

**[SUAREZ]** - Mapping resilience pathways and preferences for help-seeking of public safety personnel in the context of post-traumatic stress injuries: A community engaged research project in Ontario

**Authors:** PI: Dr. Eliana B Suarez (Social Work, WLU)

Co-PI: Dr. Ginette Lafreniere (Social Work, WLU)

Co-Investigator: Dr. Jose Arocha (Public Health, University of Waterloo)

Collaborator: Dr. Sandra Hoy (Social Work, Laurentian University)

Collaborator: Dr. Frank Sirotich (CMHA Toronto, Social Work-University of Toronto)

Collaborator: Dr. Abdel Elkchirid (Social Work, WLU)

**Priority Research Area:** Mental health awareness, stigma reduction, anti-discrimination, and/or literacy programs that have the potential to improve mental wellness among PSP

**Relevant PSP Population(s):** Police members in Ontario

**For more information, please contact:** Dr. Eliana Suarez, [esuarez@wlu.ca](mailto:esuarez@wlu.ca)

**What is the issue?** Police have incredible responsibility for and power over our communities. Equally, they are exposed to some extremely complex traumatic situations and are regularly expected, to continue serving without difficulty. However, despite the availability of mental health services, the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries (PTSI) among Public Safety Personnel in Canada, including members of Police Services, continues to be significantly higher (40%) than for the general population (12%).

**What was the aim of the study?** This study's purpose was to identify sources of strength and resilience for those police service members in Ontario who remain functioning well despite similar exposure to occupational stress, and whether their help seeking preferences are enhancing or hindering such resilience.

**How was the study conducted?** This cross sectional study uses an online survey design and purposeful sampling strategies to recruit current and former members of police services in Ontario. The final sample included 241 participants from more than ten different police services. Resilience was measured by the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). M PLUS was used to test a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis examining the relationship between resilience, individual and social context factors, attitudes towards mental health, and help seeking preferences.

Qualitative interviews have recently been completed and are undergoing analysis.

**What did the study find?** Participants were asked about what things in their life helped them the most to cope with the stresses of their job, with the most common responses being the people in one's life: family, friends, and supportive colleagues. Similarly, participants were asked to indicate by which method they prefer to get information or help regarding their mental health and the top two preferred methods were from a trusted colleague and by searching the internet. Peer support groups were selected by far fewer participants, indicating a preference for informal relationships with peers rather than formalized peer support groups.

Self-rated mental health, life satisfaction, sense of community belonging, and attitudes towards mental health treatment directly predicted resilience ( $R^2 = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Individual predictors, self-rated mental health and life stress, significantly indirectly predicted resilience via life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ;  $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , respectively), and self-rated mental health and attitudes toward mental health treatment significantly indirectly predicted resilience via community belonging ( $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ;  $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , respectively).

**What are the implications of this study?** - Police services should continue to offer self-service such as online portals for accessing helpful information as well as reducing stigma around help-seeking

- Police services should help foster good peer relationships among their members so that members can help each other as needed in informal ways
- Police services should look at ways to support their members' overall wellbeing outside of work, since life satisfaction and sense of community belonging were direct predictors of resilience

**What are the key messages?** Preferred methods of coping are through relationships, not activities

- Preferred ways of accessing help are informal (peers and the internet), not formal (e.g. professionals or formalized peer support groups)
- Resilience is influenced by factors directly related to work as well as overall wellbeing outside of work

**Provide a list of potential target audiences for this research:** - Researchers

- Mental health professionals
- Chiefs of Police or other management positions related to policing
- Employee Assistance Programs