

Mental Health of RCMP After the First Year of Service

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Why study the mental health of RCMP after the first year of service?

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) frequently report symptoms consistent with positive screens for one or more mental health disorders (65%), but RCMP cadets evidence a much lower prevalence (7.3%) prior to deployment. The differences in mental health between cadets and experienced RCMP suggests mental health challenges are related to service experiences; however, less is known about how mental health changes during the first year of service.

Background

RCMP are regularly exposed to potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTs), which include direct (e.g., happened to me) or indirect (e.g., part of my job) exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence.

Exposures to PPTs and other occupational stressors have been associated with several posttraumatic stress injuries (PTSI), including but not limited to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder (SAD), panic disorder (PD), alcohol use disorder (AUD), and major depressive disorder (MDD).

To date, there have been no studies exclusively examining changes in mental health from completion of RCMP cadet training to one year of police service.

Whether early career experiences may increase risk for subsequent symptom development as PPT exposures and other occupational stressors accumulate remains unclear and could inform proactive mental health strategies.

The current study

The current research draws on data from the larger, 10-year RCMP Study, a part of a Federal Framework on PTSD. Participants were RCMP members ($n=181$; 72.8% male) finishing their first year of service, and assessments included: web-delivered surveys and clinical interviews assessing current and mental health disorder symptoms. The current study examines changes in mental health during the first year of service.

Results

Based on newly published data about RCMP, RCMP members after the first year of service reported higher symptom severity (all $d_s=.09$ to $.53$, all $ps<.05$) and positive screens (all $Z_s=.05$ to 3.32 , all $ps<.001$) for PTSD, MDD, and SAD, compared to pre-deployment.

15.0% of the current sample screened positive for one or more probable mental health disorders after the first year of service, compared to 7.2% at pre-deployment.

	Pre-Deployment	1-Year Follow-Up	Serving RCMP
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	0%	6.1%	47.7%
Major Depressive Disorder	2.4%	9.4%	44.6%
Generalized Anxiety Disorder	4.9%	5.6%	33.5%
Social Anxiety Disorder	0%	3.3%	24.1%
Panic Disorder	0%	0%	21.3%
Alcohol Use Disorder	0%	< 2.8%*	4.5%

*The prevalence of AUD is censored at < 2.8% to protect participant anonymity.

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

Conclusions

The current results bolster notions that PTSI prevalence among experienced RCMP is related to service, rather than failures to screen out recruits who have pre-existing mental health challenges. The current results also evidence mental health challenges can begin to develop as early as the first year of service.

The current results underscore the need for evidence-based supports and longitudinal assessments, across the policing lifecycle, from initial training through to post-retirement, while also providing empirical evidence to support the continued development and deployment of organization-level PTSI mitigation strategies for all RCMP.

The RCMP Study is funded by support from the RCMP, the Government of Canada, and the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. R. N. Carleton is supported by the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Arts at The University of Regina, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canada Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and a Medavie Foundation Project Grant. L. M. Lix is supported by a Tier I Canada Research Chair in Methods for Electronic Health Data Quality. T. O. Afifi is supported by a Tier I Canada Research Chair in Childhood Adversity and Resilience. S. H. Stewart is supported by a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Addictions and Mental Health.



Read the full study here:

Carleton, R. N., Andrews, K. L., Teckchandani, T. A., Khoury, J. M. B., Shields, R. E., Maguire, K. Q., Afifi, T. O., Nisbet, J., Fletcher, A. J., Sauer-Zavala, S., Stewart, S. H., Lix, L. M., Kirby, K. M., Krätzig, G. P., Neary, J. P., Keane, T. M., Brunet, A., Jones, N. A., Sareen, J., & Asmundson, G. J. G. (2025). Mental health of Royal Canadian Mounted Police after the first year of service. *Police Practice and Research*, 0(0), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2025.2566733>

