

CHRONIC PAIN AMONG RCMP CADETS

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Why study chronic pain among RCMP cadets?

Nearly half of Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers (43.4%) report experiencing chronic pain; most (91%) RCMP officers who report chronic pain indicate that the pain began after their RCMP service. Establishing baseline chronic pain estimates among cadets can assist in determining whether occupational risk factors contribute to the high rates of chronic pain reported by RCMP officers.

The current study

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

There are associations between chronic pain and diverse mental health disorders among RCMP officers; accordingly, the chronic pain prevalence among cadets may provide insights into the impact of service on mental and physical wellbeing. The current study was designed to provide estimates of chronic pain prevalence among cadets and assess for sociodemographic differences among participants. Participants were 770 RCMP cadets beginning the CPT, who self-reported on the location, intensity, and duration of chronic pain.

Results

Few RCMP cadets (10%) reported chronic pain at the start of the CTP, which is lower than reported for the Canadian general population (25%), and significantly lower than published results for RCMP.



Older cadets (40-49 years) were more likely to report experiencing chronic pain than cadets 39 years and under, supporting age as a contributing factor for chronic pain.

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

Among cadets lower back pain was the most severe and common form of chronic pain. Similarly, among RCMP lower back pain was reported as being the most intense and frequently experienced form of chronic pain. Prevalence of lower back pain was higher in RCMP (54%) than in cadets (34.2%), likely due to duty-related experiences and repeated activities, such as wearing duty belts, prolonged sitting, and time spent in police vehicles.



Pain lasting longer than 3 months is considered chronic, and occurs most commonly in the lower back, neck, upper extremities, and head.

Conclusions

The current study results help to continue 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 chronic pain prevalence reported by RCMP cadets at the start of the CPT was lower than published results for RCMP, suggesting occupational risk factors as probable explanations for highly prevalent chronic pain experienced by officers. The high prevalence of chronic pain among RCMP may be caused by, or impacted by, operational duties, duty equipment, duty vehicles, levels of physical activity, and higher prevalence of mental health disorder symptoms, rather than being singularly associated with routine aging.

Further research could inform evidence-based mitigation strategies for reducing chronic pain among RCMP, as well as proactive mental health supports that could support recruitment and retention and mitigate risks for mental and physical health conditions.

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Read the full study here

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