THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS ON THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATORS

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PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATORS

911 Operators
Dispatchers
Call Takers

• “events experienced by others that are learned about” (DSM-IV-TR)
• “experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event” (DSM-5)
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

• “a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior”

• Is formed through member interactions, shared experiences, and is **shaped by the behaviours of its leaders**
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATOR SURVEY
OBJECTIVES

1. Improve our understanding of communicator mental health
2. Characterize workplace stressors
3. Examine the impact of organizational culture
SURVEY PARTICIPATION

696 responses
• 27 French and 669 English

329 responses to Question #1

Representation from all provinces and territories!

Great response from police communicators ☺

Poor response from fire communicators 🙁

Mixed response from paramedics 😐
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNICATOR STRESSORS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constant exposure to duty-related secondary trauma</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Demands of high-pressure environments</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Excessive workloads</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Frequent overtime</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Downstaffing or understaffing</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Lack of meaningful downtime</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Inadequate debriefing after calls</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Inadequate training</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Inappropriate training for mental health calls</strong></td>
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SIX EMERGENT THEMES

1. Organizational Affect

2. Management and Supervision

3. Morale and Staffing

4. Division and Exclusion

5. Colleagues

6. Gender
MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

The most responses (n=189)
The most subthemes (n=9)

1. Positive (n=24)
2. Don’t understand communicator roles (n=32)
3. Ineffective management (n=33)
4. Less valued than uniformed members (n=7)
5. Unsupportive management (n=17)
6. Unclear chain of command (n=20)
7. Poor communication (n=9)
8. Abusive/toxic leaders (n=12)
9. Insufficient recognition of mental health issues (n=19)
MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOURS

POSITIVE
Supportive
Respectful
Inclusive
Acknowledge
Forward thinking
ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES

- Excellent peer support teams
- Policies to remove stigma
- Proper allocation of resources
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Safe spaces for new hires

Encourage self-care

Stress and trauma validated
COMMUNICATOR SENTIMENTS

- Feel valued and supported
- Contributions are appreciated
- Motivated
- Boost morale
• Quick to punish
• “Suck it up”
• Sexual harassment
• Preferential treatment of uniformed responders
• Permitting poor treatment from responders
• Dismissing operational impacts of decisions
• Dismissing operational stress injuries
IF YOU PERMIT IT,
YOU PROMOTE IT
Organizational culture

Psychologically unsafe work environments:

- Conflict
- Toxic
- Bullying
- Harassment
- Gender bias
COMMUNICATOR

SENTIMENTS

Belittled
Devalued
Unheard
Excluded
Minimized

Fearful
EXPRESSED FEAR

• Asking questions
• Disclosing mental health struggles
• Appearing weak
• Feeling judged
• Losing respect from peers
FEAR IS THE ENEMY OF FLOURISHING
IMPACTS TO ORGANIZATION

- Increase burnout and turnover
- Increased spending on sick leave/training
- Cyclical stigma
- Cyclical patriarchy
- Limited diversity
- Erosion of trust
- Health and safety of public at risk
IMPACTS TO COMMUNICATORS

• Increased workload
• Insufficient training
• Increased stress
• Lack of meaningful downtime
• Increased prevalence of OSIs
• Risk of developing PTSD
• Lasting impact on morale
• Well-being impacted away from work
**DISCUSSION**

- **Tacit group norms guide behaviour**
- Stigma surrounding mental health remains rooted in the tacit culture
- While organizations formally endorse mental health initiatives, supports are commonly absent
- Communicators feel hopeless, devalued, and forgotten
CONCLUSION

Behaviour aligned with value statements = supportive and inclusive culture

Effective leaders + adequate resources = supportive culture

Supportive cultures can mitigate impacts of stress and regular exposure to potentially psychological traumatic events
THANK YOU!

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