may be disapproval of what she is about to say. Emphasising that she is "*human*" may be an attempt to mitigate any negative reaction and may also provide some self-reassurance that it is okay to have these feelings. This may suggest a conflict between what she thinks she should feel, and what she occasionally feels. This interpretation is supported by the frequent pauses where Chris appears to be searching for words to articulate her point. Her use of '*haha*' may be to lighten an uncomfortable message. Laughter is often viewed as a more socially acceptable conveyance of difficult feelings (Stengel, 2014). She may also be evoking humour as a defence mechanism (Vaillant, 2000) against her emotional discomfort.

Chris feels that the lack of recognition of the emotional intensity of her work extends to statutory bodies and the school's leadership,

"I don't think the emotional side is recognised by Ofsted, by the government, by the local authority, by the headteachers even sometimes… It's all focussed on academic…show us progress. What about these children's emotional health and that's not recognised? And what about our emotional health that are dealing with those children on a day-to-day basis, you know? They don't recognise any of that." (p17, line 636).

This gives a sense of emotional isolation, with little support in place for pupils or staff. The intensity of supporting these pupils on a day-to-day basis does not seem to be recognised. This had practical implications for Chris. Despite dealing with traumatised pupils, she was refused the opportunity to access clinical supervision, as she was not

providing counselling or direct therapeutic interventions, and therefore had not "*done any trauma work*" (p10, line 365),

> "*…it was that mindset of well, you have to actually sit down and do a structured intervention, not dealing with children who have got psychosis, who have been sectioned, who have died. You know, you're dealing with all that. She* [headteacher] *didn't see that as trauma because we weren't sitting …doing an actual trauma intervention…Very mainstream thinking, that isn't it?* (p10, line 367).

The headteacher's comments appear to indicate a lack of understanding of the level and intensity of the trauma work involved in Chris's role. The apparent absence of organisational support has led to colleagues informally helping each other,

> "*we've got the pastoral team, they're really good. So, there's four of us and… brilliant… the actual support in there. I've got some good friends that I worked with before I went into the pastoral side who I still see in work and outside of work as well and they understand it like completely. So, we have our own support network that's not the SLT type of thing so I know that if anything happens, I can go and speak to one of them and they're brilliant…But, yeah. No, I do feel like I'm supported in that sense but not on a higher level*" (p14, line 517).

The fact that Chris's colleagues "*understand profoundly*" means that they can reflect on their shared experiences together. This may create a safe psychological space where Chris can process her emotions, without judgement. Feeling valued and respected is an important aspect of psychological wellbeing (Weare, 2010). Schools could go some way to achieving this by acknowledging the complexities and challenges that staff supporting SEMH pupils experience (Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019). Demonstrating a culture of care for staff (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021), including opportunities for reflective practice (Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018) can help to create an environment that prioritises psychological wellbeing.

8.7 The positives

Chris experiences aspects of her work in a positive light,

> **"***… the young girl I've just spoken about, I mean that just makes me so happy to see her like that and learning again and talking to us and it just* [pause] *it makes me, I love it! I just love it. And we have a lot of children like that"* (p13, line 459).

Chris's happiness appears to come from seeing the pupil engaging with learning and with staff. This may suggest that Chris experiences the dual satisfaction of the child achieving educational outcomes and having a relationship with staff. Being connected to the children appears to be important to Chris. This is evidenced where she states,

> *"I have probably oh… about six children who still email me now and they range now between 18-26 and they still email me and say thank you so much, what you did and I'm doing this now and I'm doing that now…"* (p13, line 462).

The pleasure that Chris gains from knowing her pupils go on to do well in life is apparent when she states,

> *"… one girl she just sent me a thing she wants a reference to go and work in America and she used to sit in the corner with her hair over her face and just cry and cry and cry. And we worked so hard with her, and she was* [pause] *she's like* [pause] *she's just amazing and that is brilliant, you know. That is really brilliant. And I can't think of any that have come to us, and I've thought hmm… they're leaving us in either the same position or a worse position than when they came. They all make some progress but again, this year, that's not happening"*

This may suggest that Chris's work gives her a strong sense of purpose in life (Ryff, 2014). She becomes animated when talking about the achievements of former pupils, perhaps because she believes she has made a positive difference to their lives.

8.8 Critical reflection

Chris was the final interviewee. I had met Chris a couple of years before the interview, at a training event. I had not seen her since but had some knowledge of her school. I

liked Chris and was looking forward to the interview. I was keen to learn more about her experiences. Due to her work commitments, it was quite difficult to arrange the interview. At one point it seemed uncertain whether it would take place. Despite Chris responding to my research advert, I started to wonder if she wanted to participate. This concern was probably heightened as a few other potential participants had not pursued their initial interest.

At the time of the interview Chris was in her office at the school, and I was in my home office. During the pre-interview discussion, Chris told me about an incident where a colleague had her nose broken. This threw me a little. I wanted to let her talk, but I also wanted to capture this in the interview. During the interview I was conscious not to orchestrate a question to encourage her to talk about this incident, but I was torn, as it clearly had a significant impact on her. My concerns grew when Chris described behavioural incidents, in unstructured time as, "*Just silliness, really. General teenage behaviour really and pushing, shoving, a bit of argy bargy...*" (p3, line 101). I felt relief when she went on to say "*That's when* [name of person] *got hit in the face, broke her nose* [pause] (p4, line 106). This was the only occasion when I hoped a participant would repeat information given in the pre-interview discussion, in the interview. It was not something I had expected or prepared for.

The interview with Chris flowed well. I felt totally at ease with her. She has a 'sing song' voice. She smiled and laughed a lot. When she said she had not taken to one child, she laughed. This may have been to neutralise her comments, it was disarming. I was not at all surprised that Chris had not taken to all pupils. I think this to be expected. It is part of being human. I did, however, feel relief that Chris still supported this child and (apparently) did not show them her true feelings.

My initial thoughts, following the interview, were that Chris appeared to cope well with the psychological demands of her work. She focused a great deal on the impact of Covid-19 but other than that she did not seem to experience many difficulties. However, when I listened to the interview and read and re-read the transcripts, I found that there was a depth to Chris's narrative that had been masked by her pleasant demeanour. There was evidence of her experiencing numerous difficulties and challenges. Ending the interview with "*I hope you make a difference, my dear!*" (p17, line 645), spoke volumes. By sharing her experience, she was hoping for change. She wanted the impact on the emotional health of staff working with pupils who have complex SEMH needs to be recognised. This felt to me like a responsibility and an opportunity. It is my hope that having taken part in this study Chris feels she has added her voice to this underdiscussed topic.

Chapter 9- Discussion of findings

9.1 Introduction

The current study has examined the experiences of pastoral staff in relation to the psychological impact of their work in SEMH secondary schools. The stories have been analysed in their entirety, as an extended account of individual experience (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). The richness, complexity and uniqueness of each story has been preserved through a dedicated chapter for each participant, together with a running commentary and discussion related to my analysis. This chapter extends the analysis and discussion offered in chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, by situating the findings within the wider literature. Some findings are consistent with, and extend, the current literature, by focusing attention on a previously unconsidered context, of pastoral work in SEMH secondary schools. Commonalities of experience across narratives are also explored through secondary analysis that situates individual experience, within a collection of experiences (Fraser, 2004). This is new knowledge and is presented in three themes: *'It's a struggle,' 'My emotionally dirty work,'* and *'Protecting myself.'*

9.2 Findings consistent with the current literature

Table 10, below, offers a summary of the themes and concepts, identified in the current study, that are consistent with the existing literature.

Study Theme	Concept	Existing literature
Putting a face on (Dianne), Always look calm (Gail), The stress of one-to-one work (Milly).	Emotional labour	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2017); Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012); Rae et al. (2017); Stoll & McLeod (2020)
Being overlooked, The beginnings (Dianne) Processing emotions (Milly) Scary situations, Feeling responsible, Misunderstanding the role, Can't switch off (Gail) This is who I am, Why we do this work, Understanding what it is like, Resilience (Steve), They're too risky, Connectedness, The positives (Chris).	Relationship dynamics and attachment theory (connection and belonging).	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2019); Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019): Partridge (2012).
Being overlooked, Putting a face on, (Dianne), Feeling unsafe, Planning in advance (Milly) Behaviour and safety challenges, Scary situations, Feeling responsible, Can't switch off, Always look calm (Gail) Understanding what it's like, Resilience, Looking after myself (Steve). They're too risky, Connectedness, Emotional resilience (Chris)	Understanding and managing emotions	Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012)
They know you care (Dianne), Why we do this work (Steve) Connectedness (Chris)	Ethos of care	Fitzsimmons, et al. (2019); Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Rae et al. (2017); Willis & Baines (2018).

Study Theme	Concept	Existing literature
Protective factors (Milly), Can't switch off (Gail), Resilience, Looking after myself (Steve) Emotional resilience (Chris)	Personal resilience	Mackenzie (2012); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019).
Processing emotions (Milly), Can't swich off (Gail), Resilience (Steve, Undervalued and misunderstood (Chris)	Importance of reflective practice	Edwards (2016); Fitzsimmons et al. (2019); Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012); Rae et al. (2017); Willis and Baines (2018).
Being overlooked (Dianne), A low status role (Milly), Misunderstanding the role (Gail), Understanding what it's like (Steve), Undervalued or misunderstood (Chris)	Being valued and understood	Middleton (2018); Middleton (2019); Partridge (2012).

Table 10- Summary of themes and concepts

The current study adds to the extant literature by exploring emotional labour within a new context. The significant time spent working directly with pupils and the intensity of pastoral work, suggests that pastoral work in SEMH secondary schools involves high levels of emotional labour (Fouquereau, et al., 2019). The emotional labour strategies identified in this study, most notably surface acting, (Hochschild, 1983) and suppression (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000), especially of fear and irritation, may help to build positive relationships with pupils, and reduce and manage risk,

> "…if they think that I'm not calm, that will make them more anxious…" (Gail, p3, line 74).

It is possible that when participants describe being unable to switch off from work, they are describing burnout, caused by emotional labour (Westaby et al., 2016). Unlike

Tsang and Wu's (2022) study, there is no evidence in the narratives that participants feigned negative emotions, such as anger or disapproval to secure the desired outcome. Emotional labour appears to focus on positive or neutral emotional displays. One interpretation is that the participants felt that pupils were already experiencing extreme emotional difficulties, without school staff adding to this. The motivation may have come from compassion (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019), within a wider ethos of care (Warin, 2017).

In keeping with Middleton (2018) and Middleton (2019), the current study found that pastoral staff can feel undervalued and misunderstood. This is particularly in relation to the emotional intensity of the work,

> "*I don't think the emotional side is recognised by Ofsted, by the government, by the local authority, by the headteachers*" (Chris, p17, line 627).

New staff appear to be recruited to pastoral jobs, with insufficient preparation and knowledge of the demands of the role. Steve suggests,

> "*…having them clear expectations that actually they're going to have to face some of this…*" (Steve, p9, line 351).

The current literature suggests that reflective practice is important to enable school staff working with pupils with SEMH needs, to contain their emotions (Mackenzie, 2012; Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). The nature of the reflection is discussed in section 2.5.6. The current study found that opportunities for organised reflection were not readily available. Participants refer to end of day debriefs,

> "*It was just an offload at the end of the day*" (Dianne, p6, line 236).

Participants would welcome a reflective space where, in addition to unburdening, advice and practice guidance were given. Without this support individuals are left to find their own method of dealing with difficult emotions and work-related stressors.

9.3 New findings from across narratives

The remainder of this chapter discusses the themes that are present across the narratives.

9.3.1 "*It's a struggle*"

Culshaw and Maitland (2021) argue that far from being a competency-based concept, struggling is an aspect of wellbeing. When people struggle, they need a chance to repair and heal. This requires both personal agency and supportive structures. Drawing on the work of Durkheim (2001 [1912]) and Bourdieu (1987), the current study conceptualises struggling as an emotional experience where actors compete for status, value and recognition. These struggles can be compounded through vicariously experiencing the struggles of others, namely pupils (and their families) and colleagues, as well as their own perceptions and experiences. In keeping with the rich complexity of human existence, in the current study participants' perception of struggling is interwoven in several themes within their narratives, identified in Table 11

It's a struggle	
Participant	**Individual theme/s**
Dianne	4.1 Being overlooked 4.2 Having no idea 4.4 Education is important, but… 4.5 Putting a face on 4.6 They know you care
Milly	5.1 My type of young person 5.2 Feeling unsafe 5.3 Planning in advance 5.4 A low status role
Gail	6.1 Behavioural and safety challenges 6.2 Scary situation 6.3 Feeling responsible
Steve	7.2 Why we do this work 7.5 Looking after myself
Chris	8.1 It's not normal 8.2 They're too risky 8.3 It's all they know 8.6 Undervalued and misunderstood

Table 11- '*It's a struggle*' themes

All the narratives demonstrate that concern participants have about pupils' struggles has a negative impact on their psychological wellbeing. Participants contextualised pupils' struggles within social and medical models of disability (Stanforth & Rose,

2020), which MacLeod (2006) conceptualised as '*sad*' or '*mad*.' The behaviour of the

'*sad*' pupils being understood in terms of their adverse social or family situations.

Participants identify their experience of indirect trauma in terms of domestic violence,

separation and loss, neglect and abuse,

> *"The level of abuse and neglect it's horrendous"* (Dianne, p10, line 411),

> *"…through the care system so many times, attachment issues …so many complex issues …"* (Steve, p2, line 42).

The struggles of pupils contextualised as '*mad*,' were perceived as being pathological.

This view may be influenced by diagnosis of 'disorders' (Caslin, 2019; Stanforth &

Rose, 2020),

> *"… autistic children …"* (Dianne, p3, line 81).

> "*…ODD …. Autism… and ADHD* "(Steve p2, line 39).

As discussed in section 1.4, labels are social constructs that help people to understand

their environment and share their experiences (Mowat, 2015). Labels appear to be

used to explain pupils' difficulties and challenging behaviour. Participants in the current

study seem confident in their ability to support pupils' mental health needs. Sisask et

al (2014) found a positive correlation between teachers holding this perception and

their subjective psychological wellbeing.

Some pupils' behaviour was explained in terms of both social and pathological

antecedents,

> "*…one child with ASD, whose father is very abusive, mum's a drug addict, alcohol issues, lots of issues*" (Chris, p8, line 285).

The repetition and forceful delivery of descriptions of the trauma experiences of pupils

and the SEMH needs, used to explain challenging behaviour, suggests that they hold

significance for the participants (Overcash, 2003).

None of the participants described pupils as '*bad*' (MacLeod, 2006). Denying pupils have agency may illustrate how participants intellectualise the causes of challenging behaviour as being outside the pupil's control. This may help them to be more compassionate (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019). Compassion satisfaction can ameliorate the psychological impact of indirect trauma (Bridger et al., 2020), thus reducing emotional distress and burn-out (Klimecki et al., 2013).

A second aspect of the experience of struggle arises from interactions and observations of colleagues. This is a potent theme within Dianne, Gail, and Steve's narratives. Dianne experiences frustration and stress working with colleagues who she thinks are unsuited to a pastoral role,

> "…support workers … have not been suitable for that kind of environment…"
> (Dianne, p2, line 40).

Gail responds to the struggles of her colleagues by becoming the rescuer in a drama triangle (Karpman, 1968). This is evidenced where she takes on the responsibilities of other staff because she feels that they lack,

> "… the confidence to make decisions" (Gail, p9, line 322).

Steve frames his colleagues' struggles, in terms of their limited understanding of the challenges they will face in a SEMH school,

> "…people come from mainstream going 'it's going to be easy' and bang, instantly…. every young person … would spot the trigger, their weakness and they'll go for it…new staff come in… and maybe they were scared by the young people" (Steve, p9, line 366).

Steve also vividly describes a colleague becoming a "*shell of himself*" (Steve, p8, line 279) because he was unable to cope with the challenges and was unable or unwilling to seek out the support of his team. Steve appears to have found it difficult to understand why this person did not access the support on offer.

The third aspect of struggle arises from participants' direct, rather than vicarious experiences. In keeping with Middleton's (2018) and Middleton's (2019) studies, the limited understanding and acknowledgment of the challenges involved in pastoral support with pupils with complex SEMH needs, caused participants to feel undervalued, misunderstood, and marginalised,

> "… as a support worker… the majority of the time, you do get overlooked" (Dianne, p2, line 30).

> ".. it gets misconstrued, what the role is, and that's part of the issue" (Gail, p4, line 136).

> "…the wider world doesn't understand what we have to go through in school… that's upset me quite a lot, actually" (Chris, p16, line 609).

An element of the lack of understanding includes the fear and stress that comes from experiencing aggressive and violent behaviour,

> "It can get physical too. I've been punched, head-butted, spat at, bitten, kicked… when it's happening, it's extremely stressful" (Dianne, p6, line 203).

> "I don't get frightened easily, but … I remember shaking, I remember shaking …" (Gail, p11, line 391).

> "They can explode and be violent or aggressive. For no reason a young person may call you an f'ing 'c', or other unpleasant names…that is quite stressful" (Milly, p5, line 156).

A response to these threats is to partake in the surface acting aspect of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983),

> "You've got to stay neutral in a way and not kind of put what you're feeling on to the rest of the class …" (Dianne, p8, line 313).

> "I get that adrenalin feeling in my stomach, where my heart is thumping quite fast, but I try to stay really calm and not let anybody see that" (Gail, p2, line 62),

Another strategy is to try to avoid these situations,

> "…if I got put with a young person who I really didn't feel comfortable working with, I could say to another staff member can we swap?" (Milly, p16, line 572).

A particular aspect of the pastoral role that appeared to create fear, for Milly and Gail, is working on a one-to-one basis with pupils in community situations, away from the school building,

> *"I could be in the community with the highest risk young person, who I don't feel safe working with…"* (Milly, p7, line 243).

> *"…that was a pretty bad situation, at that point, for feeling a bit anxious"* (Gail, p3, line 79).

In contrast with the above, Chris enjoys working with pupils in their homes or community settings. It is when this stopped, due to Covid-19, that she felt,

> *"…useless… That child is crying out for somebody to just go and see them, and I can't, I can't do it. … it's worse at the minute..."* (p6, line 212).

Not being able to visit the pupils caused Chris and Gail to ruminate as to whether pupils were okay,

> *"I think…are you okay? That's the one that gets to me"* (Chris, p7, line 243).

> *"…you're still thinking, 'Is everybody okay?"* (Gail, p4, line 116).

Such rumination can intensify negative emotions (Held, et al., 2019). Opportunities for pastoral staff to switch-off and detach themselves from work could improve psychological wellbeing, through improved mood and less fatigue (Sharrocks, 2014; Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Chris stated,

> *"…our emotional health… I don't think it's addressed enough at all…"* (p17, line 613).

The literature clearly demonstrates the importance of creating an emotionally contained, holding environment (Winnicott, 1956). The support available to the participants appears to be perceived as inadequate,

> *"…It was just an offload at the end of the day, which helped, but then you had to go back into it the day after, just doing the same thing because there was no direction really"* (Dianne, p6, line 234).

> *"We had a bit of a post-briefing where we all talked about it, but it kind of got a bit heated …"* (Gail, p12, line 438).

'Off-loading' can support emotional wellbeing (Mackenzie, 2012; Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017). However, Dianne appears to be looking for more practical direction. This suggests that she is seeking advice on how to prevent difficult situations arising. In the absence of organisational support Chris states,

> *"…we have our own support network that's not the SLT type of thing…I do feel like I'm supported in that sense but not on a higher level*" (p14, line 520).

Dianne, Gail and Chris felt that there was lack of organisational support to assist them to process difficult emotions. As discussed in chapter 2, opportunities for reflective practice can enable people to feel emotionally contained by processing difficult emotional experiences (Mackenzie, 2012; Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). This can support psychological wellbeing, including improving emotional resilience (Willis & Baines, 2018).

9.3.2 '*My emotionally dirty work'*

Developed by Hughes (1951; 1958; 1962), the concept of dirty work consists of three elements of taint; physical, social, and moral. People performing dirty jobs can become tainted and seen by wider society as dirty workers (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p413). McMurray and Ward (2014) expanded Hughes's (1951) typology by adding emotional dirt, a concept arising from emotionally difficult work. It is important to stress that, in the current study, the reference to taint and dirt, does not relate to labelling SEMH pupils or participants as dirty or tainted. Rather it is an evocative phrase used to stress that some work, viewed as undesirable or degrading, exists to solve a perceived societal problem that may undermine a community's sense of self (Hughes, 1951; 1958; 1962). Thus, dirt is situational, defined by its context (McMurray & Ward, 2014).

In relation to the current study the concept of dirt can be attributed to several elements of pastoral work in SEMH secondary schools. Social taint (McMurray & Ward, 2014) can arise from the labelling and stigmatising of pupils who have been excluded from other schools, due to behaviour that challenges those institutions (Caslin, 2019). Pupils' anger (Edwards, 2016), violence (Willis & Baines, 2018) and verbal abuse (Gillies & Robinson, 2010) is conceptualised as the dirt that feeds into society's fears that good order will be dismantled (Hughes, 1962; Kleres, 2010). The person working with the dirt can become tainted and, through courtesy stigma, become devalued (Broomhead, 2013; 2016). People who are tainted often occupy positions that are low in the organisational hierarchy (McMurray & Ward, 2014). Table 12 offers a summary of the themes relevant to emotionally dirty work,

My emotionally dirty work	
Participant	Individual theme/s
Dianne	4.1 Being overlooked 4.2 Having no idea
Milly	5.2 Feeling unsafe 5.3 Planning in advance 5.4 A low status role
Gail	6.1 Behavioural and safety challenges 6.4 Misunderstanding the role
Steve	7.2 Why we do this work 7.3 Understanding what it's like 7.4 Resilience
Chris	8.1 It's not normal 8.2 They're too risky 8.3 It's all they know 8.6 Undervalued and misunderstood

Table 12- '*My emotionally dirty work*' theme

There is evidence of the perception that pastoral roles hold low status,

> *"You're just the extra body in the room…you have very little impact on how things are done"* (Dianne, p2, line 32).

> *"… my role's quite low down in the organisation…* (Milly, p18, line 648).

> *"…we have a tough job, and I don't think people realise that"* (Chris, p17, line 616).

Recruiting staff with little, or no previous experience, may also suggest that pastoral staff are undervalued,

> *"…a lot of support staff have not got the knowledge and understanding"* (Dianne, p2, line 52).

> *"… when people come into SEMH… I think it's really important that we give them a real understanding of what it is going to be like …'"* (Steve, p9, line 336).

Pastoral roles are often ill-defined. Unlike teaching roles, there are no professional standards linked to these jobs. This can cause confusion and misunderstanding,

> *"There's a lot there for teachers but for support workers, it's kind of a case of you each support each other and you filter down how you practice …"* (Dianne, p5, line 184).

> *"… it gets misconstrued, what the role is, and that's part of the issue sometimes, that it's not ironed out enough…"* (Gail, p4, line 135).

The participants describe how teachers have clear role expectations and structures, with a focus on pedagogy,

> *"… the teachers do the academic and if there's any issues, they're* [the pupils] *referred to pastoral. It's a very different role… very different"* (Chris, p11, line 384).

The teaching role is perceived as less stressful,

> *"… if you're a bit higher up, say a teacher…that's much less stressful"* (Milly, p18, line 651).

Institutional and systemic structures may act as a barrier to emotional dirt, and offer teachers protection against emotional taint, that are not available to pastoral staff. This may appear to challenge Broomhead's (2016) assertion that teachers in SEMH

schools can become stigmatised due to their association with stigmatised pupils. However, there are important differences between the concepts of stigma and taint. The former reflects disparaging interpretations of moral status, which serve to devalue a person (Goffman, 1963). Taint refers to the 'dirtiness' of work-related tasks (Kreiner, et al., 2006). McMurray and Ward (2014) suggest that emotional dirt and taint are also distinct themes. Emotional dirt includes elements such as emotions, emotional labour, threats and burdens. Taint, they argue consists of stigma, othering, and contamination. The dirty work experienced by the pastoral staff in the current study, encompasses both emotional dirt and taint. It reflects the hierarchical and structural nature of school life. In-line with the extant literature, the current study found that the pastoral staff are involved in the most emotionally intense work (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Middleton, 2019; Partridge, 2012; Willis & Baines, 2018). The participants experience somatic and emotional responses to the unwelcome emotions that arises from their work,

> *"…stress… lack of sleep because I am worrying the night before. I come home and might snap at my family"* (Milly, p8, line 259).

> *"… I just felt drained that day…My body felt tired, but my mind was not …"* (Gail, p12, line 417).

There is also a clear indication in the narratives that pastoral staff perceive that the challenges they face in SEMH schools are not widely known,

> *"People don't expect what we face* [pause]*. There's always something going on in the children's lives …. that can be quite stressful"* (Gail, p1, line 24).

> *"…people come from mainstream going it's 'going to be easy'…"* (Steve, p9, line 337).

Similarly, the participant' describe significant differences between SEMH schools and mainstream settings. This includes the different philosophical and practical approaches and expectations,

"*It's more of the mainstream mentality of, we're a school, we've got targets to hit and we're going to hit them.*" (Dianne, p4, line 148).

"*Very mainstream thinking … That the only things that happen are within the classroom …*" (Chris, p10, line 368).

This lack of awareness of the role of pastoral staff in SEMH secondary schools suggests that people from outside of these environments are ill-placed to pass any judgement or assign taint, to those who work in them (McMurray & Ward, 2014). In the current study some participants choose language that aligns their work to the concept of dirt and contamination. Steve likens work stresses to,

"*…a bit of a disease inside…*" (Steve, p8, line 294).

Gail uses the word "*toxic*" in several contexts. She describes the home lives of some pupils,

"*…they're* [the pupils] *living with troubled families. And in a really toxic environment…at home*" (Gail, p2, line 40).

In relation to her own work and the impact it has on her she suggests,

"*…such a toxic a role. You know, it does feel like toxic stress sometimes…*" (Gail, p4, line 121).

Choosing the words "*disease*" and "*toxic*" may indicate that Steve and Gail perceive aspects of their work to be dirty, although they do not specifically frame it as such. Both nouns suggest contamination. Dirtiness is a social construct, as is the fear of contamination. This interpretation suggests that the taint and stigma experienced by pupils attending SEMH secondary schools may also be mirrored in the experiences of pastoral staff. It may explain why some of the most '*dirty jobs*' within education are contracted out to SEMH secondary schools, through school exclusions and to pastoral staff, within those schools. The lack of research related to this topic may suggests some apathy in relation to the psychological wellbeing of staff who work within an

emotionally dirty environment (McMurray & Ward, 2014) and who are lower in the occupational hierarchy (Hughes, 1958).

As a means of self-protection, the tainted workers may attempt to minimise the negative aspects of their role, replacing it with more positive ones (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). All the participants cite making a difference to the lives of pupils as a positive aspect of their jobs,

> "…*the lads leave knowing that somebody's cared"* (Dianne, p8, line 299),

> "…*I know that I am making a positive difference to the young people"* (Milly, p8, line 284).

> "…*making the difference to them makes a bigger difference to me"* (Steve, p10, line 388).

These findings are supportive of what McMurray and Ward (2014) term a 'good call' (p1132). This relates to aspects of work from which people gained personal satisfaction. They suggest this response was most notable when people can display their skills, and successfully deal with service users' emotional problems. This finding was echoed in the current study,

> "… *it's all about attuning and validating feelings. I always had that ability to be able to see that a child was not quite right, …"* (Dianne, p4, line117).

> "*My skills are to de-escalate the situation… "*(Gail, p2, line 60).

There is an indication that some of the participants regret not being able to achieve more for the pupils. This is couched in terms that indicate a sense of futility,

> "… *you kind of know that there's still a lot more could have been done and they're still not in a good place. That's another downside …*" (Dianne, p8, line 297).

> "…*she's come on in leaps and bounds but … she's leaving us in a few months, and I don't know what's going to happen to her…"* (Chris, p13, line 487).

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The perception of poor pupil outcomes may affect job satisfaction, limiting a sense of purpose (Ryff, 1989; 2014). If intervening in the pupils' lives led to better outcomes, then it is possible that the emotional dirt may be diminished.

McMurray and Ward (2014) position emotions as an element of dirt. This holds relevance to the current study, as emotions play an essential role in the conceptualisation of psychological well-being offered in section 1.6. Experiencing unwanted emotions may heighten the perceived threat of contamination. The suppression of difficult emotions and expression of more positive ones, has been identified in the current study,

> *"…you don't want to come across as like whatever's just gone on has affected you. You've got to stay neutral"* (Dianne, p8, line 312).
>
> *"…stay really calm and not let anybody see"* (Gail, p2, line 67)

Successfully managing emotions, so their expression is more authentic, may offer some protection against the threat of taint, through improving the quality of relationships (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). This in turn, may help to improve psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989; 2014).

9.3.3 '*Protecting myself*'

The formation of occupational identities can be influenced by the opinions of outsiders (Bosman, et al., 2016). Thus, association with work viewed as dirty can adversely affect the sense of self. This section discusses two methods that participants appear to use to protect the *self,* ego defence mechanisms and self-care.

9.3.3.1 Ego defence mechanisms

Ashforth & Kreiner (1999) argue that the utilisation of coping strategies, in the form of defence mechanisms, can counter the negative impact of dirty work. Drawing on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, narratives in the current study suggest that pastoral staff may perceive their roles as more taxing than other school professionals. This is illustrated where Dianne and Milly state,

> *"… the difference between what the support worker has to do and what the teacher has to do … That's* [support work] *more stressful"* (Dianne, p6, line 215).

> *"…if you're … a teacher, … I can imagine that's much less stressful"* (Milly, p18, line 651).

Steve presents himself as more knowledgeable than some teachers,

> *"We've got an amazing teacher who was a deputy head in mainstream …he's really enhanced his practice by looking around, learning from how we practice"* (Steve, p5, line 159).

Positive effects on psychological wellbeing can be experienced through identifying with a group whose membership confers a sense of purpose and meaning (Ryff, 1989; 2014). Self-identification is both relational and comparative. As such people can be vicariously affected by the status of the organisational group, with which they identify (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Creating a positive identification with one's own group, can enhance self-esteem, mental health, and wellbeing (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, identifying as a SEMH pastoral specialist may serve the purpose of creating an 'in-group' whose intrinsic value challenges the more widely accepted status of teachers.

In the current study coping strategies are explored from the perspective of ego defence mechanisms. Originating from Freud's work (1894), these defences serve to protect a person's self-esteem (Vaillant, 2011). As discussed in section 1.6, defences exist on a continuum, from immature to mature. The more mature the more adaptive (Vaillant,

2000). Table 13, offers a summary of the defence mechanisms identified in the current study,

Participant Hierarchy of Defence Mechanisms			
Participant	Defence Mechanism	Defensive category	Defence level	Theme/s
Dianne	Projection	Immature	Relatively maladaptive	4.1 The beginnings 4.4 Education is important, but…
	Displacement	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	4.2 Having no idea
	Rationalise	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	4.6 They know you care
	Humour	Mature	Adaptive	4.5 Putting a face on
	Altruism	Mature	Adaptive	4.6 They know you care
Milly	Reaction formation	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	5.2 Feeling unsafe 5.5 The stress of one-to-one work
	Displacement	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	5.6 Processing emotions
	Rationalisation	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	5.6 Processing emotions
	Humour	Mature	Adaptive	5.2 Feeling unsafe
	Altruism	Mature	Adaptive	6.6 Processing emotions
Gail	Rationalisation	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	6.2 Scary situation
	Humour	Mature	Adaptive	6.1 Behavioural and safety challenges
	Altruism	Mature	Adaptive	6.2 Scary situations 6.6 Always look calm

Participant Hierarchy of Defence Mechanisms				
Participant	Defence Mechanism	Defensive category	Defence level	Theme/s
Steve	Humour	Mature	Adaptive	7.1 This is who I am
	Projection	Immature	Relatively maladaptive	7.5 Looking after myself
	Displacement	Intermediate (neurotic)	Relatively adaptive	7.2 Why we do this work
	Altruism	Mature	Adaptive	7.2 Why we do this work
Chris	Humour	Mature	Adaptive	8.6 Undervalued and misunderstood
	Altruism	Mature	Adaptive	8.7 The positives

Table 13- Participant hierarchy of defence mechanisms- based on Vaillant's (2000) hierarchy of defence mechanisms

As identified in the current study, adaptive and maladaptive, coping strategies can be employed discreetly or simultaneously (Bosmans et al., 2016). Within the current study the only identified immature, relatively maladaptive defence is projection (Vaillant, 2011). This is an unconscious process where unwanted feelings and thoughts about the self are projected on to others (Klein, 1975). The use of projection is only touched upon in the literature critiqued in chapter 2. Partridge (2012) suggests that pastoral staff can project difficult emotions to other parts of the system to avoid experiencing them. In the current study examples of projection are contained within Dianne and Steve's narrative. Dianne talks about being made to feel "*stupid*" as a child. The difficult emotions evoked by this influence how she approaches aspects of her pastoral role. An example is where she pretends not to understand a lesson, to avoid the pupil having to admit they do not understand. She does this to avoid the child being

embarrassed and experiencing the discomfort of feeling stupid that she felt in her earlier life. Steve appears to be aware of the potential to project,

> *"…if we're not right here* [psychologically]*, then what we're projecting isn't going to be right"* (p6, line 236).

Steve appears to resist projecting so that he can create a holding environment where emotions can be contained (Winnicott, 1956),

> *"…learning to take a step back, to breathe, to work out why they were so emotional at that point, what annoyed them, what triggered…"* (Steve, p7, line 261).

A person's own experience of emotional containment can influence their ability to contain others' emotions (Partridge, 2012; Fitzsimmons, et al., 2019).

Displacement, reaction formation and rationalisation are intermediate, relatively adaptive defences (Vaillant, 2000). Displacement has been identified in Dianne, Milly and Steve's narratives. It is a mechanism that helps people to re-direct difficult emotions to places that they feel are safe,

> "…*I come home and might snap at my family…*" (Milly, p8, line 259).

> *"…then we go home with the pressure and then it impacts upon all of our lives*" (Steve, p8, line 326).

Dianne's narrative is less explicit. She directs her frustrations at the school recruiting inexperienced pastoral staff away from school leaders, onto a less senior, inexperienced colleague. Arguably the colleague represents a more accessible and less threatening depository for Dianne's annoyance.

Reaction formation is an intermediate, relatively adaptive defence (Vaillant, 2000). where an unwanted emotional response is repressed and concealed by behaviour that indicates the opposite. Milly appears to use reaction formation to avoid difficult

emotions arising from situations where she feels at risk of physical harm. Operating at an unconscious level she seeks to exchange anxiety provoking emotions by re-assuring herself that these events are not as threatening as they may appear (Knoll et al. 2016). By evoking this defence, Milly may be protecting the self, and therefore her self-esteem, from concerns that others will negatively judge her fear, and perhaps question her ability to perform her job,

> *"I didn't want to come across as complaining about the job…"* (Milly, p10, line 345).

Milly's use of reaction formation may help her to feel she has autonomy (Granieri, et al., 2017). Milly seeks to reinforce her sense of autonomy by internally regulating her behaviour (Ryff, 2014). However, Milly's self-doubts suggest that she does not enjoy autonomy. She is affected by how she perceives others will respond if she shares some of her stresses and emotions.

Rationalisation, identified in Dianne, Milly and Gail's' narratives, occurs where the actor creates post-event beliefs that justify their actions as rational. This can be an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance between thoughts and actions (Cushman, 2020). Dianne and Milly present this in terms of their personal attributes,

> *"…if you're in a good frame of mind and you're feeling okay and you've not got a lot of pressures within your personal life, … it's a lot easier for you to be able to rationalise what goes on"* (Dianne, p6, line 230).

> *"… it could just be my personality … it must be just different people…I"* (p18, line 665).

Rationalisation can also be used to present behaviours in a positive light. Impression management (Goffman, 1959) can be an indication that rationalisation defences are being evoked (Cushman, 2020). This is illustrated where Gail seeks to present herself as someone being in control and not easily frightened,

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> *"I wasn't bothered about myself…I didn't really think about me, I wasn't scared…"* (Gail, p3, line 85).

Rationalisation aims to establish desirable representations of the self to the intended audience. It can protect against psychological and physical health effects that can arise from having to express or suppress emotions (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000).

Humour is a mature, adaptive defence mechanism (Vaillant, 2000), that can enable people to present difficult or painful situations in a more pleasant and acceptable form. This defence has been identified in all the narratives. Steve used humour at the beginning of the interview. He described his profession as "*a clown.*" This may have reflected nervousness or his attempt to establish a light-hearted tone for the interview.

Milly talks about her colleagues' use of humour in relation to a situation that she found stressful,

> *"…they turned it into a joke …. laughing at me… and laughing about it… making it more light-hearted"* (Milly, p14, line 506).

She appears conflicted whether her colleagues' reactions were helpful. She experienced the response, at least in part, to be mocking. This coupled with her need to raise this matter at the end of day meeting, suggests that the 'humour' did not work to reduce the negative impact the stressful event had on her. When asked about her feelings towards this pupil Milly states,

> "*I never wanted to work with them again if I'm honest* [laughs]…" (Milly, p15, line 536).

Laughter is often associated with humour. It can also indicate several emotional states, including those that people experience as difficult (Stengel, 2014). It can be a mechanism to protect the ego. It is a mechanism used by all the participants. Milly's laughter could be interpreted as her jokingly rejecting working with this pupil.

Alternatively, it may be a mechanism by which she can express her true feelings, in a way that does not expose her to criticism. Gail and Chris also employ laughter when describing difficult situations,

> *"…. I don't get frightened easily, but that was quite* [pause] *I remember that one* [laughs]" (Gail, p11, line 382).

Gail appears to be admitting that she was frightened. Her laughter expresses her relief, whilst preserving her self-image, of someone who can cope with challenging situations. Chris conveys her frustration with people outside the school assuming that she has been off work during Covid-19 lockdowns,

> "*I've been working exactly the same as we were before except under more pressure,* [laughs]…. *Our job's been a lot, lot harder than it ever has been. But yeah, I cope!* [laughs]" (Chris, p17, 616).

The use of laughter may arise out of exasperation or a sense of irony. Chris appears to recognise the incongruity between what people say and her experience of reality. This may also explain Dianne's laughter,

> "*I've had some* [laughs] *of the toughest, aggressive lads in school – shall we say* [laughs] *come to me in the middle of the dining room and giving me a big hug. Bringing me cards and flowers and all the kids have looked and gone, oh my god! And it's me, tears flowing*" (Dianne, p8, line 293).

In Dianne's case the incongruity, between labels and behaviour appears to evoke a positive response. This may support Dianne's psychological wellbeing as this demonstrates the strength of her relationship with these pupils.

Altruism is also a mature defence mechanism that is associated with adaptive functioning (Vaillant, 2000). It can satisfy social, emotional and attachment needs. It is a mechanism by which people can deal with emotional distress. By challenging difficult emotions, such as anger or helplessness, altruism can enhance the sense of self and understanding of past events. Altruism exists on a continuum. It can reflect

authentic care given for the sole benefit of the recipient, or the acts can be for the sole benefit of the giver (Sun, 2018). There is evidence in the narratives that all participants are motivated by a desire to make the children's lives better, whilst also gaining a sense of satisfaction and purpose (Ryff, 1989; 2014),

> *"That's what I went into it for, to make a difference…"* (Dianne, p8, line 290).

> *"I know that I am making a positive difference to the young people*" (Milly, p8, line 282).

> **"***…makes me so happy to see her like that … I love it! I just love it…"* (Chris, p13, line 460).

Steve gives up his own time, to prepare for the pupils arriving at school,

> "*I always arrive at the site early so I can… make sure the site is ready because there's got to be the right feel and the right environment for when the young people arrive*" (Steve, p2, line 108).

His motivation for this apparently selfless act, may be because he,

> *"… want*[s] *the best for them, so I love doing what I do …"* (Steve, p6, line 222).

> *"… I were* [sic] *one of them kids…"* (Steve, p10, line 410).

In helping the pupils, Steve may be converting uncomfortable emotions emanating from his own past experiences into support for others, who he perceives experience similar difficulties.

Gail's altruism is couched in terms of protecting the pupils both emotionally and physically,

> *"…and the young people … we can take that stress off them, to try and almost take it away from them…"* (p1, line 19)

> *"… I did hold someone and stopped him from going near the young person, because he was trying to assault him…"* (p3, line 79).

In putting herself in harm's way, Gail risks her psychological wellbeing.

9.3.3.2 Self-care

The current study found self-care to be an important resource for ameliorating the risk of psychological harm, emanating from emotionally demanding work. Self-care can reduce negative compassion (Mott & Martin, 2019) by creating a protective shield against compassion fatigue (Bridger, et al., 2020) arising from exposure to direct and indirect trauma. Several concepts of '*self-care'* are offered in the literature. These include biophilia, a concept developed by Fromm (1955), which foregrounds connections, with others and nature, to overcome isolation whilst maintaining the notion of self. This is supported by Eastwood and Ecklund's (2008) dimensions of self-care, engaging in rewarding activities and hobbies, social support, including relationships inside and outside work, and adopting physical and spiritual wellbeing strategies. Focusing on the spiritual dimension, Neff (2011) emphasises the importance of self-compassion, consisting of self-kindness, rather than self-criticism, shared experience rather than isolation and mindfulness rather than rumination. In the current study many of these dimensions intertwine and overlap,

Dianne describes hobbies and activities that provide social support, physical activity and connection with nature,

> *"…I've always led quite an active life…I'm outside quite a lot…I do a lot of gardening. I like music… without* [hobby] *and my social activities…I wouldn't …have an outlet … to destress…"* (Dianne, p7, line 273).

Steve combines spiritual, social and nature activities,

> *"I use a lot of mindfulness…a lot of… amazing time with my kids and my family. Being outdoors for me is key…"* (Steve, p7, line 287).

Gail states uses physical and spiritual activities and nutrition,

> *"……I'm … working out and eating better… I concentrate on doing something for me…a mindfulness journal… what you're grateful for..."* (Gail, p10, line 344).

Informal social support from people who understand the challenges of pastoral work in an SEMH setting, appears to be highly valued,

> *"…it can be an extremely positive, rewarding job…If you've got a good support team staff around you"* (Dianne, p10, line 388),
>
> *"...talking and chatting to people within your team, your colleagues. You're sharing how you feel"* (Steve, p7, line 291).
>
> *"…my daughter's a teacher … I talk to her, she understands"* (Chris, p15, line 539).
>
> *"…getting another perspective on it really. Because on my own I can start over thinking…"* (Milly, p13, line 466).

The proactive approach taken in securing opportunities to reflect suggest that it is highly valued (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

The multifaceted approach to self-care found in the current study, aligns with aspects of Ryff's (1989) psychological dimensions, discussed in section 1.6, by developing

> *"self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth"* (p1071).

9.4 Summary

In summary, this chapter situated the findings of the current study within the wider literature. It has extended current knowledge by examining themes and concepts in a previously unexplored context. A discussion of the commonalities found across the data, has been presented to expand the analysis and discussion offered in the individual participants' chapters. The three additional themes: '*It's a struggle'*, '*My emotionally dirty work*' and '*protecting myself*' have generated a deeper understanding of the participants' experience. *Struggle* has been conceptualised as an emotional experience, emanating from direct and indirect exposure to traumatic or challenging situations. It is compounded by lack of status, value and recognition. Participants'

experiences of being undervalued and misunderstood have been further explored through the concept of emotional dirt (McMurray & Ward, 2014), in the theme '*My emotionally dirty work*.' The dirt and taint experienced arises from the nature of their roles and the hierarchical structures within which they work. The coping resources discussed in the theme '*protecting myself*' included practising self-care and evoking ego defence mechanisms.

In keeping with narrative research, this analysis and discussion has offered my 'reading' of the data. The interpretations are transparently presented to persuade, rather than prove (Fraser, 2004), but are always open to question (Butler, 2005). It is hoped that the reader is encouraged to be curious about the topic of interest and motivated to consider their own interpretation.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The study had one aim, to explore the lived experiences of pastoral staff employed in SEMH secondary schools to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of their work, and four objectives,

- explore the individual perspectives of pastoral staff employed in SEMH secondary schools in relation to their experiences of psychological wellbeing,

- discover factors that participants perceive impact their psychological wellbeing, positively or negatively,

- explore concepts and theories which further the understanding of the participants' experiences,

- enhance current knowledge regarding policies and practices that support psychological wellbeing.

This chapter discusses how this aim and objectives where achieved. The appropriateness of the chosen methodology, and the study's strengths and limitations are explored, along with reflexivity. A discussion of the unique contribution the current study has made to existing knowledge and understanding of this topic, is offered. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications for policy, practice and future post-doctoral research and utilisation of these findings.

10.1 Assessment of the methodology

The narrative inquiry approach adopted in the current study, has facilitated an in-depth exploration of the interplay of personal, professional, and relational selves (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021) in relation to the research topic. The participants have shared aspects of their experiences that they identify as meaningful (Riessman, 1993). All the

messiness, inconsistencies and contradictions of narratives are played out as participants framed and re-framed their experience during the interview. Throughout the data analysis I have asked myself, 'what is this person trying to tell me?' and 'how does the data support my interpretations?' In support of the interpretations presented, participants' quotations, along with relevant theories and concepts, have been offered. This approach has provided insights and understanding that are transparent and rigorous. It is acknowledged that often multiple alternative interpretations could be offered. This reflects the co-constructive nature of narrative inquiry (Lieblich et al. 1998) and multiple realities of experience, in-line with a social constructivist ontological perspective (Creswell, 2009; Langdridge, 2013).

A strength of narrative inquiry lies in examining the story as a whole entity (Polkinghorne, 1995). In-keeping with a narrative philosophy, chapters 4 to 8 are dedicated to exploring the unique experiences of each participant. The analysis has been presented as a running commentary, with theories and concepts that flow from the data being offered as part of the interpretative process. By offering analysis in this form the individual and distinctive experiences of each person have been preserved. The breadth of themes gives confidence that the data collection and interpretation processes have been rigorous, reliable, and trustworthy. A significant repetition of themes, between participants or within the existing literature, may have raised concerns that they were pre-determined or 'made to fit' pre-constituted ideas. The further level of data analysis, offered in chapter 9, identified some commonalities across narratives, whilst ensuring that individual voices were not lost within collective themes. Although the interpretations are presented as themes, these are not neat nor closely bound. Adopting an analytical approach that combined thematic and narrative

analysis, avoided segmentation of the stories. This brought attention to more obscure messages and meanings drawn from the narratives (Farouk, 2017; Josselson, 2013).

10.2 Study strengths and limitations

The narrative inquiry approach is a strength of this study. Dedicating a chapter to each of the five participants has not only preserved their individual stories, but it has also enabled in-depth analysis, supported by existing concepts and theories. An approach which segments data and blends it across a group of participants would not have secured the depth and richness of each individual's experience. Despite working in SEMH schools, the participants are far from homogeneous, in terms of their professional backgrounds, current roles and interpretations of the challenges of their work.

The data analysis approach adopted in this study has given the participants a voice through which their unique experiences are clearly heard. The exploration of cross-narrative commonalities, offered in Chapter 9, adds a further dimension to the discussion and findings. Examining the concepts of struggle, dirty work and defence mechanisms has provided conceptual lenses, through which the psychological impact of undertaking pastoral work in an SEMH school can be better understood. Presenting the analysis in this way has retained the integrity and authenticity of the individual stories whilst setting the findings in a wider academic context. This has enabled policy and practice recommendations to be offered, that are informed by the commonalty of working in a pastoral role in a SEMH secondary school.

Limitations of the study must be acknowledged. Firstly, findings relate to a small sample of pastoral staff. Although the sample size was deemed sufficient for this

narrative research, further studies with larger samples may reveal whether similar results are found. In terms of gender and ethnicity, the sample consisted of four female and one male participant, all white British. This is unlikely to be representative of the wider population of pastoral staff. Four of the five participants work in independent schools, one in an academy. Whether this has impacted on the data is unknown. Thus, caution must be exercised in applying the findings to differing contexts. Another limitation was not returning to participants to seek clarification or further understanding of aspects of their interview. This may have been helpful when interpreting some aspects of the interviews. Despite these limitations, this is the first study to explore the experiences of pastoral staff working in SEMH secondary schools.

10.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity entails the researcher identifying and addressing influences that may affect the research process (Fontana, 2004). Self-awareness of how the researcher's values, views and background can affect the research introduces transparency and rigour into the process (Jootun, et al., 2009). In the interest of openness, my positionality, and my motivation for undertaking this research, along with my epistemological, ontological, and axiological positions, are presented in sections 1.2 and 3.4.

Reflexivity occurred in the design of the study, and during data collection and analysis. Participants were asked to share sensitive information, that may challenge their sense of self and expose their vulnerabilities. This necessitated a sensitive research design that made participants feel comfortable and reassured that anonymity would be protected. It also acknowledged that power relationship can influence the stories that participants tell. The use of open questions (Appendix 10) sought to create a non-

hierarchical relationship (Rose & Glass, 2006), by placing the participants as experts in their own narrative (Riessman, 2008). *'Reflexivity in action'* (Jootun et al., 2009, p43), brought my conscious awareness to the danger that open questions can allow a researcher to steer the direction of the interview. I purposefully gave space and time for the participants to speak and frame their thoughts. I did not prematurely interject, offering only occasional prompts or clarifications. The transcripts demonstrate that the participants spoke for most of the time, focusing on aspects of their experience that held meaning for them.

My own position within an SEMH secondary school may have influenced aspects of the participants' narratives. I felt that Gail, Steve, and Chris attempted to 'pull me into their narrative', though their perception of a shared experience or understanding. To mitigate against this, my analysis and interpretations were discussed in supervision and findings were supported by extracts from the narratives and, where appropriate, concepts and theories. Reflexive diary notes made at the end of each interview made me aware of factors, including my assumptions and emotions, which may influence my interpretations (Elliott, et al., 2012). These observations formed the basis of the critical reflections offered at the conclusion of each story chapter.

10.4 Original contribution to new knowledge

As discussed in chapter 2, aspects of the psychological wellbeing of school staff, such as the impact of stress (Kinman, et al., 2011; Mackenzie, 2012: Willis & Baines, 2018) and challenges to emotional and mental wellbeing (Edwards, 2016: Mackenzie, 2012; Middleton, 2019; Rae et al., 2017) are well represented in the current literature. Many of these studies focus on teachers' experiences (Edwards, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Rae et al., 2017). Those that do consider the impact on pastoral staff have been

mainly conducted within mainstream schools (Middleton, 2018; Partridge, 2012). There is an absence of research focused on the experience of pastoral staff working in SEMH secondary schools.

This study adds to the existing literature in several ways. Firstly, it offers a novel conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing, that encompasses a complex array of emotions, feelings, performance, and coping strategies (Huppert, 2009; Huppert & So, 2013; Tappolet & Rossi, 2014; Vaillant, 2000). Secondly, this is the first study, to my knowledge, that specifically explores how the experiences of pastoral staff working in SEMH secondary schools impacts their psychological wellbeing. Thirdly, this study offers a unique conceptualisation of 'struggling' that acknowledges the role of status, value and recognition. The study identifies the multi-dimensional origins of struggles; vicariously experienced from observing the struggles of pupils and colleagues, and directly from participants' own perceptions and processing of events. This conceptualisation of struggling differs from Culshaw and Kurian's (2021). They situate teachers' struggling within the framework of teaching competencies and demands. Fourthly, the examination of emotionally dirty work in an educational context builds on the existing literature. Previous studies have not situated emotional taint (McMurray & Ward, 2014) within educational settings, nor have they explored the impact of emotional taint alongside the stigma experienced by staff who work in SEMH schools (Broomhead, 2016). Fifthly, the exploration of coping resources defence mechanisms (Vaillant, 2000) and self-care, has provided new insight into how pastoral staff protect their sense of self when coping with work related struggles and emotional dirt.

This unique contribution to knowledge offered by this study has taken a small step to redress the absence of research, in relation to this topic. Whilst the findings are not

generalisable they could be transferable. The remainder of this chapter offers policy and practice recommendations that could improve the psychological wellbeing of pastoral staff working in SEMH secondary schools. This thesis concludes with a plan to disseminate these findings and undertake post-doctoral research.

10.5 Policy Implications of the study's findings

To date, the voices of pastoral staff have not been adequately heard within the research community. Therefore, their experiences are not reflected in policy and there is no guidance in relation to professional standards for pastoral work. This contrasts with the statutory standards for teachers (DfE, 2021). Professional standards for teaching assistants were originally drafted by a working group set up by the Department for Education (DfE, 2014b). The Government decided not to publish, although permission was given to make them available (Skills for schools, 2016) Government reasons for this decision have not been made public. Set in the context of the academisation agenda, setting professional standards at a local level, may have been viewed as more appropriate. The unwillingness by the government to publish this guidance, may suggest that there will be little enthusiasm for creating professional standards for pastoral roles. However, this study has demonstrated that such guidance would provide a helpful framework within which role expectations and responsibilities would sit. This would give potential candidates an accurate portrayal of the demands of the role and support school leaders to employ people with suitable experience and aptitude. Coupled with availability of appropriate, quality assured training, would go some way to addressing the misunderstandings and lack of status and value experienced by pastoral staff.

10.6 Practice Implications of the study's findings

The benefits of reflective practice are well documented in the literature (Edwards, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Middleton, 2018; Middleton, 2019; Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). However, few schools appear to be offering this to school staff. This study has identified that tailored supervision, encompassing reflection and practice support, could address some of the psychological challenges faced by pastoral staff. Approaches that address the emotional skills needed to perform pastoral work, in addition to understanding emotional labour, may equip people for the emotional demands of the work (Phillips, et al., 2020). Bespoke training could also protect against secondary trauma resulting from exposure to pupils' trauma narratives (Kerig, 2019). This could include strategies for self-care (Mott & Martin, 2019). Building a culture where pastoral staff have a voice and feel valued could help them to deal with their struggles and help to remove the '*dirt*' from their work.

10.7 Dissemination of research findings

Disseminating the findings of this study will raise awareness of this under-researched topic. Post-doctrinally, my plan is to submit articles to relevant academic journals such as Pastoral Care in Education, Educational Psychology in Practice, Education Review and Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. To maximise the impact, and reach a wider audience, articles will be published in Lions Lifestyles, specialist educational literature, delivered directly to schools. Attending conferences and seminars will also enable dissemination of my findings and promote thought and discussion as to the role of pastoral staff in SEMH special secondary schools.

10.8 Future research

As this is the first study to explore this topic, further studies may determine whether studies with larger and more demographically diverse samples have similar findings. Studies examining the role of individual psychological differences on psychological wellbeing may provide further insights and greater understanding of the factors that have an impact. The current study was unable to consider any influence that gender may have had on the participants' experiences. Research into the impact of emotional labour in a school context where physical violence is prevalent, would add to the current literature (Ward, et al., 2019). These findings could have practice implications in relation to developing appropriate training and tailored supervision, that reflect relevant aspects of personality traits and gender differences. Further research may also clarify whether the length of experience in a pastoral role affects the experience of psychological wellbeing. Studies that explore a wider range of coping strategies, could underpin initiatives to manage psychologically negative impact of pastoral work.

10.9 Post-doctoral work

My post-doctoral work will focus on:

- developing a supervisory process that provides the opportunity for supportive reflective practice, which is separate from performance management and addresses the themes identified in this study. This will also include support and training for others to fulfil this supervisory role.
- creating training material which provides a clear understanding of pastoral responsibilities, along with approaches and strategies based on trauma-informed and compassion frameworks. This will support psychological

wellbeing through managing emotions, more competent performance and utilisation of adaptive coping strategies.

- creating a pastoral standards document, where expectations and performance criteria are clearly stated

10.10 Reflections of my research journey

My research journey originated from my curiosity to understand my own experiences working in a SEMH secondary school. I saw first-hand the challenges faced by colleagues working in pastoral roles. I observed some people being overwhelmed, stressed and emotionally distressed by their work, whilst others seemed to flourish. This piqued my curiosity and desire to understand the perceptions of pastoral staff working in an SEMH secondary school in relation to their psychological wellbeing.

As a part-time researcher, with a full-time job, balancing the demands of both has been extremely challenging. This set against the background of Covid-19 and a significant escalation of mental health difficulties for pupils and staff. Working alone, albeit with the support of my supervisors, has been isolating.

As a novice researcher, I have faced a steep learning curve. I have become more familiar with academic language and approaches. I have enjoyed familiarising myself with the narrative inquiry methodology. If methodologies reflect personalities, then this certainly reflects mine. I have been surprised that my analysis led me to consider aspects of the stories through a psychodynamic lens. I had always felt resistant to these theories, having found it difficult to accept that events in childhood, can hold such control and influence in adult life. This had reassured me that my analysis has not blindly followed my own previous beliefs and assumptions.

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Appendix 1 – PRISMA Search

	Key search words
	((experience* OR Views OR perception* OR attitude* OR perspective*))
AND	((pastoral* OR Mentor* OR inclusion* OR behaviour* OR emotion* OR learning*))
AND	((semh* OR social emotional mental health OR EBD* OR SEBD*))
AND	((psycholog* OR wellbeing OR well-being OR 'well being' or quality of life or wellness or health or positive affect or mental health))
AND	((school*OR education OR PRU* OR pupil referral units*))
AND	((staff or professional* or worker*))

Limiters:	Peer reviewed journals, English language, dates 2010-2022

454 papers identified from search and titles screened against inclusion criteria

432 titles rejected against inclusion criteria

22 abstracts screened against inclusion criteria

13 abstracts rejected as not fitting inclusion criteria

Askell-Williams, H., & Lawson, M. J. (2015). Relationships between students' mental health and their perspectives of life at school. *Health Education, 115*(3), 249-268. doi:http://dx.doi.org.salford.idm.oclc.org/10.1108/HE-02-2014-0007	The Australian research explored students' self-reports of their mental health and their views of their school life. This study is deemed as irrelevant as it does not concern impact in professionals working in SEMH schools and due to its geographical location
Bonell, C., Allen, E., Warren, E., McGowan, J., Bevilacqua, L., Farah, J., Viner, R. M. (2018). Effects of the learning together intervention on bullying and aggression in English secondary schools (INCLUSIVE): A cluster randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet, 392*(10163), 2452-2464. doi:http://dx.doi.org.salford.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31782-3	This research focused on the impact of interventions on bullying within Secondary Schools, rather than any impact on the staff or specialist SEMH schools

Brake, A, Kelly, M. S. (2019). Camaraderie, Collaboration, and Capacity Building: A Qualitative Examination of School Social Workers in a Year Long Professional Learning Community *The Qualitative Report; Fort Lauderdale* (24)4, 667-692.	Although this study describes the experiences and perspectives of school social workers in relation to SEMH school services, it is based in the USA, rather than the UK and does not focus on specialist schools.
Dillon, J., & Pratt, S. (2019). An evaluation of the impact of an integrated multidisciplinary therapeutic team on the mental health and wellbeing of young people in an educational setting. *Pastoral Care in Education*, (37),126 142, DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2019.1618375	The focus on this study is the mental health of young people attending SEMH and Alternative Education provisions, rather than the impact on Pastoral or support staff working in those settings.
Hanley, T. (2017). Supporting the emotional labour associated with teaching: considering a pluralistic approach to group supervision, *Pastoral Care in Education,* (35)4, 253-266. DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2017.1358295	The paper focused on supervision groups as a means of supporting teachers who support young people's emotional wellbeing. It did not consider pastoral or support staff and was not focused on specialist SEMH schools.
Hibbin, R., & Warin, J. (2020) A language focused approach to supporting children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), *Education* (3)13, 48:3, 316-331. DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2019.1664410	The paper focused on the success of nurture groups and restorative practices to support pupils with SEBD rather than on pastoral or support staff.
Law, C.E., & Woods, K. (2018) The representation of the management of behavioural difficulties in EP practice, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, (34)4, 352 369, DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2018.1466269	This literature review focused on Educational Psychologists' behaviour management practices and application of psychology to their work rather than the experience of pastoral/support staff working in specialist SEMH schools.
Mercer, D., Kenworthy, H., & Pierce-Hayes, I. (2016). Making rhetoric a reality: Inclusion in practice as "transformative learning". *Mental Health and Social Inclusion, 20*(2), 110-118. Retrieved from https://search-proquest-com.salford.idm.oclc.org/docview/1787771197?accountid=8058	The research focused on student nurses working with patients with learning or mental health difficulties. It bore no relevance to the experiences of staff working in SEMH school settings.
Norwich, B., & Eaton A. (2015) "The New Special Educational Needs (SEN) Legislation in England and Implications for Services for Children and Young People with Social, Emotional	This paper considers legislative and policy issues in relation to school mental health initiatives for pupils with social and emotional difficulties. It does not discuss the experiences of staff working in specialist SEMH schools.

and Behavioural Difficulties." *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* (20) 2 117-32.	
O'Reilly, M., Adams, S., Whiteman, N., Hughes, J., Reilly, P., Dogra, N. (2018). "Whose Responsibility Is Adolescent's Mental Health in the UK? Perspectives of Key Stakeholders." School Mental Health (10)4 450-61.	This study related to mainstream schools and the role of teachers' in mental health provision and not the impact on pastoral/support staff working in specialist SEMH schools
Segrott, J., Rothwell H. & Menna T. (2013). Creating safe places: an exploratory evaluation of a school-based emotional support service, *Pastoral Care in Education*, (31)3, 211-228, DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2013.788062	This study focussed on the delivery of school-based interventions aimed at supporting pupils with emotional or mental health difficulties. It did not consider any psychological impact on pastoral or support staff working within SEMH schools.
Spratt, J., Philip, K., Shucksmith, J., Kiger, A., & Gair, D. (2010). 'We are the ones that talk about difficult subjects': nurses in schools working to support young people's mental health, *Pastoral Care in Education*, (28)2, 131-144. DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2010.482145	This paper considers the role of the Scottish school nursing service in improving the mental health and wellbeing of pupils. This paper is post Scottish Devolution, which saw the shift in responsibility for educational issues from the UK to the Scottish government. It does not consider any impact on the staff nor are they based in SEMH schools.
Wood, R. (2019) Autism, intense interests and support in school: from wasted efforts to shared understandings, *Educational Review*, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2019.1566213	The research using an IPA approach focuses on interventions and educational support and approaches for pupils with autism. The research does not consider the impact on staff from working with children with wide ranging SEMH needs.

9 full text copy of relevant articles obtained and screened against inclusion criteria

6 full text copies identified as not fitting inclusion criteria.

Al-Ghabban, A. (2018). A compassion framework: The role of compassion in schools in promoting well-being and supporting the social and emotional development of children and young people. *Pastoral Care in Education: Facing the Challenges to Mental Health and Well-being in Schools, 36*(3), 176-188.	The vignettes of school practices were interesting, and the paper was set in special SEMH school. However, this is not a research paper and therefore did not fit the inclusion criteria. It was helpful as background reading.
Carroll, C., & Hurry, J. (2018). Supporting pupils in school with social, emotional and mental health needs: a scoping review of the literature, *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. 23(3), 310-325., doi: 10.10801/3632752.2018.1452590.	A literature review of programmes and interventions for pupils with SEMH needs rather than pastoral/support staff's experiences of psychological impact of working within special SEMH schools.
Lampert, B., Unterrainer, C., & Seubert, C. T. (2019). Exhausted through client interaction—Detached concern profiles as an emotional resource over time? *PLoS One*, 14(5). doi:http://dx.doi.org.salford.idm.oclc.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0216031	Article focussed on professionals, including teachers, and the effect of 'burnout' from client interaction. Although 'psychological impact' is considered in the paper it does not focus on the impact on pastoral/support staff working with pupils with SEMH needs in specialist schools.
Littlecott, H., J. Moore G., F. & S., M. Murphy S., M. (2018). Student health and well-being in secondary schools: the role of school support staff alongside teaching staff, *Pastoral Care in Education*, (36)4, 297-312, DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2018.1528624	This research was conducted in South Wales in 2018, which is post the Welsh Assembly gaining devolved powers in relation to education, rather than in England. Its focus is on the relationship between support staff and pupils rather than any psychological impact on the staff and is in mainstream secondary schools, rather than SEMH schools.
Rose, J., McGuire-Snieckus, R., Gilbert, L., & McInnes, M. (2019). Attachment aware Schools: impact of a targeted and collaborative intervention. *Pastoral care in Education.* 37(2), 162-184. DOI:10.1080/02643944.2019.1625429	Although the study considered non-teaching staff, as well as teachers and looked at the 'impact on professional practice, adult self-regulation and emotional self-control' it's focus was specifically on the efficacy of the Attachment Aware Schools project in mainstream schools and did not consider the psychological impact to pastoral or support staff emanating from their work in specialist SEMH schools.
Solomon, M., & Thomas, G. (2013). Supporting behaviour support: Developing a model for leading and	This article is not research. Rather it is a paper based on a workshop presentation. Useful as 'background' to contextual issues faced in specialist

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managing a unit for teenagers excluded from mainstream school. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 18(1), 44-59.	settings. Interesting observations of interventions and approaches that support staff wellbeing.

3 papers included in final literature review	
Fitzimmons, W., Trigg, R., & Premkumar, P. (2019). Developing and maintaining the teacher-student relationship in one-to-one alternative provision: the tutor's experience. *Educational Review.* DOI:10.1080.00131911.1653256	This paper was not rejected at the title screening stage as 'teacher' and 'tutor' can be used as generic terms in alternative education provisions. The role was not clear from the title. The research was based in England and explored the experiences of staff working with secondary pupils with SEMH needs.
Rae, T., Cowell, N., & Field, L. (2017). Supporting teachers' well-being in the context of schools for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 22*(3), 200-218.	Based in 2 specialist SEMH provisions- one primary day/residential and one primary and secondary non-residential. The participants are teachers with varying lengths of service. The thematic analysis considers positive and negative aspects of working with these pupils, along with existing support mechanisms. It further considers the use of supervision and role of educational psychologists.
Willis J., & Baines E. (2018) The perceived benefits and difficulties in introducing and maintaining supervision groups in a SEMH primary school. Educational Review, 70(3), 259-279, doi:10.1080/00131911.2017.1311303.	Although the research is a case study based in a primary school and was limited to the benefits to staff of introducing supervision groups, it is based in a specialist SEMH school and of the 17 participants 11 would fit the definition of 'pastoral or support'.

Appendix 2 - Critical Analysis

Critical Analysis based on Law et. al.'s (1998) process

	CRITICAL ANALYSIS		
	STUDY OVERVIEW		
Review Area			
Bibliographic Details	Edwards, L. N., (2016). Looking after the teachers: exploring the emotional labour experienced by teachers of looked after children. *Educational psychology in Practice.* DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2015.1112256	Fitzsimmons, W., Trigg, R., & Premkumar, P. (2019). Developing and maintaining the teacher-student relationship in one-to-one alternative provision: the tutor's experience. *Educational Review.* DOI:10.1080.00131911.1653256	Mackenzie, S. (2012) 'It's been a bit of a rollercoaster': Special educational needs, emotional labour and emotion work. *International Journal of Inclusive Education.* 16(10). 1067-1082. DOI 10.1080/13603116.2010.538869
Purpose	Exploring extent to which emotional labour is experienced by the teachers of looked after children	To generate a rich understanding of AP tutor's experience of their relationships with their SEMH students.	The original focus of the study was on SEN teachers' lives and careers and why they remained in their roles. This developed in to analysing the emotional aspect of these roles.
Key Findings	EL may be a prominent feature of teachers' interactions with LAC in order to manage ambivalent feelings.	Tutors extensively think about, attend to and reflect upon the teacher, student relationship. Initiating and maintaining these require high levels of emotional labour, due to students' challenging behaviour, inability	Themes that emerged from the data included: The positive value placed on caring.

	EL perceived positively by participants. Role constructs important aspect of EL. Professional duty includes managing own emotional responses. Feelings of own competency and putting pupils' emotional needs before their own may impact wellbeing Support received within the school-peer and supervision helpful to deal with difficult situations.	to reciprocate and confusion around personal and professional boundaries. The study concludes that support should ensure that tutors are aware of relational dynamics and understand attachment theory and psychodynamic concepts. Care should also be given to the emotional health and wellbeing needs of tutors.	Hiding emotions, the most challenging aspect of the job. The work is physically and emotionally demanding. SEN staff felt isolated in a mainstream environment. Staff attitudes to inclusion and frustration working with certain pupils created stress. The role required 'plate spinning and juggling' with multiple tasks. Changes in SEN policy impacted their role, increased uncertainty with new skills having to be mastered some felt de-skilled. Unending revisions in policy framework created tensions between initiatives and daily practice.
Evaluative Summary	Limitations: Author suggests finding generalisable, though methodology and limited sample size does not support this claim. The exploration of the nature of peer support is not well developed. Participants were not given the option to comment on transcripts or allotted themes.	Limitations: It is not possible to establish whether the tutors' experiences were due to the SEMH difficulties of the students or the one-one teaching model. The participants are described as a 'homogeneous sample.' Yet 2 of the 6 worked in a different region, under a different case manager. 4 participants were female and 2 male, 4 participants were teachers and 2 teaching assistants. The	This study involved participants working with SEN, not only SEMH, employed in mainstream schools. Some of the findings do not relate to staff experiences in specialist SEMH schools.

| | | The lack of clarity in relation to methodology is a weakness of this study.

Strengths:

Adds to a limited body of knowledge by:

applying EL theory to understanding teachers' emotional wellbeing

focusing on EL of teachers working with LAC

policy recommendations, including the contribution that educational psychologists can make to teacher wellbeing. | ages ranged from 31-70 years., with 3 participants in the 61-70 years bracket.

There is no clear explanation of how the 6 participants were selected from the 18 who expressed an interest, beyond the exclusion of primary school tutors.

All participants worked for the same organisation as the author. It is unclear whether this relationship introduced researcher and/or participant bias into the research process.

Strengths:

The report was widely and appropriately referenced and placed within wider theoretical frameworks.

Contextualises the challenges faced by the participants.

Reflexivity is well documented. There is evidence of reflexivity about her relationship to the participants and an acknowledgement that this may have influenced the data collection and analysis. Evidence of external/objective support would have enhanced this further. | |

		Adds to an under-researched area.	
STUDY, SETTING & SAMPLE			
Phenomena under Study	The extent to which EL is experienced by KS2 teachers of LAC.	Through the prism of attachment theory, this IPA study, seeks to understand the lived experiences of 6 one-to-one tutors, working with students with SEMH needs at an alternative education provision.	A qualitative exploration of the role of strong emotions in teachers working with pupils with SEN.
Context 1: Theoretical Framework	This qualitative study is underpinned by a social constructivist perspective. Emotional labour is the theoretical perspective. Thematic approach to analysis.	The qualitative study's theoretical framework is taken from attachment theory and humanistic approaches. The study is located within existing literature which considers the importance of relationships with students with insecure attachment and the impact of staff from emotional labour.	Qualitative study using grounded theory and life history approach. Theoretical frameworks of emotion work and emotional labour emerged from the data.
Context II: Setting	Mainstream primary schools in England.	The setting is a regional independent provider of alternative one to one tuition for excluded pupils with SEMH needs. The researcher is employed by the organisation.	Teachers working in SEN roles within mainstream schools (primary and secondary).
Context III: Sample	14 KS2 mainstream schoolteachers who had taught LAC for at least one term.	120 tutors were invited to participate in the research via email. 18 expressed an interest and of this a purposeful sample of 6 was	An opportunity (convenience) sample was used after adverts were placed in several places, including national publications.

	chosen. No additional information is given for the criteria for this final selection.	Staff working with pupils with SEN needs across England (except for the NE). The 23 participants in the four focus groups consisted of teachers (aspiring special educational needs co-ordinators-SENCO's), Student TA's, mixed TA's and SENCO's and SENCO only. 44 individual people participated in total. 28 participants worked in primary schools with 16 from secondary. All but 2 were female.

ETHICS

There is no reference to university ethical approval or conducting the research under any specific ethical guidelines.	University ethics approval was obtained, and British Psychological Society ethical guidelines followed. No reference is made to participant consent. Insufficient information is given about participants' confidentiality and any power dynamics, given that the first author is employed by the same organisation.	There is no reference to university ethical approval or conducting the research under any specific ethical guidelines.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS			
Data Collection	Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews of approximately 45mins duration were conducted. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A deductive approach with an interpretative paradigm method was adopted.	Semi-structured face to face interviews lasted between 73-95 mins. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The location of the interviews is not specified.	Semi-structured, audio recorded interviews with 21 participants and three focus groups involving an additional 23 participants.
Data Analysis	NVivo software was used to identify themes in keeping with the social constructivist approach. Seven main themes and 51 sub-themes were identified. Clearly presented and supported by a thematic map.	A four-staged analytical process was followed. This is described (p5) as a 'combination of analytic steps described by Larkin and Thompson (2012) and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014)'. However, the stages are not clearly described and are difficult to follow. Four of the sub-themes from one of the superordinate themes, are discussed in some detail, but the analytical process is not.	Qualitative data analysis allowed themes to emerge. Transcripts were coded by the author and then NVivo was used to draw out the frequency and intensity of emerging themes.
JBI Critical Appraisal Score	7	9	9

STUDY OVERVIEW			
Review Area			
Bibliographic Details	Middleton, A. (2019). Nurturing the Nurturers: A case study exploring the wellbeing of a group of nurture group practitioners and implication for practice. *International Journal of Nurture in Education,* 5(1), 36-53.	Middleton, T. (2018). Working with children with social, emotional and mental health needs in a nurture group setting: the professional and personal impact, *International Journal of Nurture in Education,* 4(1), 22-32.	Partridge, K, (2012). Exploring pastoral staff's experience of their own emotional wellbeing in a secondary school. *Educational and child psychology,* 29(4), 121-132.
Purpose	To identify the emotional and psychological resources that nurture group practitioners (NGP) use to cope with the stressors they encounter in their work.	A research project to identify the impact on two teaching assistants working in nurture group primary school settings.	To explore the experiences of emotional wellbeing of pastoral staff in a mainstream secondary school and to explore processes that would support their work.
Key Findings	Overall, the sense of wellbeing of nurture practitioners was good. With five of the seven scales used falling within acceptable ranges.	Three dominant themes emerged.	Four IPA main themes were identified:

	Five themes were identified,	Physiological impact, mainly finding the work physically draining and tiring. Resulting in tears for one participant.	Adaptation to the role, psychological impact on self, relations are central to the role and containment in the system.
	demands, support & relationships, role, personal attributes and physical & emotional effects of stress,		The Repertory Grides (RG) echoed these themes.
		Impact on motivation- despite describing deep commitment to their role, the participants described frustrations, including their work not being understood by other staff.	
	along with14 risk factor sub-themes and 11 protective factor subthemes are reported.		Psychological impact on staff could be both positive and negative, creating a complexity of emotions. Opportunities to reflect and 'offload' were needed.
		Impact on personal relationships- participants describe not switching off at home which affected their home life.	
		Further themes emerged about the effectiveness of implementing nurture groups and on the impact of the research process on the participants	
Evaluative Summary	This mixed methods study provides insight into the emotional risks and protective factors linked to the work of nurture group practitioners. The quantitative aspect suggests that overall, these practitioners felt their wellbeing was good. There is some inconsistency between the quantitative and qualitative findings. The breadth of	This narrative inquiry study took place in a mainstream primary school with two TA's who ran the school's nurture group. The study refers to emotional challenges encountered in nurture work. The sample size of two and data collection method, where both participants undertook supervision with the author, may have introduced bias.	This is a mixed methods study with pastoral staff in one mainstream school. There is some confusion whether this truly a mixed method approach. The thematic analysis of emotional wellbeing of pastoral staff is clearly documented. The lack of clarity in relation to methodology is a weakness of this study.

	stressors identified was greater in the HSEMSAT survey than the interviews. This may be due to the small sample, of two.		
STUDY, SETTING & SAMPLE			
Phenomena under Study	A mixed methods exploration of the role of strong emotions in teachers working with pupils with SEN.	The impact that working as a nurture group TA had on the personal and professional lives of two TA's	An exploration of processes that support the emotional wellbeing of pastoral staff.
Context 1: Theoretical Framework	Case study approach informed by constructivist grounded theory.	Qualitative study, using a narrative inquiry methodology. Emotional labour	Exploratory research positioned in a critical realist epistemology. Mixed methods study. The qualitative phase using an IPA approach and phase adopted Personal Construct Psychology. Psychodynamic and systemic theoretical perspectives are applied to data analysis.
Context II: Setting	Mainstream primary school Nurture Group practitioners from the South of England.	Mainstream primary school in England.	Teachers working in mainstream secondary schools across the South-East and Midlands of England.
Context III: Sample	Sample drawn from Hampshire Nurture Group. Purposive sample of 60 self-completed demographic questionnaires and 63 self-	Convenience sample of two nurture group Teaching assistants employed in a mainstream primary school in England.	Purposive sample of 6 participants.

	completed adapted HSEMSIT surveys. Convenience sample of two participants for qualitative interviews.		
ETHICS			
	Study conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research association guidelines (2011).	There is no reference to having gained university ethical approval. University ethics committee guidelines were followed. The ethical context identified as social justice and human rights, underpinned by empathy. The value of the research to the participants was an ethical consideration. The supervisory element within the research was negotiated between the parties.	There is no reference to university ethical approval or conducting the research under any specific ethical guidelines.
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS			
Data Collection	Mixed methods data gathering- surveys and semi-structured interviews.	Data was collected via 45-minute one-to-one supervision sessions between the author and participants. These occurred over one academic year. All sessions were recorded and transcribed. In the second session the participants were together and asked to read the transcript and identify 'critical events.'.	Semi-structured interviews, that were recorded and transcribed. A second interview used repertory grids. Participants were asked to identify four experiences of challenging situations and

			four supportive situations (in relation to their emotional wellbeing).
Data Analysis	An inductive reasoning process used the data gathered to identify and develop concepts. Hypotheses about the wider population were formed from the findings. Qualitative data analysis allowed themes to emerge. Transcripts were coded by the author and then NVivo was used to draw out the frequency and intensity of emerging themes	Data was analysed through an immersive and holistic approach. From working with the detail and narrative language, words, statements, signifiers and themes emerged.	The data sets were integrated using contrasting qualitative themes with descriptive quantitative themes. The qualitative aspect used thematic analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). A quantifiable rating scale was used where Principal Components Analysis explored the relationship between elements and constructs.
JBI Critical Appraisal evaluation and Score	9	7	7

STUDY OVERVIEW			
Review Area			
Bibliographic Details	Rae, T., Cowell, N., & Field, L. (2017). Supporting teachers' well-being in the context of schools for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 22*(3), 200-218.	Stoll, M., & McLeod, J. (2020). Guidance Teachers' and support staff's experience of working with pupils with mental health difficulties in two secondary schools: IPA study. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 48(6), 815-825. DOI: 10.1080/03069885.2020.1785391	Willis J., & Baines E. (2018). The perceived benefits and difficulties in introducing and maintaining supervision groups in a SEMH special school. *Educational Review*, 70(3), 259-279, doi:10.1080/00131911.2017.1311303.
Purpose	To explore the views of teachers in SEBD schools in relation to how they understood and value supervision.	The study explores the experience of school staff providing pastoral care to pupils with mental health difficulties	To examine the perceived benefits and difficulties in introducing supervision groups for staff working in a SEMH primary school.

Key Findings	From a thematic analysis 6 themes were identified:
	  1) Stress aspects of the work
	  2) Positive aspects of the work
	  3) Existing support mechanisms
	  4) Understanding supervision as a process
	  5) Staff development of emotional literacy skills
	  6) The role of the EP in the supervision process
		Three IPA main themes were identified:
		
		Personal emotional impact of work, awareness of time pressures, openness to new solutions
			From a thematic analysis 4 categories with seven themes, and twenty-four sub-themes were identified:
			  1) Benefits: shared emotional experiences, therapeutic effects and developing professional practice.
			  2) Difficulties: In-session challenges and practical challenges.
			  3) Maintaining effective group supervision: Qualities of supervisor.
			  4) Future supervision: Engagement

			The frequency with which each sub-theme was referenced by participants was recorded. Overall, the participants report more benefits than difficulties. Camaraderie and 'off-loading' to alleviate stress being most cited. The quality of the supervisor was also important.
Evaluative Summary	Limitations: Self-selection by the participants may have led to bias. These people may have held views in relation to the research topic. There may be researcher bias. The authors concede that they believe that supervision works well in social work and would like to promote it within education. The authors work for local authorities, it is possible that participants may have been aware of these views, and this could introduce bias. The lack of clarity in relation to methodology is a weakness of this study. Strengths:	Limitations: The participants are not full-time pastoral staff. Three are described as guidance teachers and appear to have a full teaching schedule. The change in the data collection method for three participants, to email rather than face-to-face interviews may have affected the results. The study took part in a mainstream setting and focused on the support given to pupils with mental health difficulties. The organisational setting is different to an SEMH school where all pupils have SEMH needs, some of whom have mental health needs. This significantly limits the relevance of this study. The method of data collection changed from face-to-face interviews to email.	Limitations: It is difficult to agree with the author that these findings are transferable to other settings, given the study's very specific circumstances. The first author is the deputy headteacher. This raises ethical issues and concerns re objectivity and potential bias (researcher and participant). Although transcripts were anonymised, given the author's intimate knowledge of the school, it is questionable whether this is achievable. The pronoun 'her' for supervisee I suggests the author may know who their identity. How immersed in the data was the author, given that independent researchers conducted the interviews? The author interviewed the group supervisor. As the supervisor is paid by the school and reports to the SLT, ethical concerns, in

| | | The report was widely and appropriately referenced and placed within wider theoretical frameworks.

Contextualises the working environment and challenges faced by the participants.

Data collection and data analysis are clearly discussed. Analysis followed a content analysis approach adopting a constructivist paradigm

The themes and sub-themes are well articulated.

Reflexivity is evidenced.

Adds to an under-researched area. | Reflexivity is thoroughly discussed. The first author stating she continually reflected on her role in shaping the data collection and analysis. | relation to power dynamics and objectivity are called in to question.

All participants were already participating in group supervision. No data was collected from colleagues who choose not to be part of existing group supervision.

No baseline data was available to be able to judge the effectiveness of the group supervision initiative.

The stated aim, when supervision groups were introduced, was to 'support staff working in difficult circumstances by providing opportunities to discuss with their associates the social and emotional pressures and challenges that working in an SEMH primary school pose, and through the process improve cohesion amongst colleagues' (p260).

The findings state that all participants reported a positive impact on stress and staff relations. This raise concerns of participant bias, being influenced by prior knowledge of expected outcomes and/or the data analysis.

Some of the study's limitations could have been addressed by including staff who were not part of supervision groups at the school. |

| | | | The lack of clarity in relation to methodology is a weakness of this study.

Strengths:

Separate coding by the researcher and research assistants. With agreement between them.

During the analysis, the frequency that participants referred to benefits or difficulties was recorded and examples from the interviews was used to illustrate how important these were to participants.

This is an under researched area. |
| STUDY, SETTING & SAMPLE | | | |
| Phenomena under Study | To explore how teachers understood and experienced supervision and the role that EP's may play in this. | An exploration of the experiences of school staff providing care to pupils with mental health needs | The merits and challenges of introducing group supervision for staff in an SEMH school.

Sufficient detail is given in relation to the phenomena being studied. |
| Context 1: Theoretical Framework | Do not identify a specific research paradigm, but position of their research as within the philosophy of social constructivism. | A qualitative study, adopting IPA methodology (Smith et al, 2009). | The research methodology is not discussed. The philosophical underpinning being a relativist perception of reality. This qualitative study's theoretical framework is taken from studies that have explored the history and |

	The study is located within existing literature appertaining to occupational stress, related to education and SEMH provisions.		nature of supervision groups in occupational settings. Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis is used to analyse the data. The study is located within existing literature which considers whether supervision groups are perceived as being beneficial.
Context II: Setting	Two SEBD school settings- one primary day/residential, one primary/secondary non-residential.	Two mainstream secondary schools located in Scotland.	The study is contextualised to SEMH primary schools, which is appropriate to address the research question. The rationale for choosing this setting being that the first author is the deputy headteacher. The school has 37 front-line staff.
Context III: Sample	Convenience sampling was used in relation to the school and self-selection recruited 8 teachers to participate.	Six participants (three from each school) including teaching and support staff who had been involved in pastoral care for pupils with mental health needs for a minimum of 5 years. Three guidance teachers, one support-for-learning teacher, one community school worker and a pupil support worker.	17 staff are members of the schools' group supervision. They were all invited to take part in the study, 12 agreed This included teacher, TA's and an office manager. There was no discussion about job roles and exposure to different challenges.
ETHICS			
	There is no reference to ethics approval.	University and City Council ethics approval was obtained.	University ethics approval was obtained. No reference is made to participant consent.

	Full details are given of the process of obtaining participant consent.		Insufficient information is given about participants' confidentiality, especially considering the first author's senior position within the school. Ethical issues, including power dynamics, are not addressed.
DATA COLLECTION			
Data Collection	Data was collected using audio recorded semi-structured interviews. These lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted by 2 researchers in a quite space within the schools. The interviews were transcribed.	Two interviews, a couple of months apart. The first were to elicit perceptions of supporting pupils with mental health difficulties. The second used open-ended questions to explore the themes that had emerged. Three of these were face-to face and three sent questions by email due to shortage of time. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. They lasted between 40-120 mins.	One to one semi-structured interviews were conducted at the school by two research assistants. Interviews lasted between 25-40 minutes each. It is not stated how many interviews each researcher completed. It is not stated who compiled the questions. The group supervisor was interviewed at his home by the first author. Interviews were transcribed by a third party, to try to preserve the anonymity of the participants. There is no evidence of reflexivity.
Data Analysis	Qualitative data analysis allowed themes to emerge. Transcripts were coded by the author and then NVivo	Data was analysed through an immersive and holistic approach. From working with the detail and narrative language, words, statements, signifiers and themes emerged.	Thematic analysis is used to 'relate to the research question in a descriptive way' (p268) rather than providing any interpretative analysis. Themes emerged during this

| | | | inductive process. There is an adequate discussion of the process where all three researchers discuss and agree coding and themes.

The data does not totally answer the research question. Especially the reference to 'introducing' supervision groups. Rather the benefits and difficulties appear to refer to participating in these groups, what was good and not so good.

The interviewing of the supervisor was justified by the authors as a form of triangulation. However, this may have introduced participant bias, given the nature of his contractual relationship with the school.

The overall findings are in keeping with other research cited in the paper. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | was used to draw out the frequency and intensity of emerging themes. | | |
| JBI Critical Appraisal evaluation and Score | 8 | 9 | 7 |

Appendix 3 – Ethics approval letter

Research, Enterprise and Engagement
Ethical Approval Panel

Doctoral & Research Support
Research and Knowledge Exchange,
Room 827, Maxwell Building,
University of Salford,
Manchester
M5 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 2280

www.salford.ac.uk

University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

19 August 2020

Dear Elaine,

RE: ETHICS APPLICATION–HSR1920-097 – A narrative exploration of the psychological impact of working with pupils educated in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) special secondary schools, as experienced by pastoral and support staff.

Based on the information that you have provided I am pleased to inform you that application HSR1920-097 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/or its methodology, then please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting Health-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Professor Andrew Clark
Chair of the Research Ethics Panel

University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Do you provide pastoral or support to pupils with SEMH needs?

If you also work in an SEMH special secondary school, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

This research is really interested to learn about your psychological wellbeing and how your work in an SEMH special school impacts this, along with any strategies that you adopt to help.

*All information you give will be **fully** anonymised.*

By participating you will:
- Be able to share your experiences to a wider audience
- Help others to understand the psychological impact of your role
- Share any strategies that you use
- Add to the body of knowledge in this much under-researched area.

What is involved?
- Over about one hour I would be really interested to hear your experiences
- The chat will be audio-recorded and then typed up
- All your, and your school, data and information will be fully ***anonymized***

Location
- Due to Covid, the interview may be via Teams or Skype. I will make it as relaxed as possible, so I can learn about your experiences

Are you eligible?
- Over 18 years old
- Currently work in a pastoral or support role in an SEMH special school
- Have worked in an SEMH special school for at least one year

If you wish to participate, or would like more information, please call or email me:

XXXXXX
XXXXXX XXXXX
XXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk
079XXXXXX

XXXXX XXX, (MSc, MA) X.XXXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk 0790XXXXX
XXXXX XXX, (MSc, MA) X.XXXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk 0790XXXXX
XXXXX XXX, (MSc, MA) X.XXXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk 0790XXXXX
XXXXX XXX, (MSc, MA) X.XXXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk 0790XXXXX
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XXXXX XXX, (MSc, MA) X.XXXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk 0790XXXXX
XXXXX XXX, (MSc, MA) X.XXXXX@edu.salford.ac.uk 0790XXXXX

**University of
Salford
MANCHESTER**

Participant Information Sheet

Title: A narrative exploration of the psychological impact of working with pupils educated in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) secondary schools as experienced by pastoral and support staff.

INVITING YOU TO HELP US

We are trying to find out about the lived experiences of pastoral and support staff who work with pupils in SEMH secondary schools in relation to any psychological impact that may flowing from their work. If you feel able to talk to a researcher about your own experiences, we would like to invite you to participate in the study. Before deciding if you would like to help or not, please take time to read rest of this leaflet and if you wish to discuss any aspect of taking part with the researcher or others.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

- It is about getting the views of SEMH pastoral and support staff in relation to the impact of their work.
- If you are working in a non-teaching capacity and directly with pupils in a SEMH secondary school and you feel that you would like to talk to a researcher about your experience, then please read the rest of this leaflet.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY HOPING TO DO?

1) Explore, the lived experience of pastoral and support staff working in SEMH secondary schools in relation to their psychological wellbeing.
2) Identify what aspects of these role affect wellbeing and mental health.
3) Explore what, if any, protective factors exist, to prevent or mitigate any adverse psychological impact.
4) Add to the very limited body of academic research and understanding regarding psychological wellbeing of those who have a pastoral and/or support role within SEMH secondary schools.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

- No, you do not have to take part. If you decide that this is not for you it will not affect you in any way.

BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH

- You will be asked to read this information sheet so you know what you will be expected to do if you decide to participate in the research. Once you have read the information there will be opportunity for you to contact the researcher to ask questions about the research.
- If you are happy to participate, you and the researcher can arrange a convenient time and place for the interview to take place.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE RESEARCH?

- Before being interviewed you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you wish, the form will be explained to you so that you are clear about what you are agreeing to do.
- Once you have given written consent the researcher will start the interview by asking you to talk about your experiences of working in a SEMH secondary school. The researcher is interested in what you have to say and your views about what you believe impacts on your psychological wellbeing. The researcher is interested in what you feel is of most importance and how this has affected you.
- With your permission the interview will be audiotaped.
- During the interview the researcher will be careful not to use your real name (an agreed name prior to the interview starting can be used if you prefer) or the names of people or places that might identify you.
- The interview will last approximately one hour and what is said will remain confidential between you and the researcher, unless you declare anything that is illegal, which the researcher is duty bound to report.
- At the end of the interview the audiotape will be turned off and there will be some time for you to talk about any aspects of the interview you found upsetting or difficult. This information will not be included in the research.
- You will be free to terminate the interview at any time. If you do decide to no longer participate in the research the information you have given will be destroyed and not used in the research. However, if you do decide to withdraw your data you must let the researcher know within 1 week of you being interviewed.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE INTERVIEW?

- The researcher is hoping to interview 6-9 professionals working in pastoral or support positions in SEMH secondary schools.
- Once the interviews are complete the audio-recordings will be sent to a firm used by the university, for transcription. Before the recordings are sent the researchers will ensure that there is no identifying information.
- Once the transcriptions are returned, the researchers will analyse what has been said by each person participating in the research and will then look across all the transcripts to see what similarities and difference there are.
- Once this work is complete the researchers will write include this anonymised data in her PhD thesis.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- As stated above what is said will remain confidential between you and the researcher, but we must highlight that if you do tell the researcher anything that is illegal or will cause to you or others the researcher is duty bound to report it to the appropriate authorities.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICPATING IN THE RESEARCH?

- By talking about your experiences, it is hoped that there will be a greater understanding of any psychological impact experienced by pastoral and support staff from their work in SEMH secondary schools.

WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS TO PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH?

- Talking about your experiences might be distressing. At the end of the interview the researcher will turn the audio recorder off and provide an opportunity to talk about any aspects of the interview that you found distressing. This will not form part of the research.
- If you feel that you would like further help the researcher will be able to direct you to appropriate support.

MAKING A COMPLAINT:

If you wish to make a complaint about the research, you can contact my supervisor:

Professor Susan McAndrew e-mail S.McAndrew@salford.ac.uk

However, if you remain dissatisfied you can contact Chair of the PGR Ethics Panel, Dr Andrew Clark, by email: a.clark@salford.ac.uk or by telephone: 0161 295 5000

WHAT NEXT?

- Take the information leaflet and think about participation, contact details are written at the bottom of this sheet if you want more information.
- If you are unsure talk to someone you trust, and feel will be able to help you decide as to whether or not you should participate.

Researcher's name: Elaine Bowes

Phone number: 07905 434 795

E-mail: E.Bowes@edu.salford.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read this leaflet.

Appendix 6 – Participant Invitation Letter

University of **Salford**
MANCHESTER

School of Health and Society,

Mary Seacole Building, Frederick Road Campus,

Broad St, Frederick Road Campus,

Salford M6 6PU

DATE

Dear XXX

My name is Elaine Bowes (Student ID Number: @00573856) and I am a doctoral student, under the supervision of Professor Sue McAndrew and Dr Donna Peach, at the University of Salford.

I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: 'A narrative exploration of the psychological impact of working with pupils educated in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) secondary schools as experienced by pastoral and support staff'

The intention is to understand the lived experience of pastoral and support staff working in SEMH secondary schools in relation to their psychological wellbeing and any factors which assist this. Also, there is currently very little academic research in this area and my research will add to this body of knowledge.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and then up to two weeks after the interview. All your data will be kept confidential and no information that can identify you or your setting, will be used in my thesis or any other publications.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Participants' Information Sheet and Informed Consent letters.

If you decide to take part in the study, I will get in touch with you by telephone and answer any questions that you may have and agree where and when we will meet for the interview.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Bowes

Appendix 7 - Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of study: A narrative exploration of the psychological impact experienced by pastoral and support staff from their roles working directly with pupils in specialist social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) secondary schools.

Name of Researcher: Xxxx Xxxx   Please read each of the statements below and if you agree to it please tick each box.

1. I confirm I have read and understand the participant information sheet (version 2 dated 10/08/2020), for the above study. I have had opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without my rights being affected.

3. If I do decide to withdraw, I understand that the information I have given will not be used in the research. The timeframe for withdrawal is up to one week after the interview has taken place and I can do this by informing the researcher.

4. I agree to participate by being interviewed and I know this will be audio-recorded.

5. I understand that my personal details will be kept confidential and not revealed to people outside the research team. However, I am aware that if I reveal anything related to criminal activity, harm to self or others and/or child safeguarding issues the researcher will have to share this information with the appropriate authorities.

6. I understand my anonymised data will be used in the researcher's thesis and other academic publications and conferences presentations.

7. I agree to take part in the study:

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   **Date**   **Signature**

Appendix 8 – Risk assessment

Task/Activity/Environment:	Location:	Date of Assessment:
Research- Professional Doctorate	**Education settings within GM &surrounding areas**	**22.02.2020**

Identify Hazards which could cause harm:		Identify risks = what could go wrong if hazards cause harm:	
No.	**Hazard**	**No.**	**Risk**
01	Participants' talking about emotive subjects	01	Psychological/emotional harm/ re-traumatisation to participants
02	Researcher hearing and transcribing emotive subjects/participants' self-disclosure	02	Psychological/emotional harm/ re-traumatisation to the researcher
03	Unexpected reactions from participants- such as anger	03	Psychological harm- participants and/ or researcher
04	Lone interviewing	04	Allegations of misconduct
05	Data breaches	05	Damage to individual's reputation.
		05	Data inadmissible to the study
		05	Financial penalties
06	Participants expecting a counselling relationship	06	Inappropriate attachment/dependency. Unethical and inappropriate relationship

List groups of people who could be affected: All participants Researcher	What numbers of people are involved? 6-10

What risk controls are in place to reduce risks?		Risk level with risk controls
No.	**Risk Control**	
01	Distress Policy	8
01	Participant pre-interview briefing	6
02	Preparation for the interviews- using 'grounding techniques'	6
02	Supervision, debriefing and self-care	4
02	Leaving sufficient time between interviews to process sensitive/distressing information	4
03	Application of counselling techniques and empathetic listening by the researcher	4
03	Distress Policy- whereby the interview may be paused, suspended or abandoned.	2
04	Interview in a public building ie school premises- in a private room but occupied building	6
05	Rigorous adherence to GDPR and University guidance on data handling	2
05	Signature on completion of the interview that both parties were content with the process, with space for any comments.	3
06	The researcher using her experience in managing a professional relationships by consistently applying appropriate boundaries	2

What additional actions are required to ensure risk controls are implemented/effective or to reduce the risk further?	Risk level with additional risk controls
Regular reflection and feedback via supervision process	2
Signposting to support- NHS Every Mind Matters, Samaritans and Mind.	2

Is health surveillance required? **YES/NO** No	If YES, please detail:

Who will be responsible for implementing risk controls: Xxxx Xxxx	By When: Prior and during interviews. During data transcription and analysis. Revisits/Feedback

Xxxx Xxxx

Completed by: .... **Signed:** ....

Record of annual review:

....

Risk Rating:

5	10	15	20	25
4	8	12	16	20
3	6	9	12	15
2	4	6	8	10
1	2	3	4	5

Increasing Consequence ↑

Increasing Likelihood →

17-25 Unacceptable – Stop activity and make immediate improvements/seek further advice

10-16 Tolerable – look to improve within specified timescale

5-9 Adequate – Look to improve at next review

1-4 Acceptable - No further action, but ensure controls are maintained

Guide to using the risk rating table:

Consequences	Likelihood
1 Insignificant – no injury	**1 Very unlikely** – 1 in a million chance of it happening
2 Minor – minor injuries	**2 Unlikely** – 1 in 100,000 chance of it happening
3 Moderate – up to three days absence	**3 Fairly likely** – 1 in 10,000 chance of it happening
4 Major – more than three days absence	**4 Likely** – 1 in 1,000 chance of it happening
5 Catastrophic – death or disabling	**5 Very likely** – 1 in 100 chance of it happening

Distress Policy

Should the participant show signs of distress e.g. crying or verbalising distress the researcher will:

- Pause the interview
- Pause the audio recorder and ask the participant if they are ok
- Offer a break to the participant
- Ask the participant if they are ok to continue or if they would prefer to stop the interview and withdraw from the research.

The researcher will act in line with the participant's wishes. If the participant expresses a wish to continue, the researcher will continue with the interview schedule, whilst being sensitive to the participant's emotional state.

If the participant wants a break, the researcher will pause the interview and ask if the participant would like a drink or would like to be excused from the room. The participant will be advised to return when they feel ready to continue the interview.

If the participant wishes to stop the interview, the interview will be terminated and they will be given details of the NHS Every Mind Matters website, https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/. The audio-recorder will be switched off and the participant will then be given the opportunity to talk to the researcher about the issues that caused distress. This conversation will not form any part of the interview.

The researcher will ask the participant if the data already collected can still be used in the research and will also remind them that they have up to one week to withdraw their data should they wish to do so.

They will be thanked for their time and reminded there are no consequences due to withdrawing.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Participant shows signs of distress  │
│ e.g. crying or verbalising distress  │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ The researcher will pause the        │
│ interview and ask the participant if │
│ they are ok                          │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
         ╱                    ╲
        ▼                      ▼
┌──────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ If no, they will be   │  │ If yes, the researcher│
│ asked if they would   │  │ will ask if they are  │
│ like a short break or │  │ ok to continue the    │
│ to terminate the      │  │ interview.            │
│ interview.            │  └──────────────────────┘
└──────────────────────┘              │
      ╱         ╲                      ▼
     ▼           ▼        ┌──────────────────────┐
```

If they wish to terminate the interview, the researcher will thank them for their time and cease the interview immediately.

If they wish to take a break, the interview will be paused, and they will be offered a refreshment. They will be advised to return when / if they feel ready to continue the interview.

If yes, the interview will continue as normal, but the researcher remaining cognisant of their distress

They will have the opportunity to speak to the researcher about what caused them distress and given the contact details of NHS website https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/.

Samaritans - Tel 116 123 - jo@samaritans.org

and MIND - Tel 0300-123-3393

They will be asked if they agree to their data still being used and be reminded, they have one week to inform the researcher that they wish to withdraw their data.

If they feel able to continue upon returning, the interview will continue, with the researcher remaining cognisant of their distress.

Narrative Interview Protocol

Initial Discussion: Completion of Consent Forms and building rapport and trust and setting the scene for the interview.

Demographic questions:

Gender: Male, Female, Non-Binary, prefer not to say

Age range: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-59, 60+

Ethnicity:

Professional Background:

Location:

Length of service:

Narrative

1. I am really interested to learn about you and the work that you do with children and young people in an SEMH secondary school. Please tell me as much as possible about you and your setting.

   1b. [follow-up in terms of professional experience, role, details of the setting c&yp]

2. Tell me what a day in your school is like?

   2b. [follow-up in terms of details, situations/behaviours that may be stressful/enriching]

3. I am really interested to learn about your psychological wellbeing. Please tell me how you think your work impact your psychological wellbeing?

   3b. [Follow up on positive and negative aspects of their work that they mention- use empathetic listening skills]

4. Please tell me about any strategies you use to help you deal with difficult situations and/or with your distress/anxiety.

   4b. [follow-up in terms of any self-care, work directed support aspects of the role]

5. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Appendix 11- Extract of Milly's interview and initial analysis

Milly's story

223 In terms of this particular young person, have they shown violent behaviour within the school
224 since they've been with the school, or since you've been with the school?

225 Yeah, so that was the young person that set the fire extinguisher off in somebody's face,
226 and he slams doors so unfortunately hit somebody in the rib as well. And then, he does
227 threaten the other young people.

228 Right.

229 I do believe he's changing medication soon, so they do think that will improve him, but at
230 the moment we have to air with caution.

231 Has anyone been hurt as a result of this young person's behaviours at the school?

232 Yeah. One person, whose head was caught by the bin, did have to go to hospital to get
233 check over, and then he did slam the door on her, which ended up hurting her rib, but I do
234 think that was more a case of wrong place, wrong time. I don't think he was aiming to hurt
235 her with the door, I think that was just an angry outburst.

236 Right okay. So, in terms of obviously some of ... the outline of some of the work you've given,
237 it's interesting to me to understand and learn about your psychological wellbeing as
238 part of working in an SEMH provision. So, can you tell me how you think your work impacts
239 your psychological wellbeing?

240 It hinders it, if anything, because I do find it very stressful, and the thought of turning up
241 to work and not knowing which young person I am working with each day does impact on
242 sleep the night before. I do stress about it, because I could be put with the highest risk
243 young person who I don't feel safe working with on the day, so I've not planned anything
244 to do with them or where to take them or anything like that. It's just on the day you're
245 working with that young person that...

246 So, you said you feel unsafe? In what way?

247 In certain situations, yeah, because if I'm sent out to work with a young person who is
248 violent and I'm driving and it's just me, then as a new member of staff, yeah, I did feel
249 very cautious about that and very anxious.

250 What were you concerned might happen?

251 I don't know, just if they hurt me or the car, or if they ran off and I didn't know what to
252 do, so I wasn't doing my job, not. All those kinds of concerns, really. I would be worried if
253 the young person were to run off and I lost sight of them.

254 In terms of the impact on your psychological wellbeing, how do you think it's actually impacted
255 on that?

256 What do you mean, sorry, in terms of negatively?

257 Yeah, well, we'll look at negatively and positively, but in terms of negatively what do you think
258 these ... how does that manifest itself?

Appendix 12- Extract of Chris's interview and initial analysis

Chris's story — *Problems?*

diff for teacher / pastoral

375 Yeah, yeah I would say so. I would say so because if there's any issues, **the teachers do the**
376 **academic and if there's any issues, they're referred to pastoral. It's a very different role,**
377 **for want of a better word, very different.**

378 So, if there was a sort of incident in a classroom, a young person couldn't regulate and, you
379 know, had ... flipped their for example, what would happen then? What's the...

380 Pastoral will be called for. — *right ... ... difficult?*

dysregulate

381 Right.

382 Yeah and we would take them out, **trying to calm them down,** take them into the zone, have
383 a chat with them and try and get them back into class.

384 Right, right. So does the class carry on while that young person's out? And will they hopefully
385 come back in?

386 Yeah, yeah that's the... yeah, and it does work to be honest. It's worked quite well and
387 again, that **I can deal with. That is okay. That doesn't play on my mind particularly.** I get
388 my... sort of my... **deal with it, there you go back in. I know it's going to happen again the**
389 day after but hey ho, **I've dealt with it. But like I say, the ones who I think are you sitting at**
390 **home in the bedroom with your lights off and what you're doing? Are you okay? That's the**
391 **one that gets to me.**

392 Right.

393 **And I didn't know. If I could go and I saw them sat in the bedroom with the lights off, in the**
394 **dark, could have a chat to them, I could deal with it, I could sort it out but when you can't**
395 **do that, that's difficult.**

396 So, are there... there are some children who are physically in front of you because they're in the
397 school, so you're aware of what's happening for them, but there are some children you don't
398 know if they are ok?

399 Yeah, yeah.

400 You gave an example of being called in to a classroom where a pupil's behaviour is externalised.

401 Yeah...

402 Do some children, perhaps internalise their difficulties?

403 Oh yeah, definitely! Yeah.

404 And how do you deal with that?

405 We know the children quite well and they have a very, very extensive induction
406 programme so we do know... we do know them quite well and when they come into school
407 they do open up to us so I think we can deal **with the children who are again in front of us**
408 **whether that's internal behaviour or external behaviour, we tend to know them which**
409 **again, the incident on Tuesday was quite shocking because the young person that did it,**
410 **we'd have said never in a million years would he have struck out like that.**

11

internal   *external*

un control / ca deal
thus does cause
rumination.

(ruminating
imagery)
— too dark!
(can't do that

Can deal w children she sees
unpredictable.

frustration, rumination, feels difficult
needs to be done & seeing