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# Impact of working through the Covid-19 pandemic on ambulance service staff and intention to leave the NHS: a mixed methods study

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## Background

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the ambulance service has caused unprecedented demand, consistently high levels of operational pressure and this has been coupled with the impact of high levels of staff absence due to sickness and covid related isolation. In this mixed-methods study we explore the impact of prevailing conditions on NHS staff experiences, future employment intentions and key factors in decisions to remain in the NHS or leave.

## Study methods

Data was collected from two ambulance trusts.  
Online survey (n=500) and qualitative interviews (n=20) between April 2021 – March 2022.  
Interview participants were sampled purposively to include frontline staff, line managers and senior managers.  
Survey analysis was undertaken in SPSS and interviews were analysed thematically using Framework approach by two researchers.

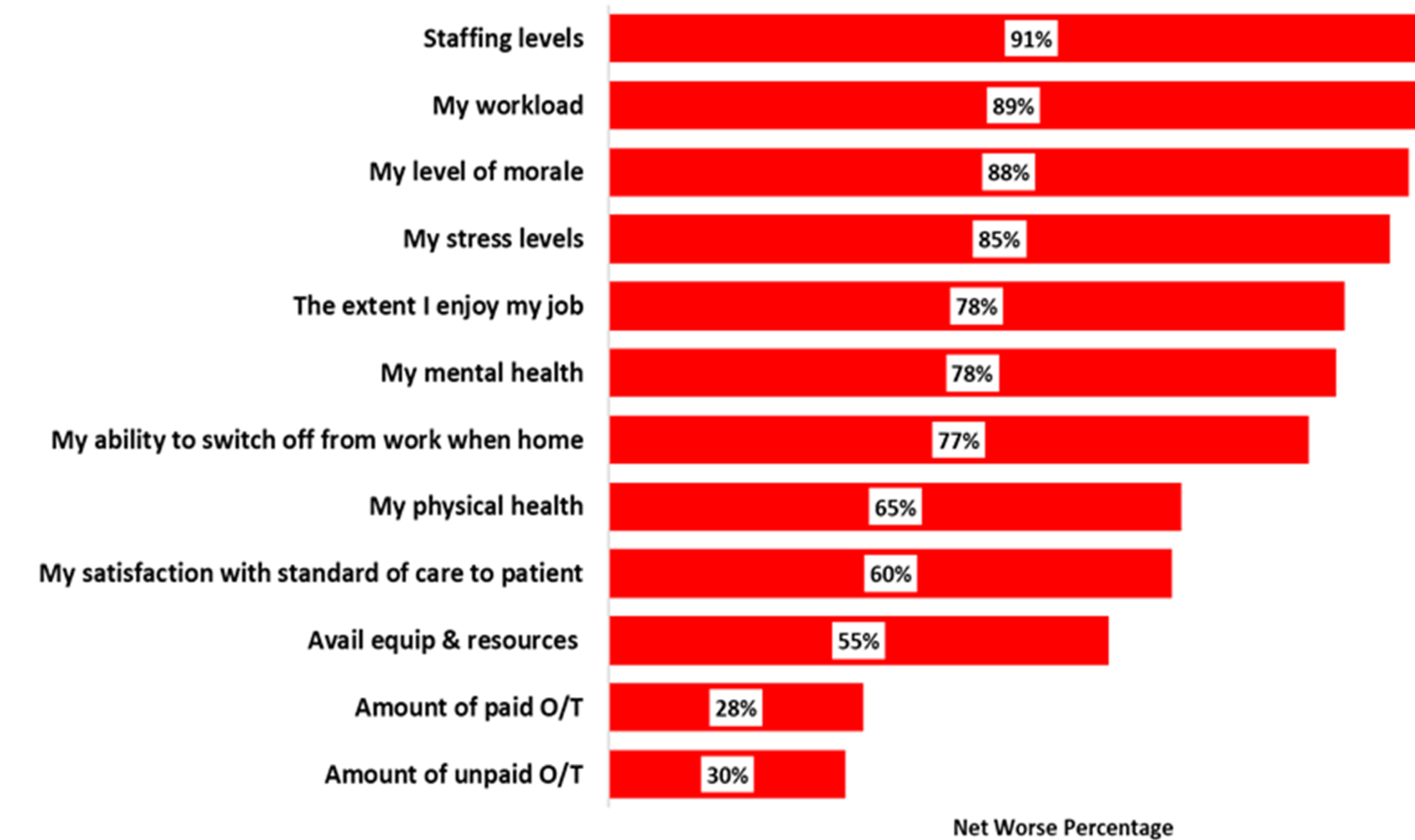
## Survey participants

- Average age of Ambulance staff was 41 and mean length of service was 13 years.
- 53% of respondents were female (53%, notably lower than for other sectors of the NHS)
- The largest single occupational group was paramedics (44%), followed by Emergency Medical Technician/Emergency Care Assistants (25%) and those in call centres (10%).
- Only 3% of Ambulance respondents were in Band 8+

## Impact of covid on ambulance staff: survey

Compared with early 2020, Ambulance staff felt that things had got worse in staffing, workload, levels of morale and stress levels.

### Q12 – Summary of issues – net % scores for 'Worse'

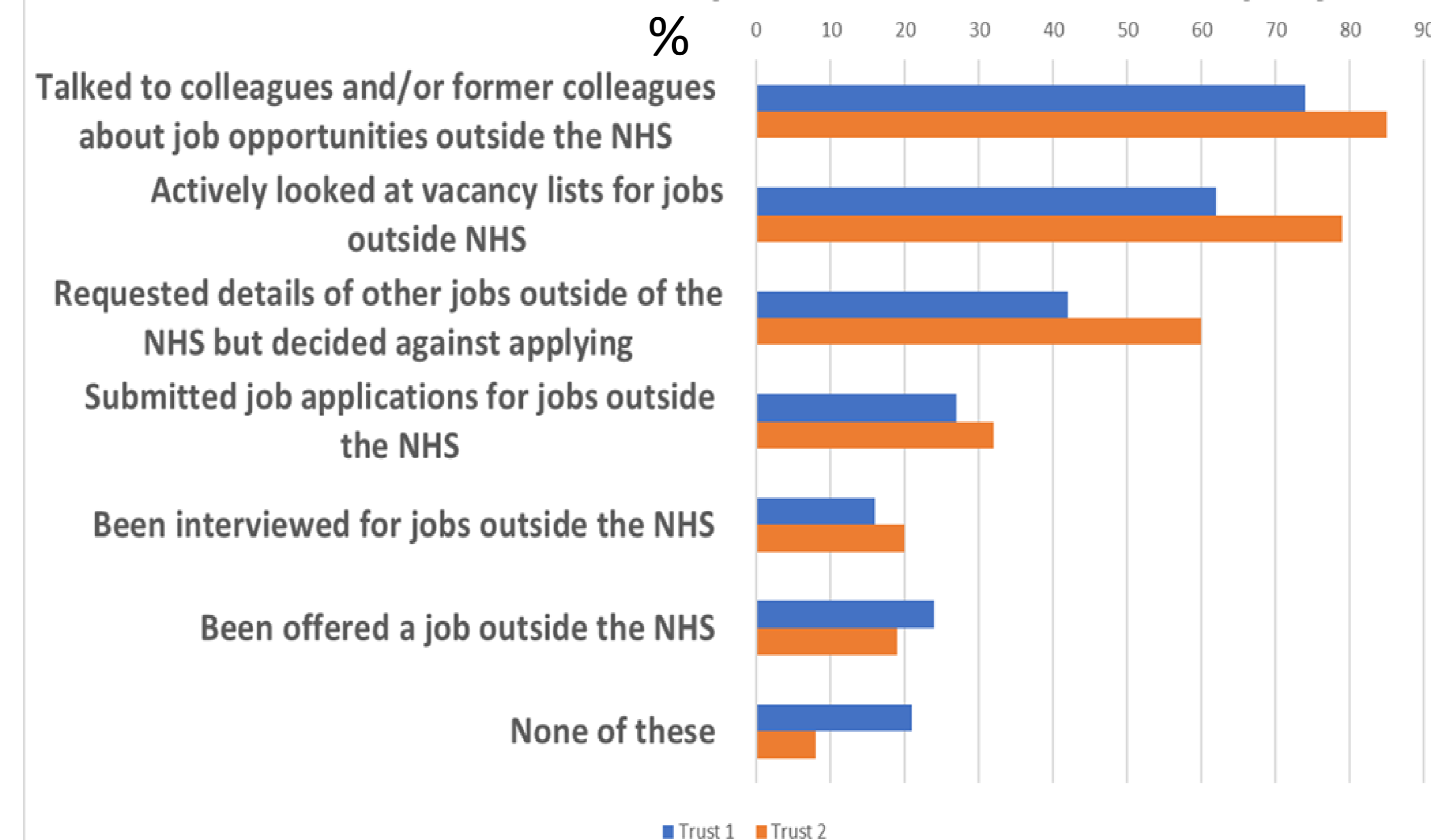


## Impact on decisions to continue working in the NHS: survey

Almost one-in-five respondents had applied for a non-NHS job in the last six months, including 25% paramedics, and 27% wished to be working elsewhere in 5 years time.

Job security and job satisfaction from patient care were the main factors keeping people in the NHS, followed by making a difference and the people they work with.

### Q18a Active steps towards non-NHS employment



## Impact on ambulance staff: Interviews

*"The way I'd describe it as is relentless. It's call after call. You can't think about the last call you've had."*

*"I feel it's aged me! I really, I feel like the last 18 months has really aged me, physically and mentally. I'd probably, if I was able to retire, I'd probably retire now."*

*"We're all frazzled. Resources are frazzled in hospitals and ambulance services, and it's like if we do have a variant....I genuinely do not know how we'd cope. I mean we're all just exhausted."*

*"I think I'm actually more at risk of my mental health at the moment [not covid], and I think a lot of people are, because that's the thing that's being overlooked."*

## Impact on decisions to continue working in the NHS: Interviews

*"If I found something similar that would pay better and would be an easier life as I come towards retirement, yeah, absolutely I would think of leaving and apply for other roles. I love the job I do, but now it's becoming very hard to think, I love my job but that's all I've got."*

*"I think I've heard a lot of people say, who are near retirement, they're ready to take an early retirement. I know some people are looking for other roles, other jobs."*

*"I think many will either look for other jobs completely outside healthcare, or will just be so exhausted that within a few years they'll completely have burnout, and have to leave. I actively encourage them to try and get the paramedic courses and things done, so that they've got a get-out plan in the longer term."*

*"But the shift work and things like that, people will be just exhausted by that as well, and just going, "I can work for a GP surgery for the same money, if not more, and they will support me to put me through the Masters and*

*prescribing and things like that"*

## Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has had and continues to have a detrimental effect on workload, morale and both mental and physical health, with implications for staff retention and NHS care delivery. Insights provided by this study are intended to inform approaches to staff retention