Institute of Criminology

Through a gendered lens:

The experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse and the emotional impact of their work.

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Student Declaration

I hereby declare that:

• Except as indicated by specific references to or acknowledgements of other sources, this dissertation is my own original work.

• I further confirm the dissertation is not more than 18,000 words (excluding the contents page, acknowledgements, abstract, table of acronyms, tables within the body of the dissertation, appendices, and bibliography).

• This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is not same as any that I have submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge, any other university or similar institution. I further state that no part of my dissertation has already been, or is currently being, submitted for any such degree, diploma, or other qualification.

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Table of Acronyms

PP	Probation Practitioner
POP	Person/People on Probation
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
HMPPS	His/Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
HMIP	His/Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation/ Prisons
SDS-40	Standard Determinate Sentences 40% (early release scheme)
AI	Appreciative Inquiry
PO	Probation Officer
PSO	Probation Service Officer
TPO	Trainee Probation Officer
STS	Secondary Traumatic Stress
SPO	Senior Probation Officer
PQIP	Professional Qualification in Probation
DA	Domestic Abuse
DV	Domestic Violence
ELS	Emotional Labour Scale
PDU	Probation Delivery Unit
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Abstract

Emotional labour studies have recently been applied to probation work; however, the gendered nature of this concept within criminal justice fields remain underexplored (Phillips *et al*., 2020b). The increasing prevalence of domestic abuse cases managed by the Probation Service highlights a pressing need to understand the emotional impact of this work. While existing literature is limited, research suggests that female probation practitioners (PPs) face distinct emotional challenges, with potential implications for their wellbeing (Morran, 2008).

This study sought to add to this evidence base through exploring the experiences of female PPs supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse in the West Midlands Region, focusing on the intersection of gender and the emotional impact of their work. Using a mixed-method sequential design, an online survey was completed by 216 of 646 eligible female PPs. Subsequently, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to build upon the survey findings and deepen insights into the gendered dimensions of emotional labour in domestic abuse work. This mixed-method approach provided comprehensive insights into the challenges practitioners face and the coping strategies they employ.

Three core themes emerged: 'the probation hat,' 'emotional seepage,' and 'the invisible force of emotions.' These themes suggest that the emotional labour performed by female PPs is inherently gendered, significantly shaping how challenges are perceived and exacerbated. Although various coping strategies were employed, these were often insufficient to alleviate the emotional toll. The study underscores the pervasive emotional strain involved in supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse, which extends beyond professional duties yet largely hidden within the structural expectations of practitioners' work.

Although the study is small-scale, the findings have important implications for policy and practice. They emphasise the need for targeted support systems to address the emotional demands of this work and safeguard the wellbeing of female PPs.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Given the increasing prevalence of domestic abuse work undertaken by the Probation Service it is crucial that the emotional impact of this work is understood. This research aims to contribute to this understanding from the perspective of those engaged in this work, providing insight into the gender-specific challenges faced by female Probation Practitioners (PPs) and the coping mechanisms they adopt to effectively supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as behaviour by one person towards another, aged 16 or over, who are personally connected, including "intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality" (HMIP, 2018:6). Behaviour is deemed abusive if it involves "physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, coercive or controlling behaviour, economic abuse, or psychological and emotional abuse"(HMIP, 2023:13). Domestic abuse, while not classified as a single offence, signifies the context within which various offences occur, encompassing a broad range of behaviours that form part of the abuse pattern, i.e. criminal damage, sexual or physical violence, non-fatal strangulation, honour-based violence, harassment, stalking, revenge porn, and coercive control (HMIP, 2023:13; HMIP, 2018:6). Thus, reflecting the complex patterns of behaviour that professionals must address to protect victims in this field.

Domestic abuse is a pervasive issue, with an estimated 2.2 million adults affected in England and Wales in 2023 (ONS, 2023a). Often referred to as a hidden crime due to significant underreporting, official statistics capture only a fraction of the abuse endured by victims (HMIP, 2023). Nevertheless, police-recorded incidents of domestic abuse have risen in recent years, with March 2023 figures showing a 14.4% increase since 2020 (ONS, 2023b). "Women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse" (HMIP, 2023:4), comprising 73.5% of recorded victims in 2023 (ONS, 2023a). They are more likely to be seriously harmed (Walby & Allen, 2004), killed in domestic homicides (HMIP, 2023) or subjected to coercive and controlling behaviours (Women's Aid, 2021). While it is essential to acknowledge that men can also be victims of domestic abuse, and require equitable access to support, there is a critical distinction, as women's experiences are often shaped by entrenched structural inequalities that perpetuate violence against them (Women's Aid, 2021). This systemic disparity underscores the need for interventions that address the underlying causes of abuse and promote gender equity. Principles of which, are now established standards in the Home Office's (2023) guidelines for domestic abuse perpetrator work, alongside having skilled and supported practitioners "who can foster motivation for change" (Renehan and Gadd, 2024b:4).

The predominance of women in the Probation Service means that they will frequently supervise perpetrators of domestic abuse and are primarily responsible for delivering interventions in this area. The latest HMPPS Workforce Statistics show that 75.7% of staff employed by the service are female (HMPPS, 2024, Tidmarsh, 2023). However, those responsible for this abuse are overwhelmingly male, forming 96% of 74,996 individuals known by the Probation Service "to have perpetrated abuse against a current or former partner" in 2023 (HMIP 2023, Renehan and Gadd, 2024a:1). Domestic abuse cases, including those with a primary offence or documented history of abuse, account for about one-third of the Probation Service's caseload (HMIP, 2023). This highlights the significant prevalence of this work, and the gendered dynamics inherent within the supervisory relationship.

Building on this context, the gendered dynamics of supervision place female PPs in a uniquely challenging position. They must “assert control in a context that” often subordinates them (Petrillo, 2007:400), while engaging male perpetrators to address patterns of power and control to reduce violence against women (Hughes, 2024; Home Office, 2023; Renehan and Gadd, 2024b). Their role involves managing risk, prioritising victim safety, delivering interventions and fostering relationships that support behavioural change (Bullock *et al*., 2010; Lewis *et al*., 2013). Simultaneously, they must navigate the emotional toll of hearing about male violence, worrying about future risks and confronting misogynistic behaviours (Petrillo, 2007), sometimes compounded by their own experiences of abuse (HMIP, 2023). Balancing care and control, they must hold offenders accountable while assisting desistance, a tension described as “managing ambivalence” (Knight *et al.,* 2016:51). This complex role underscores the emotional and professional demands on female PPs delivering this work.

The adverse effects of working with trauma survivors are well- documented across various fields, such as social care (Bride, 2007), domestic abuse support services (Baird & Jenkins, 2003), and criminal justice (Coles *et al*., 2014). This research highlights the psychological risks, such as burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress (STS), which collectively describe the “emotional, cognitive, and behavioural” toll associated with exposure to traumatic narratives (WWSWWS, 2024:6). While much of this research focusses on victim-work, similar effects have been observed amongst professionals working with perpetrators in the domestic abuse field, albeit with much less empirical attention (Morran, 2008). Although research on the traumatic dimensions of probation work is sparse, insight from related fields may offer valuable parallels, given engagement with a similar group (Lee, 2018a) and shared obligation to safeguard victims in this work. Yet, the specific emotional and psychological challenges faced by female PPs supervising perpetrators of domestic abuse remain insufficiently explored, leaving a significant gap in understanding the complexities and emotional demands of this work.

The HMPPS Domestic Abuse policy framework (2022) reflects a clear organisational commitment to prioritise staff well-being. However, despite this acknowledgement, HMIP (2023) reported that few practitioners said, “that the emotional labour of working with domestic abuse was addressed with them explicitly” (HMIP, 2023:26). This highlights a gap in organisational knowledge regarding effective support for staff managing the emotional labour of working with domestic abuse perpetrators, potentially affecting their well-being and effectiveness in addressing abusive behaviours.

Chapter 2

Literature review

This review draws on the theoretical concept of emotional labour to explore how emotions are understood and managed within this context. It then examines the literature on the adverse effects of trauma-work, including secondary/vicarious trauma and burnout. Additionally, it integrates explanations of domestic abuse from feminist theory and masculinities research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gendered dynamics in domestic abuse work. By synthesising these perspectives, the review aims to deepen understanding of the traumatic dimensions of working in domestic abuse fields and its emotional impact on female PPs.

2.1 Invisible Strains: Exploring Emotional Labour in Probation Work

Research highlights the significant role of emotions in effective probation practice. Knight *et al*. (2016) observed that empathy, frequently cited by PPs in their work, is crucial for fostering motivation, trust, and gathering information vital for effective risk management (Knight and Modi, 2014). Knight's (2014:188) work on emotional literacy revealed the "invisible world of emotion" in probation, demonstrating how positive emotions strengthen relationships, while negative emotions can lead to the "repressive and manipulative control of offenders" (Fowler *et al.,* 2020:62). Similarly, Murdin (2010) noted that unexamined negative emotions, such as anger, fear, or disgust, can influence practice, even if unconsciously (Knight, 2014). Yet, despite its significance, the role of emotion remains underexplored in probation research and is often overlooked in "policy, training, and supervision arrangements" (Westaby *et al*., 2020; Phillips et al., 2020a:9). This underscores the need to explore how emotions are experienced, utilised, and managed by female PPs supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Emotional labour provides a framework to conceptualise how PPs manage their emotional responses to perform in role (Tidmarsh, 2020). Emotional labour is "the management of a way of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display…which is for a wage" (Hochschild, 1983:7, Phillips *et al.*, 2020a). While Hochschild (1983:59) focuses on "feeling rules," which govern the appropriateness of emotions in professional contexts, other theorists (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989) emphasise the display of emotions, as these are observable and impact how emotions are received by others (Westaby *et al.,* 2020:2). Display rules may be organisational, (conveyed through formal policies or training), occupational or cultural, (shaped by shared practices and assumptions), or societal, (reflecting societal expectations for a given profession) (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993 in Phillips *et al,* 2020a).

While display rules shape emotional labour performances, research has identified various ways in which professionals enact this, i.e. 'surface acting' (displaying emotions contrary to what is felt), 'deep acting' (aligning emotions with organisational expectations), and 'emotional suppression' (inhibiting emotions that conflict with organisational display rules) (Phillips *et al.,* 2020a:7, Mesmer-Magnus *et al.*, 2012). Emotional consonance, though less studied, involves the natural alignment between felt and displayed emotions, often linked to positive outcomes such as reduced emotional exhaustion (Näring *et al.,* 2006). These emotional labour strategies have been widely incorporated into research and have served as the foundation for developing emotional labour scales to quantitatively measure the construct (e.g. Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). However, their application to probation practice, particularly in the context of working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, remains underexplored.

Studies using the concept of emotional labour have recently been applied to probation work (Phillips *et al.* 2016,2020a, Tidmarsh, 2020, Westaby *et al.*, 2020). These studies consistently show that probation work involves a high degree of surface acting, which

research has associated with negative implications for those who perform it (Westaby *et al.*, 2020). However, there are notable limitations in the existing research, primarily due to their small-scale and reliance on qualitative methods, which limit generalisability. Additionally, Westaby *et al*., (2020) note that self-reported emotional displays may not fully reflect emotion shown, while Tidmarsh's (2020) ethnographic approach provides in-depth insights but is confined to a single locality. Despite this, the studies complement each other, offering a more nuanced understanding of emotional dynamics in probation practice.

Fowler *et al*., (2020:65) emphasise the "lack of knowledge around emotional labour in probation work," despite the prevalence of emotion work and understanding that PPs must perform emotional labour to deliver their work effectively i.e. displaying emotions to build relationships, encourage compliance, rehabilitate and manage risk (Phillips *et al*., 2020a). Westaby *et al*., (2020) applied the concept of emotional labour to probation work, offering insight into how inadequate support systems and environments that hinder PPs ability to process the emotions expressed by abusive men supervised, can undermine their effectiveness (Renehan and Gadd, 2024a). Similarly, Leeson's (2010) study of child-protection work, highlights how conflicts between organisational 'feeling rules' and personal values can negatively impact practitioners, particularly when they lack support to manage the emotional labour of their roles (Lee, 2017b). Westaby *et al.* (2020:9) argue that more knowledge is needed about the "emotions practitioners experience, suppress, feel, and display" if the organisation is to truly support practitioners in their work. Yet, despite these insights, there remains little understanding within the literature regarding the effectiveness of emotional displays and coping strategies adopted by PPs, which is essential for safeguarding their well-being.

Emotional labour has more recently been explored in Duggan's (2020) study on the work of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA). While this study centres on work with victims, parallels can be drawn in the role that IDVAs play to protect victims of domestic abuse, and the emotional labour required in this context. Other studies examining the experiences of female staff who work with domestic abuse victims, such as refuge/shelter workers (Omo-Izobo and Nwoko, 2019; Molloy, 2019) report similarities in the high levels of emotional labour involved in their roles and the negative impact exposure to domestic abuse has on staff well-being. Notably, participants in these studies described suppressing negative emotions such as anger, disgust, and frustration, highlighting the emotional challenges inherent in domestic abuse work. Given that this work is predominantly undertaken by female PPs, these findings underscore the need for further exploration of the emotional labour involved in supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse.

One characteristic of emotional labour that receives limited attention within probation research is its gendered nature (Goldhill, 2018), however, Knight's (2012,2014) work on emotional literacy revealed that gender is a significant diversity issue within the research. Knight (2012:265) found that some female PPs supervising domestic abuse perpetrators experienced a sense of being 'attacked' or 'targeted' because of their gender. Practitioners also identified the misogyny often associated with domestic abuse offences as an aspect that increased the complexity of their work (Knight, 2012). Whilst female PPs hold formal authority over the men they supervise, centralising the issue of gender within the supervisory relationship, Petrillo (2007:395) emphasises how they are simultaneously exposed to the same "gendered conditions" and "potential victimisation" faced by women in society.

Hochschild (1983) introduced the term "status shield" to explain how positions of authority can protect professionals from the "displaced feelings of others" (Hochschild, 1983:163). Connecting emotional labour to gender, Hochschild (2012:163) argued that the societal "subordination of women" leaves female professionals with a "weaker status shield" making them more vulnerable to

mistreatment, particularly verbal abuse (Miranda and Godwin, 2018). This theoretical perspective highlights how gender inequalities intersect with occupational challenges, increasing female PPs susceptibility to emotional strain in their professional environment.

Alternatively, Hochschild (1983) emphasises how gender socialisation shapes the expectations placed on female practitioners, particularly the assumption of a caring role (Goldhill, 2018) which contributes to the "invisibility of emotional labour" in their work (Duggan, 2020:146). James (1989:15) suggests that this invisibility can mask signs of burnout, as the emotional labour skills expected of women often leads to perceptions of them being less skilled and "stigmatised as emotional" (Duggan, 2020:146). Maslach (1982) found that individuals with heightened empathy for others are "most susceptible to burnout," a sentiment frequently observed among PPs in existing probation research (Duggan, 2020:146). These insights suggest that the emotional labour performed by female PPs may be intensified, thereby increasing their vulnerability to burnout. This underscores a significant gap in the current understanding of emotional labour, probation practice, and its gendered dimensions.

2.2 The Traumatic Dimensions of Domestic Abuse Work

PPs must navigate complex emotional dynamics, supervising individuals in crisis, listening to trauma narratives and managing challenging behaviours (Petrillo and Bradley, 2022). These demands are intensified in cases involving domestic abuse where supervisees may simultaneously be victims and perpetrators (HMIP, 2023). Adding to this complexity, the predominance of domestic abuse within society means that many staff may have personal experiences, introducing additional emotional strain into the supervisory relationship (HMIP, 2023). Such work is emotionally taxing, with well-documented implications for staff wellbeing, and research linking high levels of emotional labour to burnout (Jeung *et al.,* 2018; Fowler *et al.,* 2020).

Trauma is conceptualised in various ways often understood as an event or series of events perceived as harmful or threatening, with lasting negative effects on an individual's well-being (Evans and Graves, 2018). Experiencing trauma can also alter beliefs and cognitive schemas, reshaping one's perception of the world (McCann & Pearlman, 1992). Research suggests that empathetic practices can expose practitioners to secondary traumatization (Figley, 1995). Given that studies have shown PPs to frequently use empathy within their work, this suggests that PPs may be at risk of experiencing significant emotional consequences (Lee, 2017a).

However, while some attention has been paid to practitioners working with individuals who cause trauma to others, much of the research is limited to sexual offences (Morran, 2008:140). Working with perpetrators of sexual abuse was found to introduce distinct emotional challenges, requiring practitioners to navigate strong reactions to disturbing narratives, maintain professional empathy and manage offenders' denial or minimisation (Way *et al.,* 2004). Studies indicate that such work can lead to "stress, burnout, and vicarious traumatization" in practitioners (Leicht, 2008, Lee, 2017b:53). Notably, Way *et al.* (2004) found that clinicians working with perpetrators and those working with survivors of sexual abuse experienced comparable rates of vicarious traumatization (Lee, 2017b). This suggests that emotional challenges may be compounded when perpetrators disclose their own victimisation, e.g. childhood abuse, blurring the boundaries of trauma and complicating practitioner's roles (Way *et al.,* 2004). Such dynamics may also be applicable to domestic abuse contexts (Davies *et al.*, 2024), though Way *et al*., (2004) did not measure burnout or other occupational stressors, leaving a gap in understanding the full emotional toll of this work.

While the literature extensively documents the impact of working with trauma victims, the role of gender remains underexplored. Baum (2016) and Baum and Moyal (2020) sought to address this gap, though their findings conflict. Baum's (2016) review of the

literature found that female therapists are more prone to secondary traumatization, reporting higher PTSD symptoms when working with trauma victims. Conversely, Baum and Moyal (2020) reviewed studies involving sex offender therapists and found that male therapists reported significantly higher rates of vicarious traumatization (Baum and Moyal, 2020:1). However, limitations in the literature, such as small sample sizes and insufficient research on gender differences, make these conclusions tentative, necessitating further study into how gender intersects with the emotional demands of trauma-focused work.

Burnout and secondary traumatic stress (STS) are closely linked concepts. STS refers to the psychological effects experienced by professionals exposed to graphic trauma narratives, “human cruelty and re-enactments of trauma”, within their work (Pearlman & MacIan, 1995, WWSWWS, 2024:16). Burnout, by contrast, is a negative emotional response to prolonged professional stress (Jeung *et al*., 2018). While some studies distinguish between the two phenomena (Jenkins & Baird, 2002), others have failed to clearly differentiate the two (Adams *et al*., 2001). However, it is well documented that both can result in “negative physical, emotional, and behavioural symptoms”(Kulkarni *et al*., 2013:116).

Although limited, existing research within domestic abuse contexts highlights the profound emotional challenges professionals face. Iliffe and Steed (2000) found that counsellors working in domestic abuse fields often experience burnout and STS. Participants described feeling ‘horrified’ by trauma narratives, leading to emotional and physical exhaustion. Repeated exposure to these narratives resulted in cognitive shifts, generating increased concern for safety, cautiousness of others and a heightened awareness of power and control dynamics. Additionally, it was widely expressed by those interviewed that they experienced burnout due to the increased exposure to domestic abuse cases (Iliffe & Steed, 2000, Kulkarni, *et al*, 2013:116). However, Iliffe and Steed’s (2020) sample included few men and had limited representation of those with high domestic abuse caseloads. This limited meaningful gender comparisons and may not capture the broader experiences of PPs, especially given the disproportionality of domestic abuse within caseloads.

Morran’s (2008) research highlighted significant gender differences in the effects of facilitating domestic abuse programmes. Female practitioners reported increased negative shifts “in their cognitive schemas," including reduced personal safety, perceptions of powerlessness, diminished self-esteem and altered views on men and society (Lee, 2017a:381; Morran, 2008:149). These findings suggest that gendered dynamics may exacerbate the emotional toll of trauma-focused work on female PPs. However, Morran’s (2008) study primarily focussed on programme staff, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges faced by PPs in diverse contexts. Similarly, Benuto *et al.,* (2019) documented high levels of STS among domestic abuse workers engaging with victims, indicating broader emotional impacts across related fields. While existing studies provide a valuable foundation for understanding the traumatic dimensions of working in domestic abuse fields, the gendered and emotional dimensions of probation work remain underexplored.

2.3 Understanding the Gendered Context of Working with Male Domestic Abuse Perpetrators: Challenges faced by female practitioners

A sizeable amount of the literature exploring gender in criminal justice engages with concepts of “masculinity, femininity, and gender stereotypes” (Boyle, 2023:2), to explain gender differences in criminal behaviour, i.e. theories of masculinity argue that certain characteristics associated with being male can contribute to greater criminality (Knight, 2014:40, McCulloch, *et al*, 2021:12). The most widely accepted explanation for men’s domestic abuse originates from feminist theory, grounded in the assumption that men’s

violence is used as a tool to uphold “patriarchal authority over women” (Renehan, 2020:30). Aligning with this framework research evidence indicates that offences of a violent/sexual nature, are perpetuated by patriarchal structures and societal norms of male-dominance (Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey 2008, Knight, 2014), fostering a culture that “entitles men to demean, abuse and control women” (Women’s aid, 2021:14).

However, the concept of patriarchy has received criticism, for conflating the impacts of men’s violence, with its underlying motivations, thus failing to account for why only some men are abusive within relationships. Accordingly, feminist and masculinity scholars have studied the concept of gender, which addresses both “inequalities between sexes” and variations across differing cultural contexts (Renehan, 2020:31). The crucial role that gender plays in addressing domestic abuse has been highlighted by such research, underscoring the significance of dominant forms of masculinity in understanding male violence (Hughes, 2023:3). These broader societal constructs, rooted in masculinity and patriarchal norms are central not only to understanding male violence, but also the gendered dynamics of probation practice. The association of domestic abuse with “masculinity ideology,” (Mshweshwe, 2020:1) combined with evidence of victim disproportionality and the predominance of women supervising probation caseloads “inevitably brings a gendered dimension” to PPs work (Petrillo, 2007:394).

This gender imbalance reflects the progressive ‘feminisation’ of the Probation Service (Petrillo, 2007), a term referring to both the increasing presence of women in traditionally male domains and the growing emphasis on emotional skills typically associated with women (Fudge and Owens, 2006, Tidmarsh, 2023:235). While this phenomenon remains “academically underexplored,” (Tidmarsh, 2023:235), research has linked it to differences in female PPs perceptions of fear, job stress or satisfaction (Petrillo, 2007; Zettler, 2019, McCulloch *et al,* 2021:13). The emotional toll on female PPs supervising domestic abuse perpetrators is significant. Previous research has shown that this work can be ‘distressing’, with female practitioners more frequently reporting feelings of ‘fear’ or ‘rage’ (Phillips *et al.,* 2016, Renehan, 2021:313). This underscores the importance of exploring the intersection between gender and emotion within probation practice, however current understandings of gender-specific challenges within this work remain limited.

Studies in related fields, such as policing (Heidensohn, 1992) and prisons (Zimmer, 1986), illustrate how gender shapes female practitioners’ experiences, often requiring them to develop strategies to cope within male-dominated environments. Although limited, existing research on the impact of gender on female PPs (Scully, 1990; Dominelli, 1991) highlights the heightened emotional work required in interactions with male perpetrators, i.e. managing empathy and intimidation, ‘avoiding collusion,’ ‘challenging misogyny’ and ‘repressing revulsion,’ (Petrillo, 2007:396). These studies are largely historical and may not adequately reflect the evolving challenges and dynamics of contemporary probation practice, however recent research confirms that gender-specific challenges persist. McCulloch *et al.,* (2021) found that gender significantly shaped female practitioners’ work with male domestic abuse perpetrators, prompting heightened vigilance, perceptions of risk, and scrutiny of their own behaviour, including dress and demeanour.

While gender-responsive services for women who offend have advanced (McCulloch *et al.,* 2021), there is little equivalent attention to the needs of female staff, despite the significant emotional demands they face in domestic abuse work. Existing literature highlights the need for research into the intersection of gender dynamics and emotional labour in probation practice. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensuring female practitioners are adequately supported in their work.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Aim and Questions:

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of female PPs who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse, aiming to develop an understanding of the intersection between gender and the emotional impact of their work. Drawing on the concept of emotional labour, understood to be an "inherent element of probation work" (Phillips et al, 2020a:9), and with the guidance of previous literature this study seeks to meet this aim through the following research questions:

- How do female PPs describe emotional labour in their work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse?
- How do gender dynamics influence the emotional labour performances of female PPs?
- What are the challenges faced by female PPs when supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse?
- What strategies do female PPs employ to cope with emotional labour in the context of supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, comprising a survey followed by semi-structured interviews. This approach "integrates the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative research", ensuring "breadth and depth" in understanding practitioner experiences (Westaby *et al.,* 2023:45). While emotional labour within probation has primarily been explored using qualitative methodologies, e.g., (Westaby et al., 2020; Tidmarsh, 2020), relying solely on qualitative methods can limit the generalisability of findings due to smaller sample sizes (Steckler *et al.*, 1992). Therefore, to address this limitation and capture insights from a larger population of PPs within the study's time constraints, a mixed-methods approach was employed. The design also facilitated addressing a broader range of research questions. Quantitative measures provided insight into the severity and prevalence of challenges faced by PPs, while qualitative methods captured the complexities of gender interactions that quantitative data might oversimplify. An exploratory approach was selected given the limited research in this area (Robson and McCartan, 2016) acknowledging that the rich narratives shared by PPs were central to achieving the research aims, offering deeper insights into their experiences (Knight, 2014).

The quantitative component was sequenced first to provide a comprehensive understanding of broader themes from the survey and to identify key areas for exploration during the qualitative stage. By embedding a qualitative method (open-ended question) within the quantitative framework of the survey (Kara, 2020), I developed a word cloud (Appendix A), to visually represent data from a single survey question. This visual tool served as a starting point for interview discussions, ensuring alignment between the two stages of the study by providing an accessible representation of themes emerging from the survey. Kara (2020:1) suggests that visual tools "can more accurately reflect the multiplicity of meanings ." This approach enhanced engagement and uncovered the nuanced, subjective meanings underlying practitioners' experiences.

3.3 Quantitative stage

3.3:1 Target Population

Selection criteria required participants to be female Probation Officers (POs), Probation Service Officers (PSOs), or Trainee Probation Officers (TPOs) who actively supervised a caseload within the West Midlands Region. This ensured participants could provide relevant insights for the research aims (Robson & McCartan, 2016). As of April 2024, the eligible population comprised 646 female PPs, including 223 PSOs and 423 POs, representing 75.8% and 84.9% of their respective roles (internal staff directory). TPOs, who are employed as PSOs during training, are included in this count. The West Midlands was chosen pragmatically, based on my role as a Senior Probation Officer (SPO) with established contacts, enhancing accessibility. Focusing on one region ensured the feasibility of a mixed-method approach within the study's timeframe. Additionally, the region's internal diversity, spanning both urban and rural areas, provided a broad range of domestic abuse behaviours and prevalence in practitioners' caseloads, making it an ideal research context.

3.3:2 Survey Design

The survey (Appendix B) was designed to support the study's aims, collecting limited demographic information (gender and role), to ensure alignment with the selection criteria. Years of experience were also captured to facilitate statistical comparisons during analysis. Most questions in the survey were closed-ended, except for one open-ended question in Section 1. The remainder of the survey focused on three key sections: challenges, coping strategies, and emotional labour each linked to the study's overarching research questions. The first two of these sections consisted of items that I developed from the existing literature. Section 2 examined challenges faced by practitioners, consisting of 12 statements, with three addressing emotional or gender-specific challenges. To reflect the role of empathy and the practitioner-client relationship in probation work, I decided to include two positive challenge statements to capture this intricacy. Section 3 of the survey, focused on coping mechanisms, divided into two sections. Participants rated five statements on coping strategies, assessing both their agreement with and the perceived effectiveness of each strategy .

Section 4 of the survey was designed to measure emotional labour strategies across four dimensions, presenting 12 statements about how PPs manage their emotions at work, with participants providing frequency ratings. This section was adapted from the Emotional Labour Scale (ELS), originally developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) and later amended by Näring *et al*. (2007). The ELS, rooted in Hochschild's (1983) foundational work, measures the display rules shaping emotional labour performances, asking participants to rate how often each expression applies to them on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). While the ELS has been validated in other public service contexts, such as healthcare and education (Jordan, 2006), it has not yet been applied to probation work. To ensure adequate internal consistency, I included three statements from each dimension (deep acting, surface acting, emotional suppression, and emotional consonance) as per the guidance of Näring *et al.*, (2007). Previous studies reported strong internal reliability scores for these dimensions, supporting the inclusion of these measures. All responses were collected on scaled (Likert) items to measure agreement, frequency, or effectiveness ratings. Each scale will be introduced within the findings chapter of this study.

3.3:3 Pilot

Survey questions were piloted with seven SPOs within the West Midlands Region to assess the time required to complete the survey and determine whether it was reasonable to expect practitioners to do so while managing high workloads (Denscombe, 2010). Although SPOs were excluded from the study's selection criteria, their inclusion in the pilot was deemed appropriate due to their oversight of domestic abuse cases and relevance of emotional labour to their roles. Westaby *et al*.'s (2023) study found that SPOs perform high levels of emotional labour, making the survey applicable to their work. Consequently, an approximate completion time of 10 minutes was determined and included in the survey participation sheet.

3.3:4 Survey Distribution

The use of an anonymous online survey was selected to encourage honest responses from participants, especially given potential concerns of insider research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The online distribution allowed access to the entire eligible population, supporting the potential for a more representative sample (Denscombe, 2010). The survey was created using Microsoft Forms, a platform approved for use within the Probation Service. In collaboration with the West Midlands Communications Officer, the survey link was distributed via Gov.Notify, targeting eligible staff using a list of email addresses. This "list-based" approach was chosen to increase participation, advantageous as it allows for a more direct recruitment style (Chandler, 2023:184). The email included an introduction to the study, selection criteria, barcode for mobile access, and a survey participation sheet (Appendix C). A prenotification message, as supported by Edwards *et al*.'s (2009) findings, was used to increase response rates (Appendix D).

The survey was open for three weeks, commencing on 15th July. After two weeks, at which point 120 responses had been received, a reminder was sent. Studies show that majority of responses typically come within the first few days of distribution (Reynolds *et al*., 2009), which aligned with this study's response pattern. The reminder, supported by Edwards *et al*. (2009), who found prompts can increase response rates by around 35% (Chandler, 2023), led to an additional 96 responses. Throughout the survey period, I utilised flexible working arrangements to visit offices, acknowledging that successful recruitment often depends on the researcher's ability to build rapport with potential participants (Negrin *et al*., 2022:2). Additionally, I contacted senior management to raise awareness about the survey, ensuring that managers were also mindful of the emotional context of the subject if support was needed for staff.

3.3:5 Survey Analysis

Data collected from the survey was entered into SPSS for analysis, with variables converted into numeric form. Descriptive statistics were initially examined to understand the demographics of the sample. Frequencies of responses were calculated for each survey question, including mean, mode, standard deviation, and percentage calculations (Sections 2-4). This analysis aimed to quantify the scale of challenges faced by practitioners, examine the emotional labour strategies employed, and identify the most highly rated coping mechanisms along with their effectiveness ratings. Additionally, total mean scores for each of the four emotional labour components were calculated by aggregating scores across each dimension.

Reliability and normality tests were performed to check the data before further statistical analysis. Independent-samples T-tests were then conducted to explore whether practitioners in differing roles or with varying experience levels reported different challenges or used distinct coping mechanisms. These analyses directly addressed the research questions by examining how these factors shaped

practitioners' experiences within each research area. In circumstances where data was observed to be skewed, the test was adjusted for skewed variables, and a Non-parametric T-test (Mann-Whitney U test) was used instead.

For section 1 of the survey, sentiment analysis techniques were applied to evaluate one-word survey responses. Textual data was classified into positive, negative, or neutral categories based on the emotional tone conveyed (Jim *et al*., 2024). Sentiment analysis is a methodological technique from the "subfield of natural language processing" (Tan *et al*., 2023:1) that facilitates the interpretation of emotions within text (Cui *et al*., 2023). Adopting this approach allowed for a quantitative exploration of the emotional dimensions of the data, which were then integrated into broader thematic interpretations. Emotional labour theory aligns closely with sentiment classifications, where positive and negative emotional experiences form the core of emotional labour (Westaby *et al*., 2020). Manual coding, informed by existing emotion research, was used to systematically analyse the responses. This process helped to identify relevant emotional insights, providing quantitative support for the study's aim. Responses without a clear implied sentiment were classified as neutral (Liu, 2020).

3.4 Qualitative stage

3.4:1 Interview Design and Procedure

During the second stage of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of survey participants. This method combines structure and adaptability, using an interview guide to cover key topics (Robson, 2024) while allowing interviewees to share their experiences openly. The flexibility to probe responses and explore emerging ideas (Kallio, 2016) made it the most suitable approach for capturing the complex and varied experiences of PPs.

An interview schedule (Appendix E) was developed following survey analysis, structured according to Robson's (2024:302) sequence: introduction, warm-up, main body, cool-off, and closure. This structure allowed me to remind participants of the study's purpose, withdrawal rights, voluntary participation, anonymity (Appendix F), and ensure their signed consent (Appendix G). Following informed consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The main body of the interview was guided by emotional labour as a framework. Questions and probes addressed challenges, emotional labour, gender dynamics, and coping mechanisms, aligning with the overarching research questions. Phillips *et al.*'s (2016) interview schedule was used as a foundation, with the author's agreement, to refine the language of questions within this theoretical context. This approach was valuable due to Phillips *et al*.'s (2016) inclusion of PPs supervising domestic abuse perpetrators and the limited existing emotional labour research within probation. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Liebling, 2004) questions were included in the interview schedule to explore positive emotional labour experiences within PPs work. This method used by Robinson *et al.* (2013:17), highlights its potential to empower PPs and “enhance their sense of well-being.” Given the emotional context of the study, AI was considered beneficial for its ethical advantages, generating meaningful insights into what works well, while minimising the risk of unintentionally causing distress during interviews (Robinson *et al*., 2013).

Interviews were initially planned in-person, but organisational changes during the scheduling period due to SDS-40 releases (HMIP, 2024) raised concerns about room availability and participant anonymity. To address this, participants were offered remote interviews via Microsoft Teams as an alternative. Most chose remote interviews, while a few opted for in-person sessions. Research indicates that online interviews may encourage openness on sensitive topics (Williams *et al*., 2012) and reduce power imbalances (Brown, 2022),

supporting this approach. Upon reflection, this shift did not compromise data quality, as engagement and responses were consistent. Moreover, the added convenience may have facilitated participation, as evidenced by PPs full attendance (Brown, 2022).

Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes, with 2-hour slots allocated in participants' diaries to allow reflective space given the nature of the topics discussed. Research suggests that participants may use interviews to reflect and make sense of "negative or traumatic experiences" (Pilbeam *et al.*, 2022:6). This was evident during the study, as one participant, (Ava), noted, "*I've just came from a DA case, who's just screamed at me for the whole meeting, so it's perfect timing… thank you*," reinforcing the value of this approach.

To recruit participants, survey respondents were invited to indicate their willingness to be interviewed and provide an email address, resulting in a self-selecting sample that may have introduced bias, as those with stronger opinions are more likely to participate (Phillips *et al*., 2016). Despite this limitation, the approach was deemed suitable given high regional workloads, which could restrict participants' availability. An initial target of 10 semi-structured interviews was set to balance comprehensive data collection with the time constraints of mixed-methods research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), with two pilot interviews planned to support data saturation, typically reached after 12 interviews (Guest *et al*., 2006).

3.4:2 Interview Pilot

Interview questions were piloted with two PPs to test the visual method and refine the interview questions (Sampson, 2004). Feedback highlighted potential bias from the use of colour in the word cloud, leading to a discussion on its insignificance within final interviews. As insights from the pilot provided valuable perspectives on the experiences of female PPs, they were integrated into data analysis and included in the overall sample count.

3.4:3 Interview Sample

Of the 216 survey respondents, 97 (45%) expressed a willingness to be interviewed. This strong response is notable given organisational changes within the Probation Service during data collection, including Probation Reset and SDS-40 (HMIP, 2024). Millings *et al*.,(2023) highlight that such reforms can create additional challenges for staff, underscoring the salience of this issue for female practitioners, who participated despite potential obstacles. This importance was echoed by PPs: "*It's great that this topic is being researched because it's a really important issue within the service."*(Ava)

To address the oversubscription, I used purposive sampling (Robson & McCartan, 2016) to select 10 interviewees, ensuring representation across staff grades, experience levels, and geographical diversity. Demographic data were cross-referenced with the probation global address book to identify participants from various locations within the West Midlands Region. Exclusions were applied to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure relevant insights, including specialist roles, unclear work locations and participants from my office location or with professional ties to me. This reduced the eligible sample to 66: PO (54), PSO (7), and TPO (5). Efforts to achieve geographical balance were partially impacted by outdated address book details. However, adjustments were made, by including additional participants from different offices when it was observed that PPs worked in the same location. This meant that although 10 interviews were planned, 14 were conducted, however this larger sample enhanced the study's demographic balance and regional representation.

Table 3:1 presents an overview of participant demographics, with office locations omitted to protect anonymity.

Table 3:1 Interview Participant Sample

Pseudonym	Gender		Current Role			Years of experience supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse				
	M	F	PSO	PO	TPO	LESS THAN 1YEAR	1-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	7-10 YEARS	MORE THAN 10 YEARS
Nyah		X		X						X
Alice		X		X						X
Ava		X	X					X		
Grace		X	X				X			
Jade		X		X				X		
Clara		X		X				X		
Ella		X			X		X			
Lila		X		X		X				
Carol		X		X						X
Emma		X		X				X		
Maya		X		X				X		
Zara		X			X		X			
Riley		X		X					X	
Roxy		X		X						X

3.4:4 Interview Analysis

All interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Teams' auto-transcription feature. During the editing process, each interview was replayed twice to familiarise myself with the data, identify patterns, and apply an inductive approach to initial manual coding (Thomas, 2006). Thematic analysis was conducted to identify, analyse, and report key themes, systematically organising the dataset in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). NVivo software supported efficient data management, enabling continuous review of transcripts, refinement of emerging themes, and exploration of their meanings in relation to the research questions and study's aims (Thomas, 2006). Emerging themes were then analysed through the lens of emotional labour, examining how they provided insights into how PPs experienced and described emotional labour in their work.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing this study, approval was obtained from the Institute of Criminology Ethics Committee, National Research Committee and West Midlands Regional Probation Director. Informed consent was secured at every stage, with survey completion indicating consent and additional signed consent obtained prior to interviews. In line with Israel's (2015) concept of dynamic consent, participants' willingness to continue was confirmed during interviews, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw until 7th

October 2024. Information sheets provided detailed the study's aims, confidentiality, limitations, and voluntary participation. All participants were referred to by pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Although participants were not directly asked about personal experiences with domestic abuse, I acknowledged that some staff may have been personally impacted, potentially causing emotional distress during or after participation. To address this, I provided the domestic abuse policy framework and an information sheet outlining available support channels, prior to interview. After the interview, I emailed participants the HMPPS staff support directory and offered additional signposting during the interview's conclusion. While some voluntarily disclosed personal experiences, I observed no visible distress during interviews. Instead, participants often expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their experiences and appreciation for the research itself, reinforcing the value of providing this platform. Editing transcripts, however, had an emotional impact on me as the researcher, prompting adjustments to editing timings, self-care practices and discussions with my university supervisor to maintain "researcher reflexivity" (Smith, 2021:25).

Further consideration was given to my position as an 'insider researcher' (Kanuha, 2000), working as an SPO within the sample region. I recognised the importance of addressing potential power imbalances and the influence of existing professional relationships on participants' responses and consent. To mitigate these risks, the duality of my role as a researcher and MSt student was clearly explained , included within participant information sheets, and self-selecting participants from my PDU were excluded from interviews. Furthermore, as a female practitioner with experience managing domestic abuse cases and continued oversight of PPs delivering such work, I was aware that my own experiences and emotions could compromise the objectivity required for data analysis (Asselin, 2003). To minimise bias, I engaged in continuous self-reflection and frequently discussed progress and findings with peers to ensure separation of my personal experiences from participants' narratives during analysis (Asselin, 2003).

3.6 Limitations

Gender was highlighted of significance owing to its inherent feature within the supervisory relationship and relevance to theoretical understandings of the factors contributing to domestic abuse. However, the research questions do not address other intersecting factors such as ethnicity and age, which may also shape the experiences of PPs (McCulloch *et al.*, 2021).

The exclusion of male practitioners is a recognised limitation, and the findings may not fully capture their experiences within this work. While a comparative study could provide valuable insights, the decision to focus on the experiences of female PPs was aligned with the central role of gender in this research, particularly given the increasing prevalence of domestic abuse work within the service. This focus was seen as valuable in highlighting the unique experiences of female practitioners.

The small-scale nature of this study limits the generalisability of the findings to other probation regions and may reflect issues specific to the West Midlands. Using a survey as a data collection method facilitated a larger sample, offering a broader perspective on the experiences of female PPs within this context. However, not all staff members responded, meaning some perspectives are not captured. Nonetheless, the homogeneous nature of the sample, shaped by shared experiences and national domestic abuse trends, suggests that similar findings could emerge in comparable studies.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the study's findings and discussion structured in line with its sequential design. Initially, quantitative analysis of survey data is presented to provide an overview of challenges, emotional labour and coping strategies reported by practitioners. This data provides a foundational overview by offering insights and patterns across the survey sample. As each area is examined, any key findings from the qualitative phase of the research are introduced. Building on this, key themes from semi-structured interviews are then integrated to deepen the understanding of these core research areas, while also exploring the nuanced role of gender dynamics. To support readability, discussion points are incorporated into the results and findings as they arise from the data.

4.1:1 Demographic Data

Out of a possible population of 646, 216 participants fully completed the survey. All respondents were female, with the majority being POs (n=159), representing 37.6% of the eligible PO population (Table 1). This may reflect their increased involvement in supervising domestic abuse perpetrators, as outlined in the domestic abuse policy framework, which prescribes allocation to those with "the appropriate level of skills and knowledge" (HMPPS, 2022:16). Although PSOs (n=35) and TPOs (n=22) made up a minority (26.4%) of respondents, their inclusion provides a broader representation of female PPs perspectives. This helps fill a gap in the literature, as previous studies incorporating domestic abuse work (Morran, 2008; Petrillo, 2007) have excluded PSOs, leaving their experiences understudied. The distribution of years' experience across all variables reflects a diverse range of experience levels among respondents.

Table 1. Sample information for survey respondents.

	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Gender	Male	Female			
Total:	**0 (0%)**	**216 (100%)**			
Current Role	PSO	PO	TPO		
Total:	**35 (16.2%)**	**159 (73.6%)**	**22 (10.2%)**		
Years of Experience	< 1 Year	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-10 Years	>10 years
Total:	**22 (10.2%)**	**79 (36.6%)**	**43 (19.9%)**	**16 (7.4%)**	**56 (25.9%)**

4:1:2 Perceptions of Working with Male Perpetrators: One-Word Descriptions and Sentiment Analysis

Section 1 of the survey asked practitioners to provide one word to best describe their experience of working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse. As shown in table 2, 70 words were provided, many mentioned by only one respondent (n=48), reflecting the individuality of experiences and perspectives. Challenging was the most frequently used term (n=77), followed by difficult (n=22) underscoring the demanding nature of this work. The choice of language used by practitioners offers valuable insight into how PPs describe emotional labour in their work, with terms such as draining (n=9) and frustrating (n=8) aligning with key descriptors within the emotional exhaustion dimension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). "The energy exertion aspect of

emotional labour is thought to lead directly to emotional exhaustion." This exhaustion often coincides with negative, cynical attitudes towards clients, reflected in terms such as 'frustrating', 'manipulative', 'sickening' and 'slimy' (Mesmer-Magnus *et al,* 2012:14). These findings connect practitioners' experiences to established burnout frameworks.

Table 2: Frequency of one-word descriptions provided by female PPs (n=216)

Description	N	Sentiment	Analysis/Rationale
Challenging	77	Negative	Often implies difficulty, strain, and emotional labour in the work
Difficult	22	Negative	Indicates challenges that may be stressful or hard to overcome
Draining	9	Negative	Suggests depletion of emotional energy and linked to burnout frameworks
Interesting	8	Positive	Implies genuine engagement in the work
Frustrating	8	Negative	Associated with emotional exhaustion and linked to burnout frameworks
Complex	5	Neutral	Suggests difficulty/complexity in the work without a clear tone
Varied	5	Neutral	Suggests diversity in the work, without a clear tone
Exhausting	4	Negative	Implies emotional fatigue, a likely consequence of emotional labour
Denial	3	Negative	Implies a refusal to accept, challenges to overcome
Manipulative	3	Negative	Implies deceit or control
Confrontational	2	Negative	Implies conflict or aggression
Conflicting	2	Negative	Suggests internal struggle and tension. Link to emotional labour strategies of emotional suppression, surface acting through conflicting emotions.
Intimidated	2	Negative	Implies fear or discomfort, associated with negative emotions
Control	2	Neutral	Context dependent: use of authority vs power and control without a clear tone
Experience	2	Neutral	Implies familiarity or involvement in this work: no clear indication of a positive or negative experience
Rewarding	2	Positive	Implies satisfaction or benefits of this work
Triggering	2	Negative	Implies distressing emotions, strong negative or traumatic responses within the work
Traumatic	2	Negative	Conveys emotional or psychological harm, linking to literature on the traumatic dimensions of domestic abuse work
Taxing	2	Negative	Implies emotional strain
Variable	2	Neutral	Suggests changes or unpredictability in the experience. No clear tone.
Relentless	2	Negative	Implies constant pressure, aligning with Phillips *et al.'s* (2016) study on the relentless nature of probation work
Enlightening	2	Positive	Positive connotation of gaining knowledge and insight
Dynamic	1	Positive	Implies energy and adaptability to change or progress made
Anger	1	Negative	Implies frustration or hostility. Language is linked to existing emotional labour scales
Confident	1	Positive	Implies self-assurance, belief in ability to deliver this work
Demanding	1	Negative	Implies high efforts, challenges faced or pressure of the role
Experienced	1	Positive	Implies skill or expertise gained through practice
Extensive	1	Neutral	Indicates extensive exposure to DA due to prevalence in caseloads vs level of experience: no clear tone
Frightening	1	Negative	Implies fear, linking to existing emotional labour scales
Calculated	1	Negative	Typically used to describe deliberate, manipulative, and controlling behaviours in domestic abuse work
Good	1	Positive	Implies enjoyment, satisfaction with the work
Gruelling	1	Negative	Implies difficulty or emotional exhaustion
Hard	1	Negative	Suggests work is difficult and challenging often leading to emotional strain
Illuminating	1	Neutral	Gaining learning, insight, but may imply challenging learning or insights gained. No clear tone.
Informative	1	Positive	Enhanced understanding, learning or gaining knowledge
Awful	1	Negative	Implies disgust or dislike, a difficult experience
Critical	1	Neutral	Can imply necessity of addressing domestic abuse behaviours, importance of work/role. No clear tone
Constant	1	Neutral	Can imply monotony of work. No clear tone
Medium	1	Neutral	Implies moderate impact or risk level. No clear tone
Minimising	1	Negative	Implies downplaying, minimising harm/abuse often negative in contexts of emotional labour
Mixed	1	Neutral	Suggests combination, variety of experiences without a clear positive or negative tone
Okay	1	Neutral	Implies average or acceptable experience, no clear tone.
Ongoing	1	Neutral	Within the context of domestic abuse work this can indicate a persistence of harmful or challenging situations vs ongoing experience of this work: no clear tone
Overwhelming	1	Negative	Suggests difficulty in managing emotions, feeling overburdened
Power	1	Neutral	Links to a position of power, power dynamics, authority struggles. No clear tone
Diverse	1	Neutral	Implies variety, range of experiences, behaviours. No clear tone
Repetitive	1	Neutral	Can indicate the monotony of harmful patterns of abuse, repeat nature of the work given prevalence in caseloads.
Resilience	1	Positive	Emotional resilience and strength
Confronting	1	Negative	Implies discomfort or a challenging/ unpleasant experience, to confront abusive behaviours, to be confronted or met with resistance
Risk	1	Negative	Implies harm or danger
Risky	1	Negative	Implies harm or danger, experiencing risky behaviours
Saddening	1	Negative	Implies upset, including a sadness felt for victims

Scary	**1**	Negative	Implies fear or apprehension
Shocking	**1**	Negative	Suggests surprising or upsetting experiences
Sickening	**1**	Negative	An emotional reaction, often linked to disgust, linking to emotional labour scales
Slimy	**1**	Negative	Implies distrust or dishonesty
Stressful	**1**	Negative	Implies pressure and strain
Superficial	**1**	Negative	Lack of depth, unmeaningful work and superficial compliance
Dislike	**1**	Negative	Lack of enjoyment, preference or negative feelings towards the work
Tiresome	**1**	Negative	Indicates emotional exhaustion, linking to burnout literature
Tiring	**1**	Negative	Indicates emotional exhaustion, linking to burnout literature
Aggressive	**1**	Negative	Implies hostility, negative experiences or difficult behaviour
Tricky	**1**	Negative	Implies difficulty or complexity, often challenging
Devastating	**1**	Negative	Suggests a severe emotional impact. i.e. impact on victims, individual, society
Uncomfortable	**1**	Negative	Implies emotional unease
Unnerving	**1**	Negative	Implies discomfort or anxiety, unpleasant experience
Unpredictable	**1**	Negative	Implies unease, unpredictable behaviours, patterns of abuse, anxiety or fear for victims and unknown outcomes
Abusive	**1**	Negative	Suggests harm, exposure to abusive behaviours contributing to emotional strain
Chaotic	**1**	Negative	Implies disorder, lack of control
Worrying	**1**	Negative	Suggests anxiety or concern, distress, linking to existing emotional labour scales
Total Words	**70**		

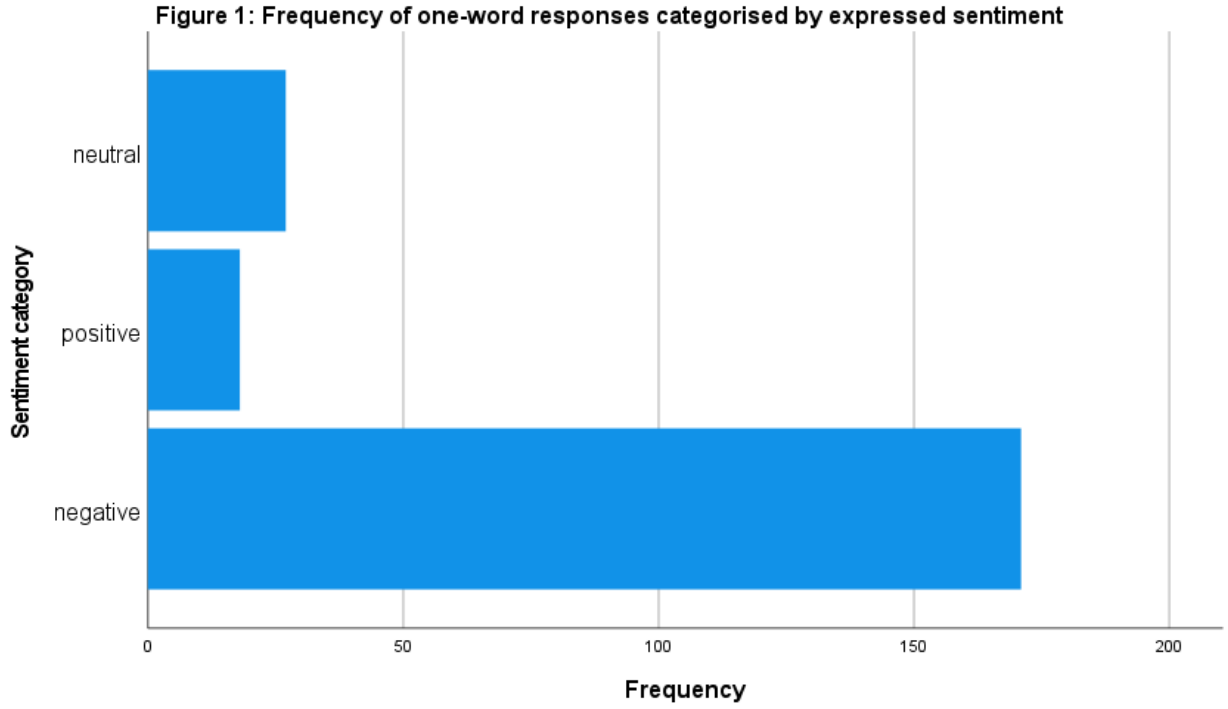
Sentiment analysis of responses revealed that most PPs expressed negative sentiments (n=171), using words like frightening and stressful. Neutral responses (n=27), with terms like variable, suggested that some PPs viewed the work as multifaceted but without a clear positive or negative tone. Positive sentiments were least common (n=18), with words like confident and rewarding. These findings highlight the predominance of negative sentiments (Figure 1), which aligns with existing research on emotional labour's adverse effects, linking emotional regulation, particularly suppressing “negative feelings, to psychological stress, burnout”, and job dissatisfaction (Mei, 2023: 454,455).

Whilst few studies emphasise positive emotional labour experiences, this study’s findings echo Mei’s (2023) work, which found that staff reported positive experiences despite emotional labour intensity, particularly when employing deep acting strategies. Interview data revealed that immediate emotional reactions captured within the survey, did not fully encompass the complexity of PPs experiences. However, after reflecting on a word cloud, half of interviewees offered additional positive terms such as, ‘resilient’, ‘confident’, ‘satisfying’, ‘thankful’ and ‘bravery’. These sentiments often related to the ability to endure challenging situations and observe changes in the males that they supervised. Similarly, four interviewees highlighted the rewarding aspects of their work, while two used the term ‘nice’ to describe how seeing other PPs share negative sentiments offered them reassurance and validated their emotional struggles: *“It’s nice not being alone in those negative feelings.”* (Nyah)

These findings align with Rourke’s (2007) research which highlights the value of promoting conversations around the emotional impact of practitioners’ work to mitigate “negative emotional responses” (Lee, 2017a:53). The reflective exercise within this study,

facilitated a more nuanced understanding of PPs emotional labour experiences, revealing aspects of their work that might otherwise have been overshadowed by the emotional weight of negative sentiments.

Figure 1: Frequency of one-word responses categorised by expressed sentiment



4.1:3 Challenges faced by female PPs

Section 2 of the survey presented participants with 12 statements regarding challenges that may be faced when working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, requiring agreement (Q6 'Challenges faced': 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) or frequency ratings (Q7 'How often are Challenges faced': 1 = never, 5 = always).

As shown in table 3, 80.5% (n=174) of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that gender dynamics created additional challenges when interacting with male perpetrators of domestic abuse. Similarly, 65.2% (n=141) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse was the most emotionally demanding aspect of their job. The most common response for both statements was 'agree' (Mode=3). In contrast, majority of respondents (n=127) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that managing their emotions was a particularly challenging aspect of their work, with 'disagree' being the most frequently selected option (Mode=2).

Responses to frequency of challenges (Q7) were categorised into low (Never/Rarely), moderate (Occasionally), and high (Often/Always) frequency groups for analysis. Eight of the nine challenge statements had more responses in the high-frequency group compared to the low-frequency group. The exception was experiencing intimidation and threats, which had more low-frequency responses (n=79) than high-frequency (n=46) and the highest moderate-frequency rating overall (n=91). This indicates that while intimidation and threats occur notably, they are less pervasive than other challenges identified in the survey.

Overall, these findings show that female PPs within this sample frequently encounter challenges in their work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, with the most common response often (Mode=4) reinforcing the regularity and intensity of these challenges. These results align with Morrison *et al.'s,* (2021:3525) and Ferreira *et al*.'s, (2023) studies, which document a broad range of challenges that practitioners face working in domestic abuse fields. These include "hypermasculine attitudes", denial/minimisation of abuse and difficulty disengaging from work. Although both studies were conducted outside of the United Kingdom, limiting generalisability, they provide comparable insights due to shared societal backdrops, featuring high domestic abuse rates and regular challenges that practitioners face within this field.

Table 3: Frequency of challenges reported by female PPs (n=216).

Challenges faced (Q6)	Strongly Disagree= 1 N (%)	Disagree= 2 N (%)	Agree= 3 N (%)	Strongly Agree= 4 N (%)	Total Disagree N (%)	Total Agree N (%)	Mode	Mean
1- Working with or supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse is the most emotionally demanding aspect of my job	8 (3.7)	67 (31.0)	107 (49.5)	34 (15.7)	75 (34.7)	141 (65.2)	3	2.77
2- I find it challenging to manage my emotions when dealing with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	17 (7.9)	110 (50.9)	70 (32.4)	19 (8.8)	127 (58.8)	89 (41.2)	2	2.42
3- Gender dynamics create additional challenges in my interactions with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	6 (2.8)	36 (16.7)	94 (43.5)	80 (37.0)	42 (19.5)	174 (80.5)	3	3.15

How often are Challenges faced (Q7)	Never=1 N (%)	Rarely= 2 N (%)	Occasionally =3 N (%)	Often= 4 N (%)	Always =5 N (%	Mode	Mean
1-Experiencing intimidation or threats from male perpetrators of domestic abuse	22 (10.2)	57 (26.4)	91 (42.1)	43 (19.9)	3 (1.4)	3	2.76
2-Building rapport/effective working relationships with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	4 (1.9)	39 (18.1)	80 (37.0)	87 (40.3)	6(2.8)	4	3.24
3-Handling manipulative behaviour from male perpetrators of domestic abuse	5 (2.3)	6 (2.8)	39 (18.1)	127 (58.8)	39 (18.1)	4	3.88
4-Addressing denial or minimisation of abuse by male perpetrators of domestic abuse	2 (.9)	3 (1.4)	9 (4.2)	128 (59.3)	74 (34.3)	4	4.25
5-Identifying strengths, abilities, and potential for positive change alongside addressing offending behaviour	4 (1.9)	31 (14.4)	86 (39.8)	84 (38.9)	11 (5.1)	3	3.31
6-Navigating power and control dynamics with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	2 (.9)	11 (5.1)	44 (20.4)	121 (56.0)	38 (17.6)	4	3.84
7-Maintaining professional boundaries under emotional strain	30 (13.9)	48 (22.2)	50 (23.1)	56 (25.9)	32 (14.8)	4	3.06
8-Challenging misogyny	6 (2.8)	10 (4.6)	45 (20.8)	118 (54.6)	37 (17.1)	4	3.79
9-Building empathy to better understand individual backgrounds and motivations for offending behaviour	9 (4.2)	37 (17.1)	70 (32.4)	76 (35.2)	24 (11.1)	4	3.32

Experiencing intimidation and threats had the lowest mean score (2.76) compared to addressing denial and minimisation of abuse (4.25) which had the highest. This finding aligns with existing literature, which highlights the well-documented challenges of working with domestically abusive men, particularly their tendencies to deny, minimize, and shift blame (Davies *et al*, 2024:14). Furthermore, "feminist researchers examining domestic violence perpetrator programmes" have emphasised the power dynamics and sexist entitlement that abusive men often maintain in relationships. This includes their efforts to deny or downplay their abuse though gender norms (Renehan, 2020). These gendered dynamics provide context for the higher mean scores found in the following areas: challenging misogyny (3.79), navigating power and control (3.84), and handling manipulative behaviour (3.88). These findings underscore the complex, gendered nature of the challenges faced by female PPs working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse in this sample.

For (Q6) 'Challenges faced', emotional management had the lowest mean score (2.42), while acknowledgement of the additional challenges that gender dynamics created had the highest mean score (3.15). This finding aligns with McCulloch *et al.'s* (2021) study which highlighted gender as a significant feature impacting the challenges faced by female practitioners delivering domestic abuse

work, especially as the victim group is predominantly female. A core idea in the emotional labour literature offers additional insight, suggesting that organisational display rules may encourage strategies like deep acting, helping individuals to better manage their emotions, thus reducing perceptions of emotional strain (Mesner-Magnus *et al.*, 2012). Alternatively**,** Ferreira, *et al.,* (2023:14) offer a different perspective finding that coping strategies, including setting emotional boundaries and seeking social support, effectively managed the psychological challenges inherent in domestic abuse work. This context helps explain the lower mean score for emotional management in this data, suggesting that PPs could have internalised emotional labour strategies or developed robust coping mechanisms to handle challenging emotional interactions effectively.

4.1:4 Mean group differences for challenges faced by female PPs by role and years' experience

To examine whether the challenges experienced by female PPs varied based on role and with years of experience, independent-samples T-Tests were conducted. Normality tests confirmed the assumption of normality, for all but two variables, namely 'handling manipulative behaviour' (skewness= -1.107) and 'addressing denial of minimisation of abuse' (skewness= -1.329) were above the cut off +/- 1, signifying a non-normal distribution. For these two variables, non-parametric t-tests (Mann-Whitney U) were performed to compare challenge frequencies (Pallant, 2020). As independent T-tests, test for "statistically significant mean differences between two groups" (Mishra, 2019:408), responses to demographic questions were recoded in SPSS to combine categories for role and years' experience. This was carried out with attention to the distribution of responses across experience variables, noting that TPOs and PSOs are employed at the same grade, so were grouped together.

4.1:5 Mean group comparisons of challenges faced by role

An independent-samples T-test was conducted to compare the extent of challenges perceived by PSOs (n=57) and POs (n=159) in their work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse. The goal of this analysis was to determine whether the mean scores for the two groups differed significantly. For emotional demands, the mean score appeared to be slightly higher for POs (M=2.82) than for PSOs (M=2.63), though both groups were generally in agreement (close to a score of 3), indicating that both perceive the emotional demands of the role as somewhat challenging. However, the t-test revealed no significant difference between the groups (t = -1.661, p = .098, 95% CI [-.42, .037], *Cohen's d* = -.26). In contrast, statistically significant differences were found for emotional management (PO M = 2.48, PSO M = 2.25) and gender dynamics (PO M = 3.25, PSO M = 2.88). For emotional management, there was a mean difference of -.239 (t = -2.045, p = .042, 95% CI [-.47, -.01], *Cohen's d* = -.32), indicating a small effect size. For gender dynamics, the mean difference was -.368 (t = -2.761, p = .007, 95% CI [-.63, -.10], *Cohen's d* = .47), indicating a small-to-medium effect size. Overall, these results show that while perceptions of emotional demands were similar, POs perceive slightly greater challenges with emotional management and gender dynamics compared to PSOs in the sample.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the frequency of challenge mean scores between groups. Statistically significant differences were found in two areas: intimidation and threats (t = -3.258, p = .001), with POs reporting higher frequency (M=2.88) than PSOs (M=2.42), a mean difference of -.459 and a medium effect size (Cohen's d = -0.50). Similarly, navigating power and control dynamics (t = -2.530, p = .013), with POs reporting higher challenge frequency (M=3.94) than PSOs (M=3.58), a mean difference of -.358 and a small effect size (Cohen's d = -.45). No significant differences were observed in other challenge areas. These findings suggest that while both groups face similar challenges, POs report greater frequency in challenges related to intimidation and power and control dynamics.

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that PSOs (Md= 4.00, n=57, M rank= 87.65) reported significantly lower challenge frequency scores for handling manipulative behaviour compared to POs (Md=4.00, n=159, M rank=115.97), U= 3343.00, z=-3.31, p=<.001, with a small effect size (r= -.23) . Similarly, PSOs (Md=4.00, n=57, M rank= 95.68) reported significantly lower challenge frequency scores for addressing denial or minimisation of abuse compared to POs (Md=4.00, n=159, M rank= 5453.50), U=3800.50, z=-2.08, p=.037, with a small effect size (r=.14).

When interpreting these findings in the context of the emotional impact of PO work, insight can be drawn from Phillips *et al.*'s (2016) qualitative study of POs managing high-risk cases. One practitioner described the challenges, "*you're going to be left with domestic violence cases who are manipulative, aggressive and controlling… the nature of the work can be distressing*." Phillips *et al.* (2016) argue that such cases can increase stress levels, potentially impacting on staff wellbeing (Phillips *et al*, 2016:187). As POs are qualified to manage individuals posing a high risk of harm, this added responsibility and exposure to such behaviours may heighten the challenges they face, increasing the need for advanced emotional management strategies (Turley *et al*., 2011).

However, the narratives of PSOs in this study present a contrasting perspective. All PSOs interviewed described manipulation and control as significant challenges but emphasised the use of rules and boundaries to cope with these demands:

> *"I think there's an internal fear that I will be taken under their wing and manipulated. So, that's why I do it so quickly… and reinforce the rules to sort out that power dynamic*." (Ella)

Similarly, Ava stated, "*I don't want them to believe that I am easily manipulated, an easy target to get what they want because I'm a woman… it means we have to be more rigid in those cases as a female."* These accounts suggest that while POs face more complex emotional regulation challenges due to high-risk cases, PSOs often adopt structured approaches to manage their emotions when confronted with manipulation and control. This underscores the gendered nature of their emotional labour and the distinct challenges that female PPs face when supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse.

4.1:6 Mean group comparisons of challenges faced by length of experience

Further independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare mean scores for the perceived extent and frequency of challenges between two groups. Length of experience was categorised into two variables: individuals with 3 years or less experience (n=101) and those with >3 years of experience (n=115). For (Q6) results showed statistically significant differences in one of the challenges areas, emotional management (t=-2.085, p= .038) with those with >3 years' experience reporting greater perceived challenges (M=2.52) than those with 3 years or less (M=2.31), a mean difference of -.215 and a small effect size (Cohen's d=-.28). While two challenges did not yield statistically significant differences between the two groups, gender dynamics (t=.860, p=.391) emotional demands (t= -1.837, p=.068).

For (Q7), a statistically significant difference was observed in experiencing intimidation and threats (t = -1.993, p = .048). Those with >3 years' experience reported a higher frequency (M=2.88) compared to those with 3 years or less (M=2.62), with a mean difference of -0.254 and a small effect size (Cohen's d = -0.27). No significant differences were found for other challenge variables based on length of experience. Similarly, a Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant differences for handling manipulative behaviour (U = 5564.00, z = -0.60, p = .549, r = .04) or addressing denial and minimisation of abuse (U = 5372.50, z = -1.10, p = .274, r = .07).

These findings indicate that while the frequency and types of challenges were generally consistent across PPs with varying years experience, a significant difference was observed in the emotional management challenges perceived by those with >3 years'

experience. This demonstrates that emotional management skills become more strained over time in this work. Existing literature on emotional labour supports this view. Grandey (2000) argues that when employees are repeatedly required to regulate emotional responses to challenging situations, they “may experience emotional exhaustion”, leading to “energy depletion and fatigue” (Grandey, 2000:104). The findings of this study show that as PPs gain experience and handle more emotionally challenging cases, such as those involving intimidation/threats, the strain of emotional regulation becomes more pronounced. However, the effect size indicates that while there are some differences in the emotional challenges reported across experience groups, the variations are small.

4.1:7 Coping mechanisms

Section 3 of the survey presented respondents with 5 statements regarding coping mechanisms that may be used within their work, requiring agreement (Q8) or effectiveness ratings (Q9). Q8 included a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4) and Q9 a 5-point scale ranging from Not effective (1) to Extremely effective (5). Effectiveness data (Q9) were grouped into low, moderate, and high effectiveness categories, and agreement data (Q8) into agree/disagree categories, to facilitate interpretation and support pattern identification across responses (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Table 4: Frequency table of coping mechanisms/ strategies reported by female PPs (n=216)

Coping mechanisms/Strategies used (Q8)	Strongly Agree= 4 N (%)	Agree= 3 N (%)	Disagree= 2 N (%)	Strongly Disagree= 1 N (%)	Total Agree N (%)	Total Disagree N (%)	Mode	M	SD
1- I engage in regular self-care activities to help manage the emotional demands of this work.	26 (12.0)	114 (52.8)	61 (28.2)	15 (6.9)	140 (64.8)	76 (35.2)	3	2.70	.770
2- I rely on support from colleagues to cope with the emotional demands of this work.	80 (37)	111 (51.4)	17 (7.9)	8 (3.7)	191 (88.4)	25 (11.6)	3	3.22	.743
3- I find that supervision and oversight from my manager supports me with the emotional work that is involved in supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse	42 (19.4)	115 (53.2)	43 (19.9)	16 (7.4)	157 (72.7)	59 (27.3)	3	2.85	.818
4- I find that setting boundaries with male perpetrators of domestic abuse is effective in addressing the challenges of working with this group	65 (30.1)	124 (57.4)	24 (11.1)	3 (1.4)	189 (87.5)	27 (12.5)	3	3.16	.666
5- I find that training and development programmes are effective in helping me to cope with the emotional demands of supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse	19 (8.8)	81 (37.5)	89(41.2)	27 (12.5)	100 (46.3)	116 (53.7)	2	2.43	.821

Note: M=mean, SD= Standard deviation

As shown in Table 4, the coping mechanism most frequently endorsed by respondents was relying on colleague support, which had the highest mean score (M=3.22). In contrast, training and development received the lowest mean score (M=2.43) and was the only variable where total disagreement scores (n=116) exceeded agreement scores (n=100). While 'agree' (Mode=3) was the most common response for coping mechanisms overall, for training and development it was 'disagree'(Mode=2). This finding echoes concerns raised by HMIP (2023), noting that training for PPs working in domestic abuse contexts often fails to meet their needs.

A similar trend emerged in perceived effectiveness ratings (Table 5), with colleague support receiving the highest mean score (M=3.96), compared to training and development, which scored the lowest (M=3.05). When responses were grouped into effectiveness categories, all variables had more responses in the high-effectiveness group than the low-effectiveness. However, the high effectiveness rating for training and development (n=75) contrasts with its lower agreement scores, suggesting that while some practitioners may undervalue its comprehensiveness in addressing emotional challenges, specific aspects of training are still valued by PPs who undertake this work.

This study's interview findings, seek to explain the disparity in the survey data. Four of 14 interviewees saw training as supporting procedural competence, with one noting the satisfying nature of using research to influence change. Yet, most interviewees felt training failed to prepare them for the emotional demands of this work, citing gaps in how to safeguard their own wellbeing and transparency about the gender-specific, emotional intensity often realised only in practice:

> "*One thing that resonates from training is 'avoid arguments,'. It doesn't mean I'm afraid to challenge, but if it starts to spiral, I have to shut it down for my own well-being. But it's not until you're in that position that you know how to deal with it…there needs to be more realism.*" (Jade)

This aligns with Ferreria et *al.*'s (2023:10) finding that training linking theory to practice enabled practitioners to "maintain rationality and emotional distance during emotionally charged situations." Thus, despite the critique of HMIP (2023), evidence-based elements of training can explain why nearly half of the sample agreed (n=100) that training was an effective emotional support mechanism and account for the high effectiveness ratings (n=75).

Alternatively, Iliffe and Steed (2000) identified debriefing and peer support as core factors for domestic abuse counsellors coping in their work (Slattery and Goodman, 2009). This study's survey and interview findings align closely with these conclusions. All 14 interviewees described colleague support as essential, citing it as a way to debrief, exchange ideas, build confidence, and alleviate emotional pressures:

"All of the horrible things you were feeling in an appointment… you can say in a safe space… … it's a burden off your shoulders, you don't have to pretend you're not affected, they'll listen." (Clara)

These findings reveal that while formal training has limitations, informal peer-based support plays a pivotal role in PPs ability to cope with the demands of this emotionally challenging work.

Table 5: Frequency table of coping mechanism/ strategy effectiveness reported by female PPs (n=216)

Effectiveness of coping mechanisms/Strategies used (Q9)	Not effective=1 N (%)	Slightly effective = 2 N (%)	Moderately effective = 3 N (%)	Very effective=4 N (%)	Extremely effective=5 N (%)	Low	Moderate	High	Mode	M	SD
1-Engaging in self-care activities	17 (7.9)	38 (17.6)	80 (37)	58 (26.9)	23 (10.6)	55 (25.5)	80 (37)	81 (37.5)	3	3.15	1.081
2- Seeking support from colleagues	1 (.5)	9 (4.2)	40 (18.5)	113 (52.3)	53 (24.5)	10 (4.7)	40 (18.5)	166 (76.8)	4	3.96	.800
3- Participating in supervision or debriefing with management	13 (6.0)	27 (12.5)	67 (31.0)	84 (38.9)	25 (11.6)	40 (18.5)	67 (31.0)	109 (50.5)	4	3.38	1.040
4- Setting boundaries during supervision sessions	6 (2.8)	19 (8.8)	62 (28.7)	88 (40.7)	41 (19.0)	25 (11.6)	62 (28.7)	129 (59.7)	4	3.64	.978
5- Undertaking training and development opportunities	15 (6.9)	53 (24.5)	73 (33.8)	57 (26.4)	18 (8.3)	68 (31.4)	73 (33.8)	75 (34.7)	3	3.05	1.060

Note: M=mean, SD=standard deviation

4.1:8 Mean group comparisons of coping mechanisms faced by role and years' experience

Mean group comparisons were computed using independent-samples T-tests, as all items had a skewness value close to zero, signifying normal distribution. When comparing coping mechanisms used between PSOs (n=57) and POs (n=159), the T-test revealed no significant difference between groups for 4 of 5 coping mechanisms. No significant statistical relationship was found between role and engaging in self-care (t=1.235, p=.218), seeking colleague support (t=-1.123, p=.298), supervision/management oversight (t=.510, p=.611), or setting boundaries (t=1.657, p=.101). However, for training and development, (PSO M= 2.65, PO M= 2.35), the T-test showed significant differences between the group, with a mean difference of .303 (t = -2.420, p = .101, 95% CI [.56, .55], *Cohen's d* = -.37), indicating a small effect size.

These results show that PSOs within this sample are more likely to view training and development as crucial to their work with domestic abuse cases, aligning with literature on the emotionally taxing nature of domestic abuse work and structural challenges faced by PSOs. Renehan (2021) notes that domestic abuse cases are increasingly managed by PSOs, who lack the support of the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) available to POs, which could better prepare them for their role. Consequently, PSOs may depend more on locally delivered training or mandatory e-learning (HMIP, 2023), to prepare for the complexities of this work, explaining their higher engagement with training as a coping strategy in this sample.

A second independent samples T-test compared coping mechanisms between PPs with 3 or less years' experience (n=101) vs those with >3 years' experience (n=115). The T-test found no significant differences between the groups for 3 of 5 coping mechanisms. No significant statistical relationship was found between years' experience and engaging in self-care (t=.955, p=.341), seeking colleague support (t=-1.106, p=.270) or setting boundaries (t=1.930, p=.055). However, significant differences were found for training and development (3 years or less M=2.54, >3years M= 2.32), and supervision/management oversight (3 years or less M=3.01, >3years M= 2.70). For training, the mean difference was .233 (t=2.005, p=.046 95% [.00, .44], Cohen's d=.27), for management oversight the mean difference was .306 (t=2.818, p=.005, 95% CI [.09, .52] Cohen's d=.38) indicating small effect sizes.

These findings show that less experienced PPs are significantly more likely to agree that supervision and training opportunities support them with the emotional aspect of this work, consistent with earlier results for PSOs. This aligns with Ferreria *et al.* (2023) whose study found that participants valued gaining knowledge through experience, recognising the importance of practical knowledge acquired over time, to manage challenges effectively. These findings are in congruence with the qualitative results of this study where 12 of 14 interviewees emphasised the value of learning from experience, which helped build confidence and improve their ability to navigate emotional situations. PPs also described how harnessing this practical knowledge allowed them to strategically approach challenges and preserve emotional energy, likened to making calculated moves in a game of chess:

> "*DA work is like a game of chess. We know the rules, but we try to approach things from different angles, because if you go straight ahead, you're not going to get anywhere…Sometimes, pretending to be a bit dim, which some men associate with women, works to your advantage. We're all playing on our gender, in some respects*" (Roxy).

Roxy's reference to "playing on our gender" highlights how practitioners learn to leverage their experience and strategically use gendered expectations to their advantage. This strategy allowed Roxy to subtly challenge gender assumptions, open dialogue, and shift power dynamics, enabling her to steer the interaction more effectively.

4.1:9 Emotional Labour Scale

Section 4 of the survey presented 12 statements related to how PPs deal with their emotions at work, requiring frequency ratings (Q10). The scale comprises 4 sub-scales: emotional consonance, suppression, deep acting and surface acting. Here, nine statements used a 5-point Likert scale from Never(1) to Always (5), with scores reversed for emotional consonance to Always (1) to Never (5). Thus, higher scores across all dimensions indicated greater presence of emotional labour.

Table 6: Frequency of emotional labour factors reported by female PPs (n=216)

Emotional labour scale statement/ sub scale (Q number)	Never=1 N (%)	Rarely=2 N (%)	Occasionally=3 N (%)	Often =4 N (%)	Always =5 N (%)	M	SD	Mode
Suppression								
I hide my anger about something a male perpetrator of domestic abuse has said or done (1)	15 (6.9)	30 (13.9)	63 (29.2)	69 (31.9)	39 (18.1)	**3.40**	1.141	4
I hide my fear of a male perpetrator of domestic abuse who appears threatening during supervision (5)	15 (6.9)	32 (14.8)	44 (20.4)	59 (27.3)	66 (30.6)	**3.60**	1.254	5
I hide my disgust over something a male perpetrator of domestic abuse has said or done (8)	4 (1.9)	14 (6.5)	39 (18.1)	83 (38.4)	76 (35.2)	**3.99**	.981	4
Surface Acting								
I pretend to have emotions that I don't really have when interacting with male perpetrators of domestic abuse (9)	57 (26.4)	39 (18.1)	74 (34.3)	40 (18.5)	6 (2.8)	**2.53**	1.149	3
I put on an act in order to deal with male perpetrators of domestic abuse in an appropriate way (10)	27 (12.5)	30 (13.9)	71 (32.9)	66 (30.6)	22 (10.2)	**3.12**	1.159	3
Although the details of domestic abuse cases may upset me, I remain neutral and composed during supervision to ensure a professional interaction (2)	1 (.5)	2 (.9)	8 (3.7)	58 (26.9)	147 (68.1)	**4.61**	.652	5
Deep Acting								
I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to male perpetrators of domestic abuse that I supervise (3)	14 (6.5)	27 (12.5)	93 (43.1)	60 (27.8)	22 (10.2)	**3.23**	1.011	3
I try to change my true feelings to show the emotions required when interacting with male perpetrators of domestic abuse (12)	21 (9.7)	47 (21.8)	69 (31.9)	60 (27.8)	19 (8.8)	**3.04**	1.114	3
I strive to truly feel the calmness I need to display during challenging interactions with male perpetrators of domestic abuse (4)	9 (4.2)	17 (7.9)	29 (13.4)	104 (48.1)	57 (26.4)	**3.85**	1.034	4
Emotional Consonance	**Always=1 N (%)**	**Often=2 N (%)**	**Occasionally=3 N (%)**	**Rarely=4 N (%)**	**Never=5 N (%)**	**M**	**SD**	**Mode**
I feel comfortable expressing my genuine emotions when working with male perpetrators (11)	10 (4.6)	37 (17.1)	65 (30.1)	75 (34.7)	29 (13.4)	**3.35**	1.059	4
I feel at ease displaying my true emotions when addressing difficult topics with male perpetrators of domestic abuse (6)	15 (6.9)	49 (22.7)	67 (31.0)	60 (27.8)	25 (11.6)	**3.14**	1.109	3
The emotions I show to male perpetrators of domestic abuse match what truly feel (7)	4 (1.9)	21 (9.7)	54 (25.0)	95 (44.0)	42 (19.4)	**3.69**	954	4

Note: *M=mean, SD=standard deviation*

A reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. According to DeVellis (2012), a coefficient value above .7 is considered acceptable (Pallet, 2020). The overall reliability of the total scale (α =.764) was acceptable, suggesting it is suitable for exploring emotional labour strategies among PPs (Table 7). Similarly, emotional consonance showed acceptable reliability (α =.721). However, suppression (α =.601), deep acting (α =.609), and surface acting subscales (α =.622) demonstrated internal

consistency slightly below the acceptable threshold, possibly reflecting the nuanced nature of emotional labour within probation work. Since deleting items did not improve reliability, future research may consider modifying or expanding subscales to better fit the context of probation work and enhance reliability (Chu & Murrmann, 2006). Despite the limitation of lower reliability scores, the ELS has not previously been applied to probation work, making this study's findings valuable for understanding PPs emotional labour performances. Hence, I proceed with discussing mean reported levels for each sub-scale.

Table 7: Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of items
Total overall scale	.764	.759	12
Total emotional regulation subscales	.737	.734	9
Emotional consonance	.721	.719	3
Suppression	.601	.604	3
Deep acting	.609	.611	3
Surface acting	.622	.622	3

As shown in Table 6, the most common response for suppression statements; hiding emotions of anger and disgust was 'often' (Mode=4), while for fear it was 'always' (Mode=5). The highest mean level of suppression was reported for disgust (M=3.99), with 73.6% (n=159) of respondents indicating this occurred 'always' or 'often.' This was followed by fear (M=3.60), reported by 57.9% (n=125) and anger (M=3.40), reported by 50% (n=108). These findings show that at least half of the sample reported frequently suppressing emotions such as fear, anger and disgust when working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.

The gendered nature of this work provides important context for these results. The high prevalence of emotional suppression, particularly for disgust, fear, and anger, aligns with Morran's (2008) observations about the heightened emotional experiences attributed to female practitioners in this work (Renehan, 2021). Suppression of these emotions is significant, given the important role of the supervisory relationship in facilitating change (Burnett and McNeill, 2005) and may have become a necessary strategy for PPs to foster change within antagonistic supervisory relationships, often shaped by gendered power imbalances (Morran, 2008). Interview findings within this study support these results, with all 14 interviewees reporting suppression of anger, fear, disgust to maintain control, model pro-social behaviour, and mitigate perceptions of female vulnerability, all emphasising its rehabilitative purpose.

For, acting components, the most common response across each subscale was 'occasionally' (Mode=3). However, surface acting showed a notable pattern with 95% (n=205) of respondents reporting a high tendency (often/always) to maintain composure during their interactions despite the upsetting nature of the work (Mode=5). The prevalence of surface acting in this context may relate to the high levels of disgust that PPs reported suppressing within the sample. During the qualitative stage of this study three interviewees explained that feelings of disgust often stemmed from reading details of offences perpetrated against women within CPS paperwork. Nevertheless, they described maintaining professional composure to avoid judgement, which they felt was essential for fostering successful relationships: "*I do hide emotions…my disgust or distaste to what I've read…I think, it's the hope that they can change"* (Ella). These findings align with Rex (1999) and Lewis (2014) and are closely linked to how PPs within the sample may use this strategy to remain neutral, by "separating the individual from their behaviour" (Lewis, 2014:168).

Similarly, 75% (n=161) of respondents indicated a high tendency to engage in deep acting to remain calm in challenging interactions (Mode=4). Interview data provides further insight into this process with 10 of 14 interviewees describing using a strategy of

separating their personal emotions from their professional responsibilities, likened to wearing “a probation hat.” (Nyah). This symbolises adopting a professional persona that allows PPs to distance their personal feelings while focusing on their role within the room. In the context of deep acting, this finding reflects how practitioners modify their internal states, characterised by anger, fear or disgust, to generate genuine calm and composure during interactions with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, as required by their role (Mesner-Magnus *et al*, 2012).

When measuring emotional consonance, the most common response across the subscale was ‘Rarely’ (Mode=4). This indicates a significant discrepancy between emotions shown and felt, commonly referred to as emotional dissonance (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). The higher frequency of responses for ‘rarely’ and ‘never’, when compared to ‘often’ or ‘always’ across all statements reinforces this pattern. For example, statement 11, (n=104 vs n=47), statement 6 (n=85 vs n=64) and statement 7 (n=137 vs n=25) all reflect this imbalance. The emotional consonance scores show that female PPs in this study rarely feel comfortable or aligned in expressing their true emotions with male perpetrators, indicating emotional dissonance in their work. This finding aligns with Bakker and Heuven’s (2006:435), argument that human service professionals often “experience a discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions”, due to the emotionally charged nature of their roles. This finding is in congruent with the interview results of the study, with five of 14 interviewees describing emotional dissonance as the most challenging aspect of their work. However, practitioners frequently related this dissonance to the tension of maintaining compassion for an individual while simultaneously finding their beliefs, particularly those targeting women, upsetting and triggering a strong emotional response:

> " *It's the lack of respect, and that's not necessarily the lack of respect for me, but the lack of respect for females. I find it sad… how have they got to that point? And then that changes that anger towards them to pity.”* (Nyah)

This captures the tension between Nyah’s initial anger and her need to shift toward understanding, enabling her to explore the supervisee's background and roots of his harmful behaviour to facilitate a more constructive intervention, despite her emotional strain. Overall, these results suggest that gender dynamics shape female PPs emotional labour strategies, requiring frequent emotional suppression to balance professionalism and compassion, which intensifies the emotional dissonance inherent in this work.

4.1:10 Mean calculations for emotional labour factors

Responses were combined in SPSS to calculate mean total scores, providing an overview of the prevalence of each emotional labour strategy reported by PPs (Table 8). While the suppression dimension showed a slightly higher mean (M=10.99), overall scores reflect moderate levels of emotional labour across the sample, leaning slightly towards the higher end of the scale (n=3-15). Skewness values indicate normal distributions for all components.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics: Emotional labour sub-scales

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Suppression subscale	216	3	15	10.99	2.525	-.409	.166	.044	.330
Surface Acting subscale	216	3	15	10.26	2.086	-.371	.166	-.042	.330
Deep Acting subscale	216	3	15	10.12	2.369	-.402	.166	.318	.330
Emotional consonance subscale	216	3	15	10.19	2.507	-.337	.166	-.599	.330
Total	216	12	60	41.45					

4.2: Understanding Practitioners' Emotional Experiences: Key Themes and Contexts

Interview data was analysed to examine the narratives of PPs and their contribution to understanding the emotional impact of their roles. This analysis identified three key themes relevant to PPs experiences in this context: 'the probation hat,' 'emotional seepage' and 'the invisible force of emotions.' Connections to emotional labour, as well as trauma-related concepts and symptomologies from the literature, are integrated throughout the discussion to offer a deeper contextual understanding of practitioners' experiences.

4.2:1 The Probation Hat

Throughout the study, participants described a conscious decision to 'put on a probation hat', which represented the process in which participants adopted a professional persona within their work: "*It's like performance… you have to put on a different persona when you're in that environment"* (Jade). The 'probation hat' symbolised the emotional labour involved in maintaining professional composure, as participants frequently suppressed emotions to remain professional despite the emotional strain of the role:

> *" There're times where I do feel angry and frustrated, but I would never show this… it's like putting on a different hat… the professional hat before entering the room. But in the room, I'm thinking...that's annoyed me, that's upset me or that's made me uncomfortable. But I'm not going to show you that it's made me feel like that."* (Zara)

Zara's experience aligns with the survey's modal response of 'occasionally' for surface acting components, as she describes "putting on a different hat" to maintain professionalism despite frustration or discomfort. However, a proportion of survey respondents reported 'rarely' or 'never' engaging in surface acting strategies, thus emotional regulation in this work appears situational, reflecting varied needs for 'emotional masking' (Wharton and Erikson, 1993). For some interviewees, the structured nature of their roles, such as delivering interventions provided an opportunity to provide gendered insights and enabled genuine engagement, seeking to explain this finding:

> "*I feel more myself when I'm delivering intervention... it's where I see myself at my best emotionally. Because I'm asking them to be vulnerable, I find that easier to reciprocate than with risk management and enforcement. Even when the intervention is challenging… it's still a connection on a human level."* (Lila)

This suggests that emotional masking is not always necessary, as structured elements of the role can facilitate deeper emotional engagement. Similarly, Clara described how her gender positively influenced her interactions with male perpetrators. This opportunity to constructively challenge gendered views fostered authentic connections and enhanced role fulfilment:

> "*Sometimes it stops that rhetoric of speaking negatively about women… in structured work, you can offer the other side of the story. I was talking about skills for relationships with a perpetrator, and we discussed the qualities he wanted in a partner. He said he wanted 'big boobs, long legs, and a tiny waist'… I asked him, 'What do you bring to the table?' and he laughed. It opened a conversation about unrealistic expectations and society's views on women. It was a fun way to address it."*

In contrast, the act of "leaving emotions at the door" (Zara) was viewed with significance, enabling practitioners to maintain the professional boundaries required for effective supervision. This aligns with Renehan's (2021) study of domestic abuse programme facilitators, where some staff reported feeling obliged to set aside their own trauma to avoid professional judgement. Similarly, practitioners in this study adopted this strategy to engage with each case objectively, prioritising their professional role over their own emotional influences, indicating emotional dissonance:

> "*You have to put your personal feelings aside, because when you read CPS, and you can read some horrendous things… or when a POP comes in and is belittling you…saying horrible degrading things. You have to put that probation hat on… and think about what we as a service want to achieve from this supervision… as opposed to personally…what I think about the person."* (Nyah)

The perceived need for self-protection and professionalism, described by interviewees often required practitioners to adopt 'the probation hat' as a strategy to maintain emotional detachment. By consciously setting aside personal emotions, practitioners were able to focus on performing in role successfully, suggesting deep acting:

> *"I must be good at compartmentalising because I remember a specific incident. I held it together and then after that appointment, I broke down and allowed myself to really feel what I was feeling. I don't disregard my feelings, but I can pause them. I can say I'm going to feel all of them and let all of this out in a minute. But right now, I need to maintain composure in the room. I think I'm guided by doing a good job, knowing what my role is, and making sure that I execute it before I allow myself to feel the human side of it."* (Riley)

Consistent with emotional labour studies (Westaby *et al*., 2020; Fowler *et al*., 2020), all interviewees frequently described the need to suppress negative emotions when working with domestic abuse perpetrators. Notably, while findings from both stages of this study align, anger was most frequently cited in interviews. In contrast, survey responses indicate that fear (Mode=5) was a more consistent emotional response to the threatening aspects of this work, with interviews providing a deeper exploration of anger. These emotions were largely suppressed to maintain professionalism and uphold participants' roles as "agents of change" (Raynor *et al*., 2004:236):

"*Anger, frustration...You have to suppress those. You have to keep those hidden because our end goal is to make changes to that behaviour, and we need to keep those professional boundaries*." (Nyah)

PPs in this study predominately associated surface acting with the concept of professionalism, a theme also identified in Tidmarsh's (2020) study of professionalisation within probation practice and further supported by Fowler *et al*. (2020). Many interviewees emphasised that managing personal emotions was crucial to upholding the probation value base, particularly through a non-judgemental approach and treating those supervised with care and respect. These elements, as Maruna (2001) notes, support the "identity shift associated with desistance" (Dominey and Canton, 2022:425). Emotional labour was thus tied to the service's goals, requiring the display of "appropriate feelings, attitudes, and emotions" (Fowler *et al*., 2020:63):

> *"You can't show what's on this word cloud…that you're drained, frustrated, shocked. You have to hide them and put this other mask on. Because you have to remain professional…and embody the probation core values. You have to be in control of your emotions and behaviour." (Nyah)*

Similarly, the risk of displaying negative emotions such as disgust was seen as potentially undermining rehabilitative efforts, with an emphasis on maintaining "emotional neutrality" (Westaby *et al*., 2020:7) to avoid exacerbating feelings of shame in those supervised:

> "*Even though my emotions are a certain way about what they've done, I can't let that come out because it might add to that shame element. The reason I come here is not to be judgmental... and make change, I can't do that if it's written all over my face."* (Jade)

This significance placed on emotional suppression to avoid judgement was described as enabling practitioners to foster empathy and gain a deeper understanding of male supervisees' behaviour to support change. However, the emotional restraint required to uphold PPs professional values may explain why survey respondents frequently identified this aspect of their work as a significant challenge (Mode=4, 'Often').

Emotional suppression via neutral displays, is often associated with authority as "affective neutrality reinforces professionals' power and prevents clients from challenging them" (Smith and Kleinman, 1989:56 in Westaby *et al*., 2020:4). For participants in this study, emotional suppression was not only about maintaining professionalism but navigating gendered power dynamics. Many interviewees questioned whether their gender influenced difficult interactions with those supervised: *"would you say that to a man?"* (Clara). Such reflections were common, with many emphasising how they felt their gender created additional expectations in their role. As Zara noted "*It's something else that we have to prove,"* referring to the need to establish authority in ways PPs believed their male colleagues did not. Similarly, Emma's experience highlights this dynamic, illustrating how female PPs may need to actively assert their authority, when challenged more because of their gender:

> *"I've seen how he acts in front of other men. When I've been on home visits…he wouldn't say boo to a goose. But when it's just me and him, that dynamic flips, and he tries to take control…something that's prevalent throughout his offending history."*

These accounts align with Petrillo's (2007:405) observation that male supervisees do not engage "on a gender-neutral basis" providing context for why 80.5% of survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that gender dynamics posed additional challenges. Hochschild's (1983) concept of the 'status shield' is particularly relevant, as a weakened 'status shield' required female PPs to exert additional emotional effort to maintain control over interactions. Emotional suppression became a necessary coping strategy to maintain authority and shield practitioners from negative experiences, underscoring the gendered nature of emotional labour in this work.

The targeting of female staff because of their gender was widely described by interviewees as a tactic used by male perpetrators to regain power and control within the supervisory relationship, aligning with survey respondents' frequent rating of 'often' (Mode=4) for this challenge area. Gendered insults, such as being called a "little girl," were described as used to undermine practitioners' professionalism and challenge their authority:

> "*He brought gender into it… he directly said, 'a little girl,' I'm not going to sit here and let this little girl tell me what to do… I do think there's discrepancies with how they perceive your authority, your role. I don't think you are taken seriously*." (Ava)

The 'probation hat' in such instances, was described to function as a 'status shield,' allowing practitioners to assert authority and maintain emotional boundaries within gendered supervisory dynamics. This aligns with the concept of 'healthy estrangement,' where professionals use the prestige of their role as a "form of self-protection" (Miranda and Godwin, 2018:322). This can be shown in Ava's reliance on procedure, which symbolises how wearing the probation hat enabled emotional composure and created a positive emotional labour experience:

"They can't argue with procedure… so I become very procedure driven…. I feel confident in staying calm whilst doing this…that's where I'm most confident in my practice."

Alternatively, Maclean *et al*., (2024) observed that fear can emerge when working with domestic abuse perpetrators, as practitioners begin to identify with victims and recognise their own vulnerability. This sense of vulnerability was reflected in the narratives of

several interviewees, who viewed emotional control, particularly the suppression of 'soft' emotions, as essential to maintaining their authority:

"*Sometimes it's survival. If you show that you're scared, then you're finished. It's a professional demeanour as well… almost about letting yourself go, isn't it? Showing fear or any one of those soft emotions*."(Alice)

Alice frames the importance of emotional suppression as a means of self-protection, emphasising that displaying 'soft' emotions often linked to femininity (Mawby and Warrell, 2013) risked undermining her professional authority. Zara expressed similar concerns, explaining how genuine emotional displays may be manipulated to regain control during supervision. Emotional suppression therefore served as a coping strategy:

> "*There're times where I feel angry… and frustrated, but I don't show it, because that's divulging how you really feel. I think sometimes people can take advantage of…. 'That made her angry' or 'that made her uncomfortable'… and it can feel like they enjoy making you feel uncomfortable. You have to put on a bit of a poker face... But also, letting personal emotions come into this room is dangerous, because people can pick up on it and they will use it against you… you have to leave that emotion at the door… it's the job to be professional*."

This highlights the intentional 'masking' (Wharton and Erikson, 1993) of negative emotions, during which both interviewees described displaying a calm persona to perform their role successfully and maintain authority, suggesting surface acting: *"I stayed calm but inside, I was thinking he's going to hit me in a minute"* (Alice). Such reflections align closely with survey results, where 65.2% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse was the most emotionally demanding aspect of their job. This underscores the importance of emotional labour strategies in managing the complex dynamics of these interactions.

These strategies serve multiple purposes, i.e. maintaining professionalism, facilitating behavioural change, and addressing the challenges arising from the gendered dynamics of the supervisory relationship. The concept of the 'probation hat', as described in these narratives, symbolises both professional authority and the conscious effort required by PPs to maintain emotional detachment to cope with the demands of their role. These insights offer a more nuanced understanding of the emotional labour strategies employed by PPs in domestic abuse work and provide valuable context for the study's survey findings.

4.2:2 Emotional Seepage

Many participants described how negative emotions experienced in their work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse spill over into their personal lives. As one interviewee, Roxy, explained, "*I don't think people understand the emotional toll that it takes on you… it seeps out of your pores… it seeps into absolutely all areas of your life.*" This observation aligns with spillover theory, which explains the process by which emotions transfer from work to personal life, despite the temporal boundaries that typically separate the two. Spillover is recognised to "have both positive and negative implications for practitioners". However, the narratives of interviewees in this study were overwhelmingly negative, indicating broader implications for their wellbeing (Westaby *et al.,* 2016:114):

> "*There're days where I go home and I sit there and go…'I can't talk to you, don't talk to me, I've got nothing to give'… and if I look at those trends, it's often when I've seen cases where it's a domestic abuse perpetrator and think…I hope I get a bit of respite tomorrow*." (Ava)

Here Ava appears to describe burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion which is referred to as ''the state of depletion and fatigue''(Mesmer- Magnus et al, 2012:14). This aligns with Morran's (2008) findings that women within his study were more likely to feel emotionally exhausted as consequence of their work with domestic abuse perpetrators (Maclean *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, strain-based conflict is said to arise when practitioners are unable to disconnect from the demands of work, which can negatively affect an individual's ability to fulfil their roles outside of work. For example, those working within emotionally demanding contexts may experience adverse impacts on energy and mood (McKendy and Ricciardelli, 2023:459) as indicated within Ava's account. To deal with this strain-based conflict some interviewees, described utilising the car journey as a coping strategy, which allowed them time to process their feelings, to avoid ruminating once they got home:

"Your journey home is the deflation time... when all of those intense emotions that you were feeling throughout the day, you can process and move on from, and if you don't, then you aren't sleeping that night." (Alice)

The journey symbolised a reflective space, emphasising the importance of reflection in managing the demands of domestic abuse work. All interviewees noted the lack of dedicated reflective time within their roles, often resorting to informal moments of reflection, as Carol illustrated: "*Reflection often pops in my head at 3.00am when I'm in bed... because I haven't necessarily had the reflective time within work.*" One interviewee highlighted how reducing her journey time led to the immediate return of strain-based conflict, prompting her to find alternative ways to process emotions and prevent emotional seepage. This underscores the need for structured reflective opportunities within this work:

> *"It was a winding down process whereas now it's not enough time for that to come out of my head…something plays on my mind… and then I take that into the house and my husband will say … 'have you had a good day'…I'd rather he just left me alone so I can go upstairs and mindlessly fold clothes …to give me that break in between."* (Roxy)

Roxy's act of "mindlessly folding clothes" can be seen as a form of self-care, an informal coping strategy used to create emotional detachment from work. These findings align with Phillips *et al*.'s (2021) study that emphasised the importance of maintaining clear work-home boundaries for PPs wellbeing. Equally, some interviewees in this study noted how remote working arrangements blurred these boundaries, particularly when challenges i.e. handling threats at home intensified strain-based conflict:

> *"I've had threats in the office, but at home, it blurred the boundaries. I completely lost it. That experience blew my world apart… At home, I can't give my emotions to my daughter. In the office, I could call on a colleague."* (Alice)

Alice underscores her reliance on colleague support to deal with the emotional challenges of this work, consistent with previous research showing that "probation staff turn to colleagues" to manage the emotional toll of their roles (Phillips *et al*., 2021:429). Survey findings closely align, showing that self-care and colleague support are commonly adopted coping strategies, yet colleague support was rated more effectively in managing the emotional demands of this work. The narratives of PPs further contextualise this disparity, identifying rumination as a key factor of emotional seepage, which self-care often failed to address. Most interviewees identified rumination as an ineffective way of managing the emotional challenges of their roles, describing rumination as a "loop of unresolved thoughts," (Lila) that heightened feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and self-doubt. For example, Jade reflected: *"I'd take it all personally…I'd think more than I should about myself and that I'm not good at my job…it was affecting my self-esteem*." These concerns often stemmed from fears about PPs efficacy, the safety of others, and the heavy sense of personal accountability they carried:

"You start to ruminate and overthink everything…should I have done that, should I have challenged him more? Anxiety and fear for that person, that something could happen… I hate that feeling." (Riley)

This constant internal questioning, described by all interviewees was deeply embedded in their work with domestic abuse cases, and was only temporarily alleviated by acts of distraction such as exercise. However, these acts were not always immune to emotional intrusion:

> *"One of the tracks they were playing was some guy singing about how he couldn't live without this woman, it was all her fault, and the instructor said… 'Oh, I really like this record.' Before I'd even considered what was coming out of my mouth, I snapped, 'Oh, yeah, I'm sure it's great, isn't it? Having some guy who blames that this woman wants to leave him'… So, it seeps into everything."* (Roxy)

Roxy's emotional reaction to a song's gendered narrative of male-entitlement illustrates emotional intrusion, a symptom of STS (Bride, 2007). Her heightened sensitivity, shaped by her work with domestic abuse cases, made it difficult to detach from these dynamics, even during moments of self-care, reflecting the pervasive emotional strain of this work. Similarly, most interviewees described arousal symptoms such as persistent anxiety and difficulty sleeping (Bride, 2007), often linked to fear for the safety of female victims, which intensified the emotional burden of their work:

> *"Sat up in bed worrying… particularly domestic abuse, because when they're still in relationships and in contact with their victim… in bed myself, thinking what's going on. I hope they're not together. I hope he's not hurting her… It's really exhausting."* (Clara)

The experience of working with male perpetrators, whose victims are predominately female was described as not just a professional concern but also a personal one, shaped by gender dynamics. This increased the professional responsibility felt by practitioners, likened to a "*backpack*" (Lila). This reflects the weight of the work felt by practitioners, but was also symbolic of how the work had a distinct emotional and psychological impact on PPs who shared the gender of the victims:

> *"Heavy…that's how I'd describe it… since I started working with male DA perpetrators, I feel like I've been carrying more of a weight related to males' violence against women… It's sad… I can deal with this within my job quite objectively and without too much emotion attached. But recently, every time I'm watching a TV programme and domestic abuse features, I find it really upsetting, I find it sad…a physical feeling… your chest is heavy, you feel weighed down by this thing*." (Lila)

Worrall's (2008:331) concept of female PPs as "symbolic victims" highlights how practitioners internalise the harm experienced by victims, blurring the boundary between professional duty and personal emotion as they aim to convey the impact of their actions to male supervisees. Lila's "backpack" metaphor and emotional response to media portrayals of domestic abuse illustrate this dynamic, with her gendered connection to female victims intensifying the emotional toll of her work. This difficulty in detaching aligns with Hochschild's (1983) notion of 'over-identification,' where emotional labour can heighten vulnerability to exhaustion and burnout (Lewig and Dollard, 2003). This underscores the importance of establishing "difficult professional boundaries" to safeguard emotional well-being in this work (Duggan, 2020:143). Yet, while survey findings show that boundary-setting is a highly effective coping strategy within challenging supervisory dynamics (supported by 87.5% of respondents), the role's varied objectives, including public protection (HMPPS, 2021), may undermine its effectiveness in preventing emotional seepage, as PPs increasingly hold themselves accountable for safeguarding female victims.

In line with the findings of Iliffe and Steed (2000) and Morran (2008), the gendered nature of domestic abuse work was evident in the narratives of PPs. Many reported heightened awareness of power and control dynamics, "persistent distortions in their perceptions of men" and an increasing sense of the world being less safe (Morran, 2008:144):

"*You lose faith in men…Those are the types of men you're interacting with most of the time. So, you get that jaded view… it's everywhere, it's emotionally challenging."* (Clara)

For some, this heightened awareness of domestic abuse risks seeped into their personal relationships. One interviewee shared how increased exposure to domestic abuse cases led her to overanalyse her daughter's relationships, disrupting her sense of trust and safety, symptoms of vicarious trauma (Morran, 2008):

> "*I'd worry about my daughter and think… I don't really like that guy she's hooked up with. That would play on my mind and translate into making it more difficult because I'd look for the signs in him and see them. That's not a great place to be*." (Roxy)

Similarly, as Morran (2008) found, some interviewees coped by focusing on positive male figures in their lives. This approach helped them stay grounded, counter negative perceptions, and prevent emotional seepage:

"I know that those men's behaviours are not typical because I have a secure, safe relationship and family at home… that's how I deal with the emotional impact." (Riley)

4.2:3 The Invisible Force of Emotions

Emotional labour was described as an essential yet invisible aspect of PPs work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, involving persistent internal cognitive and emotional effort (Dean *et al.*, 2022). This invisibility extended beyond practitioners' internal experiences to encompass the subtle, yet profound tensions within their interactions: "*It's the subtle controlling and coercive behaviour that's the worst… You feel helpless*" (Clara). While explicit expressions of misogyny were less common: *"He directly said, I end up hitting women because they don't hold themselves properly anymore,"* (Emma) interviewees overwhelmingly described sensing unspoken hostility due to their gender: *"There are some perpetrators where you just know they hate women…it's an innate feeling."* (Riley)

This unspoken animosity, captured by the word "hate," was a recurring sentiment felt by four of 14 interviewees within their work. It often manifested through hidden power dynamics rooted in "stereotypical understandings of gender roles in society" (Petrillo, 2007:398), which they linked to feelings of dismissal, belittlement, and being challenged in their work: *"I know for a fact he hated me. It was the way he'd communicate with me; he was aggressive, constantly shouting over me, belittling me."* (Maya)

Beyond verbal expressions, many interviewees described encountering a silent force of intimidation through, stance, tone and gestures, which were experienced as loudly oppressive in the room:

> "*The way that someone will stand, the tone of voice they use and the way they stare...If they want to subtly give you a warning, they'll flash their eyes. You can feel it, they will try to intimidate you to close you down… or to exert their power.*" (Roxy)

These narratives reveal the nuanced emotional labour that female PPs navigate in their work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, managing both overt, loud aggression and quiet manipulations. Subtle behaviours marked by ambiguity created what practitioners described as an invisible force of emotions: "*I'd rather someone shouted at me. I would probably feel less upset by that*,"(Clara) highlighting how quieter manipulations often carried a deeper emotional weight. Lila further illustrated this by describing how behaviours, ranging from evident acts of intimidation to seemingly innocent gestures, could evoke a similar sense of vulnerability:

> *"If somebody is aggressively trying to take control of the situation, we may feel vulnerable…scared for our own safety…feel like we've lost control… then there's another behaviour… my man who opens the door for me... he shows these niceties…I feel like he's trying to flatter me and navigating that is quite difficult as a woman. Those are two completely different behaviours, but I end up feeling vulnerable in both."*

The "niceties" of male supervisees presenting as "*charming, friendly, and chatty"* (Zara) were described by interviewees as triggering *"alarm bells"* (Nyah). This aligns with symptoms of STS, particularly hypervigilance (Smith, 2007), where politeness was often seen as a manipulative tactic, prompting heightened sensitivity and suspicion. The emotional labour required to manage these interactions was evident in how surface responses concealed inner tensions: *"You have to be consciously aware of everything"* (Maya). As Ella noted, it feels *"unnervingly nice,"* masking an undercurrent of suspicion that subtly shapes dynamics of trust and control.

Characterised as *"tiptoeing"* (Clara), this concept captures the emotional vigilance interviewees described to balance rapport-building with the risk of manipulation. Tiptoeing also symbolises the constant emotional force they experience as interactions shift from charm to manipulation and aggression: "*It's so full on…you don't know what to expect"* (Clara).

Interviewees commonly described becoming acutely aware of subtle cues in body language, particularly in response to supervisory controls, such as enforcement processes:

"Some try and flirt or use charm… particularly when you explain licence conditions…but it's a sense because you feel the frustration…the temper rising. It's little things…facial expressions, body language you pick up on." (Emma)

These moments are emotionally charged, requiring careful navigation to conceal feelings of fear, frustration, or discomfort. One interviewee described how she coped by consciously suppressing visible signs of her discomfort:

"Sometimes I'll go to take a drink with my handshaking, and I don't want them to see that. So, I'll sit on my hands…or if I need to regain composure, I will happily sit in silence until I'm ready to speak again."(Ella)

The notion of the "coming alive of CPS paperwork"(Riley) captures how emotional shifts during supervision leave practitioners feeling victimised, influenced by their gender-identity. Some interviewees drew parallels between their emotional experiences and the impact on victims, highlighting how practitioners internalise the emotional manipulation and control within these interactions, aligning with Petrillo's (2007) findings:

> "*He was so charming…and when I told him I wasn't in support of his application, he switched, I saw it…the behaviour that I'd read about, and I experienced it. It was like someone had flicked a switch…everything changed…his demeanour, his eyes, his tone. I know what this woman is now experiencing at home, because he's walked it into the appointment."* (Riley)

Alternatively, some interviewees described how visible forms of aggression, such as shouting, provided a sense of clarity, as it symbolised a loss of control by the supervisee: "*If they shout or raise their voice… that's fine because I know they've lost control in that moment"* (Clara). Practitioners' clarity about emotional dynamics enabled them to use de-escalation techniques and establish boundaries, helping to mitigate risks and alleviate emotional strain:

> *"I end the appointment and think we will talk about this more next week. I try to leave it on a positive note as I don't like the thought of people leaving the office angry because you never know what they're going to do*." (Zara)

For interviewees, these challenges extended beyond emotional labour, as they anticipated potential harm male supervisees might direct towards their partners. Zara's reflections on avoiding escalation and preventing supervisees from leaving angry highlight a strategic, anticipatory approach. This approach was echoed by six other interviewees, who described enduring emotional pressure to keep supervisees in the room, not only to manage the immediate situation but to prevent potential harm:

> *"He was aggressive, then he switched to patronisation and trying to make me feel small. It was a horrible experience to endure. It ended up going on for 45 minutes, because as I was trying to wrap up because he was so irate, he flipped it on his partner. He said, 'I'm going to ring her and tell her it's all her fault'. So, I thought I need to keep you here to deescalate this because I don't want you to go out and commit more offending…Afterwards I came upstairs and cried in anger.*" (Jade)

The narratives of PPs align with Bemiller and Williams' (2011:92) "good soldiering mentality," which conceptualises how domestic abuse advocates endure taxing work to protect victims. While this mentality can lead to burnout from prolonged stress, it can also mitigate it through a sense of "meaningful sacrifice"(Bemiller and Williams, 2011:104). Similarly, interviewees described absorbing aggression to prevent harm, navigating unseen internal struggles and cognitive demands. Their emotional restraint and resilience in

adversity reflected a belief that these efforts were essential to safeguard victims and manage future rumination, serving as a coping mechanism to prevent emotional seepage.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This study sought to better understand the experiences of female PPs supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse, with a particular focus on how gender intersects with the emotional impact of the work. The findings reveal the emotional complexity of this role, with challenges often exacerbated by gender dynamics.

A mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, revealed the frequency, intensity, and range of challenges female PPs face, particularly the emotional toll associated with gender-dynamics. Interview data emphasised how subtle, often unacknowledged behaviours caused considerable emotional strain. When viewed through the lens of feminist theory and masculinity research, these behaviours created distinct gendered challenges, requiring PPs to employ heightened emotional labour strategies to cope effectively. By highlighting these emotional experiences, the study positions its findings within the critical gap identified by Knight (2014:188), revealing the “invisible world of emotion” within the gendered context of domestic abuse work, an emotional reality that profoundly shapes practitioners' experiences yet remains “hidden within organisational structures.”

An unexpected benefit of using the word cloud was its reflective value, making the often-invisible emotional weight of the work visible to practitioners. This visualisation not only helped PPs process negative emotions but uncovered hidden positive aspects of their roles, previously overshadowed by negative experiences. Central to the findings was the theme of emotional seepage, illustrating how, despite the 'rewarding' aspects of the work, the emotional and psychological challenges extend beyond professional boundaries, affecting PPs personal well-being. This toll was intensified by the gendered nature of emotional labour, with female PPs carrying a disproportionate emotional burden due to societal expectations tied to their gender-identity and the unique challenges of supervising male domestic abuse perpetrators. The dynamics of the supervisory framework were found to expose female PPs to the same gendered conditions as those faced by women in society (Petrillo, 2007).

Female PPs frequently described performing emotional labour in their work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, including deep acting, emotional suppression, and surface acting. Survey data evidenced the use of these strategies, with emotional dissonance emerging as a key finding, particularly when PPs described balancing professionalism and authority while demonstrating empathy. Emotional labour performances were perceived as coping strategies PPs used to navigate this tension, shaped by the gendered power dynamics within the supervisory relationship. The findings are reflected in the theme of the ‘probation hat’ which symbolised PPs efforts to regulate emotions and maintain authority. Emotional displays were viewed as essential for achieving probation’s broader aims, including “public protection, rehabilitation, and risk management”(Phillips, 2020a:6), illustrating the integral role of emotional labour in the delivery of this work.

Colleague support emerged as a critical resource across both stages of the study, providing an outlet for processing emotions and preventing rumination, thus helping to address emotional seepage. This finding aligns with existing research on debriefing practices to reduce vicarious trauma (Mackenzie *et al*., 2015; Lee, 2017b), underscoring the importance of embedding such practices within organisational structures. During both stages of the study, PPs were found to employ a variety of coping strategies, including formal mechanisms (self-care, boundary-setting, management supervision, training), emotional labour strategies (masking and suppression), and informal reflective practices for emotional detachment. However, these measures were found to be insufficient to counter the

emotional toll, leading to pervasive spillover effects and trauma-related symptoms from the emotional demands of supervising male domestic abuse perpetrators.

5.1 Implications for Research

This study adds to the limited evidence on the gendered nature of emotional labour in probation, particularly in the context of supervising male domestic abuse perpetrators. By examining female PPs experiences using a gendered lens, it responds to Phillips *et al*.'s (2020b) call for further exploration of emotional labour's gendered dimensions in criminal justice. The findings demonstrate that PPs often employed emotional labour strategies to cope and maintain professionalism, influenced by both their gender-identity and the gendered dynamics of the supervisory relationship. Comparative studies could deepen this understanding by exploring how masculinity and gender stereotypes, which have been shown to impact other criminal justice sectors (e.g., police/prisons), also affect male PPs emotional labour and the challenges they encounter in their work (Phillips *et al*., 2020b).

This study was limited in its focus on gender; however, age emerged as a notable influence. Some interviewees described how their age symbolised gendered roles, such as that of a mother or partner, in their interactions with those they supervised, shaping their experiences. Future research could explore how intersecting factors, including age and ethnicity, influence emotional labour experiences in this field.

Though focused on a single probation region, this limitation does not detract from the study's value. The mixed-method design provided a broader view of female PPs experiences, and the homogeneous sample, shaped by shared experiences and national domestic abuse trends, offers valuable insights that can inform the Probation Service at a national level. These findings highlight the need for further research into the extent of emotional labour in domestic abuse work and its impact on staff well-being, particularly in regions with distinct geographical and demographic contexts, which may present unique challenges and offer further insights.

5.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

Limited awareness among interview participants of the HMPPS staff support directory underscores the need for improved communication to enhance perceptions and accessibility of organisational support systems. Participants expressed a desire for a transparent culture that validates negative emotions, advocating for practices that move beyond framing challenges as resilience.

Themes of emotional seepage and the invisible force of emotions highlight the organisational impact of the Probation Service's 'feminisation' (Petrillo, 2007), where female PPs disproportionately manage male domestic abuse cases, intensifying emotional strain from high caseloads reflecting this dynamic. Rather than limiting case allocation, a solution neither practical nor sustainable, HMPPS has an opportunity to focus on enhancing training and support systems. PPs reliance on emotional labour to manage dissonance underscores the importance of opportunities to process emotions. Gender-sensitive training and improved reflective supervision are crucial to addressing gaps in current frameworks, alleviating PPs emotional burden and providing space to "put the backpack down." (Lila)

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Statutes

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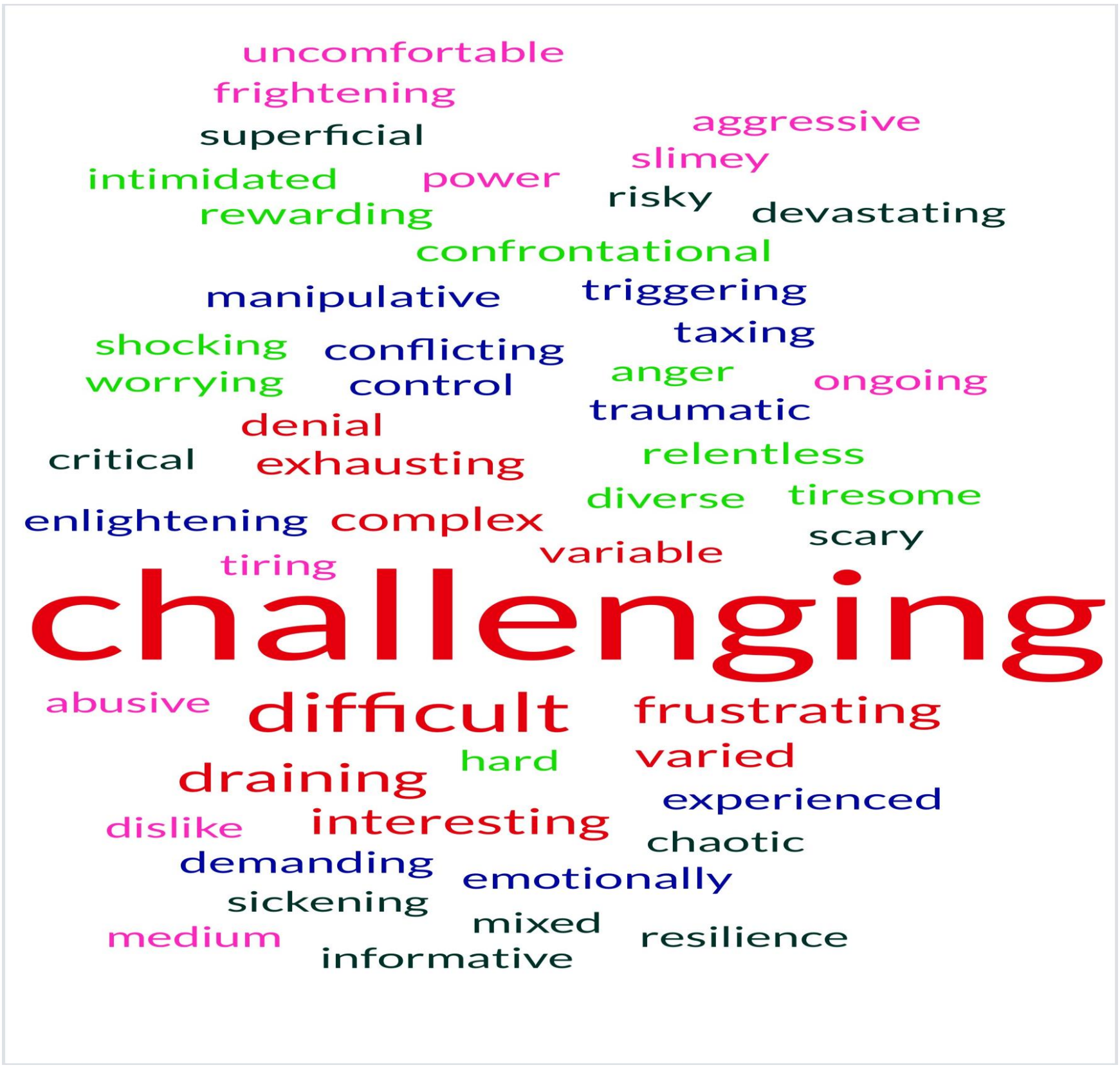
Appendices

Appendix A: Word Cloud



Appendix B: Survey Tool

The experiences of female probation practitioners

who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse and the emotional impact of their work.

General Information

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Please answer the following questions. This information helps to identify trends and will ensure that the inclusion criteria for the survey has been met. It cannot be used to identify you personally.

1. Do you currently supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

2. What is your gender? *

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

3. What is your current role? *

- ◯ Probation Service Officer (PSO)
- ◯ Probation Officer (PO)
- ◯ Trainee Probation Officer (TPO)

4. How many years of experience do you have supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse ? *

- ◯ Less than 1 year
- ◯ 1-3 years
- ◯ 4-6 years
- ◯ 7-10 years
- ◯ More than 10 years

Section 1 – Capturing your experience in one word.

5. Please enter one word that best describes your experience of working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse *

Section 2 - Challenges Faced by Female Probation Practitioners

6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding challenges that you may face in your work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse *

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Working with or supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse is the most emotionally demanding aspect of my job.	◯	◯	◯	◯
I find it challenging to manage my emotions when dealing with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Gender dynamics create additional challenges in my interactions with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯

7. Below is a list of challenges that may be faced when supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse. Please indicate how frequently you experience each challenge *

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Always
Experiencing intimidation or threats from male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Building rapport/effective working relationships with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Handling manipulative behaviour from male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Addressing denial or minimisation of abuse by male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Identifying strengths, abilities, and potential for positive change alongside addressing offending behaviour.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Navigating power and control dynamics with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Maintaining professional boundaries under emotional strain.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Challenging misogyny.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Building empathy to better understand individual backgrounds and motivations for offending behaviour.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Section 3 - Coping Mechanisms/Strategies in your work

8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, regarding coping mechanisms you use in your work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse. *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I engage in regular self-care activities to help manage the emotional demands of this work.	○	○	○	○
I rely on support from colleagues to cope with the emotional demands of this work.	○	○	○	○
I find that supervision and oversight from my manager supports me with the emotional work that is involved in supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	○	○	○	○
I find that setting boundaries with male perpetrators of domestic abuse is effective in addressing the challenges of working with this group.	○	○	○	○
I find that training and development programmes are effective in helping me to cope with the emotional demands of supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	○	○	○	○

9. Please rate the effectiveness of the following coping strategies when working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse. *

	Not effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
Engaging in self-care activities.	○	○	○	○	○
Seeking support from colleagues.	○	○	○	○	○
Participating in supervision or debriefing with management.	○	○	○	○	○
Setting boundaries during supervision sessions.	○	○	○	○	○
Undertaking training and development opportunities.	○	○	○	○	○

Section 4 – Emotional Labour

Your responses to the following questions will help to understand the emotional labour involved in supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse. This section consists of 12 statements related to how you deal with your emotions at work, so that you work as well as possible.

10. For each statement below, please indicate how often each expression applies to you *

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Always
I hide my anger about something a male perpetrator of domestic abuse has said or done.	○	○	○	○	○
Although the details of domestic abuse cases may upset me, I remain neutral and composed during supervision to ensure a professional interaction.	○	○	○	○	○
I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to male perpetrators of domestic abuse that I supervise.	○	○	○	○	○
I strive to truly feel the calmness I need to display during challenging interactions with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	○	○	○	○	○
I hide my fear of a male perpetrator of domestic abuse who appears threatening during supervision	○	○	○	○	○

I feel at ease displaying my true emotions when addressing difficult topics with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	○	○	○	○	○
The emotions I show to male perpetrators of domestic abuse match what I truly feel.	○	○	○	○	○
I hide my disgust over something a male perpetrator of domestic abuse has said or done.	○	○	○	○	○
I pretend to have emotions that I don't really have when	○	○	○	○	○

interacting with male perpetrators of domestic abuse.	○	○	○	○	○
I put on an act in order to deal with male perpetrators of domestic abuse in an appropriate way.	○	○	○	○	○
I feel comfortable expressing my genuine emotions when working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	○	○	○	○	○
I try to change my true feelings to show the emotions required when interacting with male perpetrators of domestic abuse	○	○	○	○	○

Section 5- Next steps

Thank you for sharing your insights and experiences in this survey. Your contributions are invaluable in helping us to understand the complexities of working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, and contribute towards an area where limited research has been undertaken in probation thus far.

During the next stage of this study I will be conducting 10 semi-structured interviews with practitioners.

If you would be willing to participate in this stage, where you will have the chance to explore this challenging area of practice further and have the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in this survey in more detail, please indicate below.

11. I am interested in participating in the next stage of the study *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

12. As you have selected yes, please provide your email address below.

Your email address will not be shared with any third parties or used for any purposes other than to enable me to get in touch with you about the next stage of the study.

Thank you once again for your time and commitment to this important work. *

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

Microsoft Forms

Appendix C: Information Sheet for Survey Participants

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Survey information sheet

Through a gendered lens: ***The experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse and the emotional impact of their work.***

Researcher: Nicola Johnston. **Email:** Nj369@cam.ac.uk **Work email:** nicola.johnston1@justice.gov.uk **Telephone:** 07583681757

Who is carrying out this survey?

I am currently in year two of my Masters course at Cambridge University, studying Applied Criminology, Penology and Management. As well as studying, I also work for His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) as a Senior Probation Officer. I have previously worked as a Probation Officer, Probation Service Officer within both the CRC and NPS. For this research I am operating as a student and not an employee of HMPPS.

Why am I doing this study?

Background:

- **Domestic abuse is widespread**, affecting an estimated 2.2 million adult victims within England and Wales in 2023. Women are shown to be disproportionately affected, forming 73.5% of the recorded victim population for domestic abuse-related crimes in 2023.
- **Those responsible for this abuse account for around 1/3** of the overall Probation Service caseload, whereby 74,996 individuals supervised by the Probation Service in 2023 were known to have perpetrated domestic abuse against a current or former partner, 96% of whom were male.
- **The predominance of women in the probation workforce** means that they will frequently supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse. The latest HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Workforce Statistics Bulletin shows that 75.7% of staff employed by the service are women.
- **Research undertaken with female practitioners** within other arenas of the Criminal Justice System (CJS), including police and prison suggest that gender can impact on their experiences of their work. Similarly, studies have shown gender to present challenges for female probation practitioners in their work with male domestic abuse perpetrators, however current understandings of the emotional impact on female PPs engaged in this challenging work are limited.
- **Probation workers have to perform emotional labour** to do their job effectively and is an inherent element of probation work because staff frequently use emotions in their everyday interactions. However, with that comes potential adverse effects for probation staff.

I am interested in understanding the experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse, and how this work emotionally impacts on staff. I am particularly interested in how gender dynamics may influence this emotional work, the challenges that female practitioners face, and strategies that are used to cope with emotional labour in this challenging work.

What are the criteria for participation in the survey?

As I am interested in the experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse, I have set the following criteria for participation in this survey:

1. You are a female probation practitioner.
2. You are employed as a PSO, PO, PQIP within the West Midlands Region.
3. You manage/supervise a current caseload.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve filling in an online survey. This should take around ten minutes.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to, and this will not disadvantage you in any way.

How do I agree to take part in the study?

By completing the survey, you are agreeing to take part and confirming that you understand what the study involves.

What if I want to withdraw from the study?

Given that I cannot identify who you are through the survey, once you have completed and submitted it, it will not be possible to withdraw from the study. If during the completion of the survey you wish to withdraw, simply close down the survey without submitting.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

The information you share in the survey will be kept **completely confidential** and the survey does not identify you as an individual. To participate in the survey, you are not required to include your name or other information that could identify you.

At the end of the survey, you will have the option to express your interest in participating in the next stage of the study, by providing your email address. During the next stage I will be conducting 10 semi-structured interviews. If you do not want to express an interest, you do not have to, and this will not disadvantage you in any way.

Please rest assured that should you express an interest:

- All data, including email addresses, will be stored on secure servers with access controls.
- Only authorised research team members will have access to the data, and they are bound by strict confidentiality agreements.
- Your email address will not be shared with any third parties or used for any purposes other than to enable me to get in touch with you about the next stage of the study.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will not be any financial benefit for taking part in the survey, however by engaging with the research you will contribute towards current understandings of the emotional work and challenges that female probation practitioners face when supervising this increasing cohort. Your experiences will be invaluable and will contribute towards an area where limited research has been undertaken in Probation thus far. The research also aims to better inform probation practice and staff support structures.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Initially your survey will be used as part of my thesis, however your contribution may be used in future articles, should my work be published. Following completion of the study, its findings may be used in briefings and/or presentations to be shared with the relevant HMPPS departments and other university researchers. Again, this will be done in such a way that you will not personally be identified. This study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge and approved by the HMPPS National Research Committee.

Thank you for your time in reading this information. Your contribution to this research would be invaluable and very much appreciated. If you have any further questions at any stage of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Appendix D: Pre notification message- Survey distribution

From	WMPS Communications
To	email address
Subject	For the attention of female Probation practitioners who supervise domestic abuse perpertators

Hi ((first name))

Senior Probation Officer Nicola Johnston is currently working on a Cambridge Masters study entitled:

Through a gendered lens: The experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse and the emotional impact of their work.

As part of this, if you are someone that supervises domestic abuse perpetrators, we'd really like you to have your say and influence this study.

Click here to complete the survey

The survey is open until 17.00 on Monday 29 July 2024.

We really appreciate you giving up your valuable time to complete this survey. As a region we are gaining a reputation for leading in new and innovative research to develop and influence the Probation profession, and your participation is much appreciated.

Click here for more information and click here for a QR code to fill on on mobile

Thank you,

WMPS Communications Team

Appendix E : Interview schedule

Interview Guide

Introduction

- Introduce yourself (who I am / studying MST/ SPO) and explain the purpose of the interview.
- Reminder of the purpose/design of the research- experiences of working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse, particularly interested in emotional labour (understanding the emotional displays / emotional management skills that you think are used by probation practitioners/ practitioners possess in their interaction with male DA perpetrators), gender dynamics, challenges and coping mechanisms within this work.
- Discuss confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation.
- Confirm interviewee has seen the research participation information sheet and consent form. Confirm that interviewee consents to participate
- Explain time and overview: Roughly 60 minutes – including showing a word cloud, space at end to ask any additional questions, and questions will focus on the interests of the study – i.e. challenges, coping, emotional work. Allotted time in diaries is 2 hours to provide space after the interview if needed.
- Confirm consent to audio recording ahead of starting recording.
- Any questions about the interview or contents of the research participation information sheet

Questions about professional role and experience (5 mins) – warm up

*How long have you been working in probation, and what has been your experience working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

* What type of training have you received specifically related to dealing with male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

*How well do you feel your training has prepared you for managing the emotional aspects of this work? What worked well?

** (Probing) Looking forward, what would an ideal training programme look like to help you, and your colleagues manage the emotional aspects of your work? ** (What worked less well – AI) (probe How would this training differ from what's currently available?)

Word Cloud questions and guidance (10/15 mins)

Overview of Word Cloud:

Present the word cloud generated from survey responses and ask the participant to take a minute to look at responses (give description – i.e. small/ large font= response rate, not importance and outline that colour has no relevance)

Questions

- What are your initial thoughts or reactions to the words in the cloud?
- Do any of these words resonate with your own experiences of the emotional demands when working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse?
- Can you elaborate on why that word resonates with your experience? (example where needed)
- Is there a word that you feel is missing or word that doesn't fully capture your own experience? If so, what word would you add, and why?
- Are there any words in the cloud that stand out to you in relation to gender dynamics? How do you think these dynamics shape the way you display/manage your emotions when supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

Finalise word cloud one answer: before I move on, if I were to ask you following this discussion/ now having had the chance to reflect and observe the word cloud if you would insert an additional word in respect of your experience– what would this be if any ?

Questions about emotional labour (10 mins)

*In your own words, how would you describe the emotional demands of working with male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

* How do you navigate the emotional challenges in your role? Are there specific emotions you tend to manage or suppress in these situations?

* Do you feel that your role requires you to present certain emotions outwardly that might not align with how you feel internally? If so, can you describe a specific instance of this?

- **Follow-up**: How do you manage that conflict between your outward and inward emotions?

(AI) *Reflecting on your work, when do you feel you have been at your best in navigating the emotional demands? (Probing: What was it about that situation that allowed you to feel at your best, and how would you describe this feeling (empowered/ resilient /rewarding?) (probe) what do they mean by the descriptive word if given?

Questions about gender dynamics and emotional labour (10 mins)

***** How, if at all, do you think gender dynamics influence your work with male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

*Are there any specific challenges that you believe are related to your gender in this role?

***** How do you feel that being a female affects how you manage emotions/ display emotions in these situations? If so, how?

(AI)*Can you share a time when you felt that being a female practitioner positively influenced your work with male perpetrators? (**Follow-up**: What strengths or qualities did you bring to the situation that made it a positive experience?)

* What difference do you think it makes to the male perpetrator of domestic abuse that you are supervising – that you are female?

Questions about challenges (10 mins)

***** What do you find most challenging when supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse?

*****Do these challenges vary depending on the individual or are there consistent themes?

(probing) *****Are there any behaviours or attitudes from male DA perpetrators that impact the challenges you face in supervision- (probe what is it that makes supervision particularly difficult?)

*Can you share an example of a challenging case and how you handled it?

If needed *Within your work, do you think male perpetrators perceive or react to your authority differently because of your gender?

Questions about coping mechanisms for emotional labour (10 mins)

*What strategies or techniques do you use to cope with the emotional demands of supervising male perpetrators of domestic abuse? (Follow up: Can you describe a time where one of these strategies was particularly helpful/effective).

*****Have you found certain approaches to be ineffective in managing this emotional work? (Ie if peer support, supervision, external resources, organisational support has been identified – why do you think this has not been effective?)

*How do you manage your emotions during challenging or emotionally intense supervision sessions? (**Follow-up**: Are there any techniques you rely on in the moment to stay calm or maintain control?)

* If you could share advice with a new female probation practitioner working with male perpetrators, what would you recommend they do to maintain emotional well-being in their role?

Questions about the Future/ Looking forward

- What changes could be made, either personally or at an organisational level, to ensure female probation practitioners are well-supported in handling the emotional demands of this work?

Closing interview

Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you feel is important/ would like to add about your experience of working with male DA perpetrators?

*Thank the participant for their time and insights

*Next Steps: Briefly explain what will happen next with the research (e.g., analysis, write up 7Th Oct)

*Signpost to stop recording and also remind of resources available within interview participation sheet

Appendix F: Information Sheet for interview participants

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Participant information sheet

Through a gendered lens: ***The experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse and the emotional impact of their work*****.**

Researcher: Nicola Johnston. **Email:** Nj369@cam.ac.uk, **Work email:** nicola.johnston1@justice.gov.uk **Telephone:** 07583681757

Who am I?

I am currently in year two of my Masters course at Cambridge University, studying Applied Criminology, Penology and Management. As well as studying, I also work for His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) as a Senior Probation Officer. I have previously worked as a Probation Officer, Probation Service Officer within both the CRC and NPS. For this research I am operating as a student and not an employee of HMPPS.

Why am I doing this study?

Background:

- **Domestic abuse is widespread**, affecting an estimated 2.2 million adult victims within England and Wales in 2023. Women are shown to be disproportionately affected, forming 73.5% of the recorded victim population for domestic abuse-related crimes in 2023.
- **Those responsible for this abuse account for around 1/3** of the overall Probation Service caseload, whereby 74,996 individuals supervised by the Probation Service in 2023 were known to have perpetrated domestic abuse against a current or former partner, 96% of whom were male.
- **The predominance of women in the probation workforce** means that they will frequently supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse. The latest HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Workforce Statistics Bulletin shows that 75.7% of staff employed by the service are women.
- **Research undertaken with female practitioners** within other arenas of the Criminal Justice System (CJS), including police and prison suggest that gender can impact on their experiences of their work. Similarly, studies have shown gender to present challenges for female probation practitioners in their work with male domestic abuse perpetrators, however current understandings of the emotional impact on female PPs engaged in this challenging work are limited.
- **Probation workers have to perform emotional labour** to do their job effectively and is an inherent element of probation work because staff frequently use emotions in their everyday interactions. However, with that comes potential adverse effects for probation staff.

I am interested in understanding the experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse, and how this work emotionally impacts on staff. I am particularly interested in how gender dynamics may influence this emotional work, the challenges that female practitioners face, and strategies that are used to cope with emotional labour in this challenging work.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve one semi- structured interview, which should last approximately 60 mins. The first part of the interview will involve showing you a word cloud, developed from survey responses that asked practitioners to describe in ***one-word*** their experience of working with male domestic abuse perpetrators. You will meet me in person; and I am able to arrange this meeting at a time and probation office that suits you. The interview will be recorded so that I can listen back afterwards and recall what was said. You will be anonymised as part of the research, so that no-one will be able to identify you in the work that I produce.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to, and this will not disadvantage you in any way.

Are there any risks involved in taking part?

During the interview you will be asked to discuss your background and your experiences of supervising male domestic abuse perpetrators. Some questions might also ask you to think about things you have not previously thought about or choose not to think about. Depending on your circumstances, this may be upsetting. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to, and time will be given at the end of the interview to discuss anything you may have found difficult or upsetting. If you find the interview distressing, you can stop at any time to take a break. I have included a list of support and other information that you would have access to in case you find this helpful.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will not be any financial benefit for taking part in the study, however by engaging with the research you will contribute towards current understandings of the emotional work and challenges that female probation practitioners face when supervising this increasing cohort. Your experiences will be invaluable and will contribute towards an area where limited research has been undertaken in Probation thus far. The research also aims to better inform probation practice and staff support structures.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

The information you share in the interview will normally be kept completely confidential. Any insights gained about your working practices will not be discussed with other colleagues within the PDU. This means that your personal work methods, observations, and experiences will remain confidential and will not be shared outside of the research team.

However, I will be required to pass on *anything you say that implies a threat/risk to yourself or to others.* Likewise, if during the course of the study, I identify any practice *that could impact on the safety of others/ does not adhere to HMPPS' professional standards,* this information may need to be raised with a relevant Senior Probation Officer (SPO). This is to ensure that any issues can be addressed promptly and appropriately to ensure the safety of others and uphold professional standards within the PDU.

In all other circumstances, everything you say will remain confidential. The interviews will be recorded, then transcribed. Once they are transcribed the recording will be deleted. All transcripts will be held securely and destroyed following completion of the study. The only people who will have access to your interview are myself and my supervisor.

Will my contribution remain anonymous?

If you agree to the researcher using quotes from the interviews, this will be done in such a way that you cannot be identified. I will provide you with a different name (pseudonym) and details will be changed to limit any possibility of you being identified.

How do I agree to take part in the study?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete a consent form, confirming that you understand what the study involves and have had a chance to discuss any questions with me. You will also be asked to confirm whether you are happy for the interview to be recorded.

What if I want to withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop an interview or decline to take part in any further interviews at any stage during the research process, without having to explain why you want to stop. You can insist that the content of your interviews so far is excluded from the study, without having to explain why. You may make this decision at

any point up until 7th October 2024. This is when I will begin writing the research findings. If you make this decision, I will destroy your interview recording and any associated material. This decision will not be held against you or disadvantage you in any way.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Initially your interview will be used as part of my thesis, however your contribution may be used in future articles, should my work be published. Following completion of the study, its findings may be used to develop briefings, presentations and/or training materials to be shared with the relevant HMPPS departments.

What if I want more information about the study, or want to complain about some aspect of it?

This study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge and approved by the HMPPS National Research Committee. If you would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me. If you wish to speak to someone else about the research, my supervisor would be appropriate and can be contacted by email: Dr Jane Dominey - jad78@cam.ac.uk. If you would like further information about its ethics, or if you want to complain about some aspect of the research, you should, write initially to Dr Jane Dominey, who will forward your comments to relevant person on the Ethics Committee.

Thank you for your time in reading this information. If you have any further questions at any stage of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Wellbeing and Support: useful information

During this study, I will not ask you any direct questions relating to your personal experiences. However, given the prevalence of domestic abuse within society I recognise that some staff may be experiencing or will have experienced domestic abuse previously. Talking about this topic or the emotions you feel as a result of your work may be upsetting or difficult for you afterwards. It may be helpful to speak with work colleagues, friends, or family for additional support. However, I have included useful information and contacts available, which you may also find helpful.

PAM Assist (Employee Assistance Programme)
Telephone : Available 24/7, 365 days a year.: **0800 019 8988.**
Online: Further information can be accessed from:
https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/hr/support-and-wellbeing/employee-assistance-programme/

Mind
Infoline: 0300 123 3393
Website: Helplines | Mind - Mind

NHS
Online: Mental health services - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Staff Support - HMPPS Wellbeing Directory
(Please click on the below links for further information)

HMPPS | (workplacewellbeing.com)

Wellbeing and support (sharepoint.com)

Domestic abuse policy framework

(Please click on the below link for further information)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1106675/domestic-abuse-pf.pdf

Domestic Abuse – guidance and support for employees and their managers

(Please click on the below link for further information)

Domestic Abuse – guidance and support for employees and their managers (justice.gov.uk)

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form (Interviews).

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Project title: Through a gendered lens: The experiences of female probation practitioners who supervise male perpetrators of domestic abuse and the emotional impact of their work.

Researcher: Nicola Johnston, Senior Probation Officer, Birmingham, North, East and Solihull, Probation Delivery Unit and MSt Applied Criminology, Penology and Management.

Researchers contact details: Nicola Johnston. Telephone: 07583681757 Email: Nj369@cam.ac.uk

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please tick the boxes if you agree with the following four statements.

Please note that these are essential conditions for the interview to take place.

	YES
1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the study (or have had it read out to me and have understood it) and have had a chance to ask questions.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I do not have to answer any of the researcher's questions if I do not wish to, and **that I can withdraw. at any time**, without giving reasons, until 7th October 2024.	☐
3. I agree to take part in the study, which means being interviewed by the researcher.	☐
4. I understand that my interview transcript may be viewed by the researcher or their Mst supervisor, but all personal information will be anonymised and kept confidential.	☐

Please answer YES or NO to the following four statements by ticking the appropriate box.

	YES	**NO**
4. I agree to our interview being recorded.	☐	☐
5. I agree to let the researcher use **written quotes** from our interviews and conversations, as long as this is done in such a way that all reasonable steps are taken to remove the possibility of me being identified.	☐	☐
6. I agree to let the researcher use anonymised quotes in any future learning materials that might be developed following the completion of the research.	☐	☐
7. I understand that if any practice concerns are identified during the study, that could potentially impact on the safety of others/ do not adhere to HMPPS' professional standards, that this may be reported to a relevant Senior Probation Officer (SPO).	☐	☐

Name of participant: ----------

Date: ----------

Signature: ----------

Name of researcher: ----------

Date: ----------

Signature: ----------