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University of Strathclyde Glasgow

Inspiring Children's Futures

Supporting Children's Wellbeing During COVID-19: Staff Supervision, Coping and Wellbeing, and the Impact on Service Delivery

The International **COVID 4P Log Project**

LEARNING SERIES | 2 STAFF SUPERVISION AND WELLBEING

Table of Contents

About the COVID 4P Log Project 5

Report Summary 11

- Key Messages 12
- Countries in this Report 16

In-Depth Findings

Part One: Receiving Supervision During the Pandemic and its Impact on Service Delivery 19

- Supervision Received and its Impact on Respondents' Work 20
- Characteristics of 'Useful' Supervision 24
- Enhancing Supervision Practice 26
- The Impact of Not Having Had Supervision 27

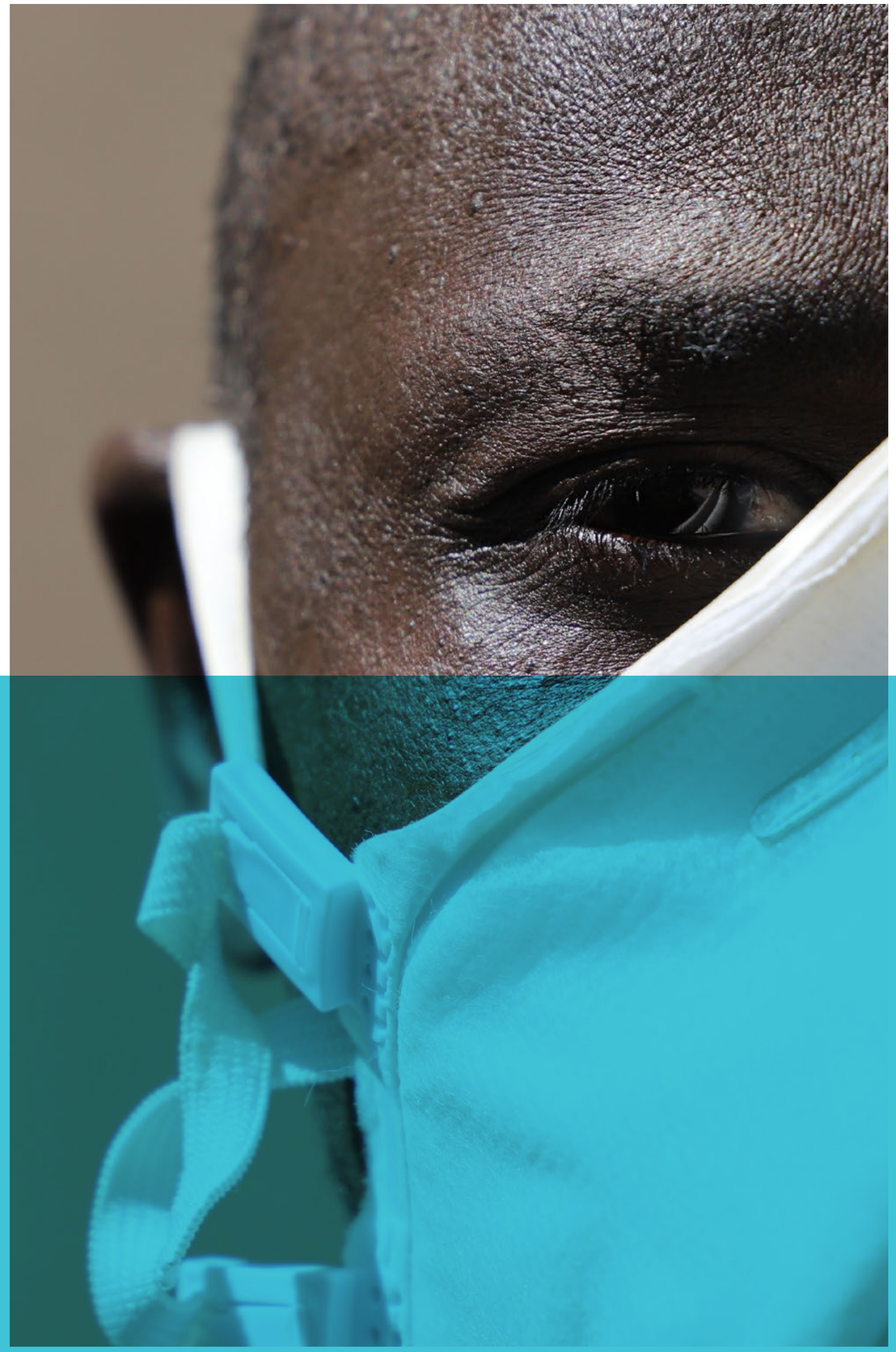
Part Two: Respondents' Own Coping and Wellbeing 31

- How Respondents Managed Stress and Anxiety During the Pandemic 32
- Impact on Stresses and Anxieties on Respondents' Work and Wellbeing 34
- Support Received by Respondents During the Pandemic and What Made it Helpful 38
- Impact of Not Having Had Care or Support During the Pandemic 39
- Advice to Colleagues About Managing Stress and Anxiety 40

A Note of Caution 42

Summary 43

About this Report 45



About the COVID 4P Log Project

COVID-19 has abruptly thrust the rights and wellbeing of children and families into greater risk around the world. The impact of COVID-19 on children continues to be vast. Risks posed to children's survival and development, to their special protections, education, health and access to food, for example, are being greatly compounded not only by COVID-19, but also by government responses.

With roughly a third of the global population estimated to be under age 18, children[1] account for a huge proportion of our population. Successful delivery of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth 'SDGs'), which relate to all ages, heavily relies on our ability to effectively and robustly respond to the distinct needs and rights of children. Even prior to COVID-19, our global task to achieve these global goals by 2030 seemed daunting. In the light of COVID-19, achieving the SDGs is even more challenging.

To effectively mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the light of protecting children's wellbeing, and ultimately for our collective societal future, policy and practice responses must be distinctively designed to address children's wellbeing needs.

Policymakers, and those working with children, are at the heart of pandemic responses as they continue to support children's wellbeing, rise to many new challenges, and respond in new, innovative and, in some cases, unprecedented ways. To address the impact of COVID-19 on children in the long term, the COVID 4P Log Project sought to better understand the changing demands on these policies and practices across different cultures and contexts, in 22 countries and five continents.

Inspiring children's Futures

The **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** is a joint initiative at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, with a collective vision of ensuring that children and young people have what they need to reach their full potential, particularly those who face adversity.

We work in partnership with a wide range of partners nationally and internationally. Children's human rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals are the heart of our work.

1. The term 'children' is used throughout to describe all those under the age of 18 years, in line with the CRC's definition of a child. Where 'young person' is used in the Report, this is reflecting that specific age group only.

THE SMARTPHONE APP

The COVID 4P Log is an Android and iOS smartphone app, free-of-cost to app users, that collected the real-time, anonymous views and experiences of practitioners and policymakers who were working across the globe to support children's wellbeing in the light of COVID-19. In answering a series of questions, these volunteer respondents helped us to better understand the ways practitioners and policymakers were responding in new, innovative and, in some cases, unprecedented ways.

During the last quarter of 2020, practitioners and policymakers were invited to download the app to log a 2-minute response to one main question every day, for eight weeks. The questions were both practice and policy-focused, and based on the '4P' children's human rights framework of Protection, Provision, Prevention, and Participation, in order to better understand the ways practitioners and policymakers around the world were protecting children, providing for their unique needs, enabling their participation in decisions that affect them, and preventing harm, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH THEMES

The smartphone app explored respondents' views of several core areas:

1. Learning from the pandemic so far
2. Protection: Ending violence against children
3. Provision: Access to food, health, education
4. Collaborations, flexibility, transparency and trust: Applying evidence from past emergencies to COVID-19
5. Prevention: Children's social and emotional wellbeing
6. Special considerations: Justice, alternative care and disabilities
7. Participation: Responding to #COVIDUnder19 - children and young people's findings
8. Preparing to rebuild post-COVID

OUR KEY PARTNERS

Our 17 international Key Partners range from capacity-buidling organisations, to international advocacy NGOs and service delivery partnerships, to the UN and other inter-governmental agencies. Their support and close engagement enabled the **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** to gather these important insights through the COVID 4P Log smartpone app. Their mention here does not imply endorsement of these findings.

African Child Policy Forum ACPF

AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP to End Violence against Children

BARNAFRID - Swedish National Center on Violence Against Children LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY

CYCNET

DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL
THE WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

European Social Network

Child Rights Coalition Asia

FICE

child rights connect

Observatory of CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS Scotland

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute
LEARNING, LEADING, CHANGING

OECD INCLUSIVE GROWTH

REPSSI
Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children

University of Strathclyde Glasgow

Terre des hommes
Helping children worldwide.

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES
Justice for Children
Justice for All

GLOBAL SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE ALLIANCE

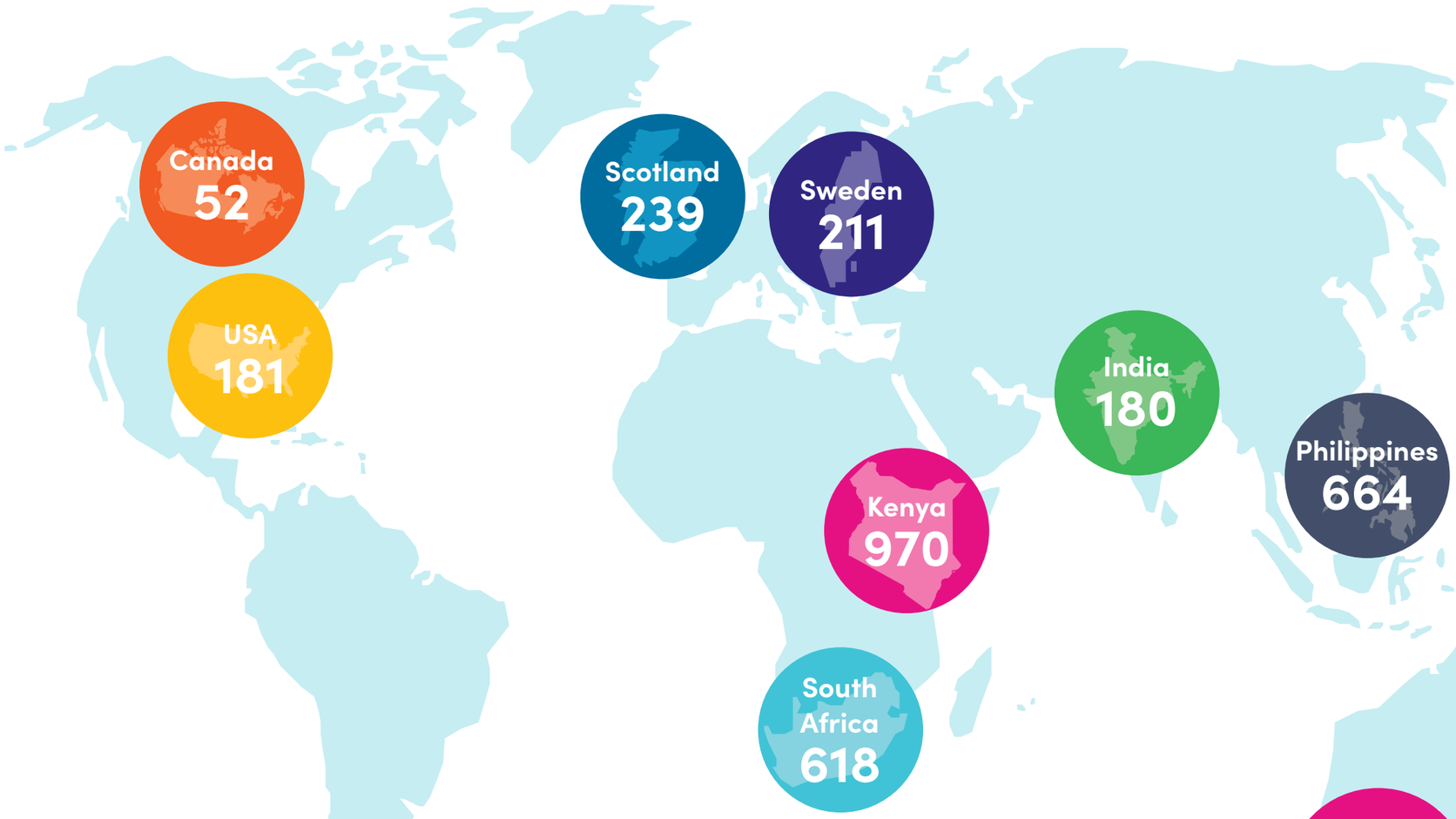
Respondents and Countries Represented in the Eight-Week COVID 4P Log Project

3339 Responses

22 Countries

5 Continents

TOP 8 COUNTRIES BY NUMBER OF RESPONSES



Overall, 247 respondents from 22 countries - including 139 direct service providers, 66 service managers and 42 policymakers - contributed to at least one main app question between last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. 173 respondents were women; 68 - men; 5 - prefer not to say; 1 - other.

The represented countries were (in alphabetical order) Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Mexico, the Netherlands, Palestine, the Philippines, the Republic of Montenegro, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (Scotland) and the United States of America (USA).

The top eight countries by highest number of respondents were Kenya (60), the Philippines (48), South Africa (41), Scotland (32), India (14), the USA (12), Canada (11), and Sweden (8).

A total of 3339 responses were generated across the eight weeks of questions - with eight countries, Kenya (970), the Philippines (664), South Africa (618), Scotland (239), Sweden (211), the USA (181), India (180), and Canada (52) - accounting for 93% of all responses.

The remaining countries had the following numbers of respondents and responses, respectively: **Malawi** (2/52), **England, UK** (1/52), **Israel** (1/40), **the Republic of Montenegro** (1/27), **Greece** (5/13), **Belgium** (1/10), **the Netherlands** (2/10), **Ethiopia** (2/4), **Lebanon** (1/4), **Palestine** (1/4), **Australia** (1/2), **Bangladesh** (1/2), **Italy** (1/2), and **Mexico** (1/2).

169 (68%) respondents worked for NGOs; 31 (13%) - for the government; 22 (9%) - for civil society organisations; 11 (4%) - in the private sector; 10 (4%) - other; and 4 (2%) - unknown.

Respondents represented a range of sectors such as child and youth care, advocacy, community-based services, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, child rights, children and family services, education, social services, working with refugees, juvenile justice, maternal and child health, housing, and others.

247 Respondents

139 Direct Service Providers

66 Service Managers

42 Policymakers

Report Summary:

Staff Supervision, Coping and Wellbeing, and the Impact on Service Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This report presents the findings from the analysis of the COVID 4P Log responses about respondents' experiences of receiving supervision during the pandemic, as well as about their coping and wellbeing during this time. The report is organised in two main parts. '**Receiving Supervision During the Pandemic and its Impact on Service Delivery**' discusses topics such as the characteristics of useful supervision, as well as the impact of having (or not having) such supervision on respondents' coping and work performance. '**Respondents' Own Coping and Wellbeing**' explores how respondents managed the stresses and anxieties experienced during the pandemic, and what type of support (formal and informal) they deemed most helpful in meeting those challenges.

The data presented here were collected in the last quarter of 2020.

This report aims to generate new insights, and spark new questions and ideas to inform, equip and strengthen policy, service and practices for and with children and their families.

This report is part of a series of Learning Reports documenting the COVID 4P Log App findings from responses across the eight weeks of questions. This COVID 4P Log Learning Report series aims to inform and equip those who seek to 'respond to children's distinct needs, and realise their full range of rights and opportunities, to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all'.[2]

2. Davidson, J.; Elsley, S.; Giraldi, M.; Goudie, A.; Hope, K.; Lyth, A.; Van Keirsbilck, B. (June 2019): Justice for Children, Justice for All: The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+ Call to Action. Glasgow: CELCIS - Inspiring Children's Futures, University of Strathclyde. https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/justiceforchildren

Key Messages

Receiving Supervision During COVID-19

The **vast majority** of respondents had received some form of supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic. Supervision took different forms - **via telephone and virtually; planned and unplanned; formal and informal**; and **individual and group supervision**.

Importance of Good Supervision for Service Delivery

Most respondents described the supervision received as useful - both personally and professionally - and highlighted its **importance for safe, responsive, thoughtful and quality service delivery.**

Respondents' Wellbeing During the Pandemic

The numerous challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic were often **overwhelming**, and had a **far-reaching negative impact** on respondents' **wellbeing, attitudes** towards themselves and their work, and on their **work performance**. Feeling unsafe, uncertain, 'helpless', 'low', 'doubtful' and a sense of failure were reported as resulting from pandemic-related stress and anxiety.

Managing Stress and Anxiety During the Pandemic

Respondents discussed their experience of **stress and anxiety** during the pandemic, with **almost half** of them reporting these had had an impact on their work. Talking and sharing; engaging in leisure activities; relaxing; praying and meditating; and 'taking it one day at a time' - were all shared as **useful practices for managing the stress and anxiety** during the pandemic. Some respondents reported having **difficulties coping with that stress and anxiety**. The **increased workload and work demands** were sometimes cited as the main sources of stress.

Concerns about the Supervision Received

Respondents shared different **concerns about supervision** during the pandemic, and discussed the impact of having reduced support on their work. Some of those concerns related to the **increased stress** faced by their supervisors, **the limited face-to-face contact** and the **insufficient organisational focus** on long-term planning and solutions.

Self-Care and Social Support

The majority of respondents had **benefitted from some form of self-care, and social and professional support** during the pandemic. Such help offered **affirmation, encouragement and emotional support. Peer support**, via online platforms or otherwise, was highlighted as helpful.

What Made Supervision Effective and Useful?

Effective supervision was immensely valuable in helping respondents **physically, mentally and emotionally cope with the challenges** faced during the pandemic. Supervision that offered **frequent, immediate, personalised and confidential support** was preferred as it fostered **collaboration, problem-solving and reflection** - resulting in more effective responses to the COVID-19 emergency. '**Useful**' supervision helped respondents **feel cared for, connected, guided and reassured**.

Preferred Supervision and Support

Respondents often preferred having **more regular, structured, focused and face-to-face support**; having **more opportunities to engage in reflective practice**; and having **better access to reporting equipment** such as laptops.

Negative Effects of the Lack of Adequate Support

Feeling unmotivated, unproductive, overwhelmed and isolated - were often reported as consequences of ***not* receiving adequate support during the pandemic. Burnout, fatigue** and thoughts about leaving one's job were also reported.

Advice for Colleagues from Around the Globe

Respondents' advice to their colleagues facing similar challenges carried messages about **self-care and self-compassion, resilience and finding support in others**.

Some of our Respondents' Advice to Colleagues on Managing the Challenges and Stresses of Working During COVID-19

Seek out supportive and reflective supervision or colleague groups.

[...] be kind to yourself.

Be strong.

Cherish small moments of happiness and the small victories because they will help sustain you in the bad times.

Take each day as it comes.

You have to be able to know when you are stressed, acknowledge it and help yourself with de-stressing techniques.

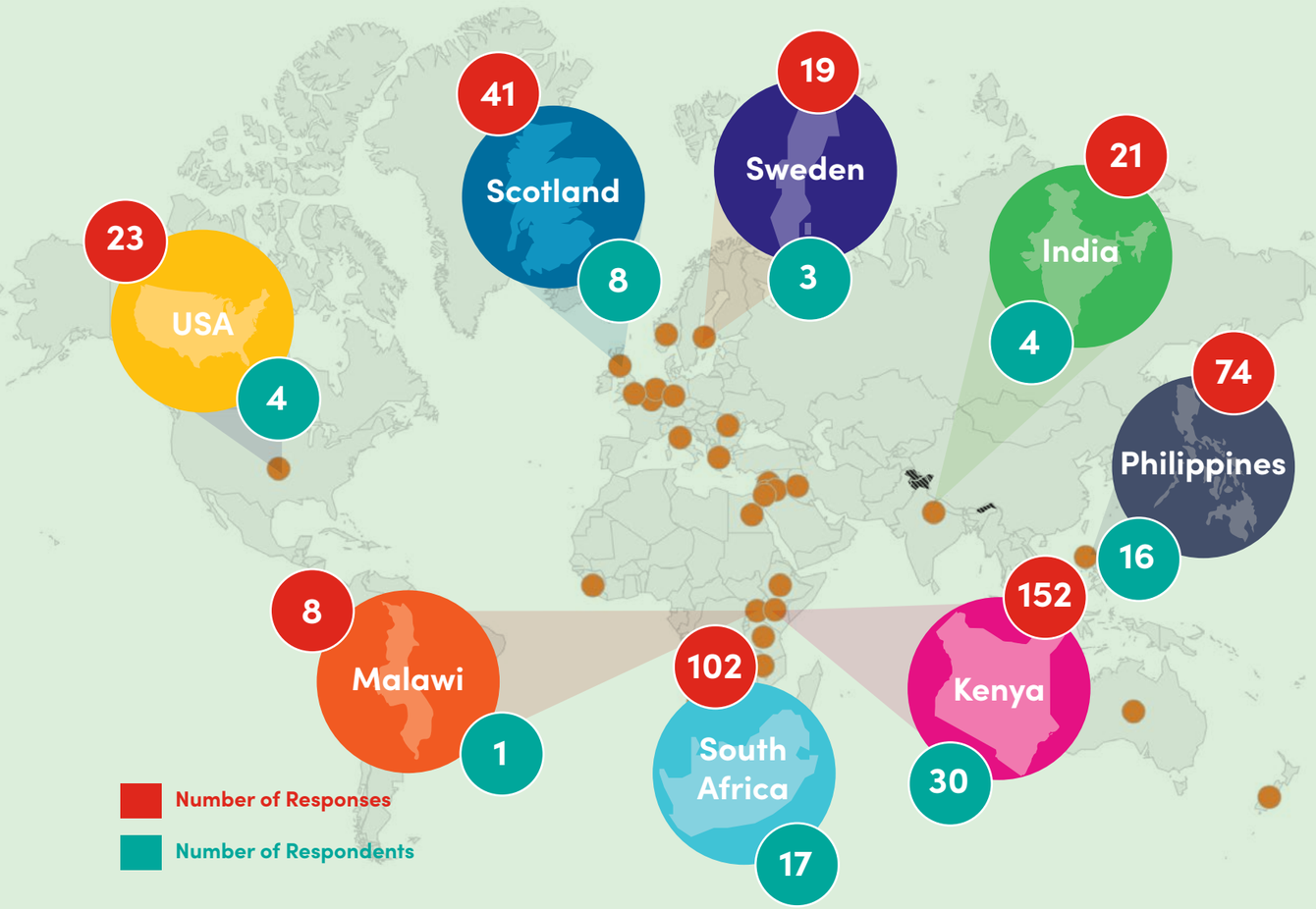
Keep team spirit and work close with your team.

Self care is vital! You MUST put your wellbeing first. You cannot pour from an empty cup!

Take care of themselves in order to protect the next person.

Respondents and Countries Represented in this Report

459 responses from 88 respondents

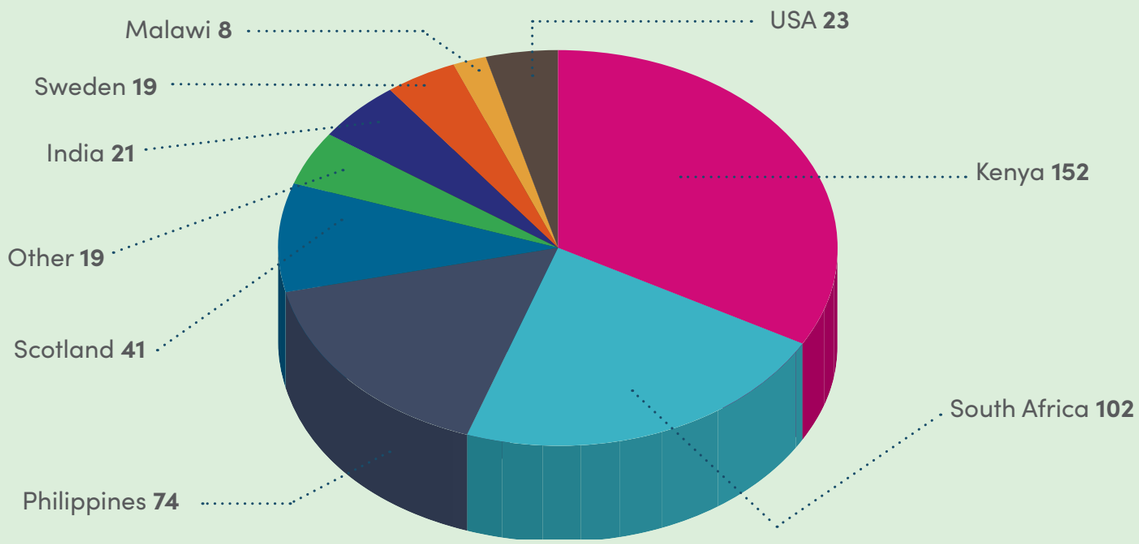


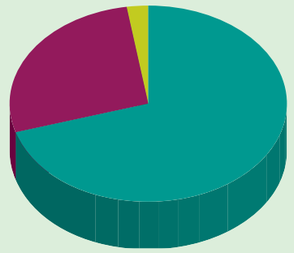
The findings in this Learning Report are based on 459 responses from 88 respondents - including 47 direct service providers, 26 service managers and 15 policymakers (62 - women; 24 - men; 2 - prefer not to say). 53 (60%) respondents stated that they supervised staff. 64 (73%) respondents represented NGOs; 11 (13%) - civil society organisations; 9 (10%) - the government; 1 (1%) - private sector; 1 (1%) - other; 2 (2%) - did not specify.

The respondents represented 13 countries:

Belgium, Canada, India, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the Republic of Montenegro, South Africa, Sweden, the UK (Scotland) and the USA.

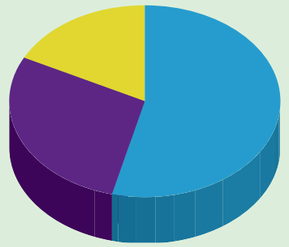
Number of Responses





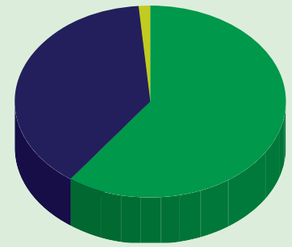
Respondents by Gender

Women	62
Men	24
Prefer not to say	2



Respondents by Role

Direct Service Providers	47
Service Managers	26
Policymakers	15



Do you Supervise Staff?

Yes	53
No	34
Did not specify	1

The top eight countries with the highest numbers of respondents and responses, respectively, were:

Kenya (30 and 152); South Africa (17 and 102); the Philippines (16 and 74); Scotland (8 and 41); India (4 and 21); the USA (4 and 23); Sweden (3 and 19); and Malawi (1 and 8).

Together, the responses from those top eight countries amount to 440 or 96% of all responses reported here. All other countries contributed to a total of 19 (or 4%) of all responses.

In-Depth Findings — Part One:

Receiving Supervision During the Pandemic and its Impact on Service Delivery

Regular, quality supervision and professional support to staff are important factors in the efforts to impact positively across policy, practice and services for children, their families and communities. Through consultations with our Key Partners, we recognised COVID added a myriad of pressures in policymaking and service delivery. Together, we wished to learn more about how the COVID emergency was affecting supervision time and quality, and ultimately the quality of service delivery. Key Partners whose remit involves workforce capacity-building were particularly keen to learn about this from respondents.

And so, a series of questions were asked in the first week concerning: respondents' receipt of supervision and its impact on their work; their view of the characteristics of 'useful' supervision and what could have made it even better; as well as the impact of not having had supervision.

The following sections offer an overview of how respondents most commonly answered those questions. Key themes and verbatim quotes from our respondents are used throughout to illustrate the main points raised.

QUESTION	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Are you receiving supervision in this pandemic?	54
Please describe the supervision you have been receiving and how this has made a difference to your work.	29
To what extent is the supervision you are receiving meeting your needs in your role?	37
What could have made this supervision even better?	34
What kind of supervision was it?	26
What made it useful? If it was not useful, why not?	26
If you have not had supervision, how has this affected your work?	20
Was it useful as a form of professional support?	26

Supervision Received and its Impact on Respondents' Work

Are you receiving supervision in this pandemic?

Of 54 respondents, 45 (83%) answered 'Yes', 8 (14%) answered 'No', and 1 (2%) answered 'Not applicable'.

To what extent is the supervision you are receiving meeting your needs in your role?

Of 35 respondents, 24 (68.5%) answered it was 'useful to a great extent', 6 (17%) answered it was 'somewhat useful', 3 (8.5%) answered it was 'of very little use', and 1 (3%) answered it was 'not at all useful'. One (3%) respondent said this question was not applicable.

Was it useful as a form of professional support?

All 26 respondents who completed this question answered 'Yes'.

Respondents were also asked to describe the supervision they were receiving and how that had made a difference to their work.

Respondents had been receiving various types of supervision:

- Via telephone and virtually (e.g. via Microsoft Teams);
- Planned and impromptu meetings;
- Formal and informal;
- One-to-one and group supervision:

'Supervision was done with the use of Microsoft teams and was directly related to my work and the delivery thereof. It can be seen as both formal and also informal (also known as frontline supervision). This would also have been the case if I was working directly with children, youth and families.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Supervision was sometimes described as including professional development support, peer support and spiritual support. One respondent - a direct service provider at a civil society organisation in the Philippines - reflected on the supervision they had received:

'My supervisor's openness to innovative ideas and worker's wellbeing was instrumental to our ability to think creatively about the situation and how we can do our work better.'

Direct Service Provider, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

Respondents described a range of examples and outcomes of supervision practices:

- **Ensuring safe and high-quality service delivery:**

'The supervision that I have recieved is individual and group supervision. This has helped immensely in my work ensuring quality services to clients and in working and supervising a team. The supervisons I have received have helped in having different perspectives and options in how to handle the challenges we face. It has helped to debrief as well with the support of our supervisors who are supportive and who give us a platform to speak out and who ask us how we are doing both personally and professionally and assist us and care for our well being as well to help us continue to do our work.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

'On Site One on one supervision. To ensure that I apply safely measures accordingly and i am safe too from the pandemic'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

- **Monitoring and improving own work:**

'Monitor the work that I am doing to ensure that I'm still on the right track ,Support me to some of the work I'm struggling with and provide guidance where needed'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

'To monitor the work that I've been doing.it has helped me to improve on my weaknesses in the children's wellbeing'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

'From social worker and this add me more effort at my work'

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

- **Mental health and coping support:**

'Iam always reminded to protect myself physically, emotionally and mentally so that I can be able to perform to the utmost level'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

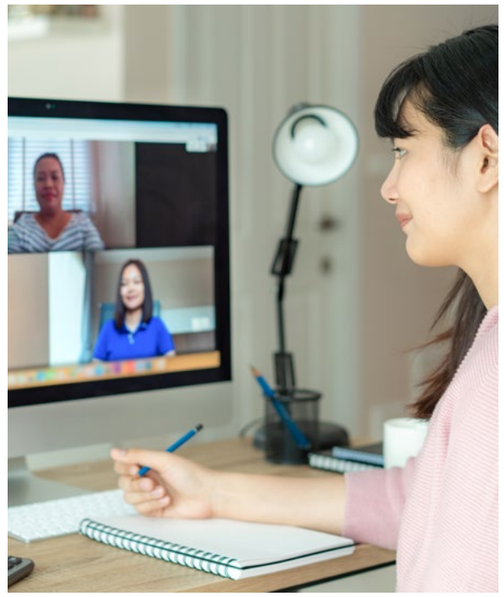
'Virtual calls to check if am I okay,and how am i coping with my work.it has been of great help'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Notably, one respondent described the negative impact hindered supervision had on their work:

'I have a supervisor but she was not able to do her job as she used to. She said that her stress level was negatively affected by the pandemic, so I have to take that into consideration and can work around it. Especially with the pandemic Issues being relatively new, it was harder for me to do my job because I I was, in a way, left to my own devices.'

Policymaker, NGO, Philippines



"I have a supervisor but she was not able to do her job as she used to. She said that her stress level was negatively affected by the pandemic, so I have to take that into consideration and can work around it. Especially with the pandemic Issues being relatively new, it was harder for me to do my job because I I was, in a way, left to my own devices."

Policymaker, NGO, Philippines

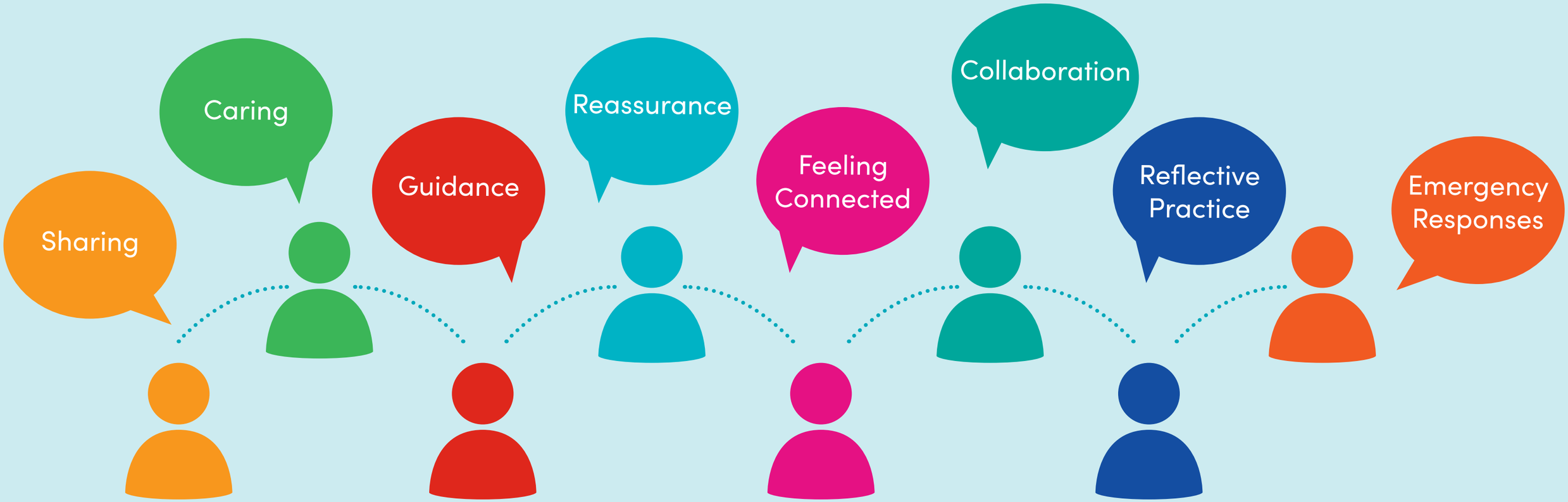
"The supervision that I have recieved [received] is individual and group supervision. This has helped immensely in my work ensuring quality services to clients and in working and supervising a team. The supervisions I have received have helped in having different perspectives and options in how to handle the challenges we face."

Direct Service Provider,
NGO, South Africa

"My supervisor's openness to innovative ideas and worker's wellbeing was instrumental to our ability to think creatively about the situation and how we can do our work better."

Direct Service Provider, Civil Society Organisation, the Philippines

Characteristics of ‘Useful’ Supervision



In response to the question about what made their supervision useful/not useful, respondents shared a number of key characteristics and outcomes of effective and useful supervision.

- Caring (e.g. ***‘It showed she cared’***) - Direct Service Provider, Government, USA
- Sharing and feeling connected
- Guidance and reassurance
- Facilitating reflective practice and problem-solving:

‘Guidance, reassurance, collaboration, relationship and connection assisted CYCs to ensure deeply reflective practice and piece of mind and ensured best practices in support of student, staff & families.’
Direct Service Provider, Government, Canada

‘It was protected time to help clearer thinking and planning.’
Service Manager, NGO, Scotland

- Collaboration
- Increasing effectiveness in service provision
- Effective responses to emergencies:

‘It was useful because we discussed as partners what is affecting us most. Like for our case apart from the COVID 19 there was flood and this supervision resulted in a linkage for direct funding to assist the flood victims in the project [...]’
Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

Enhancing Supervision Practice

In response to the question, 'What could have made this supervision even better?', several issues were clearly highlighted:

- **Face-to-face contact (2 respondents):**

'The odd face to face contact, I am a touchy feely person.'

Direct Service Provider, Private Sector, Scotland

'While I do miss face to face meetings, the quality of supervision is not impacted negatively due to being in virtual format. I do not have any suggestions for improvement'

Service Manager, Government, USA

- **More regular, formal and structured supervision (2 respondents);**
- **More focused supervision and more useful discussions (2 respondents):**

'Stringent in-depth insightful discussions missing. Too much day to day management and short term solutions. Missing leadership skills'

Policymaker, Government, Sweden

'More focused. At times the meetings went off agenda.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Scotland

- **More proactive supervision (1 respondent);**
- **More reflection and introspection (2 respondents);**
- **More group supervision (1 respondent);**
- **Less workload (1 respondent);**
- **Mental health support (1 respondent);**

'There are things that are beyond supervision and at work they provide us with counseling if we experience any anxiety that comes with our jobs during the pandemic'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

- **Having reporting equipment such as laptops (2 respondents);**
- **Other less well-specified issues (e.g. 'consistency monitoring', 'clear information')**

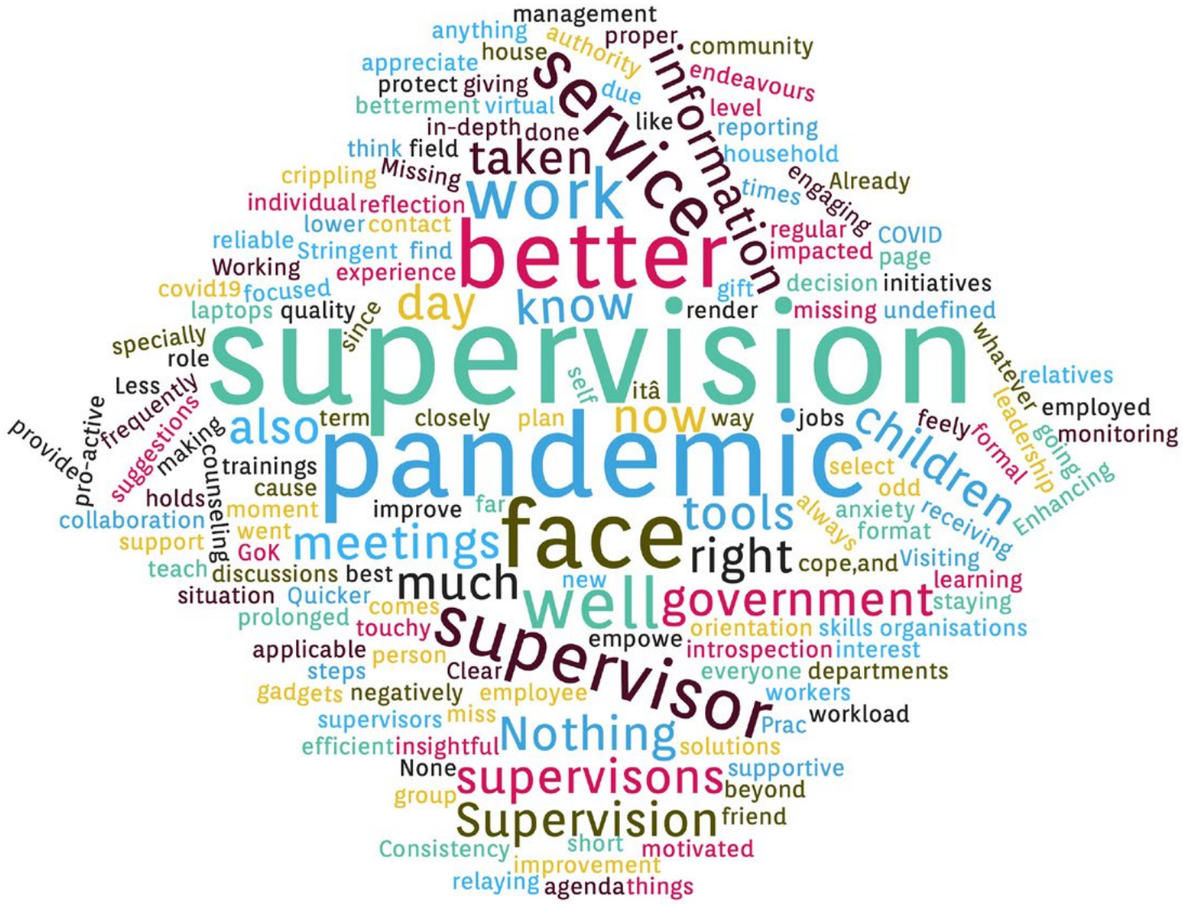
Notably, several other respondents emphasised that their supervision had been going well:

'Nothing much but to work closely with my supervisor and plan trainings and orientation to empowe [empower] myself as an employee to always improve my work.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

'Nothing, cause we had to find a way to cope,and it's the best that could have done since the pandemic is new to everyone'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa



Word cloud from responses to the question about what could have made supervision even better

The Impact of Not Having Had Supervision

Finally, some examples of the responses to the question 'If you have not had supervision, how has this affected your work?', are:

'Dealing with the fear and stress of contracting Covid 19 has stalled our work. The government's restrictions on movement and gatherings that is to contain the spread of the virus has made it difficult to deliver services to the children'.

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

'I can only imagine how hard it must be'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Israel

'My work needs consultation and therefore would be incomplete without supportive supervision'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

'It caused different understanding on certain strategic points which makes decision making difficult'

Policymaker, NGO, Philippines

'Relied on history of work experience and close relationships with colleagues but would like that formal supervision which did not feel I had even tho8gh [though] I felt I was supervised and had reported to director'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

What could have made this supervision even better?

"The odd face to face contact, I am a touchy feely person."

Direct Service Provider, Private Sector, Scotland

What could have made this supervision even better?

"Stringent in-depth insightful discussions missing. Too much day to day management and short term solutions. Missing leadership skills"

Policymaker, Government, Sweden

If you have not had supervision, how has this affected your work?

"Dealing with the fear and stress of contracting Covid 19 has stalled our work. The government's restrictions on movement and gatherings that is to contain the spread of the virus has made it difficult to deliver services to the children."

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

In-Depth Findings — Part Two:

Respondents' Own Coping and Wellbeing

In the development of the app, the Key Partners were deeply concerned for their many partners, members and colleagues working under extraordinary pressures across sectors to deliver policy and services for children and families. With the Key Partners' guidance, the app was developed to ensure respondents were asked questions about how they themselves were faring in addition to questions about their work. In doing so, it was hoped that the app could function as a way to offer additional support in times where supervisors and colleagues were unusually stretched.

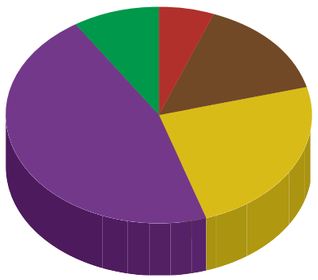
In asking these questions, we sought to understand the impact of the pandemic on practitioners' and policymakers' coping and wellbeing. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their own coping with the stresses and anxieties that often result from the personal and work-related challenges brought about by emergencies within the COVID-19 pandemic. The following sections offer an overview of how respondents most commonly answered those questions.

QUESTION	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
On a scale of 1-5, how stressed and anxious have you been feeling in the past week?	34
Please give us examples of how you have managed your stress and anxiety.	26
Have these stresses and anxieties had an impact on your work? Please tell us more about this.	51
What advice would you give to your colleagues in other countries facing similar challenges on how best to manage these stresses and anxieties?	27
Have you benefited from self care and peer support?	21
What kind of care and support was it?	17
What made it helpful?	18
If you have not had care or support, what is the impact of this on your work?	13

How Respondents Managed Stress and Anxiety During the Pandemic

Common examples of how respondents managed their stress and anxiety during the pandemic

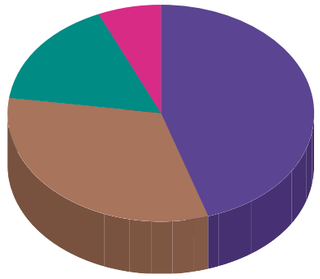
On a scale of 1-5, how stressed and anxious have you been feeling in the past week?



Extremely stressed	6%
Very stressed	15%
Stressed	24%
Somewhat stressed	45.5%
Not at all stressed	9%

Of 33 respondents, 2 (6%) answered they were 'extremely stressed', 5 (15%) answered 'very stressed', 8 (24%) - 'stressed', 15 (45.5%) - 'somewhat stressed', and 3 (9%) - 'not at all stressed'.

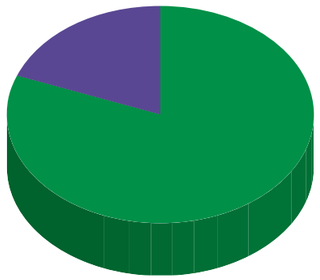
Have these stresses and anxieties had an impact on your work?



Yes	45%
No	32%
Don't Know	16%
Not Applicable	6.5%

Of 31 respondents, 14 (45%) responded with 'Yes', 10 (32%) - with 'No', 5 (16%) said they did not know, and 2 (6.5%) answered 'not applicable'.

Have you benefited from self care and peer support?



Yes	81%
No	19%

Of 21 respondents, 17 (81%) answered 'Yes' and 4 (19%) - 'No'.

MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Respondents shared a range of examples of managing their stress and anxiety during the pandemic:

- **Talking and sharing** - Sharing with friends, family and colleagues and peers (face-to-face and online)
- **Exercising and other leisure activities** such as dance, music, yoga, reading, 'keeping busy', and others
- **Relaxing** - 'doing nothing' time, breathing exercises, sleeping, taking frequent breaks, strolling outdoors and others
- **Practising meditation and mindfulness**
- **Praying**
- **Structured support** such as therapy and mental health training
- **'Taking it one day at a time'**

'Keep calm take every as it is and adapting to current situation'

-Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Two respondents shared their challenges with managing stress:

'I did not get time to manage my stresses.'

-Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

'Taking it one day at a time but difficult as I overthink and stress more.'

-Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Impact of Stresses and Anxieties on Respondents' Work and Wellbeing

Common responses concerning the impact of stress and anxiety on respondents' work

Respondents also described a range of impacts those stresses and anxieties had on their work and wellbeing.

To begin with, two respondents reflected on their **inability to serve all children** that needed support and on its potential impact:

'Most of children went un served [unserved] which brought about negative impact, at the back of their thoughts they think that the organisation has refused to support them. This contributes to a lot of stigma'

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

'When I don't have time enough to serve all the children that need my support.'

Service Manager, Other (Children's Hospital), Sweden

Relatedly, two other respondents seemed to express concerns about the **long-term impact of the pandemic and about the post-pandemic recovery**:

'Short term work was normal. Now thinking in the long term has becime [become] difficult'

Service Manager, NGO, India

'Many an answered [unanswered] questions about when the globe will be COVID 19 free. When an effective vaccine will be found and best services to be given to children.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

Other respondents shared their concerns about their **safety** and that of their colleagues, as well as their difficulties with managing **the increasing work demands** during the pandemic:

'Being in public everyday where some people do not adhere to Covid safety measures, when we get to public transport taxis are fully packed. Poeple [People] think the pandemic is over seems to care not at all.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

A service manager working in the government in the USA, for instance, indicated they had difficulties 'focusing' on short-term goals and their work when people were being affected by the virus:

'I'm having a more difficult time focusing on short term goals when all around me there are coworkers who have contracted Covid or know someone who has contracted it. It's hard to push that out of your mind and focus on a spreadsheet when people you know are ill or hospitalized or are dying from Covid.'

At least three other respondents indicated increased **stress and pressures** related to work demands and expectations:

'It is hard to say because my work is actually the reason for the stress. There is so much to do related to child rights during this pandemic and everything seems to be urgent.'

Policymaker, NGO, Philippines

'My stresses are work related, there is a very high demand, targets and expectations. There.is no way that at all times I will manage to adhere to COVID-19 rules or SOPs'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

'I wanted to quit because the pressure was too much and I felt I was failing at my job'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Another respondent, a policymaker from Sweden, offered a poignant account of their difficulties with **judging their work performance and relating to their work on an emotional level**, as a result of the nine-month remote working. This respondent, who also supervised staff and stated there had been inadequate support for supervisors, shared their difficulties with maintaining a 'constructive and hopeful atmosphere' and avoiding arguments:

'After 9 months in remote mode I feel that my capacity to judge me performance is lost. Live in a bubble and feel that social distancing makes me to care less. You can just switch off zoom and forget. Emotions and social interplay at normally are present are lost in remote meetings. You hear the stories but do not feel them. I feel that I need to navigate based on my cognitive understanding of suffering more than intuitively feeling the needs and urgency. That stresses me and feels like a harder effort than regularly. People are also in general more aggressive, irritated and uninvolved. Needs a good bunch of efforts to keep up with a constructive and hopeful atmosphere, to avoid arguments etc. not easy situation for a supervisor. The system is not supporting supervisors to a enough extend.'

Policymaker, Government, Sweden

Other respondents reported they felt '**helpless**', '**low**' **and** '**doubtful**', as well as **a sense of failure**:

> *'Anxiety makes you feel helpless and unable to do much.. It makes you feel low and doubtful'*
>
> Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

A service manager at an NGO in the Philippines regretted not being able to spend time with family as much as they would like to:

'[...] I am an extrovert person and I think that is maybe the reason why i struggle so much because I can't see other people i was alone the whole time and thank god i have an front-liner id that is why i have permission to go to the community where i work with i can visit them the family that i am working with i can talk with them.'

Similarly, a direct service provider at an NGO in Kenya highlighted the importance of having company for not feeling lonely.

Impact of Stresses and Anxieties on Respondents' Work During COVID-19

"I wanted to quit because the pressure was too much and I felt I was failing at my job"

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

"Sometimes it stresses one, witnessing the condition children and care givers go through"

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

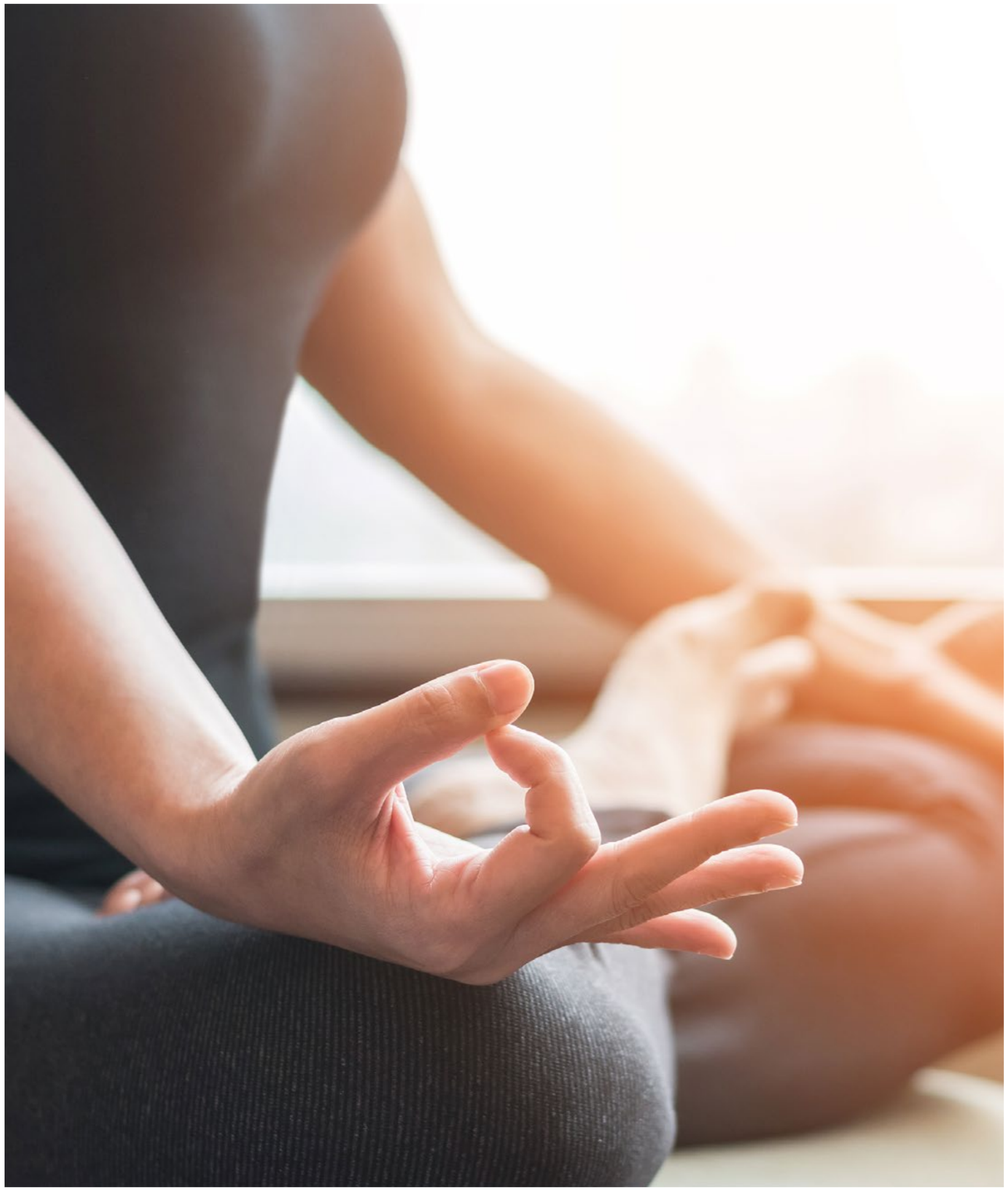
"In some cases just feeling overwhelmed and isolated. Overworked and more so during covid because we had to act fast and wih [with] pressure to support children more like getting them food parcels etc"

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

"Most of children went un served [unserved] which brought about negative impact, at the back of their thoughts they think that the organisation has refused to support them. This contributes to a lot of stigma"

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya

Support Received by Respondents During the Pandemic and What Made it Helpful



When asked about what kind of care and support they had been receiving during the pandemic, respondents mentioned **peer support** (including via online platforms), **supervisor check-ins, support from friends and family** and **self-care**:

'discussions with colleagues and debrief meetings help. I've also done other methods for self car[e] like yoga and meditation. dedicated rest days and the like also help. general speaking to others help'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

'Stress Debriefing with Colleagues/Rest'

Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

'Whatsapp messages on a team chat or connecting on Microsoft teams.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Support from the government and formal training were also mentioned.

In response to the question about what made self-care and peer support useful, respondents highlighted several aspects:

- **Receiving affirmation, learning, support and encouragement:**

'Ventillate [Vent?] my confusions, get affirmed and learn from colleagues' experiences and support then get energized.'

Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

'It gives me the feeling of not being alone and gives me company and love and secured'

Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

'The checking in and stating how one felt and was feeling during the lock down.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

'Having outlets and feeling connected to other people and the environment.'

Policymaker, Civil Society Organisation, USA

- **Helping manage stress and anxiety:**

'The need to have knowledge of how to manage the stress and and anxiety when in dilemma and to help stabilise the state of mind and self care .'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

- **Attending to personal and family needs:**

'Was able to attend to peronal [personal] needs and needs of family'

Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

- **Helping with time management:**

'I was able to manage my time.'

Policymaker, NGO, Philippines

Impact of Not Having Had Care or Support During the Pandemic

The next survey question, 'If you have not had care or support, what is the impact of this on your work?', yielded a number of responses highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by the respondents during the pandemic:

- **Stress**

'Sometimes it stresses one, witnessing the condition children and care givers go through'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

- **Feeling down, unmotivated and unproductive**

'Feeling down and unproductive'

Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

'Im unmotivated, possible i quit my job and go home to the province'

Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

'Mental fatigue increased'

Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

'burnout/feeling the weight of the work'

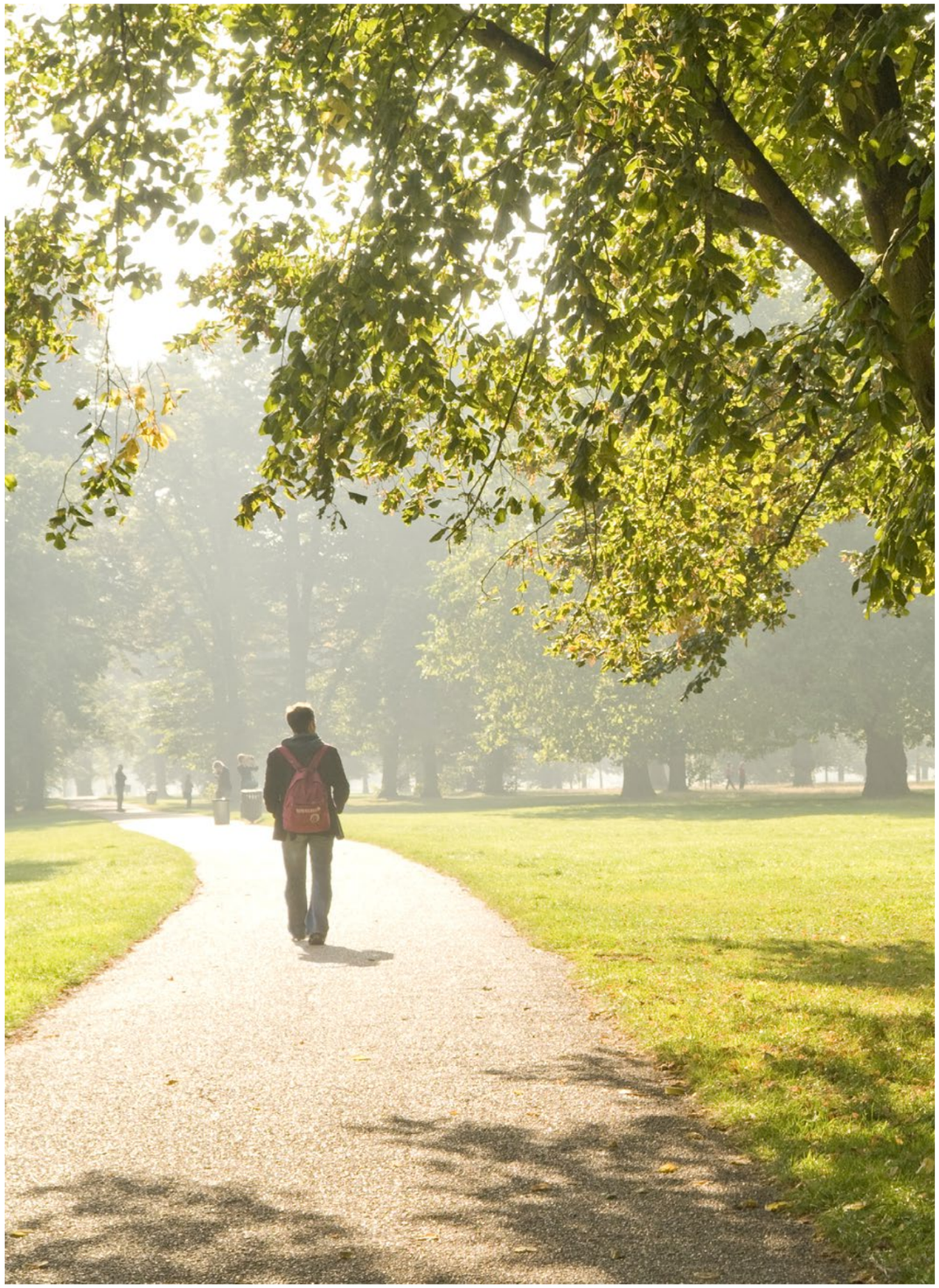
Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

- **Feeling overwhelmed, overworked and isolated:**

'In some cases just feeling overwhelmed and isolated. Overworked and more so during covid because we had to act fast and wih pressure to support children more like getting them food parcels etc'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

Advice to Colleagues About Managing Stress and Anxiety



Respondents were also asked to offer advice to their colleagues in other countries facing similar challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responses to this question contained messages about **self-care, social connections and sharing, help-seeking, encouragement, gratitude and self-compassion, and stress management**. For example, several respondents recommended engaging in debriefing with colleagues and seeking out supportive and reflective supervision and peer groups. Others emphasised the importance of not keeping things to oneself and of sharing with others with similar experiences. Planning, note-taking, frequent breaks and 'not bringing work home' were also recommended.

Other respondents advised 'taking each day as it comes', focusing on the positive and engaging in self-care. Numerous examples of self-care practices were mentioned: socialising, relaxing, meditating and being mindful, leading a healthy lifestyle and others:

'Do things u love doing that takes our mind off things like your favourite sport or dancing whatever makes u not think about what's happening in the world right now'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

Importantly, two respondents recommended more employee support and training:

'I will recommend training and more discussion about Mental health'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

'Work systems to provide better self care support and not overburden workers especially with more intense work in short timeframes and overall employee support and supervision that is structured and coordinated.'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

A Note of Caution

While the survey generated useful insights into the respondents' work in relation to children, young people and families, the findings should be interpreted with caution due to a number of factors.

- The numbers of respondents are modest, so the findings may not be representative of the experiences and challenges faced in those countries or sectors.
- The findings reported here have been produced by the COVID 4P Log research team and, due to the anonymised format of the smartphone app survey, the findings cannot be shared with the respondents for commentary or review.
- The findings are derived from a short-form survey and lack context. Respondents' engagement with the survey varied, which may have affected the completeness of the data.
- We are aware some respondents had difficulties with engaging with the app due to workload pressures and technical issues, which might have affected their response rates.

Summary

This Learning Report offered a snapshot of service providers' and policymakers' experiences with receiving supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as of how they managed the stresses and anxieties of this challenging time. Eight countries contributed to the majority of responses included in this report - Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines, Scotland, India, the USA, Sweden and Malawi.

Overall, most respondents described the supervision received as useful - both personally and professionally - and highlighted its importance for safe, responsive, thoughtful and quality service delivery. Effective supervision was immensely valuable in helping respondents physically, mentally and emotionally cope with the challenges faced during the pandemic. Supervision that offered frequent, immediate, personalised and confidential support was preferred as it fostered collaboration, problem-solving and reflection - resulting in more effective responses to the COVID-19 emergency. 'Useful' supervision helped respondents feel cared for, connected, guided and reassured. Several concerns about supervision were also reported - for example, concerns relating to the seeming lack of leadership, the limited face-to-face contact, and the increased stress experienced by supervisors.

Respondents also shared a range of stress management and self-care practices that had helped them during challenging times - including talking and sharing, exercising, meditating and relaxing, engaging in more formal support such as therapy, 'taking it one day at a time', and others.

Several respondents shared they had had difficulties optimally managing the stresses and anxieties during the COVID-19 pandemic. A range of negative effects of this increased stress on respondents' wellbeing and work were reported. Some examples were feeling helpless, unmotivated and unproductive; not being able to spend time with family; not being able to serve all children; safety concerns, and others.

Despite those challenges, respondents also shared messages about hope, perseverance and self-compassion.

Our hope is that this COVID 4P Log Learning Report series will generate new insights, and spark new questions and ideas to strengthen policy, service and practice with, and for, children and their families.

About this Report

This Learning Report has been produced by the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, UK. **Inspiring Children's Futures**, with its many partners, has a strong track record of multi-level, multi-sector global engagement, policy development and practice improvement.

This Learning Report is part of a series of reports on the findings of the COVID 4P Log Smartphone app. Together, the reports from this series form the second of a three-part 'Inspiring Children's Futures in light of COVID-19' programme.

This programme is gathering evidence on protecting children's wellbeing in past epidemics; informing better policies and practices throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; and influencing change in the long shadow that COVID-19 will cast over the recovery phases ahead.

With our partners, we are strengthening global, national and local approaches to ensure that we are collectively delivering on the Justice for Children, Justice for All SDG 16+ Call to Action to "respond to children's distinct needs, and realise their full range of rights and opportunities, to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all".

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