Staffing the force: police staff in England and Wales' experiences of working through a COVID-19 lockdown

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Staffing the force: police staff in England and Wales' experiences of working through a COVID-19 lockdown

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ABSTRACT

This online survey (N = 2365) examined the experiences of (non-sworn /non-warranted) staff serving in police forces in England and Wales during the March to July COVID-19 virus lockdown in the UK. Particular attention was paid to staff working from home, those able to partially work from home and those who remained at work in their usual police location. Home working staff were generally less stressed than those remaining partially or totally at their work location. Public interacting staff were particularly stressed. Regression analyses found that for all staff, irrespective of location, tiredness and finding work more difficult were implicated in increased stress. For those remaining at their place of work home-schooling and lacking preparedness for another lockdown were additional stressors. The importance of feeling valued is discussed. Some recommendations are offered in the light of these findings including the concept of moral injury repair.

Introduction

This paper explores police staff experiences of working through COVID-19 in police forces across England and Wales using an online survey and incorporating qualitative comments. We surveyed staff working from home, partially working from home and those staff who continued working, either from their usual place of work and/or in public facing roles. Identifying new patterns of working, the paper focuses on the views and attitudes of police staff working through the first lock down period – March 2020 – July 2020. Stress was a common denominator as staff sought to meet the challenges of uncertainty in the workplace, use of new technology and for many, striving to balance the responsibilities of work, family and home life. Police staff have largely been absent from the police studies literature other than the various references made to them as 'other actors' in the 'extended police family' discourse associated with studies of plural policing (Crawford et al., 2005; Johnston, 2003). Overall, as Foster noted (2003, p. 212) we know little about police staff perceptions, attitudes and ways of working.

The following section discusses the role of police staff with reference to the limited literature about their status in police organisations. The section also refers to the broader literature on stress as it is associated with police work. As noted, research about the stress experienced by police support staff is less well developed. The police response to the COVID pandemic is discussed with particular focus on its impact on police staff. The second half of the paper presents the findings from the survey.

What do we know about police staff?

In England and Wales police staff perform a wide range of roles in the service in a process of civilianisation and modernisation (HMIC 2004). The civilianisation of policing began in the 1970s. Initially, it was confined to technical specialties, secretarial and administrative duties, and maintenance functions. However, despite police opposition to proposals for more civilians, pay increases and other factors led to the further use of non-warranted police 'support' staff (Loveday, 1993). Over time, and increasingly as part of the 'civilianisation' process, police staff across England and Wales' 43 police organisations have become employed in both specialised professional roles such as HR, IT services, forensics and a range of front-line roles including community (neighbourhood) officers, detention officers, escort officers, detectives and investigators (Bell, 2020). More senior leadership positions are also being undertaken by non-sworn officers. It is estimated that non-sworn police staff comprise over half of the police workforce in England and Wales. Currently numbers for police staff are estimated at 72,330, a 4.4% increase from the previous year. Total numbers of police officers at present stand at 129,110 (Home Office, 2020).

The role of police staff and how they are utilised in police organisations was the focus of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary [Fire and Rescue Service][1] review conducted in 2003 (HMIC 2004). Ten years earlier, Highmore (1993) found that while personal relationships between police officers and civilian staff were generally good, corporate cultural attitudes and a potentially divisive 'us and them' environment undermined professional contact and cooperation. Like Highmore, the HMIC review (2004) concluded that there was a lack of professional integration of officers and police staff and there remained a tangible existence of a 'them and us' culture. The HMIC survey conducted for their 2004 review found many police staff, including those at very senior levels, still considered themselves to be 'the biggest minority group in the service' (2004, p. 12). Such observations from Highmore and the HMIC were supported more recently by Rice's work in 2016.

The HMIC review grouped police staff activities into the following broad categories: i) Manual, clerical and administrative roles; ii) Supervisory and managerial roles, including as members of senior and chief officer teams; iii) Professional roles in areas, such as human resources (HR), finance and IT; and iv) Specialist roles that are unique to the police service such as neighbourhood policing or crime investigation (HMIC, 2004). Thus, police staff are now performing roles which traditionally were front-line operational, which until the civilianising trends on 'core' areas of police service provision were introduced had been exclusively carried out by police officers. Reports and reviews such as those cited above have been supplemented by union wellbeing surveys and other documentation that provides information about police staff (Unison, 2003, 2016). Police studies also add periodically to what we know about police staff (see e.g., Brown et al., 2018; McCarty & Skogan, 2013; Lumsden 2017). Other disciplines have looked specifically at 'civilian' or 'support' police staff (for example, managerial studies, Gwavuya, 2010; Dick & Metcalfe, 2001; Dick & Hyde, 2006). Comparative police/police staff health studies also contribute to the literature (see Kerswell et al., 2020; Purba & Demou, 2019; Stevelink et al., 2020) particularly around stress and wellbeing.

Emerging COVID19 research

Physical and emotional exhaustion, violent and other traumatic encounters coupled with a long hours culture and stress are formally recognised as harmful to police wellbeing (Liberman et al., 2002; Houdmont et al, 2016; Elliott-Davis, 2018; Bertilsson et al, 2020). This has been particularly the case during COVID (see Sogner et al., 2020; Fleming & Brown, 2021; Frenkel et al., 2020; Mehdizadeh & Kamkar, 2020; Papazoglou et al., 2020; Sadiq, 2020). Papers addressing police staff and the impact of COVID-19 are notably absent.

Unsocial hours, anxiety, and difficult public face-to-face encounters are also stress factors experienced by police support staff (Kerswell et al., 2020). Kerswell finds socio-demographic variables have a modest impact but established what she calls an 'environmental situation', which

identifies contemporary job demand as playing a significant role in stress appraisal by officers. Similarly, a key feature of the stress experience is mediated by what Webster (2014) calls 'resource evaluation'. This includes marshalling psychological resources such as emotional intelligence. Organisational factors, critically the availability of social support are also key. In a recent qualitative study with UK. police officers, a major source of police stress was identified as inadequate equipment to perform their duties resulting from austerity cuts (Duran et al., 2019). Duran, Woodhams and Bishopp (2020) also reported stress was linked to how police employees perceive unfairness when their contributions are not fully reciprocated or valued.

A national lockdown might be considered an extreme 'environmental situation'. This took place in many work places from mid-March 2020 as the COVID-19 virus continued to spread across the UK. On March 21, under emergency powers, the government enacted The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/327) which enforced the closure in England of businesses and indoor leisure centres. This was succeeded by The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/350), informally known as the Lockdown Regulations restricting freedom of movement, gatherings, and business closures during the COVID-19 emergency period.[2] These restrictions were progressively relaxed on 22nd April, 13th May, 1st June, 13/15th June and 4th July. The College of Policing (2020) issued guidance to the police known as the four 'E's: Engage – officers speak to people and try to establish their awareness and understanding of the situation; Explain – officers try to educate people about any personal risks they are taking; Encourage – officers may need to guide individuals, suggesting they return home; Enforce – officers may, as a last resort, remove a person to the place where they live, using reasonable force only if it is a necessary and proportionate means of ensuring compliance. Individuals may also be fined for breach of the Regulations. The enforcement powers are afforded to officers by The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020.

These regulations placed new demands on policing by restricting people's liberty and freedom of movement which were met with varying degrees of compliance. Atchison et al. (2020) reported about half of respondents in a survey carried out shortly after the March lockdown engaged in social distancing by avoiding social events, although younger people (aged between 18 and 34) were the least likely to comply (38%).

The lockdown contributed to new patterns of work in both public and private sectors seeking to mitigate the spread of the disease by social distancing, use of personal protection equipment (PPE) and flexible ways of working.

In police organisations across England and Wales police officers and staff prepared to police the frontline. During the pandemic, increased stress loads and adverse consequences have been reported for other front line health professionals (Wilson, 2020) as well as the potential for 'occupational moral injury' (Shale, 2020, p. 1). Moral injury arises from a sense of injustice when moral expectations are breached; for example, such as being inadequately provided with protective equipment by those in authority or the public not maintaining lockdown rules in order to protect the community from the spread of the virus. Shale (2020) notes that occupational moral injury may result in feelings of anger, guilt, disgust and disillusionment.

Methodology

An online questionnaire survey method was employed. Unison, the public service union that represents most police staff distributed an anonymous on-line survey to a randomly selected sample on behalf of the authors and powered by Qualtrics in September 2020. Overall, Unison has 33,500 members who hold police staff roles in England and Wales which is 46% of the total complement of support personnel (Priestley,[3] personal communication). We have no way of knowing the return rate from specific police forces as we were asked not to include place of employment to help preserve the anonymity of respondents. We do know that 5% were from large metropolitan forces, 50% from provincial forces and 44% of forces were categorised as other. Overall, 2365 members of

police staff across England and Wales returned completed, usable questionnaires, a 7% response rate. This is well within the returns rate of previous surveys looking at police staff: e.g., survey of aspirations of police staff (N = 3000) (Unison, 2003); Survey of bullying (N = 1000) (Unison, 2016); survey of sexual harassment (N = 1776) (Brown & Shell, 2020).

Questionnaire survey

The broad remit of the survey was to investigate police staff's views and experiences of working during the first COVID-19 lockdown. The study was particularly interested in the shift (if any) prior to and during the lockdown. In particular:

(a) working conditions, including whether these were experienced as more difficult, hours had increased or work pattern had changed;
(b) the impact of that shift as measured by two questions about stress levels.
(c) any adverse consequences in terms of worry, tiredness, emotional energy.
(d) patterns of domestic life, i.e., burden of housework, care of children or other responsibilities/dependents;
(e) quality of supervision and support from their line manager/force.

We wanted to examine correlates of stress under these changing circumstances of the lockdown, which included the potential influence of socio-demographic, organisational and psychological variables. We asked about pre-COVID patterns of working and domestic life with comparable questions relating to the lockdown period. Participants were also asked to respond to two open questions:

Please can you briefly describe any new ways of working that were initiated during lockdown that you think are worth keeping in the post COVID recovery?

Are there any other comments you would like to make about your working life during the pandemic?

Qualitative comments used in this paper have been drawn from the responses to these questions.

The questionnaire went through a number of iterations in consultation with both the support staff union and the police officers' staff association. A full copy is available on request to the authors.

Ethical approval (No: 60798) was granted by the University of Southampton.

Findings

Sample demographics and occupational characteristics

The survey respondents were generally an older group whose average age is around 45.9 years. The Home Office (2020) indicates police staff tend to be older than other worker types, with 22% of them over the age of 55. Two-thirds of the sample were from women. This is consistent with the gender distribution of the whole police staff workforce where 62% are women (Home Office, 2020). Most identified as White British (92%) again, this is consistent with ethnicity representation of the entire police staff workforce (Home Office, 2020). Most were married or living with a partner (75%). Just over 50% of these couples were partnered with a police officer or member of police support staff. Around a third (34%) had children of school age and 14% had children over 18 living at home. A smaller percentage of workers had children under 5 (9%). A significant number of the respondents had other caring responsibilities, that is, elderly parents and/or vulnerable individuals living elsewhere (58%). Fewer respondents had aged or vulnerable people living with them (13%).

The majority of respondents identified as 'non-supervisory' (79%). First-line managers represented 13% of the respondents – the remaining 173 respondents were the middle managers

(N = 137) or the Head of Department (N = 36). In terms of the HMIC (2004) classification, most were managerial or professional with 22% holding uniquely policing core front-line roles (see Table 1). Almost half identified as shift workers (45%) and 80% were full-time with 17% working part-time and 3% who identified their working hours as 'flexi'. Respondents had an average length of service of 14.6 years with 62% having over 11 years' working experience with police.

Work factors prior to and during lockdown

Home working

In the police service, forces' traditional ambivalence towards flexible working (Dick & Hyde, 2006) is not as pronounced for police staff as it is in the working lives of ranked police officers (Fleming & Brown, 2021). Still, relatively few members of police staff could work at home pre-lock down, with 26% saying this could happen some of the time and 2% most of the time. This changed significantly in the lockdown period when 40% said they completely worked from home and a further 16% did so partially (chi-square 1028.5 p < 0.000) (see Figure 1). As one police staff member from our survey commented:

> A couple of months before the COVID 19 Pandemic happened, I put in a request to partly work from home. This was denied by upper management even though my Line Manager was in agreement with my request. However, since COVID 19 and the lock down it has proven that my request should have been accepted as I was still able to do my job from home and even to a better standard. I was very dissatisfied with their decision with my request and the lock down has proven more to me and has made me even more dissatisfied with the original response I got .[Male, professional support, working from home].

Table 1. Demographic and occupational detail by work location.

| Characteristic	All	Home working	Partially home working	Remaining at police location	Statistical significance
Gender					
Male	30%(714)	34%	15%	51%	Chi square 19.9
Female	69%(1626)	43%	16%	41%	p < 0.000
Average age	45.9 yrs	47.9 years	46.0 years	44.1 years	ANOVA F = 26.9 p < 0.000
Marital Status					
Single	14%(330)	39%	13%	48%	Chi square 110.5
Single sharing with other(s)	6%(144)	29%	14%	57%	p < 0.000
	4%(106)	38%	21%	41%	
Single parent	55%(1302)	43%	16%	40%	
Married	20%(479)	36%	14%	50%	
Co-habiting					
Average no of children	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.7	ANOVA F = 1.2NS
Grade	79%(1651)	39%	15%	48%	Chi square 29.4
Non-supervisory	2%(36)	42%	16%	42%	p < 0.000
First line manager	12%(264)	65%	26%	10%	
Middle manager	2%(36)	56%	36%	33%	
Head of Department	<1%(3)	50%	0%	30%	
Chief Executive					
Role	11%(243)	37%	13%	49%	Chi square 358.0
Managerial	42%(953)	58%	20%	22%	p < 0000
Professional	22%(485)	27%	11%	62%	
Admin/support	27% 9609)	22%	14%	64%	
Unique policing role					
Average length of service	14.6 years	16.5 years	15.6 years	12.6 years	ANOVA F = 34.0 p < 0.000
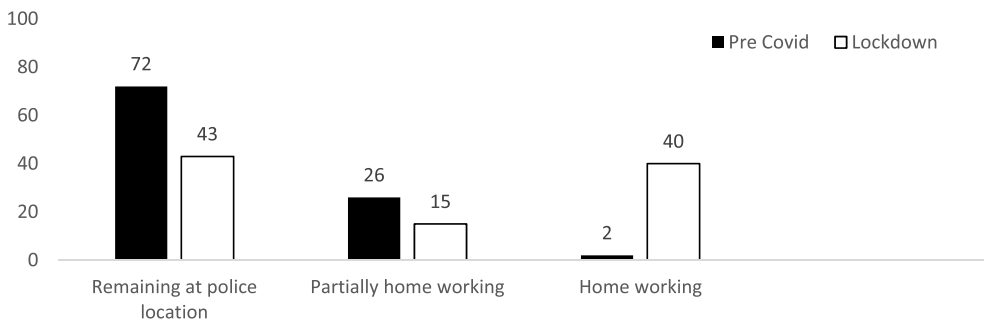
Figure 1. Percentage of police staff working from home prior to and during lockdown.

Demographic and occupational characteristics differentiated those who were able to work at home completely or partially from those who remained in their places of work. Table 1 shows that of those working from home, more were women, married, being slightly older and correspondingly had more years of service. More middle managers worked from home than any other grade and were more likely to belong to the professional cadre of staff. Those remaining at work were more often men, who were younger, having slightly less service in non-supervisory and first line manager grades, living as a single man sharing with others, and being in a unique policing public facing role.

Quality of working

Overall 23% of all respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their work hours had increased in the lockdown while 54% disagreed/disagreed strongly with that statement. Approximately the same percentage (49%) strongly agreed/agreed that their pattern of work had not changed during lockdown whereas 37% disagreed/disagreed strongly with this. Four out of 10 police staff agreed or strongly agreed (41.7%) that their work became more difficult during the lockdown period. Those who particularly found it more difficult were those on shifts with home responsibilities:

> During the Pandemic the amount of increased demand on the police resulted in numerous shortfalls in staffing. As such I had to work longer and more frequent shifts coupled with demands of home life, which also increased with children and education at home. [Male, community liaison, remained at work].

> I found my workload rocketed initially mostly due to other people being unprepared for working from home. [Male, professional support working from home].

When considering work location there were statistically significant differences in terms of whether hours had increased (chi-square 105.2 p < 0.000); pattern of work remaining unchanged (chi-square 650.0 p < 0.000) and work being more difficult (chi-square 79.3 p < 0.000). Home workers were more likely to say work was less stressful compared to those working partially at home or remaining at work (see Figure 2). Those remaining at their usual police location reported the worst quality and those working from home the better quality of working conditions although this was not the case for all home workers.

One male and one female respondent indicated how their quality of work had not suffered but they felt physically and psychologically better by managing work from home.

> I certainly have worked longer hours but have not felt as though I have worked extra hours, and my stress levels have reduced dramatically since being out of the office, I am still producing high quality work and in fact getting more done and yet feel more relaxed and less stressed. [Male, neighbourhood policing, working from home].

> Absolutely love working from home. No daily commute adding 2 hours to my day, less pollution from me and no stress about parking issues. Quiet at home in my own office so less stress from noise and distractions. [Female, Criminal justice, working from home].
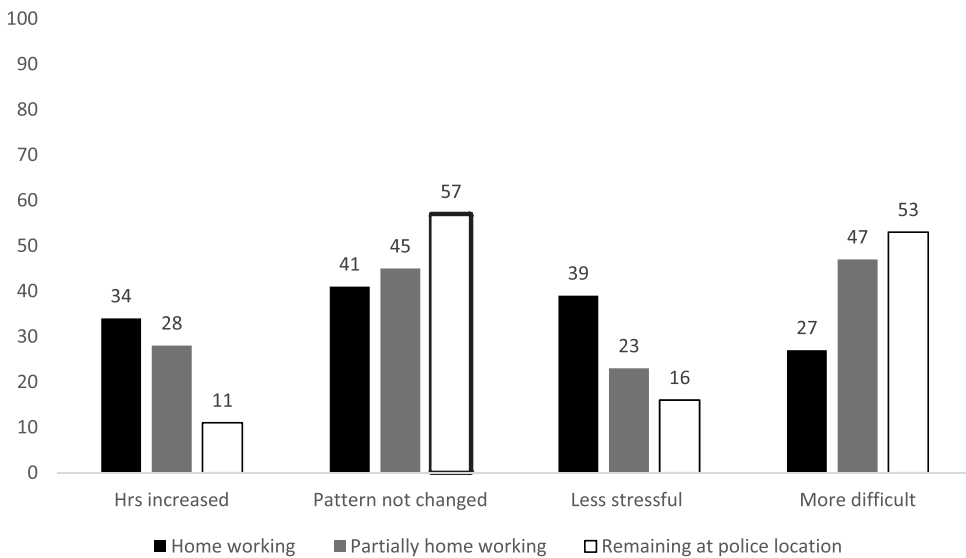
Figure 2. Percentage agreeing/agreeing strongly about quality of work during lockdown by work location.

However, working from home was experienced negatively by some especially in having to manage homeschooling:

> [Working from home] had a negative impact on home life which was already stressful with 2 young children; we had reduced childcare and 'fights' with school to keep my son there. The reduced childcare is still the most stressful part of this pandemic and the lack of holidays/days out means less opportunities to relax and enjoy time out from home. [Female, Intelligence, working from home].

> My home is no longer the location of escape from work - the two have merged and the long term dis-benefits to mental and emotional health may take some time to be fully understood. [Female, in a safeguarding role, working from home].

Many of those on the frontline found their quality of work much diminished, some of which was associated with the sense of injustice or resentment that Shale (2020) noted is a feature of occupational 'moral injury' found amongst medical staff. Examples of moral injury amongst police staff resonate with Shale's observations and include being under-valued, lacking support from supervisors and perceived failure by Government to provide adequate protective equipment.

> During the COVID 19 pandemic we have been expected to do even more during a stressful time, without any proper guidance or support from our SLT.[4] It has been expected of us just to carry on like normal with no worldwide pandemic going on, there has been an increased risk to all of us and the PPE that has been provided is sub-standard. Any time we try to raise any of our concerns we are met with resistance or ignored. We have been given additional responsibilities with no training and had to learn and get it by ourselves. [Male, custody and Detention, remaining at work].

> It took so long to get adequate PPE, however I believe this was due to government guidance being so far behind. Working on the front line and been given conflicting, advice and guidance around safety, was absolutely ridiculous and incredibly stressful. I feel as a citizen totally let down by our government on how it responded to this. [Male, neighbourhood policing remained at work].

Taken as a whole over three-quarters of respondents (77%) felt they were valued by their line managers as much the same in lockdown as previously, with around 13%, respectively, saying they thought they were valued either more or less during the lockdown. As one staff member on the front line commented:

> All I would say is I feel less valued for what I've been through as I worked all through this pandemic, but I was never felt valued before the pandemic. [Male, professional support remaining at work].

Those partially working from home were the most likely to say that they felt less valued as members of their team (16%):

> Extremely long hours to meet the demands of COVID, which I am happy to do, but wasn't recognized or knowingly appreciated. Creates a demotivating atmosphere within the department. A lot of high level tasks given to team leaders that should have sat at SLT level, again no appreciation given to the work done. [Female, support professional partially working from home].

Styles of working

The pattern in IT use and virtual working changed significantly during the lockdown for all police staff. The deployment of virtual meeting increased from 11% to 63% (chi-square 69.0 p < 0.000); webinars increased from 9% to 23% (chi-square 71.7 p < 0.000) whilst use of social media to contact the public actually decreased from 16% to 6% (chi-square 129.0 p < 0.000). The use of social media to contact the public was not statistically significantly different by working location, whereas just over 80% of those working from home, completely or partially used Zoom or similar platform compared to 56% of staff remaining in the usual place of work (chi square 241 p < 0.000). There was also a decreasing number of staff invited to participate in webinars during the lockdown by work location with 48% of those working from home, 36% of those partially working from home and only 22% of those remaining at work doing so (chi-square 90.4 p < 0.000). Three-quarters of those working from home completely and 60% of those partially working from home said that their forces had provided additional IT equipment, compared to 22% of those remaining at work (chi-square 405.0 p < 0.000). Fewer indicated that forces had initiated additional training in its use: 28% of home workers; 20% of partial home workers and 10% of work remainers (chi-square 57.1 p < 0.000).

Comments from those remaining at work reflected this sense of neglect:

> The force should have had more laptops available or bought more laptops to allow more people to work from home - we had little to no communication from our manager who would rarely come into the office during lockdown - there seemed to be no effort from management to source laptops for the rest of us who were in the office during lockdown. [Female, intelligence remaining at work].

Provision of equipment for public facing staff

The survey asked respondents whether their force had provided PPE and training for those working in public facing roles, that is Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce. Across all staff designations on average about 7 out of 10 were provided with PPE and 4 out of 10 received training in the 4 Es. The following results, given in Table 2, looked at survey respondents who worked in neighbourhood policing and custody and detention and regularly interacted with the public.

The sense of frustration, engendered by lack of training or late provision of equipment, and further examples of occupational moral injury resulting from non-compliant general public was apparent:

Table 2. Frequency of provision of safety equipment and 4 Es training for staff with public interaction roles.

	PPE	4 Es Training
Neighbourhood Policing	71%	45%
Custody and Detention	74%	27%
Criminal Investigation	58%	35%
Safeguarding and protection of vulnerable persons	77%	38%

We struggled to communicate to the public due to disbelief and conspiracies. We were vilified and attacked regularly with little to no support from the courts system. [Male, neighbourhood policing, remained at work].

We weren't given any advice or training on how to deal with the public from day 1 till now!!! I am front facing and I've had to cope with the public alone not knowing if I advise or not advise?? Who am I to advise?? Its government guidelines so how do I interpret them?? I've been so stressed . . . . close to a breakdown I would say at one point [Female, unclassified role, remained at work].

Watching the news and seeing police officers all over the world in masks, yet we were told not to wear them in public, and not given any PPE for a further 6 or so weeks. Having a small baby in the house, and being afraid to come home every day, panicking about potentially bringing it home and infecting my family was horrendous. [Male, neighbourhood policing remained at work].

Quality of supervision

The survey asked about the perceived quality of supervision during the pre- and lockdown periods. Overall, participants generally rated their supervisors/line managers highly in terms of being supportive, trusting and communicating with them prior to and during the lockdown. Once in lockdown those working completely from home were more likely to say their manager was supportive (chi-square 28.0 p < 0.000) and trustful (chi-square 7.1 p < 0.02) compared to those partially working from home or working out of their usual police location:

Working from all three locations resulted in the same levels of communication between staff member and manager (see Figure 3). There was a tendency for those working from home completely to be more positive, whilst those remaining in their usual police location were least likely to speak highly of their line managers.

When asked about force contact during lockdown just under half of all respondents (48%) said their force had been in touch to ask about their welfare and these staff members were more likely to be those in support functions (54%) rather than public facing staff (43%). There is a statistically significant correlation between being stressed and whether the force contacted the respondent about their welfare (Pearson Product Moment = −.239 p < 0.01). Those working from home were more likely to have been contacted (73%) compared to 55% of those partially working from home and 29% of those remaining at their usual police location (chi-square 112.9 p < 0.000). Previously, it was reported that those from home were suffering from less stress and those remaining at their work
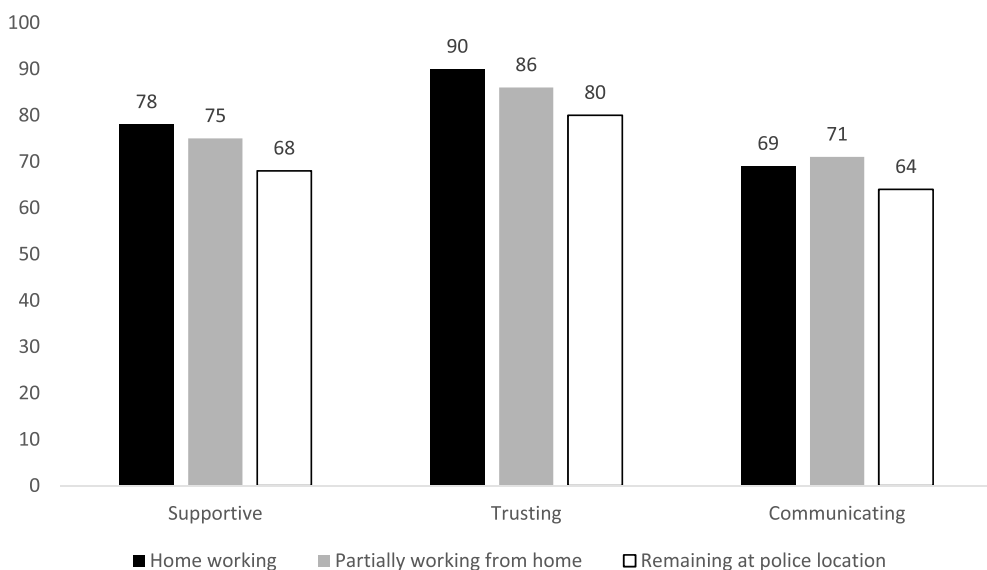

Figure 3. Agreement in quality of supervision during lockdown by work location.

location indicated they were the most stressed. The importance of being supported cannot be under-estimated as the following respondents observed:

> Having an understanding supervisor/dept throughout this time and having the ability to alter my hours as needed to fit around my childcare responsibilities has made the world of difference to what was already a massively stressful time. Trying to home school/care for 3 primary aged children and support a partner who suddenly had to work from home, whilst supporting my parents and elderly grandmother was made possible through the support I received. Without this I strongly suspect I would have become extremely stressed and probably ill as a result. [Female, criminal justice working from home].

> I feel my supervisor was extremely supportive. He communicated regularly, not just about work but also how each individual was coping and was there anything he could do to help. His attitude and under-standing was very much appreciated. I found coming to work really helped me cope with all the challenges and stresses of the pandemic and home life during this time. [Female, professional support partially working from home].

Welfare and wellbeing

When asked how they felt during lockdown compared to previously, 55% of all respondents said they were more stressed. Of those working from home, 28% said they were more stressed than prior to lockdown. Just under 40% said they were less stressed when working from home. Of those who could partially work from home, 59% said they were more stressed compared with those who could not work from home (71%). The sources of stress were various. Seven out of 10 worried a lot or
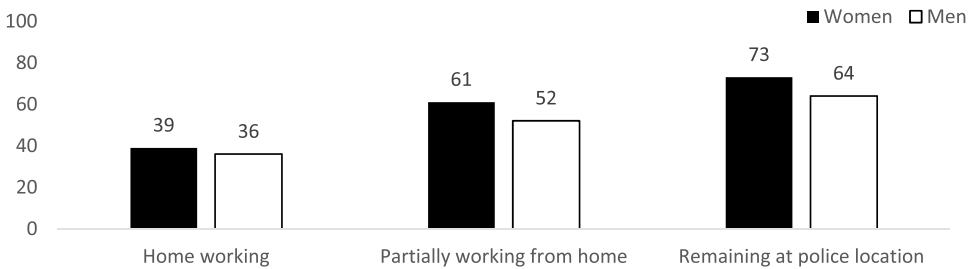
Figure 4. Gender differences in high stress levels during the lockdown by whether worked from home or not.
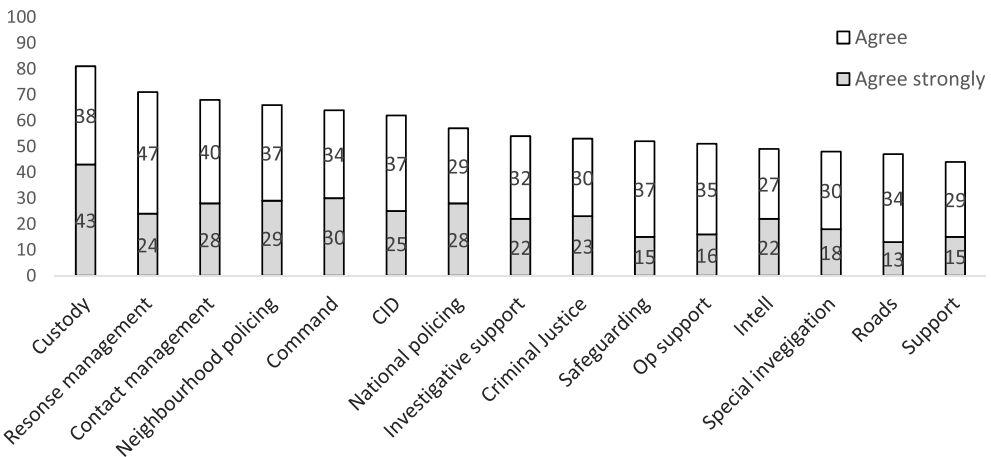
Figure 5. Percent of police staff respondents saying they agreed strongly/agree that they were more stressed during lockdown than previously.

a fair amount about the safety of their families, with more women worrying about their families (70% compared to 63% of men). Over half of all respondents (55%) reported that they felt more tired at the end of the day during the lockdown period. Only a quarter (25%) thought they had more reserves of emotional energy, (40% disagreed). Whilst these affected both genders, women were more likely to report being tired at the end of the day (58% compared to 53% of men) being stressed (63% compared to 54% of men). There were statistically significant gender differences (chi-square 17.2 p < .0001) as shown in Figure 4.

Indications from the qualitative comments suggest that the additional home circumstances did create a stress load for some women. This included feelings of guilt about neglecting children or an elderly parent and not being able to do more mundane tasks, such as putting out the washing:

> I had to prioritise work over her immediate needs when dealing with live time/urgent incidents over her personal care and that could be stressful [Female, intelligence working from home].

> I was still coming to work in the office and having to send my children to school and nursery (which I had to pay for). It seemed to be a lotto as to who got to work from home, and keep their family safe. I didn't get that choice and spent quite a bit on childcare and didn't have the luxury of putting my washing out during the day. [Female, professional support remained at work].

The roles where police staff were most likely to report being more stressed during the lockdown compared to previously, were those working in the core front facing roles (see Figure 5)

The examples from comments from staff working in the high-stress roles reflect safety concerns and failures to maintain COVID-19 precautionary protocols.

> It started well initially by limiting people into the custody suite but within two weeks it all stopped and back to a much busier than normal place with no social distancing. Really worrying. [Male, professional support remained at work].

> I did feel the safety of PCSOs[5] was looked over during the lockdown. Where we were split into little groups we had limited vehicles. We were on foot 99% of the time as no vehicles were available. We were walking around the high COVID areas, dealing with street drinkers, drug takers, the vulnerable, people who don't believe COVID exists and so on. It was very tough and we were in the middle of it - I do really feel this went completely unnoticed. [Female, neighbourhood policing remained at work].

> It's been extremely stressful made worse by the lack of interest towards me and my colleagues for suggesting ideas to help adhere to COVID guidelines and being told that when someone was trying to help us that a senior member of our SLT said fuck them it's business as usual and this was at the height of the virus, makes you feel really valued that. [Male, custody and detention remained at work].
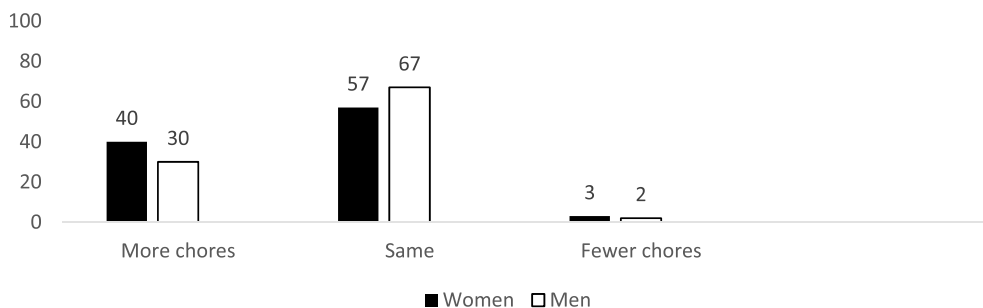

Figure 6. Estimate of quantity of domestic chores in lockdown compared to previously by gender.

Domestic responsibilities

During the lockdown period 37% of respondents said that there were more domestic chores to do, 60% said it was about the same and only 3% indicated there were fewer domestic chores to do compared to previously. Women were more likely to say that there were more chores needing doing (chi-square 24.0 p < .000) (Figure 6).

There was a marginal difference in the amount of chores respondents said they had to do during the lockdown by place of work: 35% of those at home, 36% of those partially working from home and 40% remaining in their place of work said there was more to do (chi-square 9.1 p < 0.05). There were no statistically significant differences in terms of responsibility for homeschooling or being responsible for looking after an elderly relative.

Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents were worried about the safety of their families but the place of work was not statistically significantly different. In the event of a further period of lockdown, just over half (58%) said they felt better prepared for that eventuality than before, whilst 42% thought it would be harder. Once again there where gender differences; 44% of women thought it would be harder whilst only 38% of men thought this (chi-square 4.6 p < 0.03).

> It will be absolutely devastating if we go back into another lockdown as people need to work! This virus isn't going away and we need to have common sense, keep working, keep clean and be more aware. [Female, national policing remained at work].

Predicting stress

Considering all the previous analyses which show some significant differences in the lockdown experiences of staff working from home, partially working from home and those remaining in their police work location, we undertook a series of regression analyses. We included candidate factors previously associated with the experience of stress in policing discussed in the introduction. Thus, we included demographic variables, occupational details, organisational factors and several psychological variables such are emotional resilience, tiredness and feeling valued as a team member. Given the nature of the special circumstances of the COVID lockdown we also constructed a scale of the provision of equipment and training opportunity (Cronbach Alpha .658); load in terms of different domestic responsibilities (such as doing household chores) (Cronbach Alpha 0.64) and the overall number of different members of a family the participant had responsibility for (e.g., children, aging parent, other vulnerable person) (Cronbach Alpha 0.36). This latter had only marginal reliability. Other organisational factors included work patterns and difficulty.

Regression analyses were conducted separately for the three different working locations. Overall, feelings of tiredness and increased difficulty of work predicted stress for staff working in any location (see Table 3). Thereafter age was a factor for those working at home. Here, it was older respondents who reported greater stress (ANOVA F = 2.969 p < 0.01). Additionally, emotional depletion and feeling unprepared for next lockdown added to stress load. Gender was a factor (reaching 0.7 statistical significance). For those remaining at their work location as well as physical tiredness, emotional depletion and increased difficulty of work, homeschooling featured as a significant stressor as did feeling unprepared for the next lockdown. Over 60% of those remaining at work said the pattern of their work had not changed (compared to 40% of home workers), similarly, the former were the least likely to get the equipment or training they need (statistical significance for both these items was .07)

Table 3. Linear regression measuring stress for three different work locations.

	Working from home (N = 939)		Partially working from home (N = 365)		Remaining in police work location (N = 1025)	
	Standard-ized β	t	Standard-ized β	t	Standard-ized β	t
Demographics	−.046	−1.757	−.112	−1.379	−.077	−1.552
Gender (being a woman)	-.064	−2.173*	-.077	-.878	-.024	-.409
Age	.036	1.464	.014	.198	-.065	1.420
Marital status						
Domestic circumstances	−.015	−.487	.002	.024	−.092	−1.652
No of children	-.045	−1.414	-.014	-.149	-.141	−2.493**
Homeschooling	.040	1.658	.031	.452	.029	.652
Total caring responsibilities	.005	.184	.015	.177	-.022	-.423
Total household duties						
Occupational status	.005	.567	−.016	−.234	−.044	−1.023
Grade	−040	−1.727	.068	1.034	-.110	−2.530**
Role (being in support function)	-010	-.354	-.020	.212	-.020	-.378
Length of Service						
Organisational factors	.039	1.536	.119	1.590	−.013	−.299
Increased work	.034	1.406	.117	1.637	.081	1.845
Pattern of work	−.263	−9.793***	-.202	−2.575**	−.236	−5.196***
Difficulty	-.004	-.158	.069	.994	-.078	-1.804
Equipment	.019	.772	-.015	-.231	-.047	−1.108
Contacted abt welfare						
Psychological variables	−.525	−8.854***	−.597	−7.790***	−.512	−10.682***
Tiredness	.098	4.059***	-.011	-.171	−121	2.859**
Emotionality	-.027	-.256	-.037	-.506	-.003	-.077
Worry	.053	2.198*	-.051	.960	.085	1.928*
Preparedness	−024	-1.067	-1.598	.113	−007	-.176
Being valued						
Adj R²	.614		.497		.538	
ANOVA F	62.991****		7.764****		17.823****	
Residual df	761		117		269	

*p < .05 **p < .01***p.001****p < .0001.

Post COVID19 working arrangement

Finally, we themed open-ended comments in the survey by means of NVivo identifying 'new ways of working.' Four broad themes suggested that:

- working from home (or at local sites) was favoured by many participants as an initiative worth keeping post-COVID
- Retaining flexible/agile working – with some form of blended WFH and going to work if necessary
- Increased use of technology for work, internal/digital communication, public reporting, managing incidents without deploying staff, multi-agency telephone conferencing, online training/courses
- Regular sanitisation and cleaning of work spaces/retaining stringent hygiene practices at work

Discussion

This research represents a rapid response to an on-going crisis whose results we hope can inform support for those working in policing. We recognise the limitations of self-selecting samples and on-line self-reporting surveys (Menon & Muraleedharan, 2020), but it was striking how much the qualitative comments amplified the trends observable in the quantitative results. We view our

results as contributing to and informing the growing body of research reporting on front line working during the pandemic.

The experiences of police staff during the COVID-19 precautionary lockdown revealed a workforce under stress with 22% of all respondents strongly agreeing that they felt more stressed during the lockdown than previously and a further 33% agreeing with this (a total of 55% affirming that they felt more stressed). Half felt more tired and 40% failed to agree with the statement that they had more reserves of emotional energy. This is comparable to Thomas and Quilter-Pinner (2020) report that 50% of health-care workers said that COVID-19 had had an adverse effect on their mental health and 30% on their physical health. Seventy percentage of our sample were worried a lot, or a fair amount about the safety of their families, and again this compares to 70% of those who were worried in the Atchison et al. (2020) survey. These results suggest that police staff, as other public sector workers, are feeling the pressure of working on the front line during the pandemic.

Wilson (2020) reports that for the health-care professions, sources of stress include problems in provision of appropriate equipment and changes to the working environment, with general practitioners and other community-based practitioners having to adapt to supporting patients digitally. Other health-care professionals working in the community have reported improved work–life balance due to reduced travel when working from home. The implication is that not all workers are uniformly impacted.

In the present study, around one in four staff said they could work completely from home, about the same proportion as reported by Atchison et al. (2020). In our study, a further 15% saying they were able to do so partially. More women than men said they were able to work from home, whereas more men were likely to remain at their police working location compared to women. This may be a reflection that women were more likely to hold professional and administrative supporting roles, whereas more men held core front facing roles (31% compared to 24% of women). Home workers were also more likely to be in more senior grades. Almost a quarter (23%) said that their workloads had increased. Half of these respondents suggested that the pattern of their work had changed and two in five agreed that the work had become more difficult. These pressures were most pronounced on police staff who remained working at their usual police work location. They are the most likely to be in public interacting roles. For them homeschooling and feeling ill-prepared for a further lockdown were significant stressors. Although just missing statistical significance, lack of equipment and being female were also potentially additional sources of stress. On the whole, women tended to be more stressed than men and more women were worried about their families. Women were also more likely to take responsibility for the greater number of domestic chores during the lockdown. It was striking from the qualitative comments that domestic pressures could be as mundane as not being able to get the laundry done in the usual way to feeling guilty about abandoning homeschooling efforts for children whilst trying to complete police-related work.

The most stressed police staff were those working in core policing roles such as custody and detention, response, neighbourhood policing and investigation and who were also most likely to remain working from their police stations. About three-quarters of these public interacting staff had been issued PPE in similar numbers to their police officer colleagues (as reported in Fleming & Brown, 2021). However, they were much less likely to have had training in the 4 Es compared to their warranted officers' counterparts. The qualitative comments give testament to the problems of policing the public and how many felt inadequately trained in the four Es about which several expressed a degree of scepticism as to this policy's efficacy. There was also evidence of anger with either their own SLTs or more generally, the government's failings with respect to providing them with adequate equipment and resources (examples of occupational moral injury). Although it was also evident that overall staff responding to the survey indicated a high level of agreement that their immediate-line managers supported, trusted and communicated with them during the lockdown. This was the case for all work locations. Again the qualitative comments emphasis the critical importance of being supervised sympathetically and supportively. Just over half of the respondents

said that their force had contacted them about their personal welfare during the lockdown and this rose to three-quarters (73%) of those who were working from home, contrasting with a fall to 29% of those remaining at work.

In order to mitigate stress and indeed, moral injury in the event of further lockdowns, we suggest that lessons can be learnt from other helping professions. Brown and Shell (2020) delineate resilience as an essential ingredient for key workers' mental health in the face of a crisis such as that presented by the pandemic – that is at personal, organisational, family and community levels. At the personal level this might include allowing staff to access more informal psychological support such as a telephone support line and free self-help online apps. As a response to the untimely and insufficient supply of equipment, Shale (2020, p. 3) highlights the importance of repairing the moral injury suffered in not only acknowledging the injury by listening to the testimony of the workforce, but also acknowledging the injured party as a moral equal, in other words not placing them in an inferior or less valued position; in the case of the police staff, incorporating them fully into the policing family. Organisationally, the medical profession has found Schwartz Rounds helpful (Flanagan et al., 2020). Schwartz Rounds typically are facilitated on a monthly basis by two trained staff following a structured model and last 60 minutes. A panel of three or four staff from a range of backgrounds tell a story about an experience that had a significant impact on them. The stories are used as a catalyst for a wider reflective discussion with the whole group guided by the facilitators. Flanagan et al.'s evaluation found that the personal insights gained through these rounds were particularly helpful to participants. Drills and role-play exercises that mimic real events and include shortcomings and weaknesses that can be anticipated and remedied are also useful (Brown & Shell, 2020) – clearly this did not happen as a result of UK's pandemic simulation.

In this study, additional family commitments added to staff's stress burden and qualitative commentary emphasised the importance of supportive-line management and flexibility in planning working life and accommodating these extra demands. In our study women were more likely to say that there were more chores to do and they disproportionately took the brunt of these compared to their partners. Men were more likely to say that they shared chores equally than was acknowledged by women (a similar finding in a UN survey in 2020). The obvious solution is to have a more equitable sharing of household tasks.

Finally, the community has a role to play in minimising the moral injury occasioned by their noncompliance with COVID restrictions and engaging in communitarian responses that help to limit the contagion. This requires stronger, clearer and consistent messaging from government nationally and through forces locally. It behoves us all to play our part in combating the COVID pandemic.

Notes

1. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary extended its remit to include the Fire Service and changed its name in 2017 to become Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS).
2. Coronavirus Act 2020 | The Crown Prosecution Service (cps.gov.uk)
3. Ben Priestley is a National Officer for Unison.
4. Senior Leadership Team.
5. Police Community Support Officers are uniformed members of police staff in England and Wales.

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Disclosure statement

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