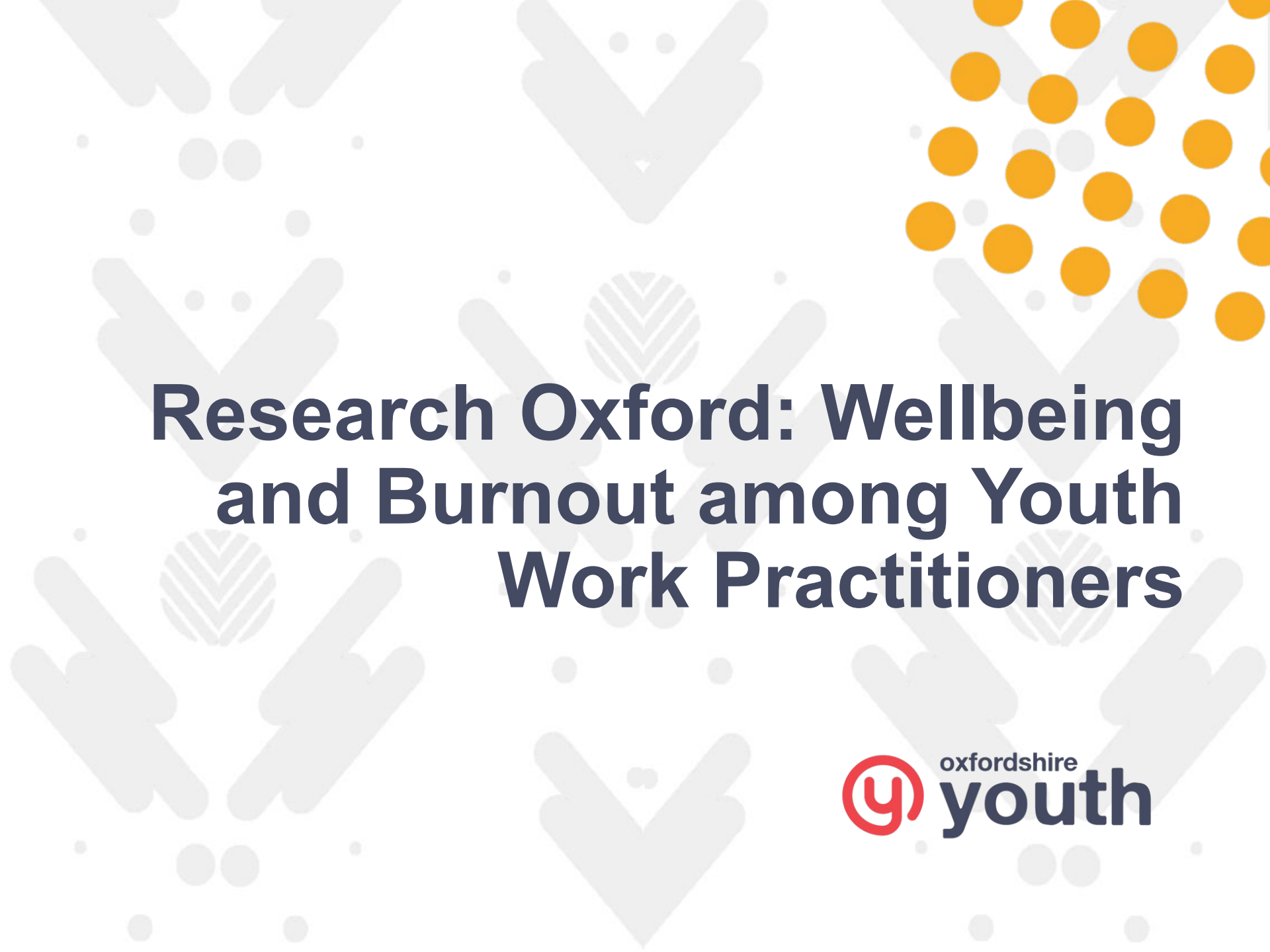




Research Oxford: Wellbeing and Burnout among Youth Work Practitioners

Background

- The Prudence Trust fund OY to deliver Sector Support initiatives in training, wellbeing and research.
- Research Oxford were commissioned in June 2023 to carry out this baseline survey and create a report to better understand burnout in the sector.



Sector context

- Changes to national funding landscape
 - 63% of organisations reported seeing an increased demand for services from young people and 67% facing increased operating costs.
 - 51% youth organisations are seeing a decrease in their funding and 53% a drop in staff wellbeing (UK Youth, 2023).
- National context
 - Increase in recruitment challenges since covid-19
 - Demand on services post covid-19
 - Cost of living crisis
- Changes in the needs of Young People
 - Young Minds (2022) report that 85% practitioners were supporting YP with low mood, 83% supporting YP with family/friend relationships, and 79% with diagnosed mental health conditions.



Methodology

- **Literature Review:**

- Survey of existing literature to understand the context and national landscape

- **Interviews:**

- 15 interviews with senior leaders and youth work practitioners
- 1:1 interviews and 2 focus groups

- **Online Survey:**

- 55 responses from youth work practitioners, using MBI-HSS, ONS4 and GSE
- 11 people have left the sector in the last 18 months



What is burnout?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) define burnout as:

“a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”

It is characterised by feelings of exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job; feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; or reduced professional efficacy.



How do youth workers describe burnout?

- Mental fatigue
- Exhaustion
- Altered behaviour
- Apathy to work
- Feeling isolated
- Increased absence
- Lack of stability



How do youth workers describe burnout?

"I think it's the mental tiredness. It's the 'I literally cannot think of anything else. I need to go and sit in a cupboard somewhere'."
[Practitioner]

"I think a sign of burnout is not giving it your best. So suddenly seeing it as just a job that pays the bills, and I'm just getting in and going home. The motivation is not there." [Practitioner]



Key learnings

Overall, youth work practitioners that responded to the survey showed:

- Similar levels of burnout when compared to figures reported for a related industry (social services) for emotional exhaustion
- Lower levels of depersonalisation and higher levels of personal achievement, suggesting there might be some factors (such as passion for working with young people), which impact how practitioners experience burnout, when compared to similar roles
- High levels of life satisfaction and strong feelings that their day-to-day activities were worthwhile
- Medium levels of happiness and medium levels of anxiety
- A good level of optimistic self-belief in themselves to perform novel or difficult tasks, or to cope with adversity



What is the impact on practitioners?

Direct Impact:

- More complex referrals
- Higher demand for services

"I do feel it's harder. I think the demands presented in the referrals coming my way are much, much higher and more complex. And actually, some are for young people who shouldn't necessarily be referred to me. But the supply and the demand is such that it's me or no one." [Practitioner]

- Shift away from group-work models

"I feel like I'm doing twice the work, almost having to repeat myself. But that's because I'm not doing it as a group anymore, I'm doing it as a one-to-one. So I'm struggling with that a little bit." [Practitioner]



What is the impact on practitioners?

“The needs of the young people that we are seeing coming into the service are so much higher, and they're so much more complex than what they used to be, even 18 months ago. It's not just a young person affected by crime, now we're seeing a young person affected by crime, with a history of complex trauma and mental health issues on top.” [Practitioner]

“I think definitely post pandemic, we've seen an increase in mental health concerns for young people. So we saw not just an increase in the number of referrals that are coming through, but the complexity of the referrals.” [Sector leader]



What is the impact on practitioners?

“Burnout has had a knock on effect on the workload for other staff members. And the problem is that with burnout somebody's still employed, so it's not like you can just bring in someone else, there isn't another pot of money that then employs a different person.”

[Practitioner]





What is the impact on the sector?

Youth work as a career:

Recruitment and qualifications:

Staff retention:

What is the impact on young people?



What is the impact on the sector?

Pay and stability:

4 in 10 survey respondents felt that their salary was competitive within the sector

Almost half of survey respondents felt that their current salary was not enough

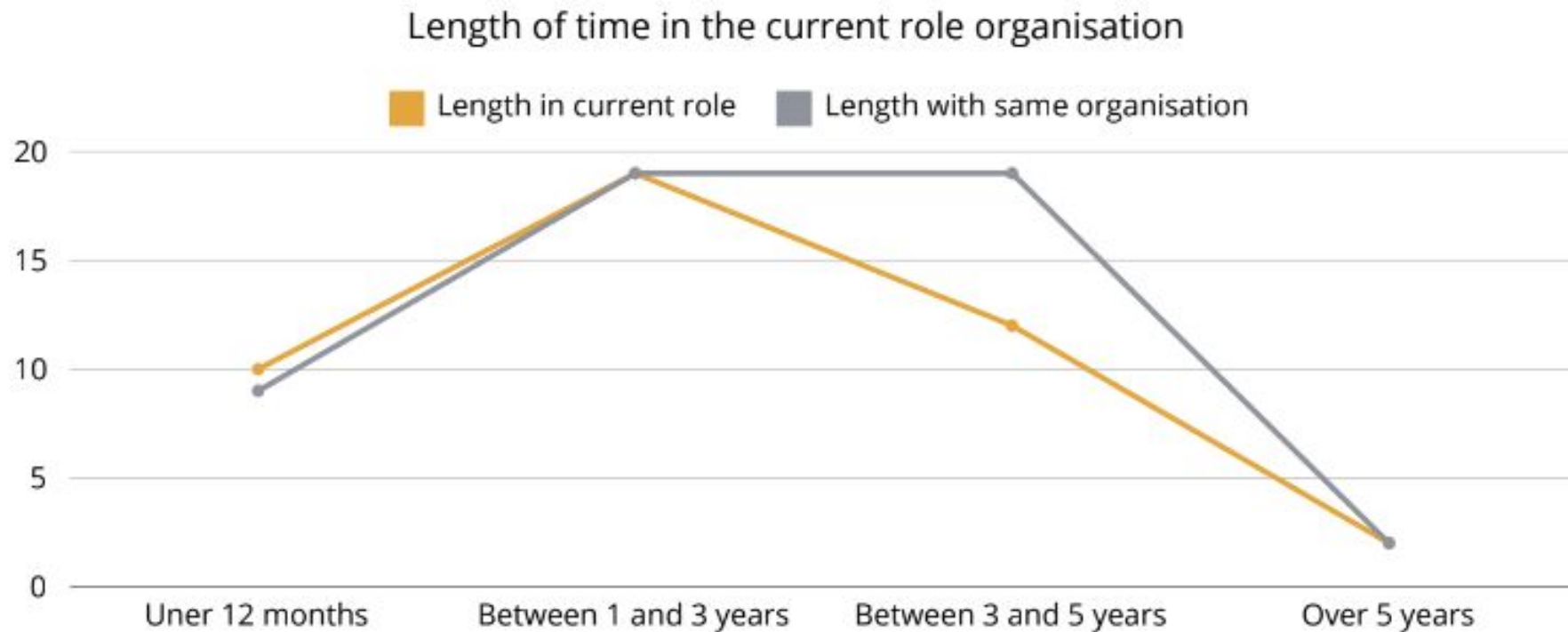
"People aren't being paid what they should be paid. Either you do something completely different for the money or you decide to stay in the sector and take a massive pay cut. You're doing more work for less money. And is that okay? Not really."
[Practitioner]

"It's basically impossible to live on even some of our better salaries in this area. I'm relying on people living with a partner. Because that seems to be the only way that people are able to survive." [Sector leader]



Staff retention

- No fixed trends in staff turnover among organizations.
- 44% reported being in the current role for 1-3 years
- 43% had been with their organisation for 3 or more years



Turnover

Low rates of staff turnover were understood as a result of:

- Flexibility
- Holiday allowance and sick leave
- Passion for the role
- Holistic wellbeing support



How are organisations responding?

- *“If you want to progress in your career to earn more money, you have to take a step away from direct work with young people, into management. To earn more money you have to say goodbye to the passion.”* [Interview participant]
- *“There's a lot of flexibility in youth work. You can move up and you can move down, you can move across, and you can specialise in this, that and the other.”* [Interview participant]



Key Learnings:

- **People who felt more in control of their work were less likely to experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and anxiety, and were more likely to feel satisfied with their lives, feel well and see things as being worthwhile**
- **People who experienced higher levels of emotional exhaustion were more likely to experience depersonalisation and anxiety. They were also more likely to present less self-belief and wellbeing, report being less satisfied with their lives and seeing things as being less worthwhile.**



Discussions

- 1. What recommendations can be made off the back of this research?**
- 2. What role does lived experience have in the experience of burnout? And how can we support practitioners with personal trauma to prevent burnout?**



Recommendations

- 1. High quality of supervision for youth work practitioners**
- 2. Ability to manage own workload**
- 3. Youth work practitioners awareness and understanding of their own wellbeing**
- 4. Appropriate monitoring and evaluation**
- 5. Joined up approach from youth organisations**
- 6. Lobbying to bring change to the current funding models of the youth sector**
- 7. Support networks**
- 8. Constructive relationships with referring bodies**
- 9. Preventative work**

