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Empowering Supporters of Vulnerable Households Experiencing Sudden Bereavement Through the Potential Applications of Digital Technology and AI

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Overview

- Household Vulnerability
  - Financial Vulnerability
  - Food Insecurity
  - Digital Poverty
- Bereavement
- Digital Technologies and AI
- Supporting Parties (SPs)
- Research Design
- Progress and Call to Action

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Household and Financial Vulnerability

The complexities of vulnerability mean that it cannot be defined singularly.

Major factors related to household vulnerability in the United Kingdom include economic, housing, energy, and food insecurity.

"3.8 million people (1 million of them children) experienced destitution, the most severe form of hardship, at some point in 2022… unable to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed" (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023).

In 2023, 29% of adults reported being unable to meet the demand of an unplanned expenditure of more than eight hundred and fifty pounds (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

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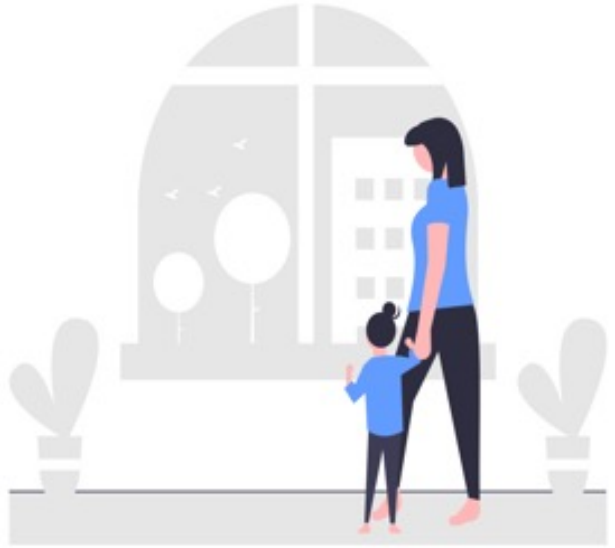
Food insecurity

- In 2022, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) showed that food was the essential item that destitute individuals most went without (61%), followed by heating (59%), clothes (57%), and toiletries (51%), light (35%), shelter (14%).
- Recent years have seen a significant increase in food banks and food parcel distribution (Boyle and Power, 2023).



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Digital poverty

- Direct interventions enabled by digital technology are potentially undermined due to digital poverty which is still widespread among the UK population.
- As of 2021, 1.7 million households had no broadband or mobile internet access.
- 2.4 million adults were unable to complete a single basic task to get online (House of Lords, 2023).

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Bereavement

- Life events such as bereavement can temporarily heighten individual and household vulnerability and exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities.
- Support is usually needed to help escape the fog of grief (Baglione et al., 2018) and recover to a state of sustainable wellbeing.

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Empowering Supporting Parties (SPs)

- Within the context of this research, those who assist vulnerable ones through bereavement are referred to as Supporting Parties (SPs).
- Taking widespread digital poverty into consideration, this research aims to lay the foundations for empowering those who support grieving households.
- Vulnerable individuals and households would therefore still be able to benefit from digital technologies (including AI) as indirect beneficiaries even if they are experiencing digital poverty.

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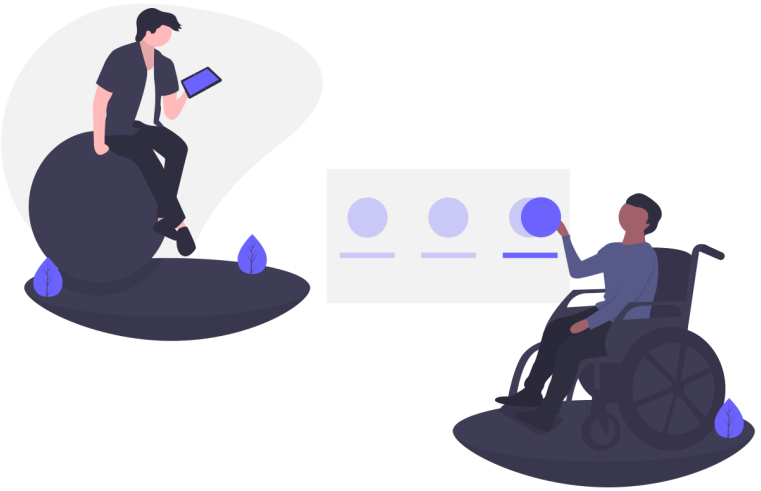
Supporting Parties

The following list of potential SPs has been constructed based on an initial literature review and authorial expertise, each with varying degrees of proximity to and interaction with vulnerable individuals and potentially with other SPs.

- Family
- Friends
- Food Banks
- Schools
- Charities
- Counsellors
- Faith based groups
- Funeral directors
- Local authorities
- Utility companies
- Insurance companies
- Solicitors
- Banks



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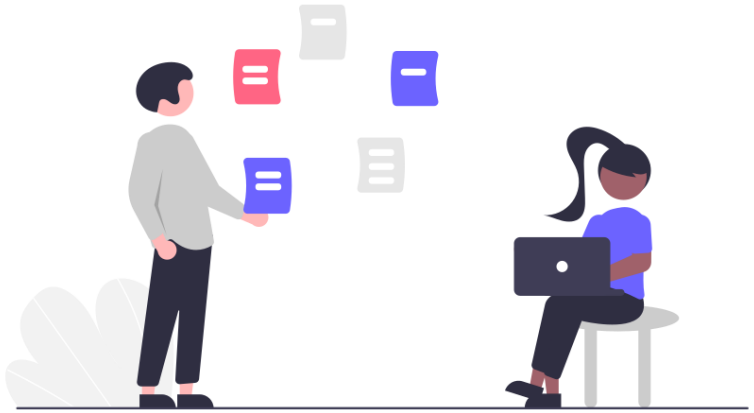
Digital Technologies and AI

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a broad term
- Ethical considerations
- There is limited literature that investigates the supportive potential that digital technology and AI could provide at the intersection of household vulnerability and bereavement.



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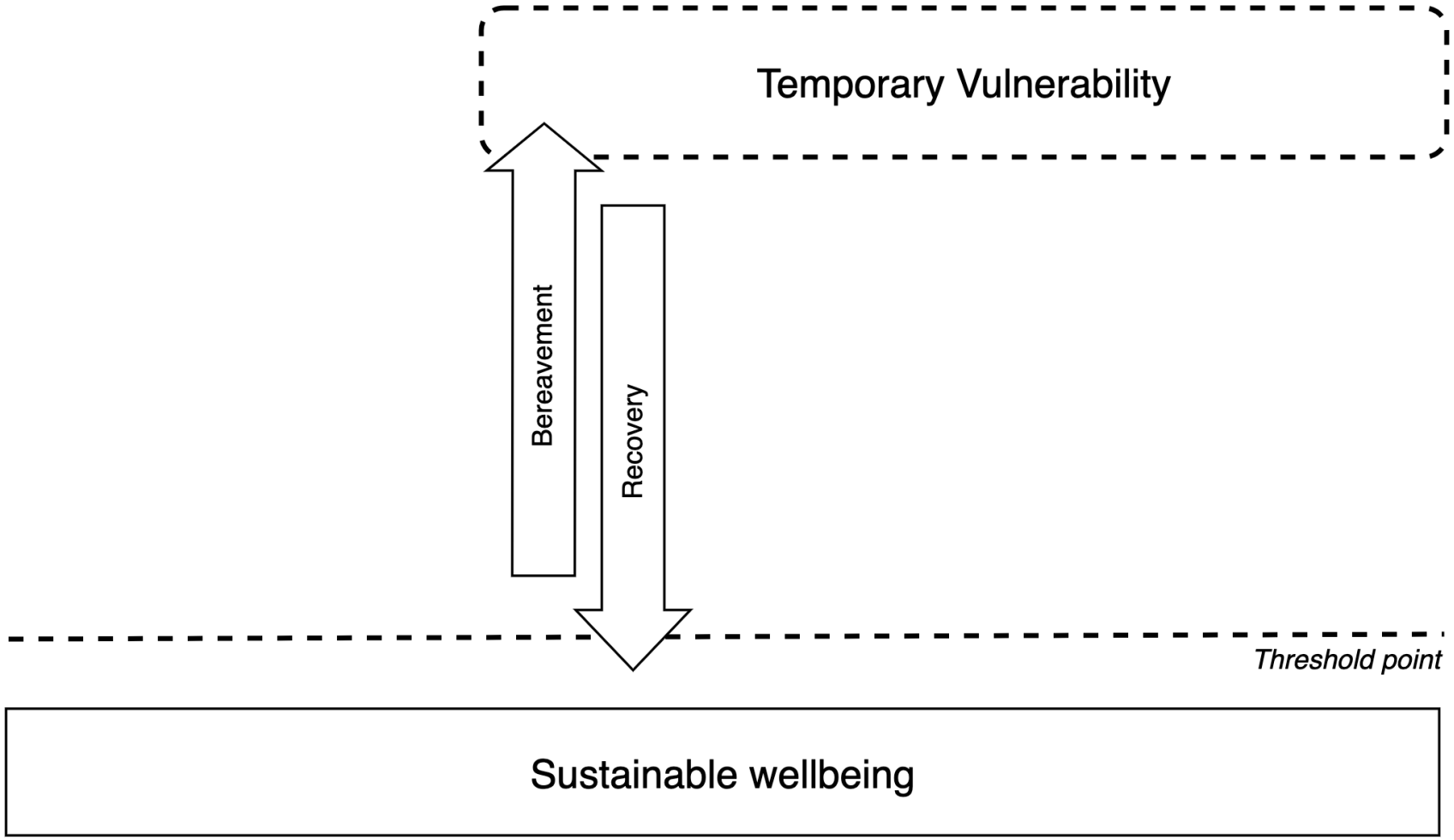
Modelling the problem



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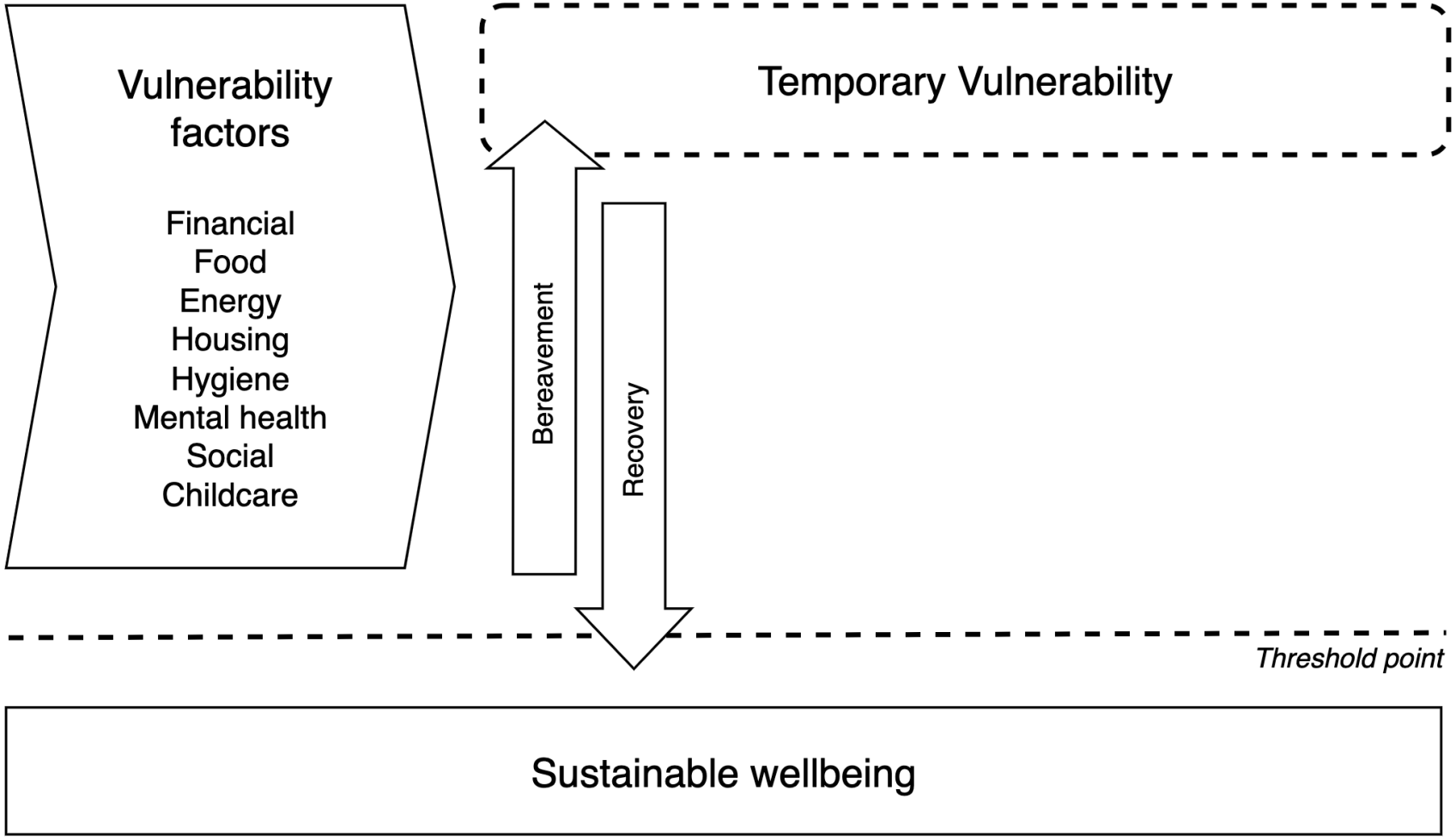

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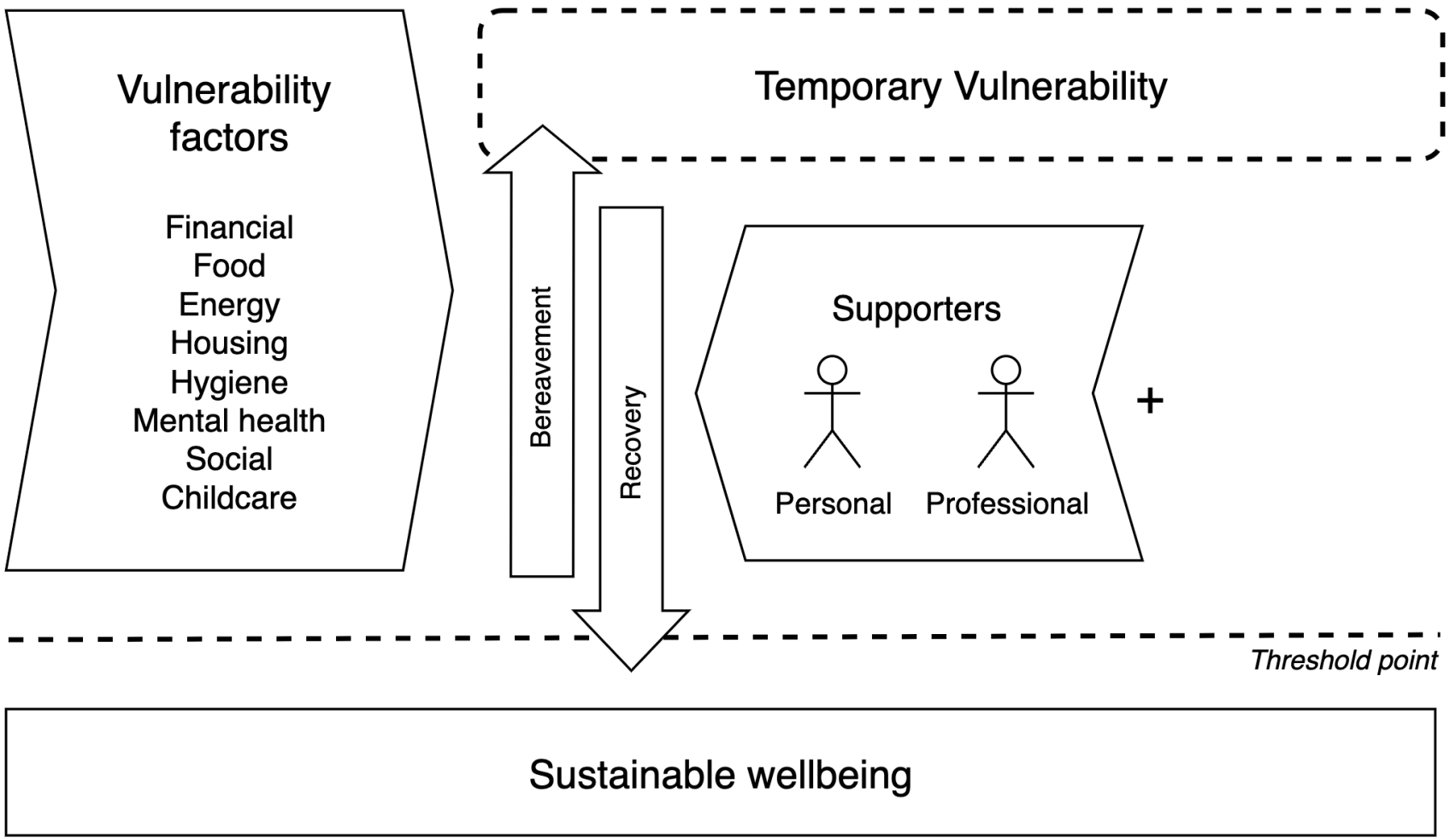

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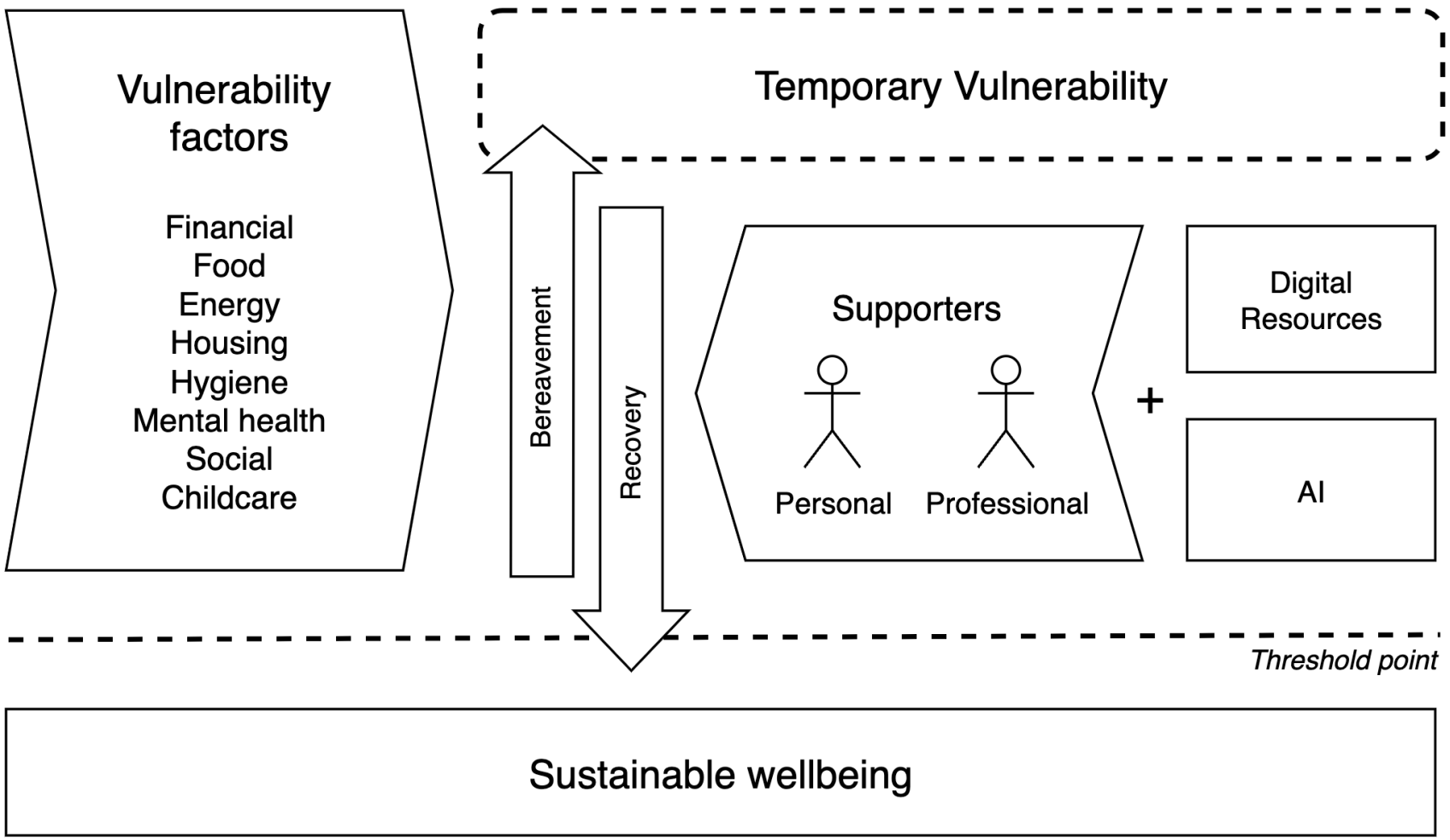

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Research Questions

RQ1. What are the main challenges encountered by Supporting Parties working with households and individuals experiencing bereavement?

RQ2. How can digital technologies and AI be used to empower Supporting Parties in their work?

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Method

- Qualitative study
- Semi-structured interviewing to understand challenges SPs encounter when supporting households through bereavement, and their perceptions of Digital Technology and AI within the context of their work.
- A Constructionist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2008)
  - open-ended, reflective, and probing questions
  - co-constructing meaning with participants
  - constant comparison
- Combination of purposive and convenience sampling.
- Author reflexivity will support the integration of the authors' insider-outsider positionality into the research.

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Progress

- High-level literature review
- Ethics application complete
- Participant recruitment starting in July 2024

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Call to action

If you would like to collaborate in any way, please get in touch:

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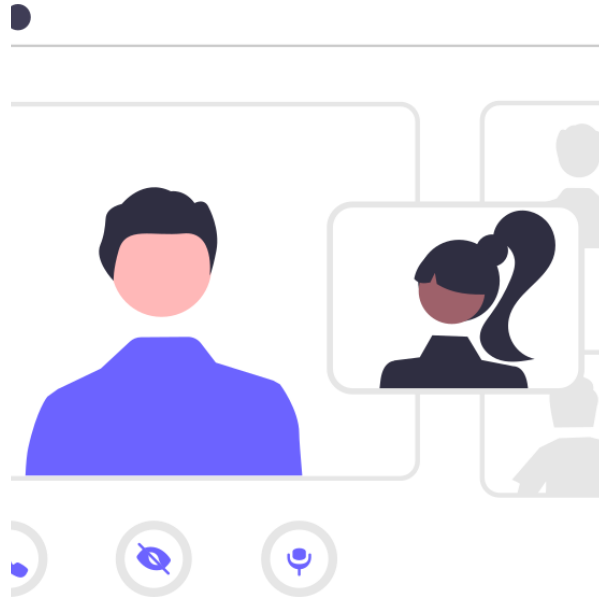

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