

# Learning Question 2:

# What are the most engaging and effective ways to improve youth workers' mental health literacy?

## Root Causes

Below are some of the potential root causes of the identified problems. We highlight these to set expectations, as the proposed interventions will not resolve these root causes. This perspective encourages funders, practitioners, and the wider system to view interventions within their systemic contexts, recognising them as part of a broader effort for change rather than isolated solutions (Ghate, 2018).

### Social determinants of adolescent mental health

The social or wider determinants of health are terms used within the public health literature to describe how a range of social factors in an individual's life and environment affect their overall health and wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2022; Compton and Shim, 2020). Factors may include, economic stability, education, home and community environments, and access to health care (Compton and Shim, 2020 and 2015).

### Nature of the work and organisational factors

The root cause of burnout in many people- focused service work is the emotional demands of the job. In particular, the repeated use of empathy and the requirement to regulate emotions. Organisational factors - such as high caseloads, lack of control, unfair structures, and insufficient support - exacerbate this strain, which can make burnout more likely (Mor Barak, Nissly and Levin, 2001; Maslach and Leiter, 2016).

## Problem

### Increase demand for wellbeing and mental health support for CYP

There is a lack of access to specialised mental health support due to high CAMHS waiting lists (NHS England, 2023). This has led to an increased demand for youth workers to support young people experiencing poor wellbeing and mental health challenges (Children's Commissioner for England, 2024).

### Youth workers do not always feel equipped to support CYP in complex and challenging situations

Youth worker's roles in supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is changing more rapidly than youth workers can upskill and adapt for (Young Minds and UK Youth, 2021). This leads to youth workers navigating situations that are potentially beyond the scope of their skills and expertise (e.g., online harms, see Catch 22, 2023).

### Youth workers experience burnout from vicarious trauma

Youth workers experience vicarious trauma and job related stress (Newell and MacNeil, 2010). The support around them may be insufficient given the scale/complexity of the challenges they are facing. Youth workers with lived experience of an issue may be further impacted when supporting young people who face the similar challenges or discrimination they have experienced. This could be around class, ethnicity, religion, disability, or experience of a mental health challenge itself.

