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# 'I seriously didn't want to walk through them gates, it was that bad': New psychoactive substance use and prison officer well-being

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## Introduction

**This paper reports on a sub section of the data from a study carried out in a Category C<sup>1</sup> prison in the north of England. The availability and use of drugs within the prison environment was discussed in the HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Prison Drug Strategy 2019<sup>2</sup> where it was revealed that between 2012/13 and 2017/18 the rate of positive random drug tests increased by 50 per cent, suggesting that drug use within prisons is widespread. The increased use of drugs in the prison also coincided with a shift in the drug prison economy that was previously predicated on what has been termed 'hard drugs' such as heroin to an 'era of new psychoactive drugs'<sup>3</sup>. This paper reports on how the increased presence of New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) impacted on the well-being of prison officers.**

Within this evolving environment there is a need to consider how these new drug economies impact on everyone within the prison estate<sup>4</sup>. The influx of NPS into the prison system during 2017 had a dramatic impact on prison regimes and staff are still recovering

from the aftermath of the effects on their physical and mental health<sup>5</sup>. The significant harm from NPS represented the greatest threat to security and safety within prisons<sup>6</sup> and drugs such as 'spice' increased in popularity, largely due to its low cost<sup>7</sup>, the difficulties of detecting use and the ability to avoid its detection<sup>8</sup>. The incursion of NPS into the prison system had a dramatic effect on people who live and work there and increased concern about their safety and well-being. To date, most research has highlighted the harms of NPS on prisoners; in order to improve the prison environment and ascertain the impacts of this drug, it is necessary to engage with both staff and prisoners<sup>9</sup>. This paper proposes that in order to promote recovery for the people in their care, it is essential to also address the impact of drugs such as NPS on officers.

The prison officer role is predicated on a complex balance between 'custody' and 'care'<sup>10</sup>, within an environment where signs of 'weakness' such as fear or anxiety are not revealed, with officers utilising 'impression management' and 'face work'<sup>11</sup> in order to remain outwardly indifferent. This can lead to a culture of being reticent of reaching out for support when

1. Category C prisons in England and Wales are classified as training and resettlement prisons. Retrieved from: <https://prisonjobs.blog.gov.uk/your-a-d-guide-on-prison-categories>
2. HM Prison & Prosecution Services (2019) Prison Drug Strategy. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-prison-drugs-strategy>
3. Gooch, K. and Treadwell, J. (2020) 'Prisoner society in an era of psychoactive substances, organized crime, new drug markets and austerity', *British Journal of Criminology*, 60(5), pp. 1260-1281. (p.1261).
4. Corazza, O., Coloccini, S., Marrinan, S., Vigar, M., Watkins, C., Zene, C., Negri, A., Aresti, A., Darke, S., Rinaldi, R., Metastasio, A. and Bersani, G. (2020) 'Novel psychoactive substances in custodial settings: A mixed method investigation on the experiences of people in prison and professionals working with them', *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, pp. 460.
5. Corazza et al (2020) see n.4.
6. Ralphs, R., Williams, L., Askew, R. and Norton, A. (2017) 'Adding spice to the porridge: The development of a synthetic cannabinoid market in an English prison', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 40, pp. 57-69.
7. Faure Walker, D. (2015) 'The informal economy in prison: Studying prisoner trading can offer significant insights into prison life', *Criminal Justice Matters*, 99(1), pp. 18-19.
8. Ralphs, et al (2017) see n.6
9. Wheatley, M. (2019) 'Promoting recovery in prison: The Holme House approach', *Prison Service Journal (Special edition: Recovery in prison)*, (242), pp. 11-17.
10. Liebling, A., Price, D. and Shefer, G (2018) *The Prison Officer*. 2nd Edition. Milton, Willan Publishing
11. Crawley, E.M (2004) *Doing Prison Work: the public and private lives of prison officers*. Milton, Willan Publishing

officers may be adversely affected by major incidents such as the threat to safety and security — and personal safety — due to the effects of NPS on prison officer well-being.

### Prison Officer Mental Health and Well-being

Prison officers work within what could be described as a difficult and complex workplace and this can have a detrimental impact on their overall well-being<sup>12 13</sup>. This study took place within the context of prison overcrowding, staff shortages, increased levels of violence and a lack of meaningful activity, with officers frequently being diverted to deal with drug related emergencies<sup>14</sup>. A number of factors can impact negatively on the prison officer's experience at work, including levels of noise, general cleanliness and access to natural lighting<sup>15</sup>.

There is evidence that people who work within what could be described as 'emergency or security roles', are more likely to experience workplace strain and in time this can lead to poor mental health and well-being<sup>16</sup>. This stress could potentially relate to a number of factors including poor working conditions, high levels of violence and increasing levels of self-harm in prisoners. Despite an acknowledgement that high levels of stress are also a concern for the police, paramedics and other security roles, it appears that the levels of stress amongst prison officers could be even higher<sup>17</sup>. Research<sup>18</sup> has also highlighted the

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significance of relationships and interactions within the prison environment which can, in turn, be fundamental to levels of tension within the prison.

### Prison Officers and Emotional Labour

Prison officers play a pivotal role within the prison as they spend most of their time with prisoners, undertaking a dual role in providing both care and control<sup>19</sup>. Officers are increasingly being asked to develop positive relationships with prisoners to support what is described as dynamic security, and while this shift has been welcomed by some, it can lead to ambiguity and mistrust<sup>20</sup>. As officers have developed relationships with prisoners it has become more important to consider the impact of traumatic events on them and to ensure that the appropriate support is available. Major incidents and the risk of them occurring can have a detrimental effect on the prison environment due to officers becoming overwhelmed, which can lead to a further breaking down of positive interactions<sup>21</sup>. Where support is not available to them, officers can be reluctant to engage emotionally with prisoners and in some cases fail to meet their minimal needs<sup>22</sup>.

The formation of positive relationships requires officers to deal with prisoners' emotional states at the same time as managing their own<sup>23</sup>, this can sometimes lead to emotional burnout<sup>24</sup>. The need for officers to manage their emotions was

12. Evers, T. J., Ogloff, J. R. P., Trounson, J. S. and Pfeifer, J. E. (2020) 'Well-being interventions for correctional officers in a prison setting: A review and meta-analysis', *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(1), pp. 3-21.
13. King, A. and Oliver, C. (2020) 'A qualitative study exploring vicarious trauma in prison officers', *Prison Service Journal*, (251), pp. 38-45.
14. Gooch, and Treadwell (2020) see n.3
15. Evers et al (2020) see n.12
16. Kinman, G., Clements, A. J. and Hart, J. A. (2016) 'Work-related wellbeing in UK prison officers: a benchmarking approach', *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 9(3), pp. 290-307.
17. Evers et al (2020) see n.12
18. See, for example: Morrison, K and Maycock, M (2021) Becoming a prison officer. *The Howard Journal* 60(1) 3-24; Liebling et al (2018) see n.10; Crawley (2004) see n.11
19. Kolind, T., Frank, V. A., Lindberg, O. and Tourunen, J. (2015) 'Officers and drug counsellors: New occupational identities in nordic prisons', *British Journal of Criminology*, 55(2), pp. 303-320.
20. Crewe, B. (2011) 'Soft power in prison: Implications for staff-prisoner relationships, liberty and legitimacy', *European Journal of Criminology*, 8(6), pp. 455-468.
21. Liebling et al (2018) see n.10
22. Tait, S. (2011) 'A typology of prison officer approaches to care', *European Journal of Criminology*, 8(6), pp. 440-454.
23. Nylander, P.-A., Lindberg, O. and Bruhn, A. (2011) 'Emotional labour and emotional strain among Swedish prison officers', *European Journal of Criminology*, 8(6), pp. 469-483.
24. Lambert, E. G., Hogan, N. L., Dial, K. C., Jiang, S. and Khondaker, M. I. (2012) 'Is the job burning me out? An exploratory test of the job characteristics model on the emotional burnout of prison staff', *The Prison Journal*, 92(1), pp. 3-23.

discussed by Nylander et al.<sup>25</sup> with reference to the work of Hochschild on emotional labour, a process by which a person attempts to induce or suppress their emotions. Drawing on this work, it is necessary to ensure that officers have the opportunity to recover from work-related emotional strain, but this can be difficult in a fast moving work environment, and one where any expression of anxiety or fear could be considered a weakness. The role of prisoner officer and the culture within the prison is one where the officer, during work hours, is required to balance the complexities of care and control and do 'face work' — performing emotions and engaging in 'impression management'<sup>26</sup>. However, without means of support, or accepting that support is needed, officers can suffer from 'burnout' which can result in an inability to commit to the personal encounters that are the backbone of the prison officer role<sup>27</sup>, and this is likely to impact negatively on their engagement with prisoners.

The threat of violence from prisoners can be a significant source of stress<sup>28</sup> but during the period when the use of NPS was at its highest, prison officers also faced danger from inadvertently inhaling the drug and the consequences of this. Officers who have experienced this type of ordeal are more likely to withdraw from prisoner contact<sup>29</sup> and for them personally, it can be detrimental to their own well-being<sup>30</sup>. Liebling<sup>31</sup> argued that 'the moral quality of prison life is enacted and embodied by the attitudes and conduct of prison officers' (p.484). With this in mind it is essential to consider the impact of NPS on individual officers and in turn the potential wider effects of this on prison regimes.

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The findings presented here relate to the impact of high levels of NPS on the prison officers in a Category C prison in the north of England. The study utilised qualitative data, including interviews with staff and focus groups with prisoners. Interviews were semi-structured in nature, ensuring that all participants were asked the same range of questions, with prompts and probes used where appropriate. Interviews ranged from fifteen minutes to one hour. The interviews carried out with staff (n=26) included representatives from a range of roles; all those included in this article were uniformed staff.

Focus groups were held with groups of four prisoners over three occasions (n=12) and they were asked the same questions as the staff interviews. Prison officer well-being was not the sole focus of the initial study<sup>32</sup>, but links with the issues of NPS use within the prison estate, as outlined above, gave officers and some of the prisoners a chance to reflect. Hence only a limited number of prisoners spoke directly about the impact on staff but where they did, their comments have been included in the analysis.

The qualitative data from the individual staff interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and anonymised. The group interviews with prisoners were captured in note form by the researchers and then written up in full directly after the data collection had taken place. The transcription of the staff interviews was carried out by an HMPPS approved transcription service. All qualitative data was entered into 'NVivo', a computer software package that supports the analysis of large amounts of qualitative data and thematic analysis was undertaken<sup>33</sup>. All data

25. Nylander et al (2011) see n.22

26. Crawley, E.M (2004) *Doing Prison Work: the public and private lives of prison officers*. Milton, Willan Publishing

27. Nylander et al (2011) see n.22

28. Evers, T. J., Ogloff, J. R. P., Trounson, J. S. and Pfeifer, J. E. (2020) 'Well-being interventions for correctional officers in a prison setting: A review and meta-analysis', *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(1), pp. 3-21.

29. Tait (2011) see n.22

30. Kinman, G., Clements, A. J. and Hart, J. A. (2017) 'Job demands, resources and mental health in UK prison officers', *Occupational Medicine*, 67(6), pp. 456-460.

31. Liebling, A. (2011) 'Distinctions and distinctiveness in the work of prison officers: Legitimacy and authority revisited', *European Journal of Criminology*, 8(6), pp. 484-499.

32. Bell, V. and Leese, M. (2021) 'Increased security measures in a drug recovery prison: Disrupting the drug supply', *Prison Service Journal*, January 2021 – No.252.

33. Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.

have been treated confidentially and stored securely and anonymously. In order to maintain the anonymity of staff participants, specific roles have not been attributed to their quotes and comments.

## Findings and Discussion

### A Challenging Environment

The findings from this study support the suggestion that NPS had impacted dramatically on the prison<sup>34</sup> and led to what many participants described as a very challenging environment to live and work in. The staff described the prison environment prior to the implementation of security measures aimed at reducing illicit drug availability within the prison as very difficult for both the staff and prisoners because the use of NPS was at a high level within the prison.

*I've been here two and a half year — what it is now and what it was then [...] there's been a massive difference though; I've seen it with my own eyes (Prisoner).*

One participant referred the prison as a 'jungle', an environment where danger was present even when it was not visible, this was similar to the way the staff described their experience at that time.

*I was on the house blocks, house block 5. And, to be blatantly honest, it got to the point where I didn't want to come into work (Officer).*

Officers described a volatile atmosphere that was difficult to predict and they noted the subsequent impact that this had on all staff, both physical and psychological. Officers described the increased number of emergency situations, or 'code blues' that could happen several times a day, where a prisoner had collapsed and needed emergency care. In addition, they also described the impact on staff who became ill due to secondary exposure to NPS. The large number of emergency situations that they described offers insight into what the prison environment was like when the levels of NPS were at their highest.

*[There were] high levels of harm [...] the impact on the staff in terms of secondary exposure and things like that (Officer).*

These high levels of harm were echoed by other staff and is a clear indicator of the heightened levels of

strain that the potential negative impact of NPS was having on the safety and well-being of everyone within the prison system<sup>35</sup>. This highly charged prison environment had clearly impacted negatively on the well-being of both prisoners and officers<sup>36</sup>.

*We've seen reductions in kind of code blues, so people kind of overdose — like, eighteen months, two years ago it was quite bad for overdose and stuff, which impacts the staff well-being (Officer).*

The increased security measures that were put in place did subsequently reduce the supply and demand of the NPS drug 'spice' and this had resulted in a reduction in the number of emergency situations, or 'code blues' occurring within the prison. This was welcomed by both the staff and prisoners.

*There's a lot less 'spice', that has really improved, there's not as many 'code blues' (Prisoner).*

*I think it's probably one of the most immediate areas where you see success anywhere. [...] it feels a calmer place (Officer).*

The impact of the positive changes in the prison environment were discussed by a number of staff, for them there was tangible evidence that the increased security measures and new procedures within the prisons were working. These measures included the increased use of scanners in all reception areas and the searching of staff entering the prison:

*So it helps the staff feel safer as well and I think that was a key thing from a prison and a health side, if people can see different technologies being brought in, they can see an investment in making the environment safer and they are better placed to be able to deliver the care (Officer).*

### Being 'spiced'

The challenging prison environment posed risks to officers with increased violence and inhalation of the drug when attempting to safeguard prisoners. Most of the officers referred to being 'spiced' when they were attempting to offer support to a prisoner who had collapsed. When responding to a 'code blue', an officer would enter the cell and within seconds become

34. Ralphs et al (2017) see n.6

35. Gooch and Treadwell (2020) see n.3

36. Evers et al (2020) see n.12

overcome by the impact of inhaling the drug in a confined area.

*You know, seriously didn't want to walk through them gates. It was that bad. Even walking back out, I'd even get 'spiced'. It was a major problem with 'spice'. You know, it was absolutely flooring people (Officer).*

*Staff would be affected; they would inhale 'spice' from prisoner's use (Prisoner).*

While the majority of instances occurred when officers were responding to an emergency, some officers described cases where prisoners had intentionally caused them to inhale the drug.

*I mean, I've known staff have accidents. I've known staff be in really bad ways. There was a colleague in the seg [segregation unit], who was literally crawling round on the floor because they'd blown it through the door. I think they found him hours later just laid cuddling in the toilet, crying — a different person you'd ever met. And they were goading him to try and get him to open the cell doors on nights (Officer).*

The possibility that prisoners could use NPS to assault an officer raises concern within the wider context of increased violence within prisons. The threat of violence from prisoners can be a source of workplace stress<sup>37</sup>, and the possibility that NPS could be used as a weapon increased levels of concern for some officers. While willing to talk about the experience of others, some were reluctant to acknowledge that they had personally suffered the impacts of NPS.

*I'm not saying it's affected me but sometimes the 'spice' — I don't know whether you're aware, some — some staff are a bit — they go poorly with it (Officer).*

*It's been horrendous, absolutely horrendous, but I've been fortunate. Like, I usually just get a strange feeling on the end of my tongue, and my lips feel strange if I've been affected (Officer).*

These comments are an example of two officers keen to distance themselves from the suggestion that they had been affected by NPS within the prison. This was perhaps because they had indeed experienced very minor reactions to the drug, or it could be an attempt to resist being labelled as a victim. In the interviews some officers attempted to retain the illusion of being

in control, possibly in an attempt to manage their own emotional states<sup>38</sup>. Where officers had experienced secondary effects of NPS, they described instances where it had happened without them being aware.

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*You just didn't know it was there. Just walking around the landing like I done every day and go in and check the mail, come back out and lock the door, go to the next wing, go to the next wing, and it was about ten minutes after I realised I'd been, like, 'spiced', as we call it (Officer).*

*Been affected by 'spice'. But there was no, you know, there wasn't, there was nothing to say that it had happened and, like, if you bang your finger or somebody punches you you've got an immediate reaction. There was nothing, I had no warning that I'd been [spiced], was just the effects (Officer).*

These officers had experienced some unpleasant secondary effects of NPS and there was a sense that at times they felt that this was not acknowledged by the prison management. Officers reported that they had suffered physical symptoms from NPS even when they were not aware that they had inhaled the drug.

*And, like I say, it gives you a banging headache. I know staff were going, making them physically sick (Officer).*

37. Kinman et al (2017) see n.30  
38. Nylander et al (2011) see n.23

*There were times where you were working, and you were like — you would be coming off and your head would be [...] pounding headache (Officer).*

The officer's anxiety about being 'spiced' was something that they had to deal with on a daily basis, adding to the complex nature of risk within the prison. The impact of NPS on the officer's health was described by some as having a transient effect that would wear off quite quickly, whereas others suggested that the negative physical symptoms could last much longer.

*It's like a hangover for days. I mean, it does affect you big time (Officer).*

Despite their reassurances that things had improved for many of the officers who were interviewed, it was clear that their experience had had a detrimental impact on their overall well-being<sup>39</sup>.

### **Emotional Labour**

In addition to the impact of personal exposure to NPS, officers described the impact of responding to multiple 'code blues', where prisoners had collapsed due to an overdose of NPS. The participants described how emotionally difficult these situations are for the members of staff who are the first to respond. Although as discussed earlier, the participants suggested that these code blues are now rare, the memory of what it was like was still vivid for the people involved.

*I've seen some terrible states, honestly, really bad [...] all of a sudden, this 'spice' boom kicked right off and I'm not kidding you, we had four or five code blues, when somebody is under the influence or unconscious in the morning and the afternoon. But now, we had one yesterday but apart from that [it's] very, very rare (Officer).*

Here the officer outlines the emotional impact of witnessing prisoners and staff who repeatedly became unwell due to NPS inhalation. This needs to be set within the recent prison context when officers are being asked to develop positive relationships with prisoner<sup>40</sup>.

*If they are fearful and they are seeing people, you know, becoming unconscious, they have to respond to that and it's not delivering the*

*kind of like proactive care that we want to (Officer).*

Another aspect of emotional labour that the officers described is the need to manage their own emotions simultaneously with prisoner's emotions, and officers suggested that this can be difficult. In a highly charged environment, the officers were having to make split second decisions about risk to self and to others and the presence of NPS made this a difficult task.

*Someone comes towards you, you react, and you think — is that seen as assault? Could you be seen as assaulting somebody? Because when it happens to one of the men, they were like: 'Oh, I was under the influence, I didn't mean to throw me arms at you', but where do staff stand at the risk of drunk driving, the risk of themselves? You don't know how you're going to react; you don't know if you're going to be angry, sad (Officer).*

This officer was concerned about the risk of violence from a prisoner who may be under the influence of NPS, but they also had concerns about their own response if they had been exposed to NPS, highlighting one of the potential stresses of working in such an environment. This heightened sense of alert is likely to have a detrimental impact on the officer and lead to emotional burnout<sup>41</sup>.

Officers recognised that the situation had improved with the new security measures, but some concern was also raised that there could be a level of complacency with a relaxation of some of the screening that had been put in place.

*[If] we go back to the old ways and they get a bit relaxed about it: 'It's okay, we haven't got a drug problem now'. We have got a drug problem (Officer).*

Here there was recognition that the prison still needed to adapt practices in a response to the changing nature of the drug use and supply chains. It was agreed that the security measures had disrupted the supply of drugs into the prison, however participants noted how different supplies and supply routes had now started to open up. Changes to the prison economy included an increased use of prescribed medication and with the ban on smoking, debts relating to the use of vapes.

39. Evers et al (2020) see n.12

40. Crewe (2011) see n.24

41. Lambert et al (2012) see n.24

*It's always going to be the case in prison [that people will take drugs and they will be available]. They stem a couple of avenues, for some that means that they're gone from the prison, but there's a demand, so others soon take over (Prisoner).*

*We are finding in the searching that we're doing at the minute there are bits and pieces coming in but it's more we're seeing a big change in- we're finding a lot more of prescription medication that's already inside the jail (Officer).*

Whilst there was an acknowledgement that things had changed for the better; that the reduction in the supply of NPS was contributing to a calmer and safer prison environment for all, officers were concerned about what the future would hold. This is linked to the earlier discussion by Nylander et al.<sup>42</sup>, that officers who have experienced emotional strain need to be given have the time, space and opportunity to recover.

### **Officer Health and Well-being**

The concept of recovery for staff was discussed in a number of different interviews where the officers noted their concern about the possible longer-term physical and psychological impact of NPS on their health and well-being.

*[I] took some time off to recover, because some people, I don't know, a lot of the [prisoners] who use it, they kind of, they do drugs a lot. So, when you don't, like, I don't drink, I don't smoke. When it, when it hits me, I feel rough for days (Officer).*

Here the officer identified how they had needed to take time off work due to the impact of the drug on their own health. Officers reported that they had experienced numerous periods of sickness because on their return to work they had been 'spiced' again.

*I was off sick last year for five months (Officer).*

*I was off for a set period, came back, and the very next day I ended up going off again, and since that's happened to me once again where my blood pressure jumped to 210 over 120, and I was in quite a bad way. I was straight to hospital (Officer).*

For some of the officers NPS had impacted on their long-term health and there was some frustration that this was not always recognised. This is a concern because it is essential that the appropriate support is given at the right time to enable them to continue to do their job well<sup>43</sup>. Concern was raised that at times they were not supported to take time off to recover from the inhalation, and that because of this, officers were left feeling that any sickness was viewed as a personal weakness.

*They knocked me back on my sick excusal. I opened a door, I went sheet white, and I could barely walk, and I was ready to collapse, and I'm told, oh, no, it's just me. Well, it's not. I'm thinking about 'spice' now, and I'm nearly passing out on the floor (Officer).*

Here the officer is describing the physical symptoms that they experienced, but during their interview and they also discussed the longer-term psychological impact related to their own experience. Some officers stated that when they remember how they felt when exposed to NPS, they experience a repeat of physical symptoms. The psychological impact on some officers was related to a lack of knowledge about what drugs such as NPS may do to a person's health in the longer term.

*What's it doing to your lungs then? Because no one knows...because every batch is different (Officer).*

A number of the officers described the psychological impact of working in the prison at a time where there were staff shortages, with rising levels of violence. There was a perception amongst the officers that if you admitted you were finding things difficult, it could show individual vulnerability.

*I had depression and anxiety. I've never had depression and anxiety before ever (Officer).*

*It was awful. It was really, really an awful time. It was depressing, and I was quite low and, you know, it was just the same thing day in, day out, incident after incident, ambulances coming in one after another, staff getting, being assaulted, staff being affected by 'spice', prisoners being affected by 'spice' having to go to hospital (Officer).*

The memories of a time when things were at their hardest had clearly taken its toll on some of the staff.

42. Nylander et al (2011) see n.23

43. Kinman et al (2017) see n.30



The levels of stress and in some cases, trauma, were clearly evident when officers recalled this time in the prison. These conditions were, therefore, likely to have impacted on their ability to fulfil their job role<sup>44</sup>.

Furthermore, officers described how their experiences and concerns about NPS had impacted on other parts of their life outside of the prison, including uneasiness that they might be driving home under the influence of drugs without even being aware.

*You don't do a test before you leave the prison, so you could be under the influence driving, not knowing, and you think: 'Well, wow' (Officer).*

*So, I think that's a big, that was a big concern of everybody involved. I mean, as well when you go under the influence yourself, there's always — I think people have had to worry, like, you could drive home, not think anything different (Officer).*

The impact on family life was also highlighted by the officers with some concerned that their behaviour toward their family had changed due to both the physical and psychological effects of being in such a volatile workplace.

*I could have lost my family because of that. So, I was mega, mega angry about that. I still get upset about it (Officer).*

*My kids are only young and sometimes it gets you upset, but you are human, you know, it's horrible (Officer).*

The need to protect the family from the reality of their day-to-day job meant that for some officers they needed to portray that they were in control and that they were coping with what was happening. This prevented some from having the opportunity to talk about their feelings and express their concerns over a long period of time and it is likely that as a result they experienced significant stress<sup>45</sup>.

## Conclusion

In conclusion the findings suggest that the prevalence of NPS, including 'spice', has had a significant impact on officers' health and well-being. It would appear from the findings that this relates to a number of factors, including inhaling NPS, having to attend emergency situations where prisoners have collapsed, increased levels of violence, and low staffing levels due to sickness. While acknowledging that this was a small study in one prison, it offers insight into the experience of prison officers and makes some recommendations to improve their health and well-being. The supply and demand for NPS in the prison system presented a number of challenges in the way that the prison drug economy was managed<sup>46</sup>. While there have been changes made to deal with these, there is a lack of understanding about the experience of officers on the 'front-line'.

The increase of security measures was a response to the escalating levels of NPS and in many ways this was successful, but the aftermath for the officers needs to be acknowledged. The findings suggest that a significant number of officers had experienced trauma and that for many this was not addressed. These findings support the assertions of King and Oliver<sup>47</sup> that some prison officers are exhibiting both physical and psychological signs of direct and indirect trauma, therefore more research is needed to understand what support the officers need. Returning to Liebling's<sup>48</sup> argument that 'the moral quality of prison life is enacted and embodied by the attitudes and conduct of prison officers' (p.484), it is essential that these officers are supported. As Tait<sup>49</sup> identified, if officers have experienced trauma and this is unresolved, this will impact on their ability to engage positively with the prisoners in their care<sup>50</sup>. Finally, the paper has demonstrated the difficulties that people can experience when working in such a fast-moving environment where there are few opportunities to reflect on the past.

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44. Tait (2011) see n.22

45. Evers et al (2020) see n.12

46. Gooch and Treadwell (2020) see n.3

47. King and Oliver (2020) see n.13

48. Liebling (2011) see n.31

49. Tait (2011) see n.22

50. Nylander et al (2011) see n.23