



2014 POLICE STAFF STRESS SURVEY REPORT



1. Introduction

In 2010 before the last election there were 79,500 police staff working for police forces in England and Wales. Three and a half years later, in September 2013, this number had dropped to 64,500. This represents a fall of 15,000 staff, or a cut of nearly 19% in the workforce. Over the same period, 3,500 police community support officers (PCSOs) also lost their jobs – a 22% reduction in just over three years. In Scotland, 800 police staff jobs have been lost since April 2013 as part of police reform; that's about 13% of the police staff workforce in the country.

This is the state of policing under a Coalition Government in England and Wales which has slashed police budgets by 20%, and a Scottish Government which has maintained police officer numbers at the expense of their police staff colleagues. These cuts have reduced services to local people, as fewer PCSOs and officers patrol their streets, fewer police stations and control rooms are open for fewer hours and experienced and dedicated police staff lose their jobs.

UNISON has documented the impact of these cuts elsewhere, but what of the police staff themselves? How have those who remain employed coped with the savage downsizing of the workforce, as colleagues and co-workers are forced out?

This report tells the story of the damage which the government cuts have caused to police staff morale and work-life balance and the huge increase in workplace stress which has arisen as a result. For a police service which relies on good morale and for staff to often go the extra mile,

the results of UNISON's survey should make for very concerning reading.

2. Synopsis

This report is split into the following sections:

- Executive Summary
 - Commentary and Action Plans
 - Conclusion
 - Appendix: full survey results
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3. Executive Summary

Here are the top-line results from UNISON's 2014 police staff stress survey (full results in Appendix):

- 3,335 police staff completed the on-line survey between 9 April and 6 June 2014
- This equates to just over 9% of UNISON's police staff membership
- Responses were received from police staff in England, Scotland and Wales
- 74% of respondents report job cuts in their work area since 2010
- 32% of police staff are very stressed
- 62% of police staff are moderately stressed
- 77% report that their stress levels have increased over the last 12 months
- The main reason behind workplace stress is:
 - increased workload (68%)
 - uncertainty over job security (60%)

- concerns about cost of living (52%)
 - Lack of support from management (50%)
- Low morale is the main outcome of the increase in workplace stress for police staff, (reported by 63% of respondents) followed by anxiety (55%) and lack of motivation (48%)
- Only 18% of police staff enjoy a good balance between their work and personal life
- For 36% of police staff their work interferes with their ability to enjoy their private life
- Police staff are trying to deal with their increased stress levels responsibly by talking with other colleagues or confiding in friends and family
- Only a quarter of police staff talked to their manager about their stress
- 15% of police staff have been referred to their force occupational health department due to stress
- Respondents rated their force's occupational health provision for stress as follows:
 - Good: 24%
 - Adequate: 43%
 - Poor: 33%
- 22% of police staff say that stress is affecting their ability to do their job
- 49% say that stress sometimes impacts on their ability to do their job
- 58% of police staff report that their force has not taken any steps to reduce workplace stress
- 50% of police staff were not able to answer the question about the success of their force's strategy to reduce stress, presumably because they were not aware that any such strategy existed
- The majority of those who did comment on their force's stress reduction strategy, did not believe that the steps to reduce stress had been successful.
- To combat workplace stress, police staff believe that their force should:
 - Employ more police staff/fill vacant posts: 64%
 - Train all managers in leadership: 47%
 - Set more realistic targets/deadlines 41%
- For the time being, the majority (54%) of police staff are not taking time off work due to stress, but 34% have considered doing so.
- Nearly 20% of police staff report that they might need to take time off work if their stress level does not improve, and 43% said maybe.

4. Commentary & Action Plans

It is very clear from these survey results that workplace stress among police staff in England, Scotland and Wales is a real problem and one which the police service is failing to deal with. If the staff delivering such a vital public service as policing, are reporting such worrying growth in stress, it is time for the UK Governments and for police

leaders to take notice and take action. UNISON is calling on them to take action now.

The Home Office and some police leaders have tried for some time to pretend to the public that 20% cuts to police budgets can be absorbed with no impact on the quality or coverage of police services. Common sense would tell you otherwise, but now UNISON's research is giving the lie to the reassurances which have been fed to the public.

4.1 Increased Workload

It is a fairly obvious point, that the increased workloads that have resulted from the police cuts, are the major contributory factor in the growth of workplace stress among police staff.

94% of police staff say that they are stressed: 62% moderately so, and 32% very affected. 77% report that their stress has gone up over the last 12 months.

Not surprisingly, in view of government police cuts, increased workload is the main reason which police staff give for suffering from stress at work. The fact that 50% of police staff also cite the lack of support from management as a reason for their stress, must be very worrying for a service which prides itself on the quality of its management and supervision and which spends considerable sums of public money on training its most talented leaders.

UNISON therefore calls upon the UK Governments and police leaders to urgently review the way in which demand for police services is being handled, and to enter into talks with

the police staff trade unions to agree a programme to:

- *Acknowledge the unbridgeable gap between escalating demand for police services and the cutbacks to the police workforce*
- *Explain to the public and to the media that, with diminishing resources, demand for police services can no longer be met and that some services may have to be withdrawn*
- *Commit to develop a transparent system of resource allocation in forces*
- *Agree national and local service imperatives*
- *Draw up plans for work to be prioritised*
- *Decide which low priority work will no longer be delivered*

4.2 Well-Being

The police service prides itself on being an employer of choice and one which looks after those in the police family. But the results of UNISON's stress survey show that the well-being of police staff is being very adversely affected by the working conditions in which they now find themselves working.

Raised stress levels have led to:

- Low morale: 63%
- Anxiety: 55%
- Irritability/Mood Swings: 50%
- Lack of Motivation: 48%
- Exhaustion: 47%

On the whole, the survey results show that police staff are dealing with their

stress in a responsible fashion, by talking to colleagues or confiding in friends and family, rather than resorting to alcohol or drugs. But the fact that only a quarter of police staff have talked to their manager about their stress is very telling. It suggests that police staff do not regard their managers/leaders as approachable or empathetic when it comes to workload and stress issues. UNISON considers this to be nothing short of a failure of police leadership.

Relatively few police staff report being referred to their force occupational health department for help with stress (15%). Those who have been referred are not particularly complimentary: 33% report that provision is poor and 43% that it was adequate. This is simply not good enough and needs to improve. UNISON accepts that many occupational health departments themselves may have been subject to cuts, so this is not a criticism of the staff working in occupational health, but more so of the funding and support for their work from police leaders.

As UNISON's poll makes clear, although most police staff have not taken time off work due to workplace stress, 34% have considered doing. With staffing levels at such a low level, the prospect of a big increase in work related sickness should be hugely worrying.

UNISON calls upon the UK Governments and police leaders to jointly develop a programme of employee care, with the police staff trade unions, that delivers for both the service and police staff.

4.3 Taking Action

One of the most worrying findings in UNISON's police staff stress survey is that nearly 60% of police staff report that their force has not taken any action to reduce workplace stress. This may be because police leaders are in denial, or that the challenge of addressing stress in a time of savage budget cuts is too difficult.

But difficult times demand courageous leaders, who will speak up for their staff, not brush problems under the carpet, or act as apologists for the Governments' austerity programmes.

Police staff have their own ideas of what forces should do to address the problem of workplace stress. Not surprisingly, the most common suggestion is for the service to employ more staff. Although this appears unlikely in the current political climate, it is something that all the main political parties should consider in advance of the next general election. Anything else will look like re-arranging the deckchairs on the deck of the Titanic.

Other suggestions from our survey for addressing stress could be delivered immediately with the right political and managerial will. For example:

- 47% of respondents to the survey are critical of the leadership and management skills of those in positions of authority in the service and want better training of managers in leadership and people management skills.

- 41% want more realistic targets and deadlines set by those running police forces.
- 36% ask for risk assessments for work related stress and for working practices to be modified to take the results into account.

UNISON calls on the College of Policing and police leaders to audit the response of managers/supervisors to the demand crisis now affecting policing in the UK with a view to ensuring that:

- *managers/supervisors are properly trained, equipped and enabled to support their staff during a time of severe police funding cuts*
- *targets and deadlines are managed with a view to reducing the stress demands on police staff*
- *risk assessments are carried out in all forces as a matter of urgency to establish the local incidence of workplace stress and to put in place safe systems of work to combat it.*

5. Conclusion

It is clear from UNISON's 2014 police staff stress survey that our members are suffering adverse effects from the impact of the UK governments' austerity cuts to policing. Workplace stress is being predominantly driven by increased workloads as one would expect. What is unexpected from the results is the failure of most police forces to recognise the problem, or develop an action plan to deal with it. For organisations that seek to manage risk on a day to day basis, this head in the sand approach is very worrying.

Failure by employers to deal with workplace stress has very negative consequences for employees, as our survey shows. But it can also lead to similarly negative outcomes for employers in the form of service failure or legal action for compensation. The police service would do well to recognise these dangers before it is too late and act.

In light of our survey, UNISON calls for:

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- Acknowledge the unbridgeable gap between escalating demand for police services and the cutbacks to the police workforce
 - Explain to the public and to the media that, with diminishing resources, demand for police services can no longer be met and that some services may have to be withdrawn
 - Commit to develop a transparent system of resource allocation in forces
 - Agree national and local service imperatives
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5.2 The UK Governments and police leaders to jointly develop a programme of employee care, with the police staff trade unions, which delivers for both the service and police staff.

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