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Segmenting the Rape and Serious Sexual Offence (RASSO) investigator workforce: implications for wellbeing and burnout

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing awareness of police investigators' wellbeing and the rising prevalence of burnout symptoms, creating long-term difficulties for policing. We utilized Maslach and Leiter's approach to segment the workforce population for Rape and Serious Sexual Offence (RASSO) investigators based on a cross-sectional survey of 18 police forces ($n = 2,108$) across England and Wales. We fitted a Proportional Odds model to analyze the factors associated with the odds of becoming disengaged and burned out. The findings show that RASSO investigators were grouped as 'effective' (39%), 'ineffective' (26%), 'overextended' (24%), 'disengaged' (2%) and 'burned out' (9%). Strong effects predicting disengagement and burnout were noted for increased stress levels and organizational or self-imposed pressures to work despite being unwell. Higher odds of being disengaged or burned out were related to dissociative views toward victim-survivors, including negative attitudes to specialist training, which we hypothesize were related to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, where an individual cognitively compensates in emotionally challenging situations. Increased workload, the impact on work-life balance and being mid-career (10–20 years) increased the odds of disengagement and burnout. A supportive learning environment combined with salient and credible health policies were shown to be protective factors, reducing the odds of being disengaged or burned out. Preventative interventions focusing on enhancing the learning environment alongside early identification and treating the build-up of stress to prevent long-term manifestations of burnout are recommended. The linkage between worsening RASSO investigator wellbeing and dissociative attitudes toward victim-survivors is a crucial finding from this study.

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Introduction

There is an acceptance that police investigators will be subject to prolonged exposure to job-related stresses, including challenging employment conditions such as shift work, occupational hazards and complex community interactions (Anderson et al., 2002; Cartwright & Roach, 2022; Morash et al., 2006). These complexities involved in routine policing affect investigators' physical wellbeing (Garbarino et al., 2013; Magnavita et al., 2018; Maguen et al., 2009) and mental health relative to the general population (Syed et al., 2020), including a higher risk of self-harm (Krishnan et al., 2022; Stanley et al., 2016). In this context, an emerging evidence base highlights the multifaceted

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interaction between policing and deteriorating wellbeing (Civiloti et al., 2022; Santa Maria et al., 2018).

The consequences of work-related stress in policing are reduced productivity, job satisfaction and overall quality of life, increased job turnover, absenteeism and early retirement (Alexopoulos et al., 2014; Gomes et al., 2022; Magnavita & Garbarino, 2013). Prolonged exposure to work-related stress has resulted in interest in 'burnout' as a separate, if related, concept (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Chronic stress manifesting as burnout is related to raised anxiety levels (Santa Maria et al., 2018), changing career intentions (Drew et al., 2024; Nonis et al., 2024) and compassion fatigue towards victims and investigators' families (L. E. Davies et al., 2023; Lennie et al., 2020; Turgoose et al., 2018). Moreover, to adjust to the consequences of burnout, there is evidence of officers adopting maladaptive practices such as problematic drinking, particularly for male investigators (Houdmont & Jachens, 2022; Irizar et al., 2021; Nielsen et al., 2018) and counterproductive working practices (Smoktunowicz et al., 2015).

Most of the research on burnout has focused on three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, negativity and cynicism (depersonalization) and the lack of professional accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). A recent series of reviews (Alves et al., 2023; Correia et al., 2023; Galanis et al., 2021; Purba & Demou, 2019; Sherwood et al., 2019) have identified common factors associated with stress and burnout in policing, including demographic factors (such as age, gender, marital status), job characteristics (rank, length of service, tasks), job demands encompassing occupational and operational factors (such as team cohesion, resourcing, hostile working environments and exposure to trauma), lifestyle (eg, smoking, drinking, exercise), coping strategies (maladaptive and adaptive), the nature of social interactions namely social support (Cartwright & Roach, 2022) and personality traits (eg, resilience, affective empathy). These factors are broadly predictive, to a greater or lesser extent, across most studies where differences may relate to policing function (Habersaat et al., 2015).

Increasingly, there is tension for police investigators to be seen by the general public and the government to be able to reduce offending while also supporting the victims of crime (Foley & Massey, 2021; Noblet et al., 2009). The tension between crime-solving and being responsive to victims is notably greater for investigators working in Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) faced with demanding media interest. Increased RASSO cases reported to the police resulting from high-profile initiatives such as Operation Yewtree¹ have led to complex and intrusive forensic evidential demands, a lengthy criminal justice process causing significant attrition juxtaposed with entrenched attitudes exposing adherence to rape myths, resulting in the poor treatment of victims-survivors (K. Davies et al., 2022; George & Ferguson, 2021; Hohl & Stanko, 2022). These issues have been compounded by a lack of adequate resources to meet the increased demand, a lack of suitably qualified investigators and restructuring that has diminished RASSO investigations as a specialism in favour of a more generalized approach (Dalton et al., 2022; Maguire & Sondhi, 2022; E. Williams et al., 2022) exacerbated by the recruitment of a younger and inexperienced police workforce (E. Williams & Sondhi, 2022). Moreover, E. Williams et al. (2022) argued that there is a critical intersection for complex RASSO investigations between the learning environment and investigator wellbeing, theorizing that investigator perceptions of being inadequately prepared and untrained to manage complex investigations will be a source of stress and if sustained, burnout. Maguire and Sondhi (2022) showed that RASSO investigators were highly motivated to support victim-survivors but were frustrated by organizational constraints that affected their ability to deliver support and to focus on performance metrics at the expense of victim care. Furthermore, the aetiological association between wellbeing and the organizational learning environment was borne out by statistical analyses of Maslach's three burnout domains for RASSO investigators that found substantial effects for workload, work-life balance, perceptions of the utility of organizational health policies and the broader learning climate on all three burnout symptoms (Sondhi et al., 2023).

Empirically, the focus has been on measuring burnout as an end product rather than conceptualizing Maslach's three domains as only quantifying the symptomology, leading to

definitional and interpretative confusion (Bianchi et al., 2019; Hillert et al., 2020; Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Maslach and Leiter (2016, 2021) offered a new conceptual framework for understanding burnout by establishing five workforce segments on a continuum: ‘engaged’ (strong positive scores across all three domains), ‘ineffective’ (strong negative score on professional efficacy), ‘overextended’ (strong negative score on exhaustion), ‘disengaged’ (strong negative score on cynicism) and ‘burnout’ (negative scores on all three domains). Here, the authors use standardized values that establish the critical boundaries for exhaustion at $z = \text{Mean} + (\text{SD} * 0.5)$, cynicism at $z = M + (\text{SD} * 1.25)$; and efficacy at $z = M + (\text{SD} * .10)$. The structure of the segments is shown in Table 1. The method is relatively novel and has been used across comparably demanding work environments such as medicine, mental health and social work. The derivation of the five segments incorporates several disciplines, including police officers, that comprise one-fifth (20%) of the dataset used to determine the groupings (Maslach et al., 2018).

Table 1. Summary of the Maslach five-segment structure (Maslach et al., 2018).

	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Efficacy
Engaged	Low	Low	High
Ineffective	Low to Moderate	Low to Moderate	Low
Overextended	High	Low to Moderate	Low to Moderate
Disengaged	Low to Moderate	High	Low to Moderate
Burnout	High	High	Low

Furthermore, an Australian study also incorporated responses from police officers and different professional groups, providing additional evidence for the model structure (Leiter, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to describe the characteristics of the RASSO workforce population using this new granular approach. Specifically, we will determine what factors are associated with a granular description of RASSO investigators.

Methods

Study design, settings and participants

We deployed an online cross-sectional survey using the JISC platform (www.onlinesurveys.co.uk) to RASSO officers as part of Operation Soteria Bluestone in 19 police forces across England and Wales, who agreed to participate in the research. The participating forces covered the largest forces to some of the smallest, encompassing all regions in England and Wales, embodying a range of complexity and urban and rural concerns. The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee HRCE/3854 approved the study. All respondents received an information sheet that detailed informed consent procedures. We administered the online survey to an estimated 6,590 RASSO investigators, including first responders, dedicated RASSO investigators and primary and secondary investigators and their supervisors between January and February 2023. These 2 months were negotiated in light of ongoing operational commitments. The survey contained filter questions ensuring that the roles that managed RASSO investigations were selected for participation. We received 2,108 (32% response rate) completed survey responses with an average time for completion between 15 and 30 min. There was difficulty in determining the exact response rate as the survey was administered to areas with specialist RASSO investigators (as a dedicated function or within a generalist unit) and to forces with a blended or generic approach generalist (investigators were responsible for managing a range of offences, including RASSO).

Instruments and measures

Our primary focus was to segment the RASSO investigator population using the ordering derived from the five groupings described above as the dependent outcome (Maslach et al., 2018). The Maslach Burnout Inventory Human Services Survey measuring on a Likert scale (0 – never to 6 – every day) the three dimensions of *Emotional Exhaustion* [EE] ($\alpha = 0.92$) comprising nine measures, *Depersonalisation* [DP] ($\alpha = 0.75$) including five items and *Lack of Personal Accomplishment* [LPA] ($\alpha = 0.72$) containing eight items. We profiled the RASSO workforce profile using Maslach et al.'s criteria (2018 Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Maslach et al., 2018), which was established using z-scores to establish critical boundaries as described earlier. Our independent variables included demographic characteristics (*age* and *gender* only, as ethnicity data may allow for the potential identification of an individual), location (*police force area*) and occupational characteristics (*length of service in policing*, *policing function*, *rank*, *length of time in the current role*, *entry route into policing*) as overall descriptors of the respondent population. To understand the nuances of the broader learning environment, we deployed measures from Tones and Pillay (2008), where four groups emerge specific to RASSO investigators, including *Learning Climate* ($\alpha = 0.89$), *Individual Goal Disengagement* ($\alpha = 0.68$), *Time for Learning* ($\alpha = 0.82$) and *Working Environment* that encapsulates colleagues and supervisors that are supportive and receiving helpful feedback ($\alpha = 0.74$) measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree).

The type of occupational demands with relevance for policing were derived from the UK Civil Service People Survey, which created a *Work Demands* component from three items: 'having an acceptable workload', 'having enough time to get the job done' and 'being satisfied with the time spent on paid work' ($\alpha = 0.82$). We utilized five items: 'working in your own free time', 'worrying about job problems after work', 'finding it difficult to unwind after work', 'too tired to enjoy things at home' and 'thinking about work when with family or friends' ($\alpha = 0.85$) to create a *Work-Life Balance* measure. Both components were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree). To understand further the drivers of organizational demands, we included measures of the perceptions underpinning personal or organizational priorities: *Charge or Conviction* ($\alpha = 0.67$) and *Risk Avoidance* comprising questions on not making a mistake or not getting into trouble ($\alpha = 0.60$) using an 8-point forced response Likert scale of 1 – most preferred to 8 – least preferred.

A crucial study component investigated health, wellbeing and stress levels for RASSO investigators. As noted in the introduction, we hypothesized that RASSO investigators face unique challenges when working with interpersonal crime. To allow for comparability across sectors, we incorporated health and wellbeing measures from the UK NHS Staff Survey that included binary yes/no questions: *Unwell due to work-related stress in the last 12 months*; *Pressure to come to work despite being unwell from supervisors and/or colleagues*; *Put pressure on yourself to come to work despite being unwell*; *Unwell during the last 12 months due to work-related stress*. A final health-related question is on the perception of the salience of *organisational health policies* on a Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree).

Additional sections included measures of perceptions of *self-efficacy* comprising confidence and experience in managing RASSO cases on a Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree), which have been hypothesized to be related to training and education (E. Williams et al., 2022). The unique nature of investigating and managing RASSO, we examined through the perceptions of the main *barriers to working with victim-survivors* that included five questions encompassing communication, addressing distress and concerns over victim-survivor credibility ($\alpha = 0.66$) on an 5-point scale of indicating relative perceived importance from 1 – main issues to 8 – least perceived issue. Perceptions of the most challenging aspects of dealing with victim-survivors included nine questions: *Managing victim-survivors' distress*, *managing workload*, *Under pressure to meet performance targets*, *Unsure how to communicate*,

Lack of training on victim engagement, Victim credibility, Unsure where to signpost victim-survivors, Lack of team support and Concerns over personal wellbeing measured using a binary yes/no. Attitudes towards victims-survivors were also tested over three separate questions on a 5-point scale.

Data analysis

We deployed a proportional odds model as the outcome variable establishes a natural ordering. In the absence of testing for the ordinal structure of the dependent variables, it has been shown that the use of standard regression techniques leads to distorted estimates of the independent variable effects and erroneous tests of statistical significance (R. A. Williams & Quiroz, 2020) and specifically for instances using binary logistic modelling (Norris et al., 2006). With its superior statistical power, proportional odds modelling is broadly viewed as appropriate in ordinal measures as outcome variables because it allows independent variables to affect the different orders of the outcome measure, and creates a single interpretable measure as opposed to multiple outcomes (Buri et al., 2020; R. A. Williams & Quiroz, 2020).

The five measures are considered to have sequentially worsening effects on the individual, starting with 'effective' and ending with 'burned out'. This was achieved by defining the cumulative probabilities rather than considering the probability of a single outcome. Using the five outcomes, it reported a departure from the Proportional Odds (PO) assumption such that the estimated effect of a criterion included in a selected summary model is the same across the cumulative logits of all ordered categories. This was noted for three approaches across ordered categories, continuation ratios and adjacent categories (Liu, 2015). Consequently, the categories created were engaged, ineffective-overextended, disengaged-burned out, which adhered to the PO assumption.² We ran the PO model in Stata v18 (StataCorp, 2023) using the command (ologit).

We entered the complete set of 40 measures described above into a backward stepwise regression model that reduced the set of significant variables (set at 5% by way of a Wald test) to 16, of which two measures failed the PO assumption (*gender* and *self-efficacy*). To test whether the PO assumption was met, we deployed the Brant test (Brant, 1990) using the command (brant). The assumption test was not violated using a global test for all 33 regression coefficients tested simultaneously against the overall intercept. The p-value of 0.112 indicates that the PO method can be considered appropriate. Four goodness of fit tests (ordinal version of Hosmer–Lemeshow test, Pulkstenis–Robinson chi-squared and deviance tests and the Lipsitz likelihood-ratio test) using the command (ologitgof) demonstrated that none of the tests indicated a lack of fit (p-values between 0.14 and 0.86), confirming the appropriateness of the overall approach.

Results

Participants characteristics

As shown in Table 1, the average (mean) age of participants was 39.6 years, with the majority reported as female (51.8%, $n = 1,091$). A recent study has highlighted the notable growth in female representation across all areas of policing, including RASSO investigators, suggesting that the survey sample may be comparable with the broader population (Maguire et al., 2024). The primary grouping by rank was Detective Constable (32.8%, $n = 692$) and Constable (30.5%, $n = 643$). Of the respondents, over one-third (35.8%, $n = 755$) have 10–20 years of experience, with 23.1% ($n = 487$) having more than 20 years in policing. In addition, more than one-quarter (27.5%, $n = 580$) of the sample were in their current role for 4 years or more, and one-quarter (25.7%, $n = 541$) were in their role for 2–4 years. There was a broadly even spread by function with the largest groupings specialist RASSO investigators (28.1%, $n = 593$), Response (27.7%, $n = 584$) and General Investigative roles (26.5%, $n = 559$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Participant characteristics, $n = 2,108$.

Characteristic	Number/Mean	Percentage/Standard Deviation (SD)
<i>Age</i>		
Average (mean) age	39.6	(8.7)
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	1,091	51.8
Male	993	47.1
Other	24	1.1
<i>Rank</i>		
Constable	643	30.5
Sergeant	112	5.3
Inspector	84	4.0
Chief Inspector	10	0.5
Trainee Detective Constable	77	3.7
Detective Constable	692	32.8
Detective Sergeant	292	13.9
Detective Inspector	81	3.8
Detective Chief Inspector	24	1.1
Civilian Investigator	93	4.4
<i>Length of Service (Policing)</i>		
Less than 12 months	20	0.9
1–2 years	82	3.9
2–3 years	170	8.1
3–5 years	208	9.9
5–10 years	386	18.3
10–20 years	755	35.8
More than 20 years	487	23.1
<i>Length in Current Role</i>		
Less than 1 month	34	1.5
1–2 months	58	2.8
3–6 months	189	9.0
6–12 months	307	14.6
1–2 years	399	18.9
2–4 years	541	25.7
4 years or more	580	27.5
<i>Area of Policing</i>		
Specialist dedicated RASSO	593	28.1
Other investigative	274	13.0
General investigative	559	26.5
Response	584	27.7
Other	98	4.6

Health and wellbeing

High levels of perceived sickness were noted in the sample, with 63.4% ($n = 1,337$) reporting coming to work in the last 3 months despite being unwell and 62.2% ($n = 1,091$) stating that they experienced work-related stress in the previous 12 months. The indicators of burnout show that the mean level of emotional exhaustion (23.1) was higher than normative responses from medicine, social work, mental health and ‘other’ occupations and that the level of professional accomplishment (19.4) was considerably lower than these professions that score in the range of 31–37, whilst depersonalization was within the broader normative range (Maslach et al., 2018) (Table 3).

Table 3. Health and wellbeing perceptions, $n = 2,108$.

Characteristic	Number/Mean	Percentage/Standard Deviation (SD)
<i>Perceptions of Wellness</i>		
(last 3 months) Came to work despite being unwell (yes/no)	1,337	63.4
(last 12 months) Unwell due to work-related stress (yes/no)	1,091	62.2
<i>Burnout</i>		
Emotional Exhaustion	23.1	(13.3)
Depersonalization	5.3	(5.4)
Lack of Personal Accomplishment	19.4	(5.2)

RASSO workforce profile

Using the standardized profiles derived from Maslach et al. (2018), we show that the most extensive grouping of RASSO investigators was defined as ‘engaged’ (39%, $n = 812$), with over one-quarter (26%, $n = 541$) described as ‘ineffective’, 24% ($n = 495$) as ‘overextended’, 2% ($n = 49$) as ‘disengaged’ with ‘burnout’ incorporating less than one in ten (9%, $n = 180$) of the workforce (Figure 1).

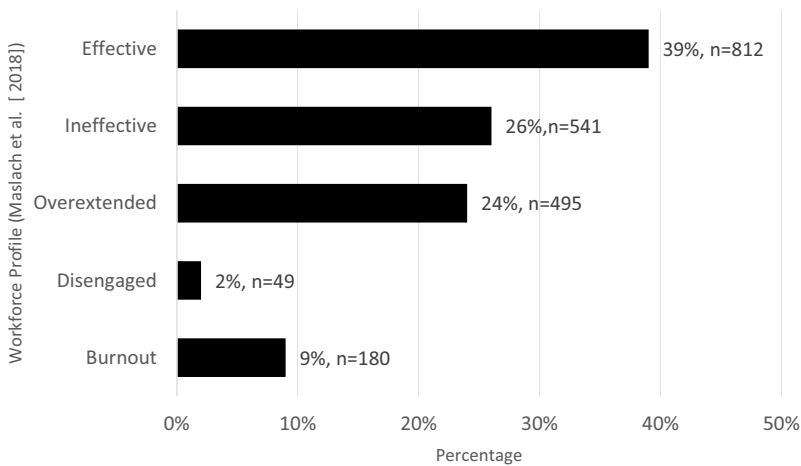


Figure 1. Profile of RASSO workforce, $n = 2077$ (valid cases).

Proportional odds model

The findings illustrate the substantial effect of stress (Odds Ratio [OR] 1.86, 95% Confidence Interval [CI] 1.48–2.33) and the pressure to come to work from colleagues (OR 1.61, 85% CI 1.21–2.14) and themselves (OR 1.44, 95% CI 1.17–1.78) despite being unwell. In other words, participants had worsening odds of moving from being effective to becoming disengaged and burned out, according to Maslach and Leiter’s (2016) criteria. The other factor that had higher odds of being worse than effective and ineffective-overextended (and thus more disengaged-burned out) was being in service for 10–20 years (Odds Ratio [OR] 1.23, 95% CI 1.07–1.42). Substantial effect sizes were noted for the learning environment as a protective factor against disengagement and burnout. If an individual was shown not to engage in training (Individual Goal Engagement), they had higher odds of being associated with being disengaged and burnout (OR 1.14, 95% CI 1.06–1.22). Conversely, perceptions of an enhanced working environment (supportive colleagues/supervisors) and the broader learning climate were associated with lower odds of disengagement and burnout (OR 0.89, 95% CI 0.85–0.93).

A key finding was a group of associations relating to the perceptions of working with victim-survivors. Being less willing to prioritize persuading a victim-survivor to support an investigation (OR 1.08, 95% CI 1.02–1.13) and less likely to prefer persuading a victim-survivor to continue with an investigation (OR 1.17, 95% CI 1.11–1.24) were associated with greater odds of disengagement and burnout. In addition, as the barriers managing victim-survivors become more of an issue for respondents, the odds of increased disengagement and burnout were raised (OR 0.85, 95% CI 0.79–0.91). Also, as respondents become less likely to prefer a charge or conviction as an indicator of successful organizational policy, the higher the odds that person will report being disengaged or burned out (OR 1.04, 95% CI 1.01–1.07).

We also found associations between the harmful effect of work demands (OR 0.94, 95% CI 0.91–0.98), the impact of these demands on work-life balance (OR 1.07, 95% CI 1.04–1.10) and negative attitudes to organizational health policies (OR 0.94, 95% CI 0.92–0.97) with the increased odds of disengagement and burnout (OR 0.94, 95% CI 0.91–0.97) (Table 4).

Table 4. Measurements associated with RASSO workforce wellbeing.

Measurement	Odds Ratio	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Health and Wellbeing:	1.86	p < 0.0001	(1.48 – 2.33)
Stress (yes/no)			
Pressure to come to work despite being ill: (colleagues/supervisors)	1.61	p = 0.001	(1.21 – 2.14)
Pressure to come to work despite being ill: (self)	1.44	p = 0.001	(1.17 – 1.78)
Organizational Characteristics: Years of Service (10–20 years)	1.23	p = 0.004	(1.07 – 1.42)
Learning Environment: Individual Goal Disengagement	1.14	p < 0.0001	(1.06 – 1.22)
Working Environment	0.89	p < 0.0001	(0.85 – 0.93)
Learning Climate	0.97	p = 0.001	(0.95 – 0.99)
Perceptions of managing victim-survivors: Supporting a victim-survivor, irrespective of the outcome	1.17	p < 0.0001	(1.11 – 1.24)
Persuading a victim-survivor to support the investigation, irrespective of the outcome	1.08	p = 0.001	(1.02 – 1.13)
Perceptions of the Barriers working with victim-survivors	0.85	p < 0.0001	(0.79 – 0.91)
Perceptions of Successful Organizational Policies: Charge and/or conviction	1.04	p = 0.016	(1.01 – 1.07)
Occupational Demands: Impact on work-life balance	1.07	p < 0.0001	(1.04 – 1.10)
Work Demands	0.94	p = 0.007	(0.91 – 0.98)
Perceptions of the Salience of Organisational Health Policies	0.94	p < 0.0001	(0.92 – 0.97)

Discussion

Using the approach detailed by Maslach and Leiter (2016), we provided a detailed understanding of the RASSO workforce that is generalisable to other interpersonal offending types, such as domestic violent crimes. We showed that 39% of respondents were classified as *effective*, and at the other end of the continuum, smaller proportions were *disengaged* (2%) or *burned out* (9%). Although there is a limited literature using Maslach and Leiter's (2016) approach to workforce segmentation, the prevalence of these categories mirrors a recent study in acute paediatric healthcare (Crowe et al., 2023), suggesting that highly demanding and pressurised workplaces may manifest worker well-being issues in similar ways. Therefore, we suggest that these findings indicate that the health and wellbeing of police RASSO investigators are more nuanced than previously understood, allowing for the development of targeted interventions based on the characteristics of each segment. However, analyses of ordinal data led to the proportional odds assumption being violated, creating three groups rather than five (engaged, ineffective-overextended and disengaged-burnout). We hypothesize that these factors represent a dynamic temporal process, moving from elevated stress to an ultimate 'burnout cascade' with perceptible clinical symptoms (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Van Dam, 2021; Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). Van Dam (2021) highlighted the broad stages involved in this burnout cascade, showing that changing symptoms start from slow recovery from stress, the introduction of stress symptoms across physical, mental, emotional and behavioural problems, a 'pseudo psychopathology' that encompasses involving stigmatising and victim-blaming and then a final stage of clinical burnout demonstrating reduced motivation and passivity. We found evidence in our study that supported the classification from heightened stress levels to reduced concern for victim-survivors as a person moves across these stages.

The proportional odds model identified the factors associated with differential odds of disengagement – burnout. We found strong effects of elevated stress and organizational pressures (from colleagues and supervisors) leading to self-driven pressures to work despite being unwell, moderated by perceived work demands (impacting perceptions of work-life balance). In addition, the only occupational characteristic identified as a significant factor was being in service for 10–20 years, suggesting a cumulative build-up of stress that culminates mid-career. Preventative strategies should consider addressing the impact of the long-term accumulation of stress and the implications for mid-career investigators. In combination, all these factors can increase the odds of disengagement – burnout. We suggest that these factors may point toward preventative approaches focused on stress amelioration,

including testing the efficacy of enhanced screening for stress-related symptoms, reducing perceived pressure to come to work despite being unwell and making proactive adjustments to work demands.

A key component underpinning higher odds of disengagement – burnout relates to dissociative perceptions of victim-survivors that align with Van Dam's (2021) symptomology. The increased perceived barriers to managing victim-survivors and reduced aspirations to 'go the extra mile' by being less likely to want to persuade individuals to continue with and support an investigation are associative with Van Dam's (2021) pseudopsychopathy symptoms of reduced creativity and empathy. In addition, RASSO investigators were also less likely to push for a charge or conviction as an organizational priority. We argue that worsening officer welfare, therefore, has a direct effect on likely charge/conviction rates and how well a victim-survivor may perceive their treatment by police. The complexities of managing the tension between ensuring positive criminal justice outcomes and the requirement to provide support for victim-survivors is now an intrinsic part of policing (Foley & Massey, 2021; Maguire & Sondhi, 2022; Noblet et al., 2009). If investigators become disengaged – burnt out, they become less likely to fulfil the functions required to deliver an acceptable service for victim-survivors. According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), individuals seek positive regenerative or maladaptive strategies (Cangiano & Parker, 2015) to protect valued resources when these become diminished. In wider policing and a RASSO context, maladaptive strategies have included dissociation, depersonalization, reduced empathy and compassion fatigue (Lennie et al., 2020; Maguire & Sondhi, 2022). We argue that evidence of dissociation is shown in our model by the perceived lack of aspiration to prioritize victim-survivor support or engagement in the criminal justice process, negative attitudes to RASSO training and a low sense of ambition to secure charges or obtain a conviction. The importance of addressing dissociative attitudes towards victim-survivors should be included in the support offered to investigators reaching the disengaged-burnout phases.

In comparison, we find positive pathways to acquire cognitive resources that act as a brake to disengagement – burnout focused on the broader learning environment. As defined by Tones & Pillay (2008), the overall learning climate and the organization's higher levels of supportive working (supervisors or colleagues perceived support for training) reduced the odds of a disengaged – burned out workforce profile. Furthermore, the importance of organizational health policies that have salience for recipients is a potential protective factor (Maguire & Sondhi, 2022; Sondhi et al., 2023). This finding highlights the importance of practical and relevant health policies that have credibility for police investigators.

Strengths and limitations

The study presents a granular analysis of the welfare of RASSO investigators that addresses the deficiencies of wellbeing and burnout research, namely the limitation of focusing only on three burnout symptoms (EE, DP and LPA). As far as we know, this is the first application of the detailed segmentation of a police workforce using Maslach and Leiter's (2016) method. We also examine the ordinal structure of workforce segments using a PO approach, allowing for a more intuitive interpretation of the findings. However, we note the study's limitations, including the survey's cross-sectional nature, the response rate that captures around one-third of RASSO investigators and possible selection bias as sampling was voluntary. Replies from police investigators highlighted the tension between workload and completing the survey. Further work is required to minimise the burden of engaging investigators without comprising operational activity.

The proportional odds assumption was violated for the expected five categories, likely due to the small numbers within the disengaged group. There may be factors that are not captured by reducing the categories to three and further confirmatory work across other forms of interpersonal offending (such as domestic violence) is required to supplement this analysis. However, we suggest that whilst the broad thrust of Van Dam's (2021) burnout cascade are captured within this model, further confirmatory modelling is required to test

the underpinning five-segment structure proposed by Maslach and Leiter (2016) is valid for highly pressured policing environments.

Conclusion

This study is the first known examination of the structure and wellbeing of police and RASSO investigators using Maslach and Leiter's (2016) granular approach to workforce segmentation. We illustrate the workforce structure as nuanced, with the primary grouping shown to be 39% effective, around one-quarter (26%) ineffective or overextended (24%), and just over one in ten classified as disengaged or burned out. The increased odds of becoming disengaged and burned out were associated with a range of factors, including prolonged stress, organizational and self-imposed pressure to work despite being ill, being in mid-career and, crucially, weakening attitudes to engaging victim-survivors that evolve as an investigator becomes more disengaged and burned out. The changing perception of victim-survivors linked to worsening investigator welfare will require the development of effective and sustainable interventions to ensure that victim-survivors receive appropriate and equitable support from RASSO investigators. This will require the early identification of burnout symptoms and effective treatment pathways. To address worsening perceptions of victim-survivors, we highlight the importance of the learning environment as a protective factor and the value of credible and effective organizational health policies.

Notes

1. Metropolitan Police (London, UK) led the investigation into allegations of sexual abuse by TV personality Jimmy Saville. Later, it expanded to include other public figures. Attributed to encouraging victims of sexual abuse to come forward, see for example.
<https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/yewtree-effect-trials-dave-lee-travis-rolf-harris-bill-roache-led-surge-reported-sex-crimes-1433645>
2. The proportional odds assumption requires that the effect of a specific prognostic measure should be the same across all ordered logits, ie, that the Odds Ratio [2&3 to 1] = Odds Ratio [3 to 1&2] = Odds Ratio.

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