



UNIVERSITY OF  
LINCOLN

AN EXPLORATION OF THE WELLBEING OF PRISON  
GOVERNORS AND SENIOR MANAGERS

*28<sup>th</sup> March 2022*

# Overview



**The research team**



**Methodology**



**Initial findings**

How staff are feeling  
Fears for the future  
The impact of how staff  
are feeling  
What has been done  
What needs to happen



**Additional  
emerging themes**



**Next steps**

The  
Research  
Team

	Dr Lauren Smith, Lecturer in Psychology.		Dr Gary Saunders, Senior Lecturer in Criminology.
	Professor Karen Harrison, Professor of Law and Penal Justice.		Dr Lauren Hall, Lecturer in Criminology.
	Dr Helen Nichols, Associate Professor in Criminology.		Mrs Elena Gaschino, Doctoral Student and Associate Lecturer in Social Sciences.
	Rachael Mason, Senior Lecturer in Health and Social Care.		Verity Jones, LLB Law Student

# Research Methodology

## *Participants*

64 PGA members recruited via 'opt-in' at the end of the PGA wellbeing questionnaire

Age: Range 38-60 years, Mean age 49.8 years

Gender distribution: 21 females (32.8%), 43 males (67.2%)

Ethnicity: 61/64 (95.3%) white / white British / white Scottish



## *PGA Membership*

1,038 members (interviewed 6.1%)

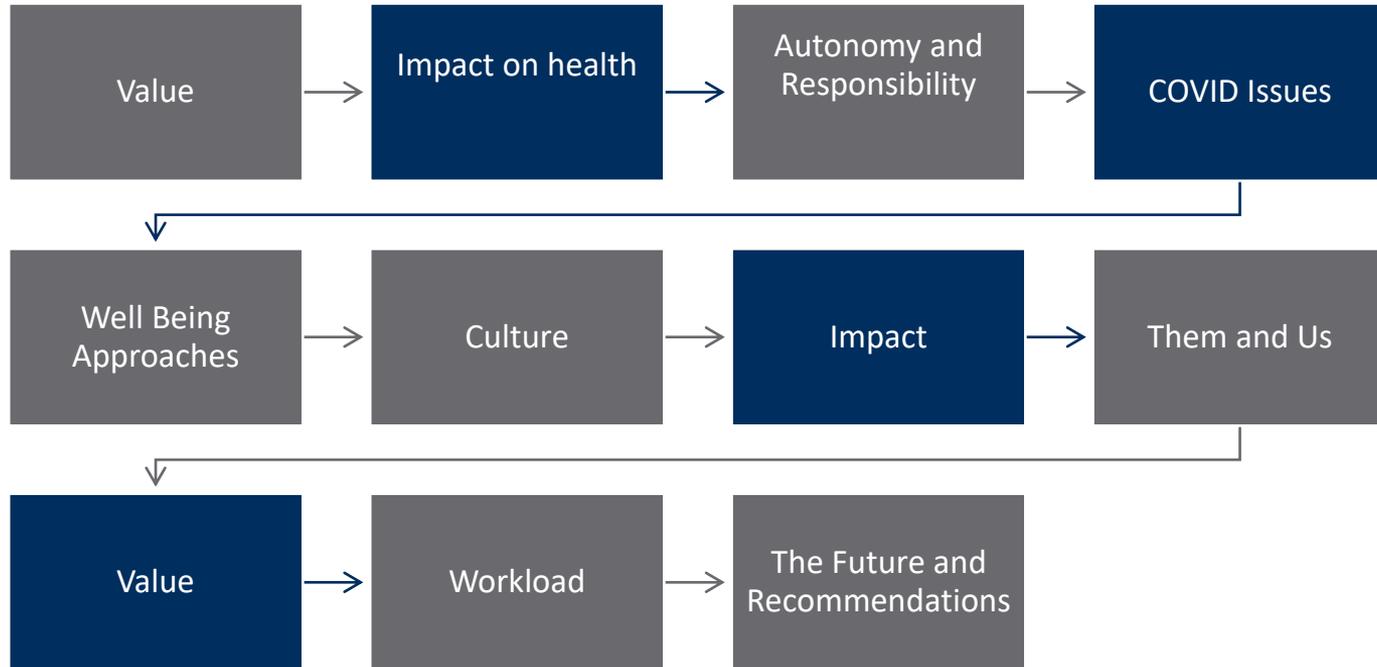
Gender distribution: 336 females (32%) 702 males (68%)

Measures and procedure	Analysis	Ethics
<p>Semi-structured interview schedule devised for the purposes of the research</p> <p>Conducted and recorded online, or over the phone</p>	<p>Thematic Analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006)</p>	<p>University of Lincoln Ethics Application Service (Reference: 2021_6526)</p>

# Initial Findings

The following is an outline of our initial findings. It is important to note that the data is still being analysed and therefore new themes will emerge and be further defined along the way.

# How staff are feeling



# Value

“You're as disposable as the food containers from last night's food”





# Additional reasons for not feeling valued

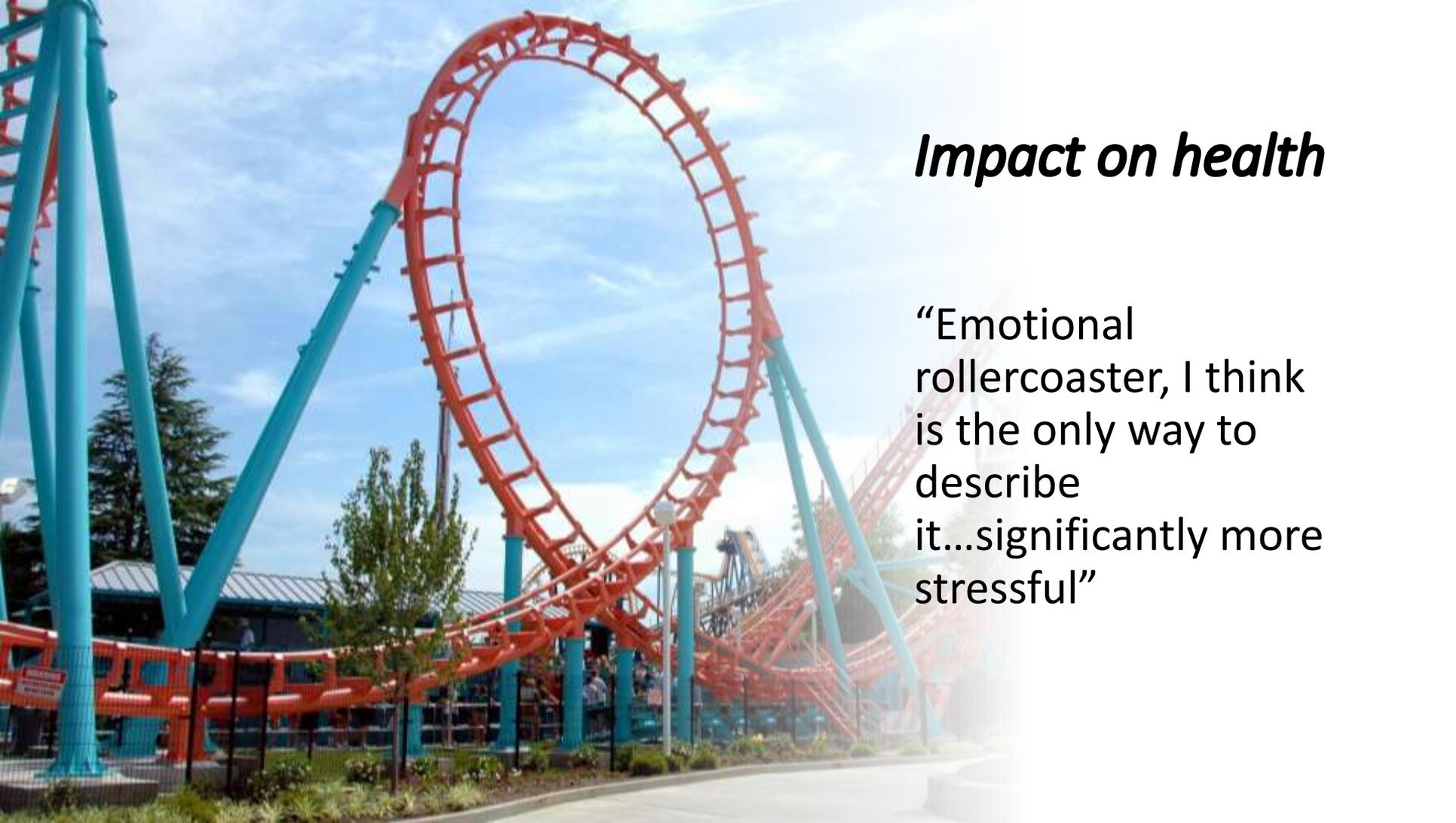
Lack of recognition

Long hours and increased workloads

Lack of reflection space and headroom

Lack of support

Lack of freedom around finances for staff wellbeing



## *Impact on health*

“Emotional rollercoaster, I think is the only way to describe it...significantly more stressful”



## *Impact on health*

“I think it's fair to say that I am less healthy than I have ever been.”

“My resilience has been absolutely tested to its limited limit.”



## *Impact on health*

“I don't sleep very well at all. I'm working long days, so consequently I'm not eating how I would normally eat”

# *Responsibility*

“As the governor of the prison, particularly at the start, I felt a huge responsibility on my shoulders...more under pressure than I ever have been in my career”



# *Autonomy*

“Right at the beginning, [of the] pandemic, it felt like freedom. It felt like when I was originally a Prison Governor, because nobody really knew what was happening. And basically, all I got from my boss was, do your best.”



# *Autonomy*

“It is just contrasting to me that I have to spend weeks and weeks and weeks of time, trying to convince people that it's alright for me to move to level three, or it's alright for me to move to level two. But when actually the only time I really have autonomy, is when I've got a major problem. And then it's kind of like you're left to get on with it . . .”



# *Autonomy*

- “That trust is really important . . . [so] establishments are trusted to run their own prisons.”
- “...somebody shouldn't be labelled [as a Maverick] just because they're trying to do something nice for the staff group.”



An illustration showing a group of stylized human figures in shades of brown and orange at the bottom. Above them is a large, white, cloud-like thought bubble filled with a dense, chaotic, brown scribble. Several thin brown lines connect the figures to the edges of the thought bubble, suggesting their collective thoughts or a shared, complex problem.

## ***Communication between Headquarters and Governors***

“I think the relationship between headquarters and prisons is very pathological. Very bad. And nobody's got an oversight of it... from the perspective of prison, you get 101 demands, from 101 different people, none of whom are taking into account the other 100 people. And nobody is really taking systemic control of that, and the implications of that, and the way that it takes your attention off what matters. So, it creates huge pressures, you stop managing the real risks, because you're managing somebody else's imagined risks.”



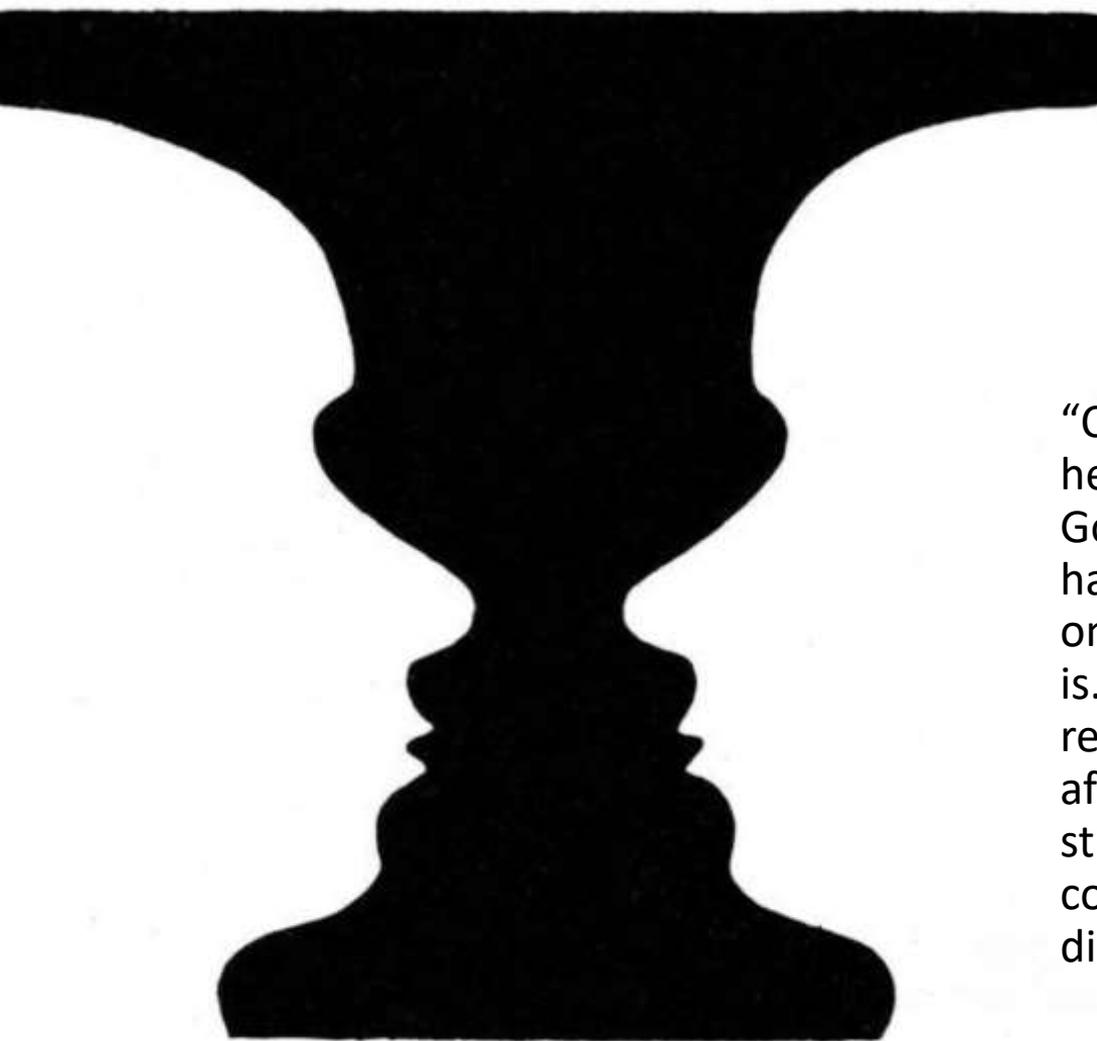
## ***Communication between Headquarters and Governors***

“Wider headquarters just disappeared. And they were firing off all this guidance, policy, everything but we had nothing to help us with it. And it felt very lonely”.



## ***Communication between Headquarters and Governors***

“We don't necessarily understand the pressures on non-operational people at headquarters, but equally they don't understand the pressures on us...[there] needs to be a better appreciation.”



## ***Communication between Headquarters and Governors***

“COVID has had a massive impact on headquarters. I've sat in that Governor's seat, and I know how hard it is. And when you layer COVID on top, I do appreciate how hard it is. I just wanted to get everybody to recognise that actually, we were all affected by the pandemic and I'm still supporting my frontline colleagues from headquarters. And I didn't want the PGA to forget that.”

# Fears for the Future

- Staff sickness – higher than usual and now a culture with a lower threshold for sickness
- Regime pressures
- Lack of experienced staff (exacerbated by McCloud judgment)
- A 'perfect storm' moving out of restrictions with inexperienced staff
- Will I regain my motivation





## The impact of how staff are feeling

- Work-life balance
- Unhealthy coping e.g., increased alcohol consumption
- Impact on relationships
- **Disenchantment**

# *Disenchantment*

“I don't want to be here anymore . . . tomorrow, if you [told] me that I could leave the prison service, I would walk out of the jail.”



# ***Disenchantment***

“I've lost sight of why I'm still doing it. You know, why do I still do this job, that I could be paid better doing something else, and probably be healthier.”



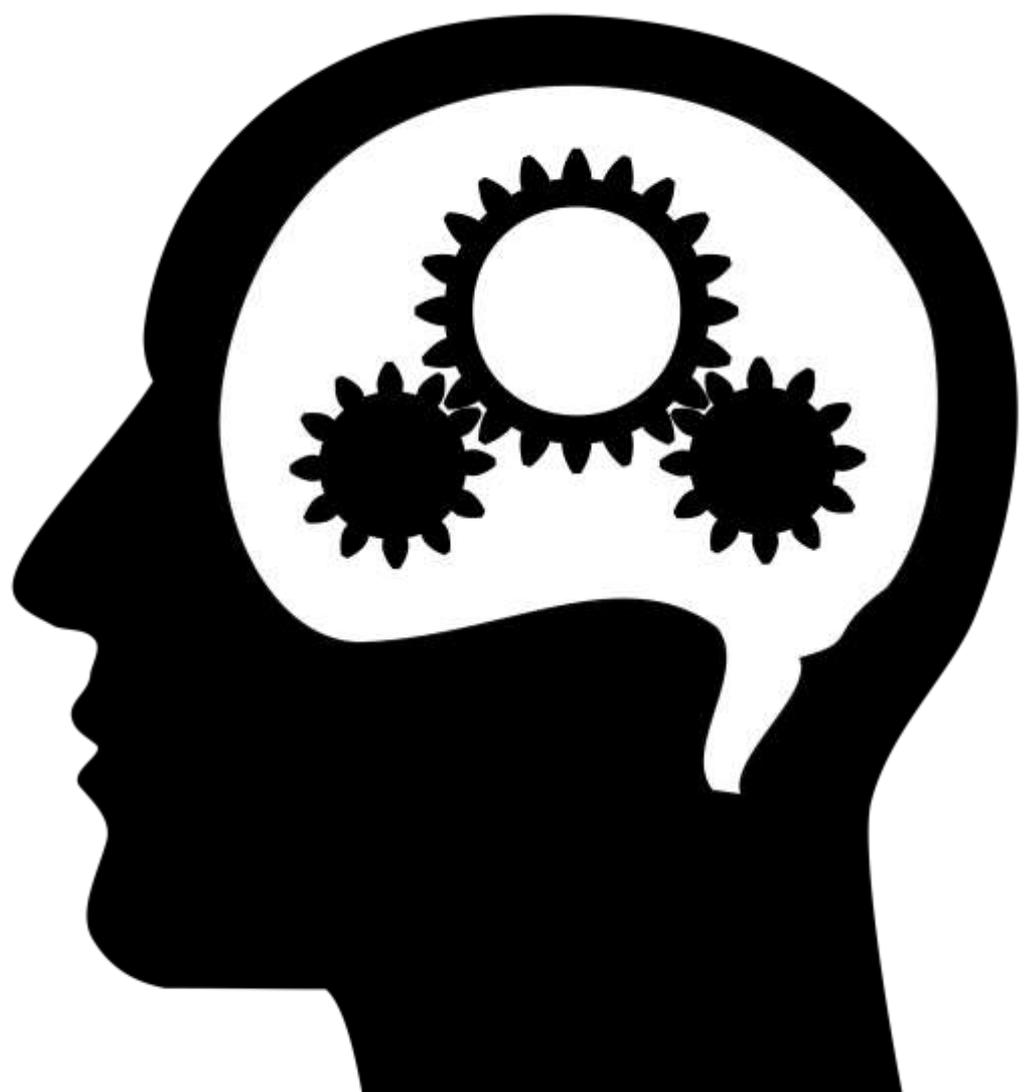
# *Disenchantment*

“I feel let down by a service that I've given [those] years to, I feel they let me down... now, it's just a job. Now it just pays the bills.”



## *Disenchantment*

“We want it to be better. And I don't want to leave. I shouldn't have to, you know, I wouldn't. I don't want to leave. But there were things in my head that made me think, is this really for me in the long term?”



# *What has been done to help with health & wellbeing*

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- Dedicated wellbeing days
- Family fun days
- Staff nominations to receive small tokens of appreciation
- Provision of outside exercise areas
- Support to help increase fitness
- Counselling support



## *How has this been interpreted?*

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“We do get a support within the group once a month. They have a session where you can have a chat with a woman there who was absolutely brilliant”

“I don't know what they could offer genuinely like we do wellbeing days. People hate them. They hate them, because they're like, that was a tick-box exercise. And that's very much how the prison service sees it. So, we do a lot of things around staff wellbeing, but we don't really listen to what staff wants”.



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## ***How has this been interpreted?***

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“I think they were calling it structured professional support for a lot of managers, but for governors specifically. So, I've had a couple of those sessions with sort of talking through, you know, my role and my pressures with somebody. I haven't found it very useful if I'm really honest, but, you know, still it's been offered and it's been there”



# *Availability of support*

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"...the lady that we can talk to every month is really supportive and really helpful. Trouble is...that's just once a month. [You can feel] alright, on the day, but absolutely sh\*t the next day, you've got to wait a whole month"



# *Pam Assist*

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- Many who had used it thought that it was good.
- Some didn't feel they were the sort of people to open up
- Some wouldn't use it for fear of 'being found out' and labelled
- Fear of opening Pandora's box.



# *Pam Assist*

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- “I did counselling through the PAM assist national team. But then it got to a certain point where they stopped paying for it, after certain sessions they say no more, no matter where you were, I really needed it at the time it stopped.”



# *Availability of Pam Assist*

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“ . . . there was something I wanted to get off my chest. I had a very small little time to squeeze that in and rang them up. And then you know, fair enough. ‘What's your name? What's your date of birth? Five minutes of demographic questions. ‘Oh, we can't speak to you now. We can get somebody to call you back tomorrow’. I said, ‘Look, I've got seven minutes until dinners on the table. I can't talk to you tomorrow, give me seven minutes. But no, you just sort of assume people will speak to you when you call.’”



# *Unintended consequences of the research*

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“This has been enormously cathartic for me, just having a safe space to exercise my concerns and thoughts. But just having the opportunity to have a safe space to say these things. Because we're not afforded this luxury, very often. I think it's more difficult for younger members of the SMT to have this opportunity to be candid, because their careers can stand or fall from the comments they make.”



# *What needs to happen now?*

Better communications, relationships and understanding between Headquarters and prison staff.



Return of trust and autonomy.



Access to some funds/resources to implement wellbeing activities.



Having the confidence to share more.

# *What needs to happen now?*

“I think there should be really strategic work with people at the initial training, to help them think about how to engage with the support, probably to run a few sessions, even if all the stress that they're going through at that point is getting through college, but just to socialise people into it. And one of the things I'm really interested by is the difference between psychologists and prison officers, there is something about the professional training of a psychologist that teaches them to engage with supervision without any sense of shame. And also, understands that this is my professional responsibility. If I don't do this, I'm a less effective professional”.

***It's going to  
take some  
time***

“ . . . there isn't a magic solution, I'm the governor of a prison. It's a tough ask. I've signed up to that. And it's COVID and it's nobody's fault. I . . . [need] to be honest with myself about you know, where's my kind of breaking point? And how close am I to it?”

# Further emerging research themes

Bullying/control

Trauma

Exhaustion

Macho culture

Mental health  
stigma

IT issues

Covid legacy

Lack of staff  
training

## Further questions for potential exploration

How representative are the initial findings?

Are there people who feel unable to talk to us?

Have some people been unable to interview due to working hours?

How have wellbeing initiatives been experienced/interpreted at ground level?

What do we need to do next to ensure that those who have spoken to us have been heard?

# Next Steps



Full report to PGA early 2022, with recommendations



Presentation to MoJ People Group



Presentation to HMPP Strategic, Planning and Performance Directorate



Publication in peer-reviewed journal(s)



Thank you  
for listening

Any  
questions?