

[MCCARRON] *Research 101 for Public Safety Personnel: Course Development and Pilot Testing*

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Priority Research Area: N/A

Relevant PSP Population(s): All PSP service areas, particularly those in leadership positions

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What is the issue? Public Safety Personnel (PSP) leadership are faced with challenging decisions when trying to support PSP mental health. There is considerable confusion and debate about current mental health training and treatment options due to the limited available research. This issue is compounded by the problem that academic publications are generally not written with layperson audiences in mind, making the available evidence less accessible to decision-makers. Nevertheless, PSP leaders are frequently asked to facilitate research participation among their members, adopt treatment or training programs, and to comment on or make decisions regarding established and novel interventions to support PSP mental health.

What was the aim of the study? The aim of this study was to develop and pilot test a novel, interactive, online “Research 101” course specifically geared towards PSP leadership. This course was designed with the goal of equipping PSP leaders with the knowledge of how to interpret and critically appraise research results. Feedback about content (e.g., scope, clarity of descriptions), ease of use, relevance, understanding/knowledge acquisition, and engagement from participants in this pilot course will inform further development and refinement of this educational resource. Ultimately, the goal is to equip PSP leadership with foundational knowledge in research methodology and to demonstrate how to use this information to critically assess the quality of published literature, grey literature reports, research proposals/requests for participation, and requests they may receive to adopt training or intervention programs to support PSP mental health.

How was the study conducted? An 8-module online course has been developed to equip PSP leaders to use research to inform decision making. Feedback on a beta version of the course will be obtained from a focus group (n= 4-6) of knowledge users across multiple PSP sectors. Feedback will be incorporated into revisions, following which PSP leaders in Saskatchewan (n=30) will be enrolled. An online pre-course assessment of research knowledge/comprehension will be conducted and repeated post-course, along with questions to evaluate course content/presentation. Additional feedback and recommendations will be solicited via one-on-one interviews. These recommendations will be reviewed with members of the initial focus group.

What did the study find? The study is still currently underway. Availability of identified PSP knowledge users to provide focus group feedback on the beta version of the course, and for PSP leaders to complete an 8-week online course has been limited due to shifting priorities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are the implications of this study? This study is expected to increase PSP leaders’ knowledge and understanding of research concepts and in turn, to facilitate informed decision-making about PSP mental health programming and research. By equipping decision-makers with information about research concepts and encouraging application of these concepts through a process of critical appraisal of published literature, we hope that PSP leaders will feel more confident in their understanding of research findings and will be inclined to use their skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about participation in/endorsement of research projects and adoption of PSP mental health initiatives.

What are the key messages? Given the plethora of mental health programming options for PSP available in Canada, it is essential that PSP leaders feel confident in their ability to evaluate the merits of the programs that are proposed to them. Furthermore, PSP are increasingly being asked to participate in research; by providing leaders with more in-depth information about research funding models and the life cycle of a research project, as well as the tools to critically evaluate proposed methods and existing literature, PSP leaders can make better informed decisions about the commitments they are being asked to make.

Provide a list of potential target audiences for this research: PSP (multi-sector)
Senior PSP leadership and policy-makers