



MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG RCMP CADETS

www.rcmpstudy.ca

Why study social support among RCMP cadets?

Social support is known to play a crucial role in the maintenance of good mental health. It is necessary to understand Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) cadets' perception of their social supports at the start of training in order to understand how social support might change over the course of officers' service careers, and in turn, how these changes impact mental health.

Background

Like all public safety personnel (PSP), RCMP are frequently exposed to potentially psychologically traumatic events. The frequent exposures and other occupational stressors can contribute to Posttraumatic Stress Injuries (PTSI) and other mental health challenges. A high number (approximately 50%) of RCMP screen positive for one or more mental health disorders.

Social support appears to be particularly important for PSP. Increased social support has been shown to buffer the effects of occupational stress among, yet PSP frequently report diminishing social support throughout their service careers.

The study

The current research draws on data from a larger, 10-year RCMP Study designed to assess the impact of skills taught to help protect members from PTSI.

Researchers collected the baseline social support levels (Social Provisions Scale, or SPS-10) of 765 cadets beginning the RCMP Cadet Training Program (CTP) and examined whether their self-reported levels of social support were related to sociodemographic factors or to experiencing symptoms of mental health disorders. These results were compared to data from the Canadian general population and serving RCMP.

Results

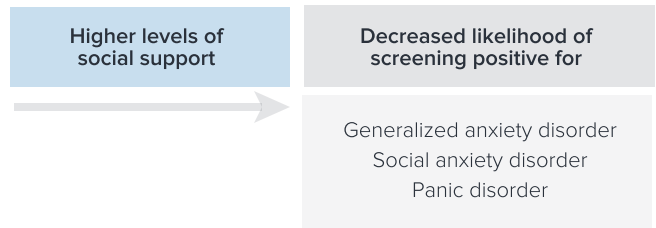
Cadets reported levels of social support comparable to the Canadian general population, but higher levels of social support than serving RCMP. The results suggest that social support decreases during service, thereby increasing mental health risks among officers.

The RCMP Study is supported by the RCMP, the Government of Canada, and the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. R. Nicholas Carleton is supported by a Medavie Foundation Project Grant. Sherry H. Stewart is supported by a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Addictions and Mental Health. The development, analyses, and distribution of the current article were supported by a generous grant from the Medavie Foundation.

Self-reported levels of social support (SPS-10 mean scores)



Cadets reported high levels of social support across demographic categories. Higher levels of social support were associated with decreased likelihood of screening positive for anxiety-related mental health disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, and panic disorder.



Conclusions

The current results demonstrate that cadets beginning the CTP experience high levels of perceived social support across socio-demographic categories. Higher levels of perceived social support were associated with a decreased risk of several mental health disorders, suggesting that it may play a protective role in mental health.

The stark contrast between new cadets and serving RCMP members suggests that service may lead to a substantial decrease in perceived social support, possibly related to mental health challenges and other occupational stressors.

The current results help to continue advancing Canada's first-ever National Action Plan on Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries, including additional investment to support the health and well-being of first responders and other public safety personnel.

The original wording of the study was changed and condensed for the current research infographic.



[Read the full study here](#)

Nisbet, J., Jamshidi, L., Andrews, K.L., Stewart, S.H., Shields, R.E., Teckchandani, T.A., Maguire, K.Q. and Carleton, R.N. (2023) Mental health and social support among Royal Canadian Mounted Police cadets. *Front. Psychol.* 14:1092334. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1092334

