

## Wellbeing of Forensic Practitioners – Results from the National Wellbeing Survey

### Introduction

The National Police Wellbeing Programme have undertaken a National Wellbeing Survey for the last 3 years. The most recent full survey report can be found on the Oscar Kilo website ([oscarkilo.org.uk](http://oscarkilo.org.uk)). The Forensic Capability Network (FCN) commissioned Durham University to complete a forensic appendix to the 2021 National Police Wellbeing Survey to highlight the specific areas of interest and challenges faced by the forensic community. The report provided by Durham University is attached in Appendix A, this report is a summary of the analysis session held with Durham University.

This is the first time that a specific forensic response has been commissioned and the results were to be used to determine the priorities of the Forensic Workforce Strategy, and topics that should be included in the first Forensic Wellbeing festival held May 2022. The wellbeing festival was a week-long event covering a range of wellbeing and mental health topics. It was attended by more than 500 people, with many more watching the recorded sessions later.

This festival addressed some of the issues that are impacting the wellbeing of our workforce, issues such as anxiety and depression, PTSD, and sleep. The sessions were presented by a wide range of professionals and practitioners from across policing and the wellbeing sector.

### Background

The FCN is developing a Forensic Workforce Strategy with the community which includes priorities for forensic practitioners' wellbeing, recruitment & retention, education & training, continued professional development, workforce competence, and workforce planning.

The Workforce Strategy Wellbeing Workstream, led by D/Supt Tim Rowlandson from Hampshire Constabulary, have worked closely with the National Police Wellbeing Service, police services, academia, and the private sector on the following identified priorities.

- Explore methods to understand current wellbeing status and issues within our forensic community
- Identify gaps in existing wellbeing support and good practice within forces
- Make recommendations for change to enhance wellbeing of forensic practitioners

The National Police Wellbeing survey provides an opportunity for every member of the policing workforce to explain how they really feel at work and the results from the survey provide policing with a clear picture of the areas that need to be addressed.

This was the third National Policing Wellbeing survey and was designed to assess the current state of wellbeing of the policing workforce. This survey was available to all forty-three Home Office Police forces in England and Wales, was launched in October 2021 and was available for 7 weeks. In this survey, Forensic services were included as a separate category for the first time. This, and the

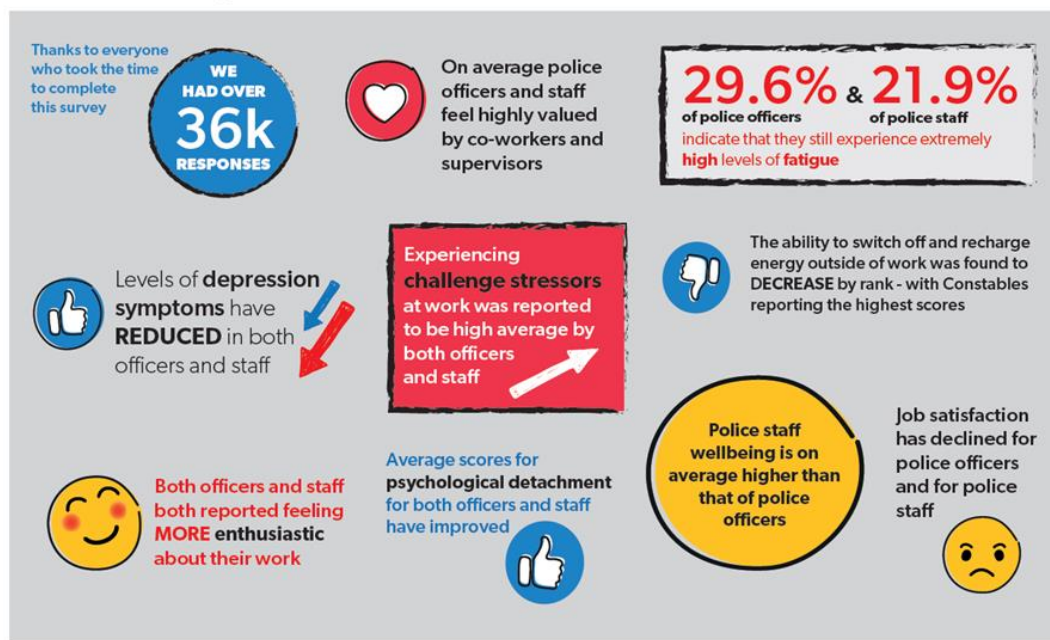
change in some other metrics, means that it is not possible to make comparisons with results from previous years surveys, however it will allow us to baseline our results and compare against future surveys.

## Survey Results

The forensic appendix of the National Wellbeing Survey 2021 was designed to provide a specific picture of the priority areas for forensic services and those working in this area, however it does not report on the separate disciplines within forensics. There were 784 responses to the survey from those working within Forensic Services, 745 police staff, 27 police officers and 9 other respondents. There was very little difference found between responses from regional groupings of forces and due to the small sample sizes involved it was not possible to provide results for any specific role area. It is important to read the appendix in conjunction with the main survey ([oscarkilo.org.uk](https://oscarkilo.org.uk)) for comparisons to be made in key areas.

National Police Wellbeing Survey 2021

### Main Findings



**Figure 1: the main findings for the overall survey**

Figure 1 shows the main findings from the National Wellbeing Survey across all policing roles. The key challenges identified related to fatigue levels that were very high, a decline in job satisfaction and a high level for challenge stressors.

### Key findings from the Forensic Appendix

Analysis of the forensic appendix identified the following areas that need highlighting.

**Fatigue** is associated with reduced communication skills, reduced ability to handle stress, increased risk taking, reduced decision-making ability, increased errors of judgment, a lack of attention and vigilance, and can be relieved by using compensation mechanisms. Forensic services staff scored 4.72 which is **moderately high**, compared to 4.99 for police officers, and 4.53 for police staff.

**Sleep** is an area that impacts across our workforce. Lack of sleep impacts our recovery and can have serious impacts on individuals’ health, wellbeing, and performance. In this study, they asked individuals how often they had less than six hours of sleep, and how frequently they had experienced sleep disturbance. The scores overall for forensic staff were 4.39 for disturbed sleep, and 4.41 for insufficient sleep, which are both moderately high, but comparable with other areas of policing. This compares to police officers who score 4.80 and 5.04 respectively, and police staff who score 4.38 and 4.34 respectively.

Anxiety refers to feelings of tension and nervousness, worried thoughts. Symptoms of **anxiety and depression** tend to be highly linked. Forensic services score 6.16 for symptoms of anxiety, which is moderately high, and 5.45 for symptoms of depression, which is moderate (both on a scale of 1-10). These results are similar to police officers with scores of 6.25 and 5.53 respectively but are higher than for other police staff roles which score 5.89 and 5.27.

Forensic services are generally one of the lower scoring groups for wellbeing measures such as **emotional energy** which scores 3.78, and **fatigue** which scores 4.72. Police officers score 3.25 and 4.99 respectively and other police staff score 3.96 and 4.53 respectively.

**Table 1: Sleep Quality by shift work**

Role	Shift Working	Disturbed sleep (Frequency of “very often” or “all of the time”)	Insufficient sleep (Frequency of “very often” or “all of the time”)
Forensic staff	Shifts	20.7%	31.8%
	Not shifts	18.5%	26.8%
Police Officer	Shifts	18.5%	26.8%
	Not shifts	23.9%	33.6%
Police Staff	Shifts	24.9%	39.2%
	Not shifts	16.5%	23.6%

Respondents from forensic services also reported higher frequencies of **challenge stressors** and **hindrance stressors** (3.92 and 3.79 out of 5) than other police staff who scored 3.84 and 3.44 respectively but lower than police officers who scores very high on both (4.16 and 4.19). Challenge stressors reflect an individual’s perception of work-related demands i.e., workload time pressures can be viewed as opportunity for personal growth and hindrance stressors include bureaucratic

barriers, admin difficulties, poorly designed work process that are viewed as constraints that hinder performance, impacts strongly on wellbeing, and reduces discretionary effort.

Leadership identified in previous surveys and measures have been expanded on this one. Average scores for measures relating to **supervisory leadership (line managers)** are generally slightly less positive for respondents from forensic services however they are still within the high and moderately high brackets.

The low levels of **workforce incivility experienced** and the high and moderately high scores for **sense of being valued by co-workers and supervisors** is a positive area within the survey results. **Sense of being valued by the force** is moderate which is higher than police officers but lower than police staff and **sense of being valued by the public** is also moderate and is higher than police officers and police staff.

Individuals with strong **prosocial values** are motivated by a core desire to help and benefit others, which influences their actions and decisions. For this measure, they asked whether individuals feel motivated by helping and benefiting others in society through their work. Forensic Services scored very high in this area with a score of 5.92 out of 7, which is **very high**, higher than our police officer colleagues who score 5.58 and police staff who scored 5.83.

**Job satisfaction** is high for forensic staff at 5.21 which is slightly lower than other police staff (5.30) but higher than police officers (4.66) with the **intention to quit** moderately low as it also is for police officers and staff.

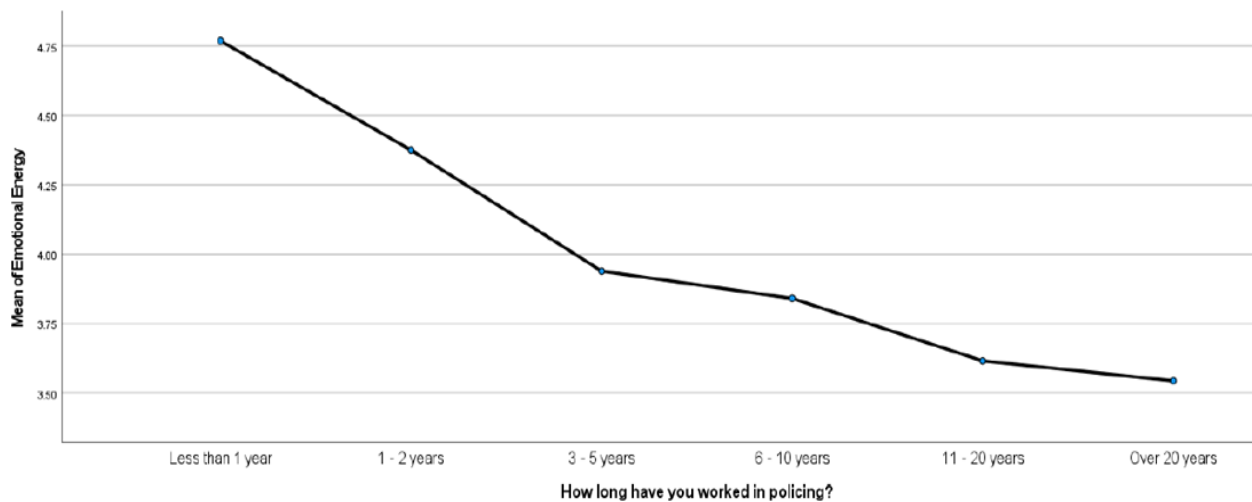
#### **Comparison by other indicators**

Across forensic services there were other indicators that impacted on the wellbeing of the forensic services workforce.

#### **Comparison by length of service (Tenure in Policing)**

The majority of measures were found to decline across length of service. While a steady decline for many measures, several measures seem to drop in particular between the 1-2 years and 3-5 years of service groupings (e.g., fatigue, disturbed sleep, hindrance stressors).

Measures around relatedness, need satisfaction and sense of feeling valued, appear to drop in particular between the less than 1 year and the 1-2 year groupings, as does frequency of challenge stressors.



\*Please note that the software automatically zooms in to fit all groups the line can sometimes suggest a larger effect size difference in responses than is actually the case.

Research has suggested that people have three universal psychological needs; autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which need to be satisfied to maintain optimal performance and wellbeing

Relatedness refers to a need to feel a sense of belonging and being part of a team where they feel respected and valued

### Comparison by age

Average scores on measures generally declined with age. For some key measures (such as emotional energy, fatigue, symptoms of anxiety and depression, perceived organisational support, hindrance stressors, work engagement), the grouping of 36-45 years of age in particular reported lower average scores.

As described in the previous graph they drop off over tenure, unsurprisingly it is echoed with age, with 36-45 have the lowest scores

### Comparison by grade

Psychological detachment is slightly lower for supervisory managers. It demonstrates an individual's ability to switch off and distance themselves from their job, not only physically but also mentally, average is moderate

As would be expected, autonomy need satisfaction increases with grade.

Organisational measures such as perceived organisational support and vision clarity (of their force) are also reported more positively at higher grades.

Frequency of experiencing challenge stressors (time pressure, high levels of responsibility) unsurprisingly increase with grade; supervisory managers score particularly high on this measure.

Job satisfaction increases with grade.

### Comparison of Force regions

Minimal differences were found by regional groupings of forces (grouped by general force areas, not necessarily directly overlapping with forensic collaborative groups).

### **Main work location**

Those in roles involving working predominantly from home reported higher levels of autonomy, need satisfaction, sense of feeling valued by their supervisor and their force, supportive leadership and supervisor listening, vision clarity (of their force), perceived organisational support (from their force), job satisfaction, and engagement in process improvement activity.

Individuals mainly working from home also reported lower frequencies of facing hindrance stressors at work; those working out in the community / face to face with the public scored highest for this measure.

Sense of feeling valued by the public was highest for those working out in the community / face to face with the public, while lower for those working from home.

### **What Next**

These results will be shared across policing and particularly with forensic leaders who have influence in this area.

The wellbeing workstream are working on the creation of a Forensic Wellbeing Toolkit with these findings in mind. This will align with the work completed by the National Policing Wellbeing Service and will complement the Investigators Wellbeing Toolkit.

Other FCN workforce workstreams are working across the community to identify effective methods to mentor and support our new members of staff and to provide continuing support to existing colleagues.

If you would like to get involved with any of the FCN Workforce Strategy Workstreams please drop us an email at [paula.mulroy@dorset.pnn.police.uk](mailto:paula.mulroy@dorset.pnn.police.uk) and [joanne.morrissey@dorset.pnn.police.uk](mailto:joanne.morrissey@dorset.pnn.police.uk)

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## **Appendix A**



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