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## Empowerment Through Research: Bridging Academia and Society

Research in Progress

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

### Household 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).

### Financial vulnerability

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).

### 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).

### 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).

### 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. There is limited literature that investigates the supportive potential that digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) could provide at the intersection of household vulnerability and bereavement.

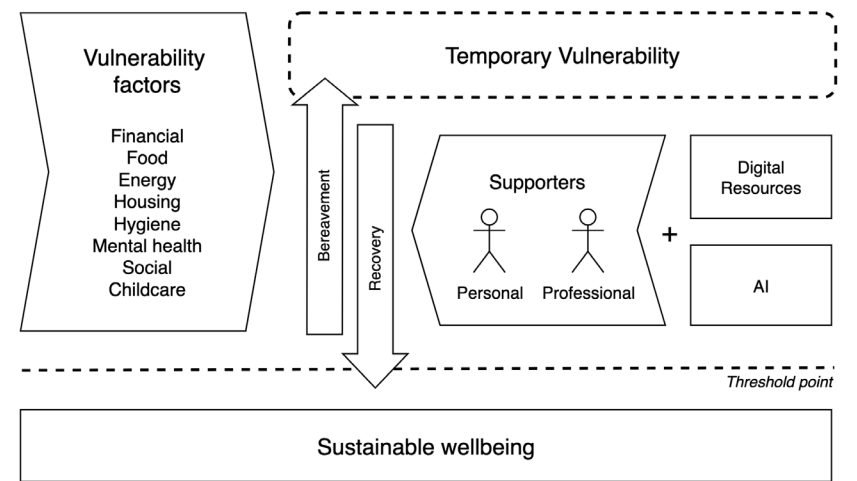
### Empowering Supporting Parties

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. Within the context of this research, those who assist vulnerable ones through bereavement are referred to as Supporting Parties (SPs).

### 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?



### Method

Semi-structured interviewing will be used to understand the challenges SPs encounter in their work supporting households through bereavement, along with their perceptions and attitudes towards Digital Technology and AI within the context of their work. A Constructionist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2008) is proposed, utilising a combination of purposive and convenience sampling to recruit participants within the target population. Author reflexivity will support the integration of the authors' insider-outsider positionality into the research.

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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