

Understanding risk and protective factors to UK railway workers' mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic: a cross-sectional survey



The importance of access to psychological input, team support and leadership in mitigating the adverse impacts of the pandemic on railway workers' mental wellbeing

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BACKGROUND

Frontline railway workers have provided an essential service throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Although railway workers are known to be at risk of developing traumatic stress-related conditions, little is known about the effects of COVID-19 on the mental wellbeing of railway workers in the UK.

Two hypotheses were tested:

- I. increased scores in COVID-19-related risk factors will predict decreased mental wellbeing
- II. protective factors will mediate the relationship between COVID-19-related risk factors and mental wellbeing

METHODS

A cross-sectional online survey exploring the effects of COVID-19 on the mental wellbeing of railway workers (n=906) in the UK, using data collected during the third lockdown (between 1st Dec 2020 – 24th March 2021).

The survey was advertised on social media and internal platforms of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

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
- General Help-Seeking Questionnaire

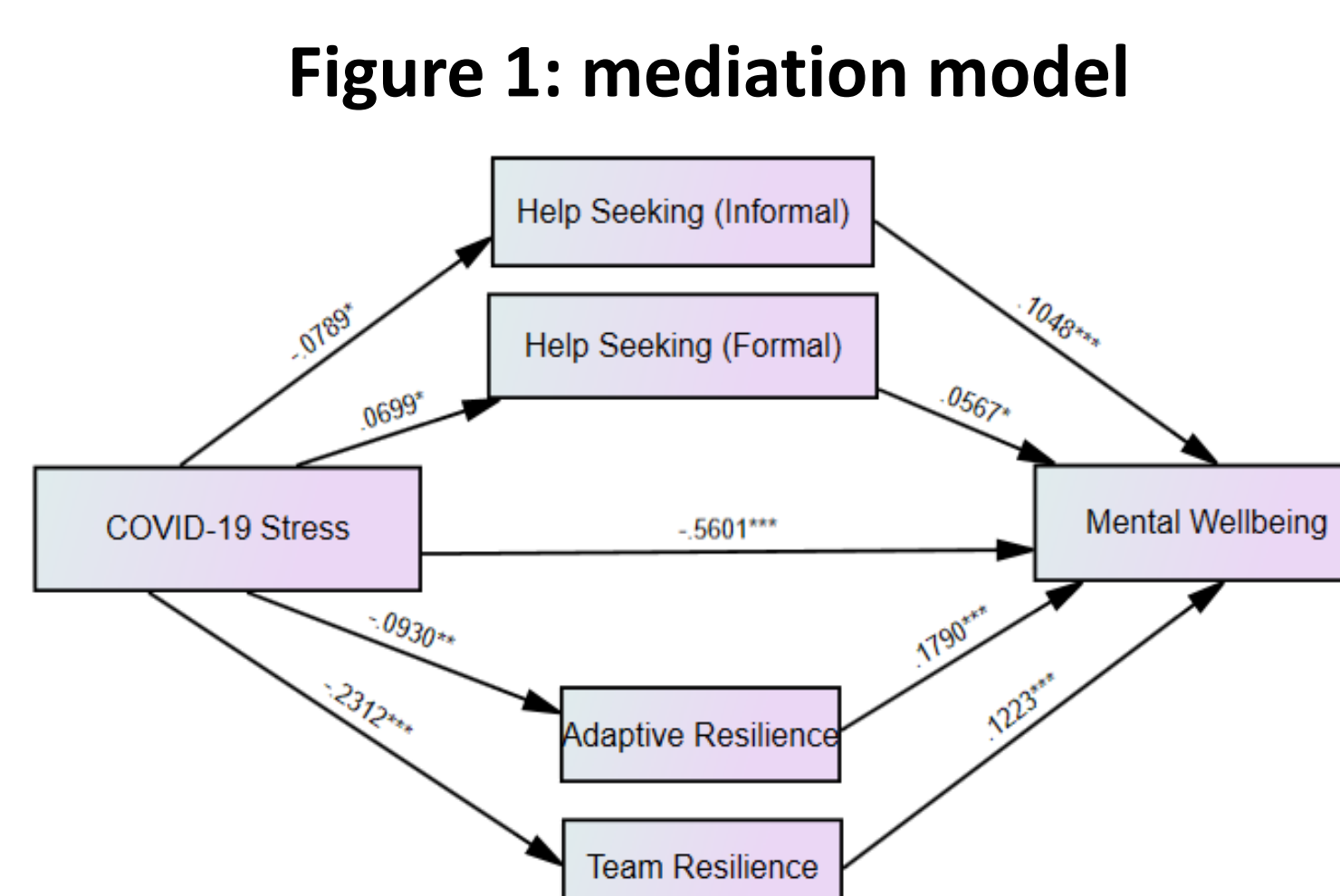
It explored how these factors were associated with mental wellbeing using:

- Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale–Short

FINDINGS

Responses were analysed using multiple regression and parallel mediation analyses.

COVID-19 related risk factors negatively predicted wellbeing. Protective factors significantly mediated the relationship between wellbeing and burnout, stress, PTSD and risk perception (figure 1).



*=p<.05 **=p<.01 ***=p<.001

Content analysis found the following codes:

- self-reported mental health decline throughout the COVID-19 pandemic
- perceived loss of workplace supports
- need for psychological support
- concerns for the future.

Worrying about my and my families future regards to health and career certainty is affecting my wellbeing and happiness

INTERPRETATION

These findings emphasise the importance of adaptive coping and team-based resilience in alleviating the negative impact that COVID-19 has on railway workers' mental wellbeing and in preventing burnout.

Work-based supports and access to psychological input for railway workers who need it is essential.

Building a resilient railway workforce moving forward requires attention to staff mental wellbeing and to ensuring that support systems are robust and accessible.



Feel badly let down. passengers are not following the rules and putting mine and my family's health at risk.