

Chapter 4 - Analysis of Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and analyse the results of the survey, which explored perceptions of the effectiveness of the return-to-work (RTW) process following stress or mental health-related leave.

It addresses the first and third research objectives: to explore officers' experiences of RTW support, identify its strengths and limitations, and consider whether any shortcomings contributed to further time off. The findings aim to show how effective current RTW processes are and highlight common concerns raised by those with experience of stress or mental health-related leave.

Data was collected through an anonymous online survey using Microsoft Forms. The survey combined closed and open-ended questions, allowing for a mixed-methods analysis. Descriptive statistics will be outlined first, followed by an inductive thematic analysis of open responses. A broader interpretation of these results will be explored in Chapter 5.

4.2 Participant Demographics

A total of 12 eligible participants completed the survey. All respondents met the inclusion criteria, having taken a period of stress or mental health-related leave within the past five years. Participants were aged between 25 and 34 (75%), 35-44 (17%) and

45-54 (8%). The gender split was even, with 50% identifying as male and 50% as female. All participants identified as "White."

The majority of participants (92%) were Police Constables at the time of their leave. One respondent (8%) had an unspecified "other" role. Most (83%) had worked for Gwent Police for one to five years, and the remaining 17% had between six and ten years of service.

4.3 Quantitative Results

This section will present findings from the survey's closed questions, focusing on participants' experiences of support during their leave and after their RTW. Although all 12 participants met the inclusion criteria, one respondent did not return to work at Gwent Police. The participant did begin the RTW process, therefore their responses are included where relevant, but they are excluded from questions requiring a completed return.

4.3.1 Circumstances of Leave

Most participants selected multiple factors contributing to their most recent period of mental health-related leave (92%). The most frequently selected reasons were excessive workload (92%), lack of managerial support (75%), and poor work-life balance (58%). Other contributing factors included personal circumstances (25%) and exposure to traumatic incidents (17%). Two participants selected "Other" and described

factors such as working on an understaffed shift and having unresolved grievances at work.

4.3.2 Support Offered and Accessed

The most commonly offered type of support was occupational health (83%). Half of the participants (50%) were also offered line manager support and internal counselling. Peer support was offered to 33%, and 8% were offered a TRiM referral. Another 8% said no support was offered at all.

For support accessed, 75% engaged with occupational health. Line manager contact was accessed by 42%, and both peer support and internal counselling by 25%. Several participants also turned to external sources, including their GP for support or medication (42%) and external counselling or therapy (17%). Nobody accessed TRiM, and one participant (8%) reported not accessing any support.

4.3.3 Return-to-Work Procedures

Of the 11 participants who fully returned to work, 73% had a formal RTW plan in place, while 18% said they had no plan. One participant (9%) said their RTW plan was discussed verbally but had no follow-through. A majority (64%) returned on a phased basis, while the remaining participants (36%) resumed full duties immediately.

When asked about their readiness to return, 45% said they were not emotionally and professionally ready. A further 27% said they were "unsure," and 18% said they were fully ready. One respondent (9%) felt ready, but only with additional support.

4.3.4 Perceived Support

When asked whether they felt adequately supported by Gwent Police during the RTW process, 64% of eligible participants said they felt "somewhat" supported. A further 18% felt "not at all" supported, while 18% felt "fully" supported.

The most common source of support was the line manager, selected by 91% of eligible participants. Occupational health was involved for 46%, and HR representatives for 36%. Peer support was also selected by 27% of respondents. One participant (9%) said nobody supported them.

When asked whether the factors that originally contributed to their absence were addressed, 36% selected "not at all." A further 55% said issues were "partially" addressed, and 9% felt the issues were "fully" resolved.

4.3.5 Repeated Absences

Of the 11 participants who did RTW, 9% reported taking further stress or mental health-related leave, citing unresolved issues from their initial absence. A further 18% said they had only recently returned to work, suggesting it is too early to assess longer-term outcomes.

4.4 Thematic Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model for thematic analysis, open-text responses were coded inductively to explore patterns in RTW experiences. Three main themes emerged: mixed perceptions of manager support, workload pressures and a culture of stigma and mistrust.

4.4.1 Manager Support

Inadequate support from line managers was frequently highlighted by survey participants. Several respondents described feeling unsupported or dismissed, with one saying their line manager "would not communicate with me," and another saying they "made me feel pressured to come back."

When asked what would have improved their RTW experience, one respondent said, "Better line manager support. Sit down with me. Listen to concerns and develop a plan."

However, other participants highlighted positive experiences with their line manager, with several respondents identifying them as a supportive factor in their RTW.

4.4.2 Workload Pressures

Heavy workloads were frequently cited as a contributing factor in taking leave and a barrier to a successful RTW. Several participants described returning to unchanged or increased demands, which they felt undermined the success of the RTW process:

"It was difficult to return as nothing [had] changed. I don't feel better supported than I did before, and now my workload is climbing very fast again."

"I returned to my workload, which was high and the reason I went off, however, in an even worse state, as this time the cases had 6 months with little to no actions completed and now even more stressed about doing them."

"Managing the excessive workload like I wasn't off due to it."

One participant who went on to take additional mental health-related leave said:

"I returned and quickly had a heavy workload again, and there was not enough support to help me manage it."

When asked what would have improved their RTW, several participants highlighted the need for better support with workloads:

"Returning to a smaller caseload than when I left (since this was the main reason I was off with stress)."

"Workload meeting and 1-to-1 discussion on sorting workload out."

"Someone sitting down with me and going through my workload... making a plan... focusing on most pressing problems."

"Assistance with getting workload down to help start fresh to manage it and manage stress."

4.4.3 Culture of Stigma and Lack of Trust

Several participants referenced a perceived stigma around mental health within Gwent Police and a broader sense that wellbeing was undervalued. One respondent who did not return to work cited a "complete lack of trust in the organisation" and described feeling they were not "valued or wanted."

Others expressed discomfort or guilt about taking leave, in some cases linked to peer judgment. One participant said they were "made to feel like I was letting down my colleagues," while another said, "I felt blamed like I was the problem and I couldn't cope."

Several participants shared concerns about stigma when asked what made their RTW more difficult:

"Awareness of how some people view mental health within the workplace and how policing culture doesn't always make mental health absence feel 'acceptable.'"

"Fear of what other officers were saying about me regarding the stigma around mental health in the police."

4.5 Conclusion

The survey findings show inconsistencies in the RTW experience. While some support mechanisms were generally considered successful, like a phased return, many participants described unresolved issues, inadequate managerial support, and ongoing stigma as primary concerns.

Word count: 1,346 *(This is way over word count, sorry. I am struggling to know where to whittle it down).*

Reference List:

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, [online] 3(2), pp.77–101. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa> [Accessed 1 August 2025].

Appendix

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Returning to Work After Stress or Mental Health Leave in Policing

This anonymous survey is about your experience returning to work after taking stress or mental health-related sick leave. If you have served in Gwent Police and have taken this type of leave within the past five years, your input is welcomed.

Section 1

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Section 1: Survey Consent Form

Study Title: *Worried Sick: To what extent do British police forces adequately support officers' return to work after periods of stress or mental health-related sick leave?*

Purpose of the Study: You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how police officers experience returning to work following a period of stress or mental health-related sick leave. To participate, you must serve or have served in Gwent Police and have taken such leave within the past five years.

Procedure: If you choose to take part, you will complete an anonymous online survey asking about your experiences with the return-to-work process. The survey will include a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. It is expected to take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Potential Risks and Benefits: Some questions may involve reflecting on personal experiences related to your mental health. While no significant risks are anticipated, some questions could be challenging. You are free to skip any questions or stop the survey at any time. There are no direct personal benefits from participating, but your responses will help inform research into the effectiveness of return-to-work support in policing.

Confidentiality: This survey is completely anonymous. No identifying information will be collected, and the information you provide cannot be linked back to you. Data will be stored securely on password-protected devices.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Amos Hall

Email: 2236651@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Before You Begin: This survey includes questions about your experiences with stress, mental health, and returning to work. Some questions may be emotionally triggering or challenging. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you may skip a question, take a break, or withdraw from the survey entirely without repercussion.

If you would like support, the following confidential resources are available:

- Mind Blue Light Support Line: 0300 102 1234
(Monday to Friday, 9am – 6pm)
www.mind.org.uk/bluelight
Offers mental health support specifically for emergency service workers.
- Oscar Kilo – National Police Wellbeing Service:
www.oscarkilo.org.uk
Provides access to wellbeing guidance, self-assessments, and support tools for police officers.
- Police Care UK – Confidential Support:
www.policecare.org.uk
Independent charity supporting police wellbeing and trauma recovery.
- Samaritans: 116 123 (24/7, free)
www.samaritans.org
Offers emotional support to anyone in distress.

1. Consent Statement:

I have read and understood the above information. I confirm that:

- I am 18 years of age or older.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- I understand that my responses will be anonymous and confidential.
- I understand that I may skip questions or stop the survey at any time.

By selecting "I agree," you indicate your consent to participate in this study. *

☐ I agree

Section 2

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Section 2: About You

The following questions are designed to provide context for your responses. You must choose an answer for each one, but you can select "Prefer not to say" if you'd prefer not share that information.

2. How old are you? *

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55 or older
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. What is your gender? *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

4. What is your ethnicity? *

- ☐ White (including British, Welsh, Irish, or any other White background)
- ☐ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- ☐ Asian / Asian British
- ☐ Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

5. What is (or was) your most recent role/rank within Gwent Police? *

- ☐ Police Constable
- ☐ Sergeant
- ☐ Inspector
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

6. Approximately how long have you worked (or did you work) for Gwent Police? *

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 10+ years
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Section 3

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Section 3: Your Experiences With Mental Health Leave

This section asks about your experiences of taking stress or mental health-related leave. They relate to your most recent period of leave. You can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

7. Approximately how long was your most recent period of stress or mental health-related leave?

- ☐ Less than 2 weeks
- ☐ 2-4 weeks
- ☐ 1-3 months
- ☐ 3-6 months
- ☐ More than 6 months

8. What were the main reasons for your most recent leave? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Excessive workload
- ☐ Trauma or exposure to traumatic incidents at work
- ☐ Bullying or harassment
- ☐ Lack of managerial support
- ☐ Personal circumstances outside of work
- ☐ Poor work-life balance
- ☐ Other

9. Were you **offered** any of the following support services during your time off? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Occupational health
- ☐ Internal counselling services
- ☐ TRiM (Trauma Risk Management)
- ☐ Line manager support
- ☐ Peer support / colleague support
- ☐ I was not offered any support
- ☐ Other

10. Did you **access** any of the following support services during your time off? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Occupational Health
- ☐ Internal counselling services
- ☐ TRiM (Trauma Risk Management)
- ☐ Line manager support
- ☐ Peer support / colleague support
- ☐ External counselling or therapy
- ☐ Support or medication from GP
- ☐ I did not access any support
- ☐ Other

11. How would you describe the support you received from Gwent Police during your time off work?

- ☐ Very supportive
- ☐ Somewhat supportive
- ☐ Neither supportive or unsupportive
- ☐ Somewhat unsupportive
- ☐ Very unsupportive
- ☐ Other

Section 4

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Section 4: The Return-To-Work Process

This section asks about your experience of returning to work after stress or mental health-related sick leave. The questions relate to your most recent period of leave. You can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

12. When you returned to work, did you feel emotionally and professionally ready to return?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other

13. When you returned to work, did you have a formal return-to-work plan in place?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I did not return to work
- ☐ Other

14. Which of the following best describes your return to work?

- ☐ Phased return (reduced hours/duties)
- ☐ Full-time return with adjusted duties
- ☐ Full-time return with no adjusted duties
- ☐ I did not return to work
- ☐ Other

15. Who was involved in supporting your return to work? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Line manager
- ☐ Occupational Health
- ☐ HR representative
- ☐ Peers / colleagues
- ☐ Federation representative
- ☐ Nobody supported me
- ☐ I did not return to work
- ☐ Other

16. Did you feel adequately supported during your return to work?

- ☐ Yes, fully
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ I did not return to work
- ☐ Other

17. Were the underlying issues that contributed to your time off addressed before or during your return to work?

- ☐ Yes, fully
- ☐ Partially
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Other

18. What aspects of the return-to-work process did you find the most helpful or supportive?

Enter your answer

19. What, if anything, made returning to work more difficult?

Enter your answer

20. What could have improved your return-to-work experience?

Enter your answer

21. Have you taken further stress or mental health-related leave since your return?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I did not return to work
- ☐ Other

22. If you **have** taken further stress or mental health leave, do you feel this was connected to how your previous return-to-work was managed?

Enter your answer

23. If you **did not** return to work after taking stress or mental health-related leave, what were the main reasons why?

Please only answer this question if you did not return to work following your most recent period of stress or mental health-related leave.

Enter your answer

Section 5

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Section 5: End of Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses are appreciated and will help contribute to a better understanding of how police forces can support officers returning to work after stress or mental health-related absences.

All responses will remain anonymous and will be studied collectively as part of an academic research project. The findings may be published in summary form, but no identifying information will be published.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this survey, you may wish to contact one of the following support services:

- Mind Blue Light Support Line: 0300 102 1234
(Monday to Friday, 9am – 6pm)
www.mind.org.uk/bluelight
- Oscar Kilo – National Police Wellbeing Service:
www.oscarkilo.org.uk
- Police Care UK – Confidential Support:
www.policecare.org.uk
- Samaritans: 116 123 (24/7, free)
www.samaritans.org

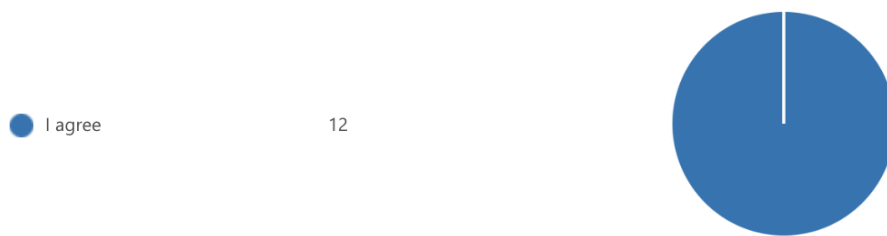
Responses

1. Consent Statement:

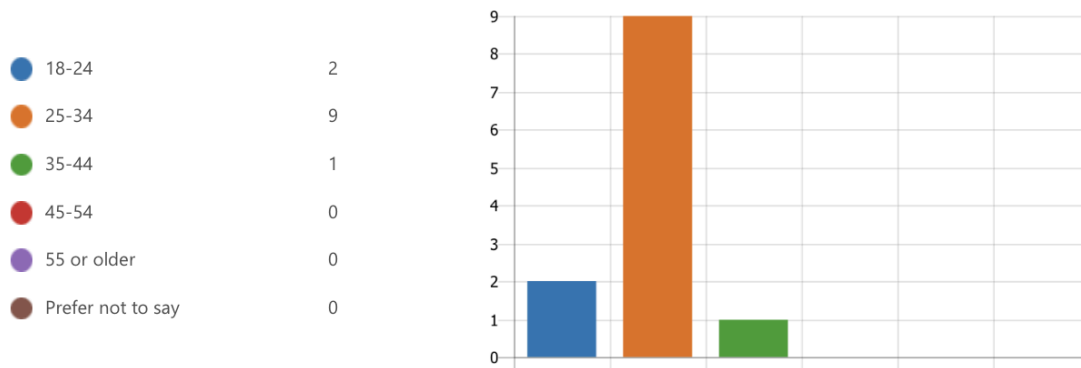
I have read and understood the above information. I confirm that:

- I am 18 years of age or older.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- I understand that my responses will be anonymous and confidential.
- I understand that I may skip questions or stop the survey at any time.

By selecting "I agree," you indicate your consent to participate in this study.



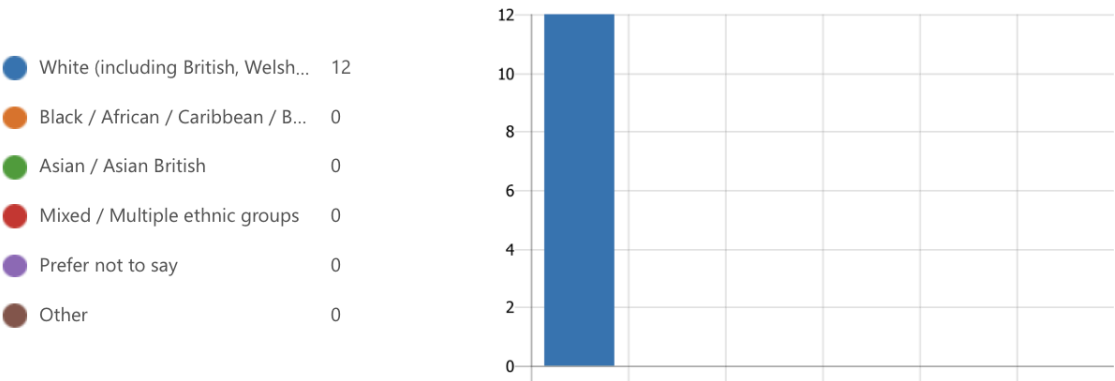
2. How old are you?



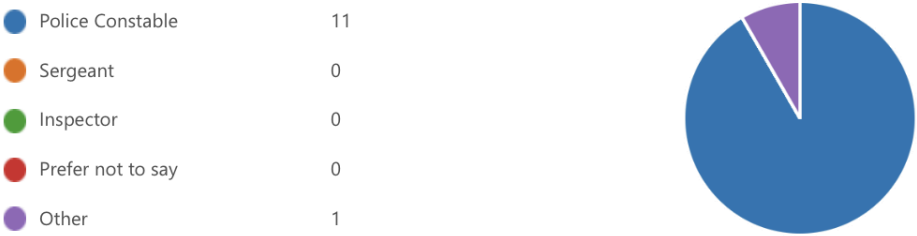
3. What is your gender?



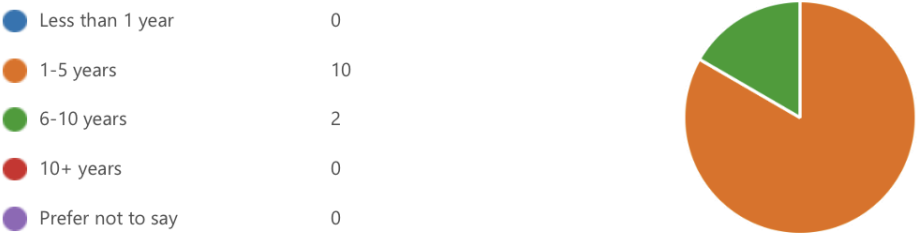
4. What is your ethnicity?



5. What is (or was) your most recent role/rank within Gwent Police?



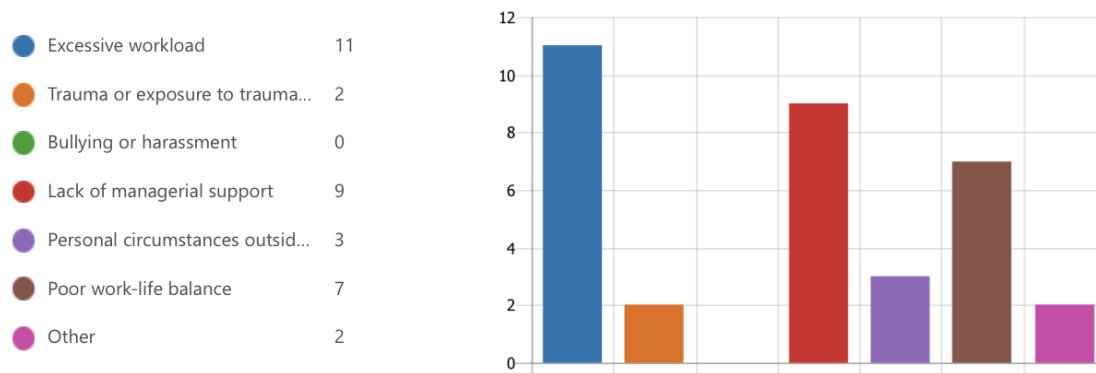
6. Approximately how long have you worked (or did you work) for Gwent Police?



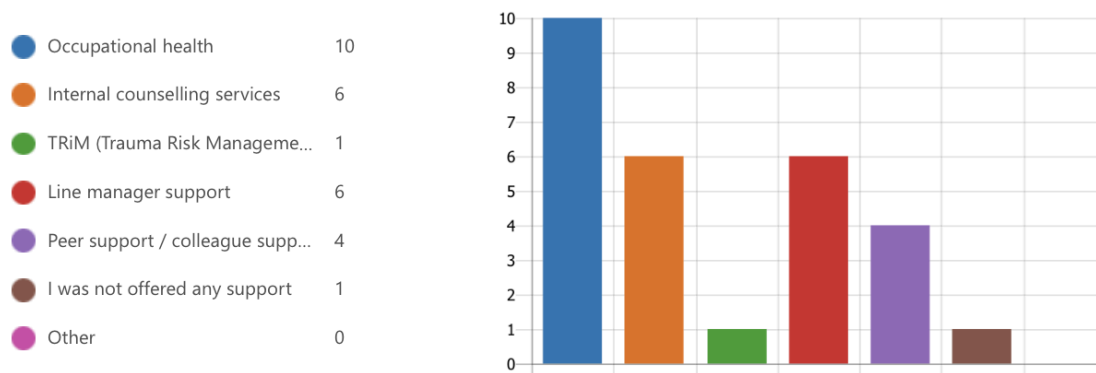
7. Approximately how long was your most recent period of stress or mental health-related leave?



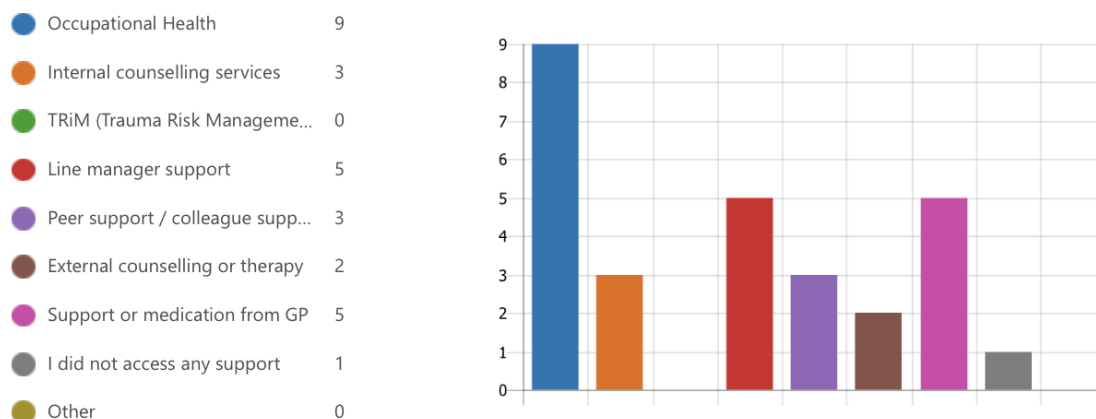
8. What were the main reasons for your most recent leave? *(Select all that apply)*



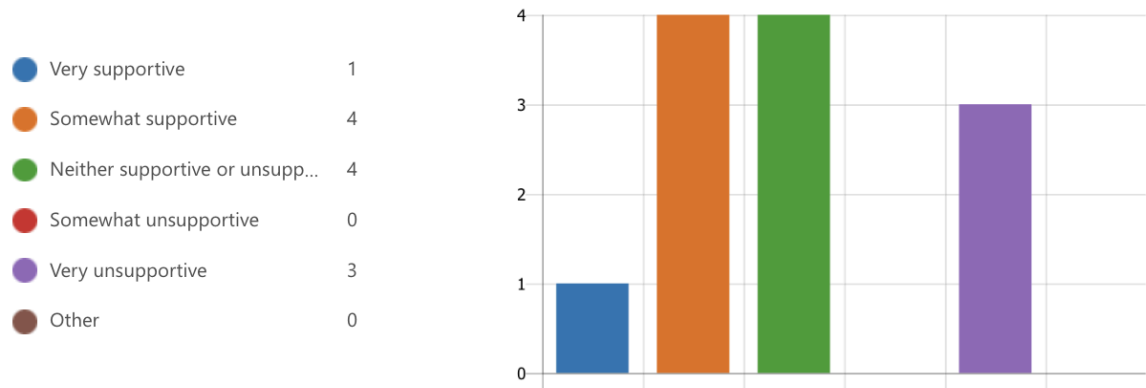
9. Were you **offered** any of the following support services during your time off? *(Select all that apply)*



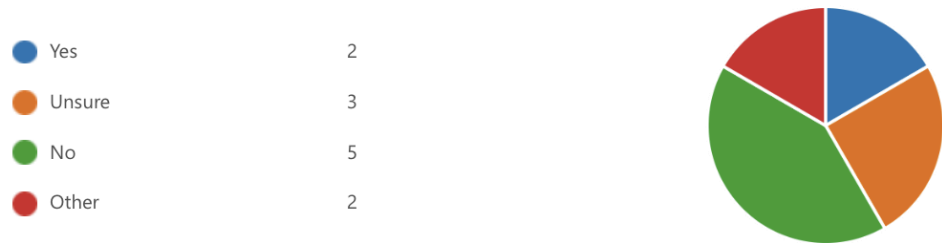
10. Did you **access** any of the following support services during your time off? *(Select all that apply)*



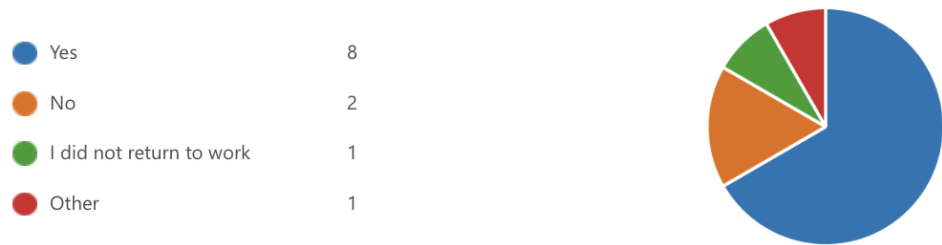
11. How would you describe the support you received from Gwent Police during your time off work?



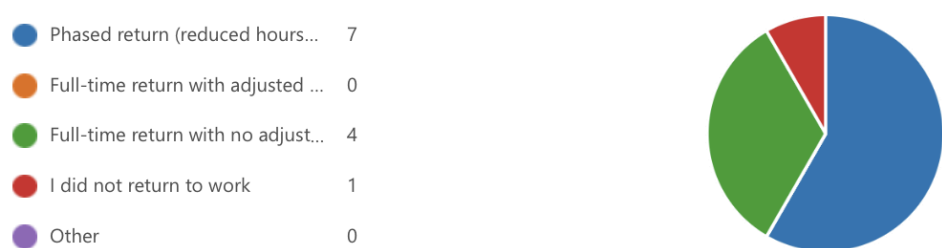
12. When you returned to work, did you feel emotionally and professionally ready to return?



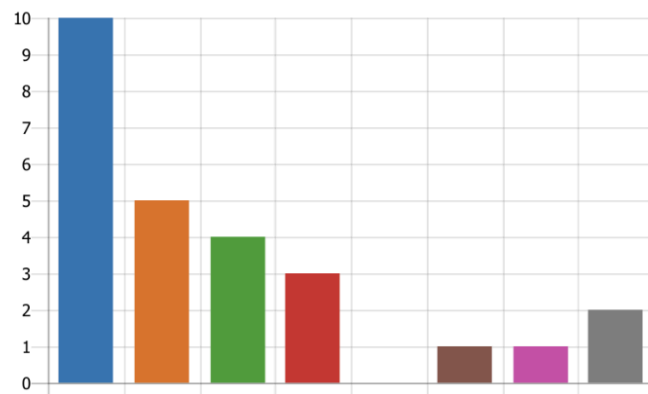
13. When you returned to work, did you have a formal return-to-work plan in place?



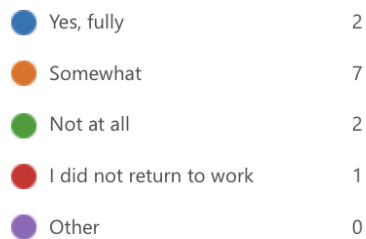
14. Which of the following best describes your return to work?



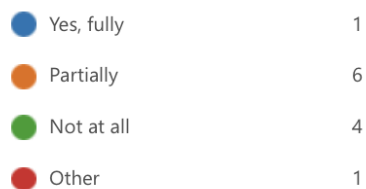
15. Who was involved in supporting your return to work? *(Select all that apply)*



16. Did you feel adequately supported during your return to work?



17. Were the underlying issues that contributed to your time off addressed before or during your return to work?



18. What aspects of the return-to-work process did you find the most helpful or supportive?

12
Responses

Latest Responses

"Nothing"

"Completing a phased return was super helpful to ease back into th...

"Colleagues, support and medication from GP"

19. What, if anything, made returning to work more difficult?

12
Responses

Latest Responses

"spoke to my line manager and said id retrun on X date. That was it..."
"Fear of what other officers were saying about me regarding the sti..."
"Workload and stress unresolved "

20. What could have improved your return-to-work experience?

12
Responses

Latest Responses

"Clearer communication and better support from line manager "
"More support from SGT. More experienced officer available for sup..."
"The whole system is flawed, everybody is under too much pressur..."

21. Have you taken further stress or mental health-related leave since your return?

Yes	1
No	8
I did not return to work	1
Other	2



22. If you **have** taken further stress or mental health leave, do you feel this was connected to how your previous return-to-work was managed?

1
Responses

Latest Responses

"The reasons I initially needed time off for were unresolved, I retur..."

23. If you **did not** return to work after taking stress or mental health-related leave, what were the main reasons why?

1
Responses

Latest Responses