



## LAY SUMMARY

### **I Want Help, But Not From You: Public Safety Personnel and Mental Health Programs and Support**

Public safety personnel (PSP) include professionals working in public safety sectors as communications officials, correctional workers, firefighters, paramedics, and police. Mental health support for PSP is a serious issue; however, there is little evidence to explain what helps PSP who are facing mental health challenges. On the job, PSP are exposed to situations which may have a strong effect on mental health. Potentially traumatic events, including critical incidents, can generate strong emotional reactions that may interfere with how PSP function on the scene or later. Mental health training programs may help to reduce the effects of exposures. The programs fall into broad categories including critical incident stress management, debriefing sessions, peer support, mental health first aid, and mental health training such as Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR). PSP may seek professional support from physicians, psychologists, employee assistance programs, psychiatrists, and chaplains. PSP members may also seek support from spouses, friends, colleagues, and their leadership teams.

The current study used data from an online survey that assessed mental health symptoms and invited open-ended feedback from PSP participants recruited through their respective employers or organizations, as well as through public service announcements. PSP were asked about their experiences with mental health training, their attitudes about mental health, and the types of assistance they were willing to access if they had a workplace mental health problem.

### Findings

The current results provided evidence that:

PSP are most willing to reach out to spouses and friends for help with mental health problems.

Most PSP reported being unwilling to use employee assistance programs or to speak with their leaders about mental health problems, which appears consistent with previous reports about workplace stigma.

Participation in mental health training appeared to have a small effect on PSP willingness to ask for help; however, most PSP reported that they do have access to professional mental health resources.

Participation in mental health training was associated with fewer PSP screening positive for some, but not all, mental health disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and certain types of anxiety.

## Next Steps

So how do we use this information? If spouses are the first choice for mental health support, then the results suggest that more training and resource support for PSP family members may be very beneficial. If asking for help from an employer is considered a last resort, additional leadership training to create stigma-free workplaces may be very beneficial. In any case, more research is needed to better understand PSP concerns about using employee assistance programs, and the effect that mental health training has on certain types of mental health disorders as reported by PSP.

## Contact Us

For more information about this research, please contact [CIPSRT@cipsrt-icrtsp.ca](mailto:CIPSRT@cipsrt-icrtsp.ca).

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