

MENTAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG RCMP CADETS

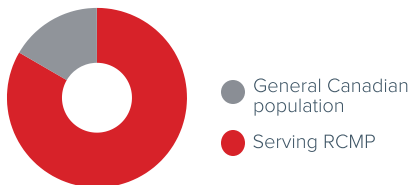
www.rcmpstudy.ca

Why study physical activity and mental health?

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) frequently experience potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTe). PPTe exposures and other occupational stressors impacting PSP are associated with higher prevalence of posttraumatic stress injuries (PTSI), such as posttraumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and alcohol use disorder. The prevalence is five times that of the general Canadian population.

Evidence suggests that physical activity can moderately decrease symptoms of mental health disorders. Yet there is currently limited research evaluating the role of physical activity on mental health disorder symptoms among public safety personnel. The current study assesses the relationship between physical activity and mental health disorder symptoms among RCMP cadets in order to determine whether physical activity is a useful tool for maintaining and improving mental health during training and potentially throughout the duration of RCMP service.

Comparative rates of mental health disorder



The study

As part of a Federal Framework on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, the current research draws on data from a larger, 10-year RCMP Study designed to assess the impact of skills taught to help protect members from posttraumatic stress injuries (PTSI).

The current study examined the relationship between levels of physical activity and changes in self-reported mental health disorder symptoms for the 26-week duration of the RCMP Cadet Training Program (CTP). Data was collected from 394 cadets via Apple Watch devices, which recorded the average number of active calories burned per day. These results were compared to changes in cadets' self-reported mental health disorder symptoms.

*The original wording of the study was changed and condensed for the current research infographic.

Results

Cadets who burned more active calories per day on average experienced greater decreases in symptoms of anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress, and alcohol use disorder.



Existing research highlights the reliability of calories burned as a longitudinal measure of physical activity.

Conclusions

Exercise appears to be an accessible, acceptable, and effective tool for supporting cadet mental health. Further research is needed to determine whether continued engagement in physical activity could mitigate impacts from occupational stressors, including PPTe, during RCMP members' careers. The current study results have the potential to inform mental health training and resources, including promoting the role of physical activity in reducing mental health disorder symptoms.

The current results assist in advancing Canada's first-ever National Action Plan on Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries, including additional investment to support the health and well-being of first responders and other public safety personnel.

The RCMP Study is funded by support from the RCMP, the Government of Canada, and the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. R. N. Carleton is supported by the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Arts at The University of Regina, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canada Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and a Medavie Foundation Project Grant. L. Lix is supported by a Tier I Canada Research Chair in Methods for Electronic Health Data Quality. T. O. Afifi is supported by a Tier I Canada Research Chair in Childhood Adversity and Resilience. The development, analyses, and distribution of the current article was made possible by a generous and much-appreciated grant from the Medavie Foundation.



[Read the full study here](#)

Teckchandani, T., Krakauer, R. L., Andrews, K. L., Neary, J. P., Nisbet, J., Shields, R. E., Maguire, K. Q., Jamshidi, L., Afifi, T. O., Lix, L. M., Sauer-Zavala, S., Asmundson, G. J. G., Krätzig, G. P., & Carleton, R. N. (2023). Prophylactic relationship between mental health disorder symptoms and physical activity of Royal Canadian Mounted Police Cadets during the cadet training program. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1145184>

Special thanks to Kara Vincent for excellent support in creating this infographic.



University of Regina