



Organisational Support for Police Employees Investigating Child Abuse in Norway

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Abstract

Requests have been made for research addressing the mental health of police employees, especially studies on available organisational support and stigma. We explored the mental health work climate, opportunities for debriefing, and training among police employees who investigate child abuse cases in Norway. The data was collected through a survey: 77 police employees from six police districts responded, of whom 41% reported that there was an organisational focus on mental health and 20% had received training specific to child sexual Abuse material (CSAM). The majority (90%) endorsed the mandatory annual psychological consultations for police employees working with child abuse investigations. There were significant differences between the police districts regarding work pressure and mental health focus. A content analysis of open-ended responses identified five key categories: Lack of resources; Organised follow-up and debriefing; Acknowledgement and recognition from management; Guidance and training; and Teamwork as optimal work design. The primary stressor was a lack of resources, particularly understaffing and insufficient time. The respondents emphasised structured follow-up, debriefing and teamwork as key to providing a supportive work environment.

Keywords

organisational support, CSAM, debrief, police mental health, investigative interviews

1. Introduction

The escalating prevalence of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) represents a concerning societal challenge. The Global Threat Assessment Report (UNODC, 2023) indicates an 87% rise in reported instances of CSAM since 2019, underscoring the expanding prevalence and gravity of child sexual exploitation and abuse. This increase highlights the imperative to support specialised law-enforcement employees who work with child abuse investigations. In order to attract and retain skilled personnel, it is essential to address the work environment and identify factors contributing to welfare and job satisfaction. Further, it has been argued that the organisation needs to address the stigma regarding mental health to ensure the well-being of employees involved in child abuse investigations (Redmond et al., 2023).

Overall, research specifically targeting police investigators is rather limited, although gradually increasing. Police investigators face unique stressors related to the nature of their work, such as dealing with sensitive cases, prolonged investigations, knowledge of or relation to the victim, and the pressure of solving crimes while facing the same organisational pressures as operational police officers (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Cartwright & Roach, 2021; Fansher et al., 2019). The investigation of crimes can have a significant impact on mental health. In particular, dealing with cases of child maltreatment and abuse is reported to be the most stressful aspect of police work (Cartwright & Roach, 2021; Powell et al., 2010). Research indicates that investigating child abuse and exposure to CSAM can lead to secondary traumatic stress (Bourke & Craun, 2014b; Maceachern et al., 2011), vicarious trauma (Bozga et al., 2021), and burnout (Brady, 2017). Working on child abuse investigations also carries a risk of moral injury, which can affect moral beliefs, hope, and trust in humanity (Blumberg et al., 2020; Tapson et al., 2021).

The prevalence of mental health impairment among police officers in general exceeds those figures reported for the general population (Syed et al., 2020), and the high levels of police stress and its consequences have raised concerns among researchers, who have request further studies on how to address this issue (Bjørkelo & Emsing, 2024; Morgan, 2023). Research consistently points to organisational factors as equally or more critical for police officers' health and well-being (Blumberg et al., 2020; I. M. Cohen et al., 2019; Patterson et al., 2014; Purba & Demou, 2019; Randall, 2013; Syed et al., 2020; Velazquez and Hernandez (2019)). Cumulative stress among police employees can be aggravated by organisational factors such as long working hours, job pressure, and lack of support (Purba & Demou, 2019), as well as a work environment that stigmatises mental health concerns (Soomro & Yanos, 2019). Besides the distressing nature of the content police investigators encounter and deal with, organisational factors contribute to heightened stress and dissatisfaction among staff members involved in child abuse investigation (Powell et al., 2013b; Rostad & Langvik, 2025). High work demands, organisational stress, and, consequently, high turnover are prevalent among police employees investigating abuse, especially child abuse (Aarons et al., 2004; C. M. Burns et al., 2008; Fortune et al., 2018). The most stressful work factors are often caseload, lack of leader recognition and support, and the strain of emotional commitment (Fansher et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2013b). A recent study across police roles suggests that organisational context plays a substantial role in police employees' burnout, where investigators' burnout is related to relationships with coworkers and challenges with the court system and bureaucracy, which suggests a need to improve the occupational environment (Baker et al., 2023).

1.2 Mental health stigma in the police profession

The stigma around mental health within police organisations is a significant concern that affects officers' willingness to seek help and can affect overall organisational effectiveness (Blumberg et al., 2020; Burns & Buchanan, 2020; Papazoglou et al., 2020; Velazquez and Hernandez (2019). Police culture often emphasises strength, toughness and resilience, leading to the fear that not meeting these standards may result in negative repercussions such as being labelled unfit for duty or facing career consequences. Hence, due to concerns about confidentiality and stigma, it is uncommon for police employees to seek help (Loncar et al., 2025; Tucker, 2015). As a result, there have been calls for studies that address mental health and stigma as an obstacle for interventions among police employees (Bjørkelo & Emsing, 2024). Research suggests that creating a workplace culture that reduces stigma and explicitly prioritises the emotional health and well-being of the workforce would improve the well-being of police employees (Fansher et al., 2019; Redmond et al., 2023). Within the organisation it is crucial to establish a supportive environment that provides emotional safety and allows police employees to access the support system, without fear of stigma that might negatively affect their careers (Redmond et al., 2023). Despite progress in promoting mental health awareness and reducing stigma around work-related stress (Violanti, 2021), these efforts have not been fully embraced as crucial well-being initiatives in police organisations. This is often due to the persistent, less-informed perception that acknowledging one's mental health struggles may be seen as a sign of personal inadequacy, weakness or even mental illness. At the same time, there is a growing trend of high turnover and early retirement in the police profession (Violanti, 2021). A bias against the reporting of mental health symptoms has been observed within police organisations (Loncar et al., 2025; Marshall et al., 2021), and those with symptoms of trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are the ones who score highest on measures of mental health stigma (Soomro & Yanos, 2019). A mandatory annual check with a psychologist has been suggested as one way to support police employees who work with child abuse investigations in combating the stigma of help-seeking (Krause, 2009). The mandatory implementation of debriefing routines and regular psychological checkups have also been suggested for Norwegian police employees who work operationally (Filstad & Rød, 2024). However, little is known about how an initiative such as mandatory annual psychological checkups is perceived by police employees working with child abuse investigations.

1.3 Training and mental health awareness programme

Mandatory measures, such as general stress management interventions, have been shown to have limited effectiveness in the police profession (Patterson et al., 2014), while specific measures related to CSAM, such as talking to trusted colleagues about the case and its content, or taking breaks, are associated with increased well-being and reduced symptoms of mental health impairment (Mitchell et al., 2023). Furthermore, resilience training (Steel et al., 2024) and adaptive coping strategies that have a positive impact on resilience and well-being (Violanti, 2021) have been suggested as other ways to support police employees who investigate child abuse. However, coping strategies often rely on personal resources rather than formal training (Langvik et al., 2022). A recent study of on-scene commanders in Norway indicates the same challenge: due to the lack of training and education on emotional coping, the police employees were developing and relying on their own coping strategies (Filstad & Rød, 2024).

The recommended best practices in terms of the optimal work environment for CSAM investigators include environmental design – such as open floor plans – to reduce isolation, job rotation to ensure variability, and technological measures to reduce immersion such as turning off audio or minimising disturbing three-dimensional content (Steel et al., 2024). Specialised training, relevant mental health education, and knowledge of well-being (i.e., psychoeducation) are equally important (Leclerc et al., 2022; Steel et al., 2024), enabling CSAM investigators to address police stigmas and improve their resources to understand and cope with both victims and offenders. Additionally, they should be trained in trauma-informed practices to safeguard all parties (Campbell et al., 2020; Darwinkel et al., 2013).

The results of a recent study on strategies used by CSAM investigators to mitigate harm (Mitchell et al., 2023) showed that investigators who actively took care of their mental health reported higher well-being scores. This was achieved by engaging in practices such as preparing before exposure to CSAM, taking breaks when needed, attending related training programmes, participating in staff meetings, and seeking support from mental health professionals. Furthermore, higher well-being scores among CSAM investigators correlate with acknowledgement and offers such as wellness programmes, flexible work hours, and opportunities for daily debriefing (Mitchell et al., 2023). Hence, the research strongly encourages the introduction of changes to the work environment that support mental health interventions in police in general (Violanti, 2021) and for police employees working with CSAM in particular (Steel et al., 2024). Both general education on coping and resilience, and specific training on how to work with child abuse material, are important factors that mitigate health impairment (e.g., Fansher et al., 2019; Krause, 2009; Steel et al., 2024). However, CSAM exposure is not the only specific stressor that is relevant for police employees who work with investigations. Being in close contact with both victims and offenders, especially when performing investigative interviews, represents an important specific stressor for police employees, with the perceived organisational support being predictive for mental health impairment (Fansher et al., 2019).

This current study focuses on identifying areas for improvement in the police profession, particularly in relation to mental health, stress management, and specific support and training for police employees working with CSAM in Norway. In Norway, police education is a three-year bachelor-study at the Norwegian Police University College, where the second year constitutes an internship at a police station. In a recent study of police employees working primarily with child abuse investigation, we identified that the availability of CSAM training and organisational support was marginal and that there were barriers towards using the organisational support available – i.e., opportunities to talk to a psychologist if needed (Loncar et al., 2025). This study explores the organisational climate by examining factors such as mental health support, stress availability of CSAM training, utilisation of health services, and attitudes towards mandatory annual mental health checkups for police employees working on investigations into incidents of child abuse and other violent crimes. The research questions were twofold: First, how do employees perceive the mental health climate and available support, and how are these related to stress symptoms? Second, what are the participants' suggestions for improving how the work is organised?

2. Methods

2.1 Participants and procedure

This study is an extension of a larger cross-national project exploring empathy, resilience and distress among investigative interviewers in the UK and Norway (Iversen, 2021). For the data collection in Norway, certain variables were added to explore the research question in this current study. The survey also included other standardised measures on organisational support, and Rabbing and colleagues (2022) present the results of analyses of musculoskeletal back pain, stress and physical activity, and organisational support. The questionnaire is available by contacting the corresponding author. One hundred paper-and-pen surveys were distributed to six different police districts across Norway. Inclusion criteria were police officers working mainly with investigative interviews in the special unit, i.e., doing interviews with victims of abuse. The distribution was facilitated by a national workgroup established by the National Police Directorate with the purpose of developing procedures regarding follow-up for police employees working with demanding cases (violence and abuse). The group included human-resources representatives for several police districts. The second and last author was invited to be a part of this group. We also invited police districts that were not represented in the group to participate in the study. Representatives at the different police districts distributed the survey, which included a prepaid addressed response envelope to facilitate responses. Seventy-seven persons from six different police districts in Norway responded to the survey: 23 men, 38 women, and 16 who did not report gender. In total, 60% reported that they worked in teams. The percentages reporting that they worked alone varied across the districts, from 20 to 63%. The median age was 30–39, and the mean years of experience was 11.66 (SD 9.05), with a range of 1–38 years. The survey included both standardised items with fixed responses and an open-ended question. Stress at work was measured with a validated single-item measure (A.-L. Elo et al., 2003; Houdmont et al., 2019) with wording as follows: *Stress means a situation in which a person feels tense, restless, nervous or anxious or is unable to sleep at night because his/her mind is troubled all the time. Do you feel this kind of stress these days?* ('Not at all' to 'Very much'). The other items included in this study were *I have received training on how to work with abuse material (pictures/videos); My workplace has a focus on mental health; At my workplace, there is a climate for speaking up about high work pressure; and It should be mandatory with an annual conversation with the organisations' health service for those investigating child abuse.* All statements had a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The participants were also asked about whether, during the previous two years, they had had a conversation with a psychologist, priest or other professionals about working with investigating violence and abuse. The study was approved by the Regional Ethical Committee for Medical and Health Research (REK2019/7168).

2.2 Analysis

We used a one-way ANOVA to explore differences between the police districts, where Eta squared (η^2) of .14 or higher represents a large effect size (J. Cohen, 1992). For the responses to the open-ended item *If you have input on how the work can be organised in a better way, please provide them here*, we applied a qualitative content analysis widely used for identifying patterns and relationships within textual data fields (S. Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The inductive process of the content analysis consisted of systematic data reduction at a low abstraction level and included six key steps: (1)

familiarisation with the data by rereading the data and gaining initial overview; (2) generating initial codes by identifying meaningful text segments in the raw data; (3) labelling text segments as key concepts; (4) categorising codes according to their similarity and differences in content; (5) grouping the categories and ensuring their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity; (6) describing categories and relating those to raw data, ensuring consistency. The qualitative data was stored, managed and categorised in NVivo R1 software (Allsop et al., 2022). To ensure transparency in the content analysis, a structured method using NVivo R1 was followed (Kraiwanit et al., 2023). Initially, data was familiarised through rereading the responses. Open coding identified key segments in the data, followed by axial coding that refined categories, highlighting nuances and differentiating concepts such as divergent views and beliefs. Coding was visually tracked using NVivo's tools, maintaining an audit trail that enhanced analysis credibility.

3. Results

3.1 Organisational climate

Table 1 presents the descriptives for the variables included and the association between them. Forty-one per cent agreed that there was a focus on mental health in their workplace ($M = 3.16$, $SD .98$), ranging from 13 to 64% across the districts. Sixty-three per cent agreed there was a climate for speaking up about high work pressure, and the percentage ranged from 40 to 100 between the districts. There were significant differences between the six different police districts concerning the climate for speaking up about high work pressure, $F(5, 71) = 5.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$, whether they had received training, $F(5, 71) = 3.26$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .19$, and whether there was a focus on mental health in their workplace, $F(5, 71) = 3.11$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .18$.

Table 1 Mean, standard deviation and association between variables included in the study

Variables					
	M (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. CSAM Training	2.36(1.2)				
2. Focus on mental health	3.16 (.98)	.35**			
3. Climate for speaking up	3.90(1.05)	.15	.66**		
4. Positive towards mandatory health check	4.43(79)	.20	-.04	-.03	
5. Stress	2.18(1.08)	-.16	-.27*	-.14	-.02

3.2 Organisational resources

Twenty-two percent of the sample reported having received training on working with CSAM ($M = 2.36$, $SD 1.2$), though the percentage reporting having had such training was less than 14 for four of the districts, and 27 and 39 for the two others. Thirty-five of the respondents reported having had a conversation with the organisational health care system about working with investigating violence and abuse during the last two years, and three had used a private mental health service for this purpose. Ninety percent agreed with the statement that an annual talk to a psychologist should be mandatory for those working with child abuse investigations ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 79$), and for this statement, there were no

significant differences between the six districts, nor were there any significant differences for stress.

3.3 Stress

There were no significant differences in level of reported stress between the police districts. Sixty-five percent of the sample reported none/little stress, 13% reported quite much/very much stress. Stress was significantly associated with perceived focus on mental health at the workplace $r(77) = -.27, p = .02$.

There were no significant associations between the variables and age, neither were there any gender differences in any of the included variables.

3.4 Results from the qualitative content analysis

Twenty of the 77 respondents provided input to the open-ended question, which asked for input on how the work should be organised. The content analysis of the responses resulted in 54 codes condensed into five categories describing the main stressors and improvement areas, presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Results from the content analysis of responses to the open-ended question (n=20)

Category	Data examples	Respondents (n)	Codes (n)
Lack of resources is the most stressful aspect	“It’s the amount of work and the feeling of not being able to cover everything and feeling guilty that things take time”; “It’s not the content/people that are demanding, but everything around, like the resources, too little time to do a good enough job”. “a lot of overtime work (and thus less private life) (...) – therefore e.g., exercise during working hours is of low priority, and the effort at work means that you have little or no energy to exercise when you get home. It becomes a vicious circle”; “For my part, the nature of the cases is not the problem per se”.	7	8
Organised follow-up and debriefing	“Initiatives from the management in this regard (follow-up and debriefing) lead to more acceptance of the need that not only those who ‘can’t take it’ have to request an appointment. It can feel stigmatising, so people are reluctant to report a need”; “It should be easy to get an appointment with a psychologist not connected to the workplace”; “Mandatory follow-up/ conversation initiated by the employer”.	13	15
Guidance and training	“Advice/guidance on how best to work with the abuse material to avoid psychological distress”; “(...) adequate preparation of novices”; “educate about the importance of physical training (for coping)”; “More education”. “I think it is important to prepare new employees for what they are about to encounter, and maybe have a follow-up conversation after one month to check on how things are going”.	5	5
Acknowledgement and recognition from management	“The manager must understand the strain of working with these types of cases and that you cannot be at a 120% all the time. Interrogating children requires a lot	5	6

(Continued)

Table 2 (Continued)

Category	Data examples	Respondents (n)	Codes (n)
	from you as a person, and the next day, you may be drained of concentration and mental capacity”.		
Teamwork as optimal work design	“It is good to work in a team; then, you are not alone in these matters, and there is greater possibility for variation in workload”; “Investigative teams in pairs, in the same way as the operational patrols, I think that would help”.	4	7

3.5 Lack of resources

The category *Lack of resources is the most stressful aspect* (1) covers responses pointing to that the lack of resources, such as understaffing and lack of time, not the content in the cases, was the most significant stressor, leading to feelings of guilt or moral stress of not being able to do a good enough job. The respondents describe a vicious circle where they do not have the time for selfcare like physical exercise. Further, several of the respondents mentioned that the content of the cases was less challenging than stress due to scarce resources and workload.

3.6 Requesting organised follow-up and training

The second category *Organised follow-up and debriefing* covers the request for better follow-up and debriefing for CSAM investigators. Management was requested to initiate changes to the work environment, creating a space of acceptance and understanding of the investigator’s needs and reducing the stigma of reporting the need for help. The category addresses that the threshold to seek help, follow up and debrief the team should be addressed. The category *Guidance and training* is related to a need for follow-up, where the suggestion is to provide the employees with more knowledge through psychoeducation, especially when it comes to the training of novices. It also covers requests for education about the importance of physical activity.

3.7 Acknowledgement and recognition

The fourth category, *Acknowledgement and recognition from management*, includes responses concerning a request for support and understanding of the nature of the work from management, especially about balancing moral stress and requiring recovery time after mentally and emotionally demanding interviews with children.

3.8 Teamwork

The last category, *Teamwork as optimal work design*, covers responses that suggest that working together is the best way to manage complex cases both in terms of efficiency and social and moral support. The participants commented that teamwork made sure that they felt taken care of and ensured variation in task. Other comments that were not covered by these categories included “Integrated prosecution is important” (n=1), “longer opening hours at the Children’s House (Barnehuset)” (n=1) and “shift work for investigators” (n=1).

4. Discussion

In general, there is a need to address the mental health of police employees and barriers towards mental help-seeking (Bjørkelo & Emsing, 2024). Police employees working with child abuse investigation face unique stressors (Cartwright & Roach, 2021; Denk-Florea et al., 2020; Fansher et al., 2019) that require adequate follow-up. The results from this study suggest that the focus on mental health among police investigators varies substantially across the police district in Norway. Less than half of the respondents had used mental health services, and very few had sought help outside of the organisation. Although we did not explore why those who did not make use of the health service refrain from doing so, these findings align with research showing that seeking help for mental health issues in the police profession can be hindered by stigma concerns (Blumberg et al., 2020; Papazoglou et al., 2020; Velazquez and Hernandez (2019)) resulting in bias against reporting mental health symptoms (Marshall et al., 2021) and a reluctance to use services (Tucker, 2015).

If not attended to, cumulative stress among police investigators can lead to severe health impairments, including secondary trauma and burnout, as well as moral injury (Bourke & Craun, 2014b; Brady, 2017; Tapon et al., 2021). Having knowledge about mental health and on-demand access to services alone will most likely not suffice in an environment that is characterised by the stigma of seeking help (Redmond et al., 2023). There was substantial variation across the police district regarding whether there was a focus on mental health at their workplace, ranging from 13 to 64%, and the same variation was observed in responses to the question whether there was a climate for speaking up about high work pressure, where the percentage ranged from 40 to 100. These results indicate that some districts have a better work climate than others.

One of the aspects that we wanted to explore was the opportunities for debriefing by addressing the perceptions around mandatory mental checks by psychologists. A recent study of Norwegian operational police has pinpointed the necessity of regular formal debriefing practices to safeguard the mental health and resilience of police officers (Filstad & Rød, 2024). Ad-hoc or less structured on-demand support carries with it limitations and creates gaps that novices or those with a less obvious need to seek help fall through. This can create a work climate in which mental health issues stay under the radar and the threshold to seek help can remain high, which can in turn aggravate cumulative stress and, consequently, health impairments (Purba & Demou, 2019). Therefore, preventive measures are crucial for recruiting and retaining roles that are critical for society such as CSAM investigators.

Previous research concerning police investigators has already addressed the need for procedural safeguards to mitigate the impact of high-risk assignments (Krause, 2009), and the unanimous support for mandatory annual mental checkups for police employees investigating child abuse cases underscores the need for urgent measures to address issues of both mental health and stigma towards help-seeking in the police. The police profession has not yet fully embraced changes aimed at instilling more sustainable mental health work climates (Bjørkelo & Emsing, 2024). In addition to the lack of resources, one reason might be that mandatory stress management interventions have shown limited effectiveness in the police profession in general (Patterson et al., 2014). Hence, further research is needed to develop initiatives relevant to specific work fields, targeting particular stressors.

An annual mental health checkup could be an important measure to put mental health on the agenda, manage stress through adaptive coping, and reduce turnover among CSAM investigators. However, yearly psychological counselling would still not be sufficient on its own. The results suggest that other factors need to be addressed to reduce the accumulation of stress and create a sustainable work climate where employees can thrive. Hence, it is vital to pinpoint the specific stressors that are related to the different roles within the organisational context (Baker et al., 2023; Cartwright & Roach, 2021; Langvik et al., 2022; Powell et al., 2013b) and to understand the particular support needs of CSAM investigators.

Our content analysis identified the category *Lack of resources is the most stressful aspect*, consistent with previous research on this employee group (e.g., Fansher et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2013a). This highlights the need for additional staffing to distribute the caseload burden and, in particular, reduce moral stress. Resources are required not only to manage high work demands and cumulative stress (Berg et al., 2006) but also to provide moral support to mitigate the risk of moral injury (Papazoglou et al., 2020). The sense of insufficiency that arises from a lack of time and resources to handle all the cases poses a risk of neglecting selfcare, including preparation, breaks, or seeking support. This way of working contradicts the evidence-based recommendations on caring for police investigators (Mitchell et al., 2023; Steel et al., 2024). Overloading scarce staff can result in high turnover, which has been a prevalent issue among child abuse investigators for decades (C. M. Burns et al., 2008; Fortune et al., 2018). This comment from one of the respondents in this study summarises both the challenge and the suggested solutions:

For my part, it is not the nature of these [child abuse] cases that is the problem per se. It is the amount of work and the feeling of not managing to do everything that I should, and feeling guilty over the fact that things take time. Specific solutions to improve this are more people; both investigators and prosecutors.

The largest category, *Organised follow-up and debriefing* encompasses a request for mandatory follow-up. It is also pointed out that it is crucial for leadership to establish a climate for mental health as a norm and to avoid stigmatisation by offering services to those who do not explicitly ask for it. Recent findings show that higher well-being scores among CSAM correlate with acknowledgement by management and offers of daily debriefing (Mitchell et al., 2023). Consulting with a psychologist could help detect early signs of health impairment before the accumulation of stress and symptoms. The respondents in our study suggest that the management, besides initiating follow-up, should be able to acknowledge the emotional burden and the need for breaks or a timeout in the aftermath of severe cases. These findings support previous research that shows that a lack of leader recognition and support is one of the most stressful work factors besides caseload (Fansher et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2023; Powell et al., 2013b). They also resonate with prior findings using this sample, where a negative association between stress and organisational support was observed (Rabbing et al., 2022). Awareness of such imbalances might bring attention to resource distribution and address needs concerning cumulative stress among police investigators, not only acute stress in field operations. Furthermore, on-demand support available in the police work climate seems to carry less value as it requires breaking the stigma in order to be utilised. The following response

from one of the respondents illustrates the addressed importance of the management taking the initiative for follow-up:

Monthly conversation with a priest/psychologist about the specific demands/pressure. Organised debrief that everybody must attend. Small groups to create a sense of safety, so that they feel safe to open up. Initiative from the management = More acceptance for this need, that not only those who “can’t tolerate much” need to report a need themselves. Can be stigmatising, and people avoid reporting a need [for follow-up conversation].

There were significant differences between the police districts when it came to receiving training in working with CSAM. In total, only 22% reported having received such training. However, across the police districts this percent varied substantially, as in one of the districts it was as high as 39%, whereas for four districts it was less than 14%. In the category *Guidance and training* there was a request for stress management training, including learning coping skills and developing resilience, resonating with our other study on police employees investigating child abuse (Loncar et al., 2025). Guidance and training, as well as social support, are protective factors when it comes to mitigating adverse outcomes among police employees investigating abuse (Bourke & Craun, 2014a; C. M. Burns et al., 2008; Darwinkel et al., 2013; Eddy et al., 2021). However, the police training provides limited focus on mental health and psychological resilience when it comes to emotional demand work (Langvik et al., 2022). Training and supervision could also facilitate relationship-building between leaders and employees and provide a context consensus and standard narrative that can influence the work climate regarding mental health. Furthermore, training should consist of both adaptive coping strategies to increase resilience, and specific education on how to mitigate harm while working with child abuse material to avoid maladaptive coping (Krause, 2009; Langvik et al., 2022; Steel et al., 2024).

Teamwork is considered the optimal work design, as organising the work in teams provides more available support and allows for more variation in work tasks. This finding is consistent with a study of child abuse investigative interviewers, where the respondents emphasised the advantages of working in teams (Langvik & Rostad, 2020) and other studies of forensic interviewers, emphasising the importance of collegial bonding and teamwork to mitigate health impairment (Fansher et al., 2019). The results indicate that the investigators would like to receive the same level of follow-up and debriefing services as operational police. Some respondents suggested being organised in team pairs similar to operational police, therefore giving them someone to discuss the cases with, share responsibility, and provide mental health support. However, teamwork also carries relational risks in case of incompatibility, which can lead to stress (Baker et al., 2023). Therefore, providing individual and team follow-up is important in building a healthy and sustainable mental health work climate.

As identified in this study, the negative association between perceived stress and perceived focus on mental health highlights the necessity of prioritising mental health work climate at a national level. This emphasises the significance of incorporating mental health initiatives into the national agenda to address the challenges associated with stress and promote overall well-being through regular debriefing and training for police employees investigating child abuse. This is a crucial measure contributing to supporting specialised CSAM investigators and retaining and developing the expertise necessary to combat CSAM crime.

4.1 Strengths and limitations

As mentioned, the sample is relatively small, especially concerning the data used in the content analysis. Only half of the 12 police districts in Norway were represented in the study and therefore the generalisation and transferability of the results is limited. Future studies on this topic should strive for broader national participation. Aside from this obvious limitation, the study provides important new knowledge concerning a relevant and timely topic. The use of paper-and-pen questionnaires instead of interviews provides anonymity and confidentiality, which can contribute towards disclosure.

4.2 Implications

The results of this study highlight the need for targeted interventions to enhance mental health support for police investigators, especially those working with child abuse material. The results suggest that there is substantial variation regarding mental health climates and that the police districts should aim to explore and improve their focus on mental health and the availability of training and support. One limitation of our study is the number of respondents. However, the responses received represent a consistent voice from the investigator's perspective both in terms of what is perceived as stressful and suggestions for improvement. Based on the results, we suggest implementing mandatory psychological services and regular debriefing sessions. Implementing this can play a pivotal role in normalising mental health discussions and reducing stigma. Moreover, addressing the significant resource gaps identified in the study is essential for effective workload management and moral support, which are crucial for preventing turnover and maintaining the sustainability of the workforce.

Furthermore, it is vital to develop training programmes focused on adaptive coping strategies and resilience-building tailored to the unique stressors CSAM investigators face. A new course on investigating digital sexual abuse is being now offered as an elective subject by the Norwegian Police University in Norway, and it includes a section on health risk of CSAM exposure¹. However, psychoeducation regarding this topic is something that should be mandatory in the special victims unit, and preferably as a part of the general police education.

Initiatives should also prioritise teamwork and leadership recognition to create a supportive environment that enhances mental well-being. More nuanced targeted research is needed to identify and confirm factors crucial for tailored stress management for specific roles within police forces, such as the role of CSAM investigators. Finally, integrating mental health initiatives into national policies will not only enhance the well-being of police investigators but also improve the overall effectiveness of law enforcement in investigating child abuse cases.

Ethical approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The study was approved by the Norwegian Regional Ethical Committee (REK 20197168). This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any

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of the authors. Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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