

England Innovation Project

Signs of Safety

Staff Surveys

Technical Report

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Contents

1 Background to the Staff Survey	4
1.1 Data collection dates and response rates	4
Table 1.1 Survey data collection times, number of respondents and response rate	4
1.2 Changes to the survey	5
Table 1.2 Consistent questions across all four surveys.	6
1.2.2 Direct work or managers	6
1.2.3 Training.....	7
1.2.4 Usage and confidence	7
2 Methodology and Scope	8
2.1 Measures and splits.....	8
2.2 The safety attitudes questionnaire domains, survey 3 and 4.	8
Table 2.1 Safety attitudes questionnaire domains.....	8
2.3 Analysis and Presentation	9
3 Results	10
3.1 Training	10
Figure 3.1 Number of Signs of Safety training event.....	10
3.2 Usage of and confidence with Signs of Safety Tools	10
Figure 3.2 Usage of signs of safety tools	11
Figure 3.3 Confidence in using Signs of Safety tools	12
3.3 The Safety Attitudes Questionnaire domains and individual questions responses	13
3.3.1 Team climate	13
Figure 3.4 Overall team climate domain	13
Figure 3.5 Individual team climate questions	14
3.3.2 Safety Climate	15
Figure 3.6 Overall safety climate domain.....	15

Figure 3.7 Individual safety climate questions	16
3.3.3 Perceptions of Management.....	17
Figure 3.8 Overall perceptions of management domain.....	17
Figure 3.9 Individual perceptions of management questions	18
3.3.4 Job Satisfaction.....	19
Figure 3.10 Overall job satisfaction domain.....	19
Figure 3.11 Individual job satisfaction questions	20
3.3.5 Working Conditions.....	21
Figure 3.12 Overall working conditions domain.....	21
Figure 3.13 Individual working conditions questions	22
3.3.6 Stress recognition.....	23
Figure 3.14 Overall stress recognition domain.....	23
Figure 3.15 Individual stress recognition questions	24
3.4 Remaining comparable questions.....	25
Figure 3.16 Comparable questions.....	25

1 Background to the Staff Survey

1.1 Data collection dates and response rates

As part of the evidence base to understand the work environment and staff experience during the implementation of Signs of Safety, staff across the 11 local authorities (10 in any one survey wave, with one dropping out after wave 2 and being replaced) were asked to respond to four surveys, spaced roughly every year. No identifying or contact information was asked at any point during these surveys therefore longitudinal analysis assessing within respondent change is not possible, and all the work presented here is based on repeated cross-sectional data. These surveys were conducted as part of an action research approach and as such they were adjusted and refined throughout the project.

Table 1.1 shows the first and last response in each area in each wave, along with the number of respondents and the response rates (when known). In the first wave surveys, 3 areas were surveyed as part of a pilot with data collected from 9th December 2014 to the 6th January 2015, roughly a month before the other areas. From survey 2 onwards data were collected at approximately the same time across all the Local Authorities.

One area withdrew from survey data collection to be replaced by Area A. The survey responses from this area are however included in the analysis due to the comparability of their engagement with Signs of Safety until their point of withdrawal.

Table 1.1 Survey data collection times, number of respondents and response rate

Area	Survey 1		Survey 2		Survey 3		Survey 4	
	First/last survey	Responses and rate	First/last survey	Responses and rate	First/last survey	Responses and rate	First/last survey	Responses and rate
A	No survey		No survey		01 Dec 17 15 Dec 17	161 (58%)	16 Sep 19 08 Oct 19	87 (39%)
B	20 Jan 15 20 Feb 15	127 (28%)	05 Jan 16 09 Feb 16	160 (52%)	08 Jan 18 02 Feb 18	126 (64%)	17 Sep 19 27 Sep 19	32 (13%)
C	09 Dec 14 30 Dec 14	108 (45%)	18 Dec 15 18 Feb 16	142 (46%)	10 Jan 18 02 Feb 18	161 (47%)	02 Sep 19 24 Sep 19	224 (45%)
D	21 Jan 15 20 Feb 15	70 (N/A)	25 Jan 16 12 Feb 16	114 (69%)	09 Jan 18 24 Jan 18	79 (43%)	10 Jun 19 28 Jun 19	134 (74%)
E	09 Dec 14 22 Dec 14	141 (38%)	17 Dec 15 03 Feb 16	164 (52%)	08 Jan 18 26 Jan 18	158 (47%)	16 Sep 19 10 Oct 19	123 (22%)

F	22 Jan 15	61 (N/A)	22 Dec 15	110 (65%)	11 Jan 18	96 (24%)	02 Jul 19	100 (41%)
	06 Feb 15		23 Feb 16		02 Feb 18		23 Jul 19	
G	06 Feb 15	44 (N/A)	17 Dec 15	138 (46%)	08 Jan 18	37 (N/A)	17 Sep 19	26 (13%)
	18 Feb 15		16 Feb 16		27 Jan 18		25 Sep 19	
H	15 Jan 15	115 (33%)	16 Dec 15	127 (62%)	08 Jan 18	77 (38%)	No survey	
	13 Feb 15		18 Feb 16		30 Jan 18			
J	23 Jan 15	190 (65%)	16 Dec 15	53 (69%)	09 Jan 18	70 (64%)	No survey	
	13 Feb 15		09 Feb 16		05 Feb 18			
K	15 Jan 15	337 (56%)	17 Dec 15	363 (56%)	08 Jan 18	169 (34%)	07 Oct 19	207 (30%)
	13 Feb 15		11 Feb 16		02 Feb 18		03 Nov 19	
Not assigned	09 Dec 14	72 (N/A)	18 Dec 15	157 (N/A)	No survey		No survey	
	06 Jan 15		17 Feb 16					
Total		1265		1528		1134		933

1.2 Changes to the survey

Although the broad three-part outline of the survey (namely: staff characteristics, usage and confidence with the Signs of Safety tools; staff attitudes towards dimensions of the work environment; and open-ended questions to allow the workforce to feedback their opinions and their worries) stayed the same through the data collection sweeps, there were some significant changes to the exact specifics of what was collected.

The most prominent of these was the adoption of the safety attitudes questionnaire (SAQ) measures in the third and fourth survey waves. This was a significant and meaningful adaptation and allowed the findings from the third wave onwards to be placed onto a more evidence-based and cross-disciplinary footing than the initial survey items that were deployed (the first 2 waves of data collection were built on a safety management framework but the questions used did not align with the wider field). The exact questions asked in each in of wave 1 to 2 can be found in appendix A, with those asked in wave 3 and 4 in Table 2.1. Eight questions were asked in all surveys (or questions that have been deemed similar enough to allow comparisons) and these can be seen in Table 1.2 and are reported against in sections 3.3.5 and 3.4. All of the questions relating to working conditions were asked across all surveys, and this is where there is a slight departure from the complete SAQ seen in other investigations, with these changes made to reflect the specific needs of the project.

Table 1.2 Consistent questions across all four surveys.

Dimension	Survey 1 and 2 question text	Survey 3 and 4 question text
Working Conditions	I do not feel able to spend enough time in direct work with the family	I do not feel able to spend enough time in direct work with the family.
Working Conditions	In our team and Children's Social Care generally we have a strong culture of sharing the responsibility for risk and decision-making	In our team and agency we have a strong culture of sharing the responsibility for risk and decision-making.
Working Conditions	My team is organised so that we spend planned time on critical reflection of cases	My team is organised so that we spend planned time on critical reflection of cases.
Working Conditions	Manager or specialist involvement in case decisions encourages a sense of shared risk	Manager or specialist involvement in case decisions encourages a sense of shared risk.
Working Conditions	Management usually assumes that a person who makes a mistake is incompetent or not conscientious	Management usually assumes that a person who makes a mistake is incompetent or not conscientious.
Working Conditions	I think pressure to achieve performance targets takes precedence over time spent with the family	I think pressure to achieve performance targets takes precedence over time spent with the family.
Team climate	It is easy for staff in my team to ask questions when there is something they do not understand	If I have a problem during the course of my work it is easy to find an appropriate person to discuss it with.
Safety Climate	In my team when my opinion on a case differs from others I find it difficult to speak up	When my opinion on a case differs from others I find it difficult to speak up.

Beyond the changes to the attitudinal section of the survey, there were some smaller but nevertheless still important adjustments that made.

1.2.2 Direct work or managers

In the pilot survey there was no question as to whether the respondent worked directly with children and families or was a manager, whereas in the remaining areas a question asked if the respondent worked “directly with children, young people, families or other groups (such as foster carers)” or not. By the 2nd survey this varied slightly to ask whether the respondent work role primarily concerned direction work or was more managerial¹ and this method was retained until the final survey. Although this split has been reported against in the survey-by- survey analysis it will not be used in this report.

¹ “Direct work with children, young people, families or other groups (e.g. foster carers)” or “Managerial, or other senior position with limited or no direct work with children, young people, or families”

1.2.3 Training

The wording and routing of the questions about training received changed. In the first survey there was no time limit put on when the training had occurred, in the second survey, however, the question specified “in the last three months”, before this condition was dropped again in the third and fourth surveys. Further, in the third wave, respondents were not allowed to move to the next question without giving a valid response. Although the types of training that were asked remained broadly the same across the surveys, in the fourth, respondents were asked as to whether they had been on a “2 days basic training with an internal trainer” for the first time.

Overall, the lack of specificity to the time frame in which the training should have occurred and problems with recall as to the exact training events that had been undertaken, which by the 4th survey could be up to 4 years ago, mean that the data quality of this part of the survey is poor when combined into one dataset and therefore no results will be presented that focus on the specific training types.

1.2.4 Usage and confidence

In general, all respondents were asked about their usage and confidence in the Signs of Safety tools, the only exception being in the 2nd survey where managers were not asked specifically about each tool, instead asked to freely identify which parts of the Signs of Safety they had used the most and to enter some open text as to their opinions about them. The impact of these changes on the final dataset is minimal.

2 Methodology and Scope

2.1 Measures and splits

This technical report focuses solely on the quantitative aspect of the survey and reports against a limited set of metrics:

1. The average number of training events reported
2. The usage of each Signs of Safety tool
3. The confidence levels with each tool
4. The relative levels of response across the SAQ domains
5. The individual questions across the survey waves from the SAQ
6. The two individual questions listed in table 2 that were adjudged to be broadly comparable

Local Authorities are divided into three groups: good progress (listed as Group 1), some progress (Group 2), and poor progress or deterioration (Group 3). This is based on Ofsted ratings and is used as the basis for the presentation of results.

2.2 The safety attitudes questionnaire domains, survey 3 and 4.

The SAQ questions group into 6 dimensions as detailed in Table 2.1 and were responded to on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These were answers were combined using a simple summative scale, once negatively phrased responses were accounted for, with the result being standardised. As such these measures have no meaningful scale of their own and any results presented on this basis should be read relative to others presented alongside them. Question text was varied slightly if the question was asked of direct workers or managerial staff, with the word “team” being replaced by “Local Authority”

Table 2.1 Safety attitudes questionnaire domains

Dimension	Question text
Team climate	It is easy for staff in my team/Local Authority to ask questions when there is something they do not understand
	I have the support I need from other staff to do my work
	In my team/Local Authority it is difficult to speak up if I perceive a problem in the service provided to a family
Safety Climate	Disagreements in my team/Local Authority are resolved appropriately (i.e. not who is right but what is best for the family / families)
	The culture in my team/Local Authority makes it easy to learn from the difficulties in practice that others have experienced
	I know the proper channels to direct questions regarding any child safety concerns I may have

	<p>In my team/Local Authority when my opinion on a case differs from others I find it difficult to speak up</p> <p>I receive appropriate feedback on my performance</p> <p>I would feel safe if I or a family member were to receive a service from my team</p> <p>In my team/Local Authority it is difficult to discuss poor practice</p>
Perceptions of Management	<p>Senior managers do not knowingly compromise the safety of children</p> <p>The local authority's administration supports my daily efforts</p> <p>I am provided with adequate timely information about events in the authority that might affect my work</p> <p>The levels of staffing in my team/Local Authority are sufficient to handle the number of cases</p>
Job Satisfaction	<p>This team/Local Authority is a good place to work</p> <p>I am proud to work for my area office</p> <p>Working here is like being part of a large family</p> <p>Morale in my team/Local Authority is high</p> <p>I like my job</p>
Working Conditions	<p>I do not feel able to spend enough time in direct work with the family – ASKED ONLY OF DIRECT WORKERS</p> <p>In our team and Children's Social Care generally we have a strong culture of sharing the responsibility for risk and decision-making</p> <p>My team/Local Authority is organised so that we spend planned time on critical reflection of cases</p> <p>Manager or specialist involvement in case decisions encourages a sense of shared risk</p> <p>Management usually assumes that a person who makes a mistake is incompetent or not conscientious</p> <p>I think pressure to achieve performance targets takes precedence over time spent with the family</p>
Stress recognition	<p>When my workload becomes excessive, my performance is impaired</p> <p>I am more likely to practice badly in tense or hostile situations</p> <p>Fatigue impairs my practice during emergency situations</p> <p>I am less effective at work when fatigued</p>

2.3 Analysis and Presentation

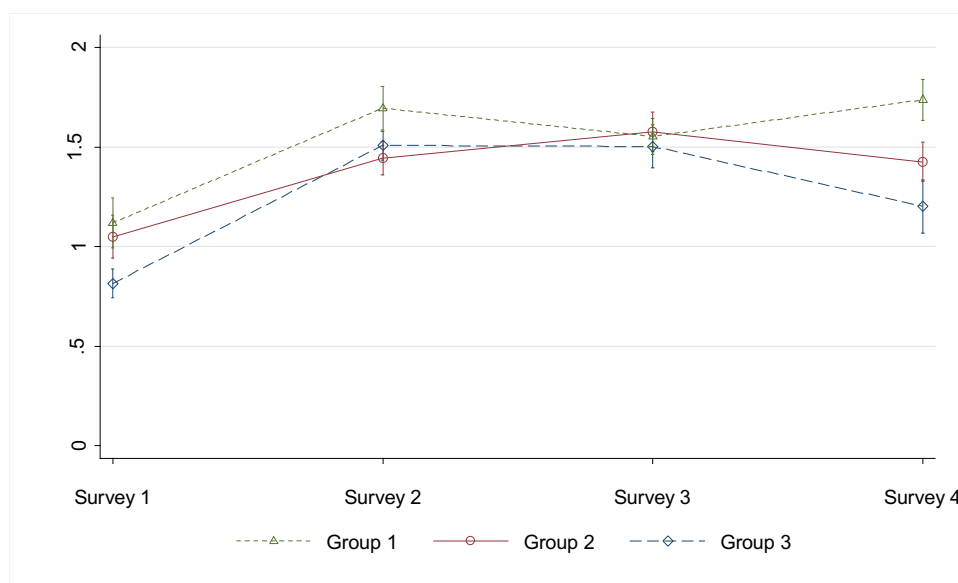
Results are presented in a standardised graphical format across each of the analysed metrics and present the mean average response at each data collection time point along with their 95% confidence intervals, with each wave being considered to have happened at the same time for each Local Authority, despite the variation shown in Table 1.1. In the analysis of presented in the SAQ analysis, trends are presented across the waves as opposed to precise identification of levels at data collection sweep.

3 Results

3.1 Training

The most marked increase in the number of training events was between the first survey and second, with either marginal or no increase in the amount of training for each staff member between survey 2 and 3 and for Group 2 and Group 3 respondents, falls into the 4th survey. Group 1 employees had experienced most training, on average, in each survey wave. However the issues with the training questions noted in section 1.2.3 mean these results should be treated with caution.

Figure 3.1 Number of Signs of Safety training event



3.2 Usage of and confidence with Signs of Safety Tools

There is remarkable consistency in the usage rates across all 9 Signs of Safety tools (figure 3.2), with Group 1 respondents more likely to use each at a survey wave (with some minor exceptions). Interestingly usage seems to drop off across all areas and all tools in the 4th survey wave, possibly representing an effect of a different cohort of respondents or a real effect.

Confidence, in figure 3.3., is again broadly consistent across tools and groups, and there is scope for improvement in the confidence with each tool. There are some variations in levels of confidence between tools, which are clearly shown on the charts.

Figure 3.2 Usage of signs of safety tools

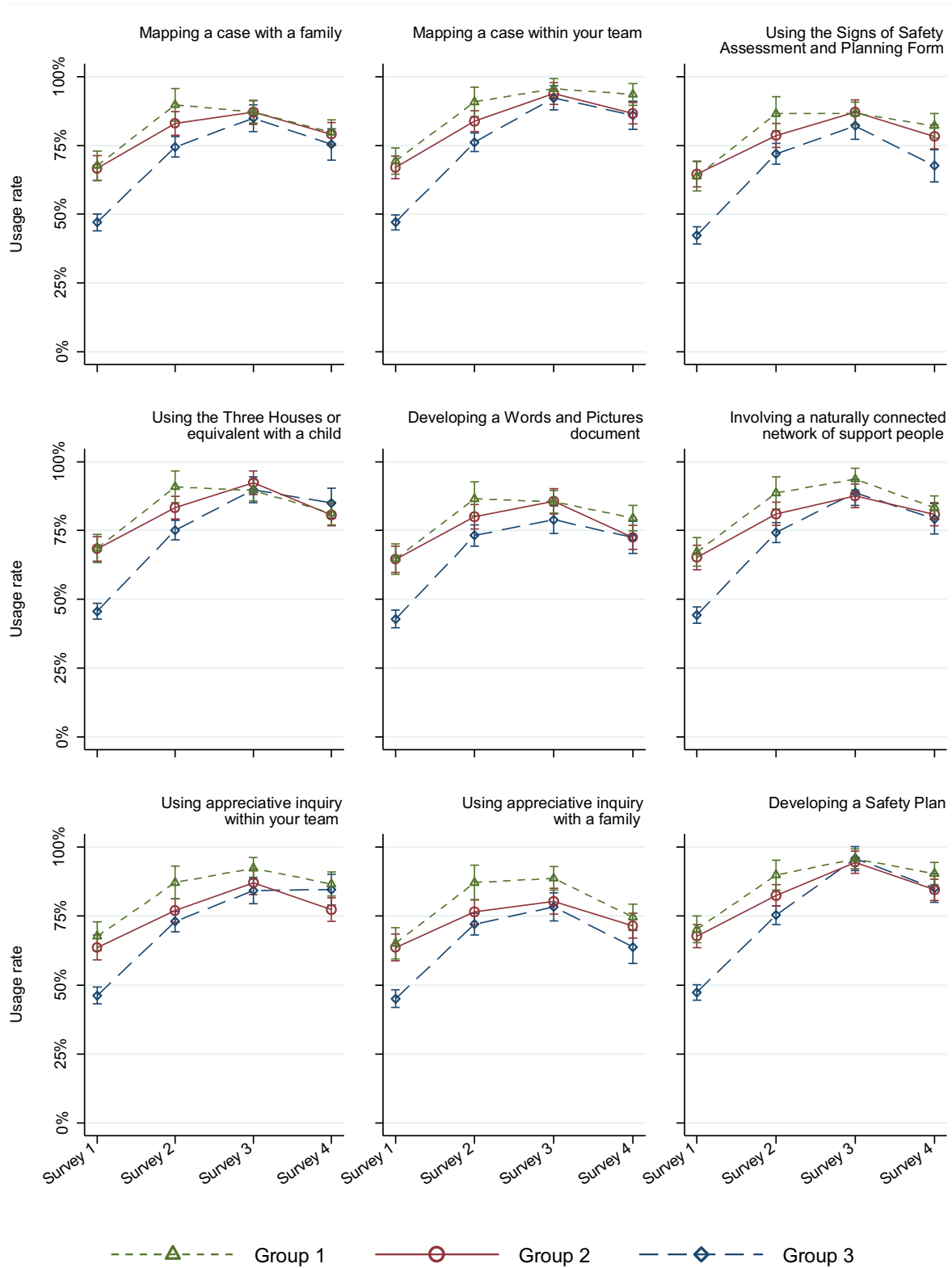
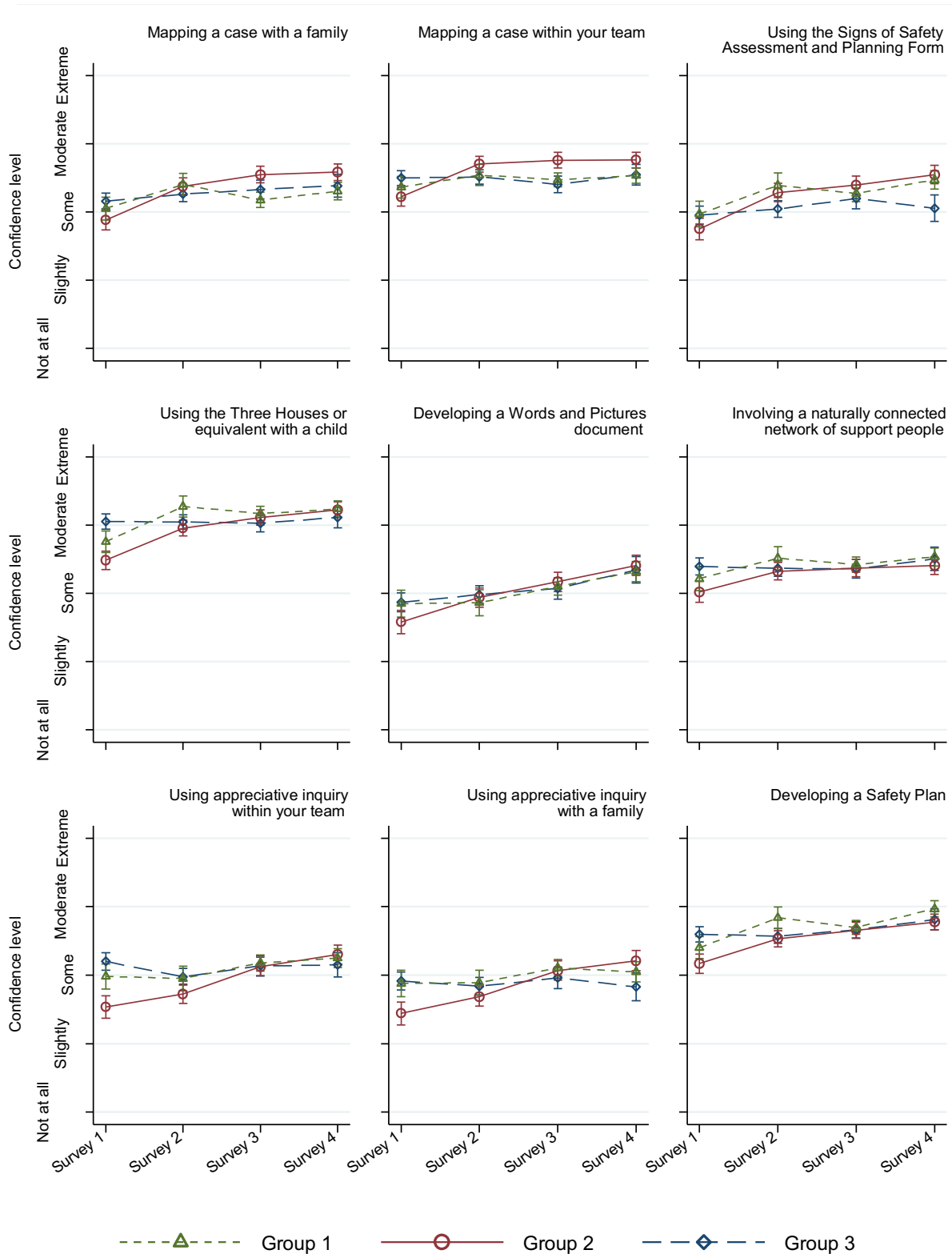


Figure 3.3 Confidence in using Signs of Safety tools

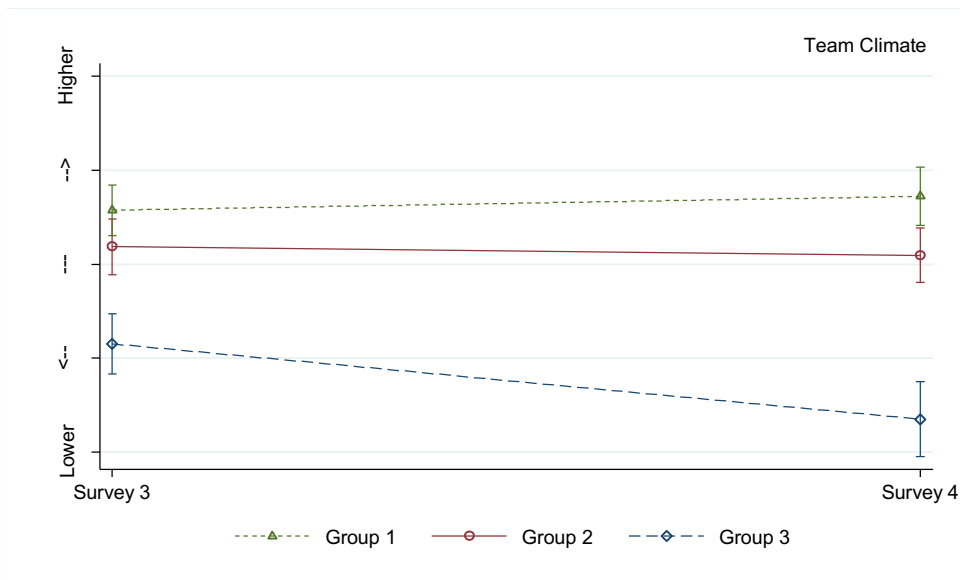


3.3 The Safety Attitudes Questionnaire domains and individual questions responses

3.3.1 Team climate

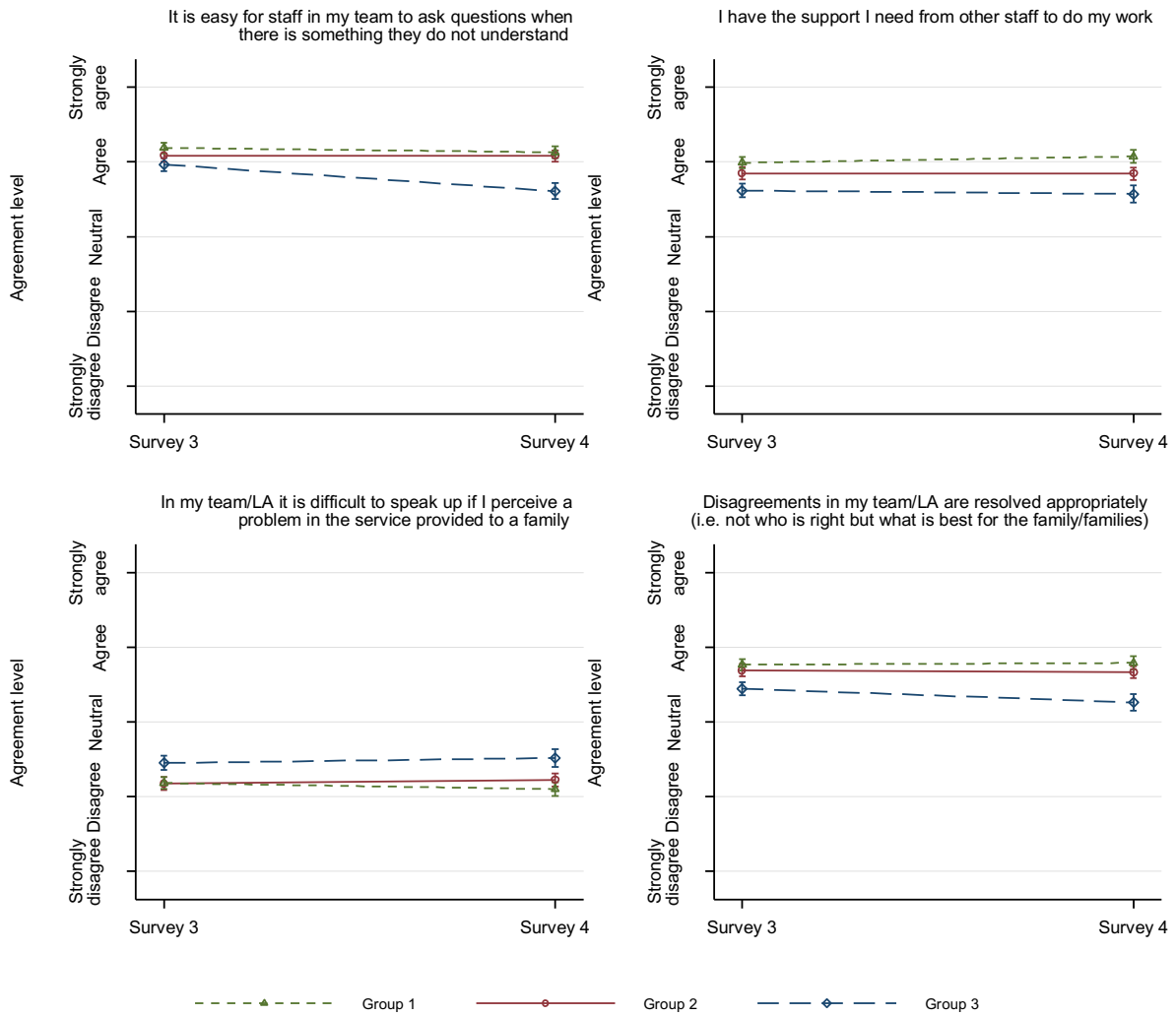
Figure 3.4 shows that team climate reported by respondents between the 3rd and 4th survey waves was broadly comparable for Group 1 (good progress) and Group 2 (some progress) Local Authorities, whereas Group 3 (no progress or deterioration) Local Authorities had lower levels at the 3rd survey, and these had got worse by survey 4.

Figure 3.4 Overall team climate domain



The individual questions in figure 3.5 show that this pattern is repeated across all 4 constituent parts of the overall measure, with a generally consistent pattern all across all questions.

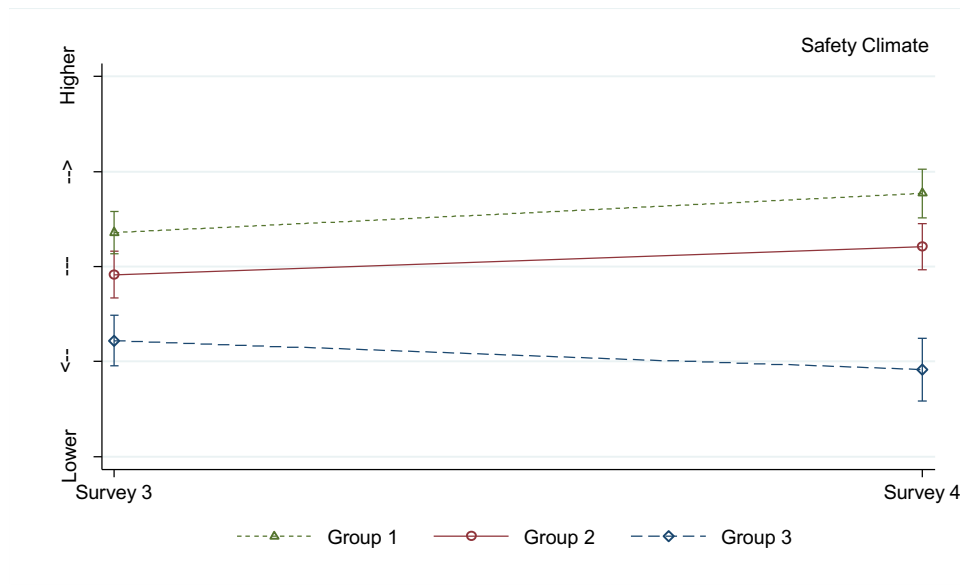
Figure 3.5 Individual team climate questions



3.3.2 Safety Climate

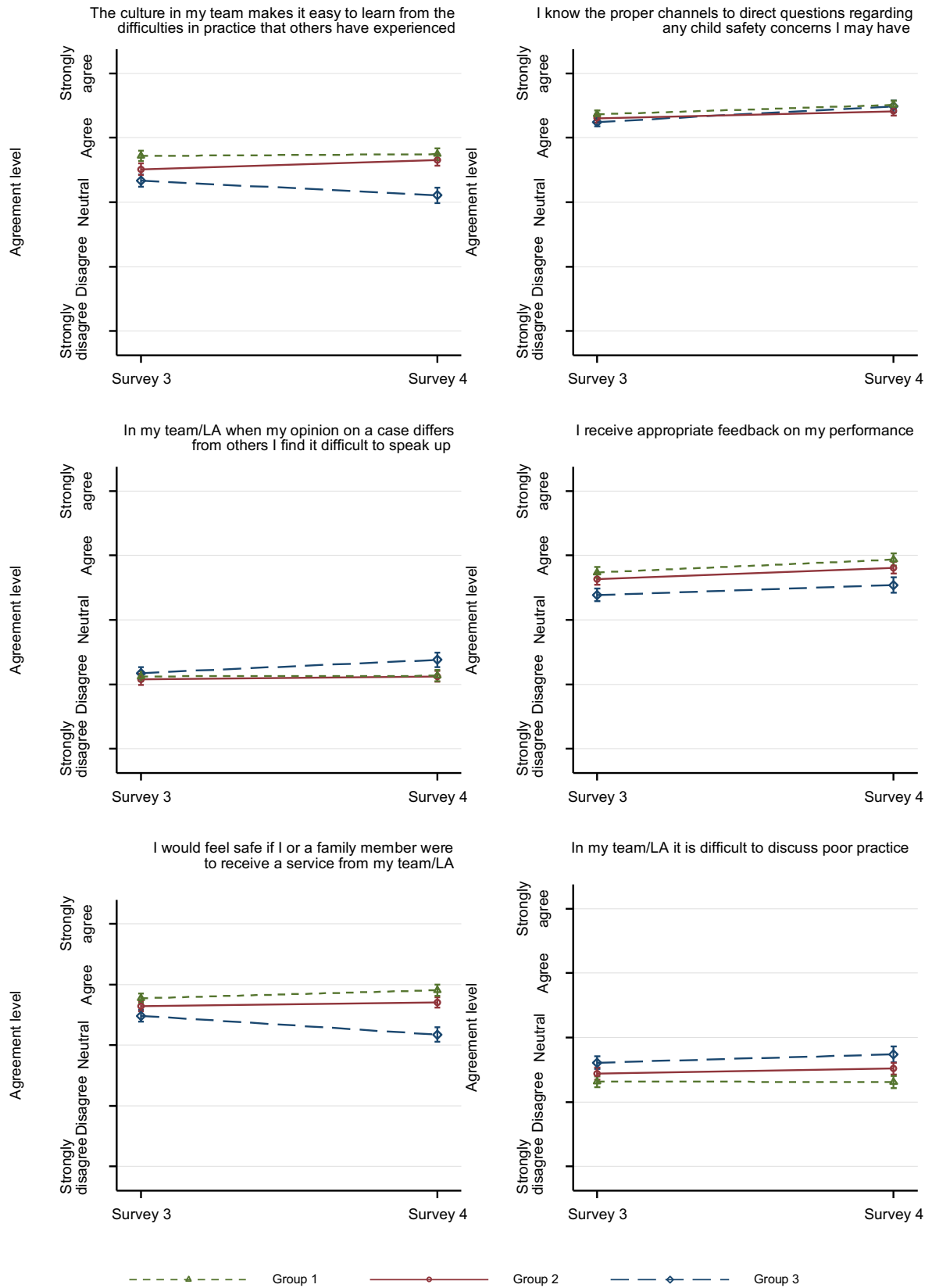
As with team climate, Group 3 local authorities show deterioration in terms of safety, with Group 1 and Group 2 local authorities showing small improvements – Group 1 starting at the highest position and increasing most.

Figure 3.6 Overall safety climate domain



When looking at the individual questions, in figure 3.7, there are some slight differences. Staff in all areas agreed or strongly agreed that they knew the proper channels for questions about child safety, and all areas showed similar increases. The direction of improvement was similar when it came to discussing poor practice and receiving appropriate feedback – albeit with Group 1 ahead of Group 2 who were in turn ahead of Group 3. The divergence apparent in the overall domain is mainly found in the questions about culture and learning from difficulties and whether respondents would feel safe if a family member were to draw on the services provided.

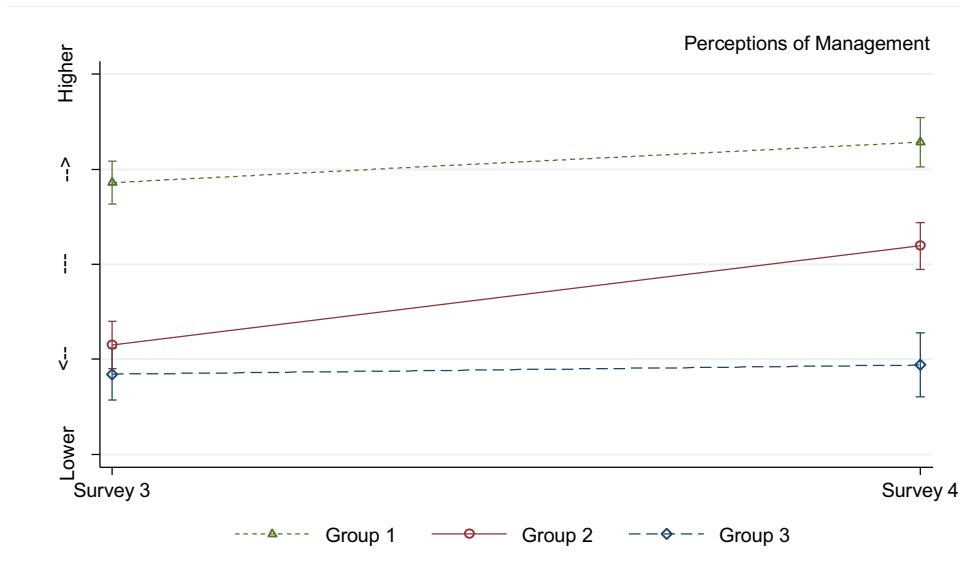
Figure 3.7 Individual safety climate questions



3.3.3 Perceptions of Management

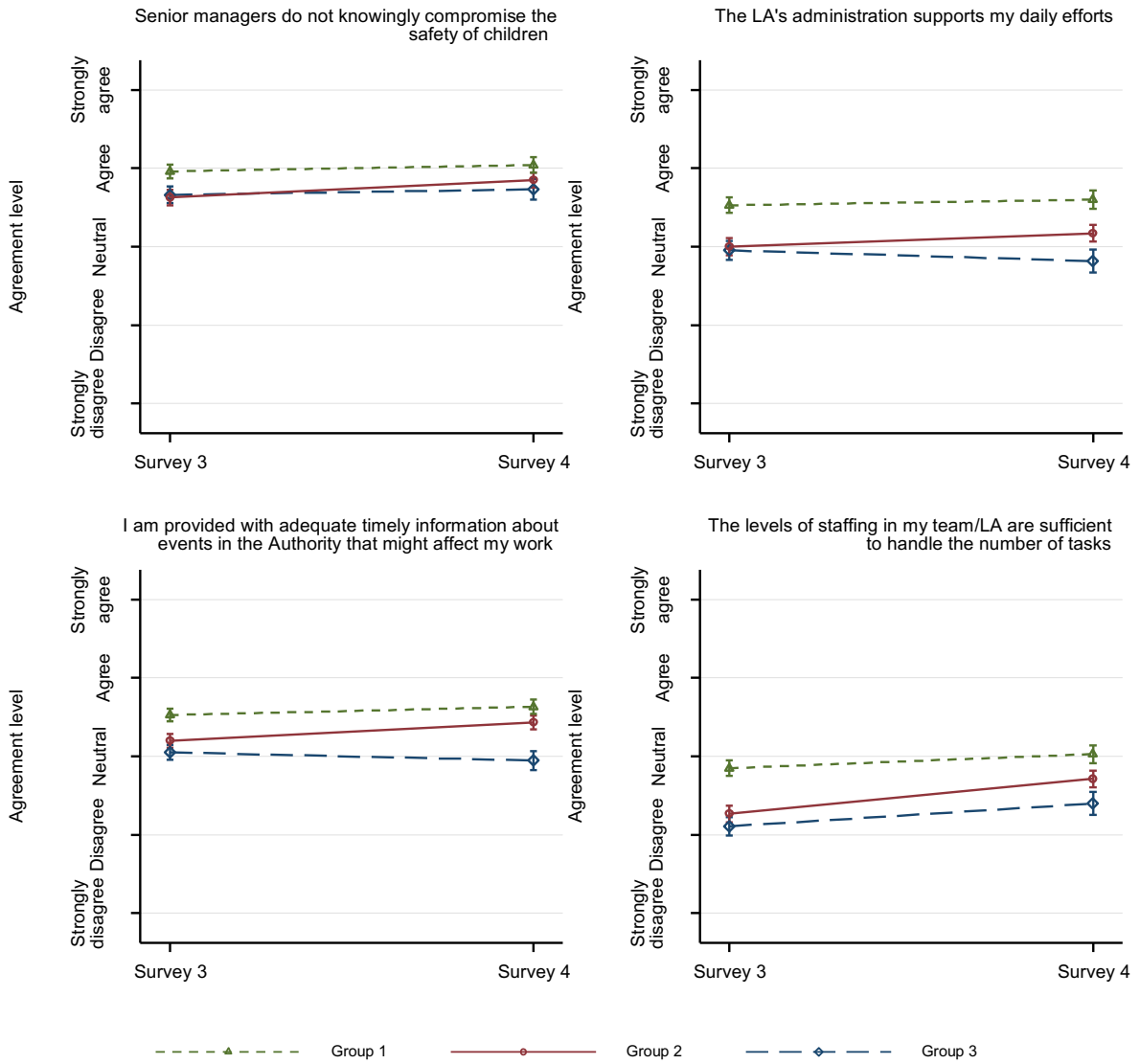
Perceptions of management varied significantly by local authority classification. Group 1 areas started at high point had a minor increase; the Group 2 local authorities moved from having low perceptions of management and increased their level substantially; Group 3 areas demonstrated very little change.

Figure 3.8 Overall perceptions of management domain



The overall pattern was broadly reflected, with minor differences, in all of the individual questions with no one question bucking the trend. Inspection of figure 3.9 shows that staffing levels were generally thought to be too low, all areas reported greater satisfaction in the 4th survey, whereas views about LA administration and the amount of information provided increase in Group 1 and Group 2, but decreased in Group 3.

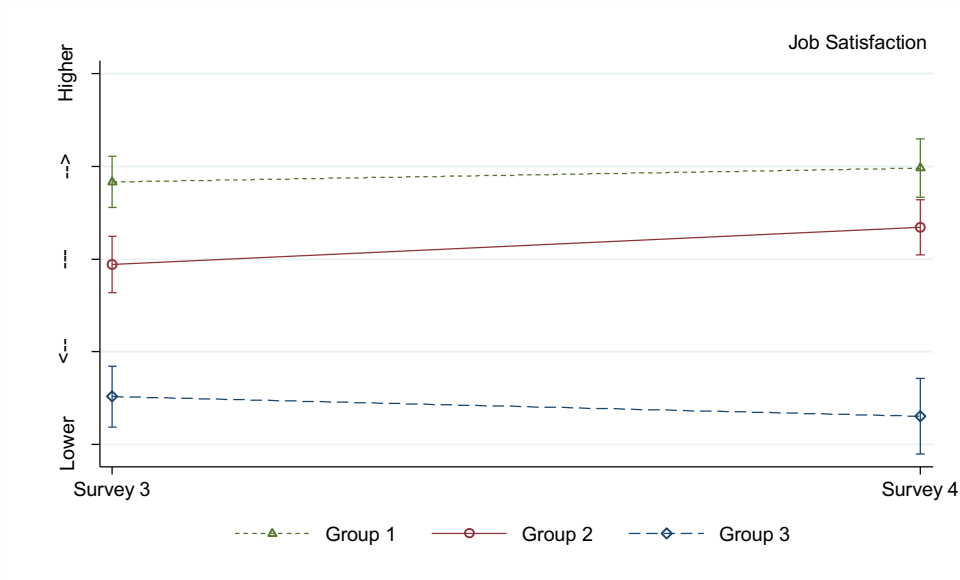
Figure 3.9 Individual perceptions of management questions



3.3.4 Job Satisfaction

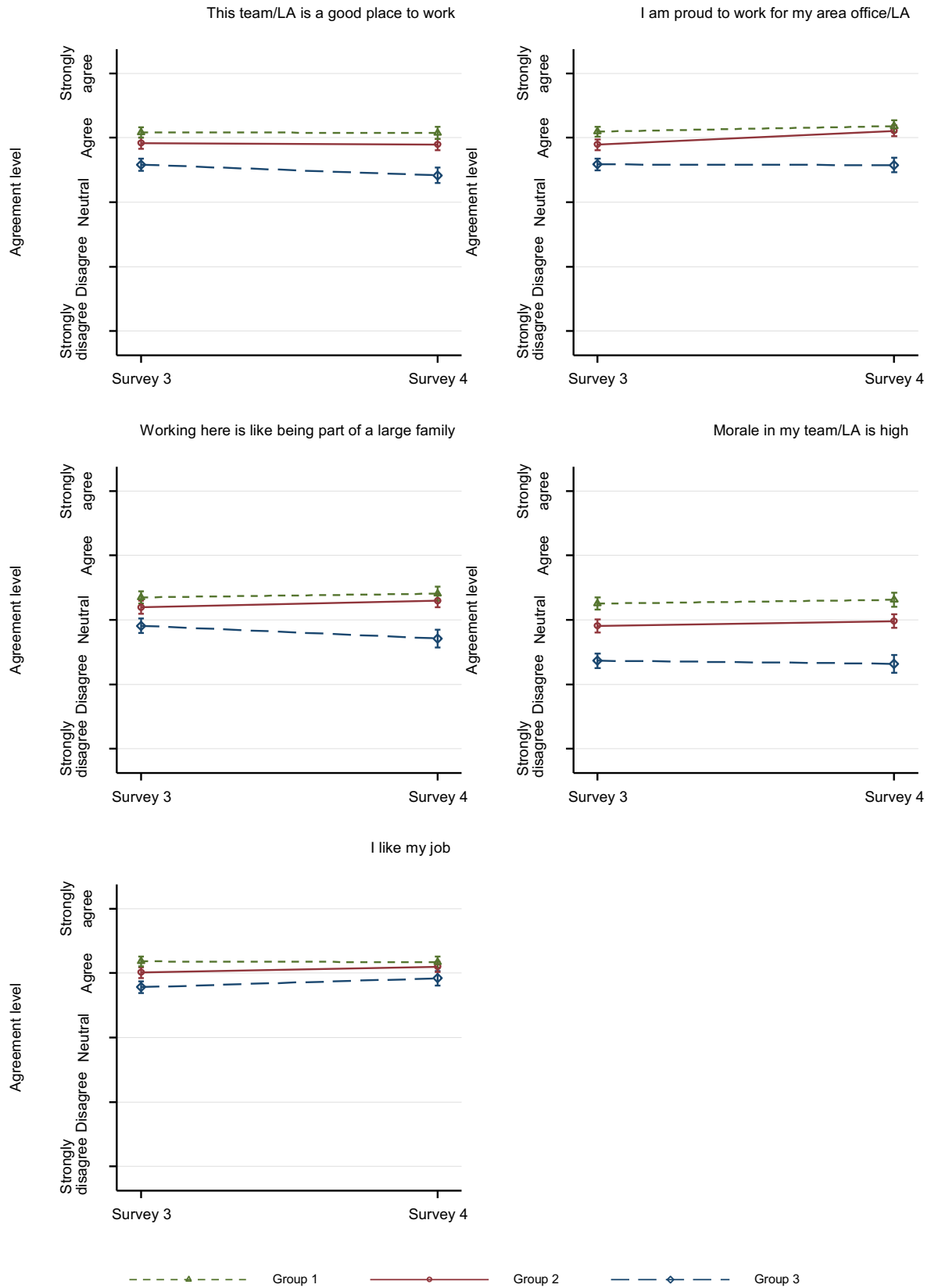
Job satisfaction was significantly better in Group 1 and Group 2 than in Group 3, with group 2 increasing their level and Group 3 slightly decreasing between the data collection points.

Figure 3.10 Overall job satisfaction domain



The biggest difference in the individual questions was on the morale question, where Group 3 were substantially lower than Group 2, who were behind Group 1. Interestingly, there was a high level of agreement across all 3 groups of local authorities to the question as to whether respondents liked their job.

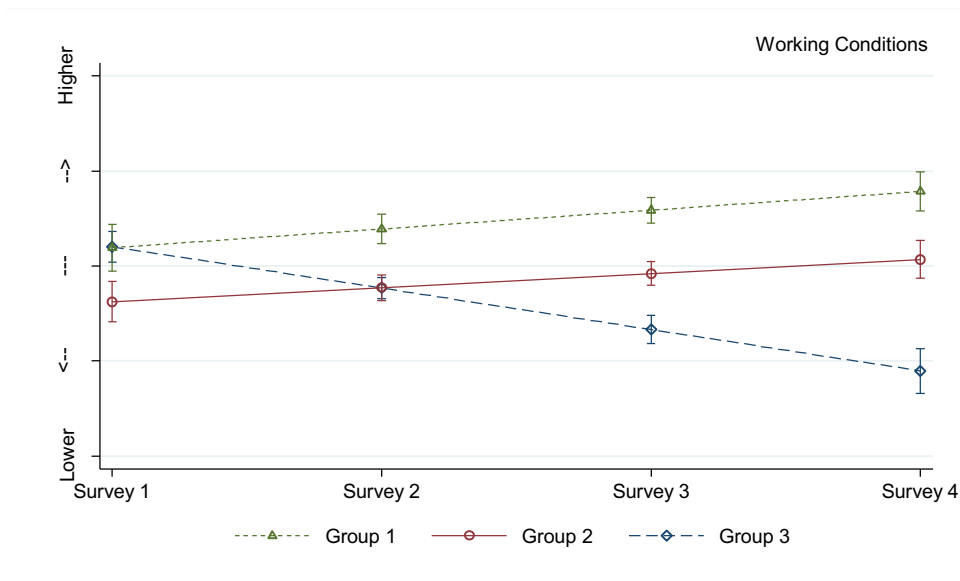
Figure 3.11 Individual job satisfaction questions



3.3.5 Working Conditions

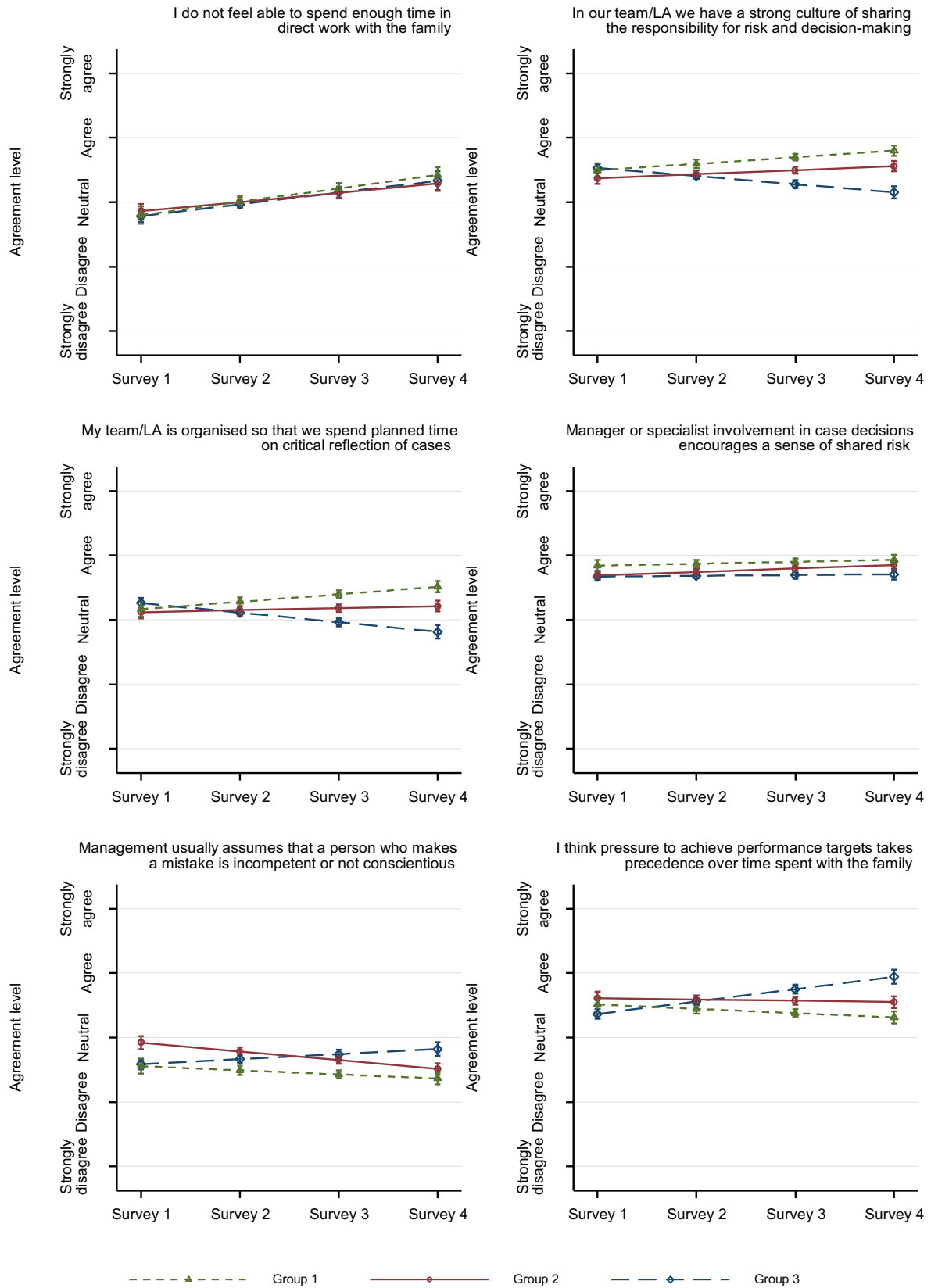
Questions around working conditions were consistent across all 4 surveys and therefore it is possible to report changes over all 4 survey waves. The differences between the 3 groups of LAs are stark. Group 1, started at a comparable level to Group 3, with increases over the 4 waves of data collection, whereas Group 3 Local Authorities show a substantial decrease. Group 2 areas had comparable increase as Group 1, but from a lower base.

Figure 3.12 Overall working conditions domain



There are differences within the individual questions. There is a remarkable consistency between all 3 groups when asked about being able to spend time in direct work, with all types of area more likely to agree in the 4th survey wave than the first. Similarly there is comparability between the responses about shared risk. The overall pattern of divergence between Group 3 Local Authorities and the other Local Authorities is therefore driven by the remaining questions in this domain.

Figure 3.13 Individual working conditions questions



3.3.6 Stress recognition

At first glance it appears that stress recognition goes against the trend of the other 5 domains, with Group 3 – which up until this point seem to have been the poorest performing Local Authorities - showing the greatest increases, followed by Group 2 and Group 1- usually the group with the most positive results - at the lower end and with minimal changes in this domain between survey wave 3 and 4.

However, inspection of the individual questions in figure 3.15 shows there is some ambiguity as to how one would wish them to be answered in a well-functioning organisation. For example "I am less effective at work when fatigued" - would it be preferable for people to feel free to agree to that, showing that the organisation is more open to concerns? Or not to be fatigued, and therefore not agree as it would be irrelevant to them? The same logic applies to each question.

Figure 3.14 Overall stress recognition domain

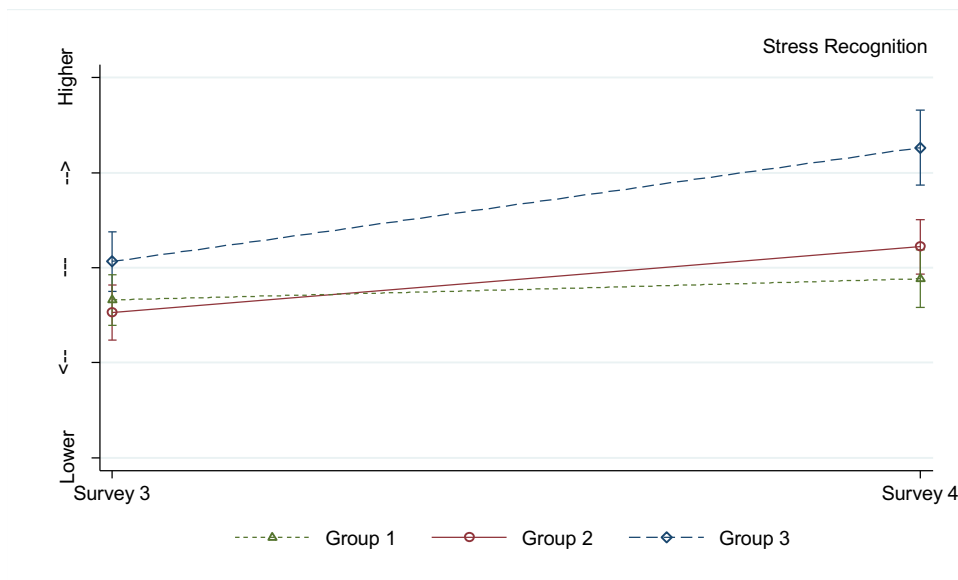
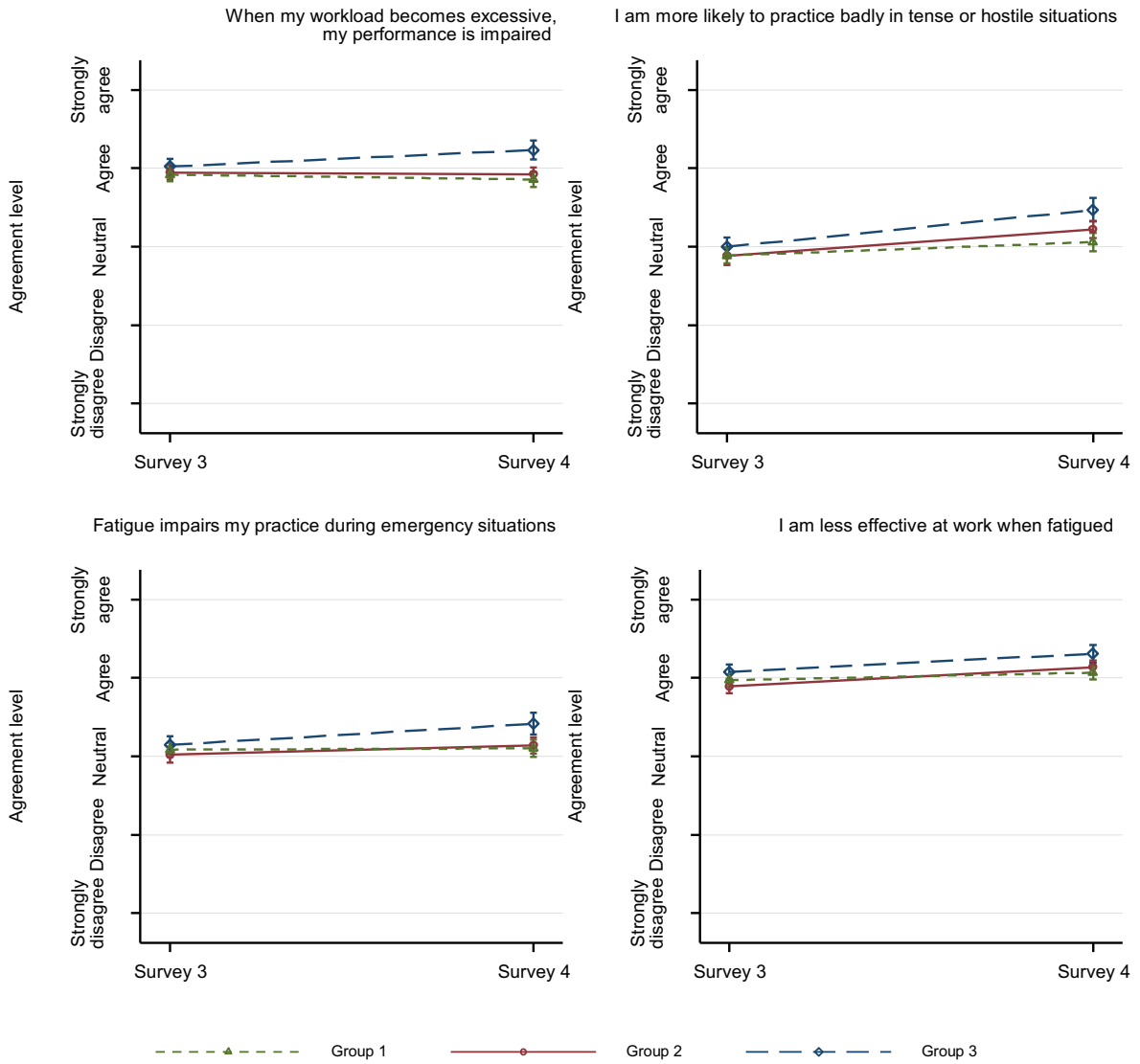


Figure 3.15 Individual stress recognition questions



3.4 Remaining comparable questions

The questions charted in Figure 3.16 were deemed broadly comparable and are presented for completeness. Good and some progress areas have comparable levels which are moving in a positive direction, and are more positive than poor areas, which are moving in a negative direction.

Figure 3.16 Comparable questions

