

Public Safety Personnel Mental Wellness: The Impact of Organizational Factors



Importance

160,000 Canadians work in public safety organizations, providing public services in potentially traumatic emergency situations. Over the past 10 years, the number and cost of WSIB mental health claims in this sector have been rising, and the unprecedented stress of the COVID-19 pandemic is making these issues worse. Public safety organizations have attempted to mitigate these issues by providing mental health interventions; however, by focusing efforts on the individual within high stress work environments, these interventions neglect the role of organizational factors, like supervisor and co-worker support and mental health stigma, and their impact on employees and employment outcomes. Building the evidence base on the impact of organizational factors on mental wellness will help public safety employers better support the well-being of their employees.

Impact

The findings of this study will impact have municipal and provincial impacts. This study, and the organizational factor assessment tool it creates, will support public safety organizations to positively impact employee mental wellness, and in turn benefit their families and communities. The long-term plan for this work is to build on the findings of this study and expand this research beyond Ontario, to the mental wellness of Canadian public safety personnel.

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
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Project Objectives

The main goal of this study is to build an understanding of how organizational factors impact public safety personnel mental wellness and work outcomes.

Four study objectives:

1. Determine the ways that public safety organizations in Ontario currently address organizational factors.
2. Explore public safety personnel experiences of their organizations' efforts to address organizational factors.
3. Quantify the impact of organizational factors on public safety personnel mental wellness and work outcomes.
4. Develop a tool for public safety organizations to assess how effectively they address organizational factors and the potential impact of their efforts on employee mental wellness and work outcomes.

Commitment

Participants will include 10 Ontario public safety organizations from across public safety sectors and geographic areas.

A senior leader will be identified from each participating public safety organization whose role in the study will include:

- Sharing knowledge of how organizational factors are addressed within their organization
- Assisting with recruitment of employees for surveys and optional focus groups
- Sharing of employee wellness and work outcome data
- Providing consent for WSIB to share worker's compensation data with the research team

To address Study Objectives 1-3, data will be collected from 3 different sources and will contribute to the creation of an employer assessment tool (Objective 4).

1. Senior leaders will take part in an individual virtual interview (90 minutes) about the way their organization has addressed organizational factors over the past 10 years.
2. Employees from the recruited public safety organizations will participate in surveys and optional virtual focus groups (90 minutes) about the experience of the workers with organizational factors over the past 10 years.
3. Employee human resources, operational, occupational health, and demographic data will be collected from each organization, as well as relevant workers compensation usage data from WSIB Ontario, for the past 10 years.



Compensation

Employees who take part in this research by completing a survey will be entered to win a \$50 gift card. Two gift cards per organization.

Application Process

For more information, contact Dr. Megan Edgelow
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This study has been reviewed for ethical compliance by the Queen's University Health Sciences Research Ethics Board.