

**Principal  
Researcher(s) &  
Affiliation(s)**

Cameron Olive

Advised by:  
Dr. Greg AndersonInstructed by:  
Greg Keenan,  
David Smulders**Research Field**  
Law Enforcement/  
Health & Wellbeing**Student  
Involvement**  
N/A**Partners &  
Collaboration**  
N/A**Funding Sources**  
N/A: Course-based  
project.**Project Period**  
**From: January 2019**  
**To: April 2019**

- Funded	\$0.00
- In Kind	\$0.00
-Total	\$0.00

**Stress & Coping Strategies for Canadian Police Officers**

April 12th, 2019

**Introduction**

Police officers are often reported to experience high levels of occupational stress, and consequently face numerous effects on both their work and home lives. These individuals are responsible for the safeguarding of the general public, and accordingly, the prevention of negative effects on police officers resulting from stress should be of societal concern. This study sought to examine the reasons behind stress for Canadian police officers, and identify possible stress reduction techniques to reduce the impact of stress on long-term emotional health. Although there are many experimental techniques proposed for public safety agencies in Canada, there are few that have been widely accepted and implemented across Canadian police departments.

**Methods**

Using a qualitative analysis model, a variety of articles were reviewed in order to determine the prevalence of the issue, and formulate workable solutions. A comprehensive search and review of the Justice Institute of British Columbia's online library database (EBSCOhost) was conducted, and articles were filtered based on their relevancy to Canadian policing. Search terms and additional parameters were tailored to reflect the needs of the study. The results were then considered for specific applicability to the research, and irrelevant material was excluded.

**Results**

The findings of the research indicated that a combination of organizational and occupational stressors contribute to high stress levels in policing. The research unanimously indicated that policing is a mentally demanding occupation, and police officers across Canada are regularly exposed to stressful and potentially traumatic situations. Task-orientation and adaptive-cognitive techniques were suggested as workable methods to reduce stress whilst on-the-job, and exercise, diet, lifestyle, and maintaining social connections were commonly cited as important off-duty stress coping techniques.

## Discussion

Numerous themes arose during the research. The age, ethnicity, and personal background of the officer were found to have a direct impact on their ability to manage stress. Research consistently found that police officers have high risk levels for general stress, PTSD, and a variety of other negative mental health issues. As aforementioned, task-orientation and adaptive-cognitive techniques were found to be workable in a policing context, such as breathing exercises and documenting emotion through writing. Debriefing was found to be an effective coping mechanism for traumatic events, as was discussion of such events with family, significant others, or co-workers.

## Limitations

Time constraints on the study meant that primary research was not able to be conducted on the subject matter. Rather, qualitative secondary research was used to formulate answers to the research question. There is a dearth of research specifically pertaining to Canadian law enforcement; significantly more research is conducted both in the United States and internationally. Furthermore, it was difficult to address what improvements could be made to current policies, as many departments do not make their intra-departmental approaches to such matters publicly available.

## Conclusion & Future Research

Police officers are regularly exposed to highly stressful situations, and accordingly face increased risk of harm to their long-term emotional health. A fundamental necessity of police-based coping strategies is the ability to utilize them on the job, and all of the discussed skills were found to be workable in the context of policing. Further research should be conducted to examine the prevalence and efficacy of current stress management techniques, programs, and education in Canadian police departments.

## Key References

- Conn, S. M., & Butterfield, L. D. (2013). Coping with secondary traumatic stress by general duty police officers: Practical implications. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 47(2), 272–298. Retrieved from <https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/>
- Gilmartin, K. M. (2002b). *Emotional survival for law enforcement: A guide for officers and their families*. Tucson, AZ: E-S Press.
- Tsai, L. C.-F., Nolasco, C. A. R. I., & Vaughn, M. S. (2018). Modeling job stress among police officers: Interplay of work environment, counseling support, and family discussion with co-workers. *Police Practice & Research*, 19(3), 253–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2017.1342091>