

Demand Capacity & Welfare Survey 2020

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Executive Summary

Officer Pressures and the Demanding Nature of the Role

- Officers are often working long hours with limited access to rest and recuperation, with the current health crisis exacerbating these problems for many officers in England and Wales:
 - Officers reported working an average (median) of 2.3 hours of overtime per week, and 27% of respondents reported that, compared to before the COVID-19 crisis, the amount of overtime they worked had increased.
 - 39% of respondents reported that they were *never* or *rarely* able to take their full rest break entitlement.
 - 54% indicated that they had *two or more* rest days cancelled over the previous 12 months, and 63% indicated that they had a request for annual leave refused *once or more*.
- Minimum staffing levels are often considered inadequate by officers and furthermore remain unmet, and there continues to be a widespread perception of high demand. Despite this, officers have continued to rise to the challenge whilst working on the frontline throughout the pandemic; with some fulfilling duties that expand past the publicly visible work of enforcement, and into wider health and social remits that could place them in direct contact with the virus itself:
 - Only 14% of officers indicated that they believe there to be enough officers to manage all the demands being made on them as a team/unit.
 - 29% of respondents indicated that officer staffing levels are being met even less frequently than before the COVID-19 crisis.
 - 60% of respondents reported that their workload was *too high*; a much larger proportion than found in the Armed Forces population (45%).
 - 28% of respondents indicated that they had been performing specific COVID-19 duties, including attending COVID-related deaths and supporting local humanitarian work.
- Qualitative responses supported the quantitative findings above with officers reporting high levels of demand, heavy workloads, poor staffing levels, issues with how their minimum staffing levels were set (such as inappropriately low thresholds or a failure to take experience or skill mix into account) and the consequences of these challenges.

Officer Safety and the Dangerous Nature of the Role

- Many officers reported being frequently exposed to incidents that placed them at risk of physical and/or psychological harm. Whilst the nature of these hazards might have

changed in response to the unique challenges brought about by the pandemic, they are likely to be even more perilous than those experienced prior to the public health crisis:

- **32% reported that a member of the public, believed to be carrying COVID-19, had purposely threatened to breathe or cough on them at least once over the previous six months, whilst almost a quarter (24%) reported that a member of public had actually attempted to do so.**
- 16% of officers reported suffering one or more injuries requiring medical attention as a consequence of work-related violence.
- 55% said that they had been the victim of an unarmed physical attack over the previous 12 months. This figure increases to 83% when specifically examining responses from officers working in the following front-line roles; Response, Neighbourhood policing, Custody and Roads.
- 26% of respondents believe that they have already had COVID-19; with three percent of these officers having had their suspicions confirmed by a positive antigen or antibody test.
- Qualitative responses were useful in providing deeper insight into the distressing nature of the policing role; with officers highlighting a notable and upsetting increase in mental health, self harm, and suicide calls since the global health crisis began. Some officers also spoke of how they contracted COVID-19 through work, the organisational response, and the terrible impact that it has had on them and their families.

Officer Health and Wellbeing and the Draining Nature of the Role

- As evidenced above, large proportions of officers risk their health and wellbeing every day in the line of duty. Given the draining nature of the work, perhaps it is unsurprising that high levels of fatigue and occupational stress appear to be common, and that officers' scores on key measures of wellbeing are poorer when compared to that of the general public. Many officers also reported experiencing feelings of stress, low mood, anxiety, or other difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing, and predominantly cite work as a causal or an aggravating factor:
 - 53% of respondents indicated that, over the past 12 months, they had found it difficult to carry out certain duties and tasks at work because they have been too fatigued.
 - 33% of respondents reported high levels of job-related stress by indicating that they find their job *very or extremely stressful*.
 - Average scores for overall life satisfaction (6.2) and happiness (6.3) were both poorer than those found in the general public during a similar time period (i.e. 6.8 for both indicators).

- 77% of respondents acknowledged having experienced feelings of stress, low mood, anxiety, or other difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing over the previous 12 months; with the vast majority (90%) of these respondents indicating that their psychological difficulties had been caused by, or made worse by, work.
- Comments left by respondents highlighted a negative relationship between the nature of the job and officer wellbeing; with many reporting that these challenges are being intensified by the global pandemic due to the associated increase in officer demand and risks (including the potential to be exposed to COVID-19). It was also clear from the qualitative data that our officers are not immune to the wider socioeconomic impacts of the crisis. Many respondents clearly and eloquently described financial, social and emotional pressures they had experienced as a direct result of the pandemic and the government's response.

Introduction

The PFEW Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey is a biennial survey that was launched in 2016 in response to unprecedented budgetary cuts and a 14% fall in officer numbers over the previous seven years.¹ Though officer strength has increased slightly between 2018 and 2020, the total number of officers in England and Wales is still far below those recorded before the austerity programme was initiated in 2010. Further, although officer strength has increased slightly, it can take time before new recruits are able to police independently. As the findings below demonstrate, anticipated improvements that may ultimately result from increasing the numbers are not yet fully realised.

This is the third iteration of the Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey and this report provides a summary of key findings drawn together to feed into the 2020/21 PRRB process to reflect the experience of officers on the ground. More specifically, this report seeks to evidence the demanding, dangerous, and draining nature of police work.

The survey was open between the 5th of October and the 23rd November 2020; receiving 12,471 viable responses after data cleaning.²

The response rate for Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey 2020 was approximately 10% of all federated rank officers in England and Wales.³

This year, 32% of respondents identified as female, 63% identified as male, and 5% indicated that they would prefer not to say or identified in another way. The average age of respondents was 42 years old. The majority of respondents were Constables (71%), 20% of respondents were at the rank of Sergeant, and 9% of responses were from those in Inspecting ranks. Further details on respondent demographics can also be found within the Technical Annex which is available on the PFEW website.

In order to evidence the demanding, dangerous, and draining nature of police work, this report is organised into the following three sections which are presented sequentially:

- **Officer Pressures and the Demanding Nature of the Role:** This section will report key findings in relation to the demands being placed on officers (such as long working hours and few opportunities for rest and recuperation), the amount and pace of work

¹ Home Office. (2020). *Police Workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2020: data tables* [Dataset].

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2020>

² Data were removed where the respondent gave implausible answers: e.g. Length of time in role exceeded length of service etc. For more information, please see the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey Technical Annex, which can be downloaded from the PFEW website.

³ For information on the respondents, representativeness (including margins of error) and data weighting, please see the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey Technical Annex, which can be downloaded from the PFEW website.

(including overall workloads and the pace at which work needs to be completed) and officer staffing (e.g. minimum staffing levels and how often they are met).

- **Officer Safety and the Dangerous Nature of the Role:** This section outlines key findings in relation to the dangers that officers face in their day-to-day roles and the risks to their safety, including; experiences of work-related violence, exposure to COVID-19, and exposure to extremely distressing and/or dangerous events.
- **Officer Health and Wellbeing and the Draining Nature of the Role:** This section will detail the findings from key items relating to officer sickness and absence behaviours (such as sick leave, work-related injuries caused by accidents, and presenteeism), and officer mental health and wellbeing (including overall life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety and job-related stress).

Officer Pressures and the Demanding Nature of the Role

This section reports key findings in three key sections. The first relates to the demands being placed on officers, beginning with working hours and opportunities for rest and recuperation. This will be followed by a brief overview of the results in relation to the amount and pace of work that officers face in their day-to-day role, before finishing with the findings to some key questions regarding staffing levels.

Long hours with limited access to rest and recuperation

Long shift lengths without appropriate breaks can lead to increased fatigue and an elevated risk of errors, accidents and injuries.⁴ As such, the HSE recommends that where work is demanding, safety critical, monotonous and/or there is exposure to work-related hazards, then shifts of over 8 hours should be avoided.⁵ Similarly, advice from the Home Office states that officers' shifts should, ideally, be between 8-10 hours in length.⁶

However, 8% of officers from this year's survey indicated that their average shift (to the nearest hour) lasted *more than the 10 hours maximum* suggested by the Home Office; two percentage points higher than in 2018 (6%).

In addition, officers reported working an average (median)⁷ of 2.3 hours of overtime per week (paid and unpaid), meaning that the median working week for officers is over 42 hours. Moreover, 27% of respondents reported that compared to before the COVID-19 crisis, the amount of overtime they worked had increased. When asked, the most frequent reason for working overtime during the previous year was '*There weren't enough officers on shift in my team/unit*' (29%) – similar to previous iterations of this survey.

Opportunities for rest and recuperation are important to reduce the risk of fatigue and maintain good health. Though the HSE advises employers to encourage and promote the benefit of frequent and regular breaks, almost two fifths of respondents to the 2020 Demand Capacity and Welfare Survey indicated that they are *never* or *rarely* able to take their full rest break entitlement (39%).

⁴ Health and Safety Executive (2006). *Managing shiftwork* [Report HSG256]. Retrieved 30 November 2020 from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/priced/hsg256.pdf>

⁵ As above.

⁶ Home Office circular. (2010). Guidance on Variable shift arrangements for police officers. 016-2010.

⁷ "Average" can refer to one of three statistics: the **mean** is the numeric average calculated by adding all the data points together, and dividing by the number of data point points; the **mode** is whatever data point is most often found within the data set, and; the **median** is calculated by setting out the numbers in ascending order, and finding the number that separates the top half, from the bottom half.

Moreover, 54% indicated that they had *two or more* rest days cancelled over the previous 12 months, and 63% indicated that they had a request for annual leave refused *once or more* over the same period of time.

Half of the respondents indicated that they had not requested all the annual leave they were entitled to over the previous 12 months (50%). When we asked these respondents the reasons for not requesting all the annual leave that they were entitled to, 36% of respondents indicated that one of the main reasons for this was because it was too difficult to arrange due to other work-related responsibilities and restrictions (e.g. low staffing levels, pre-arranged meetings etc) and 27% indicated that one of the main reasons was because they knew they would not be granted permission (e.g. due to leave embargoes etc.).

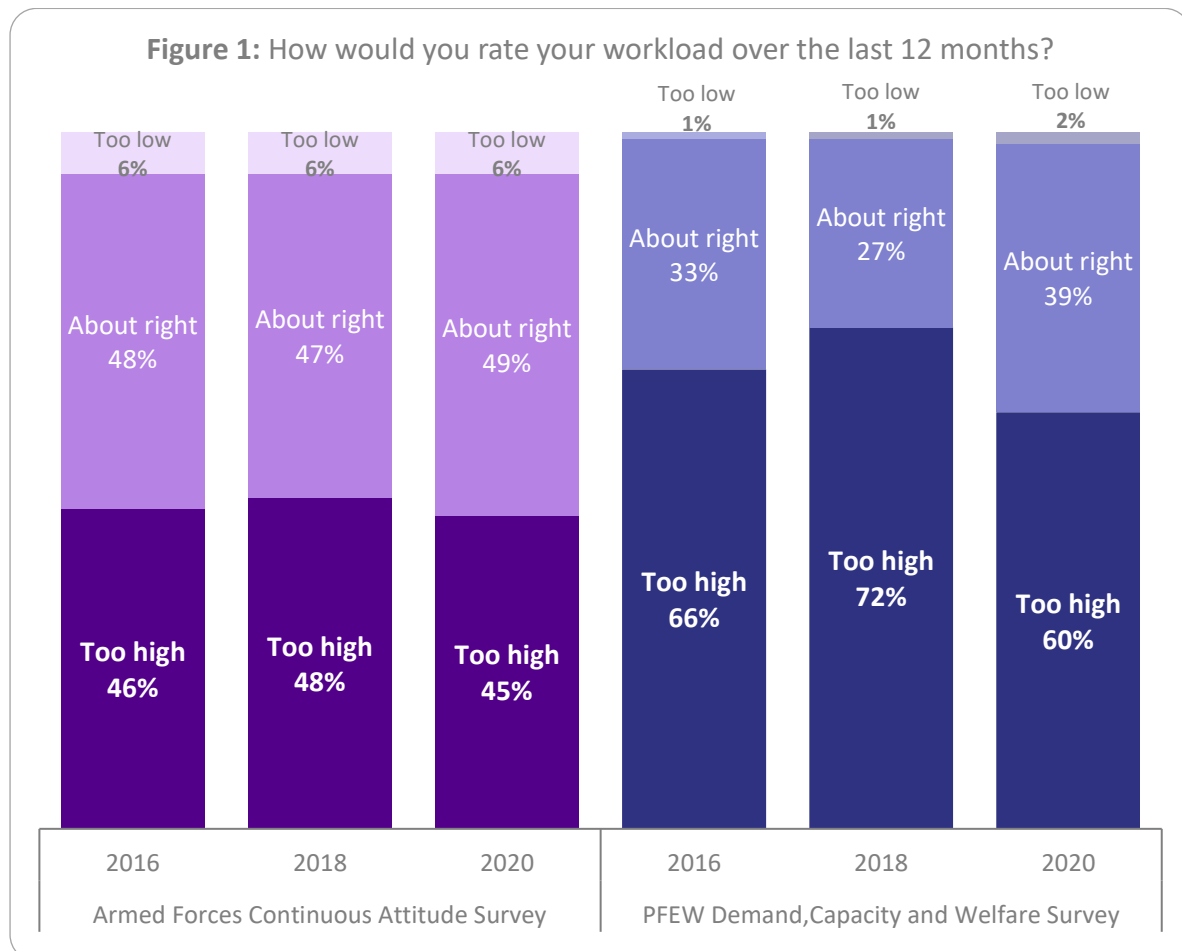
Officers were also asked to indicate whether or not they were granted the leave that they *had* requested; with almost two fifths (38%) of respondents reporting that they were unable to take all the annual leave that they requested over the previous 12 months because *some* or *all* of their requests had been refused.

Overall, the results from the 2020 Demand Capacity and Welfare Survey indicated that officers are often working long hours with limited access to rest and recuperation; with the current health crisis exacerbating these problems for many officers in England and Wales.⁸

⁸ For additional findings regarding the impact of COVID-19 on officer leave, please see the Pay and Morale Survey 2020 COVID-19 report.

Workloads, pace and pressures

There is still a widespread perception of high demand among survey respondents; evidenced by the majority of officers reporting that their workload was *too high* (60%). Although this is a smaller proportion than in previous iterations of the Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey, Figure 1 shows that this is still consistently *higher* when compared to the UK Armed Forces personnel across the same years.⁹



This may not be surprising since only 14% of officers indicated that they believe there to be enough officers to manage all the demands being made on them as a team/unit; and over a third of officers (37%) said that they *often* or *always* have unrealistic time pressures.

⁹ Armed Forces Continuous Attitudinal Survey. (2020). UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020 [data set]. Retrieved from: [Armed forces continuous attitude survey: 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/531111/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2020)

When examining the qualitative data, it is not difficult to find examples where respondents have highlighted heavy workloads, high demand, poor staffing levels, and the consequences of these challenges:

- *“I am currently feeling very anxious due to lack of staff in my department and growing workload and cannot see this changing.”*
Constable, 20 years’ service
- *“The main issue is that we don't have enough officers to manage demand. We also need to pay police staff and other specialists appropriately so we retain their skills and attract the best people to roles”*
Chief Inspector, 21 years’ service
- *“I still love my job but find it harder and harder to deal with purely because of poor staffing levels. As a whole I think Police Officers feel very undervalued and persecuted by the public which comes down to the way in which we are portrayed by the media. I think this has a huge detrimental affect on everyday hard working Police Officers.”*
Constable, 18 years’ service

In March 2020, the government brought in extraordinary measures and legislative changes to slow the spread of COVID-19; with the Police Service being granted new powers to enforce these legislative changes and officers being expected to continue working on the frontline in direct contact with the public.

To gain a better understanding of the impact that this might have on officers and their workloads, we asked respondents if they had been performing any specific COVID-19 duties over the previous six months. 28% of respondents indicated that they had been performing specific COVID-19 duties, and whilst many indicated that this was related to the enforcement of the constantly changing Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations; many reported performing duties that extended beyond enforcement, and potentially put them in direct contact with the virus:

- *“I was posted to Covid response team for 2 months, attending to those that had died and suspected to be Covid related. Wrapping bodies for undertaker to remove.”*
Constable, 25 years’ service
- *“Attending possible Covid19 related sudden deaths”*
Constable, 3 years’ service

- *“Dealing with assault allegations where the suspect has claimed to be COVID-19 infectious and has spat at complainants and Police Officers.”*
Constable, 19 years’ service
- *“Worked in designated Covid custody [...]”*
Sergeant, 21 years’ service
- *“Welfare checks on COVID positive patients who have been released to their homes from hospital and have become uncontactable. Face mask and thin plastic pinny was the only issued kit for these checks.”*
Constable, 7 years’ service
- *“Hotspot patrolling. 4Es local policing. Supporting local authorities with humanitarian work.”*
Sergeant, 19 years’ service

Overall, the results indicate that there continues to be a widespread perception of high demand. Despite this, officers have continued to work on the frontline in direct contact with the public throughout the pandemic; often fulfilling duties that expand past the publicly visible work of enforcement, and into wider health and social remits that potentially place them in direct contact with the virus itself.

Staffing levels

The vast majority of respondents (70%) indicated that their team/unit had a minimum officer staffing level; with almost a fifth (19%) of these respondents also indicating that this level was *never* or *rarely* achieved and 45% of those officers indicating that when these levels are not met, it has a *major* effect on their ability to meet demand. Moreover, 29% of respondents indicated that, compared to before the COVID-19 crisis, officer staffing levels are being met even *less* frequently. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that only 16% of respondents indicated that the way officer staffing levels are determined in their team/unit seems to be effective.

Although the proportion of respondents indicating that their minimum staffing levels were *never* or *rarely* achieved has fallen by nine percentage points since 2018 (28%), this does not necessarily mean that there are enough officers to meet the demands being placed on them, as the minimum levels a) may be disputed, and b) are likely to have been set at a time before COVID, when demands were different. We cannot read too much into this statistic alone. Tellingly, many respondents used the available open-text box to report problems with their

minimum staffing levels, such as inappropriately low thresholds or a failure to take experience or skill mix into account:

- *“The minimum staffing levels have been adjusted to match the current staff number, not because it is an adequate number.”*
Constable, 9 years’ service
- *“The minimum staffing levels have been reduced so they can be met with fewer officers but demand is up”*
Constable, 4 years’ service
- *“Minimum staffing levels being identified through resources available rather than actual demand. Minimum staffing levels becoming the norm rather than the exception”*
Inspector, 13 years’ service
- *“Minimum staffing levels are too low. So although they are often met it is still not enough to deal with our demand”*
Constable, 19 years’ service
- *“Generally not enough of us, a lot of us are students so although there are a fair few officers on the shift the experience levels vary a lot.”*
Constable, 1 years’ service
- *“The minimum staffing levels decided by SLT [Senior Leadership Team] are too low. It seems to take no account of our actual demand or the experience/capability of officers. Setting a minimum strength of 12 officers (for example) is not appropriate if all 12 officers are very inexperienced.”*
Sergeant, 6 years’ service

Overall, the results indicate that minimum staffing levels are inadequate and often remain unmet, and that perhaps more emphasis need to be placed on considering the skill mix and experience of those on shift in order to more effectively reduce the burden on officers.

Officer Safety and the Dangerous Nature of the Role

This section outlines key findings in relation to the dangers that officers face in their day-to-day roles and the risks to their safety including experiences of work-related violence, exposure to COVID-19 and exposure to extremely distressing and/or dangerous events.

The results from the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey show that violence against officers is still commonplace. 16% of officers reported suffering *one or more* injuries requiring medical attention as a consequence of **work-related violence**, and 47% of respondents reported that they have, in the line of duty, been the subject of a **serious physical assault**.

Over half of the respondents (55%) said that they had been the victim of an **unarmed physical attack** over the previous 12 months, and 13% said that they had been the victim of an attack where a **deadly weapon** was used. These figures increase to 83% and 20% (respectively) when only examining responses from officers working in the following frontline roles; Response, Neighbourhood policing, Custody and Roads.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the current health pandemic has not only increased the demands being placed on officers, but the *type* of demands they have faced have also changed. Many officers reported taking on COVID-specific duties that may have put them at risk of contracting the virus themselves. In fact, 26% of respondents believe that they have already had COVID-19; three percent of whom have had their suspicions confirmed by a positive antigen or antibody test (please see Table 1 below)

Table 1: Do you think that you have, or have had COVID-19?	% of respondents
Yes, confirmed by a positive antigen or antibody test	3%
Yes, based on strong personal suspicion or medical advice	23%
No	47%
Unsure	27%

Respondents that reported contracting COVID-19 were asked to indicate how they thought they had contracted the virus; with 45% reporting that they thought it was through work-related activities and only 18% reported that they thought it was through non-work related activities (e.g. contact with family or friends). The remaining 37% were unsure of how they contracted the virus. Some officers even spoke directly about their experience of how they contracted COVID-19 through work and the impact that it had on them:

- *“I attended a sudden death at a care home at the start of the pandemic where advice from HQ was not to wear PPE unless it was a confirmed or suspected COVID death. I therefore wore no mask and gloves only, hand sanitising on entry and exit of the building. There was no indication of this at the time. One and a half weeks after this I tested positive for Coronavirus and passed it onto my family. The advice has now changed and all death at care homes are to be treated as suspected COVID deaths and appropriate PPE worn. Different advice could have protected my family and I.”*

Constable, 5 years’ service

- *“I got Covid whilst on duty and it has effected my entire life since spring 2020 [date specified: removed to maintain anonymity]. This has impacted my mental health and overall mood. The stress of returning to work and trying to complete the required training is stressful and concerns me.”*

Constable, 1 years’ service

- *“I believe I had COVID and my family were at risk. I felt so bad that I felt like I wouldn't make it. My husband is a [Force specified: removed to maintain anonymity] officer and was working with someone whose dad had travelled from china and had COVID. At this point everyone should have isolated but the job failed to put tough measures in”*

Constable, 7 years’ service

- *“I tested positive for Covid-19 and was quite unwell, my wife also tested positive (test was inconclusive but had same symptoms and was unwell - later tested positive for antibodies). We both had to self-isolate with our two children at the same time. I have not been the same (health wise) since. I am worried about the possibility of re-infection and/or the long term implications following the illness. I strongly believe I contracted COVID-19 from a colleague from my station who also tested positive a the week before me and ended up in hospital. (We had spent several shifts working closely).”*

Constable, 19 years’ service

However, due to the nature of policing, officers are not only placed at risk of contracting the virus when carrying out COVID-specific duties; those that work on the frontline are at increased risk due to aggravated exposure; many officers reported incidents where members of the public have sought to weaponise the threat of COVID-19 by purposely coughing, spitting or breathing on others. Just under a third of respondents to the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey (32%) reported that a member of the public, believed to be

carrying COVID-19, had purposely threatened to breathe or cough on them at least once over the past six months, whilst almost a quarter (24%) reported experiencing actual attempts at doing so (please see Table 2).

Table 2: How often have citizens, that you believed to have COVID-19, directed the following towards you during the last 6 months?	% of respondents reporting a frequency of <i>once or more</i>
Threatened to spit at you	30%
Threatened to breathe or cough on you	32%
Attempted to spit at you	21%
Deliberately attempted to breathe or cough on you	24%

Our concern over the risks to our members is, however, not restricted to physical hazards alone. Officers regularly encounter extremely distressing and/or dangerous events in the line of duty (e.g. body recovery, family liaison work, exposure to child sexual exploitation material). In this year’s survey, 53% indicated that they had experienced at least one incident in the previous year that could be considered extremely stressful, upsetting, or dangerous.

Moreover, almost two fifths (39%) of respondents indicated that, *in the last six months*, they had seen the body of a person who has died from natural causes (including confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases) in the line of duty; whilst 17% of respondents said they had performed death notifications in instances where people had died due to natural causes (including confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases), and the same proportion reported having been exposed to bodily fluids that were suspected of carrying the COVID-19 infection.

In light of the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had across the length and breadth of the UK, this year’s survey included an open-ended question where officers were asked to tell us about any other events they had experienced (in the line of duty) that were related to COVID-19 and that they found particularly disturbing or caused a significant amount of emotional distress. Over a thousand comments were received, with many officers using the space to detail experiences of COVID-19 being weaponised against them, body recovery, family liaison work with those that had lost loved-ones to the pandemic, the cumulative pressure of the work, and the wider societal impact of the pandemic on the public’s mental health:

- *“A suspect who was believed to have COVID-19 (his family had tested positive) deliberately spat a mouthful of juice in my face whilst in custody and said he hoped that I died.”*

Constable, 10 years’ service

- *“Alongside my team we prepared bodies ready for the undertaker to remove and after investigating the deaths we had to deal with the trauma of the family”*
Sergeant, 20 years’ service
- *“The increase in mental health issues, and dealing with people in crisis/expressing suicidal thoughts, has been difficult cumulatively.”*
Constable, 14 years’ service
- *“Since March my team and I have seen a huge increase in self harm and suicide calls. Between April and July it felt like there was a suicide per set of shifts. I can personally count as having gone to 5 or more in that period. One in particular was a male who put a high velocity rifle to his head. There have been numerous hangings and due to working in a costal area, there have also been several bodies recovered from the cliffs or sea.”*
Sergeant, 19 years’ service
- *“After dealing for 3 months with covid deaths in the community I feel that there have been numerous disturbing things I have seen. Mainly when people with young families have passed away and left young children”*
Constable, 18 years’ service
- *“Increase in people suffering with mental health conditions, social care issues, housing issues etc that police have been dealing with because other services are working from home.”*
Constable, 2 years’ service

Overall, the results indicate that many officers are frequently exposed to incidents that placed them at risk of physical and/or psychological harm. Whilst the nature of these hazards might have changed in response to the unique challenges brought about by the pandemic, they are likely to be equally, if not more, perilous than those experienced prior to the public health crisis

Officer Health and Wellbeing and the Draining Nature of the Role

This section of the report begins by examining key results in relation to officer sickness and absence behaviours, before presenting findings in relation to the mental health and wellbeing of officers, including overall life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety and job-related stress.

Sickness and absence

In addition to questions regarding COVID-19 related sickness (please see page 12), the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey also asked respondents to indicate the total number of days of sick leave they had taken in the preceding 12-month period. Just under half of respondents reported one or more days of sickness absence (48%); with 32% of those that had taken sick leave indicating that at least one day of this absence was attributable to stress, depression, or anxiety.

Presenteeism is the act of attending for work while ill and has been shown to be associated with subsequent health decline (particularly in relation to burnout),¹⁰ negative job attitudes, withdrawal from work,¹¹ and can lead to elevated absenteeism.¹² Presenteeism associated with both physical and mental health was measured in the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey; with 66% of respondents reporting *one or more* episodes of presenteeism associated with their physical health within the previous 12-month period, and the same proportion reporting *one or more* episodes of presenteeism associated with their psychological health (66%).

Though the previous chapter highlighted that 16% of officers had reported suffering *one or more* injuries requiring medical attention as a consequence of **work-related violence** over the previous year; some work-related injuries are not obtained via violence. Indeed, 11% of officers reported suffering *one or more* injuries requiring medical attention as a consequence of **work-related accidents**. However, it is important to note that some officers, by the nature of their role, are potentially placed at higher risk of accident and injury. For example, when examining the results from officers that identified as predominantly working in a Roads Policing role, the proportion of officers reporting that they had suffered *one or more* injuries that required medical attention as a consequence of **work-related accidents**, increases to 20%.

¹⁰ Demerouti, E., Le Blanc, P., Bakker, A., Schaufeli, W., & Hox, J. (2009). Present but sick: A three-wave study on job demands, presenteeism, and burnout. *Career Development International*, 14, 50- 68.

¹¹ Lu, L., Lin, H. Y., & Cooper, C. L. (2013). Unhealthy and present: Motives and consequences of the act of presenteeism among Taiwanese employees. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 18, 406–416.

¹² Gustafsson, K., & Marklund, S. (2011). Consequences of sickness presence and sickness absence on health and work ability: A Swedish prospective cohort study. *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health*, 24, 153–165

Mental Health and Wellbeing

A top-level broad overview of mental health was established by using a single item that asked participants to indicate whether they had experienced feelings of stress, low mood, anxiety, or other difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing over the previous 12 months. 77% of respondents acknowledged having experienced these feelings, with the vast majority (90%) of these respondents indicating that their psychological difficulties had been caused or made worse by work.

When asked to indicate why their psychological difficulties had been caused or made worse by work, the most frequently reported reason was that their *workload was too high* (58% of these respondents), followed by having a *poor work/life balance* (46% of these respondents). **In addition, 20% of these respondents identified that the general impact of being on the frontline during the COVID-19 crisis had a negative influence on their mental health and wellbeing.**

Respondents were also asked to rate their overall life satisfaction, their anxiety levels, how happy they were, and how worthwhile they felt the things they do in their lives were. Each of these questions was answered on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 represented “*not at all*” and 10 equated to “*completely*.” For example, in regard to anxiety, 0 would represent “*not at all anxious*” and 10 equated to “*completely anxious*.”

Average scores are presented below alongside comparator scores from the general population.¹³ Overall, the results reveal that officers’ scores for overall life satisfaction, happiness, and how worthwhile they felt the things they do in their lives are, were all slightly poorer than those found in the general population; whilst scores for anxiety were almost on par.

Table 3: Average scores for the following single-item measurements of wellbeing (during Autumn 2020)	Police Officers	General Public ¹⁴
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	6.2	6.8
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	6.7	7.3
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	6.3	6.8
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	4.0	4.1

¹³ Comparator scores were collected during roughly the same time period as the Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey.

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics. (2020). Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 13 November 2020 [dataset]. Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritaindata>

High levels of job-related stress are still prevalent within policing, with a third of respondents (33%) indicating that they find their job *very* or *extremely stressful*. Officer fatigue also appears to remain common throughout England and Wales; with the majority of respondents reporting that fatigue had interfered with their family or social life over the last year (64%), and over half of respondents indicated that, over the same time frame, they had found it difficult to carry out certain duties and tasks at work because they have been too fatigued (53%). In addition to the above, we asked officers to indicate how frequently they feel isolated from others at work; with 23% indicating that they *often* or *always* feel isolated in this way.

When examining comments left throughout the survey, it is not difficult to find personal experiences highlighting the link between the demanding and dangerous job that officers do on a day-to-day basis, and their wellbeing:

- *“All of the wellbeing and mental health issues I have suffered are caused by the job. The day to day running of investigations and reactive policing are broken beyond recognition and the people responsible for it are asleep at the wheel.”*

Constable, 13 years’ service

- *“The system is broken, too much is being placed on officers to be okay with the workload, violence, verbal abuse they are EXPECTED to take on a daily if not hourly basis. Some of the support mechanisms in place I feel, pay lip service to the actual serious issue of people struggling with their mental health, PTSD.”*

Inspector, 24 years’ service

It is also clear, from many comments, that the current health pandemic is exacerbating these already difficult circumstances, by increasing the demands and the dangers that officers routinely face:

- *“Officers are feeling drained from the existing workload and usual stresses of the job, coupled with the expectations of the COVID regulations and the risk to officers attending incidents where either people may have COVID or where officers may be at an unknown risk from it”*

Sergeant, 21 years’ service

- *“Being allocated the COVID response car role was quite disturbing at the beginning of the crisis as I was very worried I would catch the virus and infect my close family and children that I live with.”*

Constable, 13 years’ service

- *“For the first time in 21 years I am counting down the years and months until I can retire and am banking on potentially being able to leave with the old allowances on the 1987 pension scheme. If this is not possible I would still seriously consider leaving and taking a hit with the money as I don't believe the stress and pressure of the job will be worth the cost to my mental health. I have never felt as disillusioned or under so much pressure as I have in the recent 12-24 months.”*

Sergeant, 21 years' service

It is also important to remember that COVID-19 is not only impacting officers' workloads and threatening their health through work-related exposure; it is also impacting the broader context of their lives. They too are restricted by the government regulations, they too have families that they must support and care for, and they too are struggling with the wider socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic:

- *“All of my stress and anxiety at the moment is directly from the current covid crisis due to the economic impact it is having on our family (husband is not in the police) and the rest of the country.”*

Constable, 13 years' service

- *“Due to being a single parent it has been hard to manage shifts especially due to covid when school clubs weren't available and I had no bubble or family support”*

Sergeant, 14 years' service

- *“Financial concerns due to family members being furloughed meant that I felt that I needed to work more in order to cover a shortfall in our income”*

Constable, 5 years' service

- *“Yes - right at the start my father was in a care home in his final weeks of life. Visits were restricted and I was booked to go and see him - I was about a 4 hour journey to see him. The night before a prisoner came into custody who we were dealing with - she stated she had COVID and was coughing all over the place. It turned out she did not have it - but I was distraught that I probably could not visit my dying father because of her lies - and they were lies. After talking with the custody nursing team etc I did still travel and saw dad - but I was worried and felt guilty.”*

Sergeant, 18 years' service

Finally, it is worth noting, that officers have also been highlighting the role that proper remuneration plays in their overall wellbeing; with particular focus being placed on the negative impacts caused by their current sense of inequitable reciprocity between the work they do and how they are financially compensated for it:

- *“Police pay is important to police wellbeing. Pay for those in specialist roles with high amounts of responsibility and risk is grossly below that which I would consider to be fair. Fair pay would in turn improve the welfare and wellbeing of all officers, particularly those on at the lower end of the pay scales. Additionally, fairer pay would attract more talented individuals and help prevent the service from losing experienced officers to other comparative sectors that pay better”*

Constable, 5 years’ service

- *“The Police Service is extremely demanding in nature. The types of incidents attended are traumatic, the workloads are high and the shift pattern is tough. Demand regularly outstrips resources and officers do not get breaks. Pay is far too low for new officers for the level of stress and challenges they are faced with. Many officers feel trapped in the Police Service because they do not have any other career choices - if this were not the case I suspect many more officers would leave”*

Inspector, 14 years’ service

- *“Pay and Conditions of service have dropped since I joined the Police Service, I am paid less now than I was in 2010 due to the loss of CRTP, SPP etc, respect for the Police is at an all time low and this is not helped by the press and interference by politicians, this in turn has a negative effect on morale.”*

Constable, 21 years’ service

- *“This job has had a massive impact on my personal life, my free time, who I am as a person and on top of this I put my life on the line everyday and get paid poorly to do so.”*

Constable, 2 years’ service

- *“I don't get paid anywhere near enough to be assaulted or worse in work. I have 2 young children who need a Daddy in their life and I am acutely aware of this.”*

Constable, 12 years’ service

As evidenced in previous chapters of this report, large proportions of officers risk their health and wellbeing every day in the line of duty. Given the draining nature of the work,

perhaps it is unsurprising that high levels of fatigue and occupational stress appear to be common, and that officers' scores on key measures of wellbeing are poorer when compared to that of the general public. Many officers highlighted high workloads, poor work/life balance, and violent victimisation as causes for poor wellbeing, and attention was drawn to the potential for unfair treatment, in regard to pay and remuneration, which could also impact on the state of their mental health and wellbeing.

Conclusion

The results from the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey clearly evidence that an officers' role is both demanding and dangerous. Performing this role potential inflicts significant and lasting physical and psychological harm on some of those that are brave enough to serve.

Considerable proportions of officers reported high workloads; limited access to rest and recuperation; frequent exposure to violent victimisation; and high levels of job-related stress: furthermore, average officer scores across several key wellbeing items were lower than that of the general public. When identifying the underlying work-related drivers of poor wellbeing, officers recognised high levels of demand and risk as individual causes of poor wellbeing.

Finally, it is worth considering whether this survey truly reflects the extent of the problem. Certainly, the response rate is high enough to be deemed statistically reliable: but in any scientific study it is worth considering whether data are likely to in any way under or overrepresent issues. To some degree commentary on those who did not complete the survey is speculative. However, two facts combine to suggest that there may be further unreported issues. First, it is noteworthy that the numbers of officers completing this survey is lower this year than in others. Second, we received some feedback to suggest that running the survey during the pandemic was problematic, and that those on the front line simply could not find the time this year to complete it. It could be hypothesized that officers may have been less likely to complete this year's Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey if they were experiencing extremely high levels of demand or were on long-term sick leave. If this is true, then the levels of demand, sickness, injury and poor wellbeing depicted in our results may well offer an under-representation. By contrast, we see nothing to suggest that the data in any way might over represent the extent of these issues.

Appendix A

Further information on this survey can be found in the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare's Technical Annex, including:

- Background and context
- Content overview
- Distribution of the survey
- Details of respondents, response rates and representativeness
- Demographics
- Analytical approach
- Weighting
- Grouping and aggregation of response options
- Benchmarking
- Uses of the survey data

The Technical Annex for the 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey can be found here: <https://www.polfed.org/support/demand-capacity-welfare/>.