

**How Can the Accountability of Law Enforcement be Improved to Preserve and Maintain  
the Trust of the Public?**

Kushmeet Gill

Bachelor of Law Enforcement Studies, Justice Institute of British Columbia

**Author Note**

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### **Abstract**

This study used a mixed-methods approach and a transformative worldview to critically analyze secondary data on how the accountability of law enforcement can be improved to preserve and maintain the trust of the public. The scope of this research was limited to the general public in Canada, RCMP members, and members from other municipal police agencies in British Columbia and their perspectives toward public trust in the RCMP. This research will explore the question: How can accountability of law enforcement be improved to preserve and maintain the trust of the public? The themes explored in this study include the challenges of police oversight, civilian oversight and independent investigation, the trust and perception of the public and the increased transparency of investigations. The general public perceives a lack of trust in the RCMP is due to the lack of independent investigations and a lack of transparency in the investigative process. Additionally, challenges in the complaints process are discussed as well as the influence social media has on police misconduct and public trust.

*Keywords:* police oversight, accountability, public trust, RCMP, civilian oversight, independent investigations, transparency

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## **Improving Law Enforcement Accountability to Preserve and Maintain Public Trust.**

### **Background**

The use of force by the police is a growing crisis, and numerous factors are contributing (Bennell 2022). Deaths involving the police in Canada currently are on the rise (Puddister, 2023). In the police complaint system, oversight plays a crucial role in holding police officers accountable for misconduct (Stelkia, 2020). Some believe that police officers in Canada rely on using force frequently, but in statistics, it appears to be rare. This is of concern as “these numbers underestimate the true rate of force used by police (Bennell 2022, p.8)”. The majority of British Columbia residents support their community police; however, they expressed concerns about police use of force, lack of accountability, and transparency of the police (Sundberg et al., 2022). To gain and maintain the trust of the public in law enforcement, officers and other law enforcement personnel should be held accountable for their actions. If it is the job of police officers to enforce and maintain the law, their responsibility to be integral and achieve lawfulness, their actions must be scrutinized, and they must be held accountable. Additionally, if police officers want to maintain positive relationships with the communities they serve, they must demonstrate their legitimacy and have effective police accountability procedures for individual officers who use force. The development of a nationwide use of force database in Canada would aid in addressing the concerns of the media and public (Bennell 2022). In the line of duty, there are many instances where police officers must use force. Use of force may include less lethal force and lethal force. Not only can holding individual police officers accountable for their actions help serve justice, but it may also shift the way that police officer continues their duties. There may be instances where reporting of police officers has led to a change in the way they handle situations.

The problem with law enforcement and the safety of the public is the issue of police accountability. The concern is the lack of reporting by the public of issues related to excessive use of force by the police as well as a lack of effective measures in place to hold law enforcement personnel accountable for their actions. This lack of accountability leads to a lack of trust and confidence in law enforcement by the public due to misconduct and abuse of their power. Due to a lack of accountability, the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve is jeopardized.

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges and opportunities that arise to report the actions of the police and hold them accountable. Additionally, to examine the impact of the lack of accountability on the public and their confidence in law enforcement. This research will explore the question: How can accountability of law enforcement be improved to preserve and maintain the trust of the public? Additionally, sub-questions will be explored to address the questions: What factors contribute to the lack of police accountability? How have accountability measures evolved, and how did these measures impact the community?

Recognizing the diverse communities and law enforcement agencies, this research has a transformative worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Police accountability emphasizes the potential for positive change and transformation between the police and communities. A transformative worldview is associated with social justice. This worldview seeks positive change and involves collaboration with the community that is being researched. The focus of this project is Canada because this country has a federal police force The Royal Canadian Mountain Police, and the dynamics of police accountability should not vary depending on the province. The timeframe for this study is from 2008 to 2023 as it allows the ability to factor in the changes made to law enforcement accountability measures. The groups of people that will be researched

include members of the community and law enforcement personnel. These criteria were selected to limit this study to this country to provide specific analysis and in this relevant timeframe to incorporate recent changes. This topic addressed a critical issue between law enforcement and public safety. This study will aid in a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities to report police misconduct and the impact it has on the community's relationship with law enforcement. This study will also enhance the public's awareness of the importance of police accountability. The limitations of the study include the availability of data, certain changes in police accountability measures not yet completed, law enforcement personnel sharing their biased opinions, resource limitations such as time, and ethical limitations concerning obtaining informed consent from those who are being interviewed and maintaining confidentiality. There must also be awareness regarding accessing and using copyright data.

## **Literature Review**

### **Challenges of Police Oversight**

A common theme presented in the literature reviewed is the challenges of police oversight, in particular, internal police oversight (Bhayani, 2012). The RCMP is difficult to access for public complaints (Stelkia, 2020). In response to public confidence crises resulting from potential criminal actions by police officers, provincial governments created civilian police oversight agencies (Puddister, 2023). However, though these provincial agencies have become twice as large, the public is unaware of their operations, challenges, their work, and their comparison with others (Puddister, 2023). The two-tier police complaint system existing between municipal police forces and the RCMP is seen as a big challenge to police accountability and oversight (Stelkia, 2020). The two-tier system has been described as confusing to the public when they are to address their concerns about police officers (Stelkia,

2020). Additionally, the public also shows a lack of knowledge about how to file complaints against the RCMP and which appropriate agency is responsible for them (Stelkia, 2020). Most respondents interviewed had expressed that the RCMP complaint system and oversight are insufficient and ineffective (Stelkia, 2020). The respondents interviewed expressed concerns about not having access to relevant information to review files efficiently where the outcome did not satisfy the complaint in the RCMP complaint system (Stelkia, 2020). The majority of interviewees expressed their concerns about the lengthy time it took to resolve complaints against the RCMP (Stelkia, 2020). The lengthy complaint process delays officer discipline (Stelkia, 2020). Most police officers interviewed had expressed the limited budget challenges that are in place to investigate and resolve police complaints (Stelkia, 2020).

It is essential to understand the complexities of undercover investigations and who operational decisions are best to be left with (Puddister, 2012). The issue of whether or to what extent the independence of the police from the government can arise at any given time (Roach, 2004). Not much has been done for the determination of what can be an appropriate relationship between the government and the RCMP (Roach, 2004). Police and government relations appear to be questionable to many, though this relationship is constitutional and of civic significance (Roach, 2004). Considerable attention has been given to how police independence with oversight and accountability is balanced, especially when there is fear of excessive control of the government in police operations (Puddister, 2012). To uphold accountability, police officers investigating the police is an issue the public is aware of (Bhayani, 2012). The results from the research identified that the current model of police complaints against the RCMP lacks independent oversight, the trust of the public when the RCMP investigates their own officers, and a lack of legislation for the creation of independent oversight (Bhayani, 2012).

### **Civilian Oversight and Independent Investigation**

Another theme that emerged from the literature is the importance of civilian oversight and independent investigations. The responsibilities of civilian police oversight agencies of investigations and pressing charges against police officers who have committed a criminal offence are essential when it comes to police accountability (Puddister, 2023). The results from the research indicate that to improve public trust and accountability in the RCMP, civilian oversight and independent investigations are necessary (Bhayani, 2012). Views of a mayor, the media, and a civil rights activist suggest that a civilian oversight body should investigate all investigations against the police, and the police themselves (Bhayani, 2012).

Police investigating the police creates the impression of the public of no meaningful police oversight (Bhayani, 2012). A challenge to civilian and independent oversight is the lack of resources and money allocated by the government (Bhayani, 2012). The RCMP are not ready to take on the responsibility of investigating themselves (Bhayani, 2012). An integrated model of investigation should be incorporated until a civilian oversight body is utilized. The most important aspect of the oversight system is that independent oversight enhances and maintains the confidence and trust of the public (Stelkia, 2012). Without civilian oversight, individuals will not perceive the police to be legitimate (Pinette, 2020). Accountability should also focus on individuals of the public (McGovern, 2009).

### **The Trust and Perception of the Public**

There is a lack of trust in the public in the RCMP when police officers conduct investigations against their own members (Bhayani, 2012). Whether or not a complainant is or not satisfied, trust can be earned or lost (Wettlaufer, 2011). In an interaction with the police where individuals from the public are killed or seriously injured, the trust and confidence of the

public in the police can be a determining factor. (ref p) Police violence and racial profiling that are disproportionately experienced in certain communities, result in police distrust and poor relations with the police (Puddister, 2023). The elimination of a trust deficit can only be achieved by an increase in transparency and accountability of members of the RCMP through the civilian review of the RCMP (Wettlaufer, 2011). The analysis of the results collected from research, to improve the RCMP's accountability and public trust, there needs to be the establishment of an independent investigative unit and civilian oversight, more transparency in the complaint process, the RCMP should accept responsibility and admit mistakes, and establish local connections and enhance local accountability (Bhayani, 2012). In Canada, regarding police policies surrounding criminal investigations, not a lot of attention has been given to the balance between accountability and independence (Puddister, 2012).

To preserve public confidence, the performance and behavior of police officers must be held to the highest level (Roycroft, 2021). Between the RCMP and individuals residing in Canada, the increase in the number of annual complaints and when the RCMP system has very little change, there is a trust deficit that continues to grow (Wettlaufer, 2011). Independent observers and other police forces will aid in building and restoring the trust of the public (Bhayani, 2012). The level of public confidence in the police is improved by fair and transparent oversight (Stelkia, 2012). A direct and long-term impact was made on the integrity, credibility, and accountability of the police complaint system due to the lengthy process (Stelkia, 2020). To rebuild the trust between the RCMP and Canadians, initially, complaints should be directed towards informal resolution (Brown, 2007). The aim of Bill C-42 is to amend the RCMP Act which concerns the confidence of the public in the national police force of Canada (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and the role of accountability and civilian review (R., 2012).

### **Increased Transparency of Investigations**

Police accountability and the trust of the public can be improved if the RCMP increases transparency by becoming more forthcoming and tolerant of sharing their information (Bhayani, 2012). There is an increased demand for the involvement of the public in the accountability processes and more transparency (Bhayani, 2012). Governance is linked to the transparency of the police (Bhayani, 2012). The Canadian public has argued for an increase in transparency (Bhayani, 2012). Transparent oversight improves the level of public confidence in the police (Stelkia, 2012). To provide accountability for criminality and police misconduct, public transparency and investigation are essential when such incidents are said to have occurred (Puddister, 2023). Police-government relations raise confusion regarding whether the Minister should take responsibility or whether political staff and central agencies should incorporate discussions (Roach, 2004). To promote transparency and public accountability of the police, civilian review is essential (Pinette, 2020). Through public reporting, transparency can be provided (Pinette, 2020). Lack of transparency leads to the belief that the public is not being aware of the truth of the investigation (Pinette, 2020). Transparency can assist in a better understanding of the public towards police-involved deaths (Pinette, 2020). Transparency aids in the public being able to see how an investigation is carried out (Pinette, 2020). Lack of transparency erodes a fair assessment of police misconduct (Pinette, 2020). Without transparency it will become difficult to hold police officers accountable for misconduct and for the public to trust the police (Bennell et al., 2022).

Although these articles are obtained from different sources and written by several authors, they present similar views and solutions to the issues. These articles underscore the importance of the challenges of police oversight, the importance of civilian oversight and

independent investigation, the lack of trust of the public in police accountability and the restoration of it, and the importance of increased transparency of investigations. Gaps or aspects missing from these articles include the lack of a comparative analysis between Canadian police oversight systems and international police oversight models, which could provide insight into best practices as well as more perspectives on the issue of police accountability. Additionally, there is a potential for bias in some articles, where police officers are interviewed for matters such as police accountability. From these articles, significant challenges to police accountability and oversight are exposed, such as the two-tier complaint system can be described as confusing by the public which can lead to trouble or a difficult time in addressing concerns regarding RCMP officers. The lack of independent RCMP oversight leads to distrust in the RCMP from the public when officers are investigating members from the same organization. Challenges of police oversight are discussed; however, concrete examples or evidence of these challenges are not provided.

### **Methodology**

Databases utilized for this research included Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text (CJA), ProQuest (Criminal Justice Database), and Google Scholar. To include relevant literature and exclude other articles keywords or subject terms such as “police,” “accountability,” and “RCMP” were utilized in the initial search on each database. The articles that were excluded during this selection were not relevant to measuring the accountability of the police in Canada, specifically the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or incorporate the need for further accountability measures. See Table 1 in the appendix for initial results and terms used. See Table 2 in the appendix for the terms and results of the revised search. The first database that was accessed for search of literature was the Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text (CJA). To

further refine the results of the literature the results filters on the database were selected for literature that was “peer-reviewed,” the source types were limited to “academic journals,” the subject was limited to “police accountability,” and the time frame was manually entered to match the relevant time frame for this research from 2005-2023. The second database accessed to search literature was ProQuest (Criminal Justice Database). To refine the search the results were filtered by selecting “peer-reviewed,” the source type as “scholarly journals,” the location as “Canada,” the relevant publication date between 2005-2023, and sorted by “most recent.” The search was further refined by selecting the “company/ organization” filter to “RCMP.” The titles of the articles were first reviewed to find relevance to the purpose of the research and the research question.

To find relevant articles for this research, the titles of the articles were first reviewed to find relevance to the purpose of the research and the research question. An abstract is a summary of key elements of an article and is also a brief review of the literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A total of nine articles were selected for an abstract review based on the scope of the research and their relevance to the research question. These articles were chosen on the keywords present in the abstract such as RCMP, police, accountability, and Canada. After the evaluation of the keywords of these articles, to determine if these sources were relevant and reliable the purpose and scope of the research were reviewed. From the articles chosen for an abstract review, six articles were chosen for final review and analysis. These articles were chosen for a full review based on the findings, methodologies, results, and conclusions of these articles. Although six articles were selected for a full review, nine articles selected for the abstract review will be incorporated into this research as they provide relevant information that contributes to and fills in gaps in the literature and significant themes.

Because a mixed-methods design was used for this research, qualitative and quantitative data were reviewed and analyzed. This worked in the data selection process as both data collection methods were utilized to validate data and provide a better understanding and analysis of the research problem. Criteria such as the relevance and the inclusion/ exclusion criteria of articles effectively helped in the data selection process. Additionally having a scope and modifying the search aided in narrowing down the sources. What did not work in the data selection process was narrowing down sources from Google Scholar. Due to the number of hits being large on this database, it can be difficult to review and select articles that are relevant from this database. To evaluate sources for reliability, accuracy, and validity, the peer review process was considered, and the information was cross-referenced to corroborate facts and prevent the selection of articles with bias from other selected articles and by a Google search (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, the methodology and research design of the articles were analyzed to determine if the findings were valid.

### **Results**

Results show that the approach of police officers targeting a particular group does not affect the evaluation of the respondents on police performance (McGovern, 2009). Though it was expected in the study that individuals who come from Indigenous backgrounds exhibit the impact of impartial treatment from the police, there was no significant effect reported (McGovern, 2009). From the findings of the research conducted by Bhayani, 2012, the general public believes that due to insufficient resources and funding, there is a lack of independent investigation for the RCMP (Bhayani, 2012). Due to the lack of information provided on RCMP investigations for officer misconduct, there is a need for improvement in the transparency of RCMP response to such incidents (Bhayani, 2012). Participants from the general public stated

that public trust is affected by the inability of the RCMP to conduct or facilitate investigations that are independent and the poor communication of the organization (Bhayani, 2012).

Additionally, the response to officer misconduct needs to be prompt and the public must be informed of each case (Bhayani, 2012). The results from this study which the general public believes, conclude that the RCMP should not be conducting investigations on members of their organization, and the investigation should be independent (Bhayani, 2012). Additionally, results from studies conducted with RCMP officers have shown that the complaints process was very fair towards complainants (Wettlaufer, 2011). However, results of studies have also demonstrated to be unfair and prejudicial by a majority of those who have complained against the RCMP, and they have shown dissatisfaction with the experience (Stelkia, 2012).

Studies have also resulted in the finding of public attitudes being influenced negatively by incidents that were well-publicized (Stelkia, 2012). Participants have supported the involvement of citizens in the complaints process against the police (Stelkia, 2012). However, a majority of participants in the interviews stated that their level of confidence in the police did not change after the implementation of civilian overview bodies (Stelkia, 2012). In comparison to the country, residents of British Columbia have revealed the least faith in the handling of RCMP complaint investigations (Stelkia, 2012). Compared to research that was conducted five years prior, research indicated that the trust of the public in the RCMP has been decreasing over time (Stelkia, 2012). Limited resources are a challenge that participants expressed to ensure that complaints were processed in a timely manner (Stelkia, 2012). A large number of individuals who participated in the research have expressed the dismissal of their experiences with the police complaints process (Pinette, 2020).

Participants from municipal police agencies claimed that social media affects the trust of the public in the RCMP through the ability of social media to capture police misconduct quickly (Bhayani, 2012). The trust of the public is affected due to the inability of the RCMP to conduct independent investigations as well as misconduct or acts of individual police officers.

Participants from municipal police agencies have stated that the transparency of investigations needs to be improved as the RCMP withholds information from the public (Bhayani, 2012).

Additionally, these participants believe that misconduct does occur, and there is a need for better training that needs to be ensured by the RCMP as well as the improvement of ethics to ensure integrity (Bhayani, 2012). Participants from municipal police agencies need to improve on their actions on officer misconduct as there is a lack of independent investigation and the RCMP does not take responsibility or is unwilling to admit the mistakes that have been made (Bhayani, 2012).

Results from RCMP participants in the research indicated cooperation with other authorities and working with government organizations that engage with the processes with communities, local police detachment websites, and public safety meetings would aid in the responsibility of the RCMP to the local community by the exchange of local issues in a timely manner (Bhayani, 2012). RCMP participants described social media as influencing police misconduct instances, however, not a lot about officers who work with communities with due diligence is reported (Bhayani, 2012). Results from research determine that participants from the RCMP believe that the general public is treated fairly (Bhayani, 2012). Between the years 2010 and 2014, there was a decrease in the number of complaints against the RCMP and municipal police (Stelkia, 2012). In this timeframe, the number of complaints against the RCMP had decreased by 21.2% (Stelkia, 2012). Between the municipal police force and RCMP, there was a

significant difference in the number of complaints received. Per 100 officers, between both organizations, there was a difference of 25.5 complaints (Stelkia, 2012). Results have revealed a majority of complaints against police officers are informally resolved or unsubstantiated (Stelkia, 2012). The cost of the administration of police oversight in British Columbia has increased by 93.6% from the time period of 2010 to 2014 (Stelkia, 2012). The cost of police oversight agencies for the RCMP and municipal police in 2015 was \$14.8 million (Stelkia, 2012).

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The strengths of this research are the incorporation and a thorough comprehensive literature review of existing literature on the perception of the public, RCMP members, and other municipal police agencies, on police oversight strategies including civilian oversight, and financial constraints of the implementation and maintenance of accountability measures. The incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative research from existing literature gathered information from various perspectives. Challenges that were persistent in police oversight and the lack of public trust were effectively identified in this research with the inclusion of financial constraints, the lack of transparency in the investigation process, and the delay of incidents and the action taken promptly were discussed in this research along with possible solutions to such issues.

The involvement of various stakeholders from various backgrounds enhanced the research and its credibility. These stakeholders included members of the general public, RCMP members, and individuals from municipal police agencies. These stakeholders added diversity to the findings of the research collected. The weakness of the research was the lack of a comparison between the RCMP oversight models and international models which could have provided insight into practices that have proven to strengthen the trust of the public in the police and

alternate approaches that can be incorporated. The selection of police officers in interviews could lead to a potential bias when it comes to police accountability and perspectives could have been influenced. The research touches upon the two-tier complaint system as a challenge in police oversight, however, there is a lack of evidence to support this statement.

### **Data Selection**

A comprehensive understanding was provided of police oversight, the challenges of police oversight, public trust, transparency, and financial constraints from multiple resources including primary and secondary research. However, the scope of diversity was limited to police officers and members of the public, with the incorporation of those who have worked along with police officers such as individuals from non-profit organizations or other organizations that work closely with the RCMP could have provided more diverse perspectives on the issues presented. Through data selection, the themes and challenges of this research were identified and provided valuable insights into police oversight and its challenges. However, a diversity of sources including perspectives of vulnerable or minority populations as well as international perspectives could have been beneficial to this research. What could have been done differently, is the incorporation of vulnerable or minority perspectives as well as a comparison between RCMP police oversight and international police oversight strategies.

### **Discussion**

The perceptions of the public towards the police do not always reflect the reality of policing, however, their opinions reflect their experiences with the police, and with the lack of transparency in the police and their investigations, the perceptions of the public will fill in the gaps (Sundberg et al., 2022). This is an indication of the need for more transparency, and effective communication and what actions are taken to ensure transparency, accountability, and

professionalism (Sundberg et al., 2022). For families of victims and communities to understand the circumstances and assess police use of force they must have access to more information. However, due to disclosure laws access to certain information is limited by oversight and law enforcement agencies (Pinette, 2020). There are several areas that the RCMP is to work on to rebuild and improve the trust of the public as well as to improve accountability. The general public recommended that the RMCP improve their accountability and the trust of the public by incorporating independent investigations and civilian oversight, publicly releasing information on officer misconduct and the actions taken, the improvement of media strategies to better communicate with the public, and instead of centralization, incorporate an addition of a regional component to police services in British Columbia (Bhayani, 2012). The general public described public trust to be related to poor communication, a lack of independent investigation, the RCMP to take on specific cases of officer misconduct, and a lack of resources and funding (Bhayani, 2012). Due to insufficient funding and resources, the general public claims a lack of independent investigation for the RCMP and emphasizes the need for a transparent investigation in response to RCMP officer misconduct (Bhayani, 2012).

Municipal police agencies recommended that the RMCP improve their accountability and the trust of the public by establishing an independent investigative unit and civilian oversight, the RCMP being more transparent in their investigations and actions taken, the enhancement of local accountability and local community connection, as well as taking responsibility of actions and admitting their mistakes (Bhayani, 2012). Municipal police agencies described public trust to be related to social media, a lack of independent investigations, and the RCMP to take on specific cases of officer misconduct (Bhayani, 2012).

RCMP members recommended the RMCP improve their accountability and the trust of the public by accepting responsibility for their actions and admitting their mistakes, the accountability processes in place are making the RCMP reluctant to change, in response to critical incidents for the RCMP to have better public relations and communications strategies as well as a better media response, and to become more selective with newly hired officers as well as to improve their training (Bhayani, 2012). RCMP members described public trust to be related to social media, a lack of independent investigation, a lack of funding, and the RCMP to take on specific cases of officer misconduct (Bhayani, 2012). Between RCMP members, members from municipal police agencies, and the general public their perceptions of the complaints process and its fairness differ as some described being dissatisfied with the complaints process (Bhayani, 2012). Strategies that were recommended by the general public, members from municipal police agencies, and members of the RCMP to improve the responsibility of the RCMP towards their communities and improve the level of trust the public has in them include community engagement, transparency in investigations, and their cooperation with other organizations (Bhayani, 2012).

Though police oversight in British Columbia should improve the confidence of the public in the police, and increase accountability for the police, various challenges need to be addressed to improve the efficiency of police oversight and public trust (McGovern, 2009). As discussed earlier in the paper, the two-tier complaint model between municipal police agencies and the RCMP is a great challenge that needs to be addressed, as well as complaints to be handled and processed in a timely manner to ensure appropriate action is taken without delay, minor complaints being a burden (McGovern, 2009). Police oversight is essential in handling police

complaints, and it ensures that public complaints against the police are handled outside of the organization (McGovern, 2009).

The underlying values of research participants determine their confidence in the police and policing that is racially targeted (McGovern, 2009). The results determined the indirect effect of accountability is false (McGovern, 2009). In their evaluation of the performance of the police and their trust in police officers, a member of the Indigenous community did not determine impartial treatment from the police (McGovern, 2009). However, the study did not incorporate more than one individual from the Indigenous community. For the process of complaints and the reduction of the burden on the administration, the need for a police complaint system was discussed (Stelkia, 2020). Minor complaints in the system concern a timely and costly investigation even though all complaints of police misconduct are required to be investigated (Stelkia, 2020). The inability of the RCMP to incorporate or facilitate independent investigations in cases of police officer misconduct affects the level of trust the public has in the police. In addition to this inability, the lack of transparency, time-consuming investigations, and poor communication during officer misconduct incidents and investigations decrease public trust in the police. Public trust is decreased over time by incidents that are well-publicized because of the negative influence of such publications (Stelkia, 2012).

Additionally, social media is also an influence on the trust of the public in the police which emphasizes the need to address officer misconduct, improve transparency in action taken, and ensure the integrity of the organization (Bhayani, 2012). Though there is a large amount of money allocated to RCMP investigations, these resources are still limited. This limitation is a challenge to the timely process of officer misconduct complaints, which results in the delay in action taken upon an officer and the trust of the public decreasing over time. Between the years

2010 and 2014, the number of complaints against the municipal police and the RCMP declined, and most of those complaints were unsubstantiated or informally resolved (Stelkia, 2012), which is an indication that public trust decreased. Additionally, due to the cost of police oversight increasing, there is a significant need for better management of resource allocation for police oversight measures (Bhayani, 2012).

### **Recommendations**

Though research has provided valuable insight into police oversight and the positive impact it has on police officers' conduct and behavior, literature can benefit from additional research on the views of RCMP members and their unions towards the complaint process and oversight. This knowledge would reveal the consequences RCMP officers face due to officer misconduct and how RCMP officers are protected under the union (Stelkia, 2020). Future research on the impact oversight has on police officer misconduct is suggested (Stelkia, 2020). To determine the long-term effects and the effectiveness of oversight agencies on the accountability of the police and the reduction of behaviors of officers that cause misconduct, further research is required (Stelkia, 2020). Additionally, further analysis of cases that took years to resolve will provide a better explanation of where the complaints system is lacking and expose its vulnerabilities such as resources, legal issues or fees, and time (Stelkia, 2020). Because of the lack of independent oversight, the complainant may not be satisfied or agree with the outcome of the investigation, therefore, providing the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission (CRCC) with the power to monitor all investigations could benefit in gaining more trust from the public in these investigations (Stelkia, 2012). The two-tier system has been described as confusing by the general public and can be a challenge when reporting officer misconduct, however, with the implementation of a common intake system the process

will become easier for the public and complaints will not get lost in the system (Stelkia, 2012).

Another recommendation would include transparency in the reporting of complaints against officer misconduct and in the investigative process (Stelkia, 2012). The RCMP should become more accountable and remain a community police force (Bhayani, 2012). To restore public trust as recommended by the general public, there needs to be work done with media relations and public communications, cultural change around accountability in the RCMP, civilian oversight, and a stronger regional focus of the RCMP (Bhayani, 2012). Municipal police agencies recommended the RCMP become more accountable and transparent to regain public trust, work on local issues locally, recognize the power social media and technology hold, the implementation of independent investigations, a better communication models, the RCMP to move towards a blended Police Act and the incorporation of a professional standards unit (Bhayani, 2012). To restore public trust as recommended by the RCMP, the organization needs to be restructured, remove contract policing, identify changes required, become more transparent, become more proactive and assertive, and accept responsibility and apologize promptly (Bhayani, 2012). The knowledge gaps in the literature include the lack of a comparative analysis between international police oversight measures and the RCMP, and the lack of diverse perspectives such as from minorities, vulnerable populations, and other stakeholders. Additionally, the potential bias of police officers who were interviewed for research as they may have perspectives towards law enforcement rather than from a civilian perspective and lastly more information on the complaints process and its efficiency or fairness.

### **Conclusion**

The problem with law enforcement and the safety of the public is the issue of police accountability. The concern is the lack of reporting by the public of issues related to excessive use of force by the police as well as a lack of effective measures in place to hold law enforcement personnel accountable for their actions. This lack of accountability leads to a lack of trust and confidence in law enforcement by the public due to misconduct and abuse of their power. Due to a lack of accountability, the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve is jeopardized. This research explored the question How can accountability of law enforcement be improved to preserve and maintain the trust of the public? as well as What factors contribute to the lack of police accountability? How have accountability measures evolved, and how did these measures impact the community?

Though there is a diversity of sources on the issue, there are general agreements of issues defined. Firstly, the articles present the challenges that arise from police oversight. The police complaint system where the police are investigating other police officers results in a lack of faith in the police by the public (Bhayani, 2012). Other challenges were discussed, such as the lack of knowledge about the police complaint system by the public (Stelkia, 2020). Secondly, the significance of civilian oversight and independent investigations over the maintenance of public trust was discovered (Bhayani, 2012). To perceive the legitimacy of police services, civilian oversight is essential (Pinette, 2020), and individuals of the public should focus on accountability (McGovern, 2009). Thirdly, the public has a lack of trust when police officers conduct investigations of members from the same organization (Bhayani, 2012). Public trust and confidence are improved via transparent and fair oversight (Stelkia, 2012). Finally, the transparency of the police complaints system will improve the trust of the public in the RCMP (Bhayani, 2012). A lack of transparency will result in difficulty in holding police officers

accountable for their actions (Bennell et al., 2022). Participants involved with municipal oversight systems viewed RCMP officers should receive the same level of oversight as municipal officers do (Stelkia, 2020).

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## Appendix

**Table 1***Results from the initial search*

| <b>Search Database</b>                          | <b>Search Terms</b>                 | <b># of Hits Returned</b> |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text (CJA) | Police accountability               | 499                       |
| ProQuest (Criminal Justice Database)            | Police accountability<br>AND Canada | 204                       |
| Google Scholar                                  | Police accountability<br>AND RCMP   | 10,900                    |
| Google Scholar                                  | Improve police<br>accountability    | 865,000                   |

*Note: This table shows the number of results from the initial search, including the search database used, search terms, and the number of hits returned.*

**Table 2***Results from the revised search.*

| <b>Search Database</b>                                | <b>Search Terms</b>                                       | <b># of Hits Returned<br/>(Inclusion/Exclusion<br/>Criteria)</b> |
|---|---|--|
| Criminal Justice<br>Abstracts with Full Text<br>(CJA) | Police accountability<br>AND Canada                       | 4  |
| ProQuest (Criminal<br>Justice Database)               | Police accountability<br>AND Canada AND RCMP              | 2  |
| Google Scholar  | Police accountability<br>and RCMP and Increased           | 9,860  |
| Google Scholar  | Improve police<br>accountability AND measures<br>AND RCMP | 13,900   |

*Note: This table shows the change in search results depending on the revised search terms used with inclusion and exclusion criteria.*