Introduction and welcome by Loraine Gelsthorpe, Director, Institute of Criminology

Particular pleasure welcoming Jake Philips, back to the Institute of Criminology, but also members of the research team looking at emotional labour and probation work. Including Sam Ainslie, Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice; Chalen Westaby, Senior Lecturer in Law and Andrew Fowler, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, all at Sheffield Hallam University.

Jake is a reader in Criminology with strong interests in probation, community sanctions and more broadly penology as well, and emotional labour in probation is just one of his interests as it is for the rest of the panel this evening. So Jake and Sam will be talking for about 40 to 45 minutes and then there will be an opportunity when people will be able to ask questions, but we do ask you, please to put questions in the Q & A box, which you will probably find at the bottom of your computer screen. Please put them in Q & A, rather than chat. You can put them there with your name, you can put them there anonymously and if you don’t have a particular question, but you think other peoples questions are good, then you can simply vote for the questions you would like to see addressed by the panel members.

So, as I say Jake and Sam, representing the research team will talk for between 40 and 45 minutes and then we will have a good 20 to 25 minutes to address any questions that people have.

So a very warm welcome to the panel and a very warm welcome to everyone, and with that I will hand over to Jake.

Jake Phillips

Thank you Loraine for the welcome and thank you for the invitation, it is always good to be back in the Institute of Criminology, if only I was actually there though, that would be all the better. Thank you to everybody for coming to our talk, and emotional labour amongst probation practitioners and more broadly staff well-being within probation.

So just a little bit of background to the study I am going to talk about today. We did some research a few years ago looking at emotional labour in probation practice, that was a fairly small-scale study which was
very qualitative in nature. It involved interviews with probation practitioners within the NPS, off the back of some of that research we were asked to an evaluation and some further research within the National Probation Service, looking at Supervision, Line Management, in particular the role out of Seed 2 framework and training for senior probation officers. That research involved a survey to staff within the NPS, both Front line practitioners POs, PSOs, as well as senior probation officers. We also looked at the concept of professional curiosity, but it’s all couched really in the concept of staff well-being and within the survey and in the interview we’ve been asking people about concepts related of burnout, so that’s how we’ve got to where we are today.

So I’m going to start off, just with a little bit of background around some of those key concepts, a little bit of literature, but I don’t want to get bogged down too much with literature and would rather get on with talking about the data that we’ve generated through the research, because we think it is really interesting.

So what is emotional labour first of all?

Emotional labour is a concept developed by Albi Hochschild, in the 1980s and it’s ‘the management of a way of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display for a wage’, so it’s something you would do for your job. Certainly traditionally it was for money, it has been used now in the context of volunteering, and other roles where you don’t get money, but you get something, so it is transactional. So Emotional labour asks us to look at how people display and manage their emotions in order to achieve the goals of their job and of the organisation. And that display, and the management of those emotions comes from the organisation, it’s the organisation telling you need to manage and display their emotions in this particular way. For example, we see emotional detachment as conveying the professionalism and efficiency that’s required by lots of professional occupations and so on. Emotional labour is often primarily performed in voice-to-face and face-to-face interactions, and it also asks us to think about how our own display and management of emotions produces an emotional state in other people, and I think it’s really important to stress this is about the employer or the organisation exercising control over the emotional work of the employee.

In the context of probation practice, we have looked at emotional labour and we’ve thought about display rules. So emotional display rules are basically often unwritten rules which kind of dictate how someone should manage and display their emotions and we’ll come back to display rules a bit later on. But they are often situated in slightly different contexts so you get Organisational Display Rules, so these might be rules from the organisation saying this is how you should behave in terms of your emotions, in this particular context in probation. So they might be policies written by the National Probation Service, for example. You then get Occupational Display Rules, they are more cultural, so that’s more tied in with I suppose the values and underpinning values of people who work in Probation; and they are often unwritten, but certainly dictate how one should and should not display emotion. Then there are Societal Display Rules, which come from broader society as the name kind of denotes, and what’s really important is that Professionals often have to balance these rules, these display rules and feeling rules and this can be often quite hard.

There can often be conflict between those display rules in the context of probation. Empathy is something that is considered really important in terms of probation practice. It’s showing and having empathy with the people with whom you are working, and is considered a key skill. It’s an occupational display rule to show that empathy, but then when you are working with people convicted of sex offences that becomes difficult, because societal displays rules are not that you should show empathy of people convicted of sex offences, rather you should show disgust and almost hatred, if you look around some of the discourse of people convicted of those offences. So, there are tensions and that can create problems and certainly challenges for people who work in these professions.

So, we have display rules that kind of dictate how you should display and manage your emotions, and then we have the actual performance of emotional labour and there are two really important concepts here. First of all Surface Acting this is where we display emotions that are in line with the goals of the organisation, so the official goals I suppose, the Institutionally approved goals of the of the organisation, but, it’s not necessarily how you actually feel. Deep Acting on the other hand is where you actually change
your emotional state so that it fits with the display rules. So with Surface Acting, a good example, though it’s not in the context of Probation but in shops, is working in shops when you have to wish everyone a good day, but you might actually be feeling down and in-the-dumps inside. Whereas Deep Acting is where you actually feel those emotions and express them.

In the course of that first research project we did a few years ago, we were not explicitly looking for Burnout but it was kind of in the back of our minds. We noticed that lots of the our practitioners that we talked to, we noticed were talking about concepts that seemed, well, talking about the way they felt which seemed to suggest to us some kind of Burnout. So we published an article which was called It’s Relentless and it was about the management of High Risk offenders in the National Probation Service and it was just about that Relentlessness of having to deal with and cope with and manage the risk that people own the case load posed.

So we decided to explore that in more depth, in the context of that follow up study. So burnout is about the emotional depletion and loss of motivation that results from prolonged exposure to emotional and interpersonal stresses on the job, developed by Maslach and colleagues. There are three dimensions to emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and then a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment.

We are going to focus [today] on emotional exhaustion. Which is the feeling of being burned out from your work So coming to work and already feeling emotionally exhausted. Struggling to get through the day because you are feeling so tired, emotionally. Depersonalisation is more the feeling of becoming detached, or cynical of the people that you are working with and it is often cumulative, so builds up over time; there is also something about Burnout being contagious, but I’m not going to get in to that.

There’s quite a lot of research out there being done looking at people working in the Criminal Justice, so there’s research being done with Police, Corrections Officers, a small amount of work being done with Probation trainees, but not really all that much at all. So hopefully we can fill some of that gap in knowledge. What is really important and why we are looking at emotional labour and burnout is because other research has demonstrated a link between the performance of emotional labour and certainly certain types of emotional labour and then levels of burnout. And in particular there is a link in other research between the performance of surface acting, so when you are portraying and displaying an emotional that you are not actually feeling, but you’re doing that in order to achieve the goals of the organisation and burnout.

So, what are those stresses that can cause burnout, there are lots, but these are some of the key ones that we have taken from the literature and we have broken them down in to three factors:

- **Organisational stresses;** so that’s for example, having a high case load, a high work load, dealing with constant change. Having lots of paperwork and administrative tasks that takes you away from the work that you want to do. Having insufficient administrative support, human resources, poor workplace relationships, low work-life balances because of pressures coming from the organisation; working from home creates additional organisational stresses.

- **Operational stresses;** so this is to do more with what you are doing within your job. So stresses linked with burnout include, feeling like, or being actually threatened. You’re having your personal safety threatened from people that you are actually working with. Having to perform emotional labour, dealing with unpredictability, potentially vicarious traumatic experiences.

- **Individual factors;** sleep, or lack of sleep is linked with burnout, but that relationship could go either way, burnout could cause lack of sleep, or lack of sleep could cause the burnout. These are not causative factors they are just correlations. Experience, training routes, age, gender group and so on are all linked to burnout.
How did we try and explore emotional labour and burnout amongst Probation practitioners?
So we have done a mixed methods study, started with a survey and then followed up by interviews. This wasn’t quite the plan, but the pandemic got in the way: so we did our survey a year ago [this week] and we didn’t have to close the survey early, but we were asked to potential participants so that did impact on our response rate. Nonetheless, we got 1500 responses from probation officers and PSOs and we got 218 responses from SPOs, that represents around about 25% response rate from the organisation. So around 25% of POs, PSOs and SPOs.

Then we had a big pause whilst we weren’t allowed to conduct any Primary data collection within the NPS, but we managed to pick up the interviews again in December. So as part of the survey we asked people if they would be willing to interview and then we randomly selected people from those who expressed a willingness. So the interviews we have done are people who have completed the survey, so it is a self selected sample, people who are probably interested in this kind of thing; it’s not random.
So interviews were with 55 people: 28 frontline practitioners, so Probation Officers, PSOs, Residential Workers - I should also put PQiP students in there and 27 SPOs.

A quick break down of our survey sample for the frontline practitioners: we had 40% POs; 26% PSOs; 17% PQiPs; some others VLO and similar. Gender Breakdown 72% Female & 25% Male that roughly represents the demographic makeup of the workforce as a whole. Just in terms of the role breakdown, it’s slightly over represented of the PQiP students and then the average time of service is 10 years, but you see that really large deviation.

Interview sample: 37 women, 18 men; we interviewed people from across, I think, all divisions, but need to double check that and a mix of settings, generic offender management, residential workers, AP staff and a mix of specialisms as well.

Before we get on to the actual data what we are kind of, I suppose I should say, our analysis here is probably described accurately as preliminary. Certainly in terms of the interviews, as we, I’ve only just finished them and in fact I think there is still a few more that I need to do, so the interview data that we are going to draw on is based on our preliminary discussions and analysis of what people have been telling us. So we conducted Quantitate analysis of the survey data and then we’re using the interview data to I suppose augment that and to theory build around why we are seeing some of the stuff we’re seeing in the survey detail.

So we measured Burnout using validated scale Maslach’s Burnout inventory and we used three variable to measure emotional exhaustion and then three variables to measure depersonalisation.

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We measured emotional exhaustion using these variables, and for those of you interested, we calculated the Cronbach alpha for those latent variables. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and normally if you have an alpha of less that 0.7 it is not considered a valid latent variable, so we are just going to focus on emotional exhaustion here as a proxy measure for Burnout.

So we started off by looking at who is most likely to be burned-out and we looked at this in terms of Gender and Ethnicity, and so on. The only statistically significant finding here was around Gender, so women Probation Officers, PSO’s, PQiP Students were statistically, significantly more likely to be burned out than men, and I think this is interesting considering the feminisation of Probation in recent years, certainly amongst probation Officer Grade and so on. I think for reference, interestingly we’ve done some research with some colleagues in America and they did this similar survey with Police Officers and they had a mean Burnout of 3.79 and ours is 4.19 for women and 3.81 for men, so they are actually measuring as being more Burned-out than in those Police Officers. We need to do some more statistical analysis to work out whether that is significant or not, but just for reference really.
Then we also looked at role and we can see here that Probation Officers were statistically significantly more likely to be Burnout-out than other roles PSO’s, PQIP Students and others with a mean of 4.5 amongst the Probation Officers, but less than 4.0 amongst the other groups.

We looked at Case Load, which we figured that Case Load would be related to Burnout and there is a correlation here, but it’s fairly weak. Case Load accounts for just 10% of the variance in the different levels of emotional exhaustion. There are all kinds of things here that complicate the picture: people with really high Case Loads may have ended up leaving, or on long-term sick; the people that have responded to the survey are the ones that are just hanging in there, or perhaps for whatever reason are quite capable at dealing with a higher Case Load without getting Burned-Out. They may of course be getting Depersonalised instead of Emotionally Exhausted, which we are not measuring at here.

We also looked at qualification route, this was non significant, but it is interesting nonetheless the people who qualified more recently i.e. with the PQF qualification, or PQIP qualification were more Burned-out although it was non-significant, but I think there’s something in there which probably requires a little bit further analysis and thinking about. So we had a look at levels of Burnout and how long people had been supervising clients; we also looked at time in service. Neither of those were significant, but it kind of looks like Length of Service is a protective factor against, against Emotional Exhaustion I should say. Again that may be because people have become Depersonalised, as they become more experienced, it may be because they are leaving as a result of being Burned-out, it needs further exploration that work because it’s not significant.

So that was who’s most likely to feel Burnet-out and then we were interested in what contributes most to Burn-out. So we have put those different stresses that I mentioned earlier on in to a linear regression and we picked out the factors which were, significantly statistically related to Burnout, and they are listed on this table here. So this model accounts for 32% of the variance in Emotional Exhaustion within our sample, which I think for human behaviour studies samples is not too bad of an r-Squared number for a linear regression.

The things that have the greatest predictive validity are interestingly: perceived organisational support; emotional regulation; the requirement of the organisation having pretend display rules -Sam is going to go through some of these with you. High levels of emotional awareness, and so where there is a negative number in the B column, that’s a protective factor as people who are better at emotional regulation, then Burnout comes down; if people have a higher perception of organisational support, then Burnout comes down; the more surface acting people do, then Burnout goes up, if you see what I mean; pretend display rules, if there are lots of pretend display rules, it goes up; and Case Load you see it’s got a small effect, the higher the Case Load, it goes up. Over time has a stronger effect on Burnout.

So that’s our Linear Regression and what we want to do now is have a look at the interview data and Sam is going to take you through to have a look at some of that.

-short agreement about technical operation of slides-

Sam Ainslie >

Like Jake says, I’m just going to talk through in a little bit more detail, some of these significant factors that have come out in the data analysis in relation to Burnout for our PO/PSO respondents. To start with, Perceived Organisational Support you can see are the questions from the survey that contribute to this factor, and like Jake said, what we know is that if Perceptions of Organisational Support increase, then Burnout can decrease, so it can be a protective factor. The following slide, this is just our thoughts initially when we reflected on the things that practitioners have told us in our interviews.
So we think that we have heard, we have definitely heard them talk to us about Fear, of being Blamed when things don’t go wrong and the expression ‘chucked under a bus’ has come up a few times. And this sense that it is only ever negative attention that is paid. That there is a lack of Positive recognition from the organisation, but also more broadly from the Public as well, with Probation work remaining very hidden from the public unless it is in the context of something going wrong.

Interviewees have spoken to us about their perceptions of the support available to them by the organisation, and some interviewees have said that they find the PAM Assist Support too generic. That it doesn’t really apply to their role necessarily; and others have spoken to us about the access, or lack of access to clinical supervision, and that it has felt quite restricted to the individuals delivering sex offenders programs, for example. But what has come through in our interviews is this sense that perceptions of the organisation seems to be tied to the relationship with the SPO for these Practitioners and so perception of the organisation appears to be contingent, per se on the relationship between the SPO and Practitioner, but also can appear dependent somewhat on context.

We have been really lucky and really privileged to speak to so many participants from so many different specialisms. Those individuals who have spoken to us who work in Prisons, Approved Premises, Court, or Victim Liaison Services for example, have sometimes expressed that maybe they feel more removed from the organisation and that that can impact on their perceptions of the support available. Also, that changes can impact on perceptions of organisational support. Some Practitioners that we have spoken to, for example, have had quite a high turnover of SPOs in quite a short period of time. And so what practitioners end up talking to us a lot, when we ask them where do you go to for support, it normally come back that they turn to more immediate colleagues, so it becomes a community of coping, the people that are around them, as opposed to the organisation, per se.

So if we move on to look at Emotional Regulation, again these are just the questions from the survey that contribute to this factor, as Jake said, we know that if Emotional Regulation improves, then Burnout can decrease, Burnout can come down. And in talking to our interview participants it becomes obvious to us that Emotional Regulation is viewed as an essential component, as a Probation Practitioner role, but what has also become apparent to us is the way in which people have come in to Probation. For some people they present that as if it is almost by accident, they decide to apply to be a PSO or PO once they have figured out they are good at Emotional Regulation, or that they can cope with the nature of the work. So we have spoken to individuals who have started in administration roles, for example. Or, individuals who have worked in other Criminal Justice positions, such as Prison Officers, or Third Sector related organisation. So we’ve been talking about the fact, it may be that those who are not as good at Emotional Regulation may have ended up leaving, they may not have even applied to be a Probation Practitioner in the first place. But what’s come through, and we know comes through kin a lot of Probation Research is that ongoing value base around the need for Emotional Regulation in order to ensure that you are non judgemental and that you show unconditional positive regard. We started talking about maybe some of the implications of this in terms of recruitment. So Jake talked about pretend Display Rules at the top. So these are the rules that the Organisation insist on, that the Organisation expects and the more POs & PSOs are expected to perform in this way, the higher the levels of Burnout there can be.

So these are the questions and then this links to this sense of having to suppress unwanted, or what could be perceived as being unprofessional emotions and instead the display of emotions that would be deemed appropriate through surface acting. So it is linked with this need to be seen to be professional, to be visually calm on the outside, despite being worried, or scared, or anxious on the inside. Interviewees have spoken of feeling that there is an expectation upon them to be resilient, and that word has come up a few times. But also that there can be this tension between their true feelings and the expectation from the organisation to build rapport, demonstrate empathy and maintain professional boundaries. And so this is very much then linked to Surface Acting, so the Surface Acting is the doing part of Pretend Rules it’s how you then perform your role. And we had lots of examples of this come up in our discussions with practitioners so they talk to us about feeling the need to hide true feelings maybe about certain offences, Jake talked about Sexual Offennding, but also feeling guilt over certain decisions, so recall came up and there was one particular example where a PO was feeling guilty because a Service User who’s mother had
died whilst he was back in Custody, for example. Or suppressing feelings of frustration, not necessarily at Service Users, that’s definitely there, but having to suppress feelings of frustration towards other colleagues, or other Criminal Justice Professionals. So I had an interesting interview with a Court PSO who was talking about having to suppress how she was feeling in the Court Room, when she was feeling particularly frustrated towards the Magistrates, or the Solicitors in the case, but also interesting discussion with Victim Liaison Officers about how they act Calm despite the fact they are feeling really sad sympathy for the victims they are working with.

And then I’m just going to finish up by touching on Emotional Awareness of Others because this is the one that is really difficult, in some ways, to try and work through and try and balance out. So we know that having a good level of Emotional Awareness of Others is key for the role. It supports Practitioners in building rapport with Service Users, but also with effective working relationships with colleagues inside and outside of the Organisation (request to move slides on) it can also support Practitioners in performing what we class as Edge Work, so knowing when and how to use humour, and when it’s ok to display negative emotions to Service Users. It’s also essential for communities of coping, knowing how colleagues are feeling and giving the level of support when it is needed. And it could also potentially be linked to Professional Curiosity.

So when we have been exploring Professional Curiosity with our Interviewees, sometimes they have talked about being very mindful of the impact of the questions they are asking on the Service User and that may impact on whether they do ask those questions or not, but despite all these advantages good Emotional Awareness actually comes at a cost and it is linked to potentially Hyper-vigilance, there’s work-life spill-over. Having quite a skewed view of the world, seeing risk everywhere for example, it came out particularly in Jake, Andrew and Chalen’s work previously, particularly with parents of children and being quite fearful really of the risks that they perceive because of the nature of the work that they do. So we’ve got this sense that for Probation Practitioners, they need to have a good level of Emotional Awareness of Others to do their job well, but what comes with that is a greater risk of Burnout. And therefore what is needed is a good level of Self-Awareness to protect them from Burnout. I’m going to hand back over to Jake now.

> Jake Phillips:

Thanks very much Sam, so we also like I said, surveyed Senior Probation Officers and have been interviewing SPOs as well. There has been very, very, little research done with SPO’s as far as we know, so hopefully this kind of aspect of the study can really improve our understanding of what it is like to be an SPO and the emotional demands of that role and so on.

So with our survey we had 218 people respond, with a mix of people who supervised generic Probation Officers and Specialists, similar gender split that also kind of reflects the service; time in service of 19.5 years, 6.7 years as an SPO and on average people were supervising ten members of staff.

Now we looked at Gender and ethnicity and time in service and so on, and non of that was actually statistically significant in relation to emotional exhaustion. The thing that was, and this is probably unsurprising if there are any SPOs listening in the audience, that the number of staff that you are supervising is, and that was statistically significant. So the more people, the higher the number of people you are supervising, the more likely you are to be experiencing some kind of emotional exhaustion. That is something which certainly organisations need to be aware of. So we did another Linear regression with Senior Probation Officers again using Emotional Exhaustion as our proxy measure for Burnout. Here we’ve got fewer variables which are statistically significant and you can see at the bottom there the number of staff that are being supervised in this model. And this model accounts for 39% of the variants in Emotional Exhaustion, so it’s a fairly good predictor of Emotional Exhaustion.
The most significant factor was this kind of Emotional labour around fear and hiding your fear of somebody, apologising to somebody for something that you don’t actually mean. Again in the interviews we have seen a lot of examples of this, SPOs saying they have had to hide their nerves when they are dealing with a challenging employee, in particular when it comes to performance issues. I don’t know whether this is exclusive to probation, I doubt it, I imagine these are things that middle managers, around the world in all kinds of settings have to deal with. SPOs talked about how they had to soak up some of that frustration, that anger from staff but not really showing a reaction to it. They talked about the anxiety that comes from being expected to know what to do in challenging situations; you become an SPO, overnight for some people, people talked about how you went from being a PO on a Friday afternoon, to be an SPO on the Monday morning and some people coming to you going ‘what should I do when I’m dealing with a person who is really High Risk?’

When it comes to dealing with organisational change, policy change, SPOs talked about being stuck in the middle and having to apologise for the actions of management of the organisation, and so on.

Isolation was a really strong feeling that SPOs gave us in interviews, but try not to display that to their staff, and that anxiety that POs and PSOs feel around SFOs (Serious Further Offences) is certainly felt by SPOs, as well.

Another important factor here was affiliation, so this was about feeling a part of a family, not being affiliated to the organisation, but more to the people in the organisation. So if your affiliation goes up, then you are less likely to feel Burned-out. And like I said, we’ve seen lots of, in the interviews, people talking about isolation and difficulty of that transitioning to being an SPO, not only about the increasing responsibility, but it is also about dealing with that shift in power dynamic that you have with your colleagues and that potentially puts that sense affiliation out of balance in some way. I think it is probably also related to the NPS within the broader field; the NPS is subsumed by HMPPS, where the Prison Service predominates, that’s in the Civil Service which is a huge organisation, people really felt and talked about how they feel quite anonymous in the Civil Service, the support systems that are in place don’t really feel all that relevant to the SPOs.

Again pretend display rules which Sam has already talked about a little bit and we saw this in our interviews, with people again talking about feeling like they were stuck in the middle and feeling like the organisation expected them to apologise and deal with POs and PSOs and PQIPs who weren’t happy with what’s going on. And so SPOs are kind of doing Emotional labour to two audiences; to the organisation and to the people that they are working with. This is a concept from management studies, called Boundary Spanning where people have to comply with different sets of display rules and values at the same time. And I think that SPOs they have these values imbued through occupational culturation when you are a PO, and you have to reconcile them once you become an SPO.

The impact of staff being supervised, I think is pretty clear why that would be an issue, but specifically SPOs talked about how they have to deal with everyones problems, they talked about having a huge emotional bucket they fill everyone else’s emotions with and then they don’t really know what to do with the emotions that they have kind of soaked up. They have to deal with ad hoc issues that come up on a daily basis, experiencing vicarious trauma, but not having anywhere to go with it, and that was a rally big theme that comes through the interviews; that SPOs feel unsupported by the organisation.

So they’re our key findings I suppose, and we were just having a discussion the other day about the survey was done before COVID we’ve talked to people after COVID so it’s a bit tricky, but I imagine that Burnout that we measured prior to COVID certainly there will be things going on that could make it worse. Certainly people will be finding it harder to get peer support, so those communities of coping that Sam talked about, often happen informally and on an ad hoc basis, but when you are stuck at home working just on your computer that becomes much more difficult. It’s harder to get recognition from the organisation when you are working from home, there’s a much greater risk spillover, it’s easier to do over time when you are working from home; you’ve got your laptop at home; ‘oh, I’ll just do another hour, it’s fine.’ Workloads are higher potentially with people being off sick due to COVID, it’s easier to work in the evening, and that kind of stuff.
But then there’s also things around Emotional labour that I think potentially have an impact on Burnout. It’s harder to interpret peoples emotional states when you are communicating via a screen, I’m sure we have all experienced that during the last year, or so. It’s more difficult to cope with your own emotional state, so when awareness of others and emotional self-awareness are such important factors, protected factors and potentially negative factors in relation to Burnout I think that becomes really kind of important.

I’m conscious of time, so what then are the implications of this? So, I think Case Load needs to be dealt with when it comes to POs and PSOs and for SPOs there is a clear indication for the number of people, that people are supervising. If the organisation wants to reduce Burnout it needs to do stuff around improving the perception of organisational support, this is not to say that people have a poor perception of organisational support, but that if you increase it, theoretically at least, Burnout should come down. So lots of those Wellbeing practices that organisations like to advertise like taking time out and meditation, and all that kind of stuff, good, but actually what we’ve got going on here are some structural issues and they’re not going to change. And all they do is shift the onus on individuals to look after themselves when actually, it should be the organisation that looks after them. And we think one of the ways that they can do that is by insuring emotions are acknowledged as a part of the job, and that they’re not portrayed as bad, or unprofessional, or as a kind of lack of resilience, but actually that they are intrinsic; they need to be acknowledged, explored and understood and then that the organisation should be able to help people with their emotional regulation. Think about that in terms of recruitment, training and so on.

So just to sum up Burnout was higher among women and Probation Officers and it was also correlated with length of time supervising staff. Things were slightly different for SPOs, but there were still some clear factors related to Burnout; Organisational factors and role content have a significant impact.

I think that’s it, thank you very much. Feel free to contact me after the presentation my email is [on the screen] and then I can hook you up with researchers. Thank you very much.

Lorraine Gelsthorpe>

Well, thank you Jake and Sam, and indeed Andrew and Chalen for being part of the research team, and contributing to what is clearly, hugely important research. With potential for some really important changes, one would hope.

There are a number of questions and we’ve got twenty to twenty five minutes thereabouts to address the questions. It would be good to get though all of them, some I think probably need longer answers than others because you have already touched upon some of then points, but if I read the questions out, the first one:

Q - The HMIP Report on Race Equality was published Yesterday, there are challenging findings for probation, did your research identify any particular issues for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff?

A - Jake Philips > No, and actually when I saw that had got published I went back and had a look at the data to double check and there was no discernible difference, no statistically significant difference for people from different Ethnicities, within the survey data. I can’t even remember whether there was anything, that was of interest even, despite being non-significant. And from the interviews, or speaking of the interviews that I have done there is nothing that kind of comes up, but I don’t know whether Sam, or Chalen, or Andrew do have anything to say. But I do think that report is really important and I’m really pleased HMIP have done that, for sure.

Sam Ainslie > I’ve definitely had some discussions in interviews about assumptions that are made at times about cultural assumptions are made. Those discussions have tended to be related about assumptions being made by service users about their supervising officer, and then the impact of having to deal with
those assumptions being made. For me it hasn’t been a predominant theme, but it has definitely cropped up in a couple of interviews.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > Hmm, thank you, there’s a sort of a related question about another group of Probation Staff, and the question is:

Q -
Is there any thing in the data on disability of respondents? I ask because Surface Acting, Emotional labour is a significant part of the daily experience of Autistic People in regular work and social situations, especially for those labelled as Highly Functioning and I’m interested in the double whammy potentially experienced by neuro-diverse staff.

A -
Jake Philips > Again, nothing in the data to speak of, but the numbers of people who said they had a disability were very low, so I think that we really can’t say anything about that. And again, this is not something that has come up in the interviews that I have done, and I suspect this has got something to do with our sample, more than anything and it’s a really, really interesting point which I think is worth further thought.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > Hmm, it perhaps also relates to the culture of disclosure, or cultural of worries about disclosure of an emotional kind, or other kinds too. But let me move on to another question...

Q -
To what extent is the organisation equipping SPOs to work in a way that supports staff and reduces emotional exhaustion, what would help SPOs?

A -
Jake Philips > That’s a great question. So, part of the background to this study was the NPS implementing a new Supervision and Line Managements framework which was based on SEEDS, which those of you who have been around for a while will remember form 2009, ‘10, ‘11ish as part of the offender engagement programme. Which is about implementing reflective practice supervision within the organisation to support staff with the emotional demands that the job places on them. And all SPOs, well I don’t know if all SPOs, but the majority of SPOs receive training on this new supervision framework in the last year or so, and it has ostensibly been rolled out across the organisation.

Theoretically, that model should support probation officers and probation service officers because it is supposed to give time to talk to your SPO; reflect on cases that you are dealing with, not in a managerial, management oversight kind of way, but in a ‘what’s going on with this case, how is it impacting on you, how can we improve the supervision of that case?’ Substantively, not just making sure the boxes are ticked, and I think that is great, but -and there is always a but- in the interviews with SPOs that we have done, the rollout of that programme has been patchy, I think is the word, apparently because of COVID, absolutely, part of the SEEDs2 reflective practices supervision module is observing practitioners and then having a debrief afterwards. So it’s supposed to be observing for developmental reasons, not for management oversight reasons but there is a tension there. But it’s very difficult to observe somebody when they are in a WhatsApp call with their Service User, so some of that stuff just hasn’t been possible. But also, it seems to me like there’s variability across the whole NPS in terms of that. SPOs have talked about how that model is something that they like, in principle, but it hasn’t been embedded throughout the organisation so they are not being supervised in relation to that framework, so there’s a sense of hypocrisy, perhaps? I’m a bit worried I’m putting too many words into our SPOs mouths here, but there’s certainly that sense that they are not being looked after by the organisation and that is then impacting on their ability to look after the POs and PSOs who they supervise.
cont...
When we asked staff what they thought about supervision it was really interesting, because the people who were being supervised by a member of staff who had not done the training around SEEDs2 were fairly positive actually, about supervision, the majority were in kind of the positive end. When we asked people who were being supervised by people who hadn’t done the SEEDs2 training there was a bi-modal distribution; so we had some people who were really positive and then another agroup of people who were really negative about it and then not many people in the middle, and I think that’s really interesting. I think that suggests to me, that either this model works for some people and not for others, or this new model is being implemented over here for these people and not for those people, and perhaps these people are feeling a bit more negative, or disgruntled because they’re not getting the positive development policy change, or not. This is all conjecture to a degree, so yeah, that was a long answer and I don’t know if Sam, Andrew, Chalen want to add anything to that?

Loraine Gelsthorpe > Perhaps we’ll move on to the next question then:

Q -
In the presentation you mentioned the number of people on a Case Load, but the question is to do with the type of cases and level of Risk and whether that has an impact on emotional stress and emotional labour?

A-
Jake Phillips > Sam, Sam you talked about this quite a lot, about Case Load and Work Load and the difference between the two, so I will let her answer this one!

Sam Ainslie > Yes, we have had those discussions amongst ourselves, in that numbers in terms of cases are actually not a good representation of work load: you can have 50 cases where things are relatively stable and by comparison you can have just 5 service users who are in constant crisis and have various things going on and that can obviously have more of an impact, and so that is difficult for us because the measure looks at the number of cases, it doesn’t look at the type of cases in that sense, in terms of risk. Although we have had discussions about why there is a difference between POs and PSOs for example, and discussions about what’s going on there in terms of why POs, in the data, appear to have a higher level of Burnout PSOs, and the obvious answer would be potentially around the types of cases that POs hold.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > Hmm, ok, thank you.

Jake Phillips > If I could just add to that as well, about that Data, we have people in our Survey sample that don’t hold a Case Load like Court Room Workers, Report Writers, Victim Liaison Officers, Programme Facilitators. All those people, they’re not, when we look at that Case Load scatter plot, they’re not in there, because they don’t have a Case Load. So that is something to bear in mind, we are only talking about people who hold a Case Load and not the people who don’t.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > OK. Thank you, and there is a question, which runs:

Q:
As a woman, working with woman clients, can you comment on the impact of this? Sometimes it feels like solidarity and sometimes it feels like a perfect Trauma storm.

A:  
Jake Phillips > I don’t know, I mean it’s a really good question. Again, I don’t think I have spoken to many practitioners who do work with women. As far as I can tell in the NPS it is quite a specialist role these days where people just hold a Case Load of women, I don’t know. Yes, I think it is a really interesting point to reflect on, unless the others have something, Chalen?
Chalen > It wasn’t on this one, but it was in our previous interviews that we did; I did talk to someone who only supervised women and actually it was quite an interesting, because I think that reflection in the question there, is how you could condense it I suppose. It is that kind of solidarity, but I think it does link with what we’re looking at now with that idea of Emotional Awareness and being very good at something. And I’ve noted that, and I’ll sort of go off point a little bit, but there will be people who I’ve talked to who work with Sex Offenders and they’ve said ‘I need a break, but I can’t get a break because I’m the person who does this’. And so I think you have ebbs and flows, you’re very good at something, and so you get that satisfaction and you know how to get at something, you know how to display and you know how to deal with the Emotional Exhaustion of it, but then it gets to a point where it’s, or you have a very bad day where you have to deal with a lot of emotion and there’s a really negative sort of thing and then you kind of think, well I need to get away from this, but actually, because you’ve become a specialist and I think it happens in a lot of occupations, I know from talking to Lawyers it’s the same sort of thing. I think it is that up and down, sort of Ebb and Flow of it, but yeah I think generally, if you do something and you become very good at it, they can then give you more of it and that’s a great thing because you feel fulfilled, but then obviously it can be very challenging as well. So, I think there is something to be said about, you know we’ve talked to people who have mixed Case Loads and who have a sort of, they’re not really specialists, they have some specialisms but then they have some generic, and it’s sort of thinking about how you balance the two isn’t it, you become very good at something, but then obviously... it’s a very interesting point.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > Perhaps given that as Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation is planning to sponsor some research in this area, relating to Trauma; perhaps that will add some findings to this, I think one, or two other academics are interested in the impact of work, sort of vicarious Trauma of some of the work. There’s another question here:

Q -
I’m thinking about whether we can apply your work in terms of Parole, especially recalls. You mention the power of SFOs to demoralise, and the fact that we only ever have negative news items about the Probation Tragedies. Should the NPS promote many more positive news stories? It might prevent some Burnout and encourage less Risk Averse decision making.

A -
Jake Phillips > Yeah (laughs), yeah, definitely, I think that would be a really good way of conveying organisational support. It would reduce that conflict between the different display rules, because, I don’t know, theoretically at least it may encourage the public to be more compassionate towards people who are under probation supervision. Or at least, be more understanding of how they have got where they are. There’s a concept of kind of Dirty Work, and Anne Worrall & Rob Mawby wrote some really great work on that a few years ago. You know Probation Officers feel like they do the Dirty Work of Society and that makes you feel un-valued and under valued and I think feeling under valued is something that really came out in the interviews that we were doing, so yes, emphatically yes.

Sam Ainslie > But we also know, don’t we, how staff feel about the legitimacy of the work that they do, then impacts on their ability to undertake work in a procedurally just way. So those perceptions and those feelings have very direct potential consequences in terms of outcomes for service users, so yeah! Like Jake did, Yes.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > So Jake there is someone working in NPS Probation Service Workforce Programme with a specific focus on recruitment and retention of staff, who would like to get in touch with you, so I think that is message is something you need to look at in the Q&A.

But there’s another Gender related question too:

Q -
Do you think the Second Shift of Emotional labour, which is more likely to be born by women, has an impact on the differences by Gender? The second shift, perhaps being the home shift.

cont...

A -
Jake Phillips > Yeah, I imagine it does. We didn’t ask about the unpaid Labour that people do outside their paid work, but I suppose if we think about the fact that those people who were less likely to have seven hours sleep were more likely to feel burned out they may be having less sleep because they have children and families to look after and that primarily falls to women, yeah, quite possibly. Again, this is the problem with survey data, you do it, and then you come up with a ton of other things you should have asked about, but it’s too late now because you did it.

Loraine Gelsthorpe >

Q -
There are a bunch of questions really, which relate to whether you included anyone from CRCs, but also whether there were any differences in research findings from people working in different contexts, for example Approved Premises?

A -
Jake Phillips > Yeah, we’ve got the data for different contexts and settings, but we haven’t done any analysis of it, partly because that would make this talk too long. But I think it is something which has come out in the interviews, I’m going to let Andrew, Chalen, or Sam talk about this, because I feel like I’ve been talking a lot...

Andrew > I don’t mind saying briefly about this, yes we’ve done interviews with people in Victim Liaison Services, people who work in Approved premises, people who work in the courts and in Prisons as well, and in those different contexts there are different types of strain, I guess. You know, someone who is working in an approved Premise who is working with individuals who are essentially in a place where they reside there’s different types of sort of stresses, really in those situations, but there is also a sense of, particularly in Victim Liaison Services, there’s a sense of being sort of, not being represented, not being valued. That’s something that came through for me talking to people from Victim Liaison Services, and in the Prisons again, feeling sort of detached from what’s happening in Probation, because they’re in a prison context and feeling cut-off. So they’re some of the themes that have come up for me in the interviews particularly, I don’t know if other people want to...

Chalen > I think I had a similar experience to you, Andrew, I think we have all encountered that, but also I have talked to people in Specialisms, who are almost like; ‘I’m quite glad I’m in this specialism, I feel like I have a, you know like we talked about before, that kind of sense of value because of the specialism that they do and because of the support they get. You know we’ve talked about clinical supervision and we’ve talked about that kind of thing. I’d say it really does depend, I’d say there’s a lot more boundary spanning places like Prisons and APs, kind of having to deal with people from different Criminal Justice Sectors and different environments I suppose as well, but I think it’s two-sided, there is that sort of isolation but actually there is that kind of idea that you are a specialist and you get a different kind of support in a Specialist Unit. I’d say there’s a push and pull kind of thing going on, to use that phrase.

Loraine Gelsthorpe > Thank you, with one eye on the clock I’m going to suggest some rapid questions and answers, if I may, but also again, to encourage the Research Team to look at the Q&A because there are some specific requests for information and further dialogue, which is encouraging.

Q -
There’s one question about the interviews, how those interviewed in person were selected; whether they self nominated to be involved and could this have influenced the nature of the responses. Perhaps those who were totally burned out didn’t have the energy to volunteer.

A -
Jake Phillips > Undoubtedly, I’ll start with the survey which went to everyone across the NPS and it was more couched in terms of staff wellbeing and supervision than that kind of stuff, so we weren’t targeting people who were burned out it was a question within a much broader survey. Then when it came too the interviews, we randomly sampled people who had answered the survey and said they would be willing to be interviewed. And then we contacted those people to ask if they would still be willing and we gave them two week to respond and if they didn’t respond then we destroyed their data and picked somebody else at random. So those people who didn’t respond may well have been the people who were so burned out that they couldn’t handle another email in their inbox, or they were off on long term sick already, or maybe just feel like they don’t have anything to add and everything is ‘hunky-dory’. So really we don’t know, but for sure we haven’t spoken to people who are so burned out they have gone on long term sick. And I think there is quite a lot of people, if you look at the statistics for the workforce, the workforce statistics, sickness amongst people in probation, the majority of it, or almost half is because of mental wellbeing.

Lorraine Gelsthorpe > Yeah, ok, Thank you. And there’s an interesting question here from a Probation Officer in Japan.

Q -
As Probation Officers experience the offending cases and pay attention to the rates of recidivism they might learn a kind of helplessness and start to question the ethically of their work. Did you assess this type of surface acting, that you need to engage in your work while you know that the Probation work has little impact on Probationers, or do you have any comment on it?

-Perhaps makes us think about short term impact on people under probation and then longer term impact, if I may.

A -
Jake Phillips > We didn’t assess that specifically, but it’s something that’s really important and I think goes back in some respects to the question about whether we should be more positive about Probation in the general public and actually about what it can achieve, and ok maybe there’s no definitive evidence it reduces re-offending within twelve months of sentence, but there is some evidence for Desistance studies that much more longer term it does have an impact on people. I think this is something that Probation Officers do struggle with, and what is the measure of success in Probation? It’s the absence of something and that’s not particularly good measure of success. The absence of offending, ‘ahh, they’ve never come back, that’s a really good thing’, That’s a really negative way of thinking about the Positive Impact of your work, so I think yeah, no we don’t have any data on it specifically, unless others have got some thing from interview to comment? But, I think this is a broader issue with how we frame Probation in the general public discourse.

Lorraine Gelsthorpe > Yeah, there are other questions, but I think we’re hoping to include the questions with the possibility of some written answers..

Jake Phillips > No, we didn’t know about that Loraine (laughter)

Lorraine Gelsthorpe > Sorry to add that, but I’m sure people would find it very useful to have some brief responses to those questions we have not been able to address in the discussion. There are some really telling comments, including from a former Head of Probation Service and so on. Perhaps reflecting on the challenges of managing an organisation and it’s demands while trying to do ones best to try and support staff. I think the fact that there are so many questions is telling of the real interest this topic has generated and I’m sure we are all hugely grateful to you for providing such a stimulating, if worrying presentation.
I think we have all got something to take away, to reflect on further and clearly there are many more avenues of research to pursue on this, looking backwards to previous research but also looking forward to new avenues that you yourself have touched upon, but also which some of our questioners have touched upon.

So really, it remains for me to thank Jake and Sam, and Chalen, and Andrew very much indeed for being with us today and to Jake and Sam for the presentation, but to the whole team really for for this very important research and to thank all the participants as well for joining us this evening and for the excellent questions that have been asked. We hope you have a Good Evening.