

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Burnout among British Police Officers

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Burnout is defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced efficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). With burnout becoming increasingly prevalent within policing, this study aimed to expand awareness by exploring the lived experience of this syndrome for serving officers. Utilising a qualitative approach, data was derived from five participants using semi-structured interviews and an interpretative phenomenological methodology (IPA) for analysis. Six categories of themes emerged: perceived causes, personal impact factors, experiencing burnout, changed feelings and behaviour, the underlying meaning, and learning derived from the experience. Participants perceived organisational issues as the main cause of their burnout. They also described other aspects of their experience which contributed towards their long-term suffering. The relationship between burnout and spiritual crisis is discussed, an area rarely explored, but one that provides rich material for those focused on burnout research. It is hoped that this study will help inform work-based solutions and provide a platform for future investigation.

Keywords: police burnout, value dissonance, policing culture, spiritual crisis

As a police sergeant and work-based coach, I was inspired to conduct this research in order to delve deeper into the fundamental causes of burnout. I wanted to provide a different perspective and, as my studies were predominantly within the realm of transpersonal psychology, I hoped to explore any potential connection between burnout and spiritual crisis. Despite a substantial body of burnout research (e.g., Alarcon, 2011; Queirós et al., 2020),

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studies conducted in the context of spiritual crisis were rare, especially within policing. This presented a gap in the data that indicated value in conducting this exploratory study.

Policing is a stressful and dangerous occupation (Basinska et al., 2014; Queirós et al., 2020; Violanti et al., 2018). Aside from potential injury, officers contend with varying pressures, from repeated trauma to public criticism (Brewin et al., 2022; Mourtgos et al., 2022). To exacerbate issues, rising expectations and diminishing resources have caused organisations to reach crisis point, with the current situation being proclaimed by the National Police Federation as “soul destroying” for officers (Apter, 2020). Not surprisingly, officers are becoming increasingly disillusioned and organisations are witnessing higher levels of stress-related sickness and suicide (Cartwright & Roach, 2021; Queirós et al., 2020; Violanti et al., 2013). Of further concern is a rise in resignations (Charman & Bennett, 2021; Hargreaves et al., 2017), with 11% of respondents to a recent survey indicating that they intended to leave policing, citing morale and ill-health amongst the main reasons (Boag-Munroe, 2019). Crucially, these factors will impact on organisational performance (Kop et al., 1999; Queirós et al., 2020). Urgent solutions are now needed. Not least, in my opinion, is the provision of greater wellbeing support.

Early qualitative research led to the development of theories suggesting that the more conscientious and idealistic workers were likely to experience burnout, and that it may result from extended stress exposure or excessive demands (Maslach et al., 2001). As research advanced, new models for measuring defined burnout components shifted the focus from qualitative methods to quantitative systematic research which allowed the capture of larger sample data (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Through this research, six key areas of work life were identified as burnout predictors namely, “level of workload, control mechanism, community involvement, company values, rewarding scheme for workers, and fairness of managers” (Aydin & Tekiner, 2016, p. 102). Burnout was then rephrased to represent a loss of job engagement, suggesting that work which started as meaningful gradually became unfulfilling and arduous (Maslach et al., 2001). Despite extensive research, burnout causes are yet to be fully understood and the syndrome remains unrecognised as a medical condition (Foley & Massey, 2021; World Health Organisation, 2019).

It is suggested that burnout levels are higher in policing than in other professions and that the high-stress nature of the role poses a severe threat to officers’ health (Adams & Mastracci, 2019; Basinska et al., 2014). Numerous surveys validate this research, including that conducted by Elliot-Davies (2018) indicating that 79% of respondents had experienced mental health challenges, the vast majority of whom (94%) claimed that work had caused or worsened their condition. Other studies cite organisational issues as the most likely cause, and there is a notable correlation between interpersonal conflict and burnout (e.g., Baka, 2015; Kula, 2017). Police culture plays a part and due to the *macho* nature of policing, officers avoid disclosing mental illness fearing that it will invoke ridicule or damage career progression (Bell & Eski, 2016; Burke, 2016; Purba & Demou,

2019). Other work-based complaints included unfairness and a lack of support, which, alongside the aforementioned factors, caused a variety of negative outcomes, including feelings of exclusion, anger, and a loss of trust in colleagues and the organisation. These conditions serve to exacerbate fatigue and can cause officers to become cynical (Aydin & Tekinar, 2016; Can & Hendy, 2014). Owing to these factors, Violanti et al. (2018) believe that policing makes the perfect environment to study burnout.

Due to cultural pressures, and by virtue of the paradoxical nature of police duties (i.e., the requirement to act both caring and tough), Schaible and Gecas (2010) suggest that officers will likely encounter value dissonance. Value or emotive dissonance is described by Tracy (2005) as “a clash between ‘true’ feelings and ‘false’ emotional display” (p. 261). This masking can lead to what is known as *emotion labour*, the subject of many burnout studies (e.g., Bhowmick & Mulla, 2016). Consequently, officers feel inauthentic, alienated and dissatisfied, manifesting higher levels of cynicism, alcoholism, divorce, burnout and suicide (Burke, 2016; Osborne, 2014). Schaible (2006) indicated that officers who hold values that conflict with police culture are unlikely to express their dissent or challenge traditional views. Subsequently, officers harbour resentment, particularly if they perceive a sense of injustice. Only a few police studies have established the impact of value dissonance, although they have supported the notion that it is a likely contributing factor to burnout (e.g., Bakker & Heuven, 2006; Kwak, et al., 2018; Schaible & Gecas, 2010).

Research implies that spirituality, or our ability to be authentic, connected, and true to our values, can act as a buffer to stress (Csiernik & Adams, 2002; Smith & Charles, 2010). The relationship between burnout and spiritual crisis was first suggested by Wright (2005) who claimed that both were a crisis of purpose, meaning and connection. He explained that individuals were often unable to identify the true cause of their suffering, projecting it onto external events instead of internal unconscious processes. This prevented access to solutions, leaving individuals feeling stuck and unable to move on. Goswami (2017) and Grof (2000) claimed that this kind of inner conflict may lead to psychosomatic and emotional disorders. One potential catalyst for spiritual crises is the weakening of psychological defenses (Thomas, 2020). This may occur following trauma, stress or sleep fatigue, conditions frequently experienced by police officers (Brewin et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2019). According to Read (2014) it is at midlife that we are most likely to experience a crisis of meaning. Despite achieving life’s goals, individuals may experience persistent discontent or dis-ease. This could explain the increased disillusionment among experienced officers and subsequent rise in resignations. It may also relate to police studies indicating that burnout levels increase with age, service and a feeling of being trapped in the job (Aydin & Tekiner 2016). According to Glouberman (2013) and Taylor (2017), albeit painful, burnout is not necessarily just a negative experience; if embraced, it can lead to positive transformation. For this reason, transpersonal psychologists have become increasingly interested in burnout and its potential for transpersonal development (e.g., Dängeli, 2020). Despite this, few empirical studies

have explored this relationship, particularly in the policing paradigm. Moreover, with the majority of studies using quantitative methods and focused on external factors (e.g., Houdmont 2012; Queirós et al., 2020), there has been limited scope to explore officers' deeper experiences or how they have integrated these events into their lives.

Method

This study sought to provide a detailed examination of officers' subjective experience, how they perceived that experience, and how they described any associated meaning. Due to these aims, a qualitative approach was adopted. In particular, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as a methodology as it is "committed to the examination of how people make sense of major life experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1).

For participant recruitment, a purposive strategy (Smith & Osborne, 2008) was implemented, with participants required to be serving officers who had experienced burnout. In pursuance of exploring spiritual crisis and its relationship to the mid-life phenomenon, participation was limited to those aged 30 to 60 with a minimum of 10 years policing experience. Once ethical approval was granted by Alef Trust and Professional Development Foundation Research Ethics Panel, an electronic invitation was circulated nationally. To assess eligibility, a definition of burnout was provided, alongside a self-assessment questionnaire (Wright, 2005) which was used with the permission of the author. This consisted of 69 items (yes/no format) with one of the original self-assessment questions omitted in error. To be eligible, officers were required to attain a score of 75% or above, as this was indicative of burnout. Five final participants were selected from a pool of 40 survey respondents. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was represented by a pseudonym of their choice (Table 1).

Table 1
Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Location	Rank	Role	Years service
Louise	51	Female	England	Detective Constable	Child protection	25
John	55	Male	Wales	Detective Chief Inspector	Senior management	30
Jude	43	Female	England	Constable	Front-line response	11
Joe	49	Male	Wales	Detective Constable	Offender management	18
Laura	37	Female	Scotland	Former Inspector	Front-line response	16

Primary data was sourced from semi-structured interviews developed to elicit data aligned with my core research question, namely: *What is the lived experience of burnout for British police officers?* A conversational style of interviewing was adopted with a script used simply to aid the direction of the interview, encouraging the participants to tell their story in a rich and meaningful way. Interviews were then transcribed and the data was analysed. According to Smith et al. (2009), the essence of IPA rests in the “analytical focus” towards the participant’s efforts to decipher their experience, with this methodology characterised by a process of “moving from the particular to the shared” (p. 79). My analysis of the participants’ interpretation of their experience allowed common themes to be developed in order to delineate a universal description of police burnout. Initially, guidance by Smith et al. (2009) was followed; however, due to the volume of data, I developed a system to ensure that I was rigorous in capturing the most significant information. This process was broken down into three stages. Stage one consisted of individual case analysis allowing the identification of pertinent themes and related narrative. During the second phase, patterns and common themes were established across all five cases. To allow for a more detailed analysis, themes were then organised into related sections, e.g., work, health, etc. At this point, any themes that were not relevant, significant or recurrent were discarded. During the last stage, graphics were used to help identify the prevalence of each theme and through further analysis and reduction a table of master themes was created.

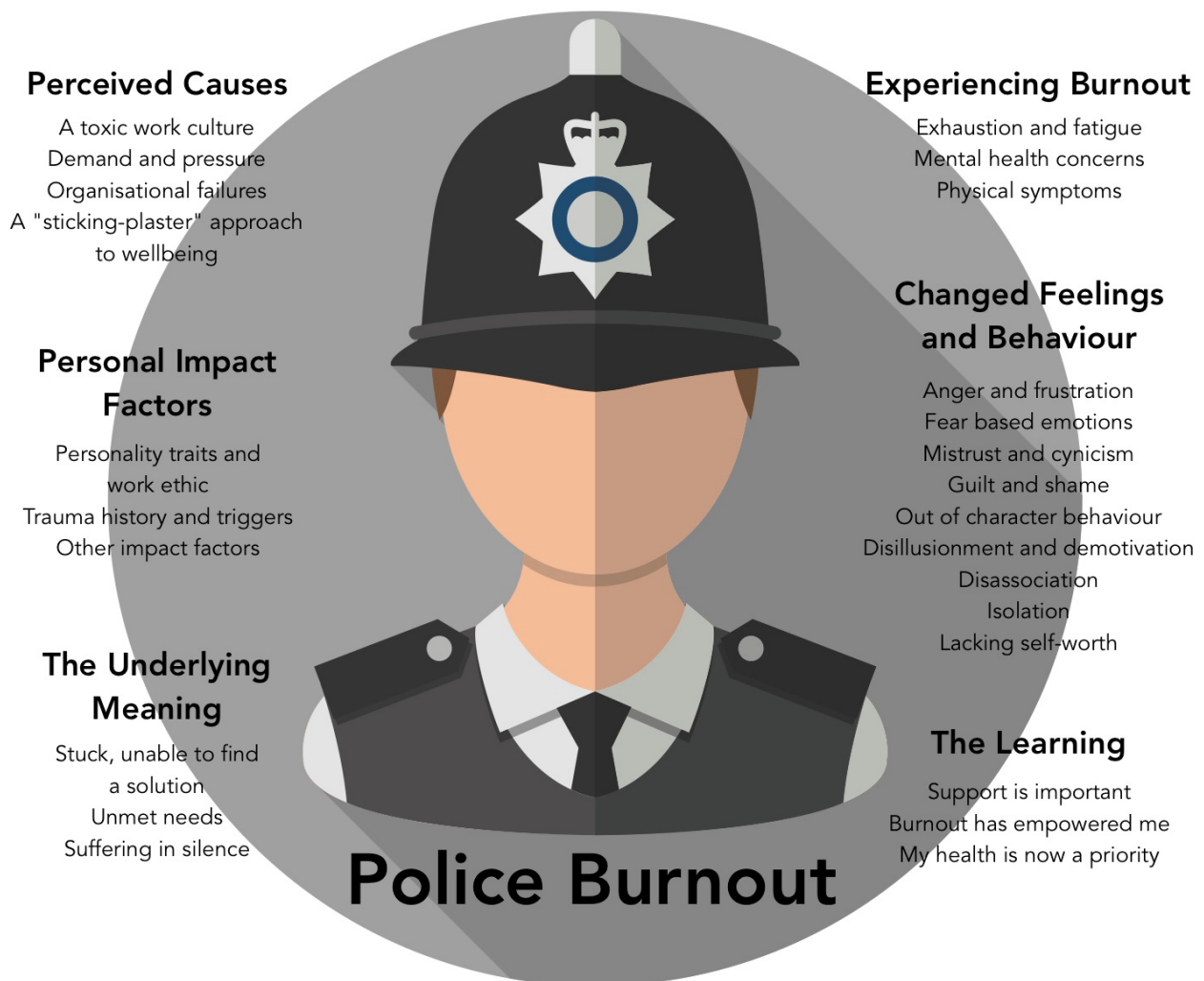
Results

Six categories of superordinate themes and associated sub-themes were identified (Figure 1). Due to the complexities associated with trauma and personality typology, the category *Personal Impact Factors* was excluded from the results. Findings from this category will appear for context only.

Perceived Causes

Police culture, the most predominant theme, was perceived as toxic. Management style was described by John (a manager himself) as “brutal”, and most participants experienced work-based bullying. Louise experienced gaslighting and exclusion, whilst Joe believed that “people were bullied religiously”, something that can “wreck people ... for the rest of their career”. Several claimed that the organisation was aware of the bullying but failed to protect them and most feared punishment if a grievance process was progressed. For some, managerial conflict was considerably more traumatic than other aspects of their role; however, due to cultural pressures participants concealed their emotions. “I needed to be tough ... put [on] a brave face”, said Jude. Participants also described a culture of unfairness. “Everyone is mates ... half of them are in the Freemasons. Nepotism is rife, if your face fits great but ... people get treated very differently”, claimed Louise. Similar views were shared by both Joe and John.

Figure 1
Categories of Themes



Work pressure, according to all participants, was overwhelming with insufficient officers to meet demand. Jude believed officers were being “dragged from pillar to post ... firefighting all of the time”. John recounted balancing several key responsibilities alongside a murder investigation and claimed that there were too many paymasters with competing priorities. Laura felt “under constant pressure to perform” protesting that she did not have “enough time to do anything”. Finally, Joe predicted that due to this pressure “two things [would happen], people will go off sick or there will be an almighty cock up with a big job”. To achieve deadlines participants worked excessive hours, often taking work home.

Perceived organisational failings were another factor. From an internal perspective, participants expressed an “appalling” lack of support and they all felt let down. Feeling unvalued appeared to be a universal issue and some participants were left feeling

frustrated when their efforts to contribute towards reform were ignored. Laura believed that “you’d be replaced in a second no matter how hard you work”, whilst Jude felt that the organisation had “such a long way to go towards valuing humans as resources”. From an external perspective, concerns were raised regarding the quality of public service, with forces, according to Louise, essentially “saying one thing but ... doing another”. Joe was able to qualify this with a work-based example:

It is like when someone phones in and there is a speeding issue in their area. We are all like ‘ooh yes, we will listen to that, it’s a big issue and we do a nice write up for the press.... then we go there and target it and we take a traffic officer, and you sit with them in the car and show them the speed gun and say ‘see, they are only slightly over, it’s not a major issue’. And then it goes from being a big thing to playing it down ... to get.... the minimum amount of effort isn’t it. And that’s how I feel sometimes it’s been with this job.

Finally, four participants claimed that occupational health departments were taking a sticking-plaster approach to wellbeing. According to Louise, care plans were ignored and medical recommendations were “cherry-picked” to suit operational needs.

It’s just a buzzword.... lip service.... I went from, work, work, work, to this blow out to then being ‘poo poo’d’ along and given a bit of ‘there there’ cream and ‘it’s fine don’t worry we will look after you, oh by the way can you do all this work as well.’ (Joe)

Another barrier was the negative perception associated with mental ill-health. Laura experienced a “stigma” around her after making changes at work. John feared that his condition would be seen as a “weakness” or “flaw”, “the ‘S’ word [stress] that people don’t like to admit”. Joe believed that “everybody” viewed his condition as “a joke”. Some of the participants disguised the reason for their sickness and attended work despite feeling unwell.

Experiencing Burnout

Fatigue was extreme and pervasive, with participants being affected physically, emotionally and mentally. Terms such as “drained” and “sheer exhaustion” were often used, with some reaching “saturation point”. Reduced energy caused participants’ activity rate to diminish and both Louise and Jude referred to a “relentless daily struggle” at work. Travelling long distances had an impact, and tiredness was not relieved following sleep. Most suffered with insomnia, predominantly due to worrying, with one participant, Jude, experiencing bad dreams. Burnout was described as chronic with symptoms that had persisted over years. Subsequently, participants felt dark and weighted down. “It’s just grey with black ... heavy, pain, it’s ... sluggishness ... slow. It’s wading through treacle”, said Louise.

High levels of work-related stress impacted personal relationships. Louise's anxiety was "through the roof", whilst John encountered symptoms so extreme that he believed he was having a heart attack. On the other end of the spectrum, participants described experiencing depression: "I was saturated with misery", said Louise. Due to these conditions, all participants describe being unable to "switch off", struggling with brain fog or intrusive thoughts. Most participants expressed a loss in resilience, becoming emotionally unstable. Feelings of despair were articulated, with many reaching crisis point. As John claimed: "I can't function at my previous level.... can't even function in the middle". Four of the participants suffered a "breakdown", with one, Joe, disclosing how he had contemplated suicide. Medication, prescribed to assist with depressive or sleep disorders, was problematic, and extended periods off work were required. Some received counselling for their mental health concerns.

Changed Feelings and Behaviour

Closely connected to the section *Experiencing Burnout*, this category describes changes that, in some cases, preceded the participants' burnout and may have acted as a catalyst.

The participants' anger was palpable, with most voicing resentment towards the job. "I hate them.... have to go to work every day and look at them", said Louise. In a similar vein, John expressed his thoughts: "You bastards, you've made me ill.... it's going to magnify ... chew away". Frustration appeared imbedded within daily experience and participants found that even simple requests such as obtaining sufficient resources became a constant battle. "It builds and builds", "it's immensely frustrating", it's like "herding cats" were just some expressions used.

Participants claimed that work was responsible for their behavioural changes. They felt irritable and intolerant, with one, Joe, becoming violent. Some noticed shifts in their appearance stating that they had let themselves go physically. They also felt insecure, expressing a fear of managers or judgement by peers. Joe felt that he was constantly "on edge", whilst Jude worried that she would "die at every job". These feelings manifested into physical symptoms including panic attacks.

Experiences of mistrust and cynicism caused participants to lose faith in others. For some, mistrust transformed into paranoia. Louise believed that she had to "watch [her] back". Jude felt that "everyone [was] conspiring against" her. Joe believed he was being "covertly monitored", that the organisation was out "to do [his] legs". Feelings of shame were also expressed. Most felt angry at their lack of resilience or allowing themselves to be placed in a compromising position. For some, shame was accompanied by guilt believing that they were letting others down. The theme of disassociation was less evidenced; nevertheless, becoming detached from normal emotions featured for most participants.

Prior to their burnout experience, being part of the work family had provided participants with a sense of belonging; however, as their condition developed many

became insular and withdrawn. Subsequently, they felt isolated believing that no-one understood what they were going through.

The most dominant traits for participants were conscientiousness and ambition, and all had a strong work ethic; however, most reported losing their “mojo”. Jude described herself as “jaded” and no longer felt “loyal to the job”. Most felt disillusioned and damaged, and as a result, many withdrew from the promotion process. “I was bruised emotionally.... it’s left ... a scar”, said John. Some disclosed crying or a sense of dread prior to attending work. Joe remembered a “heartsick” feeling, avoiding attending work until the last minute. Others “felt like a failure”, with the majority reporting a loss of self-worth and confidence. Louise felt like she “didn’t exist”, a “silly girl that should get a grip”.

The Underlying Meaning

This category provided greater insight into the underlying meaning participants associated with their burnout experience. All expressed difficulties finding a solution to challenging circumstances. For some there was panic. Others were unable to see a way through the situation, as if in a tunnel where the end moves further away. Others felt trapped or smothered. “It’s like you’re stuck in a box [and] can’t work out how you are going to get back to being you,” said John. These difficulties placed participants in an enduring state of stuckness, with some describing counting down the days to retirement.

There is no part of my life that is untouched by this ... I have nowhere to go.... I am hopeful that ... I can get to a place where I am semi happy and not the rollercoaster of shit that I have been dealing with.... I have two and a half years left.... I have been counting every single day. (Louise)

Many desired a change. Those closest to retirement viewed it as a chance to finally recover; however, others, including Joe and Jude, considered resigning. Laura looked for alternative solutions, asking for a demotion from Inspector to Constable (a rare occurrence within the service). Counteracting these desires were financial requirements with most only staying for the money or because they were caught in the *pension trap* (a term used by officers to describe staying until the end of their police service to avoid losing their pension).

Having “no voice”, repressing strong feelings and hiding personal “chaos” stood out as significant themes and gave a sense that participants were suffering in silence. Most described internal conflicts. Louise confessed to initially believing that justice would prevail. However, similar to Joe, she later realised that “there was none of that”. John discussed the importance of “integrity”; however, all participants struggled with the unfairness that they had witnessed at work. Long-term discomfort is delineated through their need to “push through”, as if work was somewhat painful and exhausting. “I kept going and kept going.... really forced myself to go into work.... I limped on”, said Louise. Laura described “never [feeling] truly comfortable with [her] role”.

Several discussed their unmet needs. In matters pertaining to work, more structure and consistency was needed. They also wanted recognition for their contributions. Joe and Louise expressed their need for closure, either wanting answers to unaddressed issues or finally obtaining justice via legal proceedings. From a personal perspective some talked of seeking meaning and fulfilment.

What was the Learning?

Regarding the transformational features that arose out of the participants' experience, most referred to new feelings of autonomy, with many developing stronger boundaries. Participants became "militant", more willing to speak out, with some wishing that they had found the courage to do so earlier. "I feel more empowered.... stronger", said John.

Participants were asked what advice they would provide future recruits. They suggested that officers should establish their personal needs and stand up for themselves. They shouldn't be "afraid to say 'No'", said Laura. Participants also stressed the importance of support, taking sick leave when required and not being afraid to admit when they needed help.

There were mixed reports regarding the benefits of counselling with two participants, John and Jude, claiming that it was helpful. Most felt that exercise improved their state of mind and that time off work helped provide clarity. After her burnout experience Laura felt that she had gained "some perspective" and decided to "return to a simpler life". Similar to Joe, John felt that in future he would be able to "recognise the signs" of burnout earlier and would never allow himself to be put "in that position" again. He also noticed that the shame and stigma that he had initially associated with his mental ill-health had subsided.

Overall, there was a feeling that following their burnout experience, participants' priorities had changed, and they were more likely to put their own needs first.

Discussion

The findings provide an insight into the lived experience of burnout for participants and the resulting difficulties that they endured in both their personal and professional lives. Several patterns emerged from the data; for instance, all participants perceived work-related difficulties to be the cause of their burnout, with the majority of issues being interpersonal. Alongside burnout symptoms (such as exhaustion, depersonalisation and demotivation), participants shared other negative emotions, including anger, frustration, fear, mistrust, cynicism and shame. All reported feeling stuck in difficult circumstances and unable to find a solution, leading to prolonged suffering. This suffering included feelings of inner conflict and value dissonance. Despite their unease, in the main, participants remained silent, feeling unable to voice concerns due to cultural pressures. Finally, all allude to the transformational

aspects of the burnout syndrome, describing a sense of empowerment that arose during recovery. For example, participants developed stronger boundaries and coping mechanisms. Many also gained a new perspective, causing their priorities to change.

With regard to perceived causation, an association exists between participants' experiences and those highlighted in previous studies. For example, organisational issues, in particular work-based conflict, were considered the main stressors. This, alongside compliance with expected norms of police behaviour and resulting suffering, reinforces evidence of a relationship between cultural pressures and poor health outcomes. Participants' symptoms were also synonymous with the established characteristics of burnout. Jackson and Maslach (1982) posit that emotional exhaustion, one such characteristic, can predict an officer's desire to leave the job, suggesting that the development of appropriate mechanisms to recognise such symptoms may help prevent voluntary resignations. This study also touched upon presenteeism (working whilst unwell), and leavism (taking work home). These phenomena are attracting greater attention as the link between officers' health and performance is becoming more established (Hesketh, & Cooper, 2014). In addition, the findings corroborate research outlining the detrimental impact of long-term stress with participants reporting both physical and mental health concerns (e.g., Brewin et al., 2022; Kula, 2017; Kurtz et al., 2015). However, by using qualitative methods, the present study was able to describe more nuanced indicators of these experiences. For instance, it provides greater insight into organisational influences and how such factors determined participants' behaviour. It also outlines the impact of wider support structures such as occupational health. Furthermore, lesser explored outcomes such as paranoia were delineated which helps build greater awareness surrounding cultural consequences.

Based on work ethic and career trajectories, it is notable that participants' initial enthusiasm turned to demotivation, anger and cynicism. The present data reveals a potential explanation, in that over time, participants become increasingly uncomfortable with certain aspects of the job, such as the behaviour of individuals or the actions of the organisation as a whole. This data supports theories that the more conscientious and idealistic workers are likely to experience burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), and that police cynicism is linked to the perception of injustice, poor management and police culture (Burke, 2016). It also corroborates studies that indicate a positive association between work stress and increased anger as well as other negative outcomes such as low self-esteem (e.g., Can & Hendy, 2014; Gershon et al., 2009). Despite losing faith in police management, expectations to perform and uphold professional standards remained, driving an unmet desire to contribute towards reform. Shaible (2006) highlighted the consequences of officers having little influence over organisational decisions which mirror current findings. However, the present study goes further, revealing that the participants held the perception that feeling undervalued was not just an individual concern, but an endemic problem within policing.

Suppressed emotions coupled with value dissonance served to exacerbate participants' *dis-ease*. This aligns with studies that investigated a relationship between police burnout and

emotional labour. In general, however, previous research focused on suppressed emotions in the context of public interactions rather than the behaviour of officers amongst their colleagues, as highlighted in this study. Furthermore, no previous studies were identified that discussed this phenomenon in terms of long-term suffering, for example the need for officers to push on despite their discomfort, and factors that prevent them from leaving, such as pensions.

The findings revealed the more transpersonal aspects of the burnout syndrome. What was rarely perceived by participants, but objectively noticed when observed from a wider lens, were the perfect conditions for a spiritual crisis. For instance, participants describe feeling stuck, losing purpose and connection, and unable to express authentic needs. As highlighted by Csiernik and Adams (2002) spirituality can help buffer stress, which may explain why, in circumstances whereby spiritual connection is lost, individuals experience suffering. Alongside feelings of unfulfillment, participants experienced physical and emotional disorders consistent with evidence presented by Grof (2000). However, as pointed out by Glouberman (2013) these circumstances also provide potential for empowerment, an experience similarly described by participants. Perhaps burnout provided the necessary catalyst or indeed *permission* for these changes to take place. Once classified as unwell, the *stigma spell* appeared broken, allowing participants to focus on recovery as opposed to the fear of judgment. In the process of *finding their voice*, they evidently moved towards authenticity. However, as highlighted by Wright (2005), the perception of work-related issues being the trigger rather than the cause appears undistinguishable to the participants who still associate with feelings of resentment towards the job. Wright suggests that once organisations are able to understand their role in creating or sustaining this process, simplistic responses can be replaced by a more informed approach to support recovery. This study provides police-relevant themes that may be used as a platform to further explore spiritual crisis in this context.

Limitations and Future Research

As is intrinsic to the nature of IPA, the sample size was small. Further understanding may be gained by replicating the study to capture a wider participant base. Research would also benefit from a reduction in focus, since a larger range of themes were identified than could be included. It may be suggested that the spiritual aspects of experience could be the most fruitful avenue for future enquiry. Although measures were applied to avoid the influence of my own experience, nonetheless, it may be advantageous for future researchers to be employed outside the police force to avoid potential bias.

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