



Job Demands and Psychological Burnout among Probation Officers in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study examined job demands and psychological burnout among probation officers in Nairobi County, Kenya, anchored in the Job Demands-Resources Model and Maslach Burnout Theory. A concurrent mixed-methods design combined a census survey of 114 probation officers across nine stations (90.4% response, $n = 103$) with in-depth interviews of nine officers and nine station managers. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and hierarchical moderated regression; qualitative data were analysed thematically. Job demands were high ($M = 4.03$), driven by emotional labour and organisational expectations rather than workload; burnout was moderate ($M = 3.16$), led by emotional exhaustion. Job demands correlated strongly with burnout ($r = .650, p < .001$) and predicted 44% of its variance. Coping strategies correlated strongly with lower burnout ($r = -.488, p < .001$), though moderation fell short of significance ($p = .085$). Organisational support was the only coping construct rated low, against high family, peer, and personal support, a gap corroborated by supervisors. Both the strain and the shortfall in protection against it are predominantly organisational. The study recommends Probation and Aftercare Service (PACS) establish a resourced organisational support structure, with implications for counselling psychology and probation policy.

Keywords: Job demands, Psychological burnout, Coping strategies, Probation officers, Kenya

How to cite this work (APA):

Adhiambo, B., Mutisya, S. & Emusugut, E. N. (2026). Job Demands and Psychological Burnout among Probation Officers in Nairobi County, Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(3), 1409 – 1420. <http://doi.org/10.59765/bs7fr>

1. Introduction

Work is a major influence on psychological wellbeing, and the World Health Organization now classifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon, estimating that depression and anxiety linked to work-related stress cost the global economy approximately US\$1 trillion annually in lost productivity (World Health Organization, 2022). In human-service professions, and particularly within criminal justice systems, employees face sustained emotional, cognitive, and organisational pressures that place them at elevated risk of this syndrome (Kinman et al.,

2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Probation officers, whose work spans offender supervision, court reporting, and rehabilitation support, sit squarely within this category, operating at the intersection of public safety, social support, and legal accountability (Ugwudike et al., 2018).

Burnout is commonly understood as a psychological syndrome that emerges as a prolonged response to chronic work-related stressors, typically marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced work engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The Job Demands-Resources Model holds that burnout develops when job demands consistently exceed the resources available to meet them (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Studies across

human-service professions estimate that between 21% and 67% of workers report clinically significant burnout symptoms at some point in their careers (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), underscoring burnout as a systemic occupational risk rather than an individual failing, one that can undermine service delivery, decision-making, and client relationships in criminal justice settings specifically (Denhof & Spinaris, 2013; McMackin & LaFratta, 2023).

Research on occupational stress within African criminal justice systems remains comparatively limited, though the available evidence, drawn from adjacent helping professions and from custodial corrections, points toward elevated strain under conditions of understaffing, thin infrastructure, and heavy social-problem caseloads (Amu et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2020). A Kenyan study of custodial correctional officers, for instance, found that heavy workload and frequent hostile encounters with offenders were significantly associated with psychological fatigue, particularly where institutional support was limited (Nabwire & Okoth, 2024). Kenyan research on occupational stress in other public-sector professions documents comparable pressures, with heavy workload, unrealistic deadlines, and limited institutional support identified as significant predictors of employee stress (Omwenga et al., 2025).

Nairobi County hosts the highest concentration of probation stations, court facilities, and correctional institutions in Kenya, and accounts for a disproportionate share of the country's criminal caseload, including its most serious offences (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Probation officers serving the county work under strict court-reporting timelines, direct exposure to traumatic case material, and thin institutional resourcing (Probation and Aftercare Service, n.d.), a combination of demand and resource conditions the Job Demands-Resources Model links to elevated burnout risk, and for which Maslach Burnout Theory predicts a specific dimensional profile.

1.1 Problem Statement

The theoretical relationship between job demands, burnout, and coping resources is well established internationally, and both the Job Demands-Resources Model and Maslach Burnout Theory have been extensively tested across human-service and criminal justice occupations in North America, Europe, and Asia (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Yet this theoretical model, including the buffering role coping resources are theorised to play within it (Schaufeli, 2017), had not been tested among probation officers in Kenya, or indeed in community-based corrections anywhere in Africa, prior to the present study. This is a gap in theory application, not

only in local service data: the one existing Kenyan test of Maslach Burnout Theory in a correctional population, conducted among custodial prison officers, found a dimensional profile, reduced personal accomplishment as the leading dimension rather than emotional exhaustion, that departs from the pattern the theory predicts and that international samples typically show (Nabwire & Okoth, 2024), leaving open whether this reflects something specific to custodial corrections in Kenya, to Kenyan correctional work generally, or to some other unmeasured factor, a question community-based probation data can help disentangle.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine job demands, psychological burnout, and coping strategies among probation officers in Nairobi County, Kenya, testing the Job Demands-Resources Model and Maslach Burnout Theory directly within this previously unexamined population.

Specifically, the study's objectives were to:

1. Assess the level of job demands experienced by probation officers in Nairobi County;
2. Analyse the level of psychological burnout among probation officers in Nairobi County;
3. Examine the influence of job demands on psychological burnout among probation officers in Nairobi County, including the role coping strategies play in that relationship; and
4. Explore the strategies employed by probation officers and PACS toward mitigating work-related psychological burnout.

These four objectives are reported together, in sequence, because each supplies evidence the next depends on: the level of job demands and the level of burnout establish the two ends of the relationship the third objective then tests statistically, and the coping strategies examined under the third objective are the same coping strategies whose adequacy the fourth objective evaluates directly. Beyond closing the theoretical gap identified above, the four objectives, carry implications for counselling psychology practice and for probation and aftercare policy in Kenya and in comparable justice systems internationally. Kenya's Probation and Aftercare Service is referred to by its abbreviation, PACS, from this point forward.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The Job Demands-Resources Model proposes that every occupation carries specific demands, aspects of work requiring sustained physical or psychological effort, and

specific resources, factors that help employees meet those demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When demands are chronically high and resources are insufficient, employees experience a health-impairment process culminating in exhaustion and burnout; job resources, including personal resources such as coping strategies, are theorised to buffer this process, so that employees exposed to similar demands may experience different psychological outcomes depending on the resources available to them (Schaufeli, 2017). Maslach Burnout Theory conceptualises burnout as a multidimensional syndrome, originally comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This study retained emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation as originally specified but operationalised the third dimension as disengagement from work, reduced motivation and behavioural withdrawal, rather than reduced personal accomplishment, on the reasoning that probation officers' day-to-day experience of strain is more immediately visible as motivational withdrawal than as a retrospective judgement about competence. The two theories are complementary: the Job Demands-Resources Model supplies the structural account of why burnout occurs, Maslach Burnout Theory the psychological account of how it is experienced, with coping strategies positioned as a variable that may shape how strongly job demands translate into burnout.

2.2 Job Demands in Human Service and Criminal Justice Work: Global to Local

Emotional labour, the requirement to manage or suppress one's own feelings to meet the emotional expectations of a role, has been identified as a persistent, near-universal feature of frontline client-facing work: a study of frontline social workers in China found emotion regulation to be a constant demand of the role, present across the caseload rather than triggered only by its most severe cases (Fu et al., 2026). Within criminal justice specifically, community correction officers routinely distinguish between the sheer number of cases carried and the felt burden of that number, a distinction shaped as much by organisational and emotional context as by caseload size alone (Harper et al., 2022), and a comparative study of United States probation officers similarly found that individual caseload volume was not always the strongest driver of reported strain once other job features were accounted for (Alward & Viglione, 2025). African evidence on job demands in criminal justice settings remains limited; the available Kenyan evidence, drawn from custodial rather than community-based corrections, found role ambiguity was not endorsed as a burnout driver among prison officers working within a fixed institutional structure (Nabwire & Okoth, 2024), a contrast this paper's own results depart from once probation's distinct case-by-case discretion is considered.

Prior to the present study, no empirical evidence existed on the level or structure of job demands among probation officers in Kenya specifically.

2.3 Psychological Burnout in Human Service and Criminal Justice Work: Global to Local

Burnout's internal structure, which of its component dimensions dominates a given occupational group, has itself been a focus of international research. A meta-analysis of burnout among social workers found emotional exhaustion to be the most consistently elevated dimension across the studies it reviewed (Giménez-Bertomeu et al., 2024), a pattern a study of Chinese correctional workers reached independently as well (Jin et al., 2018). Within probation research specifically, a United States study found burnout unevenly distributed across officers' individual characteristics and organisational attributes rather than as a single uniform experience (Alward & Viglione, 2025). Within Kenya, the custodial-officer study cited above, applying the original three-dimension Maslach Burnout Inventory to prison officers, found reduced personal accomplishment, rather than exhaustion, to be the most affected dimension, linked specifically to the poor public image officers reported experiencing (Nabwire & Okoth, 2024); since that dimension is not the one this study measures, this is not a like-for-like comparison, but it establishes that custodial and community-based correctional roles in Kenya are not necessarily psychologically interchangeable. No prior evidence existed on the internal structure of burnout among Kenyan probation officers.

2.4 Job Demands and Burnout: Global to Local

The relationship between job demands and burnout is well established internationally. A meta-analytic review across occupations found high job demands consistently predict burnout through the energy-depletion mechanism the Job Demands-Resources Model describes (Lesener et al., 2019). A one-year prospective study of United States jail correctional officers found burnout rising significantly as work-family conflict accumulated over time (Jaegers et al., 2021), and a mixed-methods study of probation officers in England and Wales found that role conflict between rehabilitative and enforcement duties, rather than administrative workload alone, significantly predicted emotional exhaustion (Phillips et al., 2024). A United States study of probation officers found the same structural-and-psychological account holding directly in its own data, giving this study's theoretical pairing a direct precedent within probation research specifically (Gladfelter & Haggis, 2024), and research in Poland has likewise found that coping style relates meaningfully to burnout severity among probation officers, without

formally establishing coping as a moderator of the relationship (Wirkus et al., 2021), a pattern this paper's own findings resemble closely. Prior to the present study, no empirical evidence examined this relationship, or coping's role in it, among probation officers in an African setting.

2.5 Coping Strategies and Mitigation of Burnout: Global to Local

International literature identifies both individual and organisational resources as central to how employees in demanding human-service occupations manage strain (Kinman et al., 2011). A large Canadian correctional-workforce cohort study notes that best practice for improving correctional workers' wellbeing has been hampered by a shortage of rigorous evidence on which institutional supports are genuinely effective (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). A United States study testing four types of workplace social support among community corrections staff found management-level organisational support carried by far the strongest association with job satisfaction (Leone et al., 2025), while whether job resources formally buffer, rather than simply relate independently to, the demands-burnout link remains inconclusive and profession-specific internationally (Gynning et al., 2025). Regionally, South African correctional officials described a formally available Employee Assistance Programme as underused and under-resourced (Willemse, 2021), and a United Kingdom analysis of psychological-illness absence among probation staff found rates significantly higher than in comparable occupations, read as evidence of a systemic, organisation-wide issue (Barrett & Cartwright, 2025). Within Kenya, formal institutional programmes addressing psychological burnout remained limited even where need was documented (Nabwire & Okoth, 2024), and no prior study had examined which specific coping sources, organisational, family, peer, or personal, Kenyan probation officers actually draw on, or how these compare in adequacy.

2.6 Research Gap

Three gaps stood out as directly relevant to this paper. First, no study had established the level or internal structure of job demands or psychological burnout among probation officers specifically in Kenya, as distinct from the custodial officers the limited existing Kenyan evidence describes. Second, whether coping strategies formally moderate, rather than simply relate independently to, the demands-burnout relationship had not been tested directly, rather than assumed, among probation officers in an African setting. Third, no study had examined, in a Kenyan probation population, which specific sources of coping capacity are strong and which are weak, evidence needed to direct institutional intervention precisely. This paper addresses all three gaps directly.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected within the same period, analysed separately using methods appropriate to each strand, and integrated during interpretation. The quantitative strand established the levels of job demands, psychological burnout, and coping strategies and tested the statistical relationships between them; the qualitative strand, comprising in-depth interviews with duty-level officers and key informant interviews with station managers, illuminated and corroborated these statistical patterns. Qualitative material is presented below alongside each quantitative result it corresponds to, rather than as a separate block of narrative material.

3.2 Study Area, Population, and Sampling

The study was conducted across Nairobi County's nine probation stations: Kibera Chief Magistrate's Court, Kibera High Court, Makadara, Milimani Chief Magistrate's Court, Milimani High Court, Dagoretti, Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Kahawa, and Mathari Liaison Probation Station. Nairobi County was purposively selected because it carries a disproportionate share of Kenya's most serious criminal caseload and its officers manage the most diverse and complex caseloads nationally, spanning ordinary community supervision, court-based social inquiry reporting, and specialised liaison work such as the psychiatric-caseload station based at Mathari National Teaching and Referral Hospital. The target population comprised all 114 duty-level probation officers serving these nine stations (30 male, 84 female); station-level officers-in-charge were treated as key informants rather than survey respondents, since their supervisory position offered evidence that could corroborate rather than duplicate officer-level data. A census approach was adopted for the quantitative strand given the population's small, fully enumerable size and the study's need for coverage across all nine stations rather than a sampled subset that could have missed station-level variation entirely; 103 of the 114 officers targeted completed the questionnaire, a 90.4% response rate, with non-response attributed mainly to leave, court duty, and field assignments during the data collection window. For the qualitative strand, nine duty-level officers and nine station managers or supervisors, one of each per station, were purposively sampled across the nine stations to capture variation in station size, caseload composition, and operating context, sufficient to corroborate or complicate the quantitative pattern at each station without requiring saturation-level qualitative sampling.

3.3 Instruments and Measurement

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via KoboToolbox, using five-point Likert-type items throughout, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Job demands were measured across three subscales, Workload Pressure, Emotional Labour, and Organisational Expectations (15 items in total), covering aspects such as caseload volume, exposure to emotionally disturbing case material, and the adequacy of institutional resources relative to what the role required. Psychological burnout was measured across three subscales, Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation, and Disengagement from Work (9 items); officers' own perceived influence of job demands on their burnout was captured separately (5 items); and coping strategies were measured across four subscales, Organisational Support, Family Support, Peer Support, and Personal Endowments (10 items), the last covering officers' own internal

resilience resources. Two semi-structured interview guides, developed from the same theoretical constructs as the questionnaire, were used for the in-depth interviews and the key informant interviews respectively, allowing the qualitative strand to speak directly to each quantitative subscale rather than covering unrelated ground. Content validity was established through review by the study supervisors, both specialists in counselling psychology, who assessed each item against the constructs it was intended to measure, and the instrument was piloted with probation officers outside the main sample at Ngong and Kiambu stations prior to full administration, resulting in minor wording revisions for clarity. Internal consistency, assessed using Cronbach's alpha against an acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Field, 2018), is reported in Table 1; every subscale met or cleared this threshold except the ten-item pooled Coping Strategies scale, which is accordingly reported and analysed at the subscale level throughout rather than as a single pooled score.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for Study Constructs

Construct / Subscale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Demands (overall)	15	0.923
Psychological Burnout (overall)	9	0.873
Perceived Influence of Job Demands on Burnout	5	0.930
Coping Strategies (pooled, 4 subscales)	10	0.697
Organisational Support	3	0.821
Family Support	2	0.834
Peer Support	2	0.891
Personal Endowments	3	0.727

Note: N = 103.

Source: Research data, 2026.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the first two objectives, descriptive statistics established the level of each job demands and psychological burnout subscale, interpreted against a mean-range scale (1.00-2.33 low, 2.34-3.67 moderate, 3.68-5.00 high), the same scale later applied to each coping strategies subscale under the fourth objective. Independent-samples t-tests, with Mann-Whitney U tests run alongside them given the ordinal origin of the underlying Likert items, examined gender differences on every subscale and composite; the Kruskal-Wallis H test examined variation by station, age band, and years of service, given the small and unequal station-level cell sizes that made parametric ANOVA assumptions difficult to satisfy with confidence. For the third objective, Pearson correlation established the strength and direction of the relationship between job demands, psychological burnout, and coping strategies; multiple regression determined the

relative contribution of the three job demand subscales to burnout once considered together, rather than relying on bivariate correlation alone, which cannot separate each subscale's unique contribution from those it shares with the other two; and hierarchical moderated regression, with job demands and coping strategies mean-centred to reduce multicollinearity and an interaction term entered at a second step, tested directly whether coping strategies changed the strength of the demands-burnout relationship, rather than assuming a moderating role from a simple correlation between coping and burnout. Regression assumptions, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity via variance inflation factors, independence of errors, and undue case influence, were checked directly before interpretation in each instance, and are reported in the relevant table notes below. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, translated where necessary, and analysed thematically, with themes organised around the same constructs

measured quantitatively so that each qualitative theme could be integrated directly alongside the corresponding quantitative result rather than presented as a separate, parallel narrative.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was licensed by Kenya’s National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI/P/26/4191495) and approved by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and Tangaza University Research Ethics Committee (TU/ISERC2026/04/00187). Participation was voluntary and conditional on informed consent, obtained through a consent form available in English and Kiswahili prior to

questionnaire access. Questionnaires did not collect names or other identifying information, and both quantitative and qualitative data were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher and study supervisors. Debriefing was offered at the conclusion of data collection, with referral to the study supervisors for any participant requiring further psychological support.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Sample Profile

Table 2: Sample Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	% (n = 103)
Gender	Female	75.7
	Male	23.3
Age	30–39 years	62.1
	40–49 years	25.2
Years of service	6–10 years	55.3
	2–5 years	28.2
Casework per month	5–10 referrals	45.6
	Over 15 referrals	31.1

Note: N = 103. Categories below 20% on each characteristic are omitted.

Source: Research data, 2026.

The sample’s gender split (Table 2) tracked closely with the 84-to-30 female-to-male split in the official station population, and its age and tenure profile describes an experienced rather than newly recruited workforce, one whose reported job demands and burnout reflect sustained exposure to this occupational environment. This female-majority, mid-tenure profile fits a pattern documented internationally, where community corrections has become

an increasingly female-majority profession in several jurisdictions alongside a growing emphasis on casework and rehabilitative engagement over custodial control (Harper et al., 2022).

4.2 Level of Job Demands Experienced by Probation Officers

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Job Demands, Psychological Burnout, and Coping Strategies

Construct / Subscale	M	SD	α	Band
Job Demands (overall)	4.03	0.68	.923	High
Workload Pressure	3.61	0.96	—	Moderate
Emotional Labour	4.34	0.63	—	High
Organisational Expectations	4.09	0.78	—	High
Psychological Burnout (overall)	3.16	0.83	.873	Moderate
Emotional Exhaustion	3.59	1.00	—	Moderate
Depersonalisation	2.66	0.99	—	Moderate
Disengagement from Work	3.24	1.05	—	Moderate

Construct / Subscale	M	SD	α	Band
Coping Strategies (overall)	3.42	0.48	.697	Moderate
Organisational Support	2.14	0.93	.821	Low
Family Support	4.05	0.80	.834	High
Peer Support	3.90	0.88	.891	High
Personal Endowments	3.95	0.62	.727	High

Note: N = 103. Bands: 1.00-2.33 Low, 2.34-3.67 Moderate, 3.68-5.00 High.

Source: Research data, 2026.

Job demands (Table 3) were shaped more by the emotional weight of casework than by its volume: workload pressure, the demand most readily tied to caseload size, was the only subscale to fall short of the high band, even though close to half of respondents (Table 2) managed more than ten referrals monthly. This mirrors evidence that raw caseload volume is not always the strongest driver of reported strain once other job features are accounted for (Alward & Viglione, 2025; Harper et al., 2022): Nairobi's probation caseload is drawn disproportionately from serious offence categories, including murder, defilement, rape, and robbery with violence (Probation and Aftercare Service, n.d.), and generating a social inquiry report on such a case requires direct engagement with its detail and often with the victim as well as the offender, consistent with emotion regulation functioning as a near-universal demand of client-facing work (Fu et al., 2026). An officer's own reported caseload correlated significantly with workload pressure ($\rho = .397$, $p < .001$) and with overall job demands ($\rho = .378$, $p < .001$), so caseload volume is a genuine contributor to demand rather than something unrelated to it, but its statistical reach was narrower than emotional labour's, correlating significantly with emotional exhaustion specifically rather than with the wider burnout composite. One officer summarised the volume dimension directly: "the more the workload, the more the burnout," while another tied pressure specifically to offence type rather than count, naming defilement and rape cases as carrying "a lot of pressure" independent of overall caseload.

Organisational expectations followed closely behind emotional labour but with the widest internal spread of any job demand subscale, driven by the item on lacking sufficient resources to meet job expectations, the single highest-scoring item in the entire construct, against a role-clarity item that scored lowest of the seven organisational-expectations items and carried the largest standard deviation of any single item measured. One officer-in-charge described fieldwork conducted without adequate facilitation, officers made to "make a follow-up with each police station... it becomes expensive on the part of the worker, because we are not facilitated," while an officer based at the station carrying the widest role-clarity spread in the sample described working "under two organisations, the hospital, and then... probation," where "no one knows

what's supposed to be done." That resource inadequacy scored higher than any other item measured, ahead even of the emotional-labour items, points toward the organisation's own operating conditions, not merely the emotional difficulty of the casework itself, as a central and directly addressable driver of demand.

4.3 Level of Psychological Burnout among Probation Officers

Burnout (Table 3) was led by emotional exhaustion, the dimension Maslach's theory identifies as burnout's central, earliest-emerging quality (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), a pattern matching both social work and correctional samples elsewhere (Giménez-Bertomeu et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2018). This finding diverges from the one existing Kenyan correctional study, which found reduced personal accomplishment, not exhaustion, as the leading burnout dimension among custodial officers (Nabwire & Okoth, 2024); since this study measured disengagement from work in place of that dimension, for the reasons set out in Section 2.1, the divergence is consistent with custodial and community-based corrections producing genuinely different burnout profiles in Kenya, rather than one uniform syndrome expressed identically across the correctional service. A station supervisor described a recognisable "saturation level," beyond which an officer "would outrightly tell you, I am [finished], I cannot do this one"; another named the frequency of officers requesting time off and visible "lethargy and tiredness" as station-level warning signs, and one officer described being "admitted to hospital" for fatigue linked directly to "high referrals and lack of resources." Disengagement from work showed the widest internal spread of any burnout subscale, with reduced motivation, the item closer to an early-stage response to chronic stress, scoring well above felt disconnection from one's professional role, the item closer to full withdrawal, a gradient consistent with Maslach's own account of burnout unfolding progressively rather than all at once (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Depersonalisation was lowest of the three dimensions, consistent with its theorised status as a later-developing defensive response (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Probation's dual mandate, weighing victim and offender interests

together, offers one explanation: treating a client as merely a case is a harder threshold to cross than in custodial work. Officer accounts of it were correspondingly mixed rather than uniform: one described a “don’t care attitude towards clients,” while another pushed back against the same premise, “not necessarily being detached, but you find that you are concerned,” and a third linked any detachment specifically to station and exposure history, having “never encountered such a situation” in Nairobi but recalling it from a rural former posting. This mix of accounts fits a

moderate rather than uniformly high depersonalisation score better than a single dominant experience would. No statistically significant gender difference emerged on burnout or any of its three dimensions, though small effect sizes on depersonalisation and disengagement (Cohen’s *d* of -0.31 and -0.26 respectively) point to a modest difference the smaller male subgroup (*n* = 24) lacked the power to confirm statistically, a pattern also reported in a comparable United States probation setting (Alward & Viglione, 2025).

Table 4: Station-Level Variation in Job Demands and Psychological Burnout (Kruskal-Wallis)

Measure	H	df	p
Job Demands	18.417	8	.018
Psychological Burnout	20.078	8	.010

Note: *N* = 103. Neither measure varied significantly by age band, gender, or years of service (all *p* > .15). Station-level job demands means ranged from 3.30 to 4.60 and burnout means from 2.14 to 3.58, both following the same ordering: Kahawa, the smallest station in the sample but one designated for counter-terrorism casework, scored highest on both measures, and Mathari Liaison Probation Station scored lowest on both. With several stations represented by fewer than ten respondents, this pattern is reported descriptively, as a basis for station-level monitoring rather than a confirmed, station-specific causal claim.

That job demands and psychological burnout varied significantly, and identically in ordering, across Nairobi County’s nine stations (Table 4) indicates that the picture emerging from the county-wide averages above is not

uniform: officers at Kahawa, whose counter-terrorism caseload combines high sensitivity with a small station complement, experience a materially different demand and burnout environment from officers at Mathari, whose caseload is narrower and more specialised despite its own psychiatric complexity. This station-level pattern anticipates the influence relationship formally tested in the next section, and points toward station-targeted rather than uniform, county-wide intervention as the more evidence-consistent course of action.

4.4 Influence of Job Demands on Burnout, and the Role of Coping Strategies

Table 5: Correlations between Job Demands, Psychological Burnout, and Coping Strategies

Variable Pair	r	p
Job Demands – Psychological Burnout	0.650	< .001
Job Demands – Emotional Exhaustion	0.652	< .001
Job Demands – Depersonalisation	0.534	< .001
Job Demands – Disengagement from Work	0.416	< .001
Job Demands – Coping Strategies	-0.279	.004
Coping Strategies – Psychological Burnout	-0.488	< .001

Source: Research data, 2026.

Table 6: Regression Results Predicting Psychological Burnout

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Model 1: Job demand dimensions (<i>R</i> ² = .444)				
Workload Pressure	0.290	0.093	3.116	.002
Emotional Labour	-0.008	0.120	-0.064	.949

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Organisational Expectations	0.415	0.125	3.323	.001
Model 2: Moderation, centred ($R^2 = .539$)				
Job Demands	0.706	0.088	8.024	< .001
Coping Strategies	-0.552	0.124	-4.438	< .001
Job Demands $\times$ Coping (interaction)	-0.320	0.184	-1.740	.085

Note: $N = 103$. Model 1: $F(3, 99) = 26.33$, $p < .001$. Model 2: R^2 change from the non-interaction step = .014, F change(1, 99) = 3.026, $p = .085$. Regression assumptions (normality, heteroscedasticity, multicollinearity) were met in both models.

Source: Research data, 2026.

Officers rated the influence of job demands on their own burnout as high on a separate direct-report item ($M = 4.03$, $\alpha = .930$). One officer described demands arriving as “a crisis response instead of planned activities and schedules,” while another located burnout in the emotional variability of casework itself rather than its volume, describing how a case that resonated personally, such as a defilement matter involving a child of a similar age to their own, affected them differently from a similar case the following day, each carrying “different disturbing issues that you find yourself being clogged or fixated” on. In regression, organisational expectations and workload pressure each contributed significantly to burnout while emotional labour did not once the other two were accounted for (Table 6), despite being the highest-scoring demand on its own. This is not a multicollinearity artefact: emotional labour carried the lowest variance inflation factor of the three demands (1.50, against 2.05 for workload pressure and 2.43 for organisational expectations), ruling out shared variance with the other two as the explanation. A more likely account lies in emotional labour’s own distribution: it had both the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation of any demand subscale (Table 3), meaning almost every officer rated it high. A predictor with that little variation across respondents has little statistical room to distinguish officers with higher burnout from those with lower burnout, whatever its true weight in the work itself. This is a statement about how the demand operates statistically alongside the others, not a claim that emotional labour is unimportant to officers’ lived experience of the work. The relationship holds strongly and significantly in the direction both the Job Demands-Resources Model and Maslach Burnout Theory predict, a result matching a comparable United States probation study testing the same theoretical structure (Gladfelter & Haggis, 2024).

Coping strategies related strongly and independently to lower burnout (Table 5), but the interaction term testing coping as a formal moderator fell short of significance (Table 6), a result consistent with international evidence that job-resource buffering is profession-specific and often inconclusive (Gynning et al., 2025) and with Polish

probation research finding coping style related to burnout severity without formally establishing moderation (Wirkus et al., 2021). The literature is not uniformly null on this question, however: a large, adequately powered study of emotional demands and burnout across healthcare, care, and human-service roles ($N = 1,506$) did detect statistically significant moderation by job resources, including social support, but found the interaction ran opposite to what the Job Demands-Resources Model predicts, with support intensifying rather than buffering the relationship between emotional demands and exhaustion (Popucza, 2026). Read against that evidence, this study’s own non-significant interaction cannot be read simply as a power problem; it sits within a wider literature in which coping resources, when they do moderate the demands-burnout relationship, do not always do so in the protective direction theory assumes. Coping functions here as an independent, well-supported source of relief, whether or not it also formally softens the demands-burnout link. The regression model’s total explanatory power, with job demands alone accounting for 44% of the variance in burnout, is large by the standards typically applied in occupational research: job demands are not a marginal contributor to burnout in this population but its dominant identified source. Since organisational expectations and workload pressure, not emotional labour, carried the statistically unique weight, intervention aimed narrowly at emotional preparedness or individual resilience training would address only part of what the regression identifies as driving burnout, leaving the organisational-level demand largely untouched.

4.5 Strategies for Mitigating Work-Related Burnout

Coping strategies (Table 3) showed a sharp asymmetry: organisational support was the only construct in the low band, while family, peer, and personal support were each high. Officers put a number on this gap directly: one rated organisational supportiveness “maybe two” out of ten, adding that “the organisation is focused on us delivering to the client... rather than the officer,” a self-rated score close

to the quantitative composite. A station supervisor, interviewed independently, corroborated the same absence, having “not seen any organisational [support],” naming only a church that had independently offered its services as something “in progress.” A supervisor has less incentive than a line officer to describe their own organisation as unsupportive, so this independent corroboration reduces the risk that the low score simply reflects officers crediting themselves while blaming the organisation.

This asymmetry sits alongside comparable international evidence. A United States study found management-level organisational support carried by far the strongest association with job satisfaction where present (Leone et al., 2025). In South Africa, correctional officials described their work as taking a significant personal toll while the Employee Assistance Programme formally available to them remained underused or insufficiently resourced (Willemse, 2021); in the United Kingdom, a national analysis of psychological-illness absence among probation staff found rates significantly higher than in comparable occupations, read as evidence of a systemic, organisation-wide issue (Barrett & Cartwright, 2025). Both framings fit the pattern found here: the gap is not in officers’ capacity to cope, which this study shows to be strong, but in the one source of coping capacity, organisational support, that PACS itself is positioned to supply and currently does not.

Asked directly what would reduce burnout, officers and key informants converged on concrete, largely standing rather than one-off measures: structured debriefing after high-severity cases; a departmental counselling unit, with one officer answering without qualification that “yes, it should be in place”; access to e-counselling or remote specialists; annual training in stress-management and counselling skills for officers themselves; discretionary rest allocation responsive to burnout symptoms rather than only the standard annual leave cycle; and a non-punitive channel through which officers could raise concerns, since one key informant framed the core intervention as “hearing [officers] out” rather than only resourcing them. These psychological interventions were consistently tied to specific, low-cost operational gaps officers named alongside them, reliable transport, field airtime, and private space for sensitive client interviews, without which supervision and debriefing measures could not be delivered consistently.

Across all four objectives, the findings form a single connected pattern. Job demands are high and organisationally rooted, not caseload-rooted (4.2). Burnout is moderate, and its dimensional ordering places this workforce early in the course chronic strain typically follows (4.3). The two are statistically linked in the direction both the Job Demands-Resources Model and Maslach Burnout Theory predict, confirmed here for the first time in this population (4.4). The resource this workforce lacks is the one the Job Demands-Resources

Model identifies as most directly within the employing organisation’s own power to supply (4.5). The theoretical gap set out in the introduction is narrowed: both frameworks hold, coping operates as an independent protective resource whose moderating role remains an open empirical question, and the intervention the evidence points to is specific rather than general.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Level of Job Demands

Conclusion. Job demands among Nairobi County’s probation officers are high, driven more by the emotional content of casework and by resource inadequacy than by caseload volume; resource inadequacy was the single highest-scoring item measured.

Recommendation. PACS should weigh emotional severity, not only case counts, in caseload allocation, and commission a station-level review beginning with the highest-demand stations.

5.2 Level of Psychological Burnout

Conclusion. Psychological burnout is moderate, led by emotional exhaustion ahead of disengagement and depersonalisation, indicating a workforce at an early stage of occupational strain rather than one already disengaged.

Recommendation. Supervisors should monitor exhaustion-specific indicators (fatigue, time-off requests) as an early-warning signal, before disengagement or depersonalisation sets in.

5.3 Influence of Job Demands on Burnout, and Coping’s Role

Conclusion. Job demands strongly influence burnout, chiefly through organisational expectations and workload. Coping strategies relate strongly to lower burnout; their formal moderating role was not confirmed and remains an open question.

Recommendation. A larger, adequately powered multi-county study should retest the moderation question directly before it is treated as established either way.

5.4 Strategies for Mitigating Burnout

Conclusion. Officers are not short of coping capacity generally; they are short specifically of organisational support, the one source PACS itself can supply and currently does not, a gap corroborated independently by supervisors.

Recommendation. PACS should establish a formal, resourced organisational support structure, comparable to an employee assistance programme, incorporating structured debriefing, counselling access, and a non-punitive channel for raising concerns, the single intervention most directly supported by the evidence.

Read together, the source of strain and the shortfall in protection against it both sit predominantly at the organisational level, not with individual officers.

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