

Competing Discourses of Masculinity and Seeking Mental Health Assistance among Male Police Officers in Canada

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Abstract : In recent years, Canadian federal and provincial law enforcement organizations have implemented numerous mental health strategies in an attempt to address officers' mental health and wellness needs. Despite these reforms, however, mental illness continues to persist in these populations. Whereas workplace stressors continue to be factored into the development of mental health initiatives, it is proposed that aspects of masculine culture have been overlooked as contributing to the prevalence of mental illness among Canadian officers. By drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, this study was conducted to determine if elements of masculine discourse exist as a socio-cultural barrier for officers seeking mental health assistance. This research supported the above hypothesis, and furthermore, identified how masculine discourse works in competition with mental health-related help-seeking discourses. To answer the research question, semi-structured phone interviews with active and retired male officers from Western provincial and municipal policing organizations, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were employed. Through thematic analysis of the transcripts, the data revealed three themes: i) masculinity in law enforcement is a determinant of workplace competency; ii) the dominance of masculine culture in law enforcement is problematic for mental health, and iii) improved help-seeking policies complicate how masculinity is expressed in law enforcement organizations. These findings suggest that within the reviewed Canadian law enforcement organizations, aspects of masculinity act as a socio-cultural barrier to officers seeking mental health services, and that the two conflicting discourses of masculinity and mental health-related help-seeking appear to be in competition with each other.

Keywords : competing discourses, dominant discourses, Foucault's theory of discourse, law enforcement, masculinity, mental health, police officers

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