Policing in the Mirror:
An investigation into the applications of moral philosophy in contemporary policing education and training.

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Trigger Warning
The Ethical Dilemmas used discuss sensitive topics, specifically:
Murder
Suicide
Racism at work
'Stop and Search'
Domestic violence
If these topics are sensitive for you, please leave now.

Are you a good person?
Singer (1972) Interactive

1. *"If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without sacrificing anything of **moral significance**, then morally speaking, we must."*

2. *"Hunger, disease, and other sources of suffering, disability, and death are <u>very bad</u>."*

3. *"The luxuries, on which we spend money, are not morally significant (e.g., the coffee you might buy, or the designer clothes we might wear, are not inherently good, or bad in and of themselves)."*

4. *"By donating money to aid organisations and charities, we **could** prevent hunger, disease, and other sources of suffering."*

We asked… Do you agree?

We noted the answers…
- Yes
- No
- Equivocation

We then asked…What is your impression of this statement?

 Can you help me to understand why you might answer in this way?

Following on from stimulus 1 – 4,

"If I choose to spend my money on luxuries instead of giving the money to a charity that potentially could reduce, or end suffering, then I am a bad person."

Context

Ethics and moral education as a priority in the National Policing Curriculum (NPCC and the APCC, 2016)

There is an obvious need for HE providers to place the interrogation of individual moral standards at the forefront of the training and education of policing students.

This also aligns with the PEQF which prioritises moral and ethical reasoning as being core skills for future police officers.

By instilling students with the tools to consider their decisions from an ethical and moral standpoint - we are equipping them with reflexive skills that are required for employment within the police and related fields.

The CoP (2018) offer guidance on the core requirements expected of HE providers

One of the core requirements is that providers must offer clear guidance and structure over how issues of ethics and integrity, especially those relating to misconduct will be addressed throughout the degree.

▶ Central to this issue and supported by National Policing Curriculum, the Police Code of Conduct, and the National Decision-Making model (NDM), is ensuring that at all levels, students can understand the complexity and impact of a range of issues encompassing morality and ethics.

Context: Corbo-Crehan (2019)

1. Should policing education on ethics contain ethical philosophy, or should moral philosophy remain a standalone subject?

2. If policing ethics should remain the remit of policing frameworks and doctrine, such as the NDM, as a standalone discipline?

3. Whether moral education should be the remit of the moral philosopher, or of practice-based supervisors when it comes to teaching policing ethics?

Corbo-Crehan (2019) outlines concerns that have increasingly been raised relating to the inclusion of ethical education in professional settings.

Context: Corbo-Crehan (2019)

Practice should be framed by critical theoretical and philosophical rigour,

and

theoretical and philosophical discourse should be underpinned by real-world practice and contextualisation.

Moral and ethical education, should be targeted at,

- enabling students to interrogate their own ethical decision-making practices,

- and for them to be able to justify these decisions.

Corbo-Crehan stresses that existing frameworks, and even any perceptions that police officers are **inherently** moral people, should be viewed with scepticism and caution.

Furthermore, educators should ensure that moral philosophy is not dominated by either end of the scale relating to experience,

e.g., whether such education is framed solely by policing practitioners, or solely by moral Philosophers
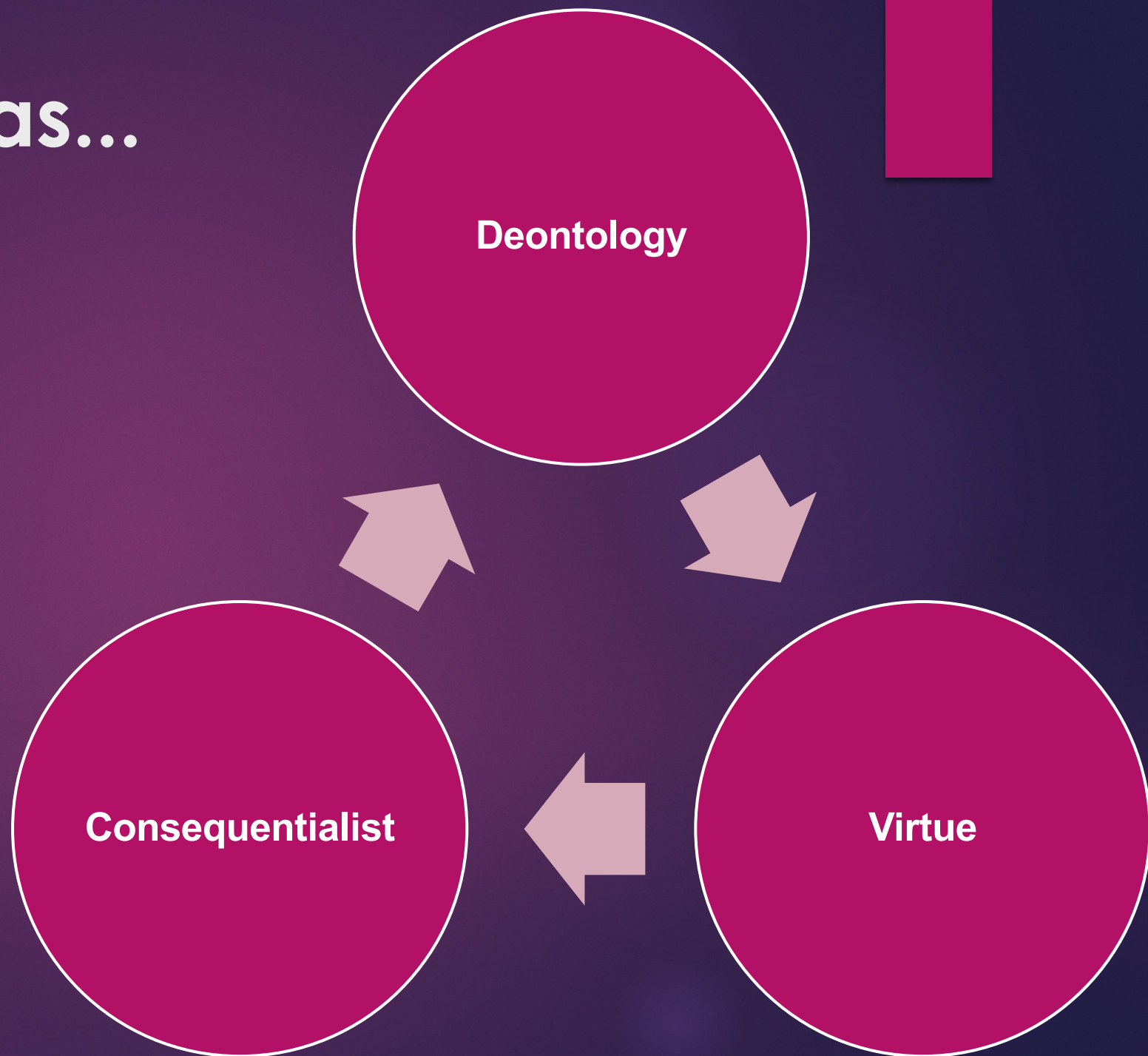
Context: Policing as...

▶ *Deontology*

    Morality by regulation or codes of practice

▶ **Virtue**

    ○ *Ethical practice as part of moral character that helps the practitioner live a 'good' life.*

▶ **Consequentialist**

    ○ *Egoism – outcome for the agent.*

    ○ *Utilitarian – greatest happiness for the greatest amount of people.*

Deontology

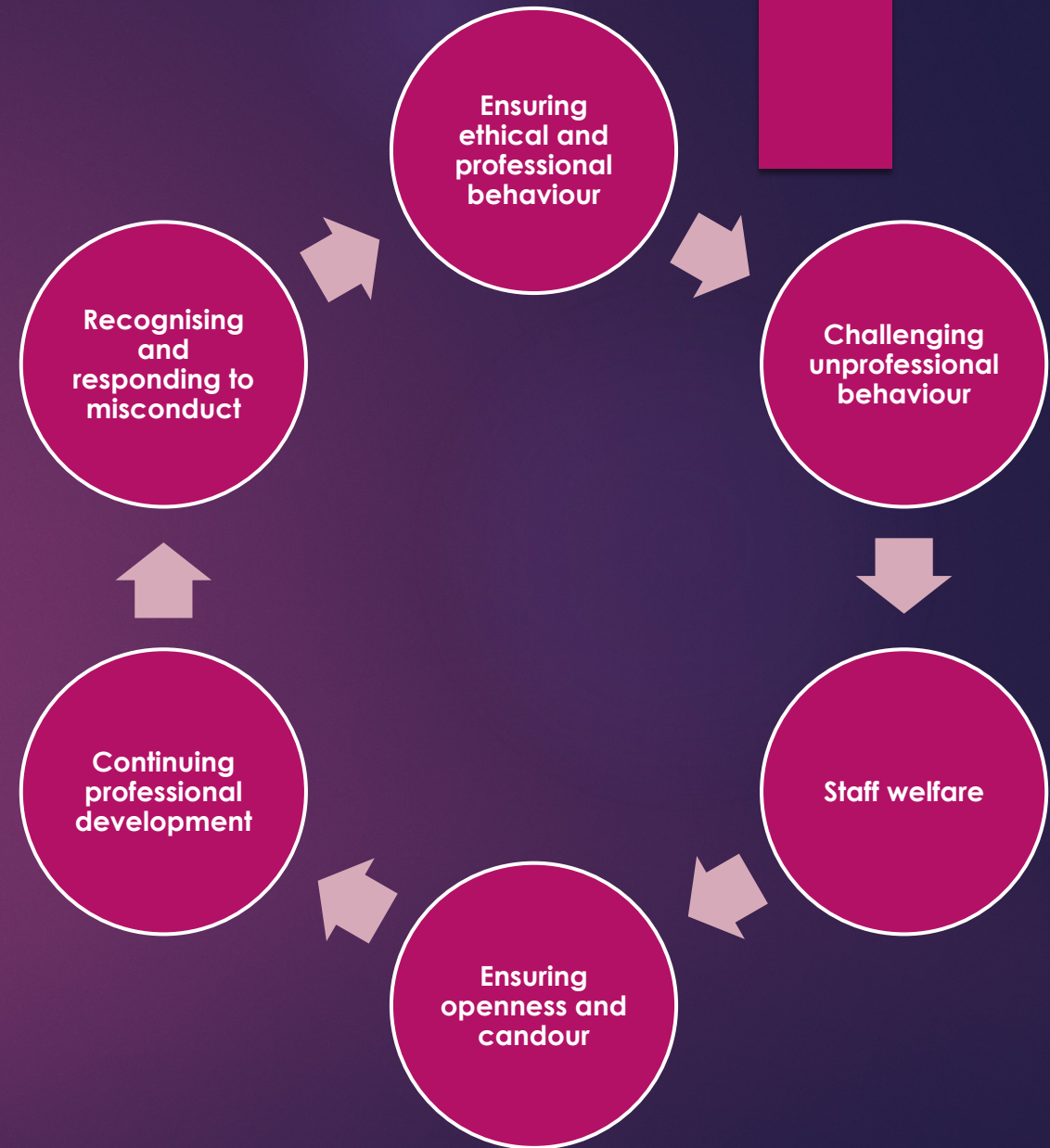**Consequentialist**

Virtue

Policing Ethics 2024:

"The purpose of this Code of Practice is to set out the actions that chief officers should carry out to ensure that they lead an ethical culture, where staff are supported and directed to use the ethical policing principles in decision making and to demonstrate professional behaviour. It also describes what needs to be done to proactively and positively identify – and respond to – misconduct and corruption when it occurs" College of Policing (2024).

Code of Ethics (2024)

The new statutory code of practice will "compliment" the new non-statutory code of ethics.

Whilst it does apply to everyone employed by the police, the 2024 codes place a renewed emphasis on the role of Chief Officers to *"lead and take action to ensure ethical and professional behaviour within their force"*

There is additional focus for Chief Staff to,

- Ensuring ethical and professional behaviour
- Challenging unprofessional behaviour
- Staff welfare
- Ensuring openness and candour
- Continuing professional development
- Recognising and responding to misconduct

Section 39 A of the Police Act 1996

Policing Ethics: *The NDM and Safe Spaces*

There is a simple question, is the NDM enough?

Whilst the Codes of Ethics (2014 and 2024) seek to instil a sense of ability and reflexivity in the student officer, with a clear decision-making framework that emphasises the best of Virtue, Deontology, and Consequential ethics.

Does it give the student enough of a space to,

o   Make mistakes?

o   Reflect on their own Unconscious Bias?

o   Safely reflect with the supervision of a colleague?

Unconscious bias

- **Unconscious bias is a key factor that impacts the equal treatment of others, and therefore impact moral and ethical decisions.**

    - It is caused by our efficient cognitions, which seek to make fast decisions or judgements, to support our smooth functioning within our environment.

    - These biases influence our behaviour and are automatic and unintentional stereotypes, that we have learned via our personal experiences, background, and society (Noon, 2018).

    - These biases can relate to specific characteristics of others, for example, race, gender, age, and myriad other attributes.

    - Individuals may not be aware that these biases are impacting their decisions.

- **In many organisations, staff are given training in relation to unconscious bias and how to combat it. In the UK the College of Policing (2019) describes how officer training on unconscious bias is a requirement under the PEQF, the PC foundation programmes, and the police degree apprenticeships. But…**

    - Within the USA, researchers exploring the long-term impacts of training have shown the impacts on the day are promising – with officers increasing their knowledge about, and motivation to reduce, bias – however, these effects do not persist one month after the training (Lai & Lisnek, 2023).

    - Reviews suggest that there is currently insufficient evidence with regard to interventions to combat unconscious bias to know which work best (FitzGerald, Martin, Berner, & Hurst, 2019; Corsino & Fuller, 2021).

Research goals

Participants were recruited from amongst academic staff working in Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of South Wales in Policing, Criminology, Youth and Community Work, Social Work and Education.

▶ **Research Questions**

- How do lecturing staff within different professional groups differ in their moral decision-making?

- What relevance does moral philosophy have in the contemporary higher education classroom?

- How can awareness of unconscious bias be incorporated into a student's education?

▶ **Hypotheses**

- There will be significant differences in the reasons for decisions given by professionals.
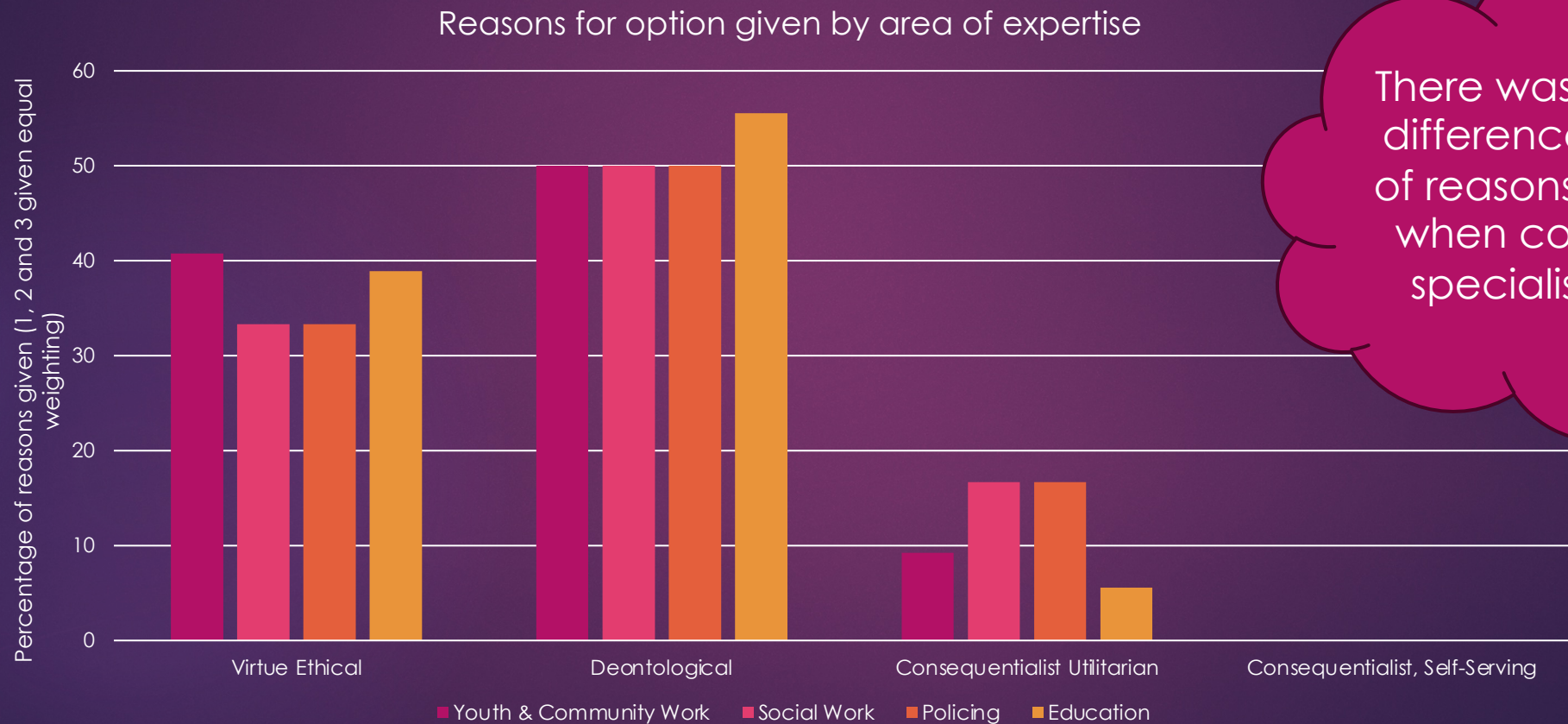
Methods

Six Ethical Dilemmas

- These dilemmas were created by Kristjansson and colleagues and were published as part of the Character Virtues in Policing research report (2021).
- Each dilemma presented participants with a realistic scenarios that could occur within policing.
- The participants had two options, both of which were morally justifiable. The goal is to examine moral reasoning as opposed to adherence to a specific type of decision.
- Participants then had to select three of six reasons that they selected their decision (rating them 1, 2 and 3).
  - Two options were classed as virtue ethical, two as deontological, one as consequentialist, utilitarian and one as consequentialist, self-serving.

Semi-structured qualitative discussions

- 4 sections:
  - The role of teaching morality and ethics within their respective fields
  - Singer's Moral Calculus and its potential use within education
  - Teaching of unconscious bias within respective fields
  - Discussion of the reasons for the decision made in response to an exemplar scenario from the online survey.

Findings: Ethical Dilemmas

Reasons for option given by area of expertise

Percentage of reasons given (1, 2 and 3 given equal weighting)

60
50
40
30
20
10
0

Virtue Ethical   Deontological   Consequentialist Utilitarian   Consequentialist, Self-Serving

■ Youth & Community Work ■ Social Work ■ Policing ■ Education

There was very little difference in types of reasons selected when comparing specialist areas.

Discussion of Results
Overview

National Professional Standards, Codes of Practice, Legislation.

Professional experience as a building block for personal professional morality.

The Impact of Normative Social Influence on Moral Decision-Making.

Higher Education as a vehicle for moral education.

Creating Safe Spaces to Discuss Morality and Unconscious Bias.

Move towards a Model of Non-Clinical Supervision in HE.

The building blocks of personal professional morality

National Professional Standards, Codes of Practice and Legislation

- Participants indicated the importance of the above on their cognitions and decision-making processes, both in practice and within the classroom.
- Given these staff work on degrees that are validated or accredited by professional bodies (e.g. CoP), these codes and standards are paramount.
- We also found that the value and principles of staff are largely informed by these standards and codes.

Professional experience

- Staff indicated that their experiences in practice and while gaining their professional qualifications helped to shape their personal professional morality. Here, mutli-agency experience was emphasised.
- This experience impacted their perceptions and understanding of the roles of themselves, the setting in which they worked and the service users they supported.
- Participants discussed the importance of the application of theory to practice.

Practitioners as moral agents:

The Impact of Normative Social Influence on Moral Decision-Making.

Participants outlined their personal ontology and the impact of that on their practice.

For some this was a deference to deontology and a focus on the standards and codes relevant to their field.

This was magnified for those who had less experience in practice.

It was through experience that participants found they were able to have a more nuanced approach to ethical conduct, particularly where following deontological regulations conflicted with their virtue ethical views.

For example, where there was a fear of normative repercussions.

The role of higher education

As a vehicle for moral education

- Promotion of moral education and awareness
- Utilisation of academic theory
- Barriers include a lack of nuanced literature
  - Practitioners are seeking to ameliorate for this through interdisciplinary practice
- Preparing students for real world contexts
  - Through understanding the context, its impact on individuals and how to use theory

As a safe space to discuss morality and unconscious bias

- Open discussions relating to morality
  - Power dynamics in and outside the classroom
  - Individual attitudes and the impact of ignorance
- Staff reflections on their unconscious bias and moral decision making in context
- The subjective nature of value
- Preparing students to reflect in real world contexts by understanding their personal agency and autonomy
- Combating unconscious bias
  - Addressing the inherent bias of academic research in this field and the need to elevate diverse voices within this narrative

A Model of Non-Clinical Supervision: A Path Forward

Our participants emphasised the need for non-clinical supervision to aid in their practice

- Some participants pay for their own external supervision

Modelling ethical supervision practice for students through:

- Supervision of staff
- Supervision of students
- Using contextual scenarios and case studies from practice

Preparing students for moral autonomy in practice

- So they can operate with confidence in the moral grey and in the ambiguity of practice
- Giving them the confidence to understand and apply their own moral position

A Model of Non-Clinical Supervision: Moral Calculous

This could involve Singer's (1972) moral calculous as a tool for reflection.

For our participants it produced questions relevant to the calculation at hand and reflections on their own ethical conduct.

Participants generally gave positive feedback in relation to this process, finding it valuable to discuss morality and use these questions as a vehicle.

Some suggested they would take these into their teaching going forward.

Next steps

Advantages

- There are benefits to leadership in terms of staff conduct, transparency and honest discourse
- It benefits staff as they feel more confident in overcoming situations with conflicting ethical principles

Barriers

- Staff training – not all staff working in these areas are equipped to supervise others
- Resources
  - Staff time
  - Staff buy-in

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