

Public Safety Personnel are exposed to a multitude of potentially psychologically traumatic events throughout their careers. From September 2016 to January 2017, an in-depth mental health survey was conducted with Public Safety Personnel from across Canada. The participants in this study included correctional workers, firefighters, municipal and provincial police officers, paramedics, public safety communications officials, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Nearly 5,000 Public Safety Personnel across Canada ($n=4,820$) responded to questions about potentially psychologically traumatic events. These respondents reported that they had experienced an average of 11 types of such events from a list of 16 possible types (Carleton et al., 2020).

Potentially psychologically traumatic events can lead to the development of posttraumatic stress injuries such as depression, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts or behaviours, and misuse of alcohol or other substances. When combined with the unique operational and organizational stressors that can also arise in public safety environments, such outcomes may also be referred to as operational stress injuries.

Of the nearly 6,000 ($n=5,813$) Public Safety Personnel who responded to questions about mental health, more than 40% (41.8%) of respondents screened positive for at least one mental health disorder, with the highest rates reported by correctional workers (51.6%), RCMP (47.3%), and paramedics (47.2%; Carleton et al., 2018). Moreover, 18% of participants screened positive for three or more disorders. The disorders for which Public Safety Personnel most frequently screened positive were major depressive disorder (26.4%), posttraumatic stress disorder (23.2%), generalized anxiety disorder (18.6%), and social anxiety disorder (15.2%).

Table 4. Frequencies of Positive Screens for Recent Mental Disorders Based on Self-Report Measures by Public Safety Personnel Category.

	% (n)						
	Total sample	Municipal/provincial police	Royal Canadian Mounted Police	Correctional workers	Firefighters	Paramedics	Call centre operators/dispatchers
PTSD (PCL-5)	23.2 (1304)	19.5 (288)d	30.0 (430)a	29.1 (225)a	13.5 (120)b	24.5 (190)c	18.3 (51)d
Major depressive disorder (PHQ-9)	26.4 (1419)	19.6 (278)b	31.7 (435)a	31.1 (235)a	20.2 (170)b	29.6 (213)a	33.2 (88)a
Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD-7)	18.6 (975)	14.6 (203)b, c	23.3 (313)a	23.6 (172)a	11.7 (97)b	20.5 (144)a	18.0 (46)a, c
Social anxiety disorder (SIPS)	15.2 (783)	10.0 (136)b	18.7 (247)a	18.3 (130)a	11.0 (90)b	20.0 (138)a	16.9 (42)a
Panic disorder (PDSS-SR)	8.9 (439)	5.9 (76)b	12.0 (151)a	12.2 (84)a	5.1 (40)b	10.3 (70)a, c	7.6 (18)b, c
Alcohol use disorder (AUDIT)	5.9 (292)	5.8 (76)c	3.9 (49)a	6.8 (47)b, c	8.0 (63)b	6.1 (40)b, c	7.2 (17)b, c
Any other self-reported mood disorder ^a	1.7 (80)	— ^c	1.6 (19)a	4.0 (27)b	— ^{a, c}	1.9 (12)a	— ^{a, b, c}
Any positive screen for a mood disorder ^b	29.0 (1460)	21.3 (285)b	34.7 (442)a	35.3 (249)a	22.4 (176)b	32.0 (218)a	36.1 (90)a
Any positive screen for an anxiety disorder ^c	30.3 (1433)	23.7 (295)c	37.3 (448)a	37.9 (249)a	19.4 (145)b	33.9 (223)a	32.2 (73)a
Any positive screen for any mental disorder ^d	44.5 (1998)	36.7 (439)b	50.2 (568)a	54.6 (336)a	34.1 (239)b	49.1 (311)a	48.4 (105)a
Total number of positive screens ^d							
0	58.2 (2495)	65.9 (757)	52.7 (563)	48.4 (279)	67.7 (462)	52.9 (322)	55.7 (112)
1	15.1 (648)	13.8 (158)	14.8 (158)	16.7 (96)	13.2 (90)	19.4 (118)	13.9 (28)
2	8.7 (371)	8.0 (92)	8.1 (87)	10.9 (63)	8.7 (59)	7.4 (45)	12.4 (25)
3 or more	18.0 (771)	12.3 (141)	24.4 (261)	24.0 (138)	10.4 (71)	20.4 (124)	17.9 (36)

PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder; PCL-5 = Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist for DSM-5²⁵; PHQ-9 = Patient Health Questionnaire³⁰; GAD-7 = Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale⁴⁷; SIPS = Social Interaction Phobia Scale³⁹; PDSS-SR = Panic Disorder Symptoms Severity Scale, Self-Report³⁴; AUDIT = Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test⁴⁵. Letters in the cells indicate categories of public safety officers that are significantly different from one another at $p \leq 0.05$.

^aAny other self-reported mood disorder includes persistent depressive disorder, bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymic disorder.

^bAny positive screen for a mood disorder includes all self-report mood disorders plus a positive depression screen (PHQ-9).

^cAny positive screen for an anxiety disorder includes positive screen for anxiety, social anxiety, and panic disorder plus self-report obsessive-compulsive disorder.

^dAny positive screen and the total number of positive screens include respondents who screened positive on any of the established mental disorder (i.e., posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, alcohol abuse) screening tools and/or who self-reported being diagnosed with a mental disorder (i.e., obsessive-compulsive disorder, persistent depressive disorder, bipolar I, bipolar II, cyclothymic disorder).

^eNot presented because of insufficient sample size (i.e., $n < 10$).

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