Evaluating the Role and Impact of School Liaison Officers in British Columbia

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Abstract

The School Liaison Officer (SLO) program is a safety model that has been a controversial topic in British Columbia, particularly in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, where debates over police presence and its impact on student well-being have been persistent. While advocates argue that SLOs improve school safety, critics claim that they over-criminalize and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students. Despite these programs having been implemented previously, there is a lack of agreement and consensus regarding their effectiveness. This study used a comparative content analysis approach to answer the question: What concerns do public members have about the SLO program in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island? By analyzing news articles and academic literature, this study revealed that public concerns strongly oppose the reimplementation of the SLO program. Findings highlight that police presence correlates with higher student arrests and suspensions, particularly among BIPOC students. Instead of increasing a sense of security, research indicates that SLOs create confusion, fear, intimidation, and role ambiguity for students. As a result, public concerns have raised questions about the role and importance of SLOs in schools, amplifying the debate and controversy over their reimplementation. However, due to a lack of Canadian data and research, conflicting perspectives are not effectively reinforced or rebutted. This study concludes that conducting Canadian-based research on SLOs is necessary to inform policy discussions and decisions. Future studies should incorporate student experiences to introduce a critical perspective that can effectively shape the future of the SLO program.

Keywords: school liaison officer, school safety program, school safety and security, student-police relationships

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In January 2025, activists, teachers, and community members gathered at the Ministry of Education and Childcare in Victoria to protest the potential reinstatement of the School Liaison Officer (SLO) program (Seymour, 2025). While critics argue that there is little evidence to demonstrate that SLOs improve school safety, supporters claim that SLOs create a safer environment for students (Seymour, 2025). Over the years, the presence of police officers in schools has been a contentious issue in Canada, particularly in British Columbia (B.C.), where ongoing debates have been held regarding the effectiveness of the program. Due to potential reinstatement plans, these debates have heightened, causing conflict among multiple stakeholders.

Although SLO programs differ depending on school jurisdictions and police authority, they were primarily created to adhere to the unifying goals of the Canadian School Programs (Vancouver Police Department, n.d.). Key goals included eliminating barriers between the police and youth, preventing crime, and promoting community policing (Vancouver Police Department, n.d.). SLOs are police officers who work within schools to enhance safety and security by serving as a resource for students, families, and staff (Vancouver Police Department, n.d.). However, the introduction of police presence in schools led to numerous allegations and claims, which negatively stigmatized the program and ultimately led to its discontinuation. The Vancouver and Victoria School Boards discontinued their SLO program due to concerns about their impact on minority communities. For instance, in 2021, the Vancouver School Board voted to end its program, citing issues of racial discrimination (Abaya-Habibullah, 2023). Similarly, in 2023, the Victoria School Board discontinued its SLO program, highlighting its disproportionate

effects on Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) (Abaya-Habibullah, 2023). The removal of the SLO program created a narrative that it had a negative impact on students.

Despite the programs having been previously removed due to severe repercussions, newly elected school board trustees in Vancouver wanted to reinstate SLOs in 2023 (Abaya-Habibullah, 2023). Correspondingly, in 2025, B.C.'s education minister made it evident that the province would like to reinstate the program after firing members of the Victoria School Board for not including SLOs in their school safety plans (Seymour, 2025). With the possibility of these programs returning, there is a wide range of criticism towards SLOs and those advocating for them. The change of events has left many questions unanswered, hindering the public's understanding of how the situation unfolded and what underlying factors contributed to its possible reimplementation.

The ongoing debates have created distinctive perspectives on its impact on school safety and student well-being. Although the topic has sparked various perspectives, there remains an absence of Canadian peer-reviewed research on the SLO program. Therefore, a significant gap in the literature amplifies the issues and hinders resolving conflicts regarding SLOs. Since the program may return, the lack of censuses over its effectiveness highlights the need for a deeper understanding of its impacts on students and communities. The SLO program must be evaluated to determine whether its return is justified, informing policy discussions and decisions.

This study takes a balanced approach, providing context to the ongoing debate and exploring the reasons behind its continued discussion. It primarily focuses on examining the impact of SLO programs on school safety and student well-being through the viewpoints of students, educators, and the community. By incorporating diverse perspectives, the study seeks to identify potential challenges associated with the program and explore possible areas for

improvement. The goal is to contribute to the ongoing debate by offering new insights, enhancing understanding, and clarifying key concepts. With evidence-based insights, this study aims to answer the following question: What concerns do members of the public have about the SLO program in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island?

In terms of scope, this study will primarily focus on cities such as Vancouver and Victoria, as these areas have a history of implementing similar programs. By narrowing the scope to these regions, the study ensures that the setting and population analyzed share a similar context. This approach helps minimize the influence of external factors, such as differing provincial laws and policies, that could alter the findings. Examining the effects of similar programs ensures that the proposed solutions and recommendations are mutually applicable and relevant.

Literature Review

Role Ambiguity

Through literature, it is evident that due to the multifaceted role of SLOs, their presence in schools can be misinterpreted (Cohen et al., 2021; Ricciardelli et al., 2020). In addition to law enforcement duties, police officers serve as mentors, community liaisons, and supportive figures (Broll & Howells, 2021). Therefore, SLOs can have conflicting perspectives and perceptions from students, staff, and administrators. For instance, Cohen et al. (2021) highlight two distinct models that SLOs follow: one involves being a part of the school community and engaging informally with students and staff, while the other focuses on investigating crimes and formally responding to incidents. Due to their dual roles, school administrators and police officers recognize that SLOs can be confusing and challenging for students (Cohen et al., 2021). The

implications of the dual role are also evident in the research conducted by Ricciardelli et al.

(2020), which found that the informality and familiarity of police officers hinder their

relationships with students. Ricciardelli et al. (2020) revealed that personal connections with

SLOs discourage youth from reporting crimes, as they fear compromising trust and facing

shame. Overall, the literature presents that role ambiguity is a significant factor influencing the

perceptions of SLOs. Research emphasizes that the roles of SLOs need to be clearly defined to

ensure consistency and effectiveness in their interactions with students and staff.

School Safety Measures

Whether police officers in schools enhance safety measures is a topic that is commonly

debated in the literature (Barrans, 2010; Broll & Howells, 2021; Cohen et al., 2021). Due to role

ambiguity, school administrators, teachers, and staff have mixed views regarding the impact

police officers have on student safety. Research by Cohen et al. (2021) and Broll and Howells

(2021) suggests that when police officers adopt a community policing approach, they establish

positive relationships. As a result, from the perspective of SLOs and school administrators, the

rapport police officers form with students deters conflicts and crime. However, Barrans (2010)

argues that some teachers felt a modest increase in safety. Research revealed that teachers viewed

SLOs as an extension of punitive school discipline where minor issues escalated to police

intervention (Barrans, 2010). Staff members believed that SLOs created a prison-like atmosphere

rather than a supportive environment, resulting in increased fear and discomfort among students

(Barrans, 2010). The divide in whether SLOs enhance student safety measures highlights the

need for further research on the long-term effects of SLO programs on school safety and student

well-being.

Disproportionate Impact on BIPOC Students

A recurring pattern within the majority of academic research is that police presence disproportionately impacts the BIPOC population in schools (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021; Teachers' Federation, 2022). While claims already exist that SLOs contribute to fear and discomfort, research by the Teachers' Federation (2022) reinforces this by showing that educators believe police presence intensifies intimidation for BIPOC students. Educators felt that BIPOC students were under surveillance and were more likely to be over-policed and disciplined (Teachers' Federation, 2022). Additionally, Barrans (2010) highlights that racialized students often only interacted with police officers in the context of discipline rather than support. Furthermore, while Samuels-Wortley et al. (2021) reveal that SLO programs were widely criticized for targeting BIPOC youth, they also emphasize that existing literature has overlooked the voices and experiences of these communities. Altogether, the research gap indicates the need for empirical evidence to gain a deeper understanding of the broader implications of the SLO program.

Psychological and Behavioural Effects

The disproportionate impact SLOs have on BIPOC students has sparked questions and concerns about whether SLOs are beneficial to students. Research indicates that the presence of police in schools impacts students' psychological well-being and behaviour (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021; Teachers Federation, 2022). Repeated exposure to law enforcement can hinder students' perceptions of authority, discipline, and justice (Cohen et al., 2021). Consequently, Samuels-Wortley et al. (2021) reported that BIPOC students internalize negative stereotypes and develop a sense of criminality due to disproportionate interactions with the police. Issues such as these can lead to mistrust in law enforcement and create barriers for students outside of the

school environment (Cohen et al., 2021). Furthermore, Samuels-Wortley et al. (2021) found that increased policing in schools led to more stress and anxiety among students, negatively affecting their academic performance and social development. Similarly, Barrans (2010) found that students perceive school discipline as a form of criminalization, which can lead to increased psychological and behavioural consequences. The literature suggests that the SLO program increases disciplinary actions, having significant unintended consequences. This impact may lead to strained relationships between students and their schools, potentially increasing the risk of delinquency (Barrans, 2010). Given these potential psychological and behavioural effects, SLOs may have a negative impact on students beyond the educational setting, highlighting the need for a deeper analysis of their long-term effects.

Absence of Student Perspectives

The ongoing debates surrounding the unintended consequences of SLOs have highlighted the challenges in evaluating the program's effectiveness. Theriot (2016) reveals that the success of SLOs is often measured through reductions in school-based arrests and incident reports. However, assessing factors such as these overlook broader implications, including students' feelings of safety, trust, and willingness to seek support from law enforcement (Theriot, 2016). The literature demonstrates that the SLO program is more often assessed through its disciplinary actions than from the student's perspective. This approach highlights that no policy or assessment models are in place to capture the program's impact on students, which is a significant issue (Theriot, 2016). Similarly, Samuels-Wortley et al. (2021) emphasize the lack of Canadian-based research on student perspectives and their opinions regarding the program. Most studies conducted in Canada focus on police perspectives rather than those of students (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). Therefore, a lack of literature on student experiences limits the ability to assess the

effectiveness and consequences of SLOs (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). The patterns in the literature make it evident that the program's effectiveness should be based on student experiences rather than disciplinary actions. Research suggests that future evaluations should incorporate a student-centered approach that examines their perspectives on law enforcement and safety.

Alternative Approaches to SLOs

Implications surrounding the SLO program have led many researchers to explore alternative models as replacements. Concerns over racial profiling and systemic bias have driven support for safety approaches that exclude police presence (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021; Teachers' Federation, 2022). In addition, the long-term psychological and behavioural impacts on students suggest that the SLO program may not be appropriate for a school setting (Barrans, 2010; Cohen et al., 2021; Teachers' Federation, 2022). Research demonstrates a growing call for student-centred approaches that assess and prioritize the mental health and well-being of students. School districts in Toronto and New Westminster have discontinued SLO programs in favour of restorative justice and peer support models (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). Proponents argue that these alternatives foster a safer and more supportive student environment by reducing fear and intimidation (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). The Teachers' Federation (2022) suggests that SLO funding should be redirected toward mental health services, student support programs, and community-based safety initiatives. The policy shift highlights the need for student-centred programs that create a more inclusive school environment for youth. The support for alternative models highlights the necessity of policy reform and implementation of reactive strategies that address student needs.

Methodology

The study adopts a pragmatic worldview, prioritizing practical solutions over theoretical debates (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Pragmatism is a result-based approach that addresses real-world problems by focusing on practicality (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As a result, this worldview is suitable for my study since it can offer actionable strategies for improving the SLO program. A pragmatic worldview enables me to synthesize multiple viewpoints, providing practical solutions that bridge the gaps between stakeholders' concerns and recommendations. Additionally, this study incorporates a constructivist worldview to explore how individuals interpret the SLO program through their lived experiences. Constructivism asserts that individuals actively construct meanings from their experiences and build knowledge through reflection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach allows me to explore which experiences shape individuals' views on the SLO program. Hence, I can uncover the lived realities of those directly affected to see the program's benefits and drawbacks.

Research Method

As my research method, I used comparative content analysis to systematically interpret qualitative data to identify correlations between recurring patterns, themes, and meanings within various sources (Charmaz, 2014). My study specifically used this method so that I could conduct primary research on news articles. Since there is an ongoing debate about the SLO program, content analysis allowed me to incorporate recent and relevant information. With news articles, I analyzed current perspectives from policymakers, educators, and the general public. As a result, through thematic coding, I interpreted relationships within texts to understand social phenomena in media and how they can influence the public.

Furthermore, comparative content analysis also allowed me to conduct secondary research by analyzing existing literature. I used previous research to identify key themes, theories, and findings relevant to the SLO program. As a result, this information served as a foundation for interpreting my primary research. By examining existing studies, I contextualized media narratives on public concerns about the SLO program and assessed if they aligned or contradicted scholarly perspectives. This comparison helped validate media claims, uncover biases, and highlight patterns in public and academic discussions. By analyzing these changes, comparative content analysis provides insights into how SLO programs are perceived, debated, and justified across different social contexts.

Although comparative content analysis is a flexible method for conducting primary research, it introduces several ethical issues. The news articles and academic literature I selected may unintentionally reflect my biases. Therefore, I may have overlooked contradicting information by only including data and sources that support my preconceived biases. Additionally, my perspectives and assumptions may have influenced my understanding of the information presented in the media and literature. Factors like this could have altered my findings by reinforcing existing perspectives rather than providing an objective analysis.

Search Methodology

To identify secondary literature, I conducted keyword searches based on the terms listed in Table A1 (see Appendix A), which directly targeted components of my research questions. Additionally, I applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table A2 (see Appendix A) to refine the search results across multiple academic databases. The initial search was conducted through the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) library website, which provides access to the EBSCO database. Using keyword combinations such as "Impacts of School Liaison

Officers," I applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria along with advanced filters; however, this yielded zero results. Recognizing that specific terms like "School Liaison Officers" were restrictive, I expanded my keywords to broader terms. This adjustment generated 18 results (see Table B1 in Appendix B). To gather more sources, I used Academic Search Complete and Criminal Justice Abstract. Based on the exact keywords and criteria in Appendix A, I generated 18 results from Academic Search Complete (see Table B2 in Appendix B) and 15 results from Criminal Justice Abstract (see Table B3 in Appendix B).

Moreover, I used a top-down approach to reviewing abstracts, starting from the first result and scanning titles and descriptions to identify relevant articles. Selection criteria included publication date, geographical focus, and publisher credibility. In terms of content, I prioritized articles that included data from direct stakeholders, thereby strengthening the accuracy and findings of the sources. Furthermore, I chose articles where the results can be generalized to the broader population to ensure their validity and applicability. A total of 11 articles were chosen for the literature review and data analysis.

Data Collection

This study utilized news articles as its primary data source as they provide valuable insights into policy changes, public reactions, and stakeholder viewpoints. I conducted a Google search to collect relevant articles using the keyword "SLO program." I reviewed the results on the first page since this approach reflected how most individuals accessed news on specific topics. Additionally, I searched CBC's website, a widely used national and regional source, to gather more articles regarding SLOs. Furthermore, I selected media based on the keywords in Table A1 (see Appendix A) and the inclusion/exclusion criteria outlined in Table A2 (see Appendix B) to maintain consistency and relevance. Due to the large number of results, I

prioritized selecting articles that examined the public reaction to the removal and potential reimplementation of the SLOs. I also included articles highlighting statements from law enforcement and policymakers regarding proposed changes and improvements to the program. Overall, six news articles were chosen based on this process.

Data Analysis

During my primary research, I conducted *open coding* by breaking data into segments based on themes, narratives, and perspectives (Charmaz, 2014). The information was then assigned labels that reflected key points, arguments, and ideas presented in the media. Furthermore, through the qualitative method of *focused coding*, I refined my initial labels into codes (Charmaz, 2014). I established codes by analyzing and categorizing labelled information based on emerging and recurring patterns. After developing initial codes, I used *theoretical coding* to explore relationships between them (Charmaz, 2014). Based on their meaning and interpretation, I combined the information into broader codes. The final codes included "Stakeholder Concerns," "Safety and Security Arguments," "Disproportionate Impact," and "Alternative Safety Models." These codes were then compared to information from secondary literature to evaluate if public concerns in media aligned with scholarly research. This method allowed my study to provide an evidence-based understanding of the SLO program and highlighted key concerns regarding its implementation.

Results

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the SLO Program

A key pattern that emerged from my analysis is that the primary justification for reinstating the SLO program is a reported rise in gang activity. Police departments and local

authorities argue that the growing presence of gangs is increasing recruitment among the youth, necessitating the return of SLOs in schools (Seymour, 2025). In support of this position, Victoria Police cited a case where detectives seized over $100,000 worth of vaping products that were being sold to minors at local schools (Coles, 2025). Law enforcement agencies advocate for the SLO program, emphasizing that officers receive specialized training in threat assessment, crisis response, and de-escalation techniques, which enables them to play a preventative role in school settings (Coles, 2025). Through such public statements, police reinforce a media-driven narrative that positions SLOs as essential for maintaining school safety and deterring criminal activity.

However, academic literature challenges law enforcement claims, showing that police presence often contributes to a punitive environment rather than improving safety or reducing crime. In the study by Barrans (2010), participants reported that the presence of police officers had a minimal impact on their sense of safety. Similarly, Theriot (2016) found that students with no police interactions in a school setting reported lower levels of school violence and disciplinary actions. In contrast, those who experienced five or more interactions encountered more severe incidents of violence and punishment (Theriot, 2016). These findings suggest that increased police presence in schools does not necessarily deter violence but may instead contribute to increased tensions.

Concerns over the program's effectiveness remain reinforced as the public questions whether SLOs make schools safer by demanding evidence-based data (Seymour, 2025). Many protesters argue that there is no information demonstrating that increased gang activity correlates to the removal of SLOs (Seymour, 2025). Similarly, the B.C. Human Rights Commissioner (BCHRC) argues that there is a significant gap in research demonstrating the effectiveness of the SLO program (Bell, 2025). Public concerns such as these strengthen the themes of *Absence of*

Student Perspectives and *School Safety Measures*, as they highlight the need for clear evaluation criteria and data-driven policy decisions. The program's effectiveness remains a persistent concern among the public, leading to increased calls for accountability. Without meaningful policy reform, public confidence remains divided. This skepticism shifts the conversation about school safety from evidence-based analysis to speculation.

Proposed Reform

Given the ongoing debate, parents, teachers, and activists have expressed concerns about whether SLOs have adequate training to deal with students effectively. The BCHRC argued that school safety needs to be centred on mental health rather than law enforcement (Bell, 2025). The media emphasizes that police officers are more suitable for enforcing laws rather than taking on psychological and educational roles in schools (Bell, 2025). Similarly, school boards and members of the public note that police officers cannot build meaningful relationships with students when those students are afraid of them (Nicholson, 2025). Media coverage highlights that the ongoing debate questions whether police officers' training in crisis intervention is beneficial for students and their safety (Nicholson, 2025). Moreover, police departments stated that reinstating SLOs would involve officers wearing business casual attire, reducing the visibility of their firearms, and undergoing enhanced cultural awareness training (CBC News, 2023). However, members of the public questioned the necessity of armed officers, noting that there has been no incident in the past decade where an SLO has needed to use a firearm (CBC News, 2023). As a result, many feel that concerns about the potential psychological impact of firearms on students have not been fully addressed (CBC News, 2023).

Public concerns reflect the theme of *Role Ambiguity* as many stakeholders argue that police officers' responsibilities do not traditionally align with the education environment.

Research shows that SLOs are often expected to act simultaneously as educators, counsellors, and law enforcers, creating confusion about their purpose in schools (Javdani, 2019). Given that SLOs typically receive little to no formal training in youth mentorship, questions arise about their ability to support students effectively (Javdani, 2019). This lack of training raises broader concerns about whether SLOs are prepared adequately to engage with students through supportive rather than punitive practices. As a result, many advocates push for alternative safety modes that remove SLOs from school settings. For example, Cameron et al. (2020) recommend that civilian personnel trained in counselling and trauma-informed approaches replace SLOs. They suggest that instead of enforcing school discipline, civilians would focus on mental health and restorative practices, which would be more beneficial for students (Cameron et al., 2020). Examples of concerns and recommendations suggest that traditional policing tactics may not be suitable in educational spaces, indicating that the role of SLOs requires revaluations and reform. The continued presence of SLOs without significant changes risks perpetuating unintended consequences, which remains a critical point of discussion among stakeholders.

Racial Disparities in School Policing

A dominant concern that emerged from the analysis is the disproportionate impact of the SLO program on BIPOC students. Across various media platforms, issues have been raised about the adverse effects on the BIPOC communities, with reports suggesting that police presence in schools increases systemic inequalities rather than enhancing safety. The BCHRC highlights this issue by referencing data that demonstrates an overrepresentation of police use of force against Indigenous and Black individuals (Bell, 2025). This concern is further reinforced by a 2017 report that examined 67 reported school incidents (Coles, 2025). It revealed that 30% of these incidents originated from Esquimalt High School in Victoria, B.C., a school with a large

population of BIPOC students (Coles, 2025). It is evident that parents, teachers, and activists strongly oppose the reimplementation of the SLO program due to its disproportionate impact on students (Bell, 2025; Seymour, 2025).

Academic research validates these public concerns and routinely highlights the program's repercussions. According to the Vancouver School Board (2021), BIPOC students often described their interactions with school officers as unfavourable, resulting in feelings of fear, discomfort, and mistrust. Many students perceived the presence of police not as a source of safety but as a symbol of systemic racism, oppression, and criminalization (Vancouver School Board, 2021). Correspondingly, SLO programs have been widely criticized for disproportionately targeting BIPOC students. Research underlines that schools with SLOs report higher student arrest and suspension rates, particularly among Black students (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). Additionally, reports indicate that Black and Indigenous students are more likely to face harsher disciplinary actions compared to their white peers, further reinforcing systemic inequalities within the education system (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021). The negative impact on BIPOC students remains a central issue in the ongoing debate over the SLO program. Research reveals that these disparities may be part of broader systemic patterns associated with SLOs.

Media coverage and academic literature consistently emphasize the theme of *Disproportionate Impact on BIPOC Students*, reidentifying concerns that have existed since the program's initial removal in 2021 and 2023. My analysis indicates that the unequal impact on BIPOC students plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of the program's potential reimplementation. The continued scrutiny suggests that efforts to reinstate the program must include policy reform to address previous shortcomings. Public concerns call on policymakers

and police departments to critically assess the role of SLOs in schools to ensure that safety measures do not unintentionally affect BIPOC communities.

Policy Discussion

My analysis revealed a persistent divide in stakeholder perspectives on the SLO program across the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Despite the involvement of various parents and teachers, the debate over the reimplementation is framed as having only two opposing sides. As presented in media coverage, this issue primarily positions school boards and police departments as opposing forces. Across various news articles, a key concern among educators is the negative impact of the SLO program on the mental and physical well-being of students (Bell, 2025; CBC News, 2023; Little, 2025; Nicholson, 2025). These findings are consistent with previous research and themes, which suggest that SLOs were removed due to their adverse effects on students (Samuels-Wortley et al., 2021; Teachers' Federation, 2022). However, law enforcement agencies countered these claims, arguing that the removal of SLOs is linked to increased gang recruitment and crime among youth (Bell, 2025; Little, 2025). My analysis revealed that media reports often focused on reporting information that deepened the divide between school boards and police departments.

Although media narratives describe an ongoing divide between school boards and police departments, they oversimplify the debate and reduce the complexity of the issue. I found that discussions in the literature include key stakeholders whose perspectives are crucial in understanding the program's broader implications. For example, Cohen et al. (2021) examine the perspectives of RCMP officers on youth engagement in schools. Research reveals that role ambiguity creates confusion and challenges for students, which in turn contributes to increased tensions and conflict in relationships between SLO and youth (Cohen et al., 2021). Another

example is research by the Vancouver School Board (2021), which highlights the program's positive benefits, noting that SLOs help build trusting relationships and offer valuable support. While the Vancouver School Board (2021) acknowledges that SLOs evoke fear, intimidation, and discomfort, it highlights that students with personal connections to SLOs are more likely to report positive experiences. Examples like these shed light on diverse perspectives from SLOs and students, which are often overlooked in the media.

The contrast between media portrayal and academic literature highlights the influence of media framing on public opinion and policy decisions. By presenting the debate as a confrontation between school boards and police departments, media coverage tends to address public concerns in a more reactionary manner than an informative one. This framing often oversimplifies a complex issue where public concerns become driven by emotion and controversy rather than empirical evidence. In comparison, academic literature presents a more diverse range of stakeholder perspectives and examines both the benefits and challenges associated with SLOs. Rather than creating reactive narratives, literature provides data-driven insights. While public concerns about SLOs are highlighted in the media, they tend to be limited in depth compared to empirical research. As a result, media coverage often overlooks the lived experiences of key stakeholders. Without prior knowledge of the topic, the complex issues surrounding SLOs are presented as an oversimplified narrative.

Discussion

Strengths

A key strength of my research lies in its comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis. By using comparative content analysis, this study effectively integrates qualitative data

with secondary sources, enabling a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the topic. The use of media sources reflects current societal reactions to the potential reimplementation of the SLO program, providing up-to-date information, public narratives, and insights into real-world implications. Although academic literature provides information on how policies were developed and their measurable outcomes, it often fails to capture the public's immediate reactions or the lived experiences of those directly affected by policies. Therefore, literature may overlook evolving societal concerns that are often captured through media reports. As my study used a comparative method, it allowed media narratives and academic literature to either support or challenge each other, resulting in a well-rounded and balanced interpretation of public concerns. Additionally, using both media and scholarly research captured a wide range of perspectives on the program, contributing to a more thorough and insightful examination of the SLOs. Using comparative content analysis helped cross-reference information, minimizing bias and enhancing the accuracy of my findings.

Another strength of this study is its specific focus on the SLO program in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island regions. My research revealed a lack of information on Canadian-based SLOs in academic research, as most studies did not specifically focus on B.C. Therefore, a significant gap exists in the literature regarding the impacts of SLOs on Canadian students. Given the ongoing debate about the potential reimplementation, content analysis enabled me to tailor my study, particularly on Canadian SLOs, with a focused examination of their role and impact within B.C. This targeted approach allowed my research to contribute valuable insights into an understudied topic, addressing a clear gap in the current academic literature and policy discussions.

Weaknesses

Despite this study's strengths, it also presented limitations in its data sources. A key concern is the reliance on news articles as a primary data source. Political or corporate interests often shape media content, influencing how stories are framed and presented. This framing may be designed to align with the audience's views or to increase engagement rather than to provide objective information. Additionally, news coverage can exaggerate or oversimplify complex issues, leading to misrepresentations of specific topics. Due to these factors, media sources can lack evidence-based or scholarly researched information. Since my study heavily depended on news articles, the information I used could significantly hinder the accuracy and validity of my findings.

Another limitation of my study is its design and duration. Given that my research was conducted over a 15-week period, it lacks a long-term analysis. At the time of this study, the debate surrounding the SLO program was current and evolving. As a result, my research provided only a short-term glimpse of the issue rather than a comprehensive and longitudinal perspective. Since the topic is still unfolding, future developments could challenge or invalidate my findings. Therefore, my research could be incomplete or outdated. Additionally, as this topic is ongoing, there is no readily available academic research or government reports. This limitation restricts my ability to use evidence-based sources to draw conclusions, impacting the study's accuracy and credibility. The lack of relevant literature to support my current findings increases the risk of bias and incomplete interpretation of my findings.

Future Considerations

The use of media played a valuable role in the data selection process for this study. Since there is limited academic research available on the SLO program in Canada, especially within

the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, media sources provided insights that were not accessible through scholarly literature. However, as I had difficulty locating Canadian-specific data, I could have utilized academic research from other countries that provided more information on similar existing programs. Although my focus was specifically on the Canadian context of SLO programs, incorporating evidence-based findings from different countries may have helped fill gaps in my research. As a result, for future research, I would consider expanding the scope to include more academic studies from regions with similar programs. This approach could help fill existing gaps in the academic literature and offer more relevant information for my analysis and discussion.

Recommendations

The primary gap in the academic literature is the absence of empirical evidence and research specific to B.C. Although the SLO program has been implemented in regions such as the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, a discrepancy remains in data and scholarly analysis on the impact of SLOs. While the Vancouver Police Department first introduced its SLO program in 1972, detailed information on its effectiveness and outcomes is limited (Vancouver Police Department, n.d.). Despite a decade-long controversy surrounding the program, there is still a lack of sufficient research assessing its effectiveness within the Canadian context.

With the possibility of the SLO program being reimplemented in 2025, media sources have highlighted criticisms directed toward the government and police for promoting its return without sufficient supporting evidence. Even though there is advocacy from the provincial level, there is no government-invested or funded research to support the return of SLOs. This highlights the urgent need for Canadian-based research on the SLO program. Collecting and

analyzing data on the benefits and unintended consequences of these programs could inform a more balanced and evidence-driven policy discussion. Such research could help resolve long-standing debates and guide future implementation efforts more effectively.

Furthermore, another notable gap is the absence of student voices and perspectives. While this study and existing research incorporate input from various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and community members, there is a significant lack of data reflecting the experiences and views of students. Given that the SLO program is designed to serve students and address their needs, their opinions, concerns, and lived experiences should be represented in research. My study demonstrates that the debate surrounding the SLO program is framed as a conflict between school boards and police departments, which overlooks the voices of students directly affected. The lack of qualitative data from students in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island is a significant issue, mainly since these regions are at the center of the current policy discussion. Without student input, claims about the benefits or unintended consequences of the program risk being incomplete or misinformed.

Future research should focus on filling in the gaps identified in this study by researching the SLO program in B.C. Since there is a lack of consensus on the program's reimplementation, it is crucial to generate evidence-based research on the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Furthermore, this research must be government-funded to ensure the credibility of the findings, allowing them to inform policy discussions and decisions effectively. Moreover, research needs to prioritize student perspectives by conducting surveys and interviews with Canadian youth. As my research reveals, there is no practical evaluation model that captures the lived experiences of students. Therefore, primary research must incorporate methods that allow students to reflect on their feelings, experiences, and opinions without compromising their identity. Ethical

considerations are crucial to ensure that the information gathered from students does not cause potential harm, respects their privacy, and maintains their anonymity throughout the research process.

Additionally, it is necessary that the SLO program be evaluated based on Canadian statistics. Research on student arrests, referrals to disciplinary actions, and suspensions should be analyzed to determine how the SLO program affected school environments and student safety. A data-driven evaluation can reveal the extent of both positive and negative impacts SLOs have on students. For example, comparing disciplinary referrals among Canadian students can help identify which genders, ethnicities, and age groups are most affected by them. By leveraging statistics, police departments and school boards can make informed decisions about implementing, training, and overseeing SLOs. As a result, research can determine whether the program aligns with its intended goals of safety and student support or if it has a negative impact on students' mental health and well-being.

These proposed actions directly address public concerns by filling key gaps in empirical research on the SLO program in B.C. Conducting government-funded studies in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island would generate region-specific evidence to help stakeholders assess whether the reimplementation of SLOs is justified. By prioritizing student voices through surveys and interviews, qualitative data will provide valuable firsthand insight into the program's impact on Canadian schools. While student experiences provide important context, data-driven analysis presents statistics that are crucial to a comprehensive understanding of program outcomes. Together, these recommendations can inform policy discussions and decision-making that address ongoing controversies and shape the future of the SLO program.

Conclusion

The potential reinstatement of the SLO program has sparked significant discussions and debates regarding its impact on safety and student well-being. This study used comparative content analysis to examine the public's concerns regarding the SLO program. By analyzing the diverse perspectives of various stakeholders, the study aimed to examine potential issues and solutions raised by public concerns. While advocates argue that SLOs enhance school safety and deter youth crime, this research highlights significant concerns regarding their effectiveness (Little, 2025; Nicholson, 2025; Seymour, 2025). Findings indicate that police presence in schools creates fear and discomfort rather than a sense of security. While law enforcement frames SLOs as crucial to school safety, evidence suggests their presence may increase disciplinary actions and psychological stress (Javdani, 2019; Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Furthermore, my findings demonstrate that SLOs disproportionately impact BIPOC students. Research highlights that police presence in schools leads to the over-policing of BIPOC students compared to their white peers (Teachers' Federation, 2022). Educators and community members emphasize that increased police presence does not necessarily improve safety outcomes but contributes to a punitive school environment (Javdani, 2019). Therefore, alternatives such as restorative justice and cultural-informed approaches have been recommended to replace SLOs due to their supportive and inclusive objectives (Cameron et al., 2020). Moreover, a gap in the existing literature underlines the importance of research on Canadian SLOs. This study emphasizes the need for student-centred research specific to B.C. to guide future decisions about the SLO program. Failing to address existing data gaps risks repeating the same harms that led to the program's initial removal. Ultimately, government-funded research is crucial to ensure that policy decisions prioritize student safety and well-being over political interests.

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Appendix A

Identifying Articles

Table A1

Key Search Terms

"Impacts" "Effects" 'Effectiveness'	AND	"School Liaison - Officers" "Police Officers"	AND	"Schools"	AND	"Canada" "Canadian" "British Columbia" "Lower Mainland" "Vancouver - Island"

Note. This Table illustrates the search terms used.

Table A2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Sources: • Peer-reviewed literature • Academic literature • Credible statistical studies	**Sources**: • Non-published literature • Non-academic literature
Data that focuses on: • The role of SLOs • The effectiveness of SLOs • The impact of SLOs • The concerns regarding SLOs • The unintended consequences of SLOs	**Data that focuses on:** • Law enforcement practices unrelated to educational settings
Geographical Scope: • Canada • Lower Mainland • Vancouver Island • British Columbia • Additional consideration will be given to articles that contain relevant information outside of this scope	**Geographical Scope**: - Studies conducted outside of the Canadian education and law enforcement system
Publication Date: • 2010 and onwards	**Publication Date:** • 2009 and older

Note. This Table illustrates the criteria used for literature selection.

Appendix B

Search Results

Table B1

Database 1 - Revised Search

Database	Search Term(s)	Results	Reason for Revision
JIBC	"Impact" AND "Police Officers" AND "Schools"	1,260	- Replaced "School Liaison Officer" with "Police Officers"
JIBC	"Impact" AND "Police Officers" AND "Schools" AND "Canada"	121	- Added "Canada"
JIBC	"Impact" AND "Police Officers" AND "Schools" AND "Canadian"	18	- Replaced "Canada" with "Canadian"

Note. This Table illustrates the search database used, search terms, and number of results.

Table B2

Database 2 – Revised Search

Database	Search Term(s)	Results	Reason for Revision
Academic Search Complete	"Effects" AND "Police" AND "School" AND "Canada"	133	- Replaced "Impact" with "Effects"
Academic Search Complete	"Effects" AND "Police" AND "School" AND "Canadian"	28	- Replaced "Canada" with "Canadian"

Note. This Table illustrates the search database used, search terms, and number of results.

Table B3

Database 3 – Revised Search

Database	Search Term(s)	Results	Reason for Revision
Criminal Justice Abstract	"Effects" AND "Police" AND "School" AND "Canada"	56	- Replaced "Canadian" with "Canada"
Criminal Justice Abstract	"Effects" AND "Police" AND "School" AND "Canadian"	15	- Replaced "Canada" with "Canadian"

Note. This Table illustrates the search database used, search terms, and number of results.