

# ONTARIO PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE MENTAL WELLNESS SUPPORTS

## WHO ARE PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL (PSP)?

- Includes border services officers, communicators/dispatchers, correctional workers, firefighters, paramedics, and police officers
- They serve across municipal, provincial, and federal jurisdictions

## WHAT DO THEY FACE?



Daily exposure to trauma and violence placing them at high risk of PTSD, anxiety, and burnout



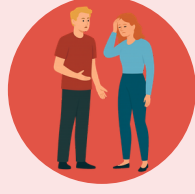
Moral injury and ethical conflicts contributing to guilt, shame, and emotional exhaustion



Stigma and fear of seeming weak make disclosure feel unsafe and unsupported in many PSP cultures



Return to work barriers and inconsistent supports and programs



Organizational stressors including understaffing and ineffective communication

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- PSP face much higher rates of psychological injury than the general population
- These injuries affect individual well-being, workplace safety, and system costs
- Despite many programs, supports remain misaligned with PSP realities and overlook organizational causes of distress



## CURRENT STUDY

- Survey: 644 PSP across six occupational groups
- Interviews: 15 PSP (3 border, 1 communicator, 3 correctional workers, 3 firefighters, 3 paramedics, and 2 police)
- Explored workplace concerns, protective factors, access to supports, and representation gaps
- Goal: understand organizational and operational factors shaping PSP mental wellness

## STUDY FINDINGS

### Survey demographics

- 644 survey participants
- Average age: 41 years
- Average experience: 14 years
- 47% (n = 300) women
- 52% (n = 337) men
- 86% (n = 551) white
- 89% (n = 571) straight

### HSE MS-IT: above average risk of work-related stress

- Firefighters and police → lower levels
- Correctional workers and border services officers → higher levels

### K6: low to moderate level of psychological distress

- Firefighters → lowest
- Paramedics, police, and communicators → mid-range
- Correctional workers and border services officers → highest

### UWES-9: average level of work engagement

- Firefighters and police scored → higher
- Paramedics and communicators → mid-range
- Correctional workers and border services officers → lower

## SURVEY OPEN-TEXT COMMENTS + INTERVIEW RESULTS

- Firefighters and paramedics → strongest positives (supportive supervisors, peer networks, clear job expectations)
- Border officers → autonomy, control, recognition
- Communicators → clear job roles, informal peer support
- Correctional workers → fewer workplace strengths, but valued association events for peer connection
- Corrections, border, and communicators → highest concerns (staffing shortages, unclear policies, weak communication)
- Police and firefighters → fewer concerns overall, some noted weak supervisor engagement and policy inconsistency
- Paramedics → broader range of issues, especially chronic understaffing and limited awareness of supports

## WELLNESS PROGRAMS

- Supports available: 83% peer support | 62% debriefing | 61% external mental health support (e.g. EAP) | 77% extended health benefits
- Supports accessed: 38% peer support | 36% debriefing | 36% external mental health support (e.g. EAP) | 63% extended health benefits
- Views: High availability of supports, but mixed confidence in impact
- Barriers: Poor timing, inaccessible formats, distrust, confidentiality concerns
- Positives: Peer support valued when trained colleagues deliver it
- Gaps: Programs often generic, reactive, or not tailored to PSP realities

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Prioritize organizational change: leadership, communication, and culture must be addressed, not just individual coping

Build trust and confidentiality: without safe environments, uptake of supports will remain low

Develop sector-specific supports: tailor programs to the realities of corrections, fire, paramedicine, border, police, and communications

Strengthen representation in research: include voices of racialized, LGBTQ+, early-career, and part-time PSP to design inclusive supports