Impact of Police Cuts on Missing Person Investigations

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Forward

The Centre for the Study of Missing Persons (CSMP) is a specialist research centre within the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, at the University of Portsmouth. The Centre was founded in April 2012, in partnership with the charity Missing People, to accommodate the growing interest in the field of missing persons. It aims to provide a clear focus for research, knowledge transfer and educational provision to academics, professionals in this community and relatives of missing people. The Centre also aims to function as a one-stop knowledge resource which researchers and other interested parties can access and use to communicate and exchange knowledge about missing persons.

The authors of this report would like to thank all that responded to the survey and provided honest and detailed information to make this possible. We would also like to thank Police Officers and Staff up and down the Country that do their best every day with limited resources and often in difficult circumstances to make things a little bit better for people and make a difference.

"The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better."
— Robert F. Kennedy

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Executive Summary

For several decades, the Police Service of England and Wales grew by nearly a third whilst the population grew only by 10%. This sustained growth ended in 2010 when a spending review led by the Government called for a 20 per cent cut. As of March 2018, there are 21,330 fewer Police Officers than on 31 March 2010; a reduction of 15%. Over the same period, the number of civilian staff fell by 21%, which gives a total reduction 18% of the workforce between 2010 -2018 (Dodd, 2018).

In contrast, missing person reports represent one of the biggest demands placed upon Policing with certain investigations can be resources intensive and lengthy (Shalev Greene & Pakes, 2013; NCA, 2016, 2020). This high demand sits against the backdrop of unprecedented cuts on police numbers. Currently, it is unknown how such dramatic changes in police forces impacted on missing persons investigations, which is the aim of this study.

Following ethical approval by the University of Portsmouth FHSS ethics committee, the study used an online survey to examine police officers and police staffs' perceptions of (1) training needs; (2) demand versus availability of resources; (3) impact of cuts on quality of investigations; and (4) impact of cuts on staff's wellbeing. Data was collected from 373 police officers and police staff working on missing person investigations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The findings show a lack of training around missing persons investigations is causing officers concern at all ranks. A significant concern is that 21% (n=78) of people investigating missing persons have not had any training at all, and most of the training is done via E - learning / NCALT, which is contrary to Police Officers training preferences. Furthermore, a large majority (50% n=164) have not had training for over 2 years and only 23% (n=83) of people had received any specific missing person training.

Participants believe that high demand outstrips resources consistently in every department for almost every crime type. However, this is particularly acute for missing person investigations. It leads, quite correctly, to strategic direction given around prioritising resources aligned to threat, risk, and harm. This research has shown that

current demand levels are not sustainable, with some officers working over 30 missing person cases per week. This level of pressure and workload is not manageable and can put missing persons at risk of harm.

The research has also added to previous literature around missing person teams and getting the correct risk assessment and investigative actions first time. There is overwhelming support, by participants, for forces to have a dedicated missing person team, and has also significantly shown that having a dedicated, specifically trained team alleviates the pressure felt by front line resources. This pressure is illustrated by the clear perception that not only has the quality of investigations decreased due to competing demands and lack of resources, but supervisory oversight has also been affected. It is of particular concern that individuals and forces alike are taking a large risk around safeguarding vulnerable people and falling short of any future scrutiny or liability.

The findings show that participants consider early identification and intervention with vulnerable people either sole agency or multi-agency is effective at managing future demand and minimising harm by getting 'upstream' of the problem. However, a clear majority of participants felt that their force did not have enough resources to be proactive in this way and are merely reacting to demand in a 'revolving door' fashion. Participants from forces with a missing person team were less likely to have this view. Therefore, having a dedicated team seems to lessen the impact of cuts and lack of resources.

It cannot be underestimated that the culmination of excess demand, reduction in resources and lack of training seem to have an adverse impact on Police Officer wellbeing, particularly those in a supervisory rank. According to the findings, participants in supervisory ranks are at increased risk of 'burnout' largely because they have the pressure and responsibility of constantly reprioritising risk, demand, and resources, and will be ultimately accountable for any inaction or harm that has occurred.

In conclusion, the study shows that, according to participants, the impact of police cuts on missing person investigations has been significant. Budget cuts and reduced resources have negatively impacted departments and individuals alike both in terms of investigative

quality and staff wellbeing. This study has found that there is a realistic possibility and serious concern around the potential for harm to occur if the elements of excessive demand, reduced resources, lack of training are not adequately addressed.

Therefore, the authors make the following recommendations:

<u>Training</u>

- To review the current training given to Officers and Staff and to be cognisant of the preferred style of face to face and case studies. The focus on the training should be about correct assessment of risk and then how to investigate the episode using the APP as the foundation/ tool to assist.
- To create 'quick guides / or checklists' for officers using the APP as the foundation. This will ensure consistency of approach and utilise the knowledge within APP.
- To establish a rolling programme of training / inputs at every level of the organisation that highlight the need to treat missing cases individually and as investigations.

<u>Demand vs Resources</u>

- Forces should review their approach to missing persons to ensure early intervention and prevention for repeat missing persons (especially for repeat missing children) is in place and being delivered alongside a partnership approach.
- A review into how missing person investigations are conducted in Police force areas should be undertaken and consideration given to investment in a team or group of specialists to tackle the vulnerability. Investment in this area may have a positive impact in relieving the stress on uniform response, but more fundamentally have an impact with early intervention and learning thereby reducing demand in the long term.
- Continue to allocate resources in line with risk assessment. However, the response should be scalable and involve professional judgement and management oversight regularly of risk and of resource allocation to ensure the correct and proportionate response.

Quality of Investigations

- Debriefs should be conducted for any missing persons that come to harm (death or serious injury) in order to capture any good practice and / or learning to inform future investigations.
- Need to embed the use of APP into daily business and have a mechanism available to dip sample and check that APP or at least the principles are being used.
- Officers & Staff should be actively encouraged to develop an investigative mindset from the start of the investigation and to have an open mind and be mindful of possible areas of vulnerability especially with the lower risk cases.

Impact of cuts / lack of resources on wellbeing / morale

- To further understand the cumulative effect of pressures faced by Officers & Staff, in particular pressures faced by those in supervisory roles. This could be combined with current wellbeing work that is ongoing in most force areas.
- To ensure that those officers new to supervisory positions or 'acting up' have a more detailed input around missing person investigations and dealing with risk assessment in order to support them in their role by giving them the confidence around investigations and thereby relieving some anxiety.
- Reward and recognition for missing persons investigations should be considered, as this will not only disseminate best practice, but also foster a culture that missing persons cases are important thereby combating any empathy or demand fatigue.

Introduction

Over several decades, the Police Service of England and Wales grew by nearly a third whilst the population grew only by 10%. This sustained growth ended in 2010 when a spending review led by the Government called for a 20 per cent cut. As of March 2018, there are 21,330 fewer Police Officers than on 31 March 2010, a reduction of 15%. Over the same period, the number of civilian staff fell by 21%, so this gives a total reduction 18% of the workforce between 2010 -2018 (Dodd, 2018).

In addition, the core issue of demand upon policing services is also evolving at pace. New threats of terrorism, cyber related crime and sexual exploitation of children are moving policing delivery away from the more traditional roles that have defined much of policing services for so long and place a new expectation on the service to respond more flexibly (Loveday, 2015). Police forces have responded to budgetary pressures in different ways. Some have disbanded dedicated teams that investigated missing person cases and now rely on general policing to cover the shortfall. Furthermore, there has been a moving away from face-to-face based training to remote online 'E -training'. There has also been reliance on officers reading and self-learning the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) in a bid to increase efficiency. This combination of a lack of specialist skills to investigate, increased calls for service on front line officers and a reduction in training leads to a workforce trying to do their best in challenging circumstances.

Missing person reports represent one of the biggest demands placed upon Policing and in turn other organisations as not only are they voluminous. However, certain investigations can be resources intensive and lengthy (Fyfe, Stevenson & Woolnough, 2014). In the UK alone, NCA statistics show that from 2012-13 to 2019-2020 the number of missing related calls in England, Wales & Scotland was consistently over 300,000 per annum (NCA, 2014, 2016, 2021). This equates to one person in the UK is reported missing every 90 seconds. 1 in 200 children go missing each year compared to 1 in 500 adults. A College of Policing review into demand (College of Policing, 2015) showed a typical Force will deal with at least 12 missing person

reports per day, 9 of which will be medium risk and take up to 18 hours of Police time (Shalev Greene & Pakes, 2013).

This demand is placed largely on uniform response officers which are often the most inexperienced members of staff. People go missing for a variety of reasons, and therefore some of the investigations are complex (Biehal & Wade, 2000) and individuality of circumstances highlights the need for officers and staff with the correct skills, knowledge and ability to correctly identify the risk associated with each case and then to provide a proportionate response and investigation. It is also of note that missing persons are only a fraction of the wide range of incidents that officers respond to daily, therefore it is crucial that they are given the tools and training to effectively prioritise the incoming demand and make informed decisions.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to critically evaluate police officers and police staffs' perception of the impact of Police budget cuts on missing person investigations. The study has four objectives (1) to assess training needs; (2) to understand demand versus availability of resources; (3) to evaluate the impact of cuts on quality of investigations; and (4) To examine the impact of cuts on staff's wellbeing.

Method

The method chosen to obtain data for this study was an online survey in order to get both qualitative and quantitative data from a specified group of people - i.e. those that are involved directly with missing person investigations. The questionnaire utilised a common platform called the Bristol Online Survey, now knows as Online Surveys, which is widely recognised as an effective tool due to the ease of use and low cost. The survey was distributed to all Forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and was open from 7th Feb 2019 - 11th March 2019 (Evans2005).

The survey consisted of open and closed questions, Likert scale questions and an opportunity for free narrative. This allowed respondents to complete the survey in a short amount of time

as possible as it was recognised that time to complete a survey would be a key factor in increasing the overall response rate. The Likert scale questions were used as it allows dependents to qualify their opinion by placing a value such as strongly agree to strongly disagree to their answers (McLeod et al, 2011).

The survey and an invitation letter were delivered electronically to gate keepers who were serving senior police officers. The snowball or chain sampling method was then utilised to ensure maximum reach of the survey. This was achieved by inviting the Chief Constables to circulate the invitation of the survey throughout their organisations. The population of the study can therefore be described as Police Officers and Police Staff who were employed by the Police at the time of the study and who had a direct link to missing person investigations.

Thematic analysis as illustrated by Braun & Clarke (2006), was used to explore participants' perceptions of the four objectives. It was considered to be the most appropriate method for this study as it is a qualitative approach that enables an in-depth understanding of the phenomena. It offers a commitment to participants' viewpoints while conducting inquiries with minimum disruption to the natural context of the phenomenon. Thus, reporting of findings can be written in a literary style, rich in participant commentaries (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The coding process started with the broad topics of open narrative responses followed by general themes for each topic followed by sub-themes.

Results

The results are presented using the responses from 373 Police officers and staff from 32 different UK forces (England, Wales & Northern Ireland).

Demographic Background

A total of 32 separate forces responded to the survey. The total number of individual respondents was 373 made up of Police Officers and Staff who are directly involved with missing person investigations.

The majority (55%, n=202) of the respondents were from uniform response 24/7, (see figure 1) which is to be expected given the distribution of roles, which largely deals with the initial missing person investigation.

Figure 1 - Role in Police
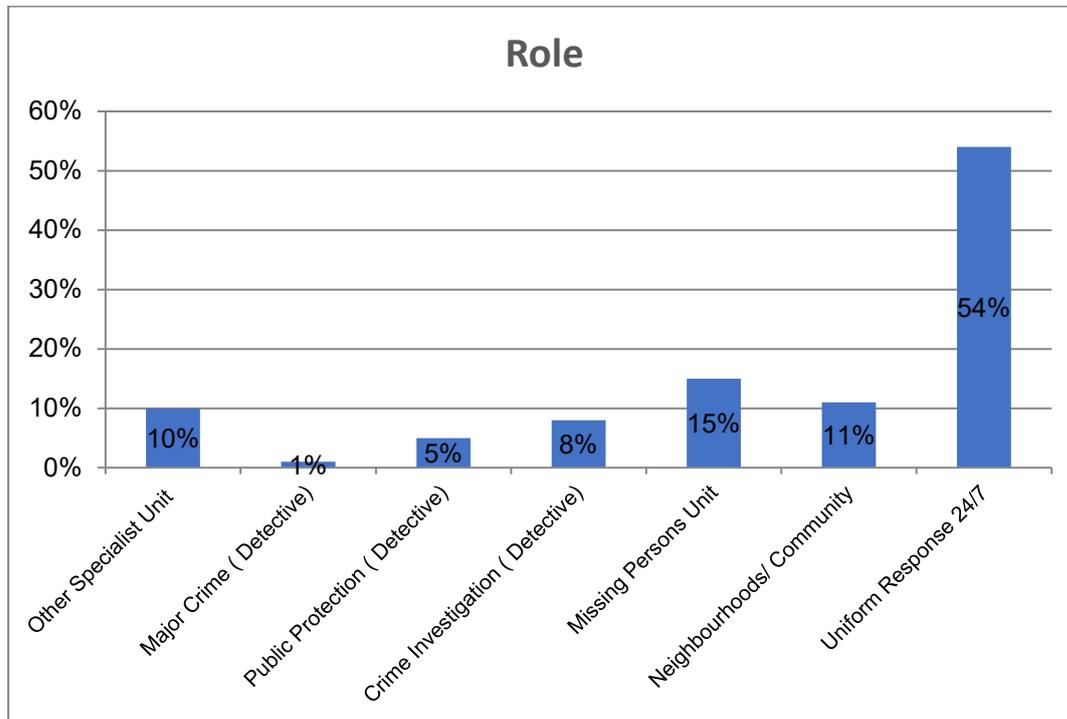
There was a good response across all ranks, and the majority of the responses came from the Police Constable rank with 52% (n=191) (see figure 2). This was followed by the middle manager rank of Inspector/Chief Inspector with 19% (n=71), and then the supervisory rank of Sergeant at 17% (n=63).

Figure 2 – Rank
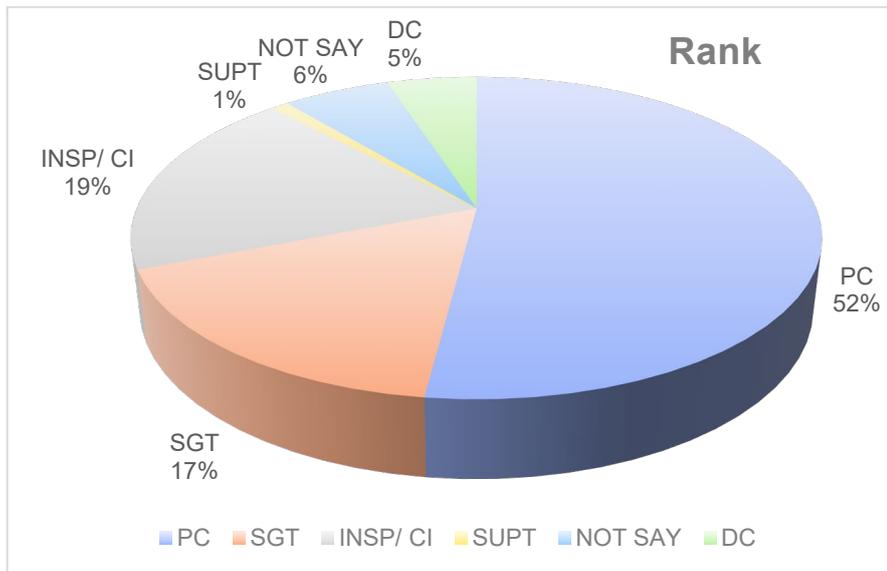
Training

Training within any organisation is the cornerstone of knowledge, skills and understanding and is the foundation and critical for developing officers to apply their skills to modern day Policing (Haberfeld, 2002). In addition to this, we know that complexity of crime is increasing (NPCC, 2018) so now more than ever, training becomes more important. If training is a critical issue within the Police, it is of concern to note that 55%(n=202) of respondents agreed that training around missing person investigations has decreased due to budgetary constraints. Only 14%(n=51) disagreed with this statement.

This supports previous research findings around lack of training from Smith & Shalev Greene (2015) and is indicative that not much progress has been made in this key area of vulnerability. This is particularity concerning given the elements of risk and vulnerability associated with many missing persons and highlights that missing person training is not prioritised or given sufficient support from Police senior leaders.

With cuts in training resources and overall budgets, more Police forces are opting to deliver core training such as missing persons training via online E-learning platforms such as NCALT due to the cost effectiveness and ability not to have the overhead cost of staff to deliver it. Participants were asked what training they have had regarding missing person investigations.

21% (n=78) of respondents had not received any training at all regarding investigating a missing person case. For those that had received training, NCALT is the most common method of training as it features in 58% (n= 214) of responses. It is, however, of concern that across Policing, only 23% (n=83) of respondents have had any specialist training for missing persons investigations. This lack of specific training and reliance on NCALT / E learning is also further illustrated in some narrative comments:

- *"There is a lack of training with regard to mispers and operational experience on front line policing."*

- *"The only training that our Force provided was only in relation to the use of the Compact Missing Persons software that we use, when that was brought in 2012. Delivered by an IT trainer it focused solely on using the software with no element of investigation."*

Out of those that have received some training for missing person investigations, albeit at various levels, 50% (n=164) advised that the training was over 2 years ago whilst only 13% (n=42) were within the last 6 months. Overwhelmingly, people stated that they would benefit from more training around the investigation of missing person cases (see figure 3), with 73% (n=264) stating 'Yes' they would benefit. Most participants (81% n=273) would like face to face training. Only 10% (n=34) stated that their preferred method of training would be NCALT / Online training. This may be because online training takes time to complete and is often done on an individual basis therefore limiting any opportunity for shared learning, discussions, or case studies to consolidate the knowledge (Lauritz, et al 2012).

Figure 3 – Preference of more training

Would like more training

8%

20%

73%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■
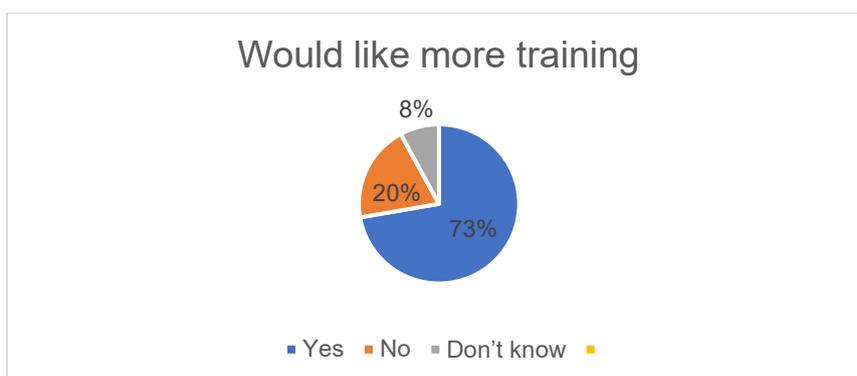
Demand / Resources

It is clear that demand often outweighs resources and that the sale and complicity of Police work is increasing (College of Policing, 2015). Responses around a how many missing person cases are investigated in a typical showed that 68% (n-=251) stated between 1-9 cases. This on the face of it appears to be high. More worryingly, 19%(n=70) worked 10-30 cases per week and 5% (n =18) worked over 30 individual cases per week (see figure 4). This level of constant pressure of workload is not sustainable. It is therefore not a surprise that 45% (n=159) of respondents state that the volume of cases was the biggest or second biggest challenge that they face when dealing with missing person investigations.

Figure 4- Number of cases per week
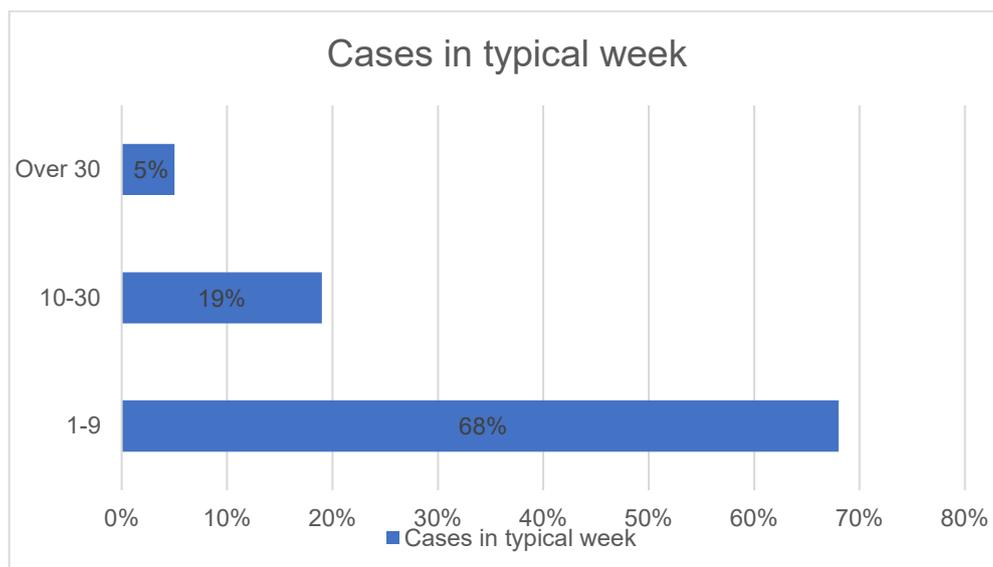
Missing Person Teams

Missing Person Teams are specialist trained officers with experience in dealing with complexities of missing person cases. With the volume of cases so high, it could be argued that a dedicated team could relieve some of the pressure from front line response 24/7officers. With respect to each force having a dedicated missing persons team, 48% (n=179) of respondents advised they have one, 44% (n=164) advised they don't have one and 8% (n=28) did not know (see figure 5).

Figure 5 – Force dedicated team

It was clear that not every force has a dedicated missing person unit. However, 88% (n=322) of respondents stated that each force should have a dedicated missing person team, with 62%(n=226) of these strongly agreeing. This clearly shows the support for a team to not only relieve some of the frontline pressure but also to ensure that the correctly trained resource with the correct skills deals with missing person investigations. The benefits of having a dedicated missing person team and the effect that a dedicated team has on demand were also highlighted by different respondents in some narrative comments:

- *"Having a dedicated missing person unit has helped manage the workload of missing people. I can see that forces who do not have a missing person team, the lack of resources would seriously restrict the level of investigation of the missing case".*

- *"The force invested in an MFH team - in 2016 and this team covers the entire force and as a force we have a dedicated team that has achieved significant results in demand reduction and safeguarding".*

- *"If you look at the amount of people reported and dealt with as missing on a daily basis throughout the force, a dedicated unit is required to allow investigations to be completed properly. Front line staff cannot properly resource all the missing from home reports".*

<u>Resources Available</u>

We have seen that demand and workload is high, and therefore a comparison to the availability of resources was required. The lack of resources and time element was again highlighted as 60%(n=220) agreed that "Due to lack of resources, I do not have enough time to deal with missing persons investigations". This sentiment was reinforced by free text narrative.

- *"We have little to no staff to effectively investigate even high-risk missing persons and if we dedicate an officer to these for a full shift the rest of the team will suffer due to lack of resources to attend outstanding logs".*

- *"We used to have a missing persons team who would do prevent and prepare work around missing persons. The knowledge of some of the children or the children's homes as well as their knowledge of investigations and contact with partner agencies was a fantastic success. They have disbanded this team due to funding so now all their work goes back to the front line who try their best but have competing demands. Missing people is a priority and will always be treated as such but not having the right resources means that they could be missing for longer…. cuts most definitely have consequences."*

We have shown quite clearly that demand outweighs resources, which leads to demand fatigue and we also know that the strategic vision of most forces is geared towards threat, risk, and harm. Therefore, it is possible that only high-risk cases are getting the resources and focus that is needed. This was corroborated as 53% (n=194) of respondents agreed that "In 2019, Police can only really afford to deal with high risk missing persons due to lack of resources available" (see figure 6).

Figure 6- High risk only?
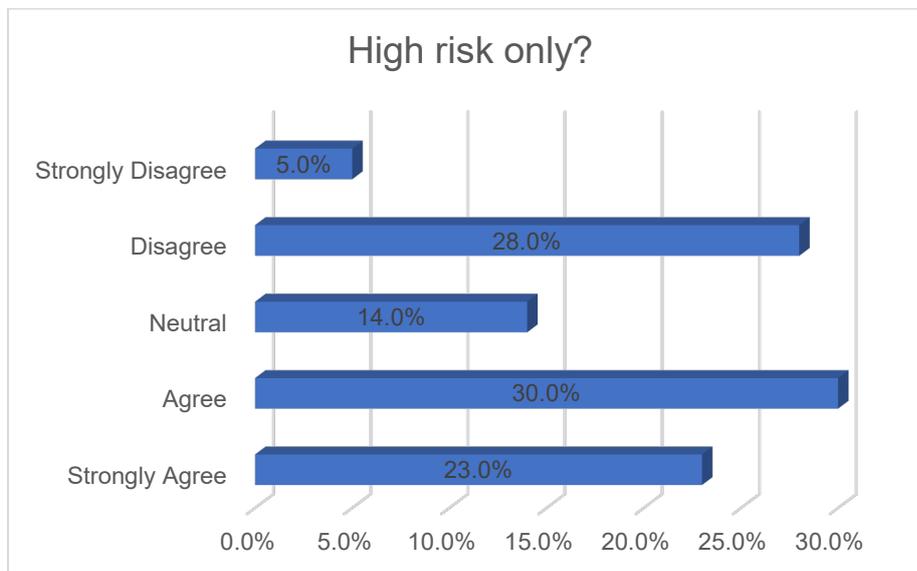
Limited resources are prioritised according to risk and the focus on high risk is evident and further enhanced by some free text narrative that shows that lower risk cases do often not get the resources allocated to them. There is also some degree of demand fatigue with these cases, especially as very few of these come to harm (Newiss, 2006).

- *"High risk cases (quite rightly) get more resources to deal with them (albeit this is generally just one officer), the medium risks are dealt with as and when the highs are completed, standard risk gets little (if any) service".*

- *"Standard risk missing persons are not looked into at all and sit on the computer system until it is reported to us that they have been found. Medium risk missing is allocated one resource who still has other demands on the radio and so are not looked into effectively causing missing persons to be missing for longer. However high-risk missing persons are dealt with effectively but at the expense of other calls coming into the police".*

- *"As with anything deemed High Risk, we will always pull out all the stops and seek to have all available resources on the enquiry, but this inevitably means, the day job is put aside repeatedly causing a snowball effect to officer's workloads."*

- *"High risk missing people do and always have been a priority and are given the resources required - it's the medium/low risk investigations that drop off the side".*

The reduction in officer numbers combined with ever increasing demand around missing persons has led officers to prioritise the higher risk cases while the lower risk cases do not the scrutiny or investigation they potentially need. This is a concern as there may be some more hidden or complex elements of vulnerability that if not correctly assessed at the time, would be missed and therefore the likelihood of harm is increased (Cook, 2019).

With the focus clearly on the higher risk cases, it is reasonable to assume that those dealing with missing person investigations may be concerned about the potential for harm to occur due to some cases not getting the investigation they require. It should be of particular note that 74% (n=268)of those investigating missing person cases felt that "It is only a matter of time before a missing person is harmed due to lack of resources available" (see figure 7).

Figure 7 – Likelihood of Harm
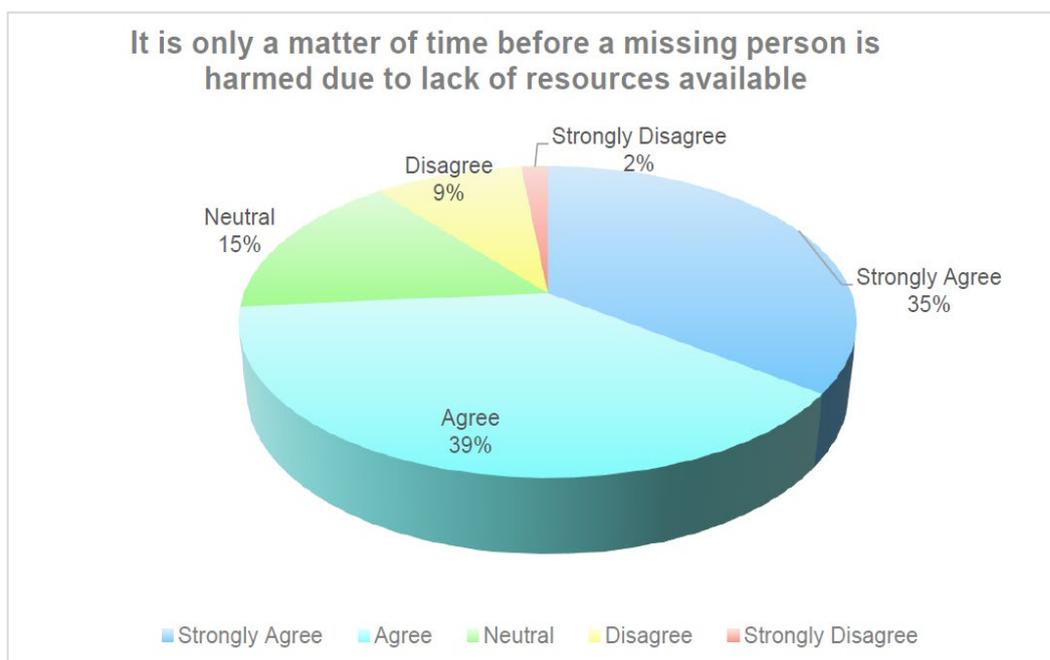
The potential for harm due to lack of resources available was illustrated in narrative comments and shows that there is genuine concern amongst officers about this issue.

- *"The response team that I lead was supposed to operate on a model of over 40 to cover my area. In the last three years this has been cut and some days we only turn out 26 cops. The system is broken, at some point a MFH [Missing From Home] will be subject to serious harm which we could have prevented".*

- *"Due to lack of resources, whilst an officer is supposed to be tasked specifically to look for an mfh [missing from home] the reality is that you try to fit it in whilst meeting demand for grade 1's [emergencies]".*

- *"We simply don't have the officers to look for the majority of "regular mispers [missing persons]" and are really just waiting for them to return the next day"*

Quality of investigation

Police Officer numbers have reduced by approximately 20,000 since 2010, and there has been a reduction in training. Therefore, it stands to reason that the overall quality of investigations has decreased. 63% (n=234) of people investigating missing person cases agreed that "The quality of missing person investigations has decreased since officer numbers have reduced" (see figure 8).

Figure 8 – Decrease in quality of investigation
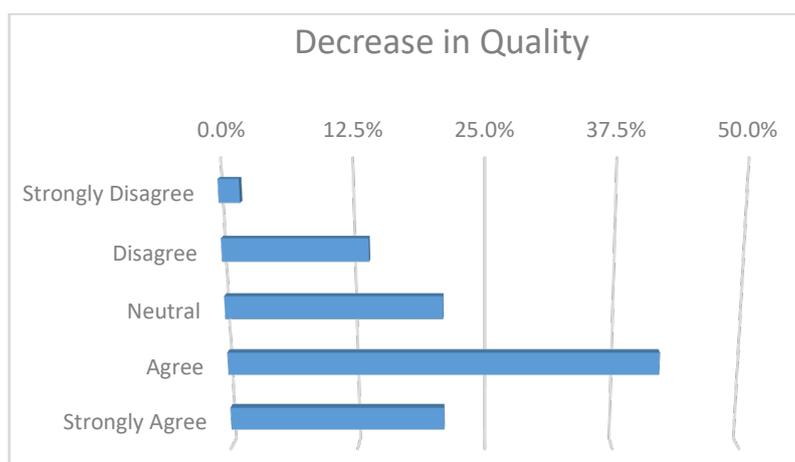
The survey also contained some honest reflections from officers around the quality of investigation and show the level of frustration around not being able to give missing person investigations the time and effort they deserve:

- *"Response officers in the main treat missing person's investigations as a paper exercise, purely to gain brief details, search a room and update minimum details on the system. They don't view it as an opportunity to locate a vulnerable person, appearing to often lack the mindset, skill or drive to do so".*

- *"I cover four market towns and a large rural area surrounding them, often with just one other colleague. I regularly get handed a misper [missing person] to investigate during my tour of duty, but have no chance to make any progress or complete enquiries as I do not get 'written off' by the control room and get diverted to other matters. Prior to the cuts, my area of responsibility would normally be covered by at least five, if not six constables. This meant someone was far more likely to be able to concentrate on the misper [missing person] and leave the other incidents to their colleagues".*

- *"The cuts have had a negative impact on missing persons investigations be it high risk or standard. With the standard risks, we now do the bare minimum ahead of waiting for their ultimate return. We do the interview upon their return, but it is basic and a 'tick in the box' exercise as opposed to the Intel gathering opportunity that it could be. Everything is done to the best that we can but it's weighed against the ever-growing pressure to just get it done and move onto the next job".*

<u>Supervisory Oversight</u>

With a drastic reduction in resources, it clearly puts an extra burden on those in a supervisory position (Sergeant and above). This was evidence by 59% (n=214) of respondents stating that they agreed that "Due to competing demands and lack resources, the supervisory oversight of a missing person investigation has decreased".

Further analysis (see table 1) shows that 70% (n=96) in a supervisory rank (Sergeant and above) agree that due to competing demands and lack of resources, supervisory oversight of a missing person has decreased.

Table 1 – Supervisory rank views

Due to competing demands and lack resources, the supervisory oversight of a missing person investigation has decreased	What is your rank ?						No answer	Totals
	PC	DC	Sgt / DS	Inspector / Chief Inspector	Supt and above	Rather not say		
Strongly Agree	27	1	18	20	0	3	1	70
Agree	69	10	28	29	1	9	0	146
Neutral	44	3	6	7	1	5	0	66
Disagree	43	5	10	13	1	4	2	78
Strongly Disagree	6	1	1	1	0	1	0	10
No answer	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	5
Totals	191	20	63	71	3	22	5	375

$p < 0.05$

Free text narrative about supervisory oversight further illustrates that the focus is on the high-risk aspect of missing persons and included:

- *"The Missing Persons Team was disbanded in April 2018. This saw a significant dip in performance in terms of reviews and oversight of cases. Especially those deemed low and medium. Those that are long term closed are currently not getting reviewed. Simply, when resources are always allocated to highest risk matters the intervention / problem solving and reviewing of filed cases is not able to be completed".*

<u>Early Intervention</u>

With any aspect of vulnerability, identification and early intervention have been proved to be effective at minimising harm. Therefore, it is disappointing that 73% (n=268) of those investigating missing person cases feel that "Due to cuts and reduced officer numbers, my Force does not have the resources to be proactive around early intervention and is merely reactive to repeat missing persons". Free text narrative illustrates that whilst early intervention and proactive approaches are acknowledged as enablers, the lack of resources mean that Police are not able to do this and instead are largely reactive.

- *"I am a Missing from Home Search Manager. There has been little change in the management of missing children from care despite the knowledge we have from Rochdale, Bristol, and Halifax and so on. They are a group of children at high risk of exploitation, and we wait for them to go missing instead of preventing it. I am just surprised more haven't gone permanently missing".*

- *"Police officers do not have enough time to investigate the reasons a person goes missing. By investing time into the reasons why a person repeatedly goes missing is likely to (eventually) reduce the frequency of missing episodes. This, in the long term, would prove to be a worthwhile investment & be more cost effective. Unfortunately, in 2019 police do not have the luxury of time because as soon as a person is found, it's a case of "get on with the next job" to keep the job queues down".*

Part of the early intervention strategy is that of identification of vulnerability. The best indicator of future behaviour is that of past behaviour. Therefore, it is vital that the Police debrief missing episodes and learn from past incidents. It is of note and concern that 70% (n=257) of those investigating missing episodes feel that ''Officers no longer have the time to debrief and learn from missing person investigations".

- *"Due to a lack of resources officers do not have the time to thoroughly investigate. Once a misper [missing person] is located they will immediately move on without completing comprehensive return sheets. We are missing opportunities for prevention and early location of repeat mispers [missing persons] due to poor recording".*

When the previous elements of discussion are combined, they offer a holistic picture of staff's perceptions of the budget cuts on missing person investigations. It is therefore not surprising that 76% (n=274) of respondents stated that "The impact of budget cuts and reduction of resources since 2010 has had a negative impact for missing person investigations" (see figure 9).

Figure 9 – Impact of budget cuts
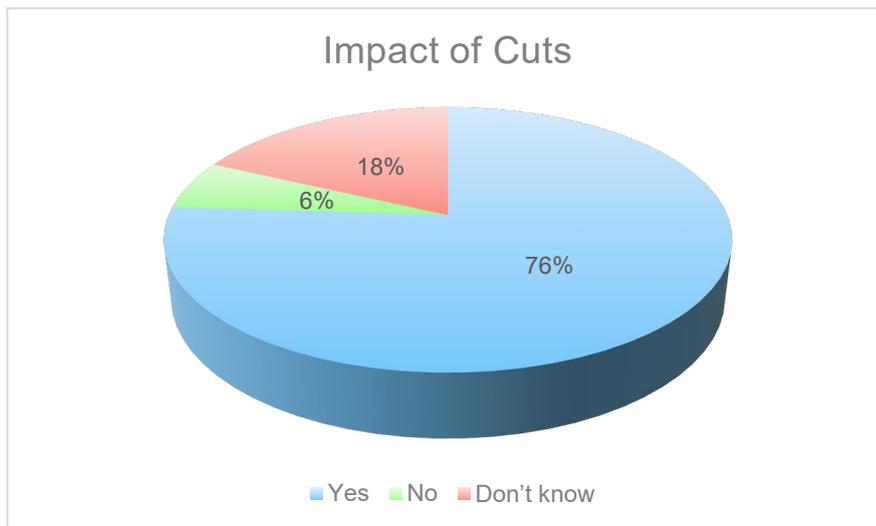
Use of Authorised Professional Practice (APP)

The College of Policing published Authorised Professional Practice (APP) in an attempt to standardise aspects of Placing across the UK. The APP lays out what an investigation should look like and in addition is the standard that Police Officers will be held to account by for any legal proceedings or conduct investigations. It is therefore of concern that only 35% (n=127) advised that they used APP when investigating missing persons. 37% (n=134) stated that they did not, and a further 28% (n=102) stated that they did not know. The 'did not know' response should be viewed as a negative, as officers will either know or use the APP or not. Therefore, we can say that 63% (n=236) of people dealing with missing person cases do not use the College of Policing Authorised professional Practice (APP).

The use of APP was cross tabulated with role and it is clear that response officers 24/7 (those most likely to attend in first instance) do not use APP whilst missing person units and other specialist departments are more likely to use APP (see table 2).

Table 2 – Use of APP

| Do you use the Authorised Professional Practice (APP) when investigation missing persons?	What is your role within force ?							No answer	Totals
	Uniform Response 24/7	Neighbourhoods / Community	Missing Persons Unit	Crime Investigation (Detective)	Public Protection (Detective)	Major Crime (Detective)	Other Specialist unit		
Yes	59	9	30	8	12	0	15	1	134
No	82	15	14	13	4	1	10	0	139
Dont' know	59	13	10	8	1	1	11	0	103
No answer	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	2	11
Totals	202	39	56	30	18	2	37	3	387

$p < 0.05$

Personal impact on officers

The culmination of excess demand reduced resources, reduction in training and then a lack of use of APP is bound to have personal impact on officers and are clear occupational stressors (Coman et al, 1991). Wellbeing is high on the agenda for every Police Force and so the personal impact on officers when dealing with missing persons cases was surveyed. 55% (n=211) agree that as direct result of cuts/reduction in officers, they often worry about misconduct / liability when dealing with missing person cases.

In addition to the cumulative effect already mentioned, the ever-present concern around misconduct / liability add to the personal impact on wellbeing. This was particularly clear with 77% (n=284) of those investigating missing persons stating that "Police cuts / lack of resources has had a negative impact on my wellbeing / morale (see figure 10).

Figure 10 – Cuts and impact on wellbeing/ morale
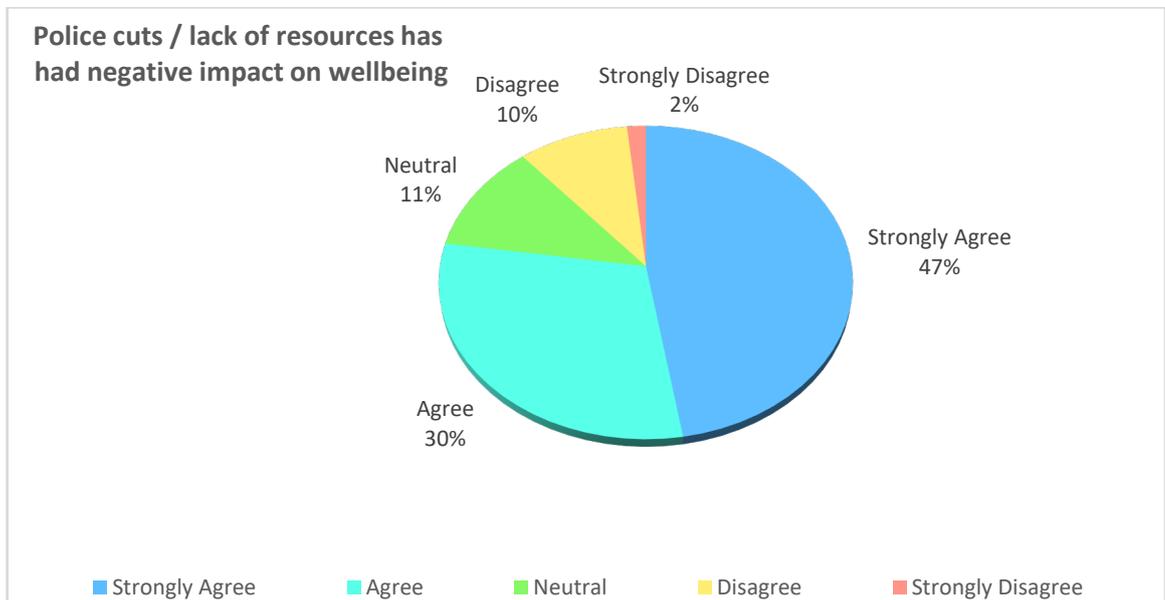
With regard to rank and wellbeing, it is clear that those in supervisory roles (Sergeants and above) are particularly feeling the pressure as 88% (n=105) of supervisors stated that cuts/lack of resources has had a negative impact on their wellbeing / morale (see table 3).

Table 3- Impact on wellbeing / morale by rank

Police cuts/ lack of resources has had a negative impact on my wellbeing / morale

Police cuts/ lack of resources has had a negative impact on my wellbeing / morale	What is your rank ?						No answer	Totals
	PC	DC	Sgt / DS	Inspector / Chief Inspector	Supt and above	Rather not say		
Strongly Agree	91	9	37	26	1	9	1	174
Agree	57	6	18	23	0	7	1	112
Neutral	22	3	5	11	0	1	0	42
Disagree	17	2	2	9	1	4	0	35
Strongly Disagree	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	6
No answer	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	6
Totals	191	20	63	71	3	22	5	375

$p < 0.05$

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to critically examine Police Officers perceptions of the impact of police cuts to missing person investigations. The study used an online survey to examine police officers and police staffs' perceptions of (1) training needs; (2) demand versus availability of resources; (3) impact of cuts on quality of investigations; and (4) impact of cuts on staff's wellbeing. Data was collected from 373 police officers and police staff working on missing person investigations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The study has shown that a lack of training around missing persons investigations is causing officers concern at all ranks. A significant concern is that 20% of people investigating missing persons have not had any training at all, and only 16% of people had received any specific missing person training. It is also of concern that the vast majority of training is done via E - learning / NCALT, which is contrary to Police Officers training preferences as online training limits cross pollination of learning and discussion.

Regarding demand and resources, it is clear that demand outstrips resources consistently in every department for almost every crime type, however this is particularly acute for missing person investigations. This leads quite correctly to strategic direction given around prioritising resources aligned to threat, risk, and harm. This research has clearly shown that current demand levels are not sustainable, with some officers working over 30 missing person cases per week. This level of pressure and workload is not manageable and therefore unsurprisingly just under three quarters of all people investigating missing persons think that "It is only a matter of time before a missing person is harmed due to lack of resources available".

The research has also added to previous literature around missing person teams and getting the correct risk assessment and investigative actions first time. There is overwhelming support for forces to have a dedicated missing person team, and has also significantly shown that having a dedicated, specifically trained team alleviates the pressure felt by front line resources. This pressure is illustrated by the clear perception by those investigating missing persons, that not only has the quality of investigations deceased due to competing demands

and lack of resources, but moreover supervisory oversight has also been affected. When this is overlaid with the lack of use and adherence to the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice, with a large proportion of those officers that first attend not using it, it is of particular concern that individuals and forces alike are taking a large risk around safeguarding vulnerable people and falling short of any future scrutiny or liability.

The study through existing research, has showed that early identification and intervention with vulnerable people either sole agency or multi agency is effective at managing future demand and minimising harm by getting 'upstream' of the problem. However, a clear majority of those investigating missing persons felt that their force did not have enough resources to be proactive in this way and are merely reacting to demand in a 'revolving door' fashion.

It cannot be understated that the culmination of excess demand, reduction in resources and lack of training has combined to have an adverse impact on Police Officer wellbeing, and in particular those in a supervisory rank. It is clear from this study that supervisory ranks are at increased risk of 'burnout' largely due to the pressure and responsibility of constantly reprioritising risk, demand and resources, and will be ultimately accountable for any inaction or harm that has occurred (Greenglass et al., 1998).

In conclusion, the impact of police cuts on missing person investigations has been significant. Budget cuts and reduced resources have negatively impacted departments and individuals alike both in terms of investigative quality and staff wellbeing. This research has found that there is a realistic possibility and serious concern around the potential for harm to occur if the elements of excessive demand, reduced resources, lack of training are not adequately addressed as each element with small failures when combined creates a 'swiss cheese model' of systemic failure (Reason, 2000).

Recommendations for Police forces

Training

- To review the current training given to Officers and Staff and to be cognisant of the preferred style of face to face and case studies. The focus on the training should be

about correct assessment of risk and then how to investigate the episode using the APP as the foundation/ tool to assist.

- To create 'quick guides / or checklists' for officers using the APP as the foundation. This will ensure consistency of approach and utilise the knowledge within APP.
- To establish a rolling programme of training / inputs at every level of the organisation that highlight the need to treat missing cases individually and as investigations.

Demand vs Resources

- Forces should review their approach to missing persons to ensure early intervention and prevention for repeat missing persons (especially for repeat missing children) is in place and being delivered alongside a partnership approach.
- A review into how missing person investigations are conducted in Police force areas should be undertaken and consideration given to investment in a team or group of specialists to tackle the vulnerability. Investment in this area may have a positive impact in relieving the stress on uniform response, but more fundamentally have an impact with early intervention and learning thereby reducing demand in the long term.
- Continue to allocate resources in line with risk assessment. However, the response should be scalable and involve professional judgement and management oversight regularly of risk and of resource allocation to ensure the correct and proportionate response.

Quality of Investigations

- Debriefs should be conducted for any missing persons that come to harm (death or serious injury) in order to capture any good practice and / or learning to inform future investigations.
- Need to embed the use of APP into daily business and have a mechanism available to dip sample and check that APP or at least the principles are being used.

- Officers & Staff should be actively encouraged to develop an investigative mindset from the start of the investigation and to have an open mind and be mindful of possible areas of vulnerability especially with the lower risk cases.

Impact of cuts / lack of resources on wellbeing / morale

- To further understand the cumulative effect of pressures faced by Officers & Staff, in particular pressures faced by those in supervisory roles. This could be combined with current wellbeing work that is ongoing in most force areas.
- To ensure that those officers new to supervisory positions or 'acting up' have a more detailed input around missing person investigations and dealing with risk assessment in order to support them in their role by giving them the confidence around investigations and thereby relieving some anxiety.
- Reward and recognition for missing persons investigations should be considered, as this will not only disseminate best practice, but also foster a culture that missing persons cases are important thereby combating any empathy or demand fatigue.

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