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# Invisible authors: an ethnography of the social life of social work assessment

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## ABSTRACT

Social work assessments are ubiquitous in daily practice, containing justifications for interventions and decisions. This article seeks to bring to the fore the extensive influence of the social work team in shaping the document and the resulting decisions. Assessments are not solely the work of the allocated social worker, supported person, and linked professionals; rather, they also represent collective actions involving multiple authors within the social work team. Drawing upon ethnographic data from a local authority adult social work team in Scotland between December 2019 and January 2021, this article explores the social life of the social work assessment. The findings outline the following themes: 1) team engineering; 2) the reader; 3) writing and rewriting; and 4) story building. The article builds a nuanced understanding of social work assessment work and provides new insight into the level and significance of team interactions within the assessment process.

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Assessment; ethnography; judgement; team dynamics; decision-making; personalisation

## Introduction

The assessment process in social work practice has been described as the gathering and ordering of information for analysis, which supports and informs professional judgement and decision-making processes (Taylor, 2017). Although multiple definitions of social work assessment have been offered, it is widely accepted that a holistic assessment is the basis for good decision making and that the decisions which follow can profoundly impact the life of the supported person and professional (Helm, 2013; Taylor, 2017; Turney et al., 2011). Yet, the practical application of ‘doing’ an assessment has been shown to be both complex and inconsistent (Samsonsen & Turney, 2017). Thus, ongoing preoccupations about the quality and variability of written assessments reoccur in the social work literature and in case reviews of practice following deaths (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Munro, 2011; Reder & Duncan, 2004; Samsonsen & Turney, 2017; Turney et al., 2011). Reports frequently emphasise shortcomings, such as ‘poor record-keeping’ (Health and Care Professions Council, 2018, p. 31), ‘poorly written’ documents (Ofsted, 2019), a ‘lack of written evidence’ (Care Inspectorate, 2019, p. 9), and ‘issues with documentation’ (Care Quality Commission, 2017, p. 36). Lillis (2023) highlights that the nature, function, and practice of social work writing and recording remains notably under-researched, despite its centrality in everyday social work.

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Assessments and the decisions arising from them are often made with high levels of uncertainty because of insufficient, unclear, and ambiguous information (Helm, 2010), alongside a shortage of institutional support and time constraints (Berrick et al., 2016). Assessments are also constructed in the context of organisations whose priorities can significantly influence practitioners (Fenton, 2020), often due to the increased bureaucratisation and proceduralisation of the assessment process (Munro, 2011; White et al., 2010). Furthermore, difficulties arise when social workers attempt to implement concepts which are poorly defined or difficult to define; for example, risk (Houston & Griffiths, 2000). This can result in ethical stress for workers (Fenton, 2020), and may also result in practitioners engaging in defensive practice (Whittaker & Havard, 2016). This spotlight on the quality and variability of assessments generates ongoing debate about how judgements and decisions can be made which will produce the best outcomes for the supported person. During the assessment and decision-making process, social workers configure their skills, knowledge, and values to satisfy these competing imperatives. They do so not simply as individuals, but with their social work team (Cook, 2020; Helm, 2013, 2022; Roesch-Marsh, 2018). Thus, ‘decision making is a core professional activity at the heart of social work with much of what social workers do involving making decisions with others’ (O’Sullivan, 2011, p. 1, as cited in Helm, 2022).

Judgements and decisions are understood to be made with others, and this is reflected in the relatively extensive literature on the importance of capturing the views of the supported person and their family within an assessment (Kennan et al., 2018; O’Reilly & Dolan, 2016), along with the perspectives of other professionals (Fengler & Taylor, 2019; White & Featherstone, 2005), and also in supervision (Gregory, 2023). Less attention has been paid to the informal peer interactions which occur amongst the social work team during the assessment writing process; however, there is an increasing body of literature which acknowledges the influence of team members. Roesch-Marsh (2018, p. 412) describes the peer discussion of cases as a process of ‘thinking it through’ with others, which supports social workers in connecting the various pieces of evidence together in a dialectic exchange to render information comprehensible. Similarly, Biggart et al. (2017, p. 123) emphasise the importance of team discussions of cases prior to recording in order to ‘create more coherent narratives about their cases’. Likewise, Helm (2017) describes how the social work team interact in order to test out different case narratives and understandings. These collaborative narrative-building conversations with colleagues prior to writing have been described as a process of ‘social rationalization’ (Avby, 2015, p. 95). Nevertheless, criticisms of social work writing framed within the broader context of communication often take centre stage in public inquiries following cases of extreme abuse or fatalities (Lillis, 2023). Given the increased recognition of the influence of the social work team on developing understanding of cases and forming judgements, the present paper aims to specifically explore the influence of the team on the assessment writing process.

The article first contributes to our comprehension of how social work assessments are constructed by elucidating the backstage everyday interactions in the office. The analysis specifically shows the effects of informal team interactions which enable constant negotiating, crafting, and adjustments, but which can also pose challenges to the idea of practitioner autonomy. Secondly, the study develops an understanding of how teams are influenced by local authority processes and procedures. It exposes how practitioners are caught up in the bureaucracy, but also

reveals how teams draw upon discretion together to engineer assessments. Thus, the study builds a nuanced image of social work assessment work and provides new insight into the level and significant of team interaction within the assessment process.

The structure of this article is as follows. Next in [section 2](#), Brown and Duguid's (1996) work regarding the 'social life of a document' is discussed, which will guide the present study's exploration of findings. [Section 3](#), introduces the context of the local assessment process, and the research methods. Then, in [section 4](#), the findings are divided into four themes: team engineering; the reader; writing and rewriting; and story building. Finally, [section 5](#) presents the discussion and concluding comments.

## The social life of social work assessments

Throughout the data collection, social work assessments were observed to be dominant and reoccurring documents within the office which were continuously written, circulated, and exchanged between the team. As one social worker bluntly stated:

Sometimes I feel our work is just assessment after assessment. It really is assessment, assessment, assessment. Nothing can happen without an assessment. ([redacted name], semi-structured interview)

Freeman (2006) highlights that a document is often oversimplified and is commonly considered as just 'a dart carrying a message from one place to another' (p. 53). Similarly, Brown and Duguid (1996) point out that documents are more than carriers or containers of information, as they are in fact 'information in and of themselves'. Thus, documents such as social work assessments are significant objects which are 'created by individuals or groups in society' which belong to a specific 'space in which they are used/created' at a certain time and often within a 'specific series of actions or events' (Cagle, 2006, p. 1994). Consequently, a social work assessment can be endowed with significance depending on who crafted it, for whom, and under what circumstances (Brown & Duguid, 1996). From this perspective, each assessment entangles the writers and readers within the team, not only through contributing information and opinions, but also in constructing and negotiating social space and coordinating practices (Brown & Duguid, 1996). Additionally, documents are 'not only material traces of actions', but act as 'triggers' too (Freeman & Maybin, 2011, p. 162). Thus, assessments are more than a simple dart or a container of information; they also constitute a 'a nexus of practices and arrangements' (Schatzki, 2002, p. xvi). This context which surrounds the crafting of an assessment, and the actions and decisions triggered by that assessment, comprise what Brown and Duguid (1996) call the 'social life of a document'.

Prior (2003) calls upon researchers to acknowledge the vitality of documents in everyday interactional practices. Similarly, Cagle (2006) outlines the importance of gathering as much information as possible regarding how objects come into being, in order to untangle the multiple truths and realities. Commonly, the social work team interactions that are generated by the assessment, and which shape the assessment, tend to be overlooked. Through focusing on the cycle of production rather than the content of an assessment, this study examines the team dynamics surrounding assessments within

an adult social work area team, thus revealing the unwritten but said, and the actions behind the unsaid and unwritten as well.

## Methods

This article presents findings from an ethnographic study into social workers' experiences of implementing Scotland's personalisation approach to social care enshrined in legislation with the passing of the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 (Morrow, 2022). The intention is that people who require support can exercise as much choice and control as possible over their receipt of social care through coproduced assessments and care plans (Morrow & Kettle, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that self-directed support is not being delivered as had been intended (Feeley, 2021). The research was carried out in a Scottish local authority social work team who supported all adults requiring social care in the community. Data collection took place between December 2019 and January 2021. The team comprised 24 social workers, five team leaders, and a service manager. More specific demographic data relating to the social work team cannot be shared in order to maintain confidentiality. The service manager has operational responsibility for the team leaders and ensuring the quality of practice within the team. Additionally, the service manager is responsible for approving assessments and community care budgets during the formal resource allocation meeting. The team leader supports the service manager and is required to supervise, monitor and mentor a small team of social workers supporting with daily tasks, case allocation, and undertaking supervision sessions. Social workers often use the term 'management' to refer to both the service manager and team leader.

From day one of the data collection the centrality of the assessment document was evident. Put simply, the ethnography revealed that when a social worker is allocated a case, they gather information from the person, their support network, and linked professionals to explore the person's needs and context. The social worker then writes the assessment, seeks approval from their team leader, and attends a resource allocation meeting where a decision is made regarding the budget based on risk ratings and associated points. Once the budget is allocated, social care and support can be organised and commissioned with the supported person during the care planning stage.

### *Ethnography and the local assessment*

Ethnography was selected for its ability to provide detailed understanding of the behind-the-scenes lived experience and interactions of social workers within their everyday environment. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) indicate that ethnographies should include the analysis of objects, specifically analysing 'how they are implicated in the production of orderly social conduct, social realities, and social identities' (p. 138). Thus, the present focus on the social work assessment is not about negating the spoken word or actions; rather, it seeks to gain a thick description of everything in combination surrounding the document.

The social work assessment form at the heart of this article is not a national standardised assessment form, but a locally established assessment process specific to the local authority. Across Scotland each of the 32 local authorities have distinct adult social care

assessment forms. The local form was devised based on the national legislation and guidance on personalisation (Scottish Government, 2022). The assessment captures who the supported person is and lays the foundations for the kind of support and care they require in the community, with an emphasis on maximising the supported person's choice and control through a co-produced assessment (Morrow & Kettle, 2021).

### ***Phase one: initial observations and informal interviews***

For the first three months of the study, the researcher was based with the social work team and engaged in gathering observations and informal interviews four days a week, from 9:30 am to 3:30pm. The focus of this was capturing their day-to-day work including desk work, meetings, assessment and care plan activities, visits to supported people, and the formation of analysis documents. These observations provide valuable insights into the often-overlooked mundane encounters, interactions, actions, and dialogue that underpin the implementation of self-directed support. An estimated 280 hours were spent with the social work team, including 20 observed home visits. Additionally, a total of 60 assessments and linked care plans from ten different social workers were examined. Furthermore, 60 resource allocation meetings were observed, at which assessments were discussed with managers, and decisions regarding social care budgets were made. Detailed descriptions of these observations and informal interviews were recorded in daily fieldnotes.

### ***Phase two: continued data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic***

In March 2020, all face-to-face research activities were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, to ensure the continuity of the research, as a registered social worker, the researcher gained ethical approval and was employed full-time for six-months to practice as a social worker within the same team. Over this six-month period, auto-ethnographic data were captured through a daily reflective log and the primary focus remained the actions of the researcher and practitioners. Additionally, during this phase the researcher completed 18 assessments and care plans.

### ***Phase three: semi-structured interviews***

In the third phase, which took place from November 2020 through to January 2021, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted online with the service manager, two team leaders, six social workers, and one community occupational therapist. These practitioners were specifically chosen as they had been directly observed during the research, to ensure that their perspectives could further enrich the data previously captured in fieldnotes (Miller & Glassner, 2016). Each interview lasted between 60–90 minutes and all were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### ***Data analysis***

The research employed a multi-method approach, which has been described as having a 'toolkit logic' (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1403). This approach combined observations, and

formal and informal interviews, which generated the following datasets: fieldnotes, a reflective log, and interview transcripts. Using NVivo software, initial descriptive codes and themes were generated for each data set. The thematic codes which emerged from the fieldnotes and reflective log datasets informed the direction of the semi-structured interviews in phase three. A full cross thematic analysis of all datasets enabled the progressive accumulation of inductive codes in an iterative cycle between data and theory, which consisted of multiple rounds of coding to refine the analysis.

To ensure reliability, multiple data collection methods were used, providing a multi-perspective account and data triangulation. During of stages of data collection, the sample was carefully selected in collaboration with the gatekeeper to create varied sample size representative of an average caseload. Data collection spanned a 12-month period, across different days, with various social workers, allowing detailed insights into practitioners' activities and experiences. The researcher continuously engaged with participants to clarify understandings of gathered data, further improving reliability. Furthermore, the practice of reflexivity was adopted, thus considering the researchers' engagement, effect, and influence within this research (Morrow & Kettle, 2023).

### ***Ethical considerations***

Ethical approval was obtained from both the local authority site and Glasgow Caledonian University's ethics committee. Written consent combined with ongoing verbal consent was sought throughout the research process from all participants, including practitioners and supported people. A manager from the social work team acted as gatekeeper. Pseudonyms have been utilised throughout the research. An in-depth ethical discussion surrounding the unexpected methodological shift to autoethnography in response to the pandemic is available in Morrow and Kettle (2023).

## **Findings**

### ***Team engineering***

The assessment document is formulaic and lengthy, with headed sections requiring completion which divide the person's life into boxes. Practitioners described it as 'prescriptive' and 'rigid', and commented that they were required to 'twist' and 'squeeze' information so it 'fits'. The information gathered for an assessment is utilised to determine levels of risk, which are then linked to a resource allocation system which calculates whether a supported person meets the thresholds for support outlined in the local authority's eligibility criteria. Consequently, if an assessment indicates high levels of critical risk, a larger budget will be generated. Practitioners engineer and craft the information together, deciding what to include or omit. The following accounts provide evidence of these commonplace happenings:

So I would put that information in that section, so it evidences higher risk there. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

I would emphasise that more, that's definitely high risk, so you'll get more of a budget. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)



I'd take that bit out [...] it makes them sound more able than they actually are, so you might not get a budget. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

Colleagues share opinions, bounce ideas around, seek and give advice, and refer to previous experiences. Although accurate and true information was included, workers debated and tweaked the associated risk ratings and the placement of information in order to try to gain the budget they felt the supported person required. The following extract captures these team tactics in crafting the assessment forms:

There are three social workers huddled around the computer discussing the risk ratings and associated points on the assessment form. One worker told the other: 'you need to bump both those sections up to substantial risk if you want to have any chance of getting a big enough budget for three visits a day, seven days a week'. He continued, 'does anyone in the family provide care? If they don't, you have a better chance of getting a budget. You know, if they don't have any informal care, you will be able to get more of a budget'. The three workers tweaked the assessment form, altering risk ratings and taking into account that some ratings may be lowered or changed by the manager during the resource allocation meeting. They looked up at me and said, 'you have to know how to work the system. It's about making sure we can argue the case and get the budget. You've got to play the game, you know'. ([redacted names], fieldnotes)

This evidence reveals the extent to which an assessment form is discussed, refined, and distilled through team talk and interactions. Daily work is increasingly organised around processes and procedures, and social workers are seen to navigate this bureaucracy together with their team. The team were caught up in processes and procedures which seemed to have a concerning influence on their practice.

### **The reader**

The social work team were immersed in documents and consequently not only engaged in writing, but also in the process of reading documents. Social workers were conscious of who was going to read their assessments, and therefore engineered documents for the intended reader, the service manager and team leader. As one worker explained:

You kind of learn after a while what gets you points. Like, I know the buzzwords now. So, I write my assessment with that in mind. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

Furthermore, when I asked a social worker who they were writing the assessment for, we had the following exchange:

Interviewer: 'So when you are writing the assessment, who is the audience? I guess, I mean, who do you have in your head as you are writing?'

Esther: 'Probably the service user, right? I want to get them the support in place. But I guess also [redacted name- service manager]. I need [redacted name service manager] to sign it off'. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

The service manager acts as the budget gatekeeper because they decide the budget. Thus, writing an assessment was not simply centred around capturing the reality of the supported person, as there was also an emphasis on crafting and framing the contents with the service manager, the team leader, and the social care budget in mind. This means that while the allocated social worker is the stated author, the backstage practice reveals



the often invisible team dynamics and organisational processes at play. The document itself is a practised object through which power flows, rather than a dart of information (Brown & Duguid, 1996).

### ***Writing and rewriting***

To progress an assessment to a resource allocation meeting between the social worker, team leader, and service manager, the team leader is required to ‘check over and sign off’ the assessment first. Consequently, the present ethnography revealed a substantial number of informal meetings between the social worker and their team leader with the objective of preparing for the resource allocation meeting. These pre-meetings took different forms, including popping into the team leader’s office, tagging on a quick conversation at the end of a phone call, organising a formal sit-down or zoom call, or communicating through a series of emails. These pre-meeting provided a space for case discussion, focussing on the generated care budget and whether the written evidence warranted the selected risk rating and would meet the supported person’s needs. One social worker summarised:

I do the assessment, then ask the team leader what the budget is coming out as, but if my professional opinion is that it isn’t providing enough money to keep that person safe . . . of course, I will alter the ratings . . . so you know . . . it reflects that person’s needs. [. . .] And I don’t think there is anything wrong with that. We’re here to write an assessment that reflects that person, and that is what I am doing. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

Sometimes the team leader asked whether sections were credible, if more evidence was needed, or whether parts should be altered. As one team leader explained:

You want to get it sorted and right before the real meeting, so there’s less room for error and potential changes. So, I try and pre-empt what might be seen as problematic, you know. Sometimes workers put the wrong bits of information in the wrong section, so it doesn’t add up. ([redacted name], semi-structured interview)

Although the social worker is the author of the assessment, their written words are scrutinised by the team leader, often resulting in alterations and modifications. It is important to note that management’s role is to guide and supervise frontline workers, which means they play an important role in monitoring and checking content and thresholds. Nevertheless, a tension sometimes arose between the social worker’s stance and the manager’s views, which could deplete the social worker’s sense of autonomy. One social worker made the following observations:

The assessment has my name on it as the social worker, so appears like I wrote it, and I did write it, but sometimes [the service manager and team leader] want you to make some changes, and you have to. [. . .] They are more experienced, and in charge, so they get final say. [. . .] You need them to sign it off to get the budget. [. . .] There was one assessment a while ago where we had completely different views, you can argue your case, but you have to go with what management say . . . But you know my name is still on it. [. . .] If there are major changes I don’t agree with . . . I always put a case note on [the database], just to cover my back. You know, so my professional opinion is documented somewhere. [redacted name], semi-structured interview)

Here, the disempowered social worker logs a case note to capture their views which become invisible on the assessment form when they do not agree with the manager. The team leader thereby takes on the role as of reader and editor, which can result in new interpretations and understandings emerging. Thus, the assessment is not simply a dart or a container of information, but it is a practised thing which acts as a trigger and impacts forthcoming meetings, interactions, and events.

### **Story building**

Once a social worker has discussed the assessment with their team leader, and any amendments have been made, they are required to present it to the team leader and service manager at a formal resource allocation meeting. Ratings are regularly debated, maintained, and changed. Management probe workers at these meetings for further evidence to understand their thought processes. The following requests were common r:

Your ratings don't really add up in these sections. Can you tell me a bit more? [...] Why is this only low risk [...] Yet that is high? ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

I don't think this section is high risk. Can you lower that to substantial risk please. [...] I see where you're coming from, but I think with that level of family support it isn't high risk. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

Although these meetings were structured around the assessment form, practitioners often described the document as acting as 'a barrier' to capturing the person, and felt it necessary to deviate from the prescribed assessment form to present the case more effectively. The unofficial rule seemed to be that these stories were appropriate in the verbal discussion to generate understandings; however, this level of detail and informal narratives were not included within the document. The following account evidences this:

She is in a really bad way. [...] Very isolated [...] I couldn't believe what she has been through. [...] So she doesn't have the best relationship with her family [...] She's had a tough life. [...] And because of all that shit, she basically said she can't trust anyone in her family now. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

The resource allocation meeting is a space where practitioners can join together in collective thinking to unpick a case, work through conflicting evidence, and further develop insights. These interactions are not simply a transfer or reproduction of the information captured in the assessment, but a space where workers move beyond the written document to share and create narratives as a team. Practitioners thus deviate or stray from the official line, creating a space for potential creativity beyond the assessment form. One social worker highlighted how the discussion and collaborative analysis with the service manager support her understanding:

That was definitely a more complex case, so I was keen to get [the service manager's] opinion on it, so I feel more reassured with the risk scorings now [...] I think I get it now. ([redacted name], fieldnotes)

This quote suggests that the manager plays a valuable role in developing the expertise in judgement through feedback. Nevertheless, meetings resulted in crucial changes and adjustments to assessment document and the subsequent budgets. Cases were at times re-

storied and re-defined. Although this was the social workers' professional assessment, they were often required to make various edits before the assessment was agreed and signed off. Social workers were required to return to a second resource allocation meeting and present the same assessment with the discussed edits. The following account evidences feelings of disempowerment as a consequence of these edits:

Sometimes, certain bits of information aren't in the assessment form. So that when we get into the discussion part of the meeting, and then it all starts coming out. You get told to add bits in there and take parts out. [...] Hopefully you can give a clear picture and explain your way of thinking... or justify something. [...] They [management] haven't met the person so they don't know anything about them, they only have the assessment form, whereas I know the case. Sometimes they see things differently, then you have to change the assessment form, which is a bit annoying, because it is meant to be my professional assessment. Like my name is on it, kinda thing. [laughing] ([redacted name], semi-structured interview)

This account highlights that workers often felt frustrated and deflated by the processes within the local authority and that they felt heavily regulated by processes.

## Discussion and concluding comments

The findings presented above explore the social life of the social work assessment, revealing how the assessment was made; by whom; from what; and for what purpose (Brown & Duguid, 1996; Caple, 2006). The article sheds light on the behind the scenes work within the social work office, involving what has been described as the 'the invisible trade' (Pithouse, 1998). Within the findings, it is possible to observe that the social work team and the management engage in testing out different case narratives and understandings (Helm, 2017). As Featherstone et al. (2014, p. 84) have argued, practitioners need 'the time, space, argumentative flexibility, analytic ability and trusting relationships to debate and make sense of the information they have recorded'. Cases were sometimes re-storied and re-defined as new interpretations emerged through team interactions. Practitioners were often required to make various edits before the assessment was agreed and signed off. Smith describes this process as 'back and forth work' (Smith, 2002, p. 3), which results in actual authorship often being distributed across the team. To rationalise their risk assessment and to render the gathered information intelligible, social workers told the supported person's story (Weick et al., 2005), which acted as a frame for making sense of the case (Cook, 2020).

Additionally, peer support was also provided regarding how to engineer risk ratings and how best to navigate the bureaucratic systems in order to obtain the required social care budget. These findings are consistent with wider research; for example, as Roesch-Marsh (2018, p. 413) states, 'the process of "thinking through" a case included thinking about how to best "work" the system to achieve the desired outcome'. Daily work has become increasingly organised around processes and procedures, and social workers were observed to navigate this bureaucracy together with their team. Thus, the findings indicate a level of discretion over the crafting of the assessment form whilst also navigating local authority processes and procedures. Although joint work can counter bias, this level of discretion and engineering also undoubtedly raises valid concerns about bias and subjectivity within the writing process.

The influence of managerial reader plays a key role, or as Freeman and Maybin (2011) state: 'Like writing, then, reading is a function of power relations. Just as it matters who writes what, so it matters who reads' (p. 164). The 'back and forth work' (Smith, 2002, p. 3) with the management was evidenced to impact the practitioners' sense of professional autonomy, with workers expressing feelings of a lack of control and influence, and of being disempowered by procedures. Workers were seen to record a case note capturing their invisible alternative views whenever they disagreed with their manager. Furthermore, an important ethical question arises about whether the voice of the supported person is lost in the process. The self-directed support legislation is underpinned by a shift towards co-produced social care with the supported person (Scottish Government, 2022). However, the evidence suggests that their voice is diluted in the process, and highlights how practitioners use professional power to select information and construct what they perceive to be a worthy case. Iversen et al. (2005) view assessment as 'a social construction that privileges the professional and disempowers the client' (p. 696). While assessment theory, frameworks, and predictive risk tools may contribute to improved judgement, they often overlook the power of the interactions between the social work team during the writing process. This study shows that assessment writing is a complex and socially situated process. Further research into authentic coproduction with the supported person ensuring their voice is heard throughout every step of the process is required.

Although the findings of this small study are not generalisable, they support a growing body of evidence suggesting that judgements and assessments are not made solely between the social worker, the supported person, and linked professionals. Instead, it is vital to consider the relationships within the team and the impact these can have on judgements, assessments, and decision-making. Given the narrow existing literature on this topic, these findings represent the first steps in examining the team dynamics surrounding the social work assessment writing process. There is compelling data, even from this small study, to suggest that the social work team play a significant role in the crafting of social work assessment, and that it is therefore worthy of further research. Future research in this area can seek to explore a team's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, interpersonal, organisational, and cultural dynamics in relation to influencing assessment writing within different realms of social work practice. This focus can offer novel perspectives on variations in assessment writing across workers, sites, and points in time. Shining a light on these areas will generate important insights about how judgements and decisions are made to produce the best outcomes for the support person.

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