Possibilities and pitfalls: exploring social welfare professionals' experiences with interpersonal process recall followed by focus group discussions

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Published online: 12 Oct 2023.

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Possibilities and pitfalls: exploring social welfare professionals' experiences with interpersonal process recall followed by focus group discussions

Moglegheiter og fallgruver: ei utforsking av sosionomar og vernepleiarar sine refleksjonar kring deltaking i ein multimetodisk studie basert på Interpersonal Process Recall og fokusgruppeintervju

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal process recall (IPR) is a qualitative research method employing video-assisted interviews, originating from training in psychotherapy skills. This method strongly emphasises recall and reflexivity, aiming to explore the interaction experience, primarily between clients and caregivers. It is used to study professions emphasising reflexive practice, such as psychotherapy and counselling but has been absent from research on social work professions. This article explores the experiences and reflections of five social workers and five social educators who participated in research applying a combination of IPR and focus group methods. Overall, the findings suggest that the participants, possessing critical and reflective practice skills, found their involvement advantageous. Their capacity for reflection and reflexivity not only benefited the participants themselves but also facilitated the researchers in gaining new insights into professional experiences in professional and service user interaction.

SAMANDRAG

Interpersonal process recall (IPR) er ein videoassistert kvalitativ forskingsmetode basert på intervju. Metoden har opphav i psykoterapeutisk ferdigheitstrening. Gjennom å leggje vekt på erindring og refleksivitet, utforskar metoden erfaringar frå samhandling, primært mellom klient og omsorgsperson. IPR er nytta for å studere profesjonar der refleksiv praksis er viktig, slik som innanfor psykoterapi, men har vore fråverande i forskinga på dei sosialfaglege profesjonane. Denne artikkelen utforskar fem sosionomar og fem vernepleiarar sine erfaringar frå, og refleksjonar kring, deltaking i eit forskingsprosjekt som kombinerer bruken av IPR og fokusgrupper. Alt i alt finn artikkelen at desse profesjonsutøvarane sine kritiske og refleksive praksisferdigheiter førte til at dei hadde nytte av å delta i prosjektet. Dei reflektive og refleksive

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ferdigheitene til deltakarane førte òg til at forskarane fekk nye forståingar for profesjonelle erfaringar frå samhandling mellom profesjonsutøvarar og brukarar av tenestene.

Introduction

Studies are increasingly exploring interaction in diverse social welfare frontline practices (e.g. Juhila et al., 2021; Pallisera et al., 2018; Saario et al., 2018; Solheim et al., 2020) However, gaining access to in-the-moment experiences and interactions has proven challenging for researchers (Larsen et al., 2008). As researchers and educators in the health and social sciences, we aim to contribute to developing professional practice. Therefore, we seek to explore and expand the understanding of research approaches that can facilitate such advancement.

This study is part of a larger research project investigating on-the-spot application of professional knowledge in encounters with vulnerable service users. The project's findings have been presented in two separate studies (Husabø et al., 2022, 2023). This article focuses on the experiences of participating social welfare professionals concerning the use of interpersonal process recall (IPR) and focus groups. This multi-method approach is previously unprobed in studies on social welfare professionals. Our primary aim is to explore the opportunities these combined methods offer social welfare professionals, enabling them to gain fresh insights into their practices. Additionally, we address conceivable challenges and limitations inherent in this research approach.

Critical reflection, reflexivity and IPR

Fostering the ideals of reflectiveness and criticality in practice holds significant importance within social work. Equipping students with the ability to develop skills in reflection, critical thinking, and reflexivity is a central focus not only in education but also throughout professional practice (Lay & McGuire, 2010; Ruch, 2005, 2012; Theobald et al., 2017; Yip, 2006). However, the concepts of reflective practice, reflexivity and critical have diverse meanings and can be somewhat conflated in the literature (Askeland & Fook, 2009; D'Cruz et al., 2007; Watts, 2019). In a comprehensive discussion, D'Cruz et al. (2007) differentiate between critical reflection and reflexivity based on timing: Critical reflection involves looking back on and learning from past critical incidents, while reflexivity is an ongoing process where practitioners constantly question their own knowledge claims, demonstrating self-awareness, role awareness, and awareness of assumptions underlying their practice (cf. Ferguson, 2018; Herland, 2022; Sheppard, 2000). This learning is momentary, comparable to Schön's (2011) concept of 'reflection-in-action'. Despite diverse meanings, there are significant similarities in the emancipatory and ameliorative aims of reflexivity, critical reflection, and reflectivity for both social work practitioners and service users (D'Cruz et al., 2007).

Macaskie et al. (2015) highlight that IPR combines reflective and reflexive principles. IPR, described as 'talking about talking' (Macaskie et al., 2015, p. 229), fosters reflection, shared exploration and pays attention to the interplay between researcher and participant dynamics. Initially developed as a skills training in therapy and counselling (Kagan et al., 1969), IPR is a qualitative interview method to access participants' in-the-moment experiences in professional settings (Janusz & Peräkylä, 2021; Larsen et al., 2008). A video-recorded encounter is reviewed with the participant shortly after, ideally within 48 h, allowing for commentary and exploration of specific sequences and interactions (Elliott, 1986; Larsen et al., 2008; Macaskie et al., 2015). The participant is asked to remember and describe immediate experiences associated with occurrences in the conversation. This dialogue enables exploration of in-session interactions, potentially revealing previously inaccessible subconscious experiences, like emotional and cognitive aspects, aiding a deeper understanding (Janusz & Peräkylä, 2021).

While IPR is most commonly used in the counselling and psychotherapy profession (e.g. Elliott & Shapiro, 1988; Janusz & Peräkylä, 2021; Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2014; Macaskie et al., 2015; Meekums et al., 2016; Solberg Kleiven et al., 2022; West & Clark, 2004), it has also been used in studies of professional practice in education, medicine and sport (e.g. Moskal & Wass, 2019; Natvik et al., 2022; Schwenk, 2019).

Within the social welfare field, various studies have employed video recordings of interactions in actual client situations (e.g. Dowling et al., 2019; Juhila et al., 2021). However, despite their potential, video data remain under-utilised in qualitative social work research (Miller Scarnato, 2019). As far as we know, IPR had not been employed to study professional practice in social work before our research. The project also pioneers a multi-method approach, combining IPR and focus groups for the first time.

Design, material and methods

This article draws from two studies employing IPR and focus group interviews. The current study aims to explore and discuss the use of this multi-method approach in investigating professional practice within two different social welfare services.

In the first study, five participants (SW1 – SW5) were female social workers employed at the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav). These social workers were part of work and activation programmes, and the conversations with vulnerable young service users who were not in work, education or training were held at Nav's offices (Husabø et al., 2022). The second study included five social educators (SE1 – SE5) [1] employed by municipal services for people with intellectual disabilities. Among them, three were female (SE1, SE2, SE5), and two were male (SE3, SE5). These participants interacted with service users at home or at a day-care centre (Husabø et al., 2023). In both studies, the inclusion criteria were a bachelor's degree in social work and social education, respectively, and at least five years of experience in professional practice.

Each of the ten participating professionals recruited a service user with whom they were actively working to participate in the IPR recording. All participants endeavoured to recruit service users who were capable of providing consent, handling videorecording comfortably and refusing participation if they felt uncomfortable.

The intersubjective and reflexive lens offered by IPR enables a researcher to elicit a participant's experience of a research conversation and discover assumptions that might skew the researcher's understanding (Macaskie et al., 2015). The method emphasises critical reflection on intersubjective and relational phenomena, aiming to collaboratively explore, analyse, and interpret research data with participants (Macaskie et al., 2015; Meekums et al., 2016). The ten individual IPR interviews were each based on a video-recorded encounter and conducted by the first author. While the interviews were mostly related to happenings in the video recording, professionals were also acquainted with a brief interview guide at the start. This guide addressed fixed topics like work experience, expectations prior to the recorded encounter, service user participation, the professional-user relationship, and experiences of being recorded and interviewed. To enhance the depth of reflections on IPR sessions, a focus group was organised for professionals in each study, moderated by the first author with the fourth author as co-moderator. The focus group's interview guide covered reflections on IPR sessions, regulatory framework influences, sources, and characteristics of professional knowledge.

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved both studies and identifiable data were anonymised. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement and withdrawal option (for more details on ethical considerations in the two studies, please refer to Husabø et al., 2022, 2023). However, research involving vulnerable people requires heightened ethical sensitivity. In studies involving those with intellectual disability, diminished cognitive abilities could intensify power imbalances (cf. Cudré-Mauroux et al., 2020; van der Weele & Bredewold, 2021). Yet, as service users did not directly engage with researchers, some concerns were mitigated. Additionally, using video cameras for studying interaction is often less intrusive for vulnerable people than an

observer's presence (Danby, 2021). The professionals primed their users for video recording and verbally reiterated information. All participants provided their written consent.

Analysis

The data consists of transcripts from ten IPR interviews and two focus groups. These twelve transcripts include sequences exploring professionals' experiences of being video recorded and their reflections on the research project participation. Extracted from previous studies, we analysed these sequences collectively. Employing Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2021), we focused on reflexivity and collaboration. Our analysis centred on professionals' thoughts about video recordings, their IPR experiences and reflections, and the research project's potential impact on their professional practice.

In the initial phase, the first author familiarised herself with the content by reading and re-reading the material. Subsequently, discussions were held with the fourth author to form an overall impression. In the second phase, the first author conducted coding. Following this, the first and fourth authors engaged in discussions during the third phase and developed potential themes, which were:

1. *reflections on being recorded while working*
2. *reflections on sample/service user participants*
3. *participants' self-critical reflections*
4. *reflections on IPR*
5. *reflections on future practice*

The initial themes were discussed in the fourth phase relative to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. Subsequently, the themes were refined and reduced from five to two. Themes 1 and 4 were combined, as were 3 and 5, and theme 2 was omitted as an independent theme. The first author selected extract examples to illustrate themes and analytical points. All authors participated in defining, refining and naming the themes, before the final write-up in the sixth phase.

The two main themes developed in the analysis are *reflections on the method in use: awakening or checkmating,* and *reflections on present and future practice.*

Researcher position

We adhere to the understanding of IPR as an intersubjective approach in which both interviewer and interviewee are integral partners in a conversational process, focusing on opportunities for shared exploration and reflection (Macaskie et al., 2015). This enables a reflexive co-analysis of the recorded encounter. Self-reflexivity and self-awareness within the researcher position are essential to IPR, and we will revisit this topic in the discussion.

Qualitative research interviews share similarities with therapeutic encounters (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Nelson et al., 2015). Various studies (e.g. Larsen et al., 2008) emphasise the need for professionally trained interviewers to differentiate between IPR as a research interview and an avenue for counselling or guidance. This concern was less pronounced given the first author's educational background in anthropology and lack of professional experience in social work practice. Nonetheless, the IPR interviews still required heightened sensitivity, as professionals occasionally sought advice on addressing communication challenges or navigating complex scenarios. On such occasions, the first author had to ensure the interview's impartiality and prevent unintentional guidance.

While dual roles can challenge boundary-setting within the researcher's position, possessing expertise in client issues and adept questioning, listening, and responding skills can be advantageous for conducting in-depth interviews on professional practice (cf. Larsen et al., 2008). The first author undertook thorough preparation to address the lack of professional expertise. This entailed generating rough transcriptions of the video recordings to become acquainted with conversation dynamics and interactions and being present in three of the video-recorded sessions to gain context insight. Additionally, the first author reviewed the initial two IPR recordings with co-authors who held extensive clinical experience.

Findings

Reflections on the method in use: awakening or checkmating?

1. Being video-recorded

The ten professionals had diverse responses to being recorded, initially expressing discomfort while closely scrutinising their appearance and expressions, as expressed by one social worker (*SW5*): '*Initially, looking at myself, it was horrible. But, beyond discomfort, you discover how you appear in a conversation. It's enlightening, actually*'. The professionals showed keen interest in interpreting their embodied messages, like noting open or dismissive attitudes and their impact on service users. Sensitivity to service users' cues was emphasised, and three participants in particular (*SW1, SW2, SW5*) valued the review of their expressions to refine their practice, such as minimising writing while the service user speaks or adopting a more relaxed posture. All participants had used video recordings during their education and considered them valuable resources for refining their approaches alongside peer guidance and service user feedback.

During recall, two social educators (*SE1, SE4*) mentioned nearly forgetting the camera during recorded sessions. As these two knew their service users very well, these instances reveal a distinct pattern in the data material: close professional-service user relationships seemed to correlate with less discomfort during video recording. In the recruitment process, nine of ten professionals chose service users with whom they were well-acquainted and on friendly terms. Social educators, who mostly met service users at home, generally felt less discomfort than social workers, who met the service users through sporadic office meetings. However, one of the social workers (*SW2*) noted that the camera heightened her attentiveness, leading to a more focused interaction with the service user.

In contrast to the experience of forgetting or becoming more alert due to the camera, some participants were significantly adversely impacted. One social worker (*SW3*) experienced stress, feeling internally pressured to ask insightful questions and bothered by the unstructured conversation. Similarly, one social educator (*SE3*) felt caught off guard, experiencing nervousness, restlessness, and an inability to listen or wait for the service user's lead. This was compounded by limited familiarity with the service user. Camera awareness also prompted two social workers (*SW1, SW4*) to provide more extensive explanations than usual. They attributed this to a desire for clarity, but looking back, they recognised that the camera negatively affected their sensitivity and feared that this could have distressed the service users.

2. Participation in IPR and focus groups: inspiring and awakening

Collectively, professionals acknowledged the project's benefits for their development. They valued the IPR interview approach, especially the possibility of pausing the recording to delve into specific events, countering the inclination to fall into routine during service user meetings. Addressing the risk of 'auto-piloting', recognised as intensifying by years of practice, professionals highlighted the

project's awakening, motivational, and awareness-enhancing impact. Moreover, seasoned professionals believed that their extensive experience aided self-observation in recordings, fostering heightened confidence compared to newly educated professionals. In general consensus, professionals agreed that IPR yielded more comprehensive insights and reflections on practice than would projects solely based on interviews or video observations.

One social educator (*SE5*) was notably enthusiastic and appreciated especially the researcher's focus on aspects she had missed: '*the conversation we had in the aftermath was incredibly interesting when you had observed different elements than I did. Reflecting on oneself this way is kind of … [laughs]. But it's an intense learning experience.*'

In both focus groups, participants discussed the benefits of integrating reflective approaches in practice, agreeing that incorporating such methods at their workplace could have elevated their professional practice. The participants found that the project provided a desired opportunity to reflect on and discuss challenges, specific cases, and established routines. Peer guidance was supposed to aid this process but was frequently disrupted due to resource constraints.

Research participation also elicited emotional responses from some professionals, as expressed by one social worker (*SW5*) in the focus group: '*It feels good to be asked about how difficult conversations affect us. Because no one ever asks – it's always about the service user – but it's crucial to articulate that service user meetings can be challenging for us*'. The social workers emphasised the scarcity of chances to address and navigate the impact on themselves, their expectations, and their professional practice. Working with vulnerable service users in stagnant processes within a system (Nav) that emphasised change and development, they found value in exploring their reactions to complex situations and conversations with service users.

The social educators found the focus group both interesting and inspiring. They used this occasion to share experiences and reflections from various parts of the municipal services. The focus groups also served as platforms for the participants to voice their frustrations experienced in daily practice. Moreover, the focus groups effectively illuminated diverse experiences from participating in the research project, as the professionals explicitly discussed their feelings about being video-recorded and diving deeply into their practices.

3. Potential risks of excessive self-awareness

Despite the overall positive participation experience, challenges and issues emerged. The professionals, accustomed to working in stages and focusing on long-term change, found the in-depth, moment-by-moment focus in IPR demanding. In their typical practice, they would consider events within a broader context and long-term change perspectives. Thus, some experienced difficulties during recall, struggling to separate the video-recorded session from the larger relationship context. Additionally, in anticipation of the upcoming IPR interview, one participant (*SW2*) felt compelled to explore the service user's responses and opinions more deeply, aiming to offer richer insights to the researcher. Similarly, another participant (*SW3*), preoccupied with the upcoming interview and recall, felt pressure to formulate 'adequate' questions.

Professionals generally believed service users were not unduly impacted by the camera and had positive experiences from the video-recorded sessions. This influenced how professionals perceived the sessions as more or less 'typical conversations'. Yet, four of the five social educators, whose video-recorded sessions were at service users' homes, voiced challenges with adjusting to the camera setup, causing reduced activity compared to the typical setting. During recorded meetings, participants and service users were seated, a contrast to the usual encounters, which would include, for example, household activities. As such, the setting was somewhat artificial, which affected the conversation. This points towards the most significant concern shared by all ten professionals: despite their experience of participation as awakening, the camera's presence made them concerned about what they were saying and how. Retrospectively, they worried about possible adverse effects on

vulnerable service users. Consequently, the research method might have introduced artificial elements to the actual sessions and relationships, differing from their 'normal' encounters.

Reflections on present and future practice

As previously mentioned, participants expressed a keen interest in assessing their appearances in the video-recorded sessions and evaluating their potential impact on service users. Many explicitly expressed a desire for self-critical examination of their practice. Throughout the IPR interviews, participants provided numerous critical assessments of their actions and remarks. They analysed how they directed conversations with service users, the content and style of their communication, and the quality of their dialogue. Among the social workers, self-critique centred on their ability to delve deeply into service users' perspectives, challenge stagnation, ensure comfort, and use accessible language. A recurring theme was handling silence. Allowing quiet moments was considered important, offering service users time to speak and respond. Participants also believed that silent intervals could provide service users with valuable training in conversational participation.

The heightened awareness professionals gained from reviewing the recordings included details such as recognising how unnecessary writing or paper shuffling could disrupt conversations or divert attention. Several of the professionals contemplated whether service users might perceive such distractions as disinterest or inattention, potentially leading to reduced engagement or heightened nervousness.

Furthermore, some participants used the IPR interview to shape their future approaches directly. Responding to questions about their decisions, reasoning, and reflections on concrete meetings prompted considerations for addressing distinct challenges. One social educator valued insights into facilitating dialogue around sensitive topics, like food habits and loneliness, as well as the effectiveness of one-on-one conversation: '*I learned the value of sitting down with him and planning our conversation. Often, he avoids these topics. But this time, since we planned it, he seemed more at ease discussing it. I gained valuable insights from that session.*', he remarked. Another social educator (SE1) shared a similar experience during the focus group: '*Just talking things through seemed beneficial for him. So, actually, we've introduced more one-on-one conversations. It appears to be beneficial for him.*' A social worker (*SW4*) highlighted that exploring the recorded session with the researcher provided concrete ideas for collaborating with child welfare services. In summary, the professionals affirmed that the IPR method fostered reflection on current practices and offered inspiration for enhancing future endeavours.

Discussion

Overall, the participating professionals reported positive experiences with the IPR method, highlighting its capacity to observe, explore, and reflect on their practice. The focus groups additionally provided a platform for collective reflection, discussions, and sharing research participation experiences. However, intriguing insights emerged regarding their diverse perceptions of the camera's presence, immersion in concrete practice, and implications for future practice.

Consequently, our discussion unfolds in two parts. Initially, we discuss the potential presented by this unique multi-method approach. Subsequently, we address potential pitfalls linked to utilising this method for studying social work professions. The discussion concludes with considerations of the researcher's role.

Possibilities

The participants perceived the IPR sessions as a unique opportunity to review and delve into their practice in in-situ encounters, encompassing bodily expressions, communication skills, dialogic leadership, and impacts on service users. They believed participating in the study gave them valuable

knowledge for their future practice. This included heightened awareness of their conduct in meetings, steering conversations, effective dialogue leadership, and a clearer understanding of service users' challenges in concrete situations. It also sparked direct inspiration, exemplified by the social worker (*SW5*) aiming to enhance collaboration with child welfare services, and the social educator (*SE4*) gaining new strategies for addressing sensitive topics in service user meetings.

The participants pronounced wish to assess, evaluate and learn from the video-recorded sessions aligns with the essence of critical reflection. This involves employing reflective abilities to retrospectively analyse and learn from past experiences (cf. D'Cruz et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2018; Sheppard, 2000). Coupled with their focus on how both their own practice and the camera impacted service users, their approach corresponds to reflective practice's characteristics – processes involving self-recall and self-articulation and the capability to use these in professional contexts (cf. Ruch, 2005; Watts, 2019; Yip, 2006). Given these skills' emphasis in education and practice, our findings suggest that the social workers and social educators' reflective capacity facilitated their engagement with IPR's emphasis on exploration, recall and reflection (cf. Janusz & Peräkylä, 2021; Macaskie et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the facilitation of the IPR recording seemed to give rise to new ideas for interaction with service users. For instance, social educators (*SE1, SE4)* found one-on-one conversation very beneficial, something they had not used in-depth before. Thus, akin to other studies (e.g. Larsen et al., 2008), our study afforded professionals new insights into their practice, with IPR serving as a productive tool.

The professional further perceived that the multi-method approach not only had the potential to enhance their own practice but also could yield rich data for researchers. This perspective gains support in the findings of Miller Scarnato (2019), who argues that video recordings' capacity to capture both verbal and non-verbal communication gives it an advantage over non-visual qualitative research methods.

The varying impact of the camera on the professionals' experiences could be attributed to their relationships with the service users. The professionals' emphasis on recruiting service users with whom they were on friendly terms underscores the interdependence between them and the service users. While it was important for the professionals to develop good relationships with vulnerable service users (Husabø et al., 2022, 2023), they also required a sense of security in the recording setting.

As prior studies highlight (e.g. Ferguson, 2018; Ruch, 2005), practitioners often lack time and space for personal reflection and analysis. The professionals in our study embraced the reflective time provided by IPR. Moreover, the social workers indicated that, while it was a one-time occurrence, the focus group partially replaced peer guidance and professional supervision they had previously received. Participants valued the opportunities for shared experience, supportive discussions, and collective reflection within these focus groups.

The professionals used their participation to improve their practice and take advantage of a unique opportunity for shared reflection, indicating that the multi-method approach had a broader impact than just 'research itself'. Their proactive engagement resonates with the principles of participatory action research, echoing an action-focused and change-oriented approach to social problems (cf. Miller Scarnato, 2019). This also reflects their reflexive capacities, which involve ongoing self-questioning about their knowledge claims, demonstrating self-awareness and an awareness of their roles (cf. D'Cruz et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2018; Sheppard, 2000). This implies that the application of IPR in research involving social workers and educators, aimed at exploring, analysing, and interpreting aspects of research data, aligns with findings from prior studies on other professions (such as Janusz & Peräkylä, 2021; Macaskie et al., 2015) that underscores the inherent reflective and reflexive potential of the method.

In essence, IPR invites reflection and shared exploration, and the professionals in our studies embraced this opportunity to get the most out of their involvement. Regarding the outcome for the researchers, the combination of IPR and focus group methods facilitated reflective discussions

and joint exploration, providing researchers insights into dimensions of the professional experience that would have remained elusive through standalone interviews, video observations, or focus groups.

Despite initial feelings of nervousness and embarrassment, the participating professionals mostly forgot about the camera and believed that the service users did the same, aligning with the findings of previous IPR studies (Larsen et al., 2008). The experience of one participant (*SW2*), who felt heightened awareness due to the camera's presence, also corresponds with earlier studies indicating the positive impact of cameras in clinical settings (Hutchby et al., 2012). Furthermore, the professionals in our studies perceived a link between their years of work experience and their ability to effectively engage in and benefit from a project that incorporated video recordings and interview sessions focused on exploration and reflection. Given that our studies involved only participants with more than five years of experience, we lack data to determine whether those with less experience would benefit less. However, in line with the emphasis placed on reflective practice (cf. Ruch, 2005; Yip, 2006) and practice knowledge within the social work domain (e.g. Trevithick, 2008), it is plausible that seasoned practitioners are better positioned than their less experienced colleagues to partake in such projects.

An intriguing finding is that the professionals not only welcomed the reflective and reflexive method in general but also perceived it as a valuable resource for experienced practitioners. Thus, substantial experience was considered beneficial both for applying the methodology and achieving positive results.

Pitfalls

As argued, having a good and trusting relationship with the service user appeared to contribute to a positive experience of the recorded session. This was highlighted notably by one participant (*SE3*), who lacked familiarity with the service user. This and other minor disturbances experienced by the professionals, along with the question of whether they might create inconvenience for the service users, were of immediate concern to the professionals. While we have argued that the professionals' adeptness in employing reflection and reflexivity rendered them well-prepared and suited for research participation, it is crucial to acknowledge that having critical approaches to one's own practice can also yield adverse outcomes. Yip (2006) emphasises that self-reflection – given appropriate conditions such as sufficient time, a supportive organisational context, and personal resources – can help social workers improve their personal and professional development.

Conversely, under unfavourable conditions like heavy workloads and time constraints, social workers' individualistic approach to self-reflection can be detrimental to their professional and personal growth (Yip, 2006). The participating professionals in our project explicitly expressed that they wanted to have a critical approach towards their practice, with a specific focus on recognising areas for improvement. Notably, two participants (*SE3, SW2*) appeared particularly engaged in consistently addressing their own weaknesses and limitations.

As we have seen, IPR's focus on a specific interaction moment coupled with current reflections on the recording is regarded as a strength of this approach (Janusz & Peräkylä, 2021). Larsen et al. (2008) argue that video recording participants in a single session and subsequently interviewing them about it is less intrusive to the therapeutic process and is thus more ethically responsible than conducting multiple sessions throughout therapy. However, our findings suggest potential disadvantages to the one-session approach. Although participants demonstrated the capacity for both reflection on their immediate practice and more general reflection, social work practice can – akin to reflexivity – be understood as processes of interactions (D'Cruz et al., 2007; Payne, 2014). The challenge voiced by participating professionals regarding differentiating between the single session and their overall relationship with service users illustrates the difficulty of isolating one encounter from a series of events, essentially isolating it from the broader 'social work process'. Similarly, the professionals found it demanding to concentrate solely on experiences from a single session during

the focus groups, as their discussions often encompassed their overarching experience within their comprehensive practice.

Hence, we advocate for caution. As highlighted by Larsen et al. (2008), researchers must debrief with participants at the end of IPR interviews to ensure they do not experience excessive distress due to their participation. However, we contend that when a research design focuses solely on one session, researchers lack the chance to ensure appropriate conditions for the participating professionals to engage in self-reflection. The professionals' call for supervision, coupled with the time constraints in practice (Herland, 2022; Husabø et al., 2022), indicates the possibility of inadequate conditions for some participants. To mitigate the risk of participants excessively analysing and evaluating their shortcomings (cf. Yip, 2006), potentially leading to adverse effects rather than professional growth, we recommend that forthcoming IPR research designs incorporate multiple meeting points. Ideally, these would occur both before and after the IPR session. In our studies, we organised an information meeting before data development and assured participants they could contact us at any point during the research process. Moreover, while the focus groups proved valuable in enabling the professionals to reflect on their research participation, they did not provide an opportunity for individual debriefing.

Role of the researcher

Ideally, reflection, reflexivity, and critical thinking are integral to practice (Askeland & Fook, 2009; Yip, 2006). Similarly, reflexivity is a valuable tool for researchers to engage in critical self-awareness throughout the research process (Probst, 2015; Råheim et al., 2016). Without venturing into an extensive discussion of reflexivity's multiplex nature (cf. Field et al., 2022; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Probst, 2015), we concur that reflexivity is vital in documenting how research knowledge is generated.

The fact that the participants did not view the research project as intended to test skills or knowledge may relate to the first author's lack of professional experience. Besides reducing the risk of blurring the boundary between research interviews and counselling sessions, this lack of professional experience also led to a dual asymmetry in the interviews wherein the researcher had a 'superior' position in terms of planning and leading the project, while the professionals had a 'superior' position in terms of professional knowledge (cf. Råheim et al., 2016). This element of 'studying-up', whereby the participants had expert knowledge about their professional practice, may have reduced the potential threat from an expert outsider. This may add to our understanding of why the professionals did not seem especially worried about their own participation.

Recent IPR approaches have helped create a mutually constructed experience (Macaskie et al., 2015). This intersubjective element may also contribute to the asymmetry and shift the power dynamics between researcher and participants towards greater equality. As video recordings enables researchers to tease out with the participants how they experience the research conversation (Macaskie et al., 2015), it can challenge the researchers' perceptions and interpretations. The dynamic interplay between researcher and participant in the research interview requires mutual respect, recognition, and trust (Larsen et al., 2008; Macaskie et al., 2015). This resembles the interdependence observed between professionals and service users in our studies, as good and trusting relationships with service users appeared to positively affect professionals' stress levels and coping ability during their video-recorded sessions. As in the IPR interviews, the shifts in the knowing and not-knowing positions between the researchers and the professionals (cf. Råheim et al., 2016) added to the interactive dynamics of the focus groups, increasing the focus groups' inherent opportunities to shift the balance of power towards greater equality (Wilkinson, 1999).

Concluding remarks

The present study aimed to investigate how ten social workers and social educators perceived participation in studies that combined IPR and focus group research methods. IPR's emphasis on

extensive recall, reflection, and collaborative exploration aligned with the professionals' wishes and capacities for in-depth exploration and reflection on their own practice. They appreciated the opportunity to observe, explore and reflect during IPR sessions, as well as to engage in more profound discussion within the focus groups. These findings support previous research emphasising IPR's value in capturing nuanced aspects of professional experience during interactions between professionals and clients.

Furthermore, a key aim of this article was to explore an underutilised multi-method within the realm of social welfare professions. We believe that with further refinement, IPR holds the potential to provide new understandings in this research domain. Additionally, the method can contribute to increased utilisation of video data in qualitative social work research.

The study, however, does identify certain challenges associated with IPR. Unlike previous IPR studies within the counselling and psychotherapy professions, our findings indicate that the prevalent one-session approach in IPR can pose difficulties for professionals who conceptualise their work as ongoing processes of change. For these professionals, reflecting upon isolated moments from a single session might curtail their learning potential. Another concern relates to the possibility that research participation could initiate intense reflective processes without researchers having the opportunity to ensure conducive conditions for self-reflection, such as adequate time and resources for professional supervision. At worst, this may disrupt participants' professional development and growth. In our multi-method design, the subsequent focus group partially mitigated this concern. Alongside sharing experiences and reflections from search participation, the focus groups provided a platform for discussing and reflecting on practice in general. Taken together, we recommend that future studies offer participants more opportunities for debriefing and guidance.

Moreover, we take seriously the professionals' concerns about recruiting service users capable of comprehending the implications of participating in IPR recordings. We also emphasise the importance of ensuring that participation does not lead to adverse consequences for the service users. Although our study's findings indicate the usefulness of this methodology for social welfare professions, we urge caution regarding the inclusion of vulnerable service users. Our research involving social educators working with individuals with intellectual disabilities underscores the necessity of taking particular care planning for the context and framing of recordings, prioritising the safety of participants, and adhering to ethical and responsible research principles.

While the existing literature on using IPR significantly enriches our understanding of in-depth interviewing and reflexive approaches, it primarily involves researchers who are also professionally trained counsellors or therapists. While we acknowledge the advantages of adept professional insiders participating in qualitative, in-depth research closely tied to practice, we also welcome further explorations into the possibilities, benefits, and challenges of utilising the IPR methodology from an outsider perspective.

Note

1. The Norwegian title 'social educator' is sometimes translated into English as 'learning disability nurse'

Disclosure statement

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