The Mental Health and Well-being of Detachment Services Assistants in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: A Qualitative Investigation

Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dr. Laura Huey
Western University

Dr. Mark Norman
McMaster University

Dr. Dale C. Spencer
Carleton University

Executive Summary

This report addresses the experiences of Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Detachment Services Assistants (DSAs), largely working in rural and remote areas, specifically examining their unique occupational stresses and their exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTE) in their work. Drawing on 49 semi-structured interviews with DSAs, this report elucidates their understandings of occupational stress and PPTE, their mental health and well-being needs, and their access to and experiences utilizing mental health resources. Contemporary police services are divided by uniformed/sworn officers and civilian personnel, and this separation may be a source of occupational stress and discord. Previous studies have found high prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among police officers, but very little focus has been on the occupational experiences of non-sworn officers, including the prevalence of PTSD and burnout experienced by this group. The findings of this study indicate that DSAs are frustrated foremost by poor training for their current positions, especially as it relates to emotionally taxing situations. In addition, a majority of the participants reported exposure to materials and/or experiences that involved PPTE. Such exposure is experienced as vicarious trauma and is compounded by the fact that in small rural communities, more often than not, DSAs know the victim and those criminalized with resultant impact on DSAs' well-being. Another source of occupational stress is upper management, particularly sworn officers, and a perceived lack of support and misunderstanding of the roles of DSAs within police services. These challenges are compounded by a hierarchical paramilitary culture in which DSAs continuously felt undervalued and excluded from social activities. Complicating mental health concerns, DSAs also articulated that they had difficulty accessing Employee Assistant Programs due to the remoteness of their jobs. This report ends with 12 recommendations to improve mental health and job satisfaction of DSAs in the RCMP.

Introduction

Public safety personnel (PSP) face significant mental health challenges arising from exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTE) in their work (Carleton et al., 2018a, 2018b). Researchers in Canada have investigated the relationship between mental health and occupational stress among various categories of PSP, including correctional workers and police officers (Carleton et al., 2018a, 2018b; Hall et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2020a). However, despite their significant public safety role and potential exposure to occupational stress and PPTE, administrative personnel working in public safety organizations are an understudied group with regards to mental health and well-being. The current study thus fills a significant gap in the understanding of the occupational mental health challenges and needs of a key sub-population of Canadian PSP: Detachment Services Assistants (DSAs) who perform administrative support roles in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Further, because most policing research has tended to focus on urban areas (Ricciardelli, 2018), the inclusion of DSAs in rural or remote RCMP detachments will provide key insights about the unique occupational stresses faced by police DSAs in these locales.

There are hundreds of RCMP detachments located in urban, rural and remote locations across Canada, each employing DSAs. DSAs occupational responsibilities vary across detachments, where they may do transcription (exposing each to vicarious trauma), criminal record checks, administrative tasks, deal with criminalized persons and victims attending the detachments (exposing them to potential physical risk), and so on. The nature of their jobs expose DSAs to a variety of potential stresses and PPTE, however we know little about the exact experiences of DSAs –including how they are exposed to PPTE and the forms such exposures manifest. Using semi-structured interviews, we explored DSAs' understandings of occupational stress and PPTE, their mental health and well-being needs, and their access to and experience using mental health resources. Via this project, we advance the scholarly knowledge on an understudied sub-population of PSP and provide evidence-based recommendations for meeting the mental health needs of Canadian public safety DSAs.

Literature Review

Scholars, stakeholders, and others widely recognize that PSP face a variety of mental health challenges arising from the risks and stresses associated with their jobs (Carleton et al., 2018a, 2018b; (Oliphant, 2016). Said risks can include intervening in physically dangerous situations and working in stressful organizational structures (Berg et al., 2006; Carleton et al., 2018a, 2018b; Carleton et al., 2019; Green, 2004; Hall et al., 2018; Mayhew, 2001; McCarty & Skogan, 2012; Ricciardelli, 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2020a; Robinson et al., 1997; Schaible & Gecas, 2010). Occupational stresses faced by police (and other PSP) can contribute to a litany of damaging mental health outcomes. Ricciardelli and colleagues (2018) analyzed qualitative survey responses from 828 Canadian PSP, of which 385 were employed by police services, and found that this sample reported:

> difficulties with substance abuse, addiction, anger, depression, irritability, seclusion, self-marginalization, distrust, low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, and a plethora of other negative coping behaviours and psychological compositions resulting from their occupational work…. The outcomes of their work experience are also detrimental to their families and loved ones…[leading to] the demise of their marriages and relationships, the strain their work placed on their temperaments, and thus the impact on their child-rearing capacities (pp. 571-572).

Given these impacts, it is not surprising that studies have found high prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among police officers (Green, 2004; Maguen et al., 2009; Mayhew, 2001; Robinson et al., 1997). While research abounds on police workers' occupational risks and subsequent mental health needs, the literature on the occupational risks and challenges faced by civilian personnel is much more limited (Dick & Metcalfe, 2001; Kerswell et al., 2019; Lentz et al., 2020; McCarty & Skogan, 2012) and there is minimal data internationally or in Canada that speaks to the prevalence of mental disorders, including PTSD, among civilian personnel working in police services. In a study of the prevalence of PTSD and other mental health disorders, Carleton and colleagues (2018) grouped all RCMP respondents together. They did not distinguish between sworn members, civilian members, or DSAs, nevertheless, they found that 30 percent of the sample

screened positive for PTSD.[1] A recent study (Lentz et al., 2020) on mental health disorders among RCMP staff in Alberta and the Northwest Territories provides the most comprehensive data to date on the mental health of civilian police personnel. The researchers found that civilian RCMP employees in the sample produced "scores that were consistently higher than those demonstrated by police officers for PTSD, anxiety, and depression" (p. 3). The authors suggest that perceived organizational factors, such as feeling unsupported or excluded from the paramilitary culture of police services, may contribute to the higher rates of mental health disorders among their sample.

Given the paucity of research on occupational stressors and mental health among civilian police employees, we report the existent research in this area. After providing some context on the role of civilian police employees, we discuss two broad themes: organizational status and occupational stresses. We conclude the review by discussing key gaps in the literature.

Civilian Employees in Police Services

Since at least the 1950s, many police services have increasingly hired civilians to perform a variety of roles, including clerical work, communication, dispatching, and skilled technical tasks such as photography or computing (Ellison, 2004; Forst, 2000)—a process known as "civilianization" (Crank, 1989; Dick & Metcalfe, 2001; Forst, 2000). The civilianization of police services emerged from a desire to unburden officers from time-consuming administrative tasks, reduce staffing costs by employing civilians in lower-paying positions, and professionalize increasingly specialized administrative and budgetary roles (Dick & Metcalfe, 2001; Forst, 2000; Harring, 1981; McCarty & Skogan, 2012; Taylor & Williams, 1992). In Canada, civilianization has seen the percentage of non-sworn officers employed in all police services rise from 18% in 1962 (when these employment data were first collected) to 32% in 2019; and, as of 2019, there were nearly 27,000 civilian personnel working in police services, accounting for 85% of all non-sworn officers and 26.8% of all sworn and non-sworn personnel (Conor et al., 2020).

[1] A positive screen for PTSD required participants to meet a minimum threshold for each PTSD criterion cluster and score higher than the minimum clinical cutoff of >32 for their total score (Weathers et al., 2013).

Status Within a Police Organization

Police services may be characterized by divisions between uniformed/sworn and civilian personnel (Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Guyot, 1979; Loftus, 2008; Mayhew, 2001), and such divisions have can be a source of the occupational stresses they experience. The initial move toward civilianization of police services met resistance from many uniformed personnel, who perceived the civilianization process as a threat to the job security of officers or to the "militaristic image of police organizational culture" (Crank, 1989, p. 167; see also, Forst, 2000; Loftus, 2008). Civilian staff are typically paid less and receive fewer benefits than uniformed officers (Forst, 2000; McCarty & Skogan, 2012). Furthermore, they are "often described as occupying a lower stratum in the police hierarchy" (McCarty & Skogan, 2012, p. 70) or as "second class citizens" (Burke, 1995, p. 3). As a result, civilian staff be looked down upon by uniformed officers, may feel their concerns are taken less seriously by management, and feel excluded from full membership in the organization (Burke, 1995; Guyot, 1979; Mayhew, 2001; McCarty & Skogan, 2012). Further, staff in some civilian roles, such as public safety communicators (e.g., dispatchers), may feel they have not been provided with adequate training, leading to feelings of inadequacy and an inability to cope with stressful and emotional occupational occurrences (Burke, 1995; McCarty & Skogan, 2012). The marginalization of civilian staff is not inevitable. Dick and Metcalfe's (2001) survey of uniformed and civilian staff in an English police force found that the degree of managerial support and placement in the organizational hierarchy, rather than their status as civilian or uniformed, influenced staff's commitment to the organization.

The status of civilian staff may intersect with other aspects of identity—notably gender and racial or ethnic background—to further marginalize many non-uniformed personnel. Police services have been widely characterized as masculine organizations (Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Loftus, 2008; Moore, 1999; Prokos & Padavic, 2002; Westmarland, 2008). Further, Loftus (2008) argues, "policing remains an overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, male-dominated occupation" (p. 757). Despite the overrepresentation of self-identifying men in policing, studies in various locations identify a significantly high proportion of female employees among civilian staff (Kerswell et al., 2019; Loftus, 2008; McCarty & Skogan, 2012). The relative overrepresentation of female civilian staff, in contrast to the male-dominated uniformed ranks, may also intersect with

race or ethnicity to further marginalize some civilian staff—as evidenced in Boogaard and Roggeband's (2010) investigation of the Dutch police service. They found a tension between executive (those who graduated from the police academy) and administrative staff. Specifically, an organizational hierarchy existed in which executive ethnic-majority men were the most powerful and administrative ethnic-minority women the least. Therefore, Boogaard and Roggeband (2010) argue "gender, ethnicity and organizational hierarchy intersect and consequently differentiate the social position, rewards, experiences, opportunities, etc. of individual members of the police" (p. 54). Given civilian status intersects with gender and race or ethnicity to produce hierarchical relations within a police service, and that the lesser status of civilians has been demonstrated to exacerbate occupational stress, this is an area deserving of much deeper scholarly inquiry and policy intervention.

Occupational Stresses

Civilian police employees may face a variety of occupational stresses—such as being the first point of contact for distressed members of the public, maintaining a professional front in stressful situations, coordinating communication between different units in emergency situations, and receiving fewer resources and supports than uniformed personnel (Burke, 1995; Mayhew, 2001; Ricciardelli et al., 2020)—all of which can contribute to burnout and other negative mental health outcomes. Two quotations from studies on civilian employees highlight some of these occupations stresses:

> Frequently, [dispatchers] must provide immediate emergency care instructions to panicked, distressed, and highly emotional callers. They must perform all these functions while remaining calm and reassuring…. Dispatchers often play a vital role in ensuring the safety of other, not only callers but officers on the street (Burke, 1995, p. 2).

> Police support personnel such as despatchers [sic] are also at risk [of stress] because of complex roles involving incoming calls, despatch [sic] of officers, distressed callers, multiple unit coordination, limited job control, shiftwork, and divisions between civilian staff and sworn officers (Mayhew, 2001, p. 3).

As these quotations demonstrate, civilian police personnel are expected to undertake a diverse range of tasks, interact professionally with members of the public who may be distressed, and, in emergency situations, perform complex duties that could directly affect the safety of uniformed police personnel and members of the public. Under these circumstances, burnout—operationalized as "psychological strain that afflicts those working in the human service professions, including health care, social work, and law enforcement" (McCarty & Skogan, 2012, p. 69)—is a significant potential consequence of the stresses that civilian police personnel face in their day-to-day jobs. Burnout in civilian police staff can be caused by a perception of low organizational status or lack of support within a police service (Burke, 1995; McCarty & Skogan, 2012) and factors such low job satisfaction (e.g., operationalized to include low pay, few opportunities for promotion, etc.), responsibility for the well-being of other police personnel and members of the public, and insufficient training for the job and lack of control over working conditions (Burke, 1995).

In addition to burnout, civilian police staff may face exposure to PPTE in the course of their occupational responsibilities. In some cases, this exposure may arise from rare large-scale PPTEs, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, which require a widespread, coordinated response from police services and other public safety agencies (Kerswell et al., 2019; West et al., 2008). For example, civilian staff involved in an Australian police service's response to a 2011 natural disaster "reported significantly higher symptoms of general distress and posttraumatic stress than police officers" (Kerswell et al., 2019, p. 6), possibly due to the fact that they did not enjoy the same social bonds and supports that uniformed officers used to insulate (to some degree) against possible negative mental health outcomes arising from exposure to trauma (Kerswell et al., 2019). However, civilian public safety personnel, including in police departments, are also regularly exposed to more routine forms of PPTE in their work, including potential vicarious traumatization "which can be acquired by witnessing, reading about, or listening to graphic and/or traumatic accounts or records" (Ricciardelli et al., 2019, p. 316; see also Lentz et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2021). Public safety organizations, including police services, may have a culture that stigmatizes seeking care for mental health concerns (Ricciardelli et al., 2020a) or create a hierarchy of trauma in which such vicarious exposures are considered less legitimate than the direct exposure to PPTE experienced by frontline personnel (Ricciardelli et al., 2020b). In such a context, civilian personnel

in police services are not only exposed to PPTE but may also face backlash or delegitimization if they seek treatment for, or even acknowledgement of, this occupational reality.

Gaps and Limitations in the Literature

Limited research on the occupational experiences of civilian police personnel: The literature we reviewed provides limited insight into the occupational experiences of civilian police personnel—indeed, until recently the occupational group was largely neglected in research on police services, broadly, and the mental health challenges and needs of PSP, specifically. Given civilians' significant and growing presence in police services, marginal organizational status, and exposure to a variety of PPTEs, there is a need to better understand how they understand their occupational roles and experiences of PPTE within police services. Furthermore, where researchers have considered the occupational experiences civilian staff, it has overwhelmingly focused on communicators (e.g., dispatchers or telephone operators), thus ignoring the numerous other civilian roles found in police services.

Non-urban police services: Researchers, in the majority of the already limited research on civilian personnel in police services, have focused largely on persons employed in larger urban areas, rather than those in small towns or rural areas (Crank, 1989). Policing in rural or remote areas, however, can involve a host of risks and stresses unique to these settings (Ricciardelli, 2018; Ricciardelli, Spencer, & Andres, 2018). It follows, therefore, that the nature of rural civilian police work would also produce distinct forms of occupational stress and risk that could contribute to overall mental health, even compromising well-being. Moreover, such research is particularly void in locations, such as Canada, where police detachments must cover vast rural and remote regions.

Geographic focus: The majority of research reviewed herein is from the US, with a smaller number of studies focusing on Canada, Australia, or the UK. The US focus suggests a rather narrow geographic range in terms of studies conducted on civilian members. Canadian studies on civilian police employees' experiences of occupational trauma are limited to large-scale studies on PSP (Carleton et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2020a) that include administrative staff and dispatchers in the larger sample, with the recent

exception of Lentz and colleagues (2020) study of mental health disorders among a sample of RCMP officers and civilian staff. That being said, “PSP roles are ubiquitous in most human cultures” (Ricciardelli 2020a, p. 263) and the international literature has much to offer in understanding the occupational challenges facing civilian police staff in Canada.

Method

In the current study, we used qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to understand the occupational experiences, challenges, and long-term effects of DSA work. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Memorial University of Newfoundland (#20201029). Subsequently, it was submitted to the RCMP's HR Research Review Board and received approval in July, 2020. Copies of the ethics approval can be found in Appendix 1 (Memorial University of Newfoundland) and Appendix 2 (RCMP). All research assistants signed nondisclosure agreements stating that they would keep all information collected during this study confidential and would not transmit this information outside the research team.

Recruitment was conducted with the assistance of USJE, which sent study information in English and French to DSAs on its mailing list. Further, several participants explained that they had, of their own initiative, assisted with recruitment through word-of-mouth or social media recommendations to their colleagues. Thus, our recruitment efforts were aided by this informal snowball sampling. In total, 54 participants agreed to be interviewed for the study. In this report, we draw from the data collected and transcribed from 49 of these interviews.

We used a semi-structed approach to interviews, which is a qualitative method that permits participants to guide the conversation and share experiences or identify issues that they feel are most relevant, while enabling the researcher to follow-up for clarification or elaboration (Brinkmann, 2020). In practice, this method meant that we came prepared with broad interview questions, but let the participant guide the discussion toward topics they felt were most relevant.

Most interviews lasted between 45-75 minutes and, despite recruitment materials being sent in French, all interviews were in English at the preference of participants. Interviews were conducted between November, 2020 and February, 2021. Due to geographic limitations and COVID-19 restrictions, we conducted all interviews over the telephone. Although face-to-face interviews are predominant in qualitative research, there is evidence that telephone interviews do not inhibit rapport-building and may permit participants to discuss sensitive topics with greater comfort (Mealer & Jones, 2014; Novick, 2008). The latter advantage of telephone interviews was

particularly salient for our study, given that participants regularly discussed difficult or potentially psychologically traumatic occupational experiences.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by research assistants for the purposes of data analysis. Transcripts were coded in an open-ended fashion to determine emergent themes. In practice, this means that three members of the research team independently and sequentially coded five transcripts to develop an initial set of codes. This process ensured inter-rater reliability, that is, consistency in coding between the research team, which is an important feature of robust qualitative research. The remaining transcripts were then coded by individual members of the research team, allowing the initial codes to be refined and new ones to be created as they emerged from the data.

Our approach to data analysis followed a semi-grounded constructed approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Ricciardelli et al., 2010), which means that we allowed our thematic findings to emerge from the data (that is, the words of participants) without preemptively imposing theoretical interpretation; yet, that we were nonetheless guided in our analysis by our scholarly and theoretical backgrounds. Transcripts were analyzed with the assistance of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated autocoding and assisted researchers in coding data into primary, secondary, and tertiary themes.

Participant Information[2]

All participants (n=54; 100%) self-identified as female and were between 25 and 74 years old (see Table 1). The majority of participants identified their race as white (49; 90.7%), while three (5.6%) identified as Indigenous, one (1.9%) as Latin American, and one (1.9%) declined to provide their racial identification (see Table 2). In terms of educational attainment, 23 (42.6%) participants had a college, university, or post-graduate degree; 16 (29.6%) had completed some college or post-graduate studies; eight (14.8%) had undertaken trade, technical, or vocational training; and seven (13.0%) had a high school diploma (see Table 3).

[2] We present demographic data, in the aggregate, for all 54 participants. However, only 49 interview transcripts were analyzed for this report.

Table 1 – Participants' Ages

Age	**No. of Participants**	**% of Participants**
25-34	3	5.6%
35-44	16	29.6%
45-54	22	40.7%
55-64	11	20.4%
65-74	1	1.9%
no answer	1	1.9%

Table 2 – Participants' Racial Identification

Race	**No. of Participants**	**% of Participants**
Aboriginal/Indigenous	3	5.6%
Latin American	1	1.9%
White	49	90.7%
No answer	1	1.9%

Table 3 – Participants' Level of Educational Attainment

Education Level	**No. of Participants**	**% of Participants**
College Graduate	13	24.1%
High School Diploma	7	13.0%
Post graduate degree	2	3.7%
Some College	13	24.1%
Some Post Graduate Work	3	5.6%
Trade/Technical/Vocational Training	8	14.8%
University Graduate	8	14.8%

All 54 participants were federal public servants working with the RCMP. The majority of participants (n=42, 77.8%) were employed as DSAs at the time of the interview, while the remainder worked as Detachment Services Supervisors (n=4; 7.4%) or in civilian administrative

roles with specialized RCMP units (e.g., Major Crime Units, Emergency Response Teams) or as court liaisons (n=8; 14.8%) (see Table 4). Nearly half of all participants had prior RCMP experience as a DSA at another detachment (n=23; 42.6%) and exactly half had worked for the RCMP in other roles or units prior to their current position (n=27; 50.0%). The majority (n=49; 90.7%) of participants were employed in full-time positions. Participants had between two and 31 years of experience working with the RCMP and the median years of experience was 13 (see Table 5). Participants were employed in nine of the 10 Canadian provinces (see Table 6). 18 participants (33.3%) listed prior professional or volunteer experience in one or more non-RCMP public safety settings, including corrections (n=5; 9.3%), non-RCMP police departments (n=4; 7.4%), fire (n=3; 5.6%), and military (n=2; 3.7%) (see Table 7).

Table 4 –Job Role at Time of Interview

Job Role	**No. of Participants**	**% of Participants**
Court Liaison or other specialized role	8	14.8%
DSA	4	7.4%
Detachment Services Supervisor	42	77.8%

Table 5 – Years of RCMP Experience

Years of RCMP Experience	**No. of Participants**	**% of Participants**
0 to 4	7	13.0%
5 to 9	10	18.5%
10 to 14	18	33.3%
15 to 19	5	9.3%
20 to 24	7	13.0%
25-29	4	7.4%
30+	3	5.6%

Table 6 – Province of Employment

Province of Employment	No. of Participants	% of Participants
Alberta	10	18.5%
British Columbia	7	13.0%
Manitoba	1	1.9%
New Brunswick	7	13.0%
Nova Scotia	8	14.8%
Ontario	4	7.4%
Prince Edward Island	5	9.3%
Quebec	1	1.9%
Saskatchewan	11	20.4%

Table 7 – Previous Public Safety Experience

Public Safety Sector	No. of Participants	% of Participants
Coast Guard	1	1.9%
Correctional Services	5	9.3%
Public Safety Communicators	1	1.9%
EMS	2	3.7%
Fire	3	5.6%
Law	1	1.9%
Military	2	3.7%
Police (non-RCMP)	4	7.4%
Security	1	1.9%

Findings

While there were many aspects of the job that interviewees felt were rewarding, challenging and/or satisfying, they did identify some areas in which they felt the organization could improve. One central concern among most respondents was a general feeling that their roles in the organization were neither understood nor valued. One respondent was very explicit in voicing this concern: "the RCMP they have a huge lack of not understanding what it is that DSAs do and see and are subjected too. They don't get it." As this sentiment is also evident in comments made throughout sections that follow, we will not belabor the point here. We structure the current section into prominent subthemes, unpacking each and highlighting participant voices.

Job mobility and promotions

Areas of concern raised included issues surrounding job mobility and the lack of promotional opportunities within the organization. In relation to job mobility – defined here as the ability to laterally transfer into other roles – seven (n=7) interviewees expressed some frustration over the fact that interesting positions were usually "too far" away, offered to individuals from outside the organization, and/or only offered as temporary postings. As one participant stated, she hoped the organization would create "more chances to move around". In the meantime, she saw herself as de-motivated or, as she put it, "just waiting to retire". Another observed that lack of cross-training on different roles within the detachment and/or the organization as a whole meant they were at a disadvantage when it came to applying for what they saw as new or better opportunities. We note that an obvious remedy for these deficiencies would entail the development of system of transparent, fair, and equitable career paths.

Training

Another issue raised – in the context of workload and lateral job mobility – was the issue of training. Twenty-three (n=23) of the interviewees cited problems with receiving training. For example, in relation to learning basic work tasks among new employees, words used to describe the relevant training included "terrible", "discouraging", "not great", "not good", "none", and "not

timely." One noted the quality of information provided for learning Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) queries as "poor." Another described on-the-job training in busy detachments as "the RCMP just clunks you down in a chair and says 'figure it out'". Some did note that the RCMP had attempted to mitigate training problems with the introduction of a training manual for newcomers. However, this was interpreted as, "Here you go, here's a 45-page manual. Figure it out."

Tasks related to CPIC were one source of stress cited. Another was lack of training for responding to emotionally taxing situations, such as dealing with angry or grieving people at the front counter or panicked callers or those with suicide intentions (see "Vicarious Trauma" section). One interviewee specifically requested, "training on how to deal with someone who might become irate." Mental health training – both for themselves and for responding to contact with emotionally disturbed people – was also cited as desirable by several respondents. As an example, a DSA in the Maritimes felt "we should be given training before you start taking calls on what to do with a suicidal individual [and on how] you deal with a victim."

Occupational stressors

The interview guide used for this study included a set of questions on aspects of the DSA role and operational environment that might serve as stressors to staff. These included questions related to: workplace safety, safety concerns outside of work (but related to one's operational role), other risks associated with the work environment, and experiences of vicarious trauma. While some staff members did raise concerns about workplace safety, mostly centered around being alone in smaller detachments or a lack of bullet-proof glass for protection for the visiting public, the bulk of responses received centered around the issue of vicarious trauma. This was a major theme in nearly all of the interviews recorded, and thus is a primary focus of this section of the report. We also note that respondents also raised concerns that were not explicitly a focus of the interview guide but appeared in their responses with sufficient frequency we felt it important to identify these stressors here.

Vicarious Trauma

In our interview sample, forty-eight (n=48) of the forty-nine participants stated their workplace duties and tasks exposed them to materials and/or experiences that involved PPTE. We analyzed the types of PPTE experiences cited by respondents, clustering them under two general categories: those involving adults and those involving children and youth. The decision to separate these experiences based on age of 'victim' was the result of frequent comments by participants to the effect that incidents involving infants, children, and/or adolescents were particularly difficult for them to process.

In relation to adult victims, the most frequently cited experiences included accidental deaths (n=16), homicides (n=15), suicides (n=13), and physical violence (n=11). Ten (n=10) of the stories related involved victims known to the interviewee (primarily as victims of accidents or homicide). This is a particularly trying situation, as knowing the victim drives home the impact of the PPTE exposure, and makes the aftermath of the incident arguably more difficult. Other types of adult-related trauma to which participants were exposed included sexual violence (n=9), death unknown[3] (n=9), attempted homicide (n=3) and accidental injury (n=3). In nine (n=9) of the examples provided, participants referenced situations in which they knew of someone in extreme danger, most often a police colleague attending a call. The fact that DSA work is a caring profession, and DSAs care about the RCMP members with whom they work, such experiences can and often do have detrimental impacts on the DSAs' well-being.

When discussing experiences related to children and youth, the types of events cited differed slightly from adults. The most frequently mentioned example of disturbing materials and/or events were those involving the sexual abuse of children (n=18). Deaths of children and youth were also mentioned; these included deaths of unknown causes (n=4) and accidental deaths[4] (n=4). Even less frequently, interviewees mentioned suicides (n=1), physical violence (n=1) and homicide (n=1). In two (n=2) instances, the child or youth was known to the participant. Again, knowing the victim personalized the incident, brought it "closer to home", and affected DSAs' interpretations

[3] These were situations in which someone died unexpectedly but the cause of death was not stated.

[4] No accidental injuries were noted in this category.

of their environment and personal safety. Knowing the victim cannot be discounted as impactful to well-being, and must be recognized as too common in remote and rural areas. DSAs are often long-time residents of a community their detachment covers, which, particularly in small communities, leaves them susceptible to knowing both victims and those criminalized.

Participants also provided helpful information as to the means by which their routine work activities exposed them to PPTE. One of the most common tasks assigned to DSAs is the transcription of victim, witness, and/or offender statements. Nineteen (n=19) of the participants cited transcribing as a source of PPTE exposure. In frequency, transcribing was followed by exposure to images (n=17), including both pictures and videos of disturbing content that formed part of a file being prepared for the courts or insurance companies.

In many detachments, DSAs are also required to attend to the front counter, which entails interacting with victims and witnesses. In some instances, police officers may ask DSAs for additional assistance involving the handling of victims. For example, some staff members mentioned providing care for the children of adult victims. Fifteen (n=15) of the interviewees related stories involving interactions with traumatized individuals through such duties.

Another duty cited as a potential source of PPTE exposure was answering the office phone line. In twelve (n=12) of the interviews, participants observed that individuals in crisis will sometimes call the office's non-emergency line to report suicidal behaviours, or panic-stricken citizens will call the number by accident to advise of a violent crime in progress. Workplace conversations – particularly those with or involving police members who attended horrific accidents or other death scenes – were another source of PPTE exposure (n=10). Less frequently cited were police radio calls (n=7), direct experiences in which the staff member was present or directly involved in an event (n=6), and reading files (n=6).

One critical point made by the majority of interviewees was their relative lack of preparedness for taking on these tasks. Most observed that they had had no training in, for example, dealing with suicidal behaviours or in how to cope with exposures to autopsy photographs or sexual assault victims' statements. Several noted that, although on entering the role they expected to deal with

'crime' and 'bad things', they were unprepared and thus shocked the first time they flipped open a file to find photographs of deceased individuals.

Aside from the obvious need for on the job training to prepare staff for working with potentially traumatizing content and to experience PPTE, the single most emphasized take-away message articulated by staff members was the need for the organization to recognize, value, and respond to the fact that staff members also experience vicarious trauma. Repeatedly, interviewees stressed the fact that, whereas the organization had significantly improved in their willingness to address well-being and mental health for police members, they often felt the toll they experienced was not equally recognized. To illustrate, several pointed to their exclusion from critical incident debriefings in situations in which they themselves had been involved. The best example of this is the exclusion of staff members from debriefings in which members – who are also friends and colleagues of DSAs – had been involved in serious or fatal incidents.

Organizational sources of workplace stress

Other significant sources of occupational stress in staff members' work environments include interpersonal conflicts with colleagues and/or supervisors, workload issues and role demands. Interpersonal conflicts, which can often be a major source of stress among co-workers, were, fortunately, not reported as a significant stressor among respondents. Most people interviewed reported positive relations with other DSAs, supervisors, and police members. Positive terms employed to describe co-workers included 'gracious', 'friends', 'great', and 'team'. Words used to describe positive working relationships with supervisors and/or managers included 'wonderful', 'supportive', and 'good leadership.' Relations with police members were also described as frequently positive – with some staff members seeing police officers as part of their 'work family'. That said, a number of interviewees felt that some police officers, particularly those supervising civilian staff, often see them as 'secretaries' or 'stenographers' and thus as somehow 'less than' police members. One example provided involved a police officer questioning why a staff member felt she needed support following a PPTE, a comment that left her feeling degraded.

Workplace conflicts were, fortunately, relatively few. Of the fourty-nine respondents, six (n=6) spoke of conflicts with supervisors, one stated she had had conflicts with other support staff (n=1) and one (n=1) mentioned a conflict with a police member. Most of these conflicts were resolved through one or the other party transferring to other roles or detachments. Three (n=3) felt they had experienced what they considered to be ongoing harassment from co-workers. One went through the respectful workplace program, concluding "it failed so miserably for me." Another experienced what she described as "five years of abuse" from a supervisor and applied for compensation under the Merlo-Davidson settlement. A third went on medical leave following extended conflict with other staff members and faced challenges with management trying to ensure she could return to a workplace in which she felt safe.

While most people did not experience conflict with their immediate supervisors, many felt unsupported or misunderstood by upper management, particularly if the supervisor was a sworn member rather than a public service employee/civilian. To illustrate, a DSA in the Maritimes noted, "a regular member knows nothing about what it is to be a public servant, so they don't know about our contracts, they don't know our entitlements, they don't know nothing about our jobs." As a result, she said, "[the supervisor] doesn't take us seriously when we say we're overwhelmed." The only resolution in such situations, she felt, was to file a grievance or be "stuck" until the supervisor transferred out. She explained frontline managers "can really make a difference to how much you love or hate your job." Another observed that the paramilitary command and control structure used to manage members creates difficulties for civilian staffers that are not enculturated into a work environment in which one marches when managers "snap the whip" and tell them to "do it and don't ask questions."

Another source of organizational stress sited was what we term here 'role demands.' Most detachments require DSAs to fulfill a broad range of tasks. The functions described include front counter duties and court liaison work, as well as running CPIC inquiries, and providing support as required to members. Most participants found the variety of their work as one of the attractive features of the job. However, in some of the smaller detachments, with fewer staff available, DSAs were more likely to, as one interviewee put it, "find the whole juggling everything" as "the most stressful part" of their job. This stress was further compounded, we note, by the overall volume of

work, specifically here administrative work, that takes place in detachments that are under-resourced.

In relation to workload, thirty percent of interviewees (n=15) said workload in their detachment had increased, and for many had become a source of stress. As one DSA described her situation, "I have a huge workload. I put in a lot of overtime … that's the stress, most stress I feel." Lack of adequate staffing levels were cited by several respondents, as well as gaps in cross-training of duties by staff members. The result for some interviewees was the experience of coming back from holidays to find a backlog of work because no one tended to their duties while they were away. Others cited increasing levels of responsibility as a source of their growing workloads; here occupational stress increased due to a coupling of increased responsibilities and increased workloads. DSAs attributed these increases to management seeking to move work "away from the members", who are, researchers suggest, already overworked and struggle with occupational responsibilities (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015; Ricciardelli, 2018). The practice however creates additional responsibilities (and stress) for DSAs. When asked what the RCMP could do to address workload issues, one DSA in the Prairies pointed to inefficiencies caused by outdated software and technology:

> We have very dated software programs. Our *Join* is a DOS based program, so you're dealing with a black and green screen and it's very old. The hardware that they give us, a lot of it breaks down. We can't get new stuff. You're always feeling frustration because your scanners are not working or the printers jamming or the software program keeps crashing. You're always trying to catch up because the software and the hardware they provide is old.

Organizational Culture

In relation to organizational culture, the most frequently cited problem identified within the RCMP was the differential treatment of members relative to public service employees. Several decades ago, researchers identified a prevalent attitude within policing in which officers differentiate themselves from civilians – a split termed the "us versus them" mentality (Skolnick 1966). What

we did not anticipate was that this differentiation would be in operation within the structure of policing itself, with regular members seeing civilian staffers not as part of a 'policing family', but rather as 'just the staff.' This distinction was observed by several (n=10) staff members from six different provinces[5], who felt the effects of this rather keenly, particularly in situations where they were excluded from the treatment members received. This exclusion was particularly evident when, as previously noted, staff members were not invited to participate in, for instances, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISMs) after events that affected the detachment as a whole. It was also present in how detachments conduct social activities. One staff member in the Prairies offered the following example:

> Our Staff Sergeant, I mean as good as he is, I know that he brings the members out for breakfast. I think it's once a week and somebody had asked him how come we're not included, and he says, 'no, I just want the officers. I don't want the clerks with us' … He doesn't want us included in his little group … We have to stay at the office.

Interviewees explained such exclusions in terms of the paramilitary structure of the organization and how those who do not fall within the RCMP rank structure are not seen or valued. One staff member from the Maritimes observed that when the Commanding Officer for the division she works in visited their detachment, "she barely gave me two glimpses because I'm not technically her employee." As a result of incidents like this, "I feel separate." Another stated she did not feel undervalued, but she did feel her and her colleagues were "overlooked" by the organization. The poignant example she cited was the fact that, after the death of Constable Heidi Stevenson in 2020, "everybody in the office stood down except for the DSAs. We were at work." As a result of these and other such incidents, some staff members conclude, "I think the higher ups in the RCMP generally don't really care about support staff."

Lack of recognition by senior management clearly has a significant effect on employee morale in the detachments. Interviewees acknowledged that they are told the organization values their work,

[5] These provinces were: Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick.

but these sentiments run counter to how they perceive their treatment within the institution as a whole. To move forward, DSAs wanted to see more emphasis placed on their inclusion: "I would like to see us part of the RCMP group because right now…we're not RCMP, we're just public servants."

Sexual harassment and abuse

We note that none of the female staff members interviewed voiced current concerns over sexual harassment in the workplace. Two (n=2) staff members had, however, experienced sexual abuse previously in their career with the RCMP[6]. One woman had been the victim of a sexual assault by a senior officer, which was reported and led to his firing. Another woman said that she had experienced situations in the past in which male police officers had engaged in sexual harassment that ranged from touching her inappropriately, calling her 'girl', and speaking to her in a degrading fashion. At the time she felt they were "allowed to continue that way without recourse" – including such acts as 'patting her ass' – because there had been no mechanisms for reporting the abuse and she was not comfortable speaking to the detachment commander. A third woman cited an experience of a comment with sexual overtones made by a former commanding officer, which she felt was inappropriate but not directed at her.

Mental Health and Well-being

All interviewees were aware of the importance of mental health. They also generally knew where they would be able to locate internal information for employee resources, including accessing and using the Employee Assistance Program. The issue identified by some, particularly those in more rural and/or remote locations, was the inability to access in-person services. One interviewee

[6] The rate of harassment experienced by participants in our sample is approximately 6%. One facile answer to explain this finding – given recent attention to sexual harassment in public policing – would be to attribute this result to recent initiatives that have served to highlight this issue. In the instant case, the average length of service for participants in this sample was 13.75 years (with a range of 2 years of service to 31 years), thus we would have expected to receive more than one complaint of this nature. This may be a sampling issue or a limitation of the study resulting from the use of phone interviews as the primary method of data collection.

advised that she herself would have to drive ninety minutes each way to get to a counseling appointment. She also explained that a colleague in an even more remote location would have to drive three hours each way, which would require planning childcare for an entire day for each appointment. In smaller communities where there were local resources, another issue was the limited number of psychologists approved for use. One individual was concerned about the lack of available choices, and another noted that psychologists on the list were not taking new patients. We do note, however, that with the increasing shift towards e-health delivery models (which has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic), there are increasing opportunities to provide individuals with counseling and other medical and mental health services online.

Another issue raised was the structure of the benefits process. One DSA stated that civilian staff members often do not seek to apply for disability benefits to which they are entitled for mental health reasons because of having to go through a more cumbersome process in securing access through the insurance provider. By contrast, she felt that the RCMP took better care of members and that their process for applying was less cumbersome. On this issue, another advised, "I have reached out before … but even then it was frustrating because … your first couple sessions are covered and then you had to jump through hoops to get proper support for your benefits." In a similar vein, a DSA in the Prairies observed that when one goes through the list of available resources, many are listed as for 'members'. A DSA in Western Canada tried calling several of the organization's approved resources, only to be told, "sorry, this is for police officers only." This and similar experiences were felt as ways the organization reinforces the 'us versus them' division previously noted.

A consideration raised by one DSA was the level of intrusiveness experienced when requesting time off to attend an appointment. She rightly objected to questions in the workplace, such as "what kind of appointment do you have?" By way of contrast, one DSA recommended instituting yearly check-ins with staff members to ensure Managers are aware of the health and well-being of employees and can provide support in securing resources, as required. Given that many, if not most, DSAs are managed by police members, it was felt that such check-ins might also be a way for supervising officers to learn more about the nature of the work DSAs undertake and the impacts of that work.

Earlier we observed that a significant point of contention for many of the DSAs interviewed was how the organization handles critical incidents, particularly in relation to debriefings from which they felt excluded and thus diminished. For those DSAs who work in areas that routinely expose them to PPTE – for example, in the Internet Child Exploitation units – it was noted that while psychological assessments were routine for members, the decision as to whether DSAs would also be mandated to attend regular assessments appeared to be left to the individual discretion of one's supervisor. Given that DSAs are exposed to the same materials, the decision to exclude staff members from assessments requires revisiting.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of our study, and the experiences of DSAs highlighted in the present report, we offer 12 recommendations to improve the occupational experiences and, by extension, the mental health and well-being of DSAs working in the RCMP.

1. **Recognizing the unique roles of DSA** – effort to create organization-wide understandings of the unique and essential roles of DSAs would assist in showing DSAs that they are respected, acknowledged, needed, and heard. Information sessions on the DSA role, as mandated to members and civilians, would help to remedy this challenge.

2. **Career paths** – the development of transparent, fair and equitable career paths for DSAs. This should include consistent processes for job advertisement, recruitment, and hiring that is done with an emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion. With regard to the latter point, we note that, despite the RCMP's broader efforts to increase diversity among its employees, the vast majority (n=49; 90.7%) of our sample identified as white, suggesting that racialized people may be underrepresented in DSA positions.[7] In addition, our sample is entirely self-identifying women which confirms that men are underrepresented in the DSA population.

3. **Training** – three basic types of training were identified as important to DSAs and their work. The first is more extensive 'on the job' training for those entering new occupational roles, which should be complemented by detailed instruction and support for the DSA as they learn their occupational role. The second is cross-training among staff members within detachments so they can backfill absences, assist in reducing workload volumes, and acquire new skills. Such training would also complement work environments by reducing the stress induced by the lack of backfill when a DSA requires leave. The third is training on handling grieving and traumatized individuals, including those demonstrating or

[7] As of October, 2020, 14.5% of civilian personnel in the RCMP were classified as "visible minorities" (RCMP, 2021). No specific statistics on the racial demographics of DSAs are publicly available.

reporting suicide behaviours. As DSAs observed, they are often a point of contact for victims and families struggling with traumatic events, a role for which they often felt unprepared. Regarding suicide behaviours, a direct and explicit protocol, informed by psychological or psychiatric professionals, for how to manage such crises is warranted, both to ensure the mental health of the responding DSA and to effectively respond to the needs of the individual in distress.

4. **Critical incident debriefings** – in situations that affect the entire detachment or select DSAs, DSAs should be included at critical incident debriefings (e.g., Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) sessions) and supervising officers should be reminded they are responsible for the morale and well-being of the detachment as a whole. This also would help remedy the reality that DSAs feel othered within the organization.

5. **Safer environments** – we recommend the installation of bulletproof barriers for DSA who interact with the public in spaces such as front desks or receiving windows, and a partnered DSA system where DSAs are not obliged to ever work alone in the detachments. These changes would offer both security and a sense of protection and support if an adverse event was to arise.

6. **Support when exposed routinely to potentially psychologically traumatic materials** – recognizing the unique jobs of DSAs can expose them to potentially psychological traumatic materials, it is important that DSAs doing such jobs (e.g., transcribing, attending to the front counter, handling victims, exposure to images and videos) have access to mental health supports when and as necessary.

7. **Improved relations between and across staff** – although fortunately not an overly frequent occurrence among our participants, horizontal (e.g., between DSAs) and vertical (e.g., between DSAs and police, management, supervisors, etc.) violence was a notable problem for some select participants. Thus, workplace collegiality training appears necessary to help improve the well-being and morale of those employed in detachments, specifically among DSAs. In addition, supervisors, managers, and colleagues need to be

held accountable for their behaviours that are negatively interpreted by DSAs; we caution that this process should first privilege restorative practices and communication, when possible, and ensure that accusations are based on evidence. Such actions may serve to rectify interpersonal challenges and conflicts, and eliminate perceived harassment.

8. **Look for workplace efficiencies** – workload volumes and staffing shortages are central concerns in multiple provinces and territories. We caution again subjecting DSAs to work-role overload by overburdening them with responsibilities and tasks that are above and beyond expected capacity. A strategy to increase efficiencies is to employ hardware and software that are functional and intuitive/user-friendly. Designing or employing software and hardware that are well functioning for end-users will alleviate both training deficits and organizational strains and help DSAs make up time otherwise lost on technological issues rather than their occupational tasks.

9. **Increase member awareness of the role and value of DSAs** – lack of recognition or understanding of DSAs' unique role in contributing to the organizations' mission may stem from how police members see their supervisors treat DSAs. Excluding staff members from some activities or events can only lead to increased divisions within the organization, divisions experienced as 'us versus them' with the result of making DSAs feel inferior. Detachment and division commanders should be evaluated on how well they do at fostering overall healthy and inclusive spaces for both members and staff alike, and efforts should be made to improve leadership skills tied to inclusivity and staff recognitions.

10. **Explore e-healthcare delivery models to support rural/remote staff** – healthcare services are taxing to access geographically for many in rural and remote communities. Thus, the introduction of e-healthcare models for psychological health (e.g., Internet Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and physical health are essential to improve access to care for DSAs. E-healthcare should not be limited to either physical or psychological care, but instead should include both areas of health. There is an undeniable need to improve access to healthcare in rural communities, and this includes for DSAs in our sample.

11. **Benefits** – Given that benefits were described as difficult to access, a more simplistic process for understanding the limitations and structures around benefits (e.g., who are eligible service providers for coverage under insurance, what are the caps on available benefits) will assist DSAs in accessing such resources. Moreover, an increased cap on psychological services could result in continuity in care, and thus a healthier DSA workforce with less absenteeism and improved morale.

12. **Develop a policy on mandatory psychological evaluations for DSAs, particularly those working in units that require regular exposure to PPTEs** – to mitigate the stigma around mental health and treatment seeking, while also ensuring that DSAs are receiving the mental health and well-being support they require, we recommend annual psychological assessments. These assessments should be routine and thus mandated by the RCMP for DSAs working in units that result in their regular exposure to PPTE (e.g., Internet Child Exploitation units). Such assessments will help create connections between DSAs and their support, building rapport that may make it easier to call for support when a situation is more dire. In addition, the check-in assessments can help to monitor DSA mental health and well-being, encouraging early intervention and prevention if compromised mental health emerges as a concern. The result will be a psychologically healthier workforce.

Conclusion

The current pathbreaking study illuminates the stressors and potentially traumatizing elements of work as a RCMP Detachment Services Assistant (DSA) in rural and remote areas. In our report, we examine DSAs' conceptions of occupational stress and PPTE, their mental health and well-being needs, and their access to and experiences utilizing mental health resources. DSAs indicate that they are frustrated by the lack of or poor training for their positions, particularly in relation to managing PPTE and exposures related to their work. A salient finding of this study lies in vicarious trauma experienced by DSAs as a result of their exposure to the PPTE associated with broader forms of police work. This exposure and attendant vicarious trauma may be intensified by the fact

that, in rural areas, DSAs have close ties to community members and may know victims and criminalized persons.

An additional key finding of this study is in relation to the dynamic between sworn members in upper management and DSAs and how this division is a source of occupational stress. DSAs felt their labour was undervalued and misunderstood. The hierarchical paramilitary structure of the RCMP and division between sworn members and civilians is also a source of occupational stress, insofar as DSAs were unfamiliar with such role assignments and were excluded from many of the social activities engaged in by sworn members. Compounding mental health concerns, DSAs also explained that they had difficulty accessing adequate support through Employee Assistant Programs due to the remoteness of their jobs.

While this research is exploratory in nature and based on a qualitative study of DSAs in nine provinces, future research on DSAs could examine how widespread the aforementioned findings are in both urban and rural police services in Canada. Case studies and survey research across RCMP divisions across Canada may indicate how such occupational stressors are experienced differently depending on the location of the DSAs, the populations they serve, and the types of crimes to which their detachment most often responds. Such research would further underscore, along with this report, the importance of responding to the occupational stressors of DSAs and the need for more robust and available mental health services.

References

Berg, A. M., Hem, E., Lau, B., & Ekeberg, Ø. (2006). An exploration of job stress and health in the Norwegian police service: a cross sectional study. *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology, 1*(1), 26.

Boogaard, B., & Roggeband, C. (2010). Paradoxes of intersectionality: Theorizing inequality in the Dutch police force through structure and agency. *Organization, 17*(1), 53-75.

Burke, T. W. (1995). Dispatcher stress. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 64*(10), 1-6.

Carleton, R. N., Afifi, T. O., Turner, S., Taillieu, T., Duranceau, S., LeBouthillier, D. M., . . . Asmundson, G. J. G. (2018). Mental Disorder Symptoms among Public Safety Personnel in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 63*(1), 54-64. doi:10.1177/0706743717723825

Huey, L., & Ricciardelli, R. (2015). 'This isn't what I signed up for' When police officer role expectations conflict with the realities of general duty police work in remote communities. *International Journal of Police Science & Management, 17*(3), 194-203.

Oliphant, R. (2016). *Healthy Minds, Safe Communities, Supporting Our Public Safety Officers Through a National Strateegy for Operational Stress Injuries: Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security*: Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on Public Safety National Security.

Ricciardelli, R. (2018). "Risk It Out, Risk It Out": Occupational and Organizational Stresses in Rural Policing. *Police Quarterly*, 1098611118772268.

Ricciardelli, R., Spencer, D. C., & Andres, E. (2018). Driving as an Under-acknowledged Risk in Rural Policing. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*.

Appendix 1 – Memorial University of Newfoundland REB Study Approval

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 icehr@mun.ca
www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

ICEHR Number:	**20201495-AR**
Approval Period:	February 20, 2020 – February 28, 2021
Funding Source:	Union of Safety and Justice Employees Title – *USJE members: Understanding their health and wellbeing* [RGCS # 20200929]
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli Department of Sociology
Title of Project:	*Occupational Stress among Canadian Parole Officers (employed by Correctional Services Canada)*

February 20, 2020

Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli
Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Dr. Ricciardelli:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR), seeking ethical clearance for your research project. The Committee appreciates the care and diligence with which you prepared your application. However, the recruitment email should be revised to state that officers are being asked to participate in a face-to-face **or telephone** interview.

The project is consistent with the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2). *Full ethics clearance* is granted for one year from the date of this letter. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2* (2014). Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you submit an Annual Update to ICEHR before February 28, 2021. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. If you need to make changes during the project which may raise ethical concerns, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes for the Committee's consideration. If funding is obtained subsequent to ethics approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR so that this ethics clearance can be linked to your award. All post-approval event forms noted above must be submitted by selecting the ***Applications: Post-Review*** link on your Researcher Portal homepage. We wish you continued success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Russell J. Adams, Ph.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research
Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics
Faculties of Science and Medicine

RA/th

copy: Director, Research Grant and Contract Services

Appendix 2 – RCMP HR Research Review Board Study Approval

July 10, 2020

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters
73 Leikin Drive
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1A 0R2

HR Research Review Board Decision

To: Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli
Memorial University of Newfoundland
rricciardell@mun.ca

RE: **Occupational Stress Among Administrative Support Personnel in the RCMP**

Thank you for submitting your research responses following the additional clarification questions that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Human Resources Sector Research Review Board had.

We are satisfied with your responses and as such we are approving your research. You will be required to sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for your project before proceeding. We will send his to you as soon as it is ready.

We wish you success with your work

Sincerely,

Sunjeev Prakash (Chair RCMP-HRRRB)
I/C Statistics, Demographics and HR Research
Workforce Programs and Services
Royal Canadian Mounted Police
73 Leikin Dr., Building M5-4-101
Ottawa, ON K1A 0R2

Appendix 3 – Presentations and Research Outputs

Academic Presentations

Peters, A., Ricciardelli, R., & Norman, M. (2021). "Glorified Secretaries" on the Second Line: Examining Detachment Services Assistants' Occupational Stressors and Mental Health within the RCMP. Annual Conference of the Canadian Sociological Association, University of Alberta [online], May 31-June 4.

Invited Presentations to the Union of Safety and Justice Employees

Ricciardelli, R., Norman, M., & Maier, K. (2021, October 28). The Mental Health and Well-being of Federal Parole Officers. Union of Safety and Justice Employees Triennial Convention, St. John's, NL.

Ricciardelli, R., Norman, M., Peters, A., & Maier, K. (2021, July 23). The Mental Health and Well-being of Parole Officers and Detachment Services Assistants. Union of Safety and Justice Employees Equity Committee Meeting [online].

Ricciardelli, Norman, M., Peters, A., & Maier, K. (2021, March 24). The Mental Health and Well-being of Parole Officers and Detachment Services Assistants. Union of Safety and Justice Employees National Executive Meeting [online].