Policewomen's experiences of working during lockdown; results of a survey with officers from England and Wales

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Introduction

Physical and emotional exhaustion, violent confrontation and long hours are formally recognised as detrimental to police officers' wellbeing (Liberman et al. 2002; Houdmont and Elliot-Davis, 2017; Elliott-Davis 2019). Organisational stressors in their many forms also carry a stress load for many police officers. These findings are well established (Purba and Demou 2019) and are relevant across a number of countries and jurisdictions (van der Lippe and Lippenyi 2018). As police officers in the UK seek to manage and police COVID19, organisational stressors are exacerbated as they continue to work 12-hour shifts, have rest days cancelled and worry about the proximity of the virus and its potential impact on themselves and their families (Apter 2020a).

A national lockdown of many workplaces began from mid-March 2020 as the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths continued to rise in the U.K. only easing slightly three months later. The lockdown has contributed to new patterns of work across a number of sectors as businesses and households seek to mitigate the spread of the disease by social distancing, use of personal protection equipment (PPE) and working from home. Various disciplines have begun to appraise the consequences, harms and benefits of new ways of working (Jones et al, 2020; Akermanns et al 2020; Alipour et al, 2020; Burke et al, 2020). Azcona et al (2020) report the results of an international survey indicating that COVID-19 preventative measures are increasing women's responsibility for the bulk of work to keep households going (i.e. household chores, care of children and family). Findings for the UK were mid-way in an 18-country comparison with 17% of women strongly agreeing they have taken on a lot more of these responsibilities. Lungumbu and Butterly (2020) argue that the increased care burdens risk a revision to stereotypic divisions of labour with the consequence of setting back women's work equality gains.

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The focus of this paper is policewomen's work experiences of COVID-19 and preventive measures particularly the impacts of working from home or remaining at their 'normal' places of work. The police service has had an ambivalent attitude towards flexible working (Dick and Hyde, 2006) with those seeking such arrangements often facing hostility, lacking support from managers and co-workers.

There have been a few speculative papers in recent months from the perspective of police working in crisis (Papazoglou et al, 2020), the probable impact of COVID19 on police services (Mehdizadeh and Kamkar 2020) and perceptions of workload (Sadiq 2020). Others have sought to consider the COVID19 pandemic in the context of previous disasters and public health emergencies, either by systematic review (Laufs and Waseem 2020) or by suggesting the possible implications for police resilience and stress (Stogner et al 2020). This study adds to this embryonic literature.

Methods

Questionnaire Survey

An online questionnaire survey method was employed. The broad remit of the survey was to investigate police officers[1] views and experiences of working during the first COVID19 lockdown. The study was particularly interested in the shift (if any) in working patterns and the impact of that shift. Additionally, the authors wished to examine the relationship between police officers and their line managers/supervisors and, more broadly, with the force itself. The survey identified three different ways of working in policing at this time. Those working from home, those partially working from home and those who were not working from home, i.e. working out of their police premises. In addition to the quantitative elements of the questionnaire, which asked about pre-Covid patterns of working and domestic life with comparable questions relating to the lockdown period, participants were asked to respond to two open questions:

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[1] The survey was also distributed to all police staff and distributed by UNISON. This paper considers the responses of female police officers only.

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

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

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

Sample demographics and occupational characteristics

The survey respondents were a generally older group whose average age is around 40 years and with an average length of service of 14.8 years. Most identified as White British (91%) and most were married or living with a partner (76%) and over 50% of these couples were partnered with another police officer. Sixty percent had children with most being of school age (57%). A significant number of the respondents also had other caring responsibilities, in the main, elderly parents and/or vulnerable individuals living elsewhere (59%).Officers were dispersed between Metropolitan (13%) Provincial (47%) and other (39%) types of forces. The majority of the survey respondents gave their rank as Constables (70%). Sergeants constituted 18%, Inspector, and higher ranks, 12%. Our sample mainly served in investigation, 38%, response, 25%, neighbourhood policing, 18%, support functions, 15% and custody and detention, 4%.

Procedure

The Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) distributed an anonymous on-line survey powered by Qualtrics during August 2020 to a randomly selected sample for the authors. 473 female officers returned completed usable surveys[2]. The University of Southampton's Ethics Committee granted ethical approval.

Results

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[2] Information received from the Police Federation suggested approximately 2000 contacts were made yielding a response rate of 23%

Demographic and occupation details of those working from home compared with those remaining in their workplaces

In terms of our research focus on work location, 23% were working at home during the lockdown, 32% were partially working from home and 45% remained on the front line. There were no statistically significant differences in marital status and ethnicity by location of working. Those working from home tended to be older (mean age 44 years) compared to those partially working from home (mean age 40 years) and those not working from home (mean age 38 years) (ANOVA 14.3 p<.0001). The average number of children looked after at home was statistically significantly different (home workers, 1.18; partial home workers 1.22; and front-line officers .93 (ANOVA 3.1 p<.04). The ages of the children at home were only statistically significantly different in the age bracket 13-18 years with 24% of home workers, 21% of partial home workers and 16% of front line officers having children of these ages at home (Chi-square 125.14 p<.0001). Overall, 42% of the respondents had care responsibilities for an aging parent and 22% for a vulnerable person/relative. There were no statistically significant differences by work location.

Type of force showed no statistically significant differences in officers' work location during lockdown. There were statistically significantly differences in role between home working and non-home working officers, with response officers the least likely to be working from home and those in support roles the most likely (see table one). Most officers worked shifts, 70%, with those assigned home working the least likely to (12%) (Chi-square 84.7 p<.0.0001). Rank did not statistically significantly differentiate between locations of lockdown working. Three quarters (74%) worked full-time, 21% worked part-time and less than 5% identified themselves as working flexibly. Location of work was not statistically significantly different in terms of employment status or rank.

Table one about here

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Work and domestic patterns prior to lockdown

Prior to lockdown relatively few officers were able to work from home with 19% saying this

happened occasionally, and only 3 respondents saying this happened 'most' or 'all of the time'.

Considering partnered police officers with children at home, 62% said they were mainly responsible

for domestic chores, this being shared by 36%. There was a more even division of responsibility for

their children with 49% saying they were the main carers and 49% saying this was equally shared.

Prior to lockdown, it was also relatively unusual for police officers to participate in virtual meetings

(9%), webinars (8%) or use social media for communicating with the public (18%). Officers were very

positive about their direct senior officers with 81% strongly agreeing or agreeing they felt supported,

89% that they were trusted and 79% that they were communicated with frequently.

Work and domestic patterns during lockdown

Compared to previously, the pattern of home working changed significantly in the lockdown period

(Chi-square 144.4 p<0.000) (see Figure 1).

Figure one about here

Looking just at partnered officers with children, there was a statistically significant change in caring

commitments (Chi-square 10.3 p<0.005) with 53% of women officers taking the main responsibility

(compared to 49% previously). In lockdown, only 38% said this responsibility was equally shared

(compared to 49% previously). Undertaking household chores remained the same in lockdown as

previously for these officers, with 62% saying they did so previously, with the same percentages

saying they continued to do so during the lockdown, not a statistically significant difference.

Overall, respondents felt working from home was a positive arrangement, citing renewed energy

and concentration levels:

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I work very hard and am very task oriented and working from home has made me more efficient, able to spend time developing my skills, spend time reading force operations, more aware of everything I would normally ignore and get my head down at police station. [Home working, partnered sergeant working in a support function having 22 years of service].

Working from home enabled me to stay calmer; I had more energy at the end of my working day. [Home working partnered sergeant working in neighbourhood policing with 21 years of service].

Others saw the plus and minus sides of home working:

The flexibility provided by my line manager to enable working from home to work alongside childcare has been amazing and as much as working from home on occasions post pandemic would be ideal, I do not believe this should become a permanent arrangement just because it is deemed to have worked. Nothing can beat the interaction with others and constantly working from home can make a work/life balance less defined and give the feeling of being in work more than you are. Plus as a member of the training department I have now never met some of the students I monitor, which is not good. {Home working partnered constable working in a support function with 20 years' service].

Yet others felt there were more negative aspects to working from home especially for those

remaining on the front line. Several felt either colleagues took advantage of the situation, or they

themselves were disadvantaged:

I feel lockdown has highlighted the unequal share of childcare responsibilities within the home. Myself, and many of my female friends with young children, very much feel that our work came second to that of a male partner. [Not working at home partnered constable in a support function with 2 years' experience].

I am aware that people were allowed to work from home during the pandemic but believe that too many people were allowed to take advantage of this.   I do not personally believe that this is conducive to a good way of policing investigations particularly when there are prisoners to be dealt with on a daily basis. [Non-home working single parent constable working in neighbourhood policing with 19 years of service].

No thought was given to the few officers that kept working all through the pandemic whilst others worked from home for the lamest of reasons. Personally, I had COVID, was very ill and came back to work as soon as I was fit. … I have been very disappointed with how weak the force has been in allowing people to shirk work. I may not be so giving during the next wave. [Non-home working partnered constable working in Criminal Justice support with 22 years of service].

There was a lot of focus on staff working from home and how to keep their positivity up (such as asking people to submit cute photos of their new "view from the office" (i.e. everyone working from home and in their gardens in the nice weather). There seemed to be no thought or consideration given to all of us who were still working on the front line and could not work from home...there was no recognition that for some of us work hasn't changed and that we were still expected to put ourselves at risk whilst other members of staff get to do their work in a flexible way whilst sitting in their own gardens. [Non-home working partnered sergeant working as response officer with 17 years of service].

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Officers either did the same job (59%) or were mostly able to do the same job during the lockdown

as previously (24%) whilst as a result of the lockdown 13% were asked to do a different job. There

was no statistical difference in this context of whether officers were working from home or not.

Overall, the relationship between the officer working at home or remaining at work with their line

manager/supervisor, was rated high in terms of the degree of supportiveness, trust and

communication, although there was a slightly negative movement in frequency of communication

between pre and post lockdown but this was not statistically significant. There were no statistically

significant differences in these ratings by respondents who were home working, partially home

working or not working from home at all.

> *During the lockdown I have been fully supported by my Manager, however in the last month since my Manager left my unit for a new position within the force, I have not been contacted or spoken to directly by my new Manager. This is not too much of an issue as I feel trusted to manage my work and approach my new manager as and when I need to, which is very much appreciated. [Home working partnered officer working in Criminal Justice admin with 23 years' service].*

> *My son is disabled … my Supervisors and colleagues have been amazing supporting me and I am very grateful. [Working from home, partnered with 4 years of service working in a command team].*

But there were some criticisms by the one in ten officers who disagreed that they felt supported,

trusted or communicated with during lockdown, as the following quotes indicate:

> *My first line manager was supportive but I found that my second line manager would make comments during meetings to make me feel bad for working from home and every so often will contact HR to try to get me back to work against medical advice.[Working from home, partnered constable working in neighbourhood policing with 10 years' service].*

> *Very unsupported - had to battle for months causing additional stress to get even a very small amount of hours as dependant's leave to cover childcare (only federation involvement eventually resolved this). I was told that as both key worriers we could use school - not very helpful when both shift workers - Schools never opened in the middle of the night or evening !!!!! This was not my direct line supervisor as they were fully supportive but more senior ranks. [Not working from home partnered sergeant working in custody and detention with 19 years' service].*

Quality of working during lockdown

About a third of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their hours of work had increased

during the lockdown with 42% disagreeing or disagreeing strongly with that statement. There was no

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statistically significant difference between those working from home or those not working from

home. Approximately half (47%) of all strongly agreed or agreed that their pattern of work had not

changed, whereas 39% disagreed with this. Nearly half again (47%) agreed, or strongly agreed that

their work had become more difficult during the lockdown period. There were however, some

statistically significant differences between those who work from home, either completely or

partially, and those remaining at the usual place of work, with respect to patterns of work, stress

and difficulties faced.

Figure two about here

Those not working from home were the most likely to agree that their work was more difficult (Chi-

square 17.7 p<001) or that their work pattern stayed much the same (Chi-square 35.5 p<000). These

respondents were also the least likely to agree that their work was less stressful (Chi-square 43.3

p<000). Notably, about a third of those working from home reported much less stress, did not feel

they worked longer hours or that their work pattern had changed significantly or become more

difficult.

Some of the responses to our question relating to working life under Covid19, reflect these figures:

> *It's been horrendous, dealing with Covid jobs on top of our normal daily basis. [Not working from home, partnered constable working in communications having 19 years of service].*

> *I felt very upset that I was actually given more work and responsibilities than prior to lockdown. This placed a lot of stress on me, especially whilst trying to juggle childcare and home schooling. I feel like I was used because of low staffing levels to do roles that were not my responsibility. [Partially working from home, partnered inspector working in National policing with 23 years' service].*

> *The work of the Neighbourhood / Community department has been completely ignored and Response has taken priority. No appreciation for having to change roles and work on Response. As such, there is a huge build-up of work having to be done now we are back on Neighbourhood. [Not working from home, partnered constable working in neighbourhood policing with 2 years of service].*

> *There was a lot more mental health and risk to deal with in custody and it became a horrendous place to work, numerous sergeants going home crying. New legislation every day to work with and no time to actually stop read it properly. [Not working from home, partnered sergeant working in Custody with 19 years of service].*

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Never worked so hard, was expected to do day job, plus provide specialist advice on PPE and run the logistics cell providing PPE for the whole force. [Working from home, single parent sergeant working in operational support with 28 years of service].

My role doubled as I worked my child exploitation investigations and domestic violence. [Partially working from home, partnered detective constable working in specialist investigations with 7 years' service.

The survey asked whether officers felt their contribution to their team was valued the same as previously or, less/more than previously during the lockdown. Of those working from home, 24% said they felt less valued by their team compared to 16% of those partially working from home and 8% of those not working from home (Chi-square 14.5 p,0.006).

Styles of working

The pattern of virtual meetings (Chi-square 364.4 p<.00001), webinar use (Chi-square 148.9 p<0.0001) and use of social media to communicate with the public (Chi-square 25.5 p<0.0001) changed (statistically significantly) during the lockdown. (See figure 3 for details)

Figure three about here

Overall, these innovations were welcomed:

Devolved work and levels of trust have increased significantly. As a woman, I have a much clearer voice round the virtual table, either by the use of comments panels on skype/MS Teams or by the 'raise the hand' flag on MS Teams. I cannot be so easily ignored, spoken over or have my points side-lined - this also leads to not being criticised for not contributing! (Not working from home, partnered chief officer working in a command team with 31 years of experience].

We held morning skype calls with whole team to share all news, encourage inclusivity. I'm aware that other teams in same department didn't have same interaction with management and therefore felt forgotten about. [Working from home, partnered sergeant working in specialist investigations with 24 years of service].

Access to IT resources, provision of equipment and/or extra training

There were three survey questions about the use of computers during the lockdown - i.e. who had access to the Internet, the preferred space for working at the computer and choice of timing when to work. There were statistically significant differences between those working from home and those

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not working from home. Those working from home (completely or partially) equally prioritized

access within their households or prioritized their own work. Those not working from home also

indicated an equal prioritization, but their own work was the least likely to be prioritized compared

to their partner. (See table 2 for details).

Table two about here

The survey asked all respondents whether their force had provided PPE and any additional IT

resources and training. Just over half (56%) of those working from home were provided with

additional IT equipment and about a third (35%) received additional training in its use. Such training

was welcomed:

> *My force did really well at rolling out IT quickly. This has led to HUGE progress in remote*
> *working and working from home. (Working from home, partnered constable working in a*
> *support function with 2 years' service].*

Others thought they were not so well served:

> *I need more training on IT and assistance from Comms department to be able to create*
> *presentations and deliver via zoom, which has not been forthcoming. [Partially working from*
> *home, partnered constable working in Roads policing with 28 years' service].*
>
> *Our organisation was slow to organise IT equipment, which initially made my job very*
> *unproductive and difficult. Once IT equipment was provided it was much easier and less*
> *stressful to work from home. I will definitely look to work from home in the future and less*
> *time in the office. [Working from home, partnered constable working in a support function*
> *with 24 years' service].*
>
> *I had terrible problems with my internet. I live in a rural area and no fibre optic connection.*
> *Internet kept dropping out and this caused me a lot of stress. BT were useless and could give*
> *no answer as to why this happened. I even changed the router to no avail. Had the internet*
> *been working as it should (I believe this was in part, a Police issue as totally unprecedented*
> *amount of Officers/staff working from home) then I would have had a less stressful experience*
> *and not have been desperate as I was to get back to the work place. [Partially working from*
> *home, partnered, constable working in CID with 13 years of service].*

Of those working away from home, approximately three quarters of neighbourhood and response

officers were issued with PPE (79%). Although these respondents and others did comment

extensively that some of the PPE was slow in being delivered. Some examples included:

It would appear the organisation's standpoint when the lockdown first started was 'were the police it's business as usual'. I felt extremely undervalued by this opinion and no PPE was forthcoming for some weeks.[3] It was as if we didn't matter at all. [Not working from home, partnered constable working in special investigations with 20 years' of service].

No one recognised that we were the front line - yes NHS had the intense pressure of saving very ill people, but their 'customers' generally wanted their help, and they had PPE up to the eyeballs. We were trying to keep people safe by stopping them get the virus in the first place - when they clearly didn't care/understand/wish to follow advice... and all we got was abuse, assaults and media criticism. We were expected to stop people spreading the virus - with no PPE, and being spat at. [Not working from home, single constable working in neighbourhood policing with 7 years' service].

PPE in custody non-existent at the start. No plastic screens or social distancing at all. [Not working from home partnered sergeant working in Custody with 22 years of service].

Welfare and wellbeing

Two thirds (67%) of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they felt *more tired* at the end of

the day during the lockdown period. The same proportion (67%) said they felt *more stressed* during

the lockdown compared to previously. Only about a fifth of respondents agreed/agreed strongly that

they had more reserves of emotional energy during the lockdown, whilst over half (55%)

disagreed/disagreed strongly and 24% remained neutral. Those working from home were less likely

to report feeling tired and were less stressed than colleagues who were partially working from home

or not working from home.

Table 3 about here

Harder now working from home 24/7 as its become a work place and not the usual escape from work. Pre Covid I had a greater mixture of work / home life travel to vary both work and home life. If anything work has increased due to more meetings taking place online, and I think digital fatigue at the end of the day is beginning to show in people's attitudes in meetings.[Working from home constable in other designated role with 25 years' of service].

My story … I became depleted, emotionally in isolation, maintained my home responsibilities with extra stressors, with eventual physical impacts. To make it worse, I had highlighted health vulnerability from stress prior to lockdown and was aggressively negated. Then suddenly in lockdown, and due to associated new trends in social media, it was ok to acknowledge the links between stress and general health, but I still wasn't given the time of day until eventually I had nervous exhaustion. Now I'm on-notice again for attendance with

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[3] The PFEW's 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey found that 34% of their 25,000+ respondees had not had access to adequate PPE during the crisis (Apter 2020b).

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half-pay looming. [Not working from home single constable working in safeguarding with 2 years' experience].

Because toddler was only going to nursery, if both myself and husband at work it was very tiring having to look after her every minute I wasn't at work. As there was nowhere to go and unable to go and see people it was exhausting stuck at home which made me more tired for work. Also as we were in the house more, there was more house work and cooking etc to do at the same time as looking after toddler. [Not working from home, constable working on response with 12 years' of service].

Just over a third (37%) of all respondents said their forces had contacted then during the lockdown to ask about their personal welfare and 43% indicated their force had facilitated their staying in touch with colleagues. However, two thirds were not satisfied about the level of Force contact in relation to their welfare. Additionally, being generally more worried about their family (over two thirds (60%) were worried about their families' safety):

At the beginning, I seriously considered retiring early to be at home with my children and reduce the risk of my catching the disease and potentially leaving them without a mum. [Partially working from home partnered constable working in specialist investigations with 28 years' experience].

Assessment of forces' performance during lockdown

Earlier we reflected on the largely positive relationship between police officers and their direct supervisor/line managers. These findings were not reciprocated when it came to looking at the force. Overall, all police officers were positive about the way their force had performed its work during the lockdown[4]. They were also mostly positive about the way their forces had policed the public in the period. They were least satisfied with the way they had been looked after personally. (see figure 4)

Figure 4 about here

The percentages reporting that they felt personally looked after by their force was greatest amongst those working from home (60% were very or fairly satisfied compared to 54% partially working from

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[4] The PFEW's 2020 Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey suggested that 49% of forces had managed their organisations well in the period (Apter 2020b)

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home and 32% not working from home (Chi-square 42.3 p<0.0001). A similar pattern emerged from

the experience of being contacted by their force enquiring about their welfare ; 68% of home

workers said this happened, compared to 43% of those partially working from home and 24% not

working from home (Chi-square 49.1 p<0.001).

The adverse comments indicate where some of the explanations of these statistics lie:

> *No care or consideration for wellbeing was offered when having to work around childcare. Sometimes working split shifts around school times to make hours up, finishing at 11 pm and starting again at 9 after school run. This could have been alleviated by providing me with laptop to work from home some of the time. There was no logic to who had laptops and were able to work from home and who didn't get provided with a laptop which caused issues in teams. [Working from home partnered constable working in safeguarding with 13 years of service].*

> *... expected to work miracles with no guidance until too late and the public had already decided what they were doing. Changing goals posts, huge demand on less staff, mixed messages from SMT. [Not working from home partnered sergeant working in neighbourhood policing with 19 years of service].*

> *Response officers were truly tested in this time, being told we had to police under legislation that had come in just hours before our shift, and not being given any training. We were sent to many, many calls from neighbours reporting each other for breaches that may have been true but was a waste of time. [Not working from home single constable working on response with 2 years' experience].*

Post-Covid working

At the time of analysis, two thirds of all the survey respondents had returned to their pre COVID

working pattern (65%). In the event of a further period of lockdown[5], just over half (57%) thought it

would be harder and 43% said they felt better prepared. One officer observed:

> *If a second lockdown happens, I shall struggle, as my ex is not helpful. I had a lot of stress caused by him telling me I would be responsible if my children became ill. [Not working from home single parent constable working in neighbourhood policing with 19 years of service].*

Those not working from home were the most likely to think a second lockdown would be harder

(67% compared to 52% of those partially working from home and 47% of home workers (Chi-square

10.7 p<0.005). At the end of COVID restrictions, 35% thought that things would return to the way

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[5] On 5 November 2020, the UK government on 5 November enforced a second lockdown. The observations in this paper do not take this period into account.

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things were. Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of those respondents who thought things might be different for them.

Figure 5 about here

The pattern of preferences was somewhat different. Looking at the largest percentages of all the preferences expressed, 36% of those working from home wanted to continue to do so; 39% of the partially working from home officers wanted to do the same job but differently, whilst 46% of those not working from home wanted to retain their ways of working before COVID.

Discussion

In summary there were no differences between those working from home, partially working from home or not working from home in terms of the type of force the officer worked in, their rank, ethnicity, marital status, whether they worked full time, part time or flexi time. All were mostly able to do the same job as previously and all were positive about their immediate supervisors before or during lock down. All agreed that their hours had increased and that they experienced a depletion of their emotional energies. There was no difference in the way in which domestic chores were conducted where two thirds of women officers took the main responsibility prior to, and during lockdown.

Where their experiences *differed* related to their policing role (more officers who worked in a support function were likely to work at home all of the time or partially, and conversely, response officers were the most likely not to be able to work from home and were also the most likely to work shifts). Home working was associated with less stress, and greater likelihood of their force enquiring about their welfare. Home workers were the most satisfied with the way their force had personally looked after them. There was a change in childcare where 53% of our respondents who were

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partnered and had children took the main responsibility in lockdown compared to 49% previously.

84% of the women officers said they took the main responsibility for home schooling.

Those not working from home were more likely to report their working lives as more difficult. Their

work pattern remained much the same, and they reported being more stressed and tired and least

likely to have been contacted by their force about their welfare. These officers were the most

dissatisfied about the way their forces had looked after them and were the most likely to aspire to

the same working patterns after the lockdown. Those working completely from home were the most

likely to wish to retain this status after COVID despite feeling less valued by their team. This finding

provides some confirmation for Dick's 2009 observation about the hostility experienced by those

who are not perceived as actively doing 'the job', although these are perceptions rather than

conclusions. Those partially working from home were the most likely to want to do the same job as

before but differently.

Overall, the picture here is of a workforce working longer hours with its officers tired, emotionally

depleted and suffering varying levels of stress. Those remaining at their places of work report

greater stress with those working from home being less stressed. That policing is a highly stressed

occupation is well documented Liberman et al. 2002; Purba, and Demou 2019; van der Lippe and

Lippenyi 2018) in the academic literature. The Police Federation of England and Wales' (PFEW)

annual *Welfare, Demand and Capacity* Surveys continually report stress levels at over 35%[6]

compared to the lower levels of approximately 15% in the general workforce (HSE 2012).

A recent survey commissioned by the College of Policing also suggests that fatigue, stress and low

emotional energy result in 'lower than average levels of wellbeing in police officers' (Graham et al

2019:1). All these observations prior to the COVID19 outbreak. Understandably, like many workers,

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[6] In 2018, the survey reported 43.9% of respondents viewed their job as very or extremely stressful (Elliott-Davis, 2019). This is a larger proportion than reported in the results from the previous 2016 survey (Houdmont and Elliot-Davis 2017) (38.6%) and almost three times that found in the general population by the Health and Safety Executive (15%) (2012).

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police in the UK have come under considerable pressure working through the pandemic (Apter

2020a). 65% of our respondents said they felt more stressed in lockdown than previously. This paper

however is about the working conditions of police working through COVID in various ways rather

than *how* police are policing the pandemic.

Part-time working, working from home, agile[7] working and other forms of flexible working practices

have long been on the agenda of policing services. In England and Wales while Forces have sought to

recruit and retain high quality staff and manage diversity overall, the enthusiasm and pressure

internally for flexible working has been notably absent. It might be argued that this is largely

because a 24/7, largely shift working workforce often reliant on short notice cover would struggle to

meet the working imperatives of such an occupation. Evidence over the past 20 years however

suggests that negative attitudes towards various 'agile' ways of working (Cannon 2017) remain. The

imperative of a 'full time and uninterrupted' career status (Silvestri, 2006), the gendered nature of

the 'flexibility stigma' (Williams et al 213) and the premise of the 'ideal worker' in policing, still play a

part in such resistance (Tuffin et al 2001; Silvestri 2017; Scholarios et al, 2017; Chung 2018). What

we see here though is that external pressures have forced police services to accept many of their

staff either partially or fully working from home.

This research suggests that those working from home have largely benefited from less stress and

tiredness and more emotional energy. The findings also indicated that officers were contacted about

their wellbeing in contrast to their colleagues who remained operating from their usual place of

work. Perhaps unsurprisingly many home workers were in favour of more flexible working

arrangements in the future. They were also less anxious than others about another lockdown period.

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[7] Cannon defines 'agile working' as 'beyond flexibility' in that it seeks to shift the perspective from flexibility as an employee benefit to agile working practices that benefit the organisation (2017: 11). Some participants in this survey referred to agile working in their responses.

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While some officers working from home reported good support from their direct line manager,

others' comments reflected the 'flexibility stigma' some senior officers conveyed:

> *My boss has never agreed with working from home. However he is one of a very few dinosaurs left in the organisation. I hope that having been forced to have his staff working from home due to Covid-19 he allows this to continue. We ALL have experienced far less stress and anxiety, we ALL have said that we have produced more work than we normally would if we were in the office, and we ALL say our fitness and wellness has improved due to working from home, so let's ensure the dinosaurs get to realise how beneficial working from home is. [Working from home partnered sergeant working in a support function with 22 years of service].*

> *Working from home! Despite Force Police allowing this it took a long time for my line Manager to accept it - only allowed in August! [Not working from home, single parent constable working in CID with 28 years of service].*

> *Whilst the force as a whole appear to support their staff and have procedures in place, there is complacency within individual departments. There is a desire to have faces in an office over the safety and welfare of officers. [Not working from home, partner constable working on roads policing with 16 years of service].*

Despite the seemingly rapid way in which forces shut down their offices and relocated workers –

these comments (and others like them) suggest that the issue of officers not being 'at their desk' still

seems to be a problem for some line managers. Penny Dick argues that flexible working of any kind

sits uneasily against the dominant norms of full-time work in policing. 'Not only does professional

reduced-hours working pose a challenge to management's 'right to manage', but its idiosyncratic

nature can also expose the precariousness of the dominant order' (2009:182).

Respondents rated their forces highly when it came to their overall performance and the way in

which they policed the public in lockdown. The statistics however were less congratulatory when it

came to the way in which the Forces looked after them. Those respondents working from home

benefited from what they perceived as being 'looked after' by their individual forces. 60% were very

or fairly satisfied compared to 54% partially working from home and 32% not working from home.

These statistically significant patterns occurred when respondents were asked whether they were

contacted about their wellbeing, with 68% of home workers said this happened, compared to 43% of

those partially working from home and 24% not working from home:

I feel the force was also slow to react with getting PPE to the front line and offering support and guidance to front line officers who were still putting themselves at risk every day. I feel the emphasis was focused on the supporting departments who were working from home and those with children/dependants. My line manager was supportive and did what he could to help, but we were both working on common sense rather than any guidance.   My working life in general during the pandemic was more difficult due to other departments not being available/working from home. [Not working from home, partnered sergeant working on response with 14 years' of service].

The importance of perceived organisational support and feeling valued within an organisation is well established in the organisational literature (Dulk et al 2016; Lewis 2001; van der Lippe and Lippenyi, 2020). Policing studies also recognise the importance of the organisational context for wellbeing and work life generally (Garbarino et al, 2013; Laufs, J., and Waseem, 2020; Purba, and Demou 2019; Boateng and Wu 2018) and this is by no means an exhaustive list. Therefore, while this research is largely exploratory its statistically significant findings about organisational support from Forces and in particular their concern for an employee's welfare is potentially troubling.

Conclusions

This was a rapid response survey to capture the immediate experiences of police officers working under conditions of the first lockdown during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, as an opportunistic sample, it is not representative of the police workforce and results are presented as first impressions from a sample of women officers. The wish to process the data quickly to feed into recommendations for the likely, and in the event the actuality of a second lockdown meant that no reminders were sent out. Police operate in a management culture where long hours and intensification of working time are expected – so this runs the risk of context-specific results (Scholarios et al 2017).

Notwithstanding these limitations, there is a strong indication from these results that working under COVID prevention working conditions was more stressful compared to previously. The police service did overcome its ambivalence to more flexible working, and contrary to previous findings that these workers felt marginalised, forces took considerable efforts to support home working and to contact

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officers. Unfortunately, it seems to have been at the expense of caring for those officers who

remained at work. As has been reported elsewhere (Azcona et al, 2020), our respondents did seem

to carry a greater burden of domestic duties during the lockdown. A possible implication of this in a

male dominated working environment may be for a reversion to gender stereotypic divisions of

labour. Brown et al, (2019) previously reported a degree of gender stereotypic tasking in police

forces especially those with a less progressive orientation. They also reported a tendency for less

progressive forces to show more sympathy for officer fathers with childcare issues than mothers.

Laverick and Cain (2015) concluded that years of austerity had seen an erosion in accountability and

monitoring mechanisms of equality policies. Such a context they argued had potentially

compromised efforts to mainstream equality and diversity in organisations.

Our research results point to the potential for a further exacerbation of this trend unless addressed

in post COVID recovery. Our findings also suggest that there is an appetite for more 'agile' working

arrangements in policing. According to Cannon (2017), agile organisations go beyond flexibility of

workers' roles and pursue adaptation of workforce practices in an incremental way. Notwithstanding

Cannon's business perspective and emphasis on 'thrive and survive' he does have a point about

future organisations needing to be 'nimble, quick on their feet, agile, … ready for almost anything'

(2017:7) and able to adapt quickly in turbulent environments. Adapting working conditions and

practices that maximise responsiveness to changing demands for services may be something

that police organisations may wish to consider.

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21

FIGURES

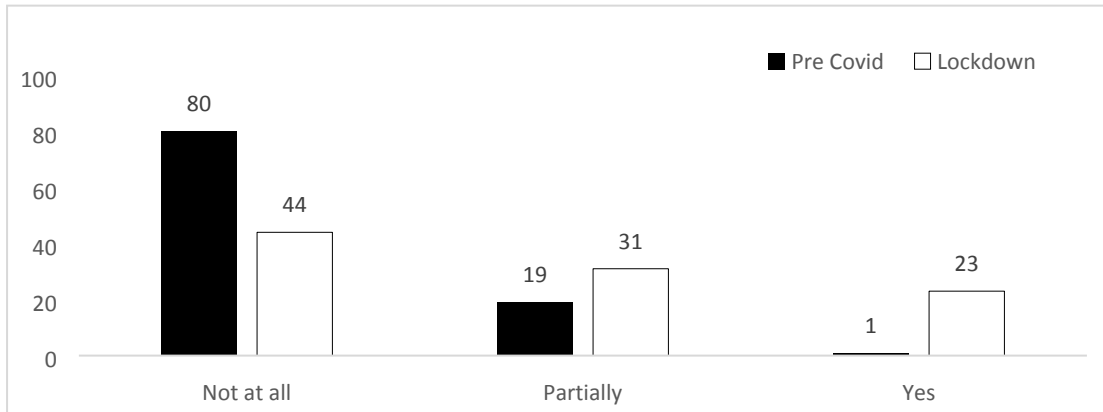**Figure 1: Percentage able to work from home prior to and during lockdown**

Figure 2: Percentage strongly agreeing/agreeing about quality of working either from home, partially at home or not working from home

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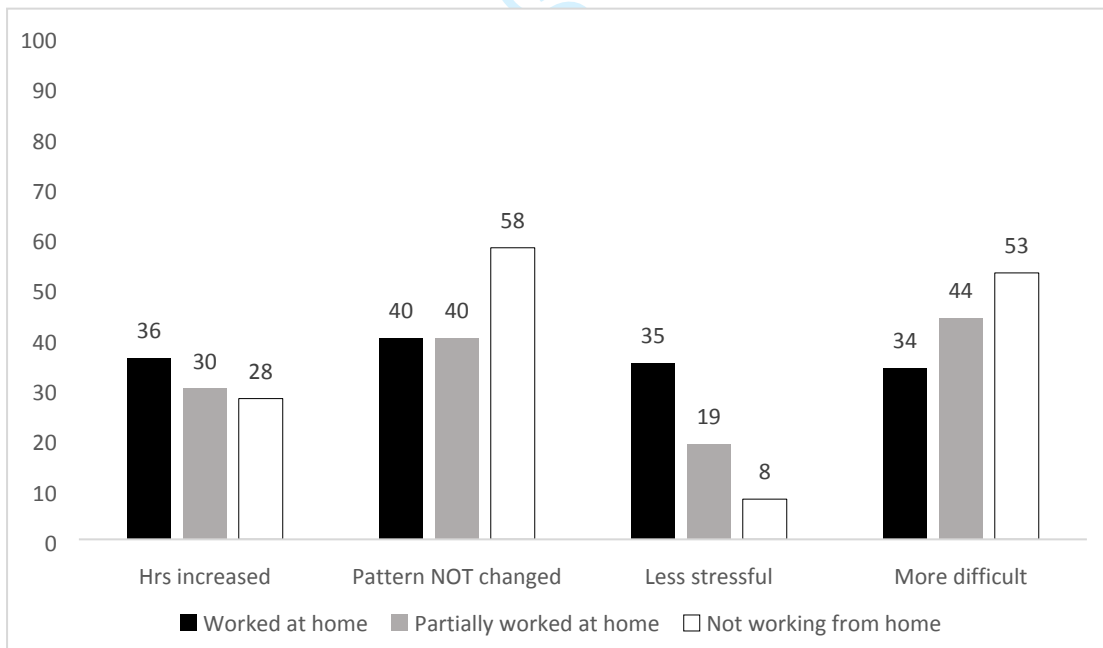44
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Figure 3: Percentage indicating changing patterns of working prior to and during lockdown
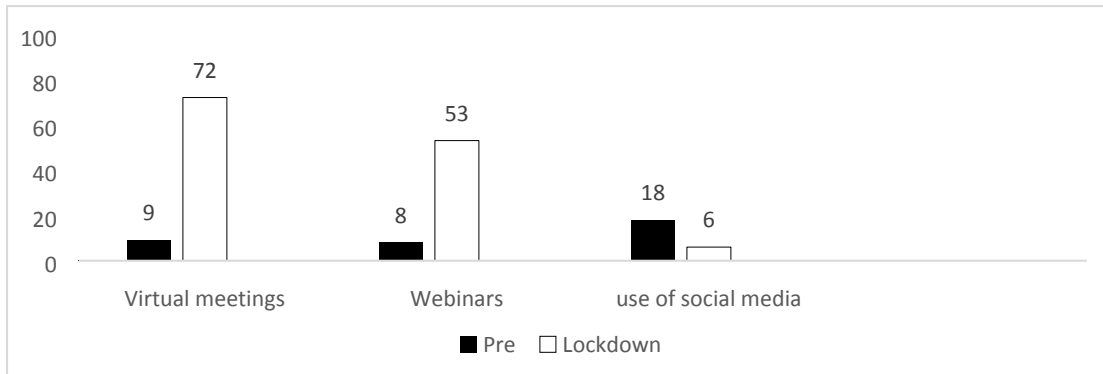

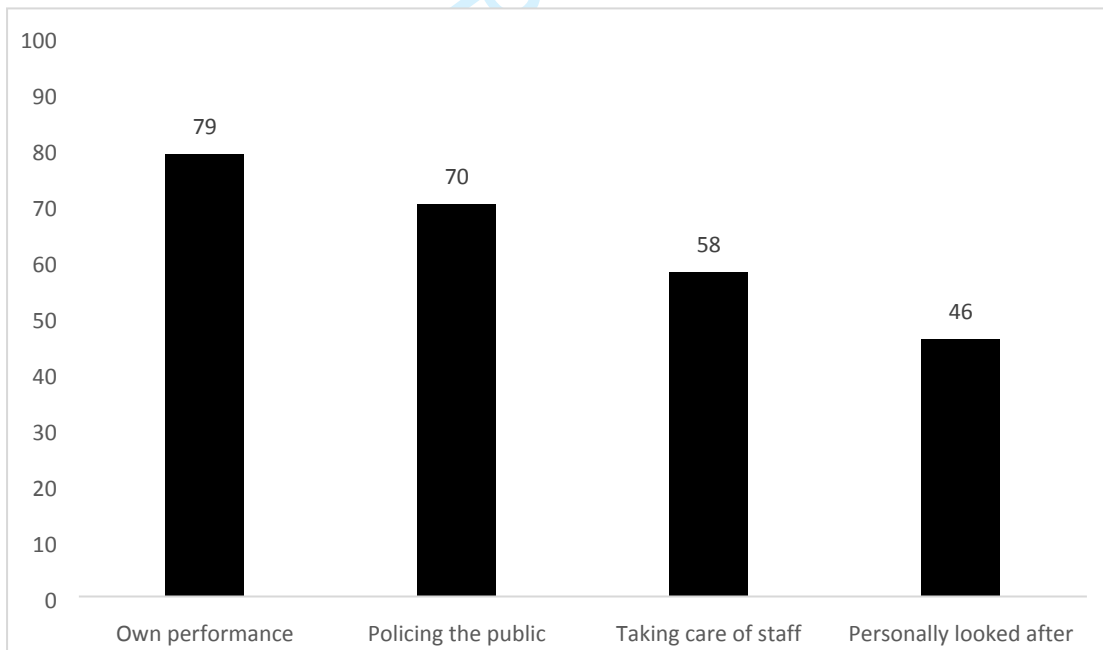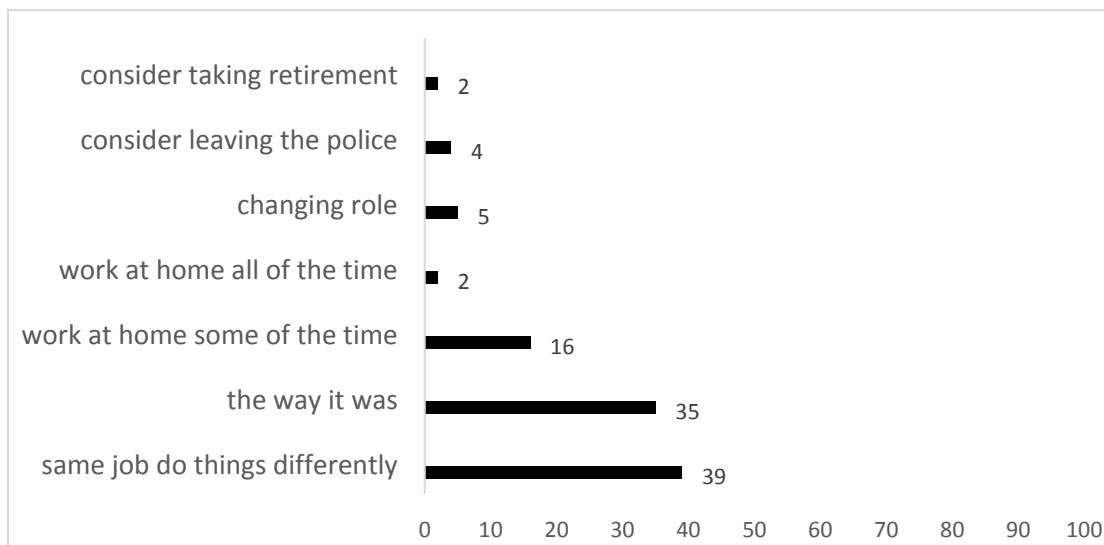**Figure 4: Percentage of respondents' ratings of force's performances as very or fairly satisfactory**

Figure 5: Percentage expressing expectations following ending of all lockdown restrictions

TABLES

Table 1: Occupational details by location of work during lockdown

Policing role	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home	Chi square
Investigation	19% (30)	53% (81)	28% (169)	50.7***
Neighbourhood	19% (13)	24% 916)	57% (38)	6.8**
Response	9% (9)	10% (10)	80%(77)	39.5***
Custody and detention	27% (4)	0% (00	73% (11)	6.0*
Support	36% (21)	34%(920)	29 (17%)	6.7**

*p<0.5 ** p<0.03 *** p<0.0001

Table 2 Access to IT resources within the home by work location

	Access to internet			Access to preferred working space			Access to preferred working times		
Whose work is prioritized	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home
My work	39%	25%	8%	39%	27%	8%	36%	28%	10%
Partner's work	5%	4%	22%	11%	10%	29%	5%	5%	22%
Children	5%	10%	31%	12%	12%	33%	6%	12%	31%
Equal	48%	60%	33%	36%	49%	28%	45%	51%	35%
Chi square	68.8 p<0.0001			45.7 p<0.0001			45.6 p<0.0001		

Table 3 Physical and psychological reactions to work during lockdown compared to previously

	Feeling more tired			Having more emotional energy			Feeling more stressed		
	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home	Home working	Partial home working	Not working from home
Agree	58%	69%	67%	28%	18%	18%	54%	63%	68%
Neutral	13%	17%	18%	25%	26%	22%	19%	17%	16%

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Disagree	29%	14%	16%	47%	56%	60%	27%	19%	16%
Chi square	32.8 p<0.0001			NS			32.1 p<0.0001		