

Introduction

- Simulation-based education is an evolving area within allied health curricula, utilised to enhance students' clinical skills and professional development.
- A formal simulation framework was recently introduced in the School of Allied Health (SAH) at the University of Limerick (UL) to guide the implementation of simulation across healthcare programmes in Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Speech and Language Therapy.
- A simulation framework provides structured guidance for planning, delivering, facilitating and evaluation to improve consistency, learner engagement, and educational effectiveness ⁽¹⁾.
- While much of the simulation-based education literature focuses on fidelity or learning outcomes, there is a notable gap in research examining the implementation and evaluation of simulation frameworks at an institutional level ⁽²⁾.
- The aim of this research is to explore how simulation-based education is structured and delivered across the allied healthcare professions in UL, and to evaluate the implementation of the SAH simulation framework across programmes and how this framework supports simulation-based education.

Methods

- Mixed-methods study using a two-stage design: Stage 1 involved a Qualtrics surveys with SAH academic/practice education staff (n=22), and national/international simulation experts (n=6), exploring experiences of simulation framework implementation.
- Stage 2 involved two focus groups with SAH staff (n=8), and semi-structured interviews with national/international experts (n=4), conducted via Microsoft Teams. Sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and pseudonymised.
- Qualitative data from surveys, focus groups, and interviews were analysed with NVivo using reflective thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach ⁽³⁾.

Results

An in-depth exploration of the themes during analysis revealed that simulation-based learning is broadly adopted across programmes, irrespective of the use of a formalised simulation framework. Staff valued the debriefing element of the framework and viewed simulation-based education as having a positive impact on students' learning.

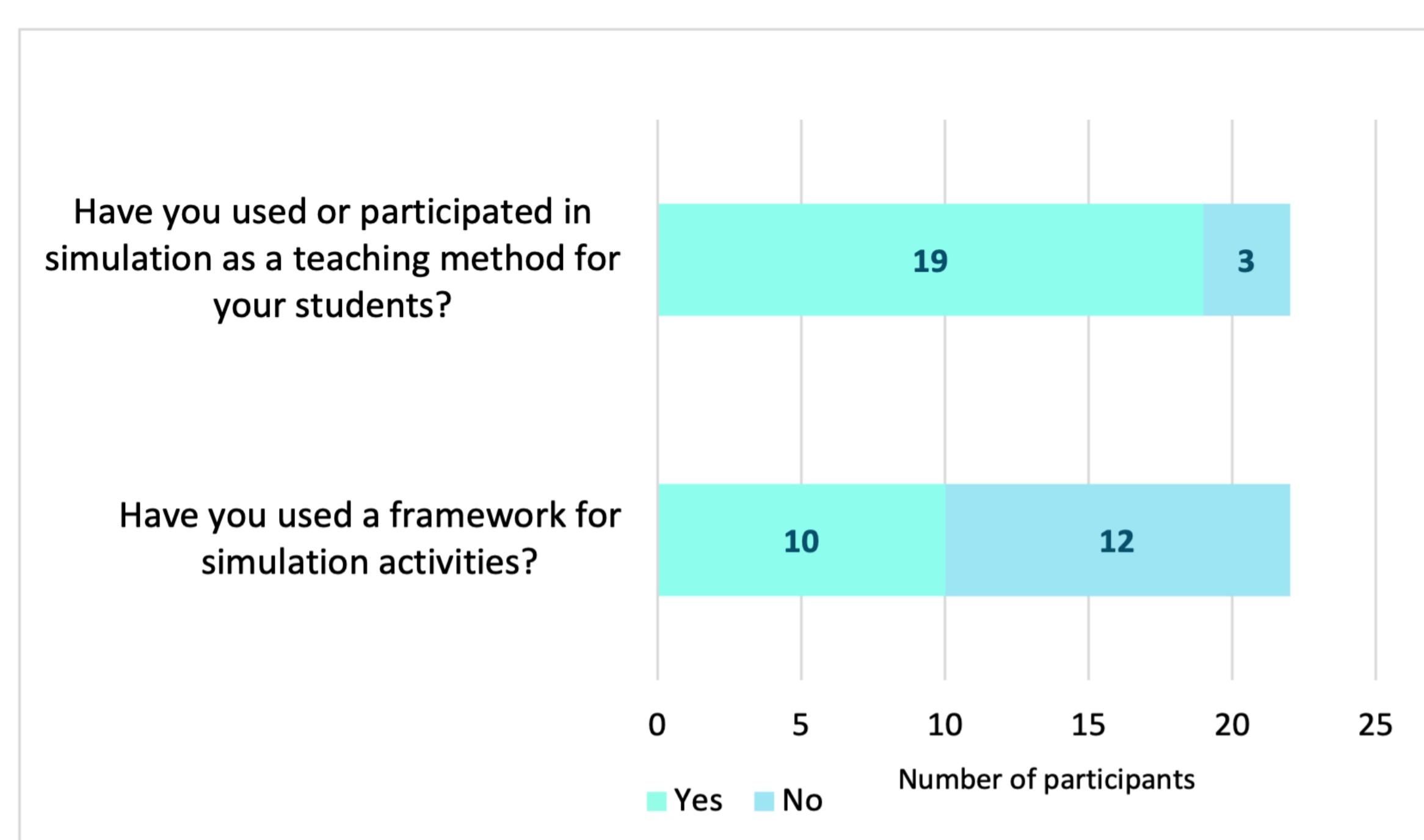


Figure 1. SAH Staff Use of Simulation-Based Teaching Methods and Frameworks.

"The placement bit is going to become an issue in the next 5-10 years. If you look at Australia, there are just no placements for health professionals...they had to go to simulation as a way of having placement hours...This might be one that forces our hand in terms of simulation".

"The huge skill that we see developed and often times taking a leap forward through simulation is communication"

Figure 2. Examples of excerpts from participants.

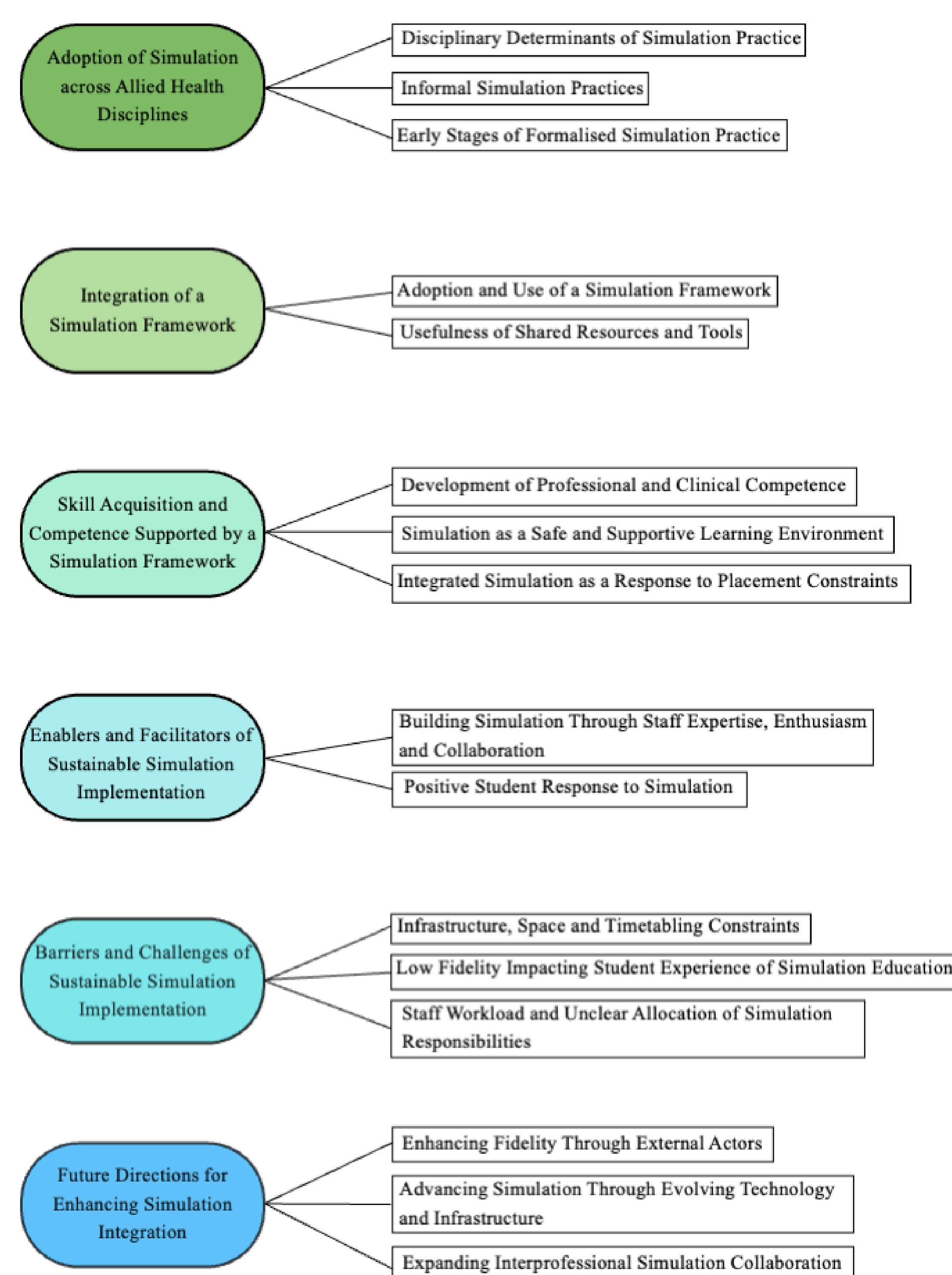


Figure 3. Primary themes and corresponding sub-themes derived from focus groups and interviews.

Conclusion

This study offers a new and nuanced insight into the early stages of implementing a formalised simulation framework in the context of an allied healthcare education environment where simulation is less advanced than in nursing and medical faculties.

The identification and understanding of both structural and relational factors that affect framework implementation may aid strategic planning and inform future institutional investment in simulation infrastructure, protected workload allocation for staff, and designated simulation coordinator roles to support consistent adoption.

This can further advance simulation practices, preserving the sustainability of simulation in allied healthcare education moving forward.

(1)INACSL, Watts, P.I., McDermott, D.S., Alinier, G., Charnetski, M., Ludlow, J., Horsley, E., Meakim, C. and Nawathe, P.A. (2021) 'Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice Simulation Design', Clinical Simulation in Nursing, 58, 14–21. (2)Pogson, R., Henderson, H., Holland, M., Sumera, A., Sumera, K. and Webster, C.A. (2023) 'Determining current approaches to the evaluation of the quality of healthcare simulation-based education provision: a scoping review', MedEdPublish (2016), 13, 207. (3)Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021) 'One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in reflexive thematic analysis?', Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18(3), 328–352. The authors would like to thank all of the participants, both nationally and internationally, who contributed to this study.