

In the Line of Duty – Facts and highlights

Operational stress injury describes persistent psychological difficulty experienced as a result of operational duties, including depression, anxiety, addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)

Staff: 6,152 uniformed members, 1,862 civilians, 123 in First Nations

General headquarters: Orillia

Detachments: 166, plus 5 regional headquarters and one divisional headquarters

Geographical territory: Nearly 1M square kilometres **Municipalities:** 322

Staff psychologists: 1

Peer support team volunteers: 51

OPP suicides

Number of OPP officers killed on duty since 1989: 21

Number of OPP suicides since 1989: 23* (16 active officers, 7 retired)

Estimated rate of death by violence (e.g., shooting, stabbing): 3 per 100,000

Estimated rate of death by accident (e.g., traffic collision): 20-22 per 100,000

Estimated rate of death by suicide*: 12 per 100,000

**The OPP keeps no formal records of suicides; these figures are based on an ad hoc list kept by the OPP Staff Psychologist.*

Cost of operational stress injuries to OPP – 2006-2012

Operational stress injury incidents (from workplace illness database): 269

Claims to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board for operational stress injuries: 207

Estimated cost (workplace insurance): \$3.5 million

Lost workdays: 22,067

Highlights of Ombudsman's recommendations

- OPP should attack stigma against operational stress injuries and suicide by reviewing best practices, consulting with experts and implementing a consistent, comprehensive program of support services, training and prevention for active and retired officers and their families.
- OPP should collect data on operational stress injury claims and suicides.
- OPP should provide immediate referrals for members and family who need help.
- OPP should enhance and improve its employee assistance programs, available psychological services, and peer support services.
- OPP should expand its Safeguard program of regular mental health checkups.

- Ministry should survey police across Ontario on extent of operational stress injuries and suicide, consult with experts and develop provincial standards for police services relating to support services, training and prevention.

Ombudsman investigation - dates and numbers

- Investigation announced: **March 30, 2011**
- Total complaints received from OPP officers: **78 (50 active, 28 retired)**
- Total complaints received from municipal police officers: **28**
- Interviews conducted: **191**
- OPP proposes full-time Operational Injury Social Support Coordinator: **August 2011** (still unstaffed)
- OPP makes Employee Assistance Program Coordinator full-time: **November 2011**
- Suicide of Sgt. Douglas Marshall: **April 2012**
- Ombudsman's preliminary report completed, sent to OPP and Ministry: **August 21-22, 2012**
- Recommendations to OPP: **28**
- Recommendations to Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services: **6**
- First response received from Ministry: **September 10, 2012**
- First response received from OPP: **September 28, 2012**
- Ombudsman's final report completed, sent to OPP and Ministry: **October 16, 2012**
- Final responses received from OPP and Ministry: **October 18, 2012**

Other jurisdictions' studies, programs and best practices cited in this report

- **Royal Canadian Mounted Police** (pp. 32, 50)
- **Toronto Police Service** (pp. 33, 51, 114)
- **Ottawa Police Service** (p. 33)
- **Calgary Police Service** (p. 51, 114)
- **Montreal Police Service** (pp. 51, 56, 122)
- **New Jersey State Police** (pp. 30, 49)
- **New York City Police Department** (p. 30)
- **San Francisco Police Department** (p. 47)
- **San Antonio Police Department** (p. 47)
- **Erie County Law Enforcement** (p. 48)
- **Michigan State Police** (p. 49)
- **Pennsylvania State Police** (p. 49)
- **Los Angeles Police Department** (pp. 49, 55)
- **Metro Nashville Police Department** (p. 50)
- **California Highway Patrol** (p. 54)

In their own words – witness comments in *In the Line of Duty*

“Most of the staff are glad that I’m back and are really supportive, but there is still some that [say] “yea you’re supposed to have PTSD, yea right.” I hear that crap... under their breath.”
– **Officer Albert, OPP** (p.16)

“Imagine being in a job where if they take your gun away, you’re done.... You can’t tell them. You have to take it and just hang on to it as long as you can. I thought I could get through the rest of my career.... I tried like hell. I tried, I cried, I worried about it, I stressed over it. Life was hell for me at home.... There were all those thoughts of ‘I just can’t do it anymore.’ ”
– **Officer Carl, OPP** (p.18)

“The police culture doesn’t look favourably on people who have problems... Not only are you supposed to be superhuman if you’re an officer, but you fear asking for help... If you go for mental health counselling, you may not be considered for promotions and you may be shamed by your peers and superiors. In some cases, your gun can be taken away, so there is a real fear of going for help.”
– **Dr. John Violanti** (p. 39)

“It was pointed out as I went through my career that if you had a problem, you didn’t want management – anybody – to find out because you would get blackballed.... You’d be labelled and then you’d be ostracized... Unfortunately, that’s how the stigma is and I think it’s still there.”
– **OPP officer** (p. 85)

“I had one meeting with [the external employee assistance provider]. Right off the bat they told me, ‘Just so you’re aware, this is a short-term thing. You’re limited to five appointments.’ So I’m thinking, five? How the hell are they going to fix this in five? So I’ve already in my mind written it off.”
– **Officer Frank, OPP** (p.94)

“Every year we get calls for potentially suicidal officers; no one knows much what to do.”
– **OPP Staff Psychologist** (p. 119)

“Those officers, in my opinion, are tragedies of police work, just as much as the officer that was shot and killed at an incident. And those officers’ names aren’t on any wall anywhere.”
– **OPP manager** (p. 120)

“I’ve had people commit suicide, on this job.... I learned from that.... I’m very blunt. I ask people, ‘Are you going to kill yourself?’ I’ve asked that question several times since then, with no shame or embarrassment...”
– **OPP supervisor** (p. 121)

“We respectfully point out that this case once more illustrates the urgent need for review of entitlement for traumatic stress benefits, and demands that the WSIB stop wasting the taxpayers’ money in this fashion.”
– **Municipal police service unit commander’s letter to WSIB, objecting to benefits for Officer Henry, who later killed himself** (p. 131)