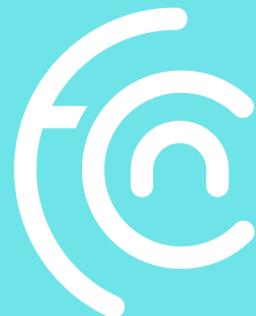


Wellbeing of Forensic practitioners

Protecting our most valuable resource

Dr. Joanne Morrissey
Workforce Strategy Lead
NPCC Forensic Capability Network



**Forensic
Capability
Network**
Shaping forensics, together.

Wellbeing for forensic practitioners



Where did this journey start?

National Police Wellbeing survey 2021

The third National Wellbeing Survey was designed to assess the current state of wellbeing from the perspective of the policing workforce.¹ The survey was available to the forty-three Home Office forces in England and Wales. On request, the Ministry of Defence Police and Guernsey Police were also able to participate in this research.

The research was undertaken to support the benefits realisation of the National Police Wellbeing Service which impacts on, and informs, strategic policing initiatives.

The survey received 36,633 responses (14.7% response rate), of which 784 responses were received from individuals working within Forensic Services roles



National Policing Wellbeing Survey 2021/22

Forensic Services

Appendix Report

Policing Research Unit

International Centre for Leadership and Followership

Durham University Business School

Durham University

Measure	All Respondents (Average)	Score Classification
Emotional Energy	3.78	Moderate
Fatigue (past 2 weeks)	4.72	Moderately High
Symptoms of Anxiety (past 3 months) (1-10 scale)	6.16	Moderately High
Symptoms of Depression (past 3 months) (1-10 scale)	5.45	Moderate
Physical Wellbeing (past 3 months) (1-5 scale)	3.34	Moderately High
Psychological Detachment from Work	4.16	Moderate
Disturbed Sleep (past 3 months)	4.39	Moderately High
Insufficient Sleep (less than 6 hours) (past 3 months)	4.41	Moderately High
Job Satisfaction	5.21	High
Intention to Quit	3.38	Moderately Low
Life Satisfaction (1-10 scale)	7.02	High
Sense of Being Valued by Co-Workers (0-10 scale)	7.49	High
Sense of Being Valued by Supervisor (0-10 scale)	6.52	Moderately High
Sense of Being Valued by the Force (0-10 scale)	4.82	Moderate
Sense of Being Valued by the Public (0-10 scale)	5.00	Moderate
Experienced Workplace Incivility (past 12 months) (1-6 scale)	2.20	Low
Sense of Competence at Work (past 3 months)	5.34	High
Sense of Autonomy at Work (past 3 months)	4.50	Moderately High
Sense of Relatedness at Work (past 3 months)	4.53	Moderately High
Prosocial Motivation	5.92	Very High
Work Engagement	5.50	High

Measure	All Respondents (Average)	Score Classification
Vision Clarity	4.72	Moderately High
Perceived Organisational Support	4.05	Moderate
Supportive Leadership	5.03	High
Supervisor Listening	4.86	Moderately High
Team Belonging	5.64	High
Challenge Stressors (1-5 scale)	3.92	High
Hindrance Stressors (1-5 scale)	3.79	High
Process Improvement Behaviour	5.50	High

Note: All of these measures used a 1 to 7 scale, unless stated.

Some key themes here that we will examine more later:

- - Anxiety
- - Fatigue
- - Sleep
- - Challenge stressors
- - Hindrance stressors

- + Valued
- + Job satisfaction
- + Competence
- + Prosocial motivation

Challenge stressors are work related demands and hindrance stressors being constraints that hinder performance.

Forensic Wellbeing Festival 16 – 20 May 2022

Monday 16th	9:45	Introduction & keynote- Andy Rhodes & Tim Rowlandson
	10:30	FCN Wellbeing Workstream & National Wellbeing Survey results- Paula Mulroy & Jo Morrissey
	11:00	Griffeye presents: Why are investigators traumatised by CSE images? Maariya Arshad
	14:00	Building resilience for employees in trauma exposed roles Dr Noreen Tehrani
Tuesday 17th	10:00	Psychological risk assessment- Liz Eades
	14:00	The story of my PTSD – Jo Ward
Wednesday 18th	10:00	Anxiety and resilience workshop- Natasha Hill
	12:00	Supporting forensic staff – some ideas to promote and maintain staff wellbeing- Tom Squire
	14:00	Sleep and fatigue- Dr Yvonne Taylor
Thursday 19th	10:00	Mindfulness- Natasha Hill
	12:00	BITESIZE: Laughter yoga- Rebecca Gilbody
	14:00	Introduction to Police Care UK- Dave Blundell
Friday 20th	10:00	PSNI & Met approach to supporting practitioner wellbeing- Eman Badri & Bob Heuston
	12:00	BITESIZE: Dynamic breathing and cold water therapy- Sam Murray & Miranda Bailey
	14:00	Wellbeing lessons learned from Grenfell- Andrew Langley

Wearables project

Harnessing data analytics to support wellbeing in the workplace

This project utilised data analytics to inform the individual of their wellbeing status and the organisation of their departmental health, through anonymised data.

It captured data with wearable devices, psychometric tests, gamified evaluative tools and existing force contextual information.

£150,000

ihp analytics and Leicestershire Police

22 CSI's and 17 DF practitioners

8 weeks Aug – Oct 2023

Garmin Vivosmart 4 wearable device

Heart Rate Variability (HRV), body battery, stress and recovery, sleep (including pulse oximetry) and the familiar wearable data on steps taken, floors climbed, and calories consumed

Psychometric testing	Wellbeing questionnaire
Openness to experience	Physical
Conscientiousness	Social
Extraversion	Environmental
Agreeableness	Economic
Emotional Stability	Psychological
Resilience	

Forensic Wellbeing toolkit

Whatever your forensic discipline or rank, this toolkit exists to help you understand and access current resources around wellbeing. All in one place which is easy to find, navigate and share. Developed by the FCN and Oscar Kilo for the NPCC, published April 2024.

[Wellbeing | FCN](#)



Where are we now? – The present

- FCN Wellbeing survey
- Created on Microsoft forms
- Shared via email, FCN website, social media and word of mouth
- 37 questions that included a combination of free text and categorical data
- Any forensic practitioners, any discipline, any country

Examining the use and value of wellbeing interventions for forensic practitioners

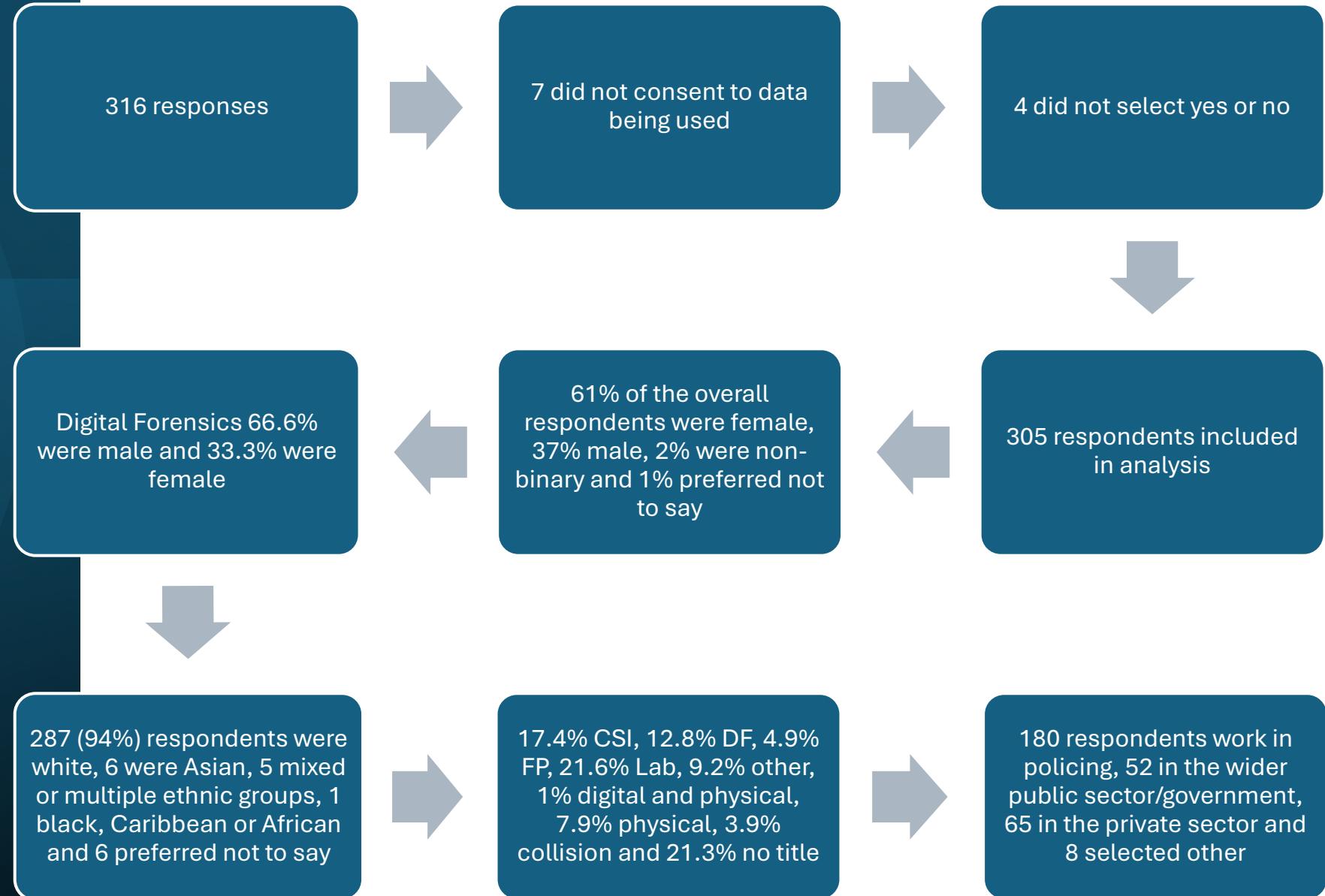
Participant Information. This research is being completed as part of work by the NPCC Forensic Capability Network (FCN) and the forensic community. The purpose of this research is to identify the wellbeing issues experienced by forensic practitioners, the help available to them, what have been most accessed by forensic practitioners and how effective they found them. This survey should be completed by **current or past forensic practitioners** (police, public and private sector) who have experienced wellbeing challenges and have engaged with wellbeing services. **Participation** is completely voluntary, you may choose not to answer any question and can withdraw at any time before submitting the survey. You should not feel under any circumstances coerced into taking part. This survey may collect **personal data** and some questions may also involve **special category data** (e.g. health, mental wellbeing and ethnicity). All responses will be anonymised as early as possible and handled in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Data will be analysed in aggregate form only and no individual responses will be identifiable in any reports. Raw data will be stored securely and only accessible to a very small number of authorised personnel. If you chose to provide an email address at the end of the survey, this will be stored separately to the survey results and for the purpose of future research requests. **Lawful Basis for Processing** We are processing your data under the UK GDPR:

- Article 6(1)(f) – Our legitimate interest is improving forensic staff wellbeing
- Article 9(2)(a) – Your explicit consent for processing special category data

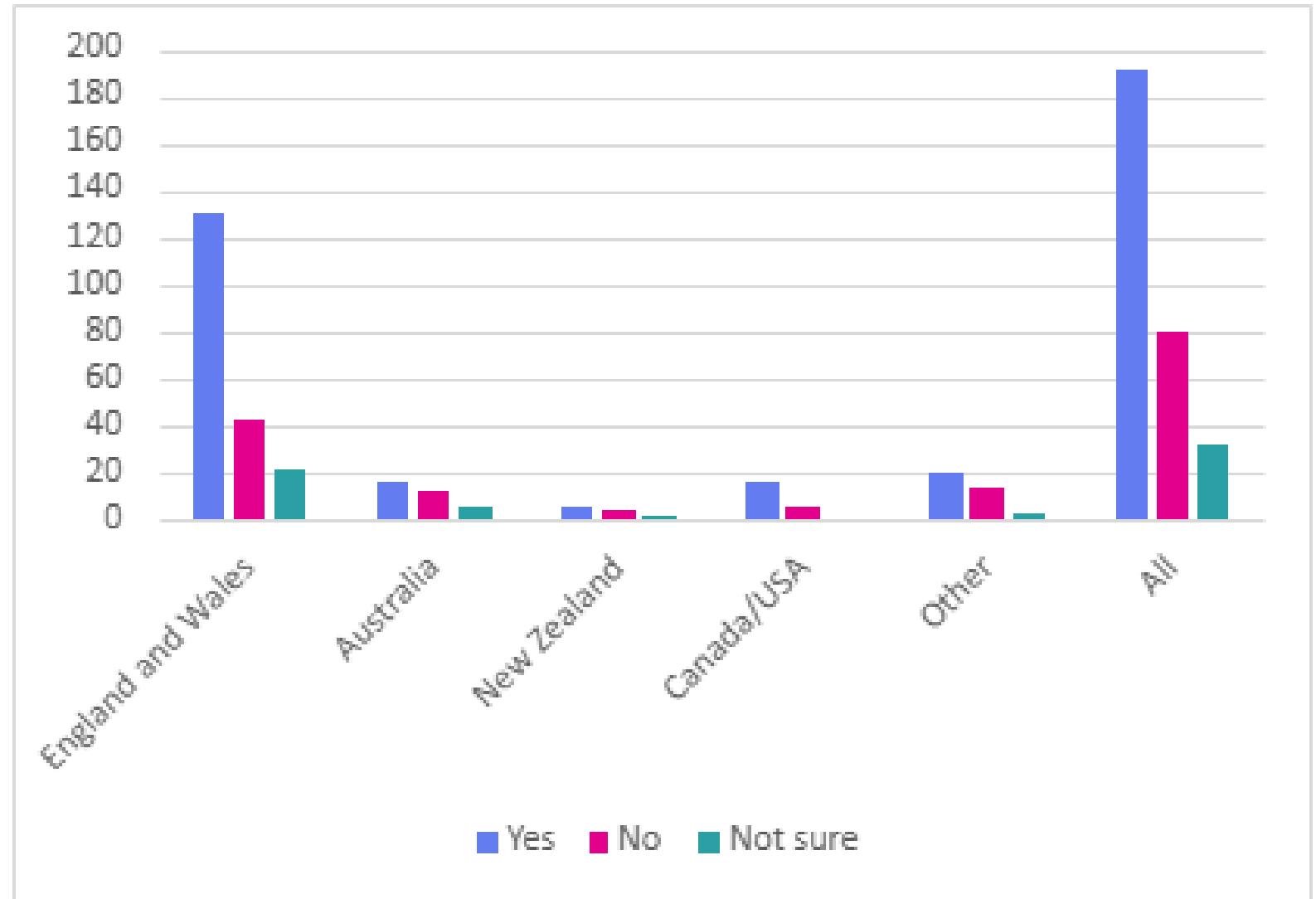
You have the **right** to access your data, request corrections or ask for deletion before submission. Once anonymised, data cannot be linked back to individuals. If participants have any questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher via email: **Project Researcher: joanne.morrissey@dorset.pnn.police.uk** By submitting your responses, you are providing **explicit consent** for us to process any special category data you choose to share in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

1. I have read the participant information details above and consent to my information being used in this research. If you do not consent then please select 'No' and you will be taken to the end of the questionnaire.
2. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study.
3. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I understand that once I submit this survey I will not be able to withdraw my data as it is anonymous. If you include your email address at the end then you will be able to contact the project researcher to request that your data is removed.
5. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
6. I understand what information will be collected from me for the study
7. For the purposes of the Data Protection Act (2018), if this project requires me to produce

The respondents

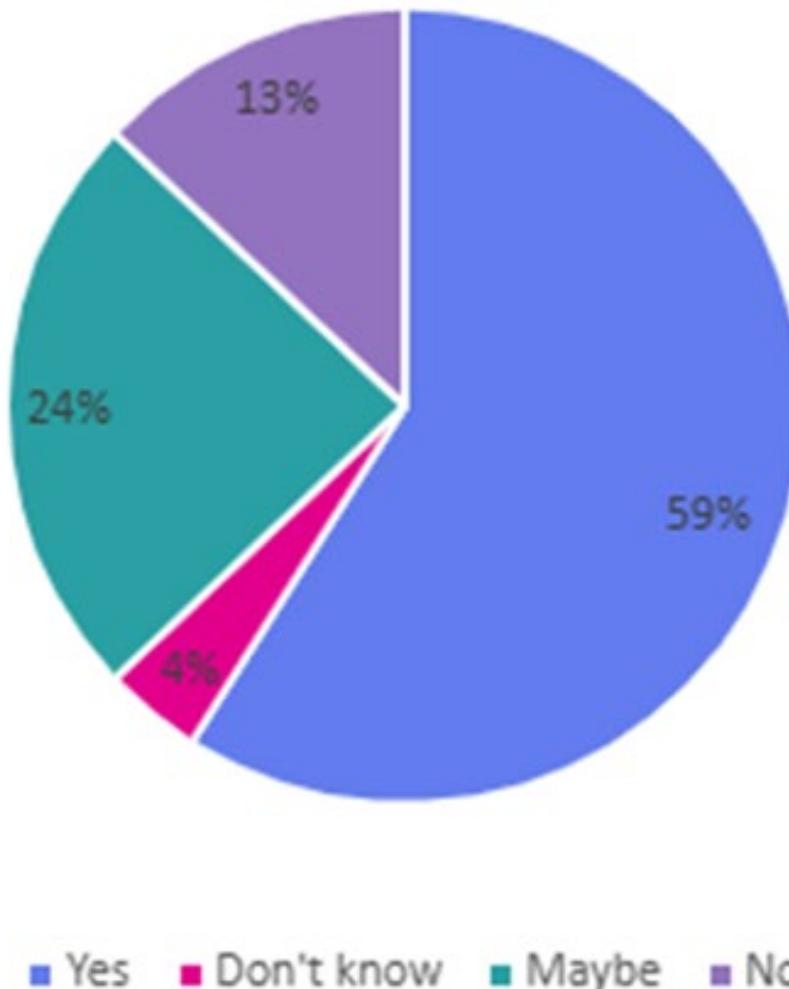


Have you experienced mental ill health?

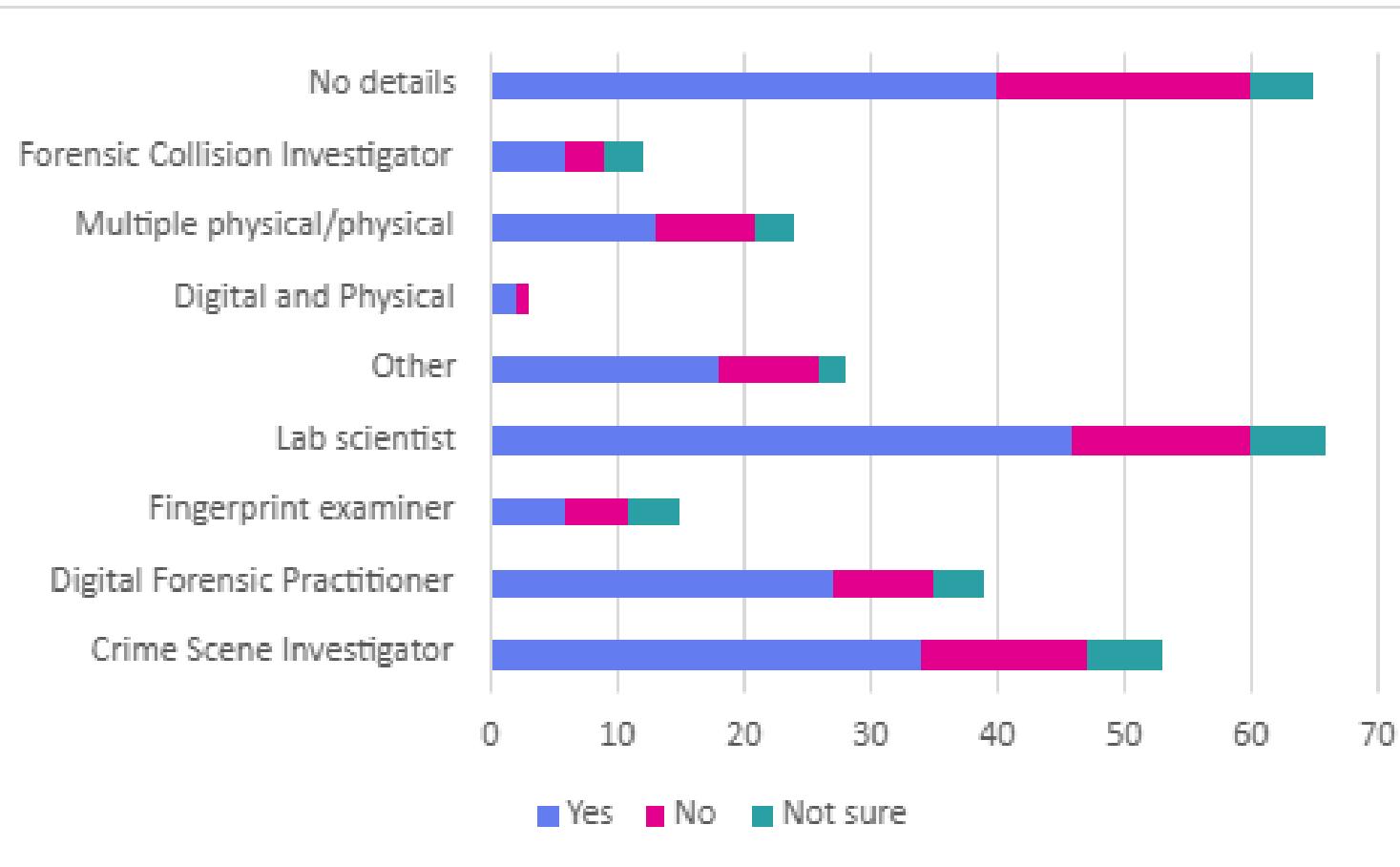


Overall – 63% Yes, 26% No, 11% Not Sure

Was this caused or exacerbated by work?



Number of respondents with their role and experience of mental ill health.



Percentage of respondents who have experienced mental ill health

- CSI – 64%
- DF – 69%
- Lab scientists – 70%
- FP – 40%

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I have the knowledge, skills and experience to do my job



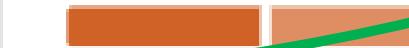
I am trusted to do my job



I understand what is expected of me in the workplace



I get a sense of personal satisfaction from work.



I feel belonging to my organisation



I feel like my job makes a difference



I have the opportunity for professional development in my workplace



I have access to learning and development opportunities



I am recognised for the work that I do



I have opportunities for career progression



100%

0%

100%

Managing time and workload

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

I am able to manage time pressures/deadlines at work



I am able to manage the workload I have



I am able to prioritise my workload



I am able to take enough breaks at work



I am able to take leave/holiday when I need it

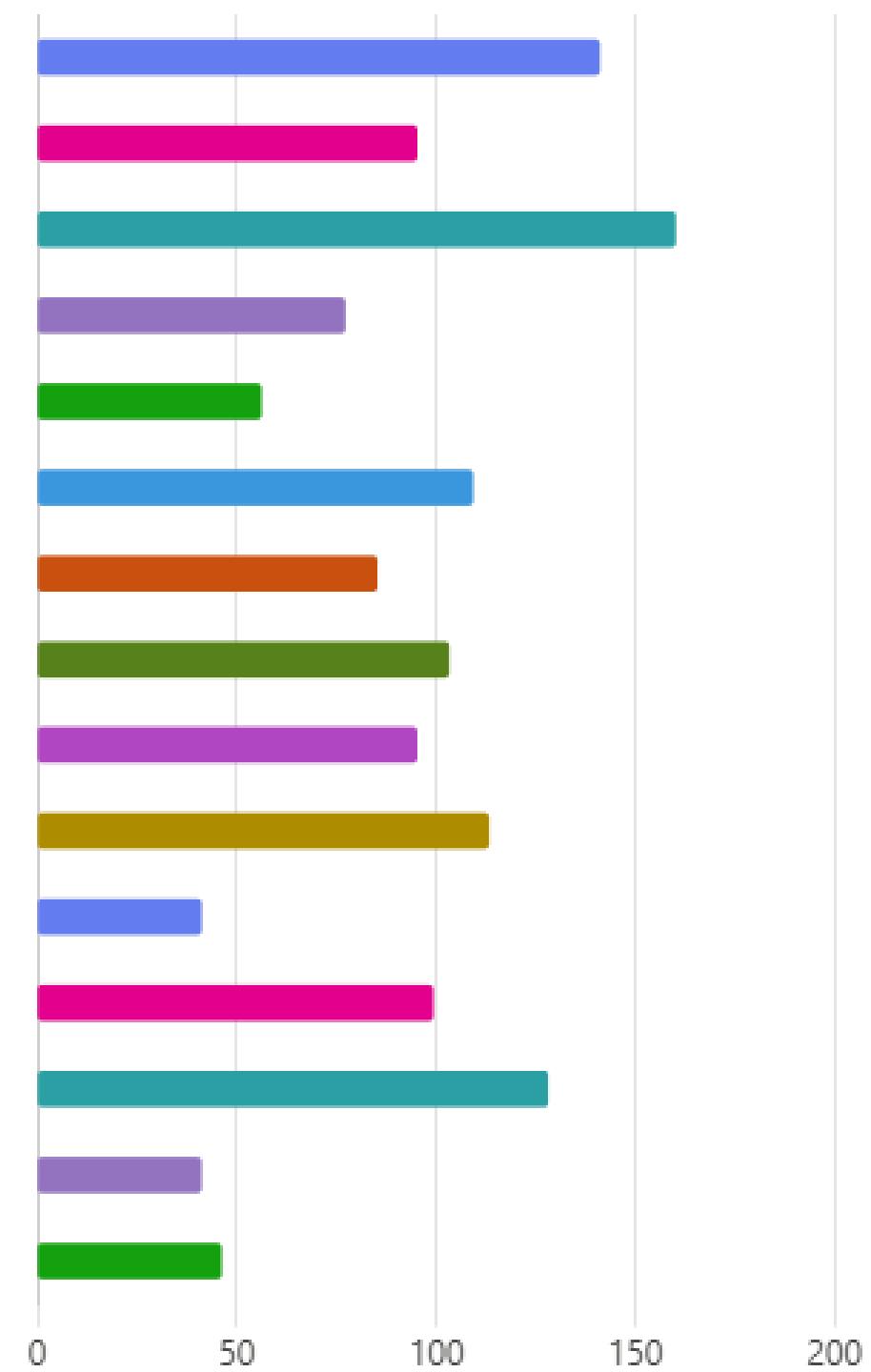


100%

0%

100%

● IT challenges (use of IT systems)	141
● Equipment issues	95
● Workload/case load	160
● Relationships with other team members	77
● Relationship with line manager	56
● Relationship with other management (not your direct line manager)	109
● Paperwork/documentation	85
● Exposure to distressing material/content/scenes	103
● Unrealistic deadlines	95
● No feedback on cases (how your work impacts the case)	113
● Exposure to Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)	41
● Lack of professional development opportunities	99
● Lack of career progression opportunities	128
● Bullying/harassment	41
● Other	46



Which work issues cause you wellbeing issues at work?

Managing time and workload

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

I am able to manage time pressures/deadlines at work



I am able to manage the workload I have



I am able to prioritise my workload



I am able to take enough breaks at work



I am able to take leave/holiday when I need it

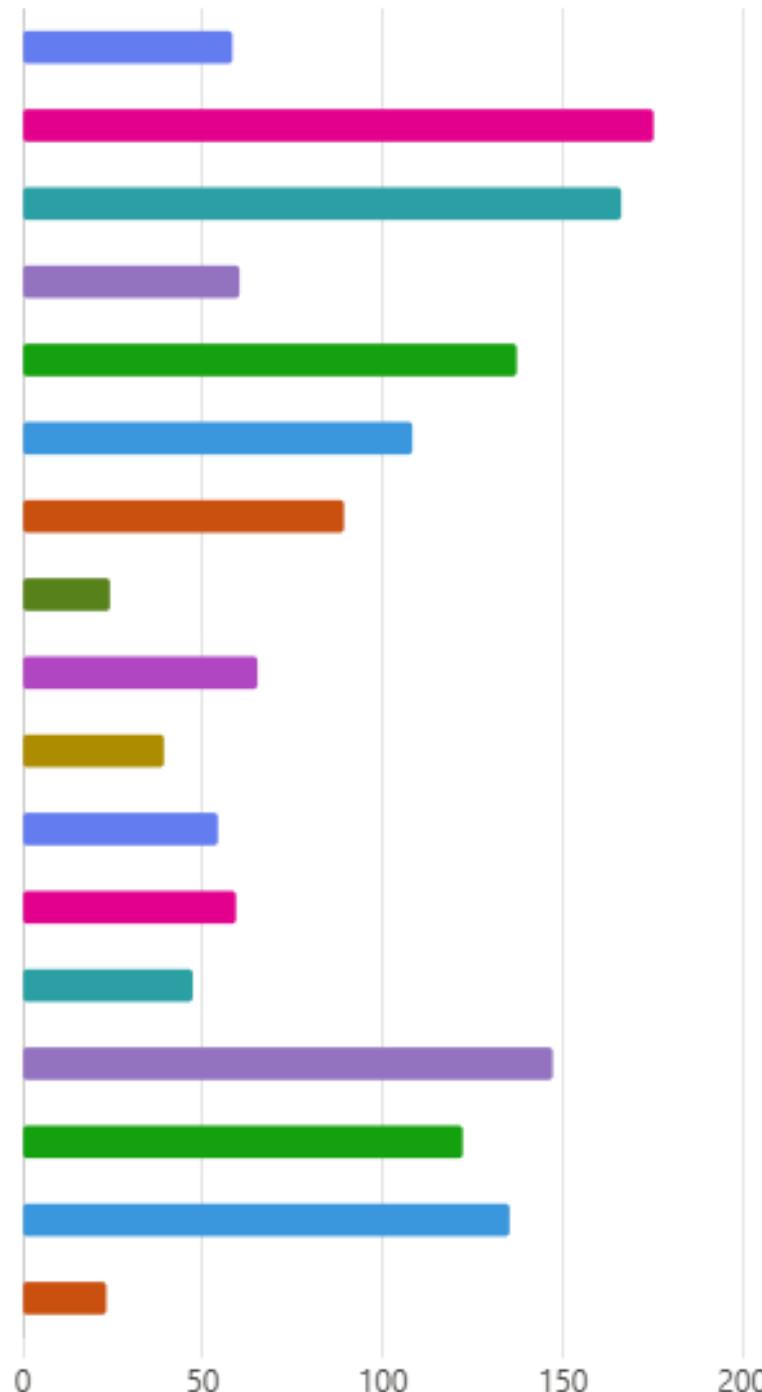


100%

0%

100%

● Mindfulness, meditation	58
● Physical - exercise	175
● Social activities/meetings- including friends and family	166
● Professional help	60
● Taking breaks from work	137
● Suppressing emotions	108
● Suppressing thoughts	89
● Use of alcohol or other substances	24
● Eating junk food	65
● Working overtime	39
● I don't have any particular strategy	54
● Good sleeping habits	59
● Good diet/food choices	47
● Talking to work colleagues	147
● Talking to friends	122
● Talking to family	135
● Other	23



How do you manage stress from your work?

Some key issues

- 37% attended work when they were unwell (39% sometimes)
- 37% feel burnt out by work (39% sometimes)
- 43% feel emotionally exhausted by work (41% sometimes)
- 49% feel fatigue or physically exhausted by work (39% sometimes)
- 36% feel that they balance work and home life – (39% sometimes) and 26% rarely or never
- Only 19% found it difficult to empathise with others, 29% sometimes and 50 % rarely or never
- Despite this 34% have no intention of leaving forensics and 14% intend to stay for the next 3-5 years

Wellbeing resources available in the workplace

- 87% of respondents have access to resources
- Of these
 - 39% had used them
 - 52% had not
 - 7% other
 - 2% didn't know
- 39% of respondents had also accessed services external to the workplace

Most used workplace wellbeing support

1. 1:1 counselling
2. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
3. Occupational Health
4. Mental health awareness training
5. TRiM
6. Wellbeing dogs
7. Wellbeing rooms
8. Peer support programmes
9. Team Wellbeing days
10. Other

Most useful intervention

1. 1:1 counselling
2. Line Manager
3. Occupational Health
4. Mental health awareness training
5. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
6. Wellbeing dogs
7. TRiM
8. Team Wellbeing days
9. Wellbeing Lead
10. Wellbeing rooms

Key themes

- The importance of peer support
 - How do we do this? Formal and Informal
 - Where?
- The importance of line management
 - Training
 - Support for line managers
- The disconnect between the workforce and the organisation
 - Why? What can we do to address this?
- The need to address organisational and operational challenges
 - What is within our control?
 - Are there any things that we can change now?
- Wellbeing initiatives
 - Do we know what works? When and for whom?

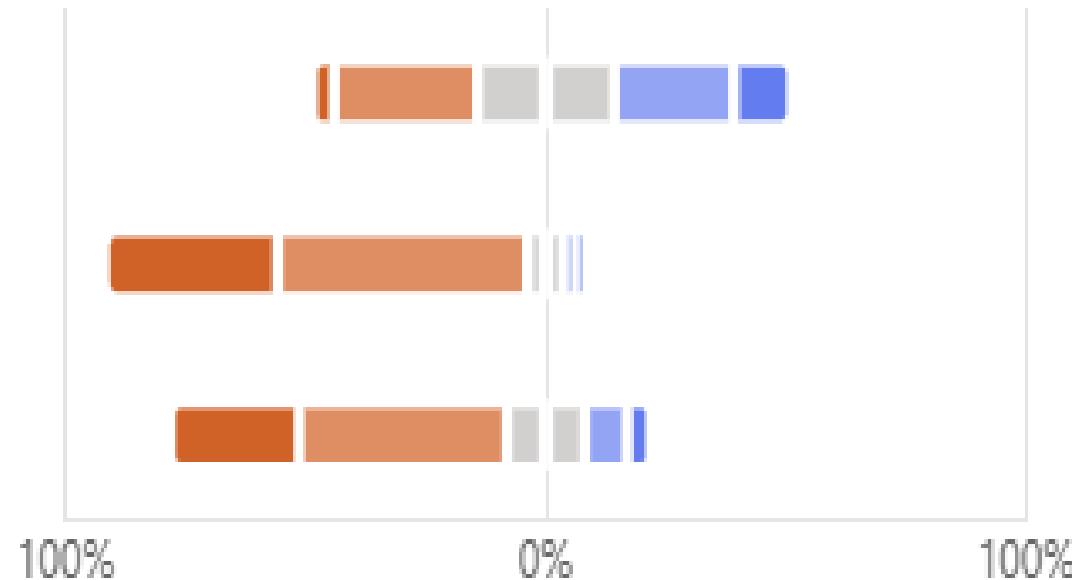
Themes that emerged from the free text comments



Feeling supported

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

by my organisation



by my colleagues

by my line manager

Remember the feedback from the 2021 National Police Wellbeing survey? Workplace stressors
Why do the workforce not feel supported by their organisation?

Peer support/colleagues

88% agree or strongly agree – feel supported by colleagues

- Colleagues are best support
- Working in isolation is an issue
- Lack of rest facilities/canteens for informal peer support
- Research in relation to lack of breaks, lack of rest and decompression time (Kealey et al., 2025)
- Police Federation research in 2024 supports this

My line manager

70% agree or strongly agree - feel supported by line manager

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree or disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

Takes an interest in my wellbeing



Provides the workplace support I need for role



Provides me with resources or links to resources I can use



Provides me with the support I need for my wellbeing

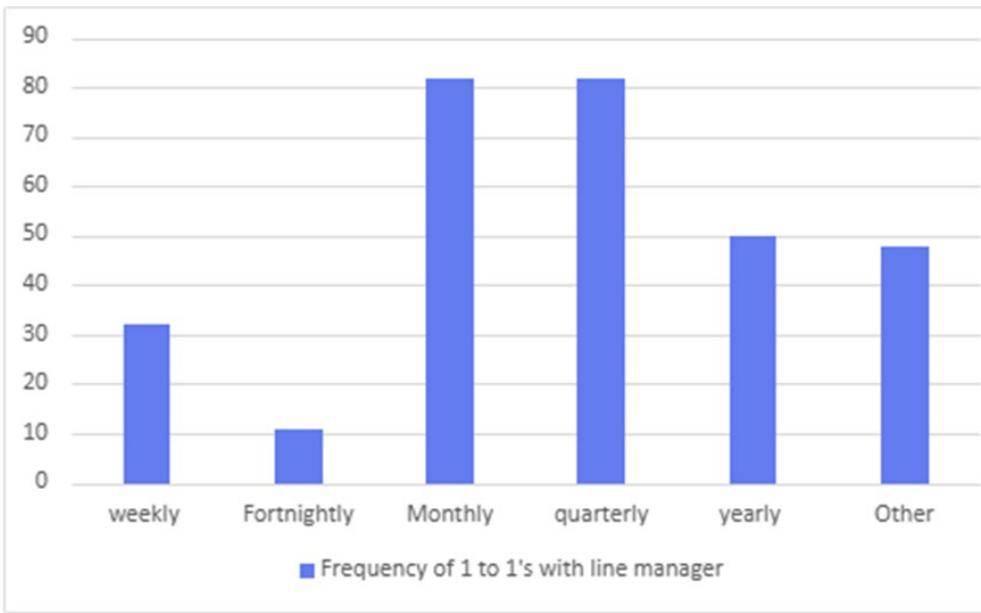


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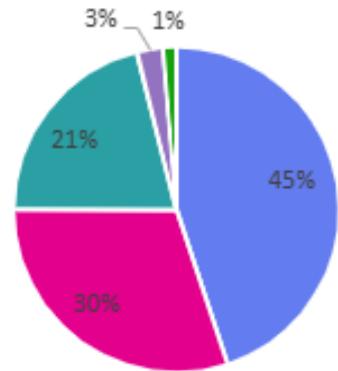
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The importance of 1 to 1's with line managers

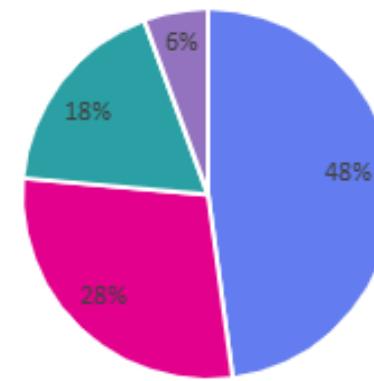


Do you feel that your line manager was equipped to provide this support?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■ Other ■ NA

Were they useful?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■ Other

Line manager support in the workplace

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Takes an interest in my wellbeing



Provides the workplace support I need for role



Provides me with resources or links to resources I can use



Provides me with the support I need for my wellbeing



100%

0%

100%

Comments about line management

Knew basic options available but was not supportive and was uncompassionate about the issue.

Line manager is available whenever required

No formal support, just conversation

Moved from lab to management.....no understanding of how to support people.line manager is given little support or additional training

Operational support not wellbeing support

Line manager not a skilled manager and was often the cause of work stresses rather than someone who could support you through work stresses

Line manager knows who to signpost to

There is no sincerity in any of the help and wellbeing

My line manager has ensured that reasonable adjustments have been to make my work life easier.

Line manager has no empathy

trim trained and fully supportive

provided space for talking, good listening; tries to suggest solutions; not really trained, however aware of many of the supports available

Understands the challenges and difficulties

I work for the Gov. so its just ticking box's ...

very understanding

I feel supported by my organisation (%)

Strongly disagree/Disagree

Country	%
England and Wales	42
Australia/New Zealand	31
Other	25

Sector	%
Policing	33
Private	54
Wider public sector/govt	27
Other	12.5

Role	%
Crime Scene Investigator	28
Digital Forensic Practitioner	33
Fingerprint examiner	33
Lab scientist	42
Other	39
Digital and Physical	67
Multiple physical/physical	33
Forensic Collision Investigator	42
No details	40

Organisational support

34% agree or strongly agree – feel supported by organisation

- I do not feel my organisation take mental health seriously, some support is available but it is a tick box exercise
- Still a lot of stigma
- "Wellbeing" is used very much as a buzzword. The facilities are technically provided but frowned upon if you actually use them
- Totally reactive not proactive when acknowledged work is potentially traumatic/ stressful.
- The word wellbeing is thrown about but they aren't actually bothered about staff's well-being, outside of direct line management
- I do not feel my organisation take mental health seriously, some support is available but it is a tick box exercise
- Burnout is a significant crisis in my office and morale is very low

Organisational support

- The change of culture and openness is key to meaningful access and engagement
- No interest in the welfare of staff. They work to ineffective policies that just pay lip service.
- Organisation appears to be concerned about welfare, but when it comes down to needing it, it is not always there
- The business is run by managers who do not understand the job and do not care about their staff
- Seen to be done but isn't actually valued or utilised effectively by management. The word well-being is thrown about but they aren't actually bothered about staff's well-being, outside of direct line management
- Don't know what it is like on the shop floor
- Would like to be recognised for my efforts
- Still a lot of stigma

Themes that emerged from the free text comments



Workplace challenges

- The job itself can be hard but mostly the stress comes from lack of resourcing/staffing
- Work will never decrease, how we prioritise the work needs review.
- Work alone, are sent to the next job with little time to process what they have dealt with.
- Burnout is a significant crisis in my office and morale is very low
- Pay and career pathways, underpaid for expected work/stress of role within company, no recognition for work
- Would like to be recognised for my efforts
- Isolation
- Pay and career pathways, underpaid for expected work/stress of role within company, no recognition for work
- I have never worked in such a stressful and unsupported workplace. Since day 1 I was shocked and almost wanted to get out straight away

Themes that emerged from the free text comments



39% had used them

52% had not

7% other

2% didn't know

Wellbeing initiatives

I don't use the wellbeing services at work because I don't feel that what I say will stay confidential.

The Wellbeing Team's support is one of the best experiences I have had when it has come to Mental health and they have a wide understanding and support to make sure we are fit to do our jobs.

Great deal of the wellbeing programmes offered are well meaning but ultimately are a sticking plaster. Really tackling systemic issues is the priority.

Only get 6 sessions of counselling offered - this is only ever going to scratch the surface, need for monthly (or maybe bi-monthly) 'mandatory' counselling

Wellbeing initiatives

Totally reactive not proactive when acknowledged work is potentially traumatic/ stressful.

There are no mandatory briefings following attendances at traumatic/serious crime scenes and a serious lack of empathy from some.

It should be compulsory for all forensic practitioners to have at least one session of counselling every year, supplied the employer

Damage has likely already been done, and many issues go unrecognised

Wellbeing for forensic practitioners



The next steps

Introduction to the working group

Establish purpose and aims of the group

Review membership

Creation of sub -groups

Determine methods and meeting dates

Practitioner group

What are the challenges?

What are the workforce stressors?

What is offered to you in the workplace?

What do you use and what works?

Why are things not getting better?

Is it different for different disciplines?

What would you like to see done?

What would help?

What is missing?

focus groups and semi-structured interviews

Leadership group

What is within your power to change?

What are you already doing?

How is success of interventions measured?

Where is the disconnect between the organisation and the workforce?

What would success look like to you?

Focus group or questions for forensic leads

Academic group

What research have you been doing?

What other research have you seen?

Literature review

Group meeting

Compile responses from each sub group

Share results with all group

Conclusions and Recommendations

Practitioner group – focus groups

- Disciplines
 - CSI
 - DF
 - FEL
 - Fingerprints
 - Any others?
- Other relevant info
 - Region
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Ethnicity
- Specific role related issues
- Overall work-related issues
- Home/personal life impact
- Interventions
 - Available
 - Used
 - What works? How do we measure it?
 - What should be introduced?

Leadership group – interviews/focus groups

- Forensic leaders
 - Leadership perspective
 - What is already happening?
 - Initiatives, communication
 - What works and what could be better?
 - Use of AI to improve practices
 - What is in their power to change?
 - How does your organisation work?
 - Psychological safety
 - What would you like to see?
 - How do we measure success?

Academic group

- What research exists already?
- What are you doing?
- How can we learn from other disciplines?

The next steps

Finalize and share the report

- Disseminate findings to the forensic community
- Shared freely across the community

Update to the FCN forensic wellbeing toolkit

Interviews and focus groups

- Gather qualitative insights to deepen understanding of organisational challenges.

Review findings and consider impact

- Identify good practice
- Evaluation of interventions and wellbeing initiatives

Forensic Wellbeing Strategic plan?

Joanne.morrissey@dorset.pnn.police.uk

www.fcn.police.uk



**Forensic
Capability
Network**

Shaping forensics, together.

The future?

- Support
 - Peer support and mental health first aiders
 - Social spaces
 - Time
 - Structured and unstructured
 - Train a peer supporter in each team
 - Early intervention through peer-led support
 - Spot warning signs sooner
 - Improve workflow and emotional safety

The future?

- Line management
 - Integrated
 - Training
 - Support for line managers
- Organisational
 - Communication
 - Organisational culture – psychological safety

The future?

- Interventions
 - Targeted
 - Focused
 - Effective
 - Measured
 - Easily accessible
 - Resilience Training
 - Recognise and manage stress, burnout, overwhelm, PTSD
 - Understand signs and symptoms and coping strategies
 - Managing expectations
 - Psychological screening

The future

- Operational
 - Pro-social motivation
 - Career flexibility, workload allocation
 - Pay
 - Short term and long term
- Automation & AI
 - Use tools to reduce exposure to traumatic material
 - Improve workflow and emotional safety