

# The importance of adaptive coping, peer support, psychological input, team resilience and supportive management among fire and rescue service workers in maintaining wellbeing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic: a cross-sectional survey



## The importance of access to psychological input, peer support, team resilience and supportive management in mitigating the adverse impacts of the pandemic on fire and emergency workers' mental wellbeing

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### BACKGROUND

Identifying wellbeing concerns among fire and rescue service workers (FRSWs) during COVID-19 is crucial to ensuring a safe and effective service is provided by these essential keyworkers.

FRSWs are known to be at risk of developing traumatic stress-related conditions; however, little is known about the effects of COVID-19 stressors on the mental wellbeing of FRSWs.

We tested two hypotheses:

- (1) COVID-19-related stressors will predict decreased mental wellbeing
- (2) protective factors will mediate the relationship between COVID-19 stressors and mental wellbeing

### METHODS

A cross-sectional online survey exploring the effects of COVID-19 on the mental wellbeing of railway workers (n=555) in the UK, using data collected during the third lockdown (between 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021).

The survey was advertised on social media and internal platforms of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The survey included measures of COVID-19-related **risk factors**:

- COVID-19 Perceived Risk Scale
- COVID-19 Stress Measure
- COVID-19 Burnout Scale
- PTSD Checklist–Civilian Version

It also included **protective factors**:

- Brief Resilience Coping
- Team resilience

It explored how these factors were associated with mental wellbeing using:

- Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale–Short

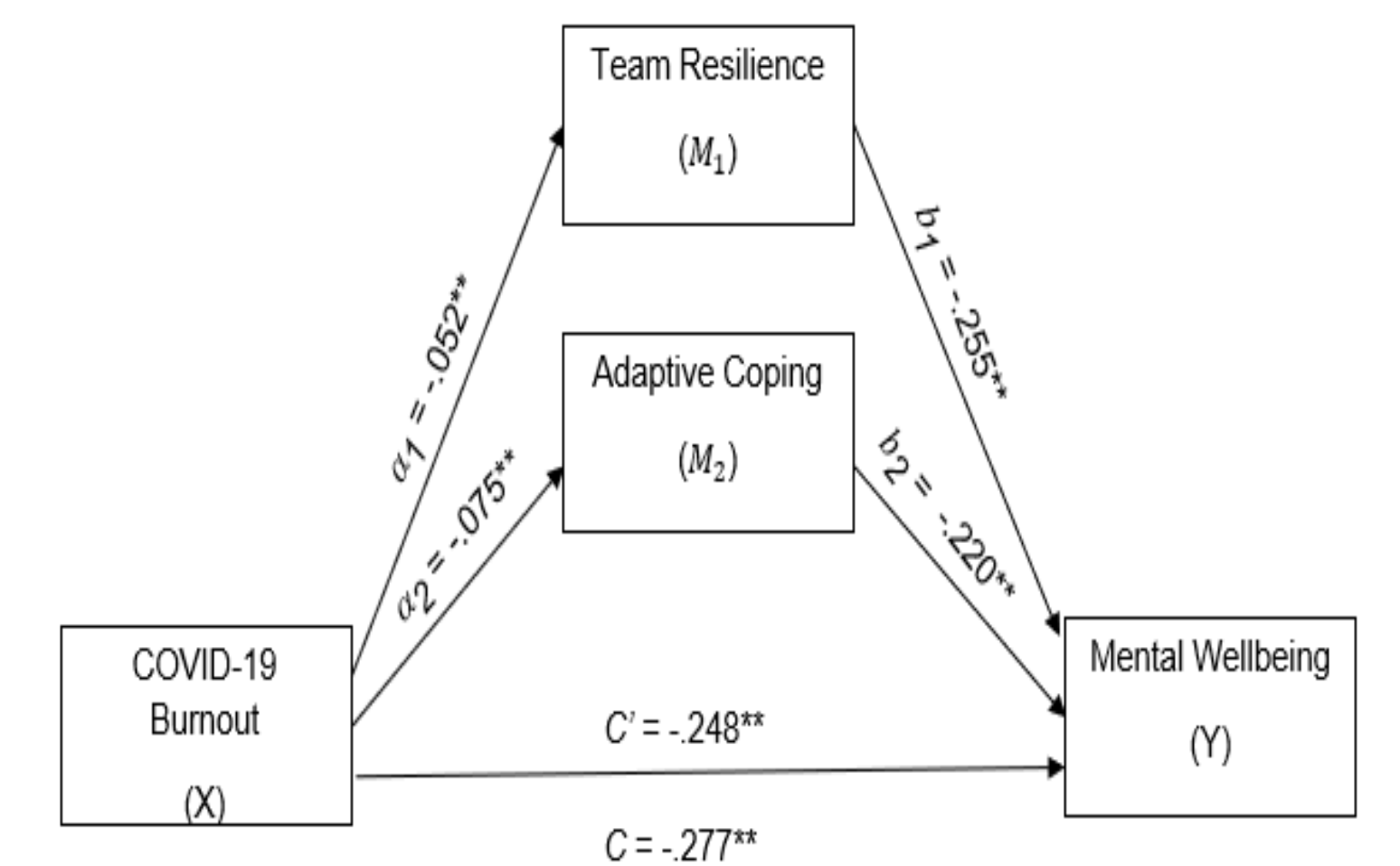
### FINDINGS

Negative associations between lower scores on mental wellbeing and higher scores on COVID-19 risk factors were found for COVID-19-related stress and burnout scores.

The independent variables, COVID-19 risk perception, stress, burnout, and PTSD outcomes, accounted for 50.90% of variance ( $F=118.00$  [5 variables,  $n=543$ ],  $p<0.0001$ ) and were each significant in contributing to the model.

The overall mediation model was significant ( $F=341.14$  [1 variable;  $n=553$ ],  $p<0.001$ ) explaining 38.50% of the variance, with team resilience and adaptive coping significantly contributing towards the model.

Figure 1: mediation model



Content analysis found the following factors as being essential in helping FRSWs adapt to the challenges of the pandemic and maintaining wellbeing:

- Need for psychological input
- Trauma informed practices
- Importance of peer support
- Supportive management and visible leadership

### INTERPRETATION

Risks to FRSWs' mental wellbeing associated with COVID-19 stressors might be buffered by fostering team-based resilience, adaptive coping and peer support.

Offering psychological input for FRSWs who need it and adopting a trauma-informed work environment is encouraged.

Supportive management and visible leadership could help FRSWs to adapt to the constant change and challenges associated with COVID-19 and in preparedness for transitioning from the response to the recovery phase of the pandemic.

