



Edmonton Police Service Workplace Reintegration Program: Analysis of a Facilitator Training Initiative

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BACKGROUND

The demands and stressful nature of police work, unpredictability of the calls to which officers respond, and exposure to traumatic events in the line of duty such as critical incidents can contribute to operational stress injuries (OSIs) including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Carlton et al. 2018). A 2016 study found that 36.7% of surveyed Canadian police officers screened positive for a mental health condition – primarily PTSD (Carlton et al. 2016). Such injuries can leave officers unable to return to work in their required capacity; some are unable to return to work at all (University of Regina, 2018). In its 2018 budget, the Government of Canada identified the treatment of OSIs as a priority for public safety personnel, including police officers (CIPSRT, 2018). Despite PTSD amongst public safety personnel (PSPs) being a widespread issue, research and services are lacking for this group. Specifically, studies related to return to work initiatives for police officers remain scarce (CIPSRT, 2016).



Originating in 2008, the primary goal of the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) Reintegration Program (EPSRP) is to assist officers who have been off work, or recently engaged in a critical incident, to return to normalcy of work setting by providing support and training in conjunction with services provided by their health care provider (i.e., psychologist, clinician or occupational therapist). Officers are engaged in a step-by-step process that addresses the unique stressors and tasks an officer may experience while on duty. This complements traditional therapies, by including skill building, exposure therapy, relationship building, and street exposures (EPS, 2018). To prepare PSP peers to deliver the EPSRP to colleagues, a 5-day EPSRP Facilitator Training course has been developed. EPS has opened the training to a variety of PSP including paramedical staff, firefighters, sheriffs, Canadian Border Safety, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). This training has typically taken place once per year in Edmonton, Alberta; however, in 2019, the increased demand for the course has expanded nationally and internationally. An internally conducted program evaluation has yielded preliminary evidence of program effectiveness of both the EPSRP as well as the facilitator training course.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the effectiveness of the EPSRP Facilitator Training course at meeting its learning goals for PSP attendees?

OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate if the EPS Reintegration Program Facilitator Training course meets the desired learning goals set out by the instructors.
2. Explore changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and learning within individual sub-groups of PSPs attending the course.
3. Identify areas of strengths and improvement within the EPSRP Facilitator training course.

METHODS

This pre/post mixed methods cohort study including participants consisting of PSP (e.g., RCMP, police, EMS, fire, border patrol, sheriffs, etc.) and clinicians who work with PSP (n=58) based in Edmonton and Calgary who voluntarily attended the 5-day EPSRP facilitator training. Questionnaires administered pre- and post-training captured descriptive data, information about participant knowledge, mental health literacy, work reintegration, mental health stigma, and workplace attitudes. These outcome measures included the 12-item Mental Health Knowledge Survey (MAKS; Evans-Lacko et al., 2010), and the 23-item Open Minds Survey of Workplace Attitudes (OMSWA; Szeto, Luong, & Dobson, 2013). Paired sample t-tests were utilized for quantitative data analysis.

World Café Questions		
1. Contextualizing the EPSRP Practically how can you: a) Tailor the EPS Reintegration Program Training to your organization and unit? Bring it to life in the context of your unit/file (practices, approaches, activities, resources, etc.)?	2. Shifting workplace culture a) What will you do to shift workplace culture to reduce stigma and support colleagues who are returning to work?	3. Skill Development a) What skills will be the easiest to implement and why? b) What skills will be the most challenging to implement and why?

Table 1: World Café Questions

A World Café is a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several tables, with individuals switching tables periodically and getting introduced to the previous discussion at their new table by a table host. The World Café (table 1) data was analyzed by 2 members of the research team. Consent for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta.

A World Café was held on the final day of training to capture qualitative data regarding participant experiences and perspectives of the EPSRP facilitator training.

RESULTS

For sample demographics, refer to tables 2 and 3. Results of the paired-sample *t*-test analyses revealed statistically significant changes in pre- to post-intervention scores: MAKS pre-intervention (Mean = 48.70, *SD* = 3.688) and post-intervention (Mean = 50.70, *SD* = 3.452) $t_{50} = -3.373$, $p = 0.001$, and OMSWA pre-intervention (Mean = 38.01, *SD* = 9.830) and post-intervention (Mean = 33.18, *SD* = 7.362) $t_{49} = 3.692$, $p = 0.001$. Mental health knowledge, literacy, and workplace attitudes towards mental health increased while mental health stigma decreased (figure 3).

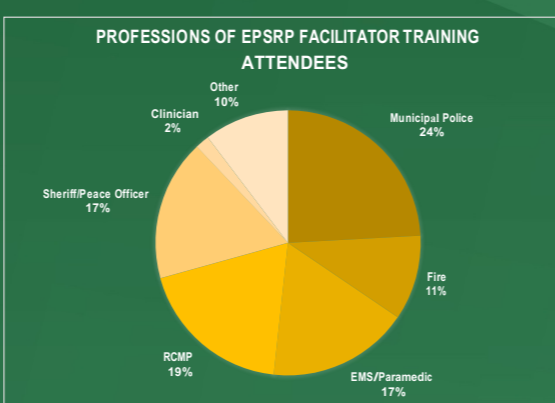


Figure 1: Demographic information by profession (n=50)

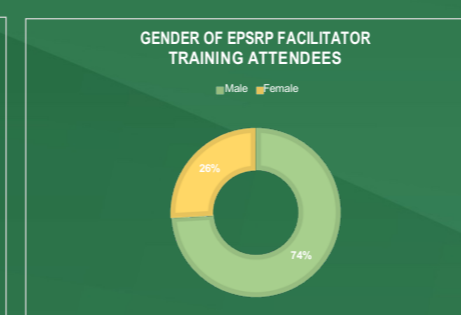


Figure 2: Demographic information by gender (n=49)

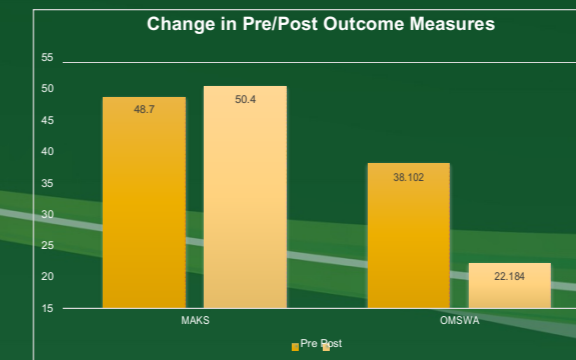


Figure 3: Pre/post outcome measure means for EPSRP Facilitator Training

Multiple themes and recommendations emerged during the World Café which included:

1. **Cultural Change:** decrease stigma associated with mental health by providing education to PSP members soon after recruitment.

2. **Organizational Trust:** increase accountability and decrease gossip at all levels.

3. **Peer Support:** Select credible personnel.

4. **Organizational Engagement:** Facilitating engagement at all levels in the organization, in cooperation with external stakeholders, to develop and maintain evidence-based, best practices within the organization that are customized to the individual.

DISCUSSION

The current study addressed the second research question regarding changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and learning of EPSRP Facilitator Training participants. Significant changes in the MAKS and OMSWA scores demonstrate that the 5 day EPSRP Facilitator Training was effective at increasing mental health literacy and reducing stigma amongst the PSP participants. The World Café revealed themes regarding more education throughout career trajectories, increasing accountability and trust, trained and credible individuals championing peer-support initiatives, and engagement at all levels of organizations. Additionally, mixed-methods analysis of data, which includes daily surveys, EPSRP specific pre/post questionnaires, and pre/post changes in specific subgroups (e.g. gender, professions, time in career, etc.) will take place in 2019. Further research will address EPSRP Facilitator Training in locations outside of Edmonton including Niagara Falls, ON, Wellington, New Zealand, and London, ON.



CONCLUSION

The EPSRP is designed to assist PSP in workplace reintegration after a critical incident or long-term absence from the workplace due to mental health conditions. Evidence-based, curriculum driven training within programs such as EPSRP may increase return to work success in PSP. Improved workplace mental health knowledge, and literacy within a positive workplace culture may reduced stigma and increased workplace productivity, morale, safety, and satisfaction. If research outcomes of the EPSRP and the Facilitator Training continue to be promising, widespread implementation may impact and benefit beyond the workplace and into PSP families, communities, and entire organizations.

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