

Research highlights 'stress and pressures' among RASSO officers

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By - [Cachella Smith](#)

New research has showcased the prevalence of pressures on RASSO officers to keep working despite “symptoms of stress and ill-health”.

A paper authored by Dr Linda Maguire and Dr Arun Sondhi from the Centre for Policing, Research and Learning at The Open University has called for interventions at an organisational level after their research has demonstrated the levels of stress among RASSO officers related to high job demands and low resources.

The study focused on one English force and comprised a survey of officers (198 officers) as well as interviews with nine focus groups (51 participants). The authors clarified that the survey had only a 39% compliance rate (with time being the main barrier) and doesn't reflect changing operational practices.

63% of respondents said that they have felt unwell due to work related stress in the last 12 months, and more than 60% said they felt they had to come into work in the last three months despite not being well enough.

“95% [respondents] who stated that they came to work despite feeling unwell, did so as a result of self-pressure,” the paper added.

Published in *Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, the paper further found low numbers of officers who feel they have a positive work-life balance with a minority who felt that their force takes positive action on health and wellbeing.

Meanwhile, interviews showcased problems of resourcing as well as a level of dissociation among some officers.

One officer told the study: “My workload is so unmanageable I don’t have time to do anything but try to keep up with the unrealistic demands placed upon me.

“I try really hard and feel like I could do a really good job if we just had the staff to do our job properly. Instead, I constantly feel like I have to choose which victim or which area of my work to fail. This has a huge mental impact on someone who genuinely does this job to try to make a positive impact on peoples’ lives.”

High workloads and lack of wellbeing support has resulted in a certain dissociation and compassion fatigue among some officers.

One officer outlined: “Victims are coming back the very next day, saying they’ve been raped again. And it’s all for attention [...] It’s just attention seeking [...] We can’t 100% disprove it, so we have to run with it because nobody’s going to say no. From a police point of view, we’re not going to say no, we don’t believe you [...] so we just spend thousands and thousands of people, play the game and tomorrow we’ll write it off [...] and lost appointments for real victims. It’s just a game that we play.”

The authors emphasised the “altruistic and compassionate” nature of the officers interviewed.

They state: “Their main driver for their work was to provide the best service and support for victims and survivors. The commitment to following due process in the service of victims and the wider general public, along with a demonstration of professional pride, is evident in [their] comments.”

The researchers have concluded that interventions are needed to manage things like dissociation and to maintain motivation among officers.

Three things need to be addressed, they said - the use of metrics as a driver of performance, managing effects of compassion fatigue and maintaining the motivation of officers.

“Pressures relating to organisational performance target culture at all levels of the organisation that foster a working climate that sets a priority of achieving work targets comes at a precedent to physical and mental distress,” they concluded.

"This is enhanced by the nature of policing [...] that places an onus on the individual to adhere to the prevailing culture. These factors are heightened by RASSO officers' desire to deliver a compassionate and caring service."

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