

QSW 24.4 In this issue

Welcome to this issue of *Qualitative Social Work*. I am sure you found the Editorial on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Social Work by Sarah Vicary and Gillian Ferguson extremely helpful. The Editorial and their excellent book (Vicary and Ferguson, 2024) are essential resources for those of us thinking of using IPA in our own work – or are supporting students using this approach.

We begin with one of my favourite articles published in the journal. It is by our Associate Editor, Kirsty Oehlers, based in Western Australia, and is titled, '*A home to dream love into*' – *An autoethnographic analysis of mothering with mental illness*. In an evocative, moving and highly creative autoethnographic piece, Kirsty writes about her great-grandmother, Laura Josephine, a mother of two sets of twins, like Kirsty herself. Kirsty skilfully weaves together her own story, Laura Josephine's psychiatric hospital records, and a letter written by Laura Josephine's eldest child, Kirsty's great-aunt Nell. In the letter, Nell describes the night her mother was admitted to psychiatric hospital in 1927. Laura Josephine was 38 years of age.

Kirsty works in the Family Court system as a private child and family therapist where mental health continues to be one of the main reasons for child removal (Morriss and Broadhurst, 2022). Alongside the autoethnographic account, Kirsty analyses four Family Court judgments where the mother's mental health was a factor in separation from her child. Kirsty then creates two Found Poems from the words of Nell, the psychiatric records, and the court reports. In an outstanding conclusion to the article, Kirsty revises an alternative story for Laura Josephine, with hope for her and her children as central. This is a must-read.

The next article in the issue is by four authors based in the UK, Bekkah Bernheim, Tim Fisher, Lucia Marquez and Lorna Stabler and is on *The power and potential of space and place in family group conferencing: Reimagining the role of the venue in child protection practice*. The article is focused on an underexplored area of both research and practice: how the space and place of the venue in which a Family Group Conference (FGC) is held has an impact on the experiences of both social workers but more importantly, on families and friends involved in the meeting. As the authors make clear:

...the idea that a meeting venue can or should be neutral, that is, devoid of meaning, is a misnomer. Neutral spaces become meaningful places as soon as people enter them carrying their own histories, beliefs, assumptions and memories.

The authors were keen to open a conversation about place and space in FGC. To do this, they worked with a creative writer to craft two vignettes that are fictional but grounded in the extensive practice experience of the co-authors. The vignettes are written from the perspective of a social worker, Stephanie, and Grace, the care experienced pregnant teenager who Stephanie is working alongside. This is an innovative approach, and the article can be used as a creative tool in social work education. For example, students and practitioners could read the vignettes as standalone material and then use these as a basis for a discussion. The next article also concerns the use of vignettes. Tarja Pösö, Tuuli Lamponen, Repo Jenni and Aarnio Noora used a vignette to compare the views of social workers with those of care-experienced young people and parents of children in care in different parts of Finland regarding assessments in child welfare. They found that the social workers, parents and young people all highlighted the need for more information than the vignette provided,

but they differed in their views about the nature of the required information and the purpose of the assessment.

Doctoral student, Mostafa Hosseini, discusses their fascinating PhD project that explores belonging, diversity, and differences among individuals with a migration background in Sweden. In the article, Mostafa reflects on the use of collage as a method of inquiry in social work. Nine participants with a migration background created collages in a series of workshops facilitated by the author. Images of the collages are included in the article. For example, in Figure 2, we can see the stunning collage created by Fariba, a 38-year-old Syrian woman. In her work, Fariba has used visual metaphors to convey 'both annihilation and life, death and existence, but also stillness and flow'. The article concludes with a Found Poem created using the words of the participants. This is a highly creative project, and I look forward to hearing more as it progresses.

The next article is also on an innovative approach. Danielle M Littman provides a case study example of using geographic interviews to understand formerly homeless young adults' experiences of safety, comfort, and connection in their new permanent supportive housing space in Colorado, USA. The author introduces Qualitative Geographic Information Systems (QGIS) approaches, which developed from critical and feminist geographic epistemologies. The research team used sketch mapping through marks on maps or floorplans alongside go-along interviews to understand the relationship between the young adults and their new physical contextual environments. For those of you who might be considering using these approaches in your own work, Table 1 contains the Geographic Interview Guide used in this study and there is a detailed protocol for conducting geographic interviews in Appendix A of the article.

The following article in the issue also reports on an interesting approach to research. UK-based researcher, Karl Mason, discusses his use of story completion methods to understand social work responses to discriminatory abuse. Participants in an online workshop were given one of three 'story stems' and asked to complete the story by imagining how the social worker might engage with the person described in the story as experiencing discriminatory abuse. What was interesting to me as a mental health social worker was that the story told by participants in which the person being assessed had mental health needs included medical terms such as 'agitation', 'fabrication', 'PTSD' and 'hallucination'. The author quotes Sarah Carr and colleagues (2019) who argued that those experiencing stigma in relation to their mental distress may be treated as unreliable witnesses. The medicalisation and pathologisation of ordinary responses to stressful situations is also apparent in my own work on the mental health of mothers who have had their child removed from their care through the Family Court system. The next article is also on mental health and by another UK based academic, Jill Hemmington. Jill used Conversation Analysis to analyse the content and style of communication in four Mental Health Act assessments. This is fascinating material, making visible the often-hidden interactions in such assessments and is a valuable contribution to work in this area.

In a Norwegian study of child welfare services, Esther Vetås, Ragnhild Hollekim, Anette Christine Iversen and Oyenyi Samuel Olaniyan undertook semi-structured interviews with 12 Child Welfare Leaders to understand how they experience their everyday work in municipal Child Welfare Services. In findings which resonate with those found in other countries including the UK, present demands such as excessive workload, time pressure, or emotionally demanding work had to be balanced with the resources available, such as support, autonomy, and opportunities for development in the

workplace. The penultimate article in this issue is by Alexandrina Schmidt. She uses the work of Goffman on frame, role and retrospective fatefulness to show how phone mediation illustrates the unequal stakes in welfare encounters in three Danish job centres. However, phone mediation can also provide confidential distance between social workers and those people deemed 'hard-to-reach'. The article concludes with a call for the inclusion of everyday technologies in future research agendas that examine the digitalisation of social work and the importance of non-verbal communication.

The final article is also focused on communication between social workers and service users. Rosemary Oram, Patricia Cartney and Alys Young from the University of Manchester, UK, report on their study concerning Deaf parents whose primary language is British Sign Language (BSL) and who are assessed as part of safeguarding and child protection processes. As part of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study, seven Deaf-specialist professionals were interviewed in BSL about their experiences of usual practice with Child and Family Social workers who have little or no experience of child protection investigation and safeguarding assessments involving Deaf BSL users. The authors found that not taking the linguistic and cultural needs of Deaf families into consideration could have serious negative outcomes, including the unnecessary removal of children. They make clear that it is vital not to frame a Deaf person as someone with a hearing disability rather than a cultural identity, as this will mean inappropriate strategies for engagement are deployed. A fascinating aspect of the study, discussed in the article, is that the first author, Rosemary, is a native BSL signer and elected to keep the data in the original form, watching the video data during the analysis stage to capture the subtle details of the interviewees' responses.

The issue ends with a review of the book by Lisa Young Larance, *Broken: Women's Stories of Intimate and Institutional Harm and Repair* by a leading expert in the field of Domestic Violence, Professor Khatidja Chantler. I highly recommend both the review and Lisa's book. Lisa is one of the Editors (with Kim Detjen and Patricia Mackey) of our forthcoming Special Issue on *Domestic Violence and Abuse across the Life Course: Considerations for Practice and Research*. We have received excellent contributions and are excited about this Special Issue being published in early 2026.

References

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