The Role of Work Culture in Female Police Officers' Mental Health

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Abstract

Females make up approximately 22% of law enforcement officers in Canada. Despite the longstanding presence of women in law enforcement, researchers have not studied female officers' experiences with their work culture and mental health until recent years. This study aimed to gain a phenomenological understanding of female police officers' work culture and its impact on their mental health. The researcher interviewed 20 female police officers from across the country, and thematically analyzed the data collected. Four core themes emerged: mental health struggles, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and reduced use of force. The researcher discusses the current literature, study methodology, findings, and discussion centred on how the findings align with previous research.

Keywords: policing, qualitative research, women, organization, culture, mental health

The Role of Work Culture in Female Police Officers' Mental Health

Canadians have scrutinized police organizations' work culture in Canada in recent years with the settlement of the Merlo and Davidson v. Canada (2017) class action suit. The case highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) divisions all across the country. Female officers who were victimized in the workplace took a stand against the organization and expressed the devastating impacts of sexual harassment and assault on their mental health, well-being, and careers. In parallel with the #MeToo movement, women across the country called for justice from an organization that failed to protect their bodies, minds, and spirits. In the final report on the Merlo Davidson settlement agreement written by the Honourable Michel Bastarache (2020), one claimant reported:

> It's difficult to put into words the way I was made to feel during my time as a regular member of the RCMP. I learned early on not to trust anyone, which remains a problem for me to this day. I often wonder what kind of career I might have had if I hadn't had to work with guys like [my harassers]. I'm sure I wouldn't have ended up contemplating suicide as my only way out. Guys like that made going to work miserable for me. They made my life a living hell. If you can't trust or depend on the people you're working with, especially in this type of work, every day is an uphill battle. (p. 50)

The public and mental health professionals have a poor understanding of the experiences and perspectives of female police officers in Canada, beyond this class action suit. The existing literature paints a picture of women fighting to establish their place in a male-dominated profession.

Researchers have extensively studied the mental health of police officers. Law enforcement is more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety,

depression, and suicidal thoughts than the general population (Carleton et al., 2018; Foley & Massey, 2020; Maran et al., 2020; Royle, 2014; Stanley et al., 2016). Researchers have linked higher rates of mental health to intra-interpersonal, occupational, and organizational stressors (Abdollahi, 2002; Carleton et al., 2020; Cieślak et al., 2020; Maran et al., 2020; Newell, 2018; Nix & Wolfe, 2015; Papazoglou et al., 2019; Purba & Demou, 2019; Ricciardelli et al., 2020). In the last 50 years, researchers have studied police officers' work culture, and like most cultures, it is complex and variable. When it comes to mental health, police culture tends to be stigmatizing (Karaffa & Koch, 2016; Stuart, 2017), which can lead to a lack of disclosure regarding mental health struggles from officers (Bullock & Garland, 2018; Kyron et al., 2020; White et al., 2015).

Researchers have shown that women in policing can experience sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace (Barker, 2020; Collins, 2004). This type of treatment from superiors and peers can lead to significant mental health challenges (Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2016; Graue et al., 2016; Langan et al., 2019; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). Although researchers are beginning to understand the stressors that impact female officers' mental health, this knowledge is limited. The current study aims to fill gaps in the literature addressing the mental health of female police officers in Canada by providing officers with an opportunity to share their stories and perspectives.

The current qualitative study uses a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the phenomenon of being a female police officer in Canada. The study also aimed to explore whether female police officers perceive their work culture to have an impact on their mental health. The researcher conducted interviews with 20 female police officers stationed

across Canada by means of telecommunication and recording. Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed for major themes.

Literature Review

In qualitative phenomenological research, the order in which the researcher should complete the literature review is a debated topic. Some qualitative researchers note that completing a literature review prior to data collection and analysis could influence the researchers' interpretation of the phenomenon studied (Fry et al., 2017). Others believe that it would be unwise to collect and analyze data without having acquired some degree of understanding of the phenomenon (Morse, 2012). The researcher began this literature review prior to data collection to gain a general understanding of the field in which the research question falls. However, it will be edited and finalized throughout the completion of this thesis.

Research in police psychology can be traced back to the early 20th century and greatly expanded in the 1960s (Kitaeff, 2011). It is important to consider that policing has greatly changed in recent years and organizations have undergone significant transformations in the last few decades (Campeau, 2015). These transformations include increasing community-based initiatives, implementing diversity in recruitment standards, ameliorating training and hiring standards, as well as increasing levels of accountability and mediatization (Campeau, 2015). Although research regarding police officers' mental health has increased in recent years, there are still significant limitations to current research (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019). Most intriguing is the lack of current research on female police officers concerning either mental health or culture. It is worth noting that the literature presented in this section includes only studies that were written or translated into the English language. This means that relevant research conducted in other languages and other countries may have been excluded.

I will bring attention to female police officers and their involvement in the current literature throughout this review. One of my goals for this study is to give Canadian female police officers a voice and provide them with space to share their stories and experiences. There have been very few qualitative studies exploring female officers' experience with their mental health and work culture experience. This section will explore the current and past literature about the topics surrounding the research question: Does the work culture of female police officers have an impact on their mental health? The literature will be explored and broken down into four themes. First, a general overview of law enforcement work in Canada. Second, current understandings of mental health within law enforcement work. Third, past explorations of law enforcement culture. Fourth, the little research conducted with female police officers. Finally, I bring these sections together to provide an overview of the current literature and justify the current research.

Law Enforcement Work in Canada

Prior to delving into research conducted in the law enforcement field, it is helpful to understand police work in the country of interest. Although presenting information regarding law enforcement structure and practices in Canada does not pull directly from current research and literature, it is vital to understand the factors that affect police officers' mental health. Since many stressors put on law enforcement officers result from both organizational and occupational circumstances, having a grasp on the organizational ranks and levels is important.

In Canada, law enforcement personnel, specifically police officers, are generally understood to play an unparalleled role in maintaining our citizens' safety and orderly conduct. They do this by providing the public with a wide range of services including traffic and automobile services, crime investigation and prevention, crisis intervention, emergency response,

and search and rescue (Government of Canada, 2019). The duties of law enforcement officers may vary based on level, rank, and specialty.

Tiered Levels

Law enforcement personnel in Canada can work at one of three levels: (a) municipal, (b) provincial, and (c) federal (Conor et al., 2019). Municipal level policing includes 141 stand-alone police services as well as 36 self-administered First Nations services. First Nations self-administered police services operate through a band council, police board, or another authority (Lithopolous & Ruddell, 2013). These First Nations police services are made possible by Canada's First Nations Policing Program (FNPP) which supports Indigenous communities in establishing their autonomous law enforcement agencies (Kiedrowski et al., 2017). This program supports culturally appropriate policing in First Nations communities around Canada. Cities, counties, and First Nations reserves around the country employ municipal law enforcement agencies. However, only three Canadian provinces have provincial-level law enforcement. These provinces are Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. At the federal level, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provides regional or municipal services including First Nations policing, where self-administered law enforcement services have yet to be established.

Rank

According to Conor et al. (2019), there are seven broad categories of police service personnel. Each category includes various ranks and positions. The types of personnel are: (a) sworn officers who consist of commissioned and non-commissioned constables; (b) commissioned officers which include those with senior officer rank such as chief, superintendents, and inspectors; (c) non-commissioned officers who consist of personnel between ranks such as corporal, sergeant majors, and staff sergeants; (d) constables of the 1st,

2nd, 3rd, and 4th classes; (e) civilian personnel who are employees who are not officers, constables, or recruits; (f) special constables which include staff who have similar power to officers such as court security, parking enforcement, and by-law officers; and (g) recruits who are police officers in training. Some law enforcement officers further specialize in tasks such as canine units, witness protection, and search and rescue operations.

Mental Health of Police Officers

Policing has long been considered a demanding and stressful job (Kuo, 2015; Ojedokun & Balogun, 2015; Soomro & Yanos, 2018; van der Meulen et al., 2018). Police officers are expected to maintain adequate psychological and physical function to continue working effectively, despite being presented with various potentially traumatic events. Since law enforcement officers are likely to be exposed to trauma and stress throughout their careers, they are also likely to experience physical and mental health problems (Andersen et al., 2016; Baka, 2015; Chopko et al., 2018; van der Velden et al., 2013). In addition to the direct trauma that police officers can experience on the job, they can also experience vicarious trauma (Burruss et al., 2018; Foley & Massey, 2020; Maran et al., 2020).

The literature shows that law enforcement officers experience high levels of suicide, depression, and PTSD when compared with the general population (Carleton et al., 2018; Kyron et al., 2020; Royle, 2014; Santa Maria et al., 2018; Stanley et al., 2016). To provide a thorough understanding and presentation of the current literature on police officers' mental health, I will present the research on four major themes: police stress; burnout and fatigue; mental health disorders arising from law enforcement employment; and stigma.

Police Work Stress

The literature on sources of stress for police officers highlights that stress in this context cannot be attributed to a single factor and is often difficult to measure and operationalize (Abdollahi, 2003). Previous research has suggested that police stressors can be categorized into four main divisions: (a) intra-interpersonal, (b) occupational, (c) organizational, and (d) the psychological, as well as physical health consequences attributed with working in the field (Abdollahi, 2002; Symonds, 1970). The researcher will present current literature that addresses the first three categories of police stressors. The researcher will then address the fourth category of stressors in later sections that explore police mental health.

Intra-Interpersonal Stressors. Over the last few decades, researchers have suggested that individuals working in law enforcement could be predisposed to experiencing high levels of stress based on certain personality traits (Abdollahi, 2002). These personality factors include, but are not limited to, optimism and pessimism (Alkus & Padesky, 1983; Scheir et al., 1986), extraversion and introversion (Tang & Hammontree, 1992), and authoritarianism and permissiveness (Andersen et al., 2018; Coleman & Gorman, 1992). Individual officers' personalities can be a factor in how the stress that they experience at work affects their mental health due to how individuals relate to others and acquire supports (Papazoglou et al., 2019).

For example, Papazoglou et al. (2019) found that the three personality traits that make up the dark triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) were positively correlated with compassion fatigue. Although researchers cannot infer causation between these two factors, Papazoglou et al. (2019) found supporting evidence for a relationship between personality traits and the impact of stress on well-being in a police population.

Occupational Stressors. Occupational stressors refer to operational duties associated with the job that result in persistent psychological difficulties (Maran et al., 2018). The terms occupational and operational when referring to these stressors can be and are used interchangeably in this paper. In the case of law enforcement work, this can include encountering violent situations, communicating with victims of crimes, interactions with the judicial system, and sometimes officer-involved shootings (Abdollahi, 2002; Maran et al., 2018). In recent years, strained police-community relations attributed to the increase in media communications and video recording has been an added occupational stress for law enforcement officers (Newell, 2018; Nix & Wolfe, 2015; Ricciardelli et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). In Canada, a recent study has expanded on occupational stressors experienced by police officers. In this study, Ricciardelli et al. (2020) found that public safety personnel experience operational stress from public harassment, public information, their geographic location which might require them to cover large areas, and the vigilance required to work.

In addition to the occupational stressors mentioned above, the unpredictability of what might happen on the job, the need to be available at all times, and the requirement to work quickly are all occupational demands that result in higher stress levels for officers (Cieślak et al., 2020; Ricciardelli et al., 2020). Occupational stressors can change depending on the level, rank, and geographical location of officers. For instance, officers working in extreme climates may perceive this as occupational stress affecting their mental health.

A recent study conducted by Carleton et al. (2020) in Canada explored the relationship between operational stress and various mental health disorders in public safety personnel, including RCMP officers. They found that there is a statistically significant relationship between operational stressors and PTSD, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety, social anxiety,

panic disorder, and alcohol use disorder. Overall, the literature highlights occupational stressors as being an important contributor to police officers' mental health.

Although research shows that operational stress can have a significant impact on mental and physical health (Carleton et al., 2020; Cieślak et al., 2020; Ricciardelli et al., 2020), other studies have studied the possible mediators of this relationship. Nelson and Smith (2016) found that the mental health impacts of police officers' operational stressors were mediated by the perception of the stress as well as job satisfaction. Bergman et al. (2016) found that increased non-judging tendencies, an aspect of mindfulness, can reduce the impact of operational stress for police officers.

Organizational Stressors. Organizational stressors refer to the characteristic of an organization that may prove to be stressful for its employees (Purba & Demou, 2019). Recent research has found that these types of stressors are strongly associated with psychological distress and emotional exhaustion (Purba & Demou, 2019). In a study conducted by Purba and Demou (2019), the most common types of organizational stressors reported were demand, lack of support, job pressure, long working hours, and administrative pressure. The structure of law enforcement agencies and the way that they operate can be a source of stress for police officers and needs to be taken into consideration when examining their mental health.

In the previously mentioned study conducted by Carleton et al. (2020), researchers found that organizational stressors were also significantly related to the presence of mental health disorder. Specifically, they found significant relationships between organizational stress and PTSD, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety, social anxiety, panic disorder, and alcohol use disorder. Altogether, intra-interpersonal, occupational, and organizational stressors make up the majority of sources of stress for police officers that may be detrimental to their mental health.

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

Burnout and compassion fatigue are important mental health factors to consider when examining the law enforcement population. It is important to distinguish burnout and compassion fatigue from vicarious trauma since these conditions can yield similar mental health adverse effects. Vicarious trauma addresses the cognitive and affective changes that occur in individuals who work with a population that experienced trauma and can impact the professional's world view, self-identity, and mental health (Aparicio et al., 2013; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Burnout, however, does not necessarily require the presence of exposure to other individuals' traumas and can occur in many lines of work not limited to helping professions.

The two key components that make up burnout are exhaustion and depersonalization (Basinka & Wiciak, 2012). Exhaustion is defined as a loss of energy to perform work duties while also experiencing the psychosomatic manifestations of irritability. Depersonalization refers to "a state in which one distances oneself emotionally, has negative feelings and cynical attitude towards clients and co-workers" (Basinka & Wiciak, 2012, p. 269). Exact rates of burnout in police officers have proven to be extremely difficult to find. However, when compared to other first responders such as firefighters, police officers were significantly more fatigued and burnt out than other similar professionals (Basinka & Wiciak, 2012). In Basinka and Wiciak's (2012) study, police officers had significantly higher mean scores of fatigue compared to firefighters ($M_{PO} = 16.75$, $M_{FF} = 9.99$), exhaustion ($M_{PO} = 19.40$, $M_{FF} = 14.35$), and disengagement ($M_{PO} = 19.26$, $M_{FF} = 15.35$).

Recent research by Violanti, Mnatsakanova et al. (2018) has shown that effort-reward imbalances present when police officers are over-committed to their work may lead to higher

rates of exhaustion and cynicism. Additionally, increases in exhaustion, a component of burnout, has been found to lead to a reduction in officers' self-protecting behaviours, which, in turn, has increased their risk of victimization on the job (Ellrich, 2016). Interestingly, the other factor of burnout, depersonalization, has been shown to be positively linked to officers having a favourable attitude towards violence (Ellrich, 2016).

Compassion fatigue is defined by Figley (2002) as a kind of secondary trauma that arises from the "cost of caring" for those suffering from psychological pain. Figley elaborates on his definition by explaining that compassion fatigue is often part of the caregiving cognitive schemata that relates directly to one's morality to help others. Police officers are often in situations that challenge morality and are required to assist individuals who are suffering from tremendous psychological pain (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017).

Andersen et al. (2018) conducted an in-depth look at compassion fatigue among North American police officers. They found that 23% of police officers reported high or extreme levels of compassion fatigue. In addition to this rate, compassion fatigue was positively correlated with burnout and authoritarian attitudes. These findings suggest that there is a relationship between burnout and compassion fatigue and that both of these factors have an impact on police officers.

Burnett et al.'s (2020) study conducted in the United Kingdom explored compassion fatigue in police officers. The researchers found that male officers experienced higher levels of compassion fatigue than their female colleagues. In addition to this finding, the researchers noted that increased length of service led to a decline in mental health and an increase in compassion fatigue. Burnett et al. (2020) suggested that compassion fatigue training be incorporated in the formation of police officers in order to promote mental well-being. Given the multiple reports of high levels of burnout and fatigue in law enforcement officers, understanding the impact that this

may have on their safety and well-being is important (Andersen et al., 2018; Burnett et al., 2020; Ellrich, 2016; Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017; Violanti, Mnatsakanova et al., 2018).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder defined in the DSM 5 (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) as the development of characteristic stress response symptoms following traumatic events that an individual has experienced. Some of the symptoms associated with PTSD include distressing memories of an event, physiological reactions triggered by stimuli that are linked to the trauma, and persistent avoidance of these stimuli (APA, 2013). The current rates of PTSD among Canadian police officers are 19.5% of municipal and provincial police officers and 30% of RCMP officers (Carleton et al., 2017). A study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2015 found that police officers' risk of developing PTSD was four times higher than those of the general population, as demonstrated by a prevalence rate of 13% (Bell & Eski, 2015). In general, police officers report higher rates of PTSD than the general population (Asmundson & Stapleton, 2008; Soomro & Yanos, 2018).

Despite the higher risk of police officers developing PTSD, certain factors have been found to be protective. Lee et al. (2016) found that the degree of self-resilience can protect law enforcement officers from developing PTSD following a critical incident. A study conducted by Potard et al. (2018) echoed these findings by revealing that hardiness, a term closely related to resilience, was a protective factor in the development of PTSD for police officers in France. As previously explored in the police work stressors section of this literature review, police officers are exposed to trauma and stressful situations as part of their occupational duties. Therefore, they are highly exposed to situations that could potentially develop into PTSD.

Effects of PTSD on Police Officers. The current literature suggests that officers who meet the criteria for PTSD may show a higher endorsement of mental health stigma among their colleagues (Haugen et al., 2017; Soomro & Yanos, 2018). The officers who met the criteria for PTSD included in Soomro and Yanos's (2018) study demonstrated more negative attitudes than the general population towards mental illness in general and seeking treatment for these struggles. Generally, police officers are understood to be resistant to seeking support and treatment when experiencing mental health issues (Royle, 2014). Other impacts that PTSD may have on police officers relate to the work culture that they are a part of and will be explored in the culture section of this literature review.

Due to the prevalence of PTSD in law enforcement, treatment centres and resources have been made readily available across the country. One particular organization, Badge of Life Canada, is a "peer-led, charitable volunteer organization committed to supporting police and corrections personnel who are dealing with psychological injuries diagnosed from service" (Badge of Life Canada, n.d.). Badge of Life Canada helps police officers across the country access psychological services. On its website, the organization presents approved mental health professionals who have experience working with this population. Boots on the Ground is a peer-support phone line created to serve first responders in Ontario. The Government of Canada also offers PTSD support for veterans and RCMP members through Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) or Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program (CFMAP) (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2019). These services provide members with toll-free numbers to call for support and more information. Treatment centres specializing in PTSD are also available privately across the country.

Depression and Anxiety

The high job demands of police officers are associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety (Santa Maria et al., 2017). A recent study conducted by Santa Maria et al. (2017) found that police officers with higher workloads and citizen assaults showed higher levels of both anxiety and depression. However, these constructs were mediated by emotional exhaustion. This highlights the overlap between different aspects of police officer mental health such as burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, and depression. When officers were provided with increased supports and leadership, their anxiety and depression decreased (McCanlies et al., 2018; Santa Maria et al., 2018) – understanding the prevalence of these symptoms is important because, like many other mental health issues, anxiety and depression can lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Suicide

As I have outlined in previous sections, police officers are exposed to a variety of stressors and trauma that may negatively impact their mental health. Being exposed to these factors combined with their access to firearms, police officers may be at a higher risk than the general public of engaging in suicidal behaviour (Costa et al., 2019; Kyron et al., 2020; Milner et al., 2013). A study conducted by Di Nota et al. (2020) suggests that in Canada, RCMP officers are at a significantly higher risk of developing suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts than provincial or municipal police officers.

A recent study conducted in Australia by Kyron et al. (2020) found that suicidal thoughts were strongly associated with PTSD symptoms and psychological distress. Interestingly, researchers also found that workplace bullying was associated with increased rates of suicidal behaviours and thoughts. Kyron et al. (2020) also found that officers who identified as belonging

to the LGBTQ+ community reported higher rates of recent suicidal thoughts and behaviours than their heterosexual colleagues. This finding aligned with previous studies noting that employees who identified as LGBTQ+ reported high rates of both recent and lifetime suicidal thoughts and behaviours when compared to their heterosexual colleagues (Hass et al., 2010).

However, a systematic review conducted by Violanti, Owen, et al., in 2018 examined 44 studies from various countries conducted between 1997 and 2016 regarding suicide in law enforcement populations. Violanti, Owen, et al. (2018) found that studies investigating suicide rates among police officers reported conflicting results with suicide rates that were higher, lower, and equivalent to the general population. These researchers hypothesized that the lack of consistency in suicide research could be due to the under-reporting of suicides as well as guarded survey responses from law enforcement officers. Although exact statistics on suicide rates of Canadian police officers were difficult for the researcher to acquire, a recent study conducted by Di Nota et al. (2020) found that in Canada, RCMP officers reported statistically significantly higher levels of suicidal ideation than other types of police officers in the country. Their research showed that 25.7% of RCMP officers reported contemplating suicide compared to 20.5% of other Canadian police.

A few researchers have generated hypotheses about why it is so difficult to collect suicide statistics in the police population. Violanti et al. (2008) suggested that police suicides are often misclassified. Stanley et al. (2016) hypothesized that rates of suicidal ideation might vary from study to study due to large variations in study designs and measurement techniques. Hem et al. (2001) explained that small sample sizes in study methodologies are a barrier to acquiring a clear understanding of police suicide rates.

Mental health in police officers is a complex, multi-faceted topic that is influenced by a variety of stressors. In order to fully grasp the challenges that law enforcement officials face in regard to mental health, it is important to understand the work culture that they are a part of.

Police Culture

The construct of culture is described by Rohner (1984) as the "way of life of a people" which includes their traditions, designs for living, heritage, and life scripts (p.114). The understanding and description of police culture in the literature heavily rely on ethnographic studies that were conducted several decades ago (Loftus, 2009). These past studies have provided current researchers with an understanding of the classical themes present in police culture. Although the police culture may have changed over the years, the literature presents this work culture as being relatively stable. This is seen in officers' world views, which remain mostly consistent over the years, most likely due to the stress and pressures experienced by police officers being the same.

Police culture has been referred to as "canteen" culture by Waddington (1999). This concept of the culture suggests that "the canteen is an arena of action separate from the street, where in contrast to the latter officers act before an audience of their peers" where officers engage in "expressive talk designed to give purpose and meaning to inherently problematic occupational experience" (Waddington, 1999, p. 287). The police culture allows officers to connect with their peers and collectively give meaning to their work, despite its difficulty. Like most sub-cultures, police culture is multi-faceted and influences many aspects of its members' lives. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on how law enforcement culture views mental health and women members.

Police Culture and Mental Health

Law enforcement work is often accompanied by a culture that makes it difficult for its members to discuss with their colleagues or in general their mental health and psychological injuries as studied by Bell and Eski (2015). Most officers report being reluctant to discuss their mental health because they feel that the topic is taboo in their occupational context. Several characteristics and factors contributing to secrecy surrounding mental health, including stigma (Conner et al., 2010; Hackler et al., 2010; Karaffa & Koch, 2016; Link & Phelan, 2001; Stuart, 2017), silence, and the dilemmas of talking (Kyron et al., 2020; White et al., 2015), as well as the professional repercussions (Bullock & Garland, 2018).

Stigma**.** Literature relating to the concept of stigma define it in different ways (Link & Phelan, 2001). For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to use Link and Phelan's (2001) definition of stigma, which indicates that stigma involves five steps. The first is that human differences are labelled. Second, those holding the dominant narrative labelled persons holding non-dominant narratives. Third, these labelled individuals are viewed in "us" versus "them" type categories. Fourth, these individuals experience a loss of status and the possibility of experiencing discrimination that could lead to unequal outcomes. Finally, this stigmatization can transfer to these individuals having limited access to economic, social, or political power, essentially exposing them to the fullest extent of discrimination, rejection and exclusion.

In the context of police culture and mental health, the concept of stigma applies when members of the culture hold a non-dominant narrative due to a mental health condition and then discriminated against or excluded from the group (Stuart, 2017). Quantitative research conducted by Stuart (2017) found that 85% of police officers surveyed would not disclose to a supervisor or colleagues any psychological concerns they might have. Additionally, 62% of participants

expected discrimination at work and would not want a supervisor who suffered from mental illness. These statistics are important in the representation of how prevalent mental health stigma is in Canadian police culture and presents information about both public and self-stigma in law enforcement (Karaffa & Koch, 2016; Stuart, 2017).

Not only can stigma dictate how members of police culture react to the mental health concerns of their colleagues, but it can also play a role in the organizational and occupational structure (Karaffa & Koch, 2016). Specifically, police officers may refrain from discussing their psychological concerns because they fear that they may be seen as unable to handle their duties and be moved to a non-public duty. The current literature supports the hypothesis that both public and self-stigma towards mental health concerns discourage individuals from seeking support or discussing their concerns (Conner et al., 2010; Hackler et al., 2010; Karaffa & Koch, 2016; Krakauer et al., 2020). Since current research suggests that both these types of stigma exist in police culture, it could explain why officers are reluctant to speak about their psychological well-being.

Dilemmas in Seeking Support. If police officers decide to seek support for mental health concerns, it is implied that they would need to talk about what they are experiencing. This poses a few problems within the culture of policing. First, police officers may view mental health professionals as "bleeding hearts" who support criminals and marginalized individuals (White et al., 2015). Therefore, they can be seen as directly opposing the culture of law enforcement. Secondly, speaking with a professional can break down the wall of silence regarding mental health within the organization (White et al., 2015). In a study by Kyron et al. (2020), officers who avoided answering questions regarding suicidality were found to experience higher levels of

shame regarding mental health issues in general, suggesting that shame may play a role in officers' unwillingness to discuss their mental health.

Additionally, police officers who choose to align with a mental health professional and open up about their psychological struggles may be seen as weak by the community (White et al., 2015). Due to the stigma present in this culture, breaking the silence and disclosing secrets of the organization and its functioning is an undesirable course of action. By speaking with a professional, many officers fear to have their secret mental illness revealed to their colleagues.

In addition to the factors impacting officers' willingness to seek support, a commonly reported fear associated with the disclosure of mental health concerns among police officers is the possibility of professional repercussions. Bullock and Garland (2018) found that officers feared that the severity of their mental health struggles could have an impact on their careers by having them removed from a role, preventing them from accessing other roles in the future, losing possible promotions, and worsening their work conditions overall. Some participants even took it one step further by hypothesizing that if they were removed from active public duty, it could exacerbate their current psychological problems. Overall, officers believed that in order for law enforcement officers to succeed and survive within their organizations greater efforts to reduce stigma associated with mental health would be necessary.

Police Culture and Female Officers

In addition to stigma, the dilemmas of seeking support, and the fear of professional repercussions, police culture as a whole adopts views, traits, and attitudes that perpetuate the marginalization and discrimination of certain individuals (Graue et al., 2016; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). Historically, policing was a predominantly male profession (Schulz, 1995). It was not until the 1970s that women first began joining the law enforcement forces. In the following two

decades, there was a growth in the number of female police officers; however, in the 1990s, the number of women in the force plateaued. Today, women make up about 22% of law enforcement officers in Canada (Conor et al., 2019). Although some women are still drawn to police work, the law enforcement culture is masculine and "macho" (Evans et al., 2013). Law enforcement is a male-dominated occupation where traditional roles of masculinity, emotional control, self-reliance, and power are pervasive (White et al., 2015).

A study conducted by Loftus (2008) shows that any formal attempts at changing the nature of law enforcement culture has led to resentment from members and has fostered informal backlash by police officers in the study's English police force. Their findings identified that heterosexual, Caucasian male officers were most likely to resist change while women and members of the LGBTQ+ community welcomed change. This finding highlights the persistence of a predominantly heterosexual, white, male police culture.

As for women in the force, previous research has shown that harassment and gender discrimination were primary factors in female police officer dropout rates (Haarr, 2005). Additionally, it has been observed that police training curriculums may be designed to discourage women from becoming officers (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). According to Kurtz and Upton (2017), this treatment of women in the police force is an ongoing issue that requires further research and investigation.

In a study conducted by Prokos and Padavic (2002), the researchers found that in an American police academy, both an explicit and hidden curriculum existed. The explicit curriculum was rigorously gender neutral. However, the hidden curriculum that existed in social interactions and police academy culture treated women as outsiders. Men were taught that there were no repercussions for excluding female officers from the in-group. The hidden curriculum

also exaggerated gender differences by emphasizing that the differences between genders made

women inferior to men in the profession. This was taught to cadets in various different ways

including how the students were paired together for tactical drills, never allowing two women to

work as a team. Additionally, the hidden curriculum taught new officers that denigrating and

objectifying women was tolerated behaviour that would not be punished. This was

communicated through training videos that objectified women, as well as slogans that were used

in training such as "There oughtta be a law against bitches" (p. 452). Finally, the hidden

curriculum highlights that male recruits do not need to respect women in positions of authority as

much as men in positions of authority. As Prokos and Padavic (2002) concluded, "While there

may be no law against women (or bitches) entering the police academy, the hidden curriculum

there taught recruits that dominant masculinity is necessary to performing their duties as cops"

(p. 454).

Female Police Officers

In the research studies presented in previous sections of this literature review, women

often make up a small percentage of participants, with the highest participation proportion being

40% (Bullock & Garland, 2018). Overall, the current literature exploring the experiences of

female police officers is lacking in comparison to the breadth of research centred on male

officers. Some of the current literature focuses on gender-work identity conflict, willingness to

report misconduct, sexual harassment, and discrimination.

Gender-Work Identity Conflict

A study conducted by Veldman et al. (2017) investigated teams in the police force and

looked at the effect of gender differences within the teams. They found that women experienced

more gender-work identity conflict when there was gender-dissimilarity in the team than men

did. In other words, female officers were more likely to notice the gender differences in a co-ed team than men were. This aligns with the hypothesis that men may see themselves as more likely to belong to police culture since their gender's place in the culture is not questioned. However, when women felt supported by their team and leader, they were less likely to feel marginalized and perceived less gender-work identity conflict. This suggests that women may perceive fewer differences between them and their male colleagues with organizational support. Literature that focuses on women's feelings of belonging and aligning both their gender and their occupation provides us with insight into how female police officers may feel when working with their male colleagues.

Willingness to Report Misconduct

Researchers looking at police officers' willingness to report colleague misconduct found an interesting trend with female officers (Lobnikar et al., 2016). In seven specific types of cases, female police officers are less likely to report misconduct to a supervisor than their male counterparts. These incidents include abuse of power, use of excessive force, shooting a runaway suspect, accepting bribes, not reporting graffiti, falsification of evidence, and a supervisor's inaction when a suspect was beaten. The researchers found that male officers were likely to report misconduct based on their personal beliefs, while women were likely to report misconduct based on others' willingness to do so as well. Lobnikar and colleagues (2016) suggest that this could be due to female police officers recognizing that the consequences of being a whistle-blower could be greater for them. This hypothesis takes into consideration the impact of police culture and their organizational dynamics.

Sexual Harassment

Barker (2020) plainly explains, "Sexual harassment is unwanted and unasked for sexual attention coming from the opposite or same-sex" (p. 366). Sexual harassment can have devastating effects on a victim, including humiliation, fear, and other psychological symptoms (Barker, 2020). Sexual harassment perpetrated by police officers can be divided into three categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Collins, 2004). The presence of sexual harassment in police organizations has been studied and observed in many countries including England, Iceland, Australia, Japan, the Netherlands, and the U.S. (Brown et al., 2016; de Haas et al., 2009; Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2016; Haarr & Morash, 2013; Kobayashi, 2018; Steinþórsdóttir & Pétursdóttir, 2017). Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir (2017) found that bullying and sexual harassment in police culture are unconsciously and consciously used to preserve the gender hierarchy within law enforcement organizations.

In the Netherlands, de Haas et al. (2009) found that female officers were more likely than males to be victims of sexual harassment in law enforcement settings. Negative mental and physical health consequences following sexual assault were moderated by whether victims felt bothered by the sexual assault. These findings bring about the question of whether actions can be referred to as sexual assault if victims do not identify it as distressing.

Goodman-Delahunty et al. (2016) conducted a study exploring the psychological injuries sustained by female officers who had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Interestingly, they found that officers who were older than 30 were more likely to anticipate psychological ramifications and clinically significant symptoms than younger officers. Overall, participants expressed that gender-based hostility such as sexual harassment requires more repercussions at an organizational level.

In Canada, sexual harassment in police culture has been a prominent topic in news reports and media. The Merlo and Davidson vs. Canada (2017) class action suit against the RCMP brought much needed attention to the current struggles of female police officers in our country. The final report of the Merlo Davidson settlement reports that female RCMP members have been subjected to offensive sexual language, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment (Bastarache, 2020). Additionally, CTV's *W5* produced an episode titled "The Tarnished Badge" (CTV, 2020) where two female officers were interviewed about the impact that workplace sexual harassment has had on their lives. The interviews focused on what drew these officers to their profession, what they experienced in terms of sexual harassment, bullying, and gender discrimination at the hands of their colleagues, and how these behaviours are tolerated by their organizations. Additionally, interviewees shared their hope for change in their organization and what keeps them strong in their fight for emotional safety in the work place.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination in law enforcement is still prevalent in police cultures internationally (Graue et al., 2016; Langan et al., 2019; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). Graue et al. (2016) have found that gender gaps in police culture remain noticeable and that any narrowing of this gap over the previous decade has been negligible. In their qualitative study, Graue et al. (2016) found that female officers were typically assigned to one of two categories by their peers: a slut or a lesbian. In addition to being labelled, female officers felt that they continuously had to prove their competency to their peers and superiors and that they experienced additional obstacles when pursuing promotions. The finding that female officers have to prove themselves echoed the findings of a study conducted by Haar and Morash (2013).

A study conducted by Hassell & Brandl (2008) found that female officers who identified as African American or Latina reported significantly more experiences with discrimination in the workplace than Caucasian women. Overall, female officers reported feeling discriminated against in the workplace and that this discrimination carried over into the promotional system (Graue et al., 2016; Haar & Morash, 2013; Hassell & Brand, 2008; Langan et al., 2019; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). In Canada, the Merlo Davidson settlement investigated the experiences of female RCMP officers, which found that female officers experienced gender discrimination in the form of systemic barriers to succeeding in the organization, recruitment discrimination, exclusion from job opportunities, and discrimination related to pregnancy and child-rearing (Bastarache, 2020).

Summary of Literature

Current literature on police officers' mental health, culture, and female members vary in depth and understanding. Research looking at the mental health of police officers notes that women may be at higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment, burnout, PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts than the general public. However, public and self-stigma, consequences of disclosure, and fear of professional repercussions perpetuated by police culture may play a significant role in preventing officers from seeking psychological support. The current research was designed to contribute to the literature addressing female police officers' experience and mental health. I plan to do this by exploring their experience with psychological health, police culture, and how the two interact. Most importantly, my goal is to give a voice to the women of Canadian law enforcement in current research and literature.

Research Methods

Introduction to Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of many qualitative research methodologies made popular over the last century (Moustakas, 1994). The term "phenomenology" was first used in a psychological context in the year 1900 by Edmund Husserl who adapted the term from earlier philosophers including Immanuel Kant and René Descartes (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl is thought to be the founding father of phenomenological research in psychology and his work eventually went on to inspire Clark Moustakas in his development of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research has an overarching goal to describe the lived experiences and meanings of a shared phenomenon between individuals and is based on the belief that phenomena make up the building blocks of both human science and knowledge (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) developed a sub-type of phenomenological research which is referred to as transcendental phenomenology. This branch of phenomenology emphasizes the researcher's desire to focus less on their interpretations and more on describing the participants' experience of the shared phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). In order to accomplish this, researchers following this methodology are required to engage in epoche or bracketing, one of Husserl's concepts which invite the researcher to acknowledge and set aside their own biases and experiences in the hopes of seeing the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Moustakas, 1994).

The procedures involved in transcendental phenomenology include identifying a specific phenomenon of interest, bracketing out one's biases and experience, and collecting data from individuals who have experienced the phenomena of interest (Moustakas, 1994). From there, the researcher analyzes the data by identifying significant statements and themes in order to develop

both a textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). When researchers use transcendental phenomenology, they are able to observe the lived experiences of participants and the meanings that these individuals have associated with the phenomenon.

The current study design was based on Moustaka's (1994) transcendental phenomenology. The researcher chose transcendental phenomenology for a few reasons. First, the researcher was interested in exploring the experience of female police officers with their work culture and mental health. Although it is uncertain whether a phenomenon of relationship between work culture and mental health exists, the researcher is hoping to explore the presence of a possible phenomenon. Since phenomenology allows investigators to explore phenomena, it was a good fit for this research. Second, the researcher's goal was to explore and observe the phenomenon without acting upon it or involving her own bias. Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to bracket out their bias and experience in order to see the phenomenon with new eyes.

In this study, bracketing was important to focus on describing the experience of the participants rather than the researcher's interpretations. The researcher believed that focusing on the experiences of the participants would be of great value since much of the current research on Canadian police officers has been focused on men. Therefore, the female experience in law enforcement is not well understood and should be "perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). Transcendental phenomenology was chosen for this study in order to maximize the researcher's ability to observe female police officers' experience of work culture and mental health with as little influence as possible from the investigator's experiences and biases.

The research design for this study was based on the steps required for transcendental phenomenological research stated in the previous section (Moustakas, 1994).

The research methodology of this study was designed to both meet the requirements of transcendental phenomenological research and the aims of the exploratory nature of this study. The researcher believes that the research design allowed for flexibility within its structure, something which proved to be crucial in the researcher's ability to adapt to the information provided by the participants along the way.

Interpretive Framework

In the process of developing this study, the researcher had to identify the interpretive framework from which she would choose to perceive the research question, participants, and information gathered. Interpretive frameworks serve to identify the beliefs or paradigms that researchers bring to their research and are often derived from theoretical orientations that guide the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher identifies as having a postpositivist framework through which she views her research.

Postpositivism describes an approach that encompasses a few ideas. First, it recognizes that the objects of study, in this case the participants and their experiences, are continuously engaged in a process of understanding their social world and therefore their experiences should be understood within a broader, ever-changing context of social science (Fox, 2008). Second, the researcher is subject to the same ever-changing subjectivity of interpretation of the information being studied and that even though objectivity may be the goal of observation, this can only be possible in the detachment from the interest of the participants and not by "some essential difference in her or his ability to interpret free from values, norms, and so forth" (p. 7, Fox, 2008). The third idea of postpositivism suggests that to address the second issue mentioned, the

researcher should engage in reflection about their interpretations in order to maximize their detachment from the subject while simultaneously accepting the ultimate impossibility of being fully detached and unbiased (Fox, 2008).

Not only does the framework of postpositivism fit the researcher's personal outlook on life, but she believes that it goes hand in hand with the methodology of transcendental phenomenology chosen for this study. Postpositivism complements transcendental phenomenology in its desire to understand multiple perspectives without reducing them to a single reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fox, 2008). This can be done by exploring themes and presenting different views of the phenomenon experienced by the participants without placing the researcher's interpretations of their experiences. Additionally, in both the framework and methodology the researcher aims to detach herself from the participants in order to observe their experience without influencing its interpretation, however, postpositivism reminds the researcher that while this is an important goal, reflecting on the imperfections of bracketing one's experiences and biases is equally valuable. In the following section, the researcher will outline how she has identified her biases, experiences, and attempted to bracket them so as to not influence the data that she collected.

Role of the Researcher

It is imperative that the researcher convey to the reader the role that she has played in this study and the goals that she had as she interacted with participants and their experiences. In this study, the role of the researcher has been to connect with a topic that she is passionate about without letting her experiences and biases get in the way of understanding the participants' experiences. More specifically, the researcher believes that the most important part of her role in this study was to create a safe space for participants to share their experiences, to respect the data

collected, and to safeguard the participants' anonymity. With her role came the responsibility to share the stories and voices of the brave women who serve our country every day.

Self-Positioning Statement

First of all, the researcher is a White, Canadian, cisgender woman currently living in Calgary, Alberta. She is a Master of Counselling Student at City University of Seattle in Canada. The researcher recognizes her privilege as a White, educated woman. The researcher has lived in four different provinces in Canada throughout her life and is bilingual in French and English.

The researcher's background and experience are limited to quantitative research both in psychology and health sciences. Despite finding quantitative research rewarding, the researcher also believes that in many instances this type of research can lack depth and colour when it comes to participant experiences. The researcher has always considered the possibility that surveys and questionnaires, no matter how valid or reliable, could be missing salient information relating to the topic of study. This curiosity about the depth of information that quantitative research might be missing is what drew the researcher to explore her phenomenon of interest with a qualitative approach. The researcher longed to dissipate the boundaries of surveys and predetermined measures in order to observe the participants' experiences without restricting them to quantitative measures.

The researcher first became interested in this research topic while completing an assignment for a graduate level class on trauma and interpersonal violence. The assignment involved doing a case conceptualization of a client who was a male police officer suffering from PTSD. In order to complete the assignment, the researcher was required to read current literature on the mental health of police officers and what counselling approaches might be best for this population. Once she had completed the assignment, the researcher continued to explore the

literature on police officers' mental health. It was then that she noticed that there was very little literature focusing on the experiences of female police officers, something that the researcher discusses in the literature review section of this thesis. When she found herself still thinking about this population a few months later, the researcher began the process of formulating her research question and identifying the phenomenon that she wanted to study.

There are a few personal factors that played a part in developing the researcher's passion for this research topic. The first is that prior to completing her undergraduate degree, the researcher considered pursuing a career in law enforcement. She has always had a desire to help others and serve the public but ultimately chose a different path which allows her to support individuals in a different way. The second factor that may have influenced the researcher's interest was her involvement with the RCMP as a teenager. When she was sexually assaulted by a classmate while attending a boarding school in a small town, the researcher was in contact with a female RCMP officer who helped her through the process of pressing charges. This officer made the researcher feel heard, believed, and understood, something that her school at the time did not. Despite the painful reason behind the encounter with the officer in charge of her case, the researcher will always remember this officer fondly. The researcher believes that this positive experience with a female officer has contributed to her desire to better understand this population's experience and hope to eventually give back to their community by working with first responders in the future.

Epoche

Moustakas (1994) describes the process of Epoche as "a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to

look and see them again, as if for the first time" (p. 74). In order to engage in Epoche and observe what is before us with new eyes, the researcher is required to become transparent to themselves. As emphasized by Moustakas (1994) Epoche is rarely flawlessly achieved. Despite having the intention to bracket out her preconceptions and biases, the researcher recognizes that this is not always completely possible. It is by becoming transparent to herself and the reader in her self-positioning statement and Epoche process that the researcher will demonstrate the steps that she has taken to bracket her own experiences and biases regarding the research topic at hand.

The first step of the researcher's Epoche process was to reflect on why she chose the topic of research, something that she did before she started designing the current study. The researcher remembers feeling energized when she first settled on studying the experiences of female police officers with their mental health and work culture. At first she attributed this excitement to the relief of having found a suitable thesis topic. However, after describing her topic to loved ones and being asked why she was interested in this topic, a question she kept answering with "I don't know, I just think it's interesting," the researcher began to identify her resistance to understanding what had drawn her to this population in the first place. It was then that the researcher decided to get quiet with herself to explore what lay at the root of her passion for this research. In her moment of mindfulness the researcher was overwhelmed with memories of her experience with the female RCMP officer who had helped her as an adolescent. It was then that the researcher understood that buried under layers of painful growth and healing lay a seed beginning to sprout; a seed sewn from a meaningful connection with a constable many years ago.

It was important for the researcher to gain a better understanding of what was pulling her to connect with this population in order to be able to set it aside when engaging with her

research. Additionally, the researcher spent time reflecting on her preconceived notions of what police work culture might look like. She reflected on what she had seen in television shows, movies, and in the news. From this process, the researcher realized that she expected the work culture of police officers to be male-dominated, built on camaraderie, and closed-off to mental health struggles that members might be experiencing. Additionally, news reporting had informed the researcher of the presence of sexual harassment claims within police organizations around the country. The researcher continued to dig through her experiences and memories over the next few months while in therapy to ensure that she was able to separate her experiences with the RCMP officer from her desire to engage in this research. This ongoing therapeutic conversation led the researcher to the second step of her bracketing process, reflective meditation before interviews.

Although this will be explored further in future sections, the interview process of this study was conducted online during the COVID-19 global pandemic. For the researcher, this meant that she was not only dedicated to this study, but also balancing the emotions and experiences associated with juggling work and graduate school in social isolation. Therefore, prior to conducting each interview, the researcher would engage in reflective meditation for 30 minutes. This not only allowed her to feel grounded in the present moment, but it also facilitated reflection on how she was hoping to approach the information that she was about to gather. Like Moustakas (1994) stated, reflective meditation allows the investigator to let "the preconceptions and prejudgements enter consciousness and leave freely, being just as receptive to them as I am to the unbiased looking and seeing" (p.77). During this process, the researcher would note the prejudgements and emotions that she was identifying and review them until she felt ready to begin the interview process with open eyes and an open heart.

This process continued during the researcher's interviews when she kept a notepad in front of her out of view of the participants. On this notepad, she challenged herself to keep note of any emotions, thoughts, memories, judgements, or other experiences that came to mind when interviewing the participants. This allowed the researcher to note her reactions as they happened in order to help prevent them from influencing her interactions with the participants. Following each interview, she spent time processing the information that was shared throughout the interview and reflected on her reactions and possible biases that may have shown up.

Epoche is important not only in the process of gathering data, but also in the analysis portion of the study, since the researcher is the one interpreting the data. In order to avoid the influence of personal bias, the researcher followed a vigorous data analysis procedure which is described in detail in the methodology section. This method involved having the researcher identify all statements pertaining to the experience of the phenomenon and the research question. All statements were then grouped into similar categories to create themes. This process and the use of software helped the researcher bracket out her bias as much as possible by then only reporting themes that were common across many participants regardless of whether the findings were aligned with the researcher's biases.

Question Development

The questions included in the semi-structured interview outline an available in the appendix were chosen for a few reasons. After doing some preliminary research in the topic selection process, the researcher engaged in brainstorming about the related topics and themes that may arise around female police officers' mental health and work culture. From this session, four categories of questions were developed with the first category being general policing, the second, mental health, the third, work culture, and the last, work-life balance. These categories

were developed with the intention of exploring as many facets of the phenomenon as possible. All questions were designed to be open ended with the exception of a few in order to encourage the participants to share their experience.

The first category of questions explored what participants' most rewarding and most challenging aspects of their job were. Additionally, it asked a few questions about being a female in policing and what drew them to the profession. Although these questions may not directly relate to the specific phenomenon being explored, they were designed with the important function of establishing a working relationship between the interviewer and the participant. By asking these questions prior to getting into the more personal questions in the mental health and work culture categories, the investigator aimed to help the participants establish trust and connection.

The mental health questions were designed in response to pre-existing research in the field and with the intention of diving deeply into some of the mental health challenges that participants had experienced. Additionally, this allowed the participants to describe one or more difficult operational and/or organizational situations that they had encountered as a police officer. In this section, the researcher decided to focus on what type of event contributed to mental health struggles, what impact this had on the participants, which types of coping strategies were deemed useful and which were not, who made up the participants' support systems, and how this event might still have an impact on them today.

The work culture section included questions aimed at better understanding the law enforcement work culture in Canada due to the majority of research being conducted either in the U.S. or in Europe. Then, more specific questions were aimed at exploring how the participants viewed their work culture as an officer, and then more specifically as a woman in a male-

dominated work place. These questions were generated in the deliberation of curiosities that

arose while reading the current literature.

Finally, the work-life balance category of questions was designed to assess the

participants' work-life balance. Although this was the section with the least amount of questions,

it aimed to prompt the participants to share the extent to which their work occupied their lives.

Overall, the semi-structured questionnaire was designed with the intention of letting the

participants guide the conversation and share their specific experiences.

Methodology

This study adheres to strict ethical procedures that were approved by the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) of City University of Seattle in Canada. Participant information was

protected by using participant identification codes rather than names and any identifying

information was kept separately and safely from the rest of the data on an encrypted USB.

Informed consent was acquired from each and every participant both in written and verbal form

prior to recording interviews. Additionally, a general statement of confidentiality by transcribers

was signed by the hired transcriber prior to engaging in the transcription process. Finally, all data

was checked for anonymity prior to data analysis. All files were individually password protected

and stored securely on an encrypted USB kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's home. Any

changes to ethical procedures were submitted to the IRB as an addendum and approved by the

board prior to implementation.

First, the researcher presents the guiding questions and specific phenomenon that she has

set out to explore. This study is exploratory in nature. This means that the researcher is not sure

that the phenomenon is common and is looking to explore what mental health difficulties might

look like for female police officers in Canada. Therefore, the greater guiding premise is the

experience of being a female police officer in Canada with regard to mental health and work culture. Then, more specifically, does the work culture of female police officers impact their mental health? This study was designed to meet the goal of better informing mental health professionals about the experience of being a female police officer in Canada and the mental health challenges that they may face.

Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, identifying a phenomenon of interest is an important part of the methodology. However, it is important to note that this study, although phenomenological, was designed to be exploratory. Therefore, the researcher chose to interview women who experienced the broader phenomenon of being a female police officer in Canada. From there, the researcher asked questions about this broader phenomenon while also exploring the possibility of a phenomenon with regard to mental health and work culture.

This decision to study the phenomenon of interest was made with a few key points in mind. First, the researcher was hoping to contribute to the current literature on female police officers, especially in Canada. Based on the previous literature, the researcher felt that designing a study that would focus solely on female officers would present an important and rare perspective into the mental health and work culture of the women who serve our country. Second, the researcher was curious about the mental health struggles of women in law enforcement and whether their experience of their work culture was perceived to influence their mental health. It is worth noting that work culture is most likely not the only factor that could affect female officers' mental health, but the researcher chose to include this in the phenomenon of interest since little research has focused on how women in law enforcement relate to their work culture. Therefore the phenomenon observed was the experiences of mental health and

work culture of female police officers in Canada with the possible discovery of more specific

phenomena.

Participant Selection

Participant selection was done using pre-determined inclusion criteria. First, participants

had to be biologically female and identify as ciswomen. This inclusion criteria was put in place

in order to eliminate the possibility that participants who identified as other than cisgendered

women might experience the work culture differently but not experience the phenomenon

currently being studied. Second, the participants had to be over the age of 18, speak English, and

be on active duty as a police officer in Canada. This meant that participants could be employed at

either the municipal, provincial, or federal level of law enforcement. The decision was made to

ensure that the participants involved would represent the perspectives of women in law

enforcement across Canada and, in order to maintain the participant's anonymity, if the location

parameters were too specific, the researcher could have risked inadvertently identifying

participants. Additionally, participants had to be on active duty in order to reduce the possibility

of covariates that may influence the phenomenon. Finally, participants of any ethnicity or sexual

orientation were included.

The number of participants appropriate for phenomenological research varies depending

on the specific study and researcher, with some studies using as few as three and some as many

as 300 (Polkinghorne, 1989). In this study the research aimed to interview between 10 and 20

participants. By staying in this range, the researcher believed that she could have enough

participants across Canada to meet the population standards that she had set as well as to meet

saturation of information regarding the phenomenon of interest. The limit of 20 participants was

put in place due to the short timeline of a Master's thesis to ensure that the project could be completed within one year.

Recruitment Strategies. Recruitment for this study was done using criterion sampling in order to meet the inclusion criteria required for the study. The researcher recruited participants using a digital poster that was shared on her personal social media pages as well as relevant Facebook groups that reached the population of interest. The social pages that shared the advertisement were those of the following organizations: Canada Beyond the Blue and region-specific branches, Blue Line Magazine, and Badge of Life Canada. The online advertisement was created to be shareable over social media and asked that those interested contact the researcher by her institutional e-mail or personal phone number.

Interested participants reached out to the researcher at which point they were provided with more information regarding the requirements of the study and inclusion criteria. If the prospective participants were still interested in participating, they were sent an electronic version of the informed consent form and asked to password-protect it before sending it back to the researcher by e-mail. If participants had difficulty protecting the document, the researcher sent them a version of the consent form that was password-protected and shared the accompanying password in a separate message or by phone. Once participants had signed the informed consent form, the researcher contacted them to schedule an interview.

COVID-19 Impact on Methodology

The current study was first approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on February 24, 2020. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic as a result of the COVID-19 virus. In the following days, Canadian provinces closed schools and non-essential services while asking individuals to remain at home unless they were

accessing essential services. Readers who experienced these unprecedented circumstances will understand the impact that this had on both the researcher and participants' lives. Therefore, it is important to recognize the impact that this has had on the current study's methodology.

First, the researcher first published the advertisement for the study on April 8, 2020, a few weeks into COVID-19's Canadian quarantine period. Since all non-essential public places were closed and physical contact was strongly discouraged, the researcher could not post physical copies of the recruitment poster anywhere which led to the recruitment process being entirely online.

Secondly, the postal service was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 governmental restrictions and the researcher was no longer able to attend the City University of Seattle campus in Calgary, Alberta. Therefore, all consent forms had to be sent and signed electronically rather than mailed to the researcher at her institutional address. This meant that the researcher and participants had to adapt to password-protecting consent forms, a process that not all participants were comfortable doing. The researcher worked with participants on an individual basis to assist them in password-protecting documents and ensuring that their confidentiality was maintained. This included assigning a different password to each participant and deleting e-mail folders containing downloaded consent forms once they had been saved to an encrypted USB.

Thirdly, the researcher had hoped to conduct interviews in person when location allowed. However, this was not possible due to the global pandemic. This meant that all interviews were conducted online through secure video-chat platforms. Overall, the study's methodology was not significantly impacted by COVID-19 since the researcher, participants, and IRB were willing and able to adapt to the circumstances while still maintaining and abiding by privacy standards.

Data Collection

Once participants had completed the informed consent form, they were scheduled for their Zoom interview with the researcher. Zoom is a communication software that allows users to video-chat while recording and protecting their data. Zoom uses a 256-bit TLS encryption for communications and all shared content can be encrypted using AES encryption. Therefore, Zoom was chosen as a way of video-chatting with the participants to conduct the interview and record the session. Only the audio was recorded in order to ensure that the participants' faces could never be associated to their interview as an added layer of confidentiality protection.

All 20 interviews were conducted in April and May of 2020 and lasted between 49 minutes and 3 hours and 23 minutes. The average interview length was 1 hour and 37 minutes. At the time of their scheduled interview, the participants joined the password protected Zoom meeting where the researcher introduced herself. Prior to starting the video, the researcher reviewed informed consent and asked the participants if they had any questions or concerns about the study. When reviewing the limits of confidentiality, the researcher wrote down the phone number and current location of the participant in case there was risk of harm to self or others during the interview and local emergency services needed to be contacted. Participants were informed that their location would be shredded following the interview in order to ensure that their identity would remain confidential. Many participants were reluctant to share their location but agreed to do so when informed that it would be destroyed if not pertinent at the end of the interview.

Once all participant questions regarding the process of the interview and study were answered, the researcher started the recording with the consent of the participant. This was made apparent by each recording starting with the researcher informing the participants that they were

now being recorded. To begin the interview, the researcher gathered demographic information about the participant. This included age, preferred pronouns, sexual orientation, marital status, religious affiliation, province of residence, length of service, law enforcement level, and rank.

Next, the researcher explained the way in which the interview questions were organized by outlining the four main sections: policing, mental health, work culture, and work-life balance. The researcher then began with the interview questions, following them in order when possible. At times, participants would unknowingly answer future questions without prompt. In these cases, the questions were still asked while informing the participants that if they had anything to add, they could. When appropriate and as participants began sharing their experiences, the researcher asked follow-up questions that were not scripted. This allowed the researcher the freedom to dig deeper into what the participants were sharing when necessary. Throughout the interview, the researcher provided validation and reflective statements intentionally used to connect with the participant and help them feel heard and understood since some of the content included traumatic, emotional and/or sensitive content. If the participant began expressing high emotional arousal, the researcher checked in with the participants about their current emotional state and remind them that they did not need to answer any questions if they feared becoming overly distressed.

At the end of the interview, the researcher asked each participant if there was anything that was not brought up today that they would like to add or include. This allowed the participants to add any information that they felt relevant to the topic of study and served the purpose of highlighting that the participants are the experts in their experiences. This question helped the researcher remove any biases and preconceptions that may have crept into the interview by opening the door to new information that may have been missed.

Once the interview was completed and the participant left the meeting, the recording would be encrypted, and password protected with a password that was unique to each participant and saved to an encrypted USB drive. Only audio recordings were kept in order to ensure that participants' faces could not be linked to any of their data. Any remaining files and recordings were permanently deleted from the researcher's computer.

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was to transcribe the interviews that were conducted. This was accomplished in two ways. Half of the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber who signed confidentiality agreements. In this case, the password-protected recordings were transported using the encrypted USB, transcribed by the transcriptionist on a safe and secure laptop, and collected by the researcher using the encrypted USB again.

The other half of the recordings were transcribed by the researcher using NVivo transcription software. The NVivo transcription software created by QSR International is accessible through an online platform from the researcher's private and password-protected computer. The software encrypts the data and stores it securely in order to protect participant privacy according to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) standards. Although NVivo is not officially recognized as being compliant with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA), the HIPAA equivalent in Canada, QSR International states in their privacy policy that they do not have access to the files uploaded or created in a user's account. Therefore, the use of this online program was approved by the ethics institutional review board. Completed transcripts were then password protected and saved to the researcher's encrypted USB drive and audio and transcription files were deleted from the NVivo transcription platform.

Anonymized transcripts were then uploaded to the researcher's NVivo desktop application which is password-protected, on a secure computer, in the researcher's locked home. NVivo is especially helpful in qualitative studies that have an overwhelming amount of data. This study yielded over 600 pages of transcriptions. Transcripts were then read by the researcher and analyzed according to Moustakas' (1994) methods.

First, the researcher highlighted all statements that related to the research question and the participant's experience of the phenomenon in a process that Moustakas (1994) calls horizontalization. She did this by reading over each transcript and comparing statements related to experience to the research questions and phenomenon of study. Therefore, statements relating to what it is like being a female police officer in Canada and how work culture has interacted with their mental health were of particular interest. Once highlighted, the researcher grouped similar statements into categories. For example, two statements regarding work culture from different participants that were grouped together are "… There are people coming and going all the time, and people are transferring out. They finished their commitment here, and they want to move on to something else. And then the entire dynamic of the team changes like day and night," and "And then it changes, right? Because new people come in and out and then all of a sudden it's like, okay, like no one gets along with the supervisor." Both quotes reflect the experience of participants with the transient nature of work culture and are grouped accordingly. Next, the researcher eliminated statements that could not be abstracted and labeled or that did not provide enough information for understanding. Third, the researcher grouped similar statements and experiences together and began to create categories of experiences.

Once all transcripts had been analyzed and experiences had been accumulated, the researcher clustered the highlighted participant statements into common themes as per

Moustakas (1994). The researcher then reviewed all the statements collected within each theme to confirm that the theme was present in the participant's overall experience in order to validate that the process of thematic generation was valid. The researcher then was able to identify which themes were most common among participant experiences. From there, the researcher compiled the necessary information to provide central and content themes with textural descriptions as explained by Moustakas (1994).

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Morrow (2005), a postpositivist qualitative study is required to meet four types of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Credibility is the qualitative equivalent to quantitative internal validity according to Morrow (2005). In qualitative research, this means that the study has been conducted in a rigorous way and that this has been effectively communicated by the researcher. The researcher believes that the current study is credible due to the extensive time spent discussing the experience of participants during the interviews. Additionally, the researcher paraphrased the participants' answers and asked them to confirm that what they had said was interpreted as intended. Credibility in this study could have been additionally improved if participants had had the chance to review their transcripts as well as if the data analysis had been duplicated by a co-researcher.

Transferability can be seen as the parallel concept to quantitative external validity or generalizability (Morrow, 2005). The researcher believes that given the small sample size of this study and the exploratory nature of the research, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other female first responders. This is not only due to the small scope of this study, but also to the fact that work culture can vary greatly in types of first responders as well as within police officers depending on the police detachment and branch across the country. Therefore, this study

has poor transferability. In order to increase transferability, a larger sample would be needed as well as multiple rigorous investigations with this population.

Dependability can be understood as the reliability of a qualitative study (Morrow, 2005). The dependability of this study lies in the communication and transparency of the methodology used. This ensures that the study could be replicated in order to determine whether results are similar to the study of origin. The dependability of this study is strong in the clarity of the methods and due to the involvement of the supervisor and second reader. All of these steps ensure that the final product of this study has been examined by professionals outside of the primary researcher. The dependability of this study could be improved through replication in future studies.

Confirmability is rooted in the understanding that research can never be fully objective (Morrow, 2005). This aligns with Moustakas' (1994) reality of the Epoche. Although objectivity is the goal with any scientific research, achieving it fully is nearly impossible. The confirmability of this research is demonstrated in the researcher's transparency with her biases, preconceived notions, and actions to bracket these in the Epoche.

Summary of Research Methods

The current study is founded in transcendental phenomenology as presented by Moustakas (1994) and uses a postpositivist interpretive framework (Fox, 2008). Biases, preconceived ideas, and experiences related to the topic were explored in the positioning statement and Epoche. The methodology of the study was approved by the IRB of City University of Seattle in Canada and followed meticulously by the researcher throughout the study. Informed consent was acquired from female police officers who participated and semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. Interviews were then transcribed and

analyzed using NVivo software and following Moustakas' (1994) methodology. Core and content themes were then generated and supported by direct quotes from participants. Overall, the research methods of this study were explored in depth and yield results presented in the following section.

Results

Introduction to the Participants

Twenty participants from across Canada were interviewed for this study. All participants were cis-gendered women who were on active duty as police officers. Qualitative research typically calls for detailed descriptions of each participant involved in the study. Due to the sensitive nature of topics brought up in this thesis research, possibly identifying material, and the small number of female officers in certain regions across Canada, describing each participant's background and general experience is not possible. Doing so would risk breaching participants' confidentiality. Therefore, the study sample will be described according to its demographics, and specific details about participants will not be shared.

Demographics

Participants in this study were recruited from seven provinces spanning from British Columbia to New Brunswick. However, the researcher was unsuccessful in recruiting participants from the Northern Territories or from First Nations Police Services, leaving an important demographic out of the current study. The average age of participants was 36.5 years ($SD = 8.61$), and the average length of service was 10.5 years ($SD = 7.62$).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Baseline Characteristic	Sample	
	n	%
Marital status		
Single	4	20
Married/partnered	15	75
Divorced	1	5
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	19	95
Bisexual	1	5
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	16	80
Métis	3	15
Black Mixed	1	5
Religion		
Catholic	3	15
Christian	5	25
Atheist	1	5
Not Religious	11	55
Law Enforcement Level		
Municipal	11	55
Provincial	1	5
Federal	8	40
Rank		
Constable	14	70
Senior Constable	1	5
Corporal	2	10
Sergeant	2	10
Detective	1	5

Note. $N = 20$. Participants were on average 36.5 years old ($SD = 8.61$), and had on average 10.5 years of service ($SD = 7.62$).

Commonalities Among Participants

Whether it was at the initial contact or in the interview, all participants expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to participate in the study. It was made clear to the researcher that female police officers in Canada may not be given the opportunity to share their experiences with the research community very often and that the advertisement for this study was well received by many individuals. Many of the participants informed the researcher that they were eager to finally share their experiences and stories. Additionally, most of the

participants had concerns regarding confidentiality and anonymity. Due to the nature of their work and the potential consequences of being identified, this was a topic of great discussion with the researcher prior to engaging in the study.

Thematic Analysis Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the data collected in this study yielded complex and interwoven results. The complexity and multi-faceted nature of the themes developed from the 20 interviews conducted in this study echo the findings of Dermikol and Nalla (2020) that police culture is much more intricate than previous literature may have depicted. Due to the overlapping concepts of work culture and mental health at the core of the research question, teasing apart themes and drawing definitive lines between could over-simplify the rich experiences of participants. Therefore, the researcher will make the necessary connections between themes as they occur. The researcher will do this by highlighting when participant statements involve more than one theme in order to highlight the overlap.

First, the researcher will provide a composite textural description of the police work culture in Canada, as described by the participants of this study. Second, the researcher will explore four core themes that arose in the research: mental health struggles, sexual harassment, discrimination, and female officer's diminished need for force while on the job. Each core theme is made up of supporting context themes substantiated by participant quotes. An overview of these themes can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of Thematic Analysis

Central Themes	Content Themes	Sample of Participant Quotes
Mental health concerns	Suspected and diagnosed mental health disorders	"10 years after, I started having anxiety issues." "The two options I was thinking was [*sic*] either kill myself or quit." "My anxiety was getting really bad and I'd have panic attacks in the bathroom." "I was in tears almost every day on the way into work."
	Perceived support from their organization	"We have a lot of support." "…It's just lip service. It's just to look good on paper." "It's more for show than it is, you know, rather than in practice."
	Stigma of mental health leave	"…They label you as being part of the rubber gun club." "People will always find something to criticize you on. It's totally horrible." "…When it's mental, people think you're taking advantage of the system."
	Fear of disclosing mental health struggles	"I was just so afraid of committing career suicide by, you know, getting help." "I have a diagnosis of PTSD but nobody knowns. So that's how I deal with it." "I haven't ever told any superior officers or anything like that because I don't want that to colour anything."
Sexual harassment	Fear of reporting sexual harassment	"…Going through the judicial system, you're re-victimized, you're blamed." "I did not want the reputation as like the P.W. that fucking reports somebody for sexual harassment." "If you want your career to continue, you cannot say anything."
	Repercussions of reporting	"The [organization]'s not wanting you to speak up for yourself or defend yourself… And I've seen members lose their career over it." "I'm on my own, 100%. They've refused to come to domestic calls with me because it's too far of a drive…" "It is less personally and mentally damaging to just keep it to yourself, unfortunately."
	Lack of accountability for perpetrators	"…Knowing (that) if they do bring it forward, watching that absolutely nothing happens to the male in question." "…There is no, absolutely no way, that anyone could be punished for basically anything that they do." "…They'll take the victim… they'll move her to a different spot, or they'll move the male offending party in question to a different placement doing the exact same job, and/or they'll promote him."
Gender discrimination	'You're either a slut, a bitch, or a lesbian':	"…You're either a slut, a bitch, or a dyke. Like you're one of those. You fit in one of the three."

	Discriminatory categories	"I started out being nice and friendly and you know, bubbly and all that kind of stuff, so I was the slut." "I was like, I'm not either of those things so then what does that make me?"
	Women need to 'work twice as hard to prove that they're half as good'	"You are so dominated by males… And there are so many alpha personalities, you truly do as a female have to work twice as hard to prove that you're half as good." "You have to do double the work than a guy would just to get to a normal rank or get a course of be this or do that…" "As a woman, I am automatically less than."
	Maternity leave and discrimination	"Don't have babies until you want your career to die and probably just don't do it at all." "They just find some sort of busy work for you to do until it's time to start mat leave but then it just kind of feels like they're treated sort of as an inconvenience and a liability." "…He said he would not sign off on my paperwork because I have two maternity leaves under my belt and until I could work seven straight years like any male officer, he refused to allow me to promote."
Female officers' reduced use of force	Approachability	"…If it's a female victim, they generally are more willing to speak with you and tell you what's going on…" "The big advantage is being able to actually help people without scaring the crap out of them." "There is [sic] some avenues of policing that we can just get to the bottom of what's happening faster than the males can…"
	Communication skills	"I think that communication skills are significantly better in a lot of females than males." "…Your tongue's kind of your first weapon and you should really use communication to your best advantage." "If I can prolong a situation through talking and verbal communication, trying to de-escalate things until at least some backup can get there… Then at least I'm going to save myself from getting my butt kicked before my partner shows up."

Work Culture

A common understanding among participants about police culture in Canada is that the work culture can vary extensively across location, organization, specialty group, and leadership. As one participant concisely stated, "As far as police culture goes, I think it depends on where you work." Within organizations, specialty teams and different squads can also have their own specific sub-cultures:

There's a lot of different cliques and different groups that you can associate yourself with

inside of policing. So it depends on which group you're choosing to be in, on how strong

the culture is… So there's also groups that get, kind of like little sub-cultures, I guess.

The variation in police culture is important to keep in mind while interpreting the descriptions of

the work culture provided by participants in this study. Since participants were stationed across

seven different provinces, descriptions of work culture varied, although common themes still

emerged.

Old Boys' Club. Many participants used the term "Old Boys' Club" to describe their

work culture. This was apparent in interviews with participants who liked their work cultures as

well as participants who dislike their work culture. This aligns with Kurtz and Upton's (2017)

report that police narratives in work culture are still highly gendered and most often depict

women as a liability while favouring a predominantly male perspective and storyline. One

participant reports on the length of her service and the permanence of the Old Boys' Club

mentality as well as its presence in some high ranking females' mentality:

I think for me in the, like, eighteen, nineteen years that I've been with the service, it's

very much an old boy's club, and it will always be to me, and the few women that have

sort of made it to the top, I find that they're not encouraging the younger women, like,

coming up in the ranks. They're not encouraging them to do better, they're actually

holding them down, and to me, it's kind of like they don't want you, another female, to

join the club. Like, they made it in, you know, and like, if you understand what I'm

saying, you know they join the boys, but they don't want anybody else to get to that rank

type thing.

Multiple participants reported that the Old Boys' Club mentality present in the policing culture had played a role in their ability to move up in their careers. This topic will be covered in greater depths in a later section outlining the theme of discrimination. However, this quote from a participant shows the impact that this mentality could have on a woman's career in law enforcement:

There's still the boys' club mentality, which kind of drives me crazy sometimes. It's gotta be the biggest piece of it because even though a female is just as capable for like some position that comes open or something, they'll typically, not all the time because obviously they've gotta let girls have some opportunities, but it's harder to get yourself into the specialty positions and stuff like that because things do become a bit of a boys' club and it's still there, that piece of it.

Assessors that investigated claims filed by female officers in the Merlo Davidson settlement in Canada reported that claimants frequently used the term "Old Boys' Club" to describe the RCMP's work culture (Bastarache, 2020). This study's findings align with Bastarache's (2020) final report.

"It's Like High School." Another theme that stood out in descriptions of police culture in Canada described the culture as similar to high school. One participant who reported liking her work culture added that "I think in some instances, coppers are like gossipy little bitches and they can be super like, it's like high school sometimes, honestly." Another participant reported that her work culture is "Eight million times worse than in high school." Aspects of police culture being like high school that participants found most difficult to deal with are rumour spreading and labelling. Aligning with our findings, Bastarache (2020) found that Merlo

Davidson settlement claimants described the culture of the RCMP as one where gossip and rumours flourish.

     Rumours. Rumours were said to be prevalent in police culture. "It's Gossip Central, like if you want to hear some hot shit, you come to the police station," one participant noted. Multiple officers highlighted how difficult and damaging rumours at work can be, including this participant:

> I'll be honest. I find the biggest challenges, not even the work we do, but the people we work with and the culture and the bullshit that you have to deal with within work. I would rather deal with a call where someone got murdered, and there's babies flying around, and the world is blowing up, and the world is ending, than deal with the gossip and rumours that my coworkers have put me through or put other people through or whatever. I know that sounds so twisted, but it's just the reality of it, and I hate it, and I wish it was not like that.

     Although participants reported that most officers find themselves at the centre of a rumour at some point in their career, they specified that rumours about female officers were more likely to revolve around their sexuality or suspected relations with other officers. One participant estimated that "9.9 out of 10 of them are sexually related… Probably more so for women, they're sexually related." One participant reported that the rumours begin in police college where:

> The rumours are outrageous. It's every three seconds, like, I bet she's banging him. I bet she's banging him. I bet she's banging that guy too, all at the same time. Oh, you looked at him at the gym? Sucked his dick for sure! Like every day, something new.

The sexual focus of rumours about police officers will be further explored in the section on sexual harassment.

   Labelling. Labelling was reported to be common in police culture across the country. Specifically, participants reported that officers are likely to be labelled early on in their career and that this label can be impossible or very difficult to change over time. One participant used the example of being labelled as a lazy officer:

   So, if they decide you're lazy like that's it, you're fucking lazy and screw you, and you're

   a hump and, and it's really hard to change that perception. Like, your reputation is really

   everything. And they tell us that in classes too, like even when you're going through,

   your reputation is everything. So you screw that reputation up, and the whole service

   knows it, then like, that's it.

   The most common complaints about the nature of labelling in police culture are the permanence of labels and the impact that these labels can have on an officer's career. As one participant put it, "…You have to set your reputation, or you're not going to fit into certain groups, and nobody's going to want to work with you." Some may think that the transient nature of some police organizations would allow officers to shed inaccurate labels, but one participant noted that "Your reputation will move with you."

   The interviews conducted suggested that despite an officer's satisfaction level with their work culture, rumours and labelling are a key part of a culture that seems to still be rooted in an Old Boys' Club mentality. Despite one participant saying that "I think there are some people who are really trying to change [the culture], but there's just not enough, it's not enough of a priority," it seems that participants have varying outlooks on the possibility of change within the work culture. One states that "Nothing's changed. Nothing will change. Definitely not in my

lifetime," while another said, "I definitely see our culture as having changed quite a bit. I'm not sure what it'll look like in the next ten years, but it's way different than it was before, but I still think it's male-driven." This textural description of the police culture experienced by the officers in this study is important to keep in mind as the four core themes are discussed and explained.

Mental Health Concerns

Police officers are considered to be a high-risk group for mental health struggles due to the nature of their work (van der Velden et al., 2013). The researcher will demonstrate the specific diagnosed or suspected mental disorders experienced by the participants. Overall, the interviews conducted for this study yielded context themes of having differing levels of support from organizations, the stigma of taking mental health leave, and fear of disclosing mental health concerns due to the possible repercussions of doing so.

The specific mental health disorders and concerns that came up in our study align with findings by Jetelina, Molsberry et al. (2020). The most commonly mentioned and reported mental health concerns in Jetelina, Molsberry et al.'s (2020) study were depression, PTSD, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. In addition, their study also conducted quantitative measures that showed that mental health diagnoses were more common among female officers than their male counterparts. This study's findings are consistent with Jetelina, Molsberry et al.'s (2020) results. Our context theme of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidality is also supported by previous research which has found that police officers are at higher risk of developing these concerns than the general population (Andersen et al., 2016; Bell & Eski, 2015; Costa et al., 2019; Milner et al., 2013; Royle et al., 2014; van der Velden et al., 2013). Bastarache (2020) reported that many of the female RCMP claimants reported diagnoses of PTSD, Major Depressive Disorder, Panic Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Substance Use Disorder. Merlo Davidson claimants

also reported self-harm behaviours, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviour with one officer dying by suicide in the course of the claims process. The mental health struggles expressed by this study's participants will be explored in order to provide a textured description of this core theme.

The theme of organizational support with regard to mental health is one that is supported by Tucker (2015). In the current study, the researcher found that there was an even split of participants who believed that their organization was supportive of their mental health and participants who felt their organization was unsupportive of their mental well-being. Tucker (2015) found that participants also differed in the level of perceived support from their organization and went on to discover that those who perceived that their agency would support them were more likely to see mental health support. Although the design of the researcher's study does not allow her to make a similar comparison, the participants' experience of organizational support with mental health generally aligns with Tucker's (2015) findings.

The content theme of the stigma associated with taking mental health leave for female police officers in this study is supported by previous literature (Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Royle et al., 2009). Ricciardelli et al.'s (2018) study specifically found those police officers who took mental health leave to seek additional support were likely to be seen as abusing the system and leaving their coworkers to pick up the slack. They also discovered that understaffing could be responsible for increasing negative responses when officers take stress leave, and that stigma could be related to financial constraints.

The final content theme that arose under the mental health of police officers in this study is the fear of disclosing information about mental health struggles to others in the workplace. This finding parallels many previous articles exploring the reasons that disclosing about mental

health struggles could be detrimental to police officers (Bell & Eski, 2015; Bullock & Garland, 2018; Conner et al., 2010; Hacker et al., 2010; Karaffa & Koch, 2016; Stuart, 2017; White et al., 2015). Many of the participants in this study experienced fear in sharing about any mental health struggles that they might be experiencing with someone at work for fear of repercussions that it could have on their careers.

Suspected and Diagnosed Mental Health Disorders. Anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts were the most commonly mentioned mental health struggles experienced by the participants of this study. Some participants experience mental health symptoms many years after occupational incidents like the one who said:

> Ten years after, I started having anxiety issues. And I would feel in times of extreme anxiety, those same physical symptoms would come back, even though the danger was nowhere near and a lot of time they weren't even proportionate to what was actually going on.

Others felt the weight of their declining mental health on a daily basis, which contributed to feelings of helplessness and suicidal ideation. One participant who greatly suffered due to work culture and sexual harassment in the workplace reflected on the mental health battle that she experienced every day for three years while heading into work:

> I was having a really rough time at work. I was in tears almost every day on the way into work. I was in tears almost every day on the way home, but I was able to pretend that everything was okay while I was at work. It was just, I went through that for, like, three years. I was literally crying myself to sleep some nights, just not wanting to wake up in the morning. Not wanting to kill myself, but just wanting to die in my sleep and never wake up.

One participant describes residual reactions to an occupational event that she experienced and how she realizes that it was time for her to reach out to a professional:

> I started having nightmares. Then the guy that died, I started having nightmares of his face quite a bit. And then my husband's like, that's not normal. And I recognized my anxiety was getting really bad, and I'd have panic attacks in the bathroom. I never really chalked it up to that incident. But then, when I started having my nightmares, I went and talked to somebody, and we started dealing with it.

All of the officers who reported experiencing suicidal thoughts had been victims of either workplace sexual harassment, sexual assault, or bullying and related that those events had more of an impact on their mental health than occupational. For participants, it appeared that sexual harassment, sexual assault, and bullying were all aspects that were connected to the workplace. This is an example of the overlap of themes that arose in this research.

One participant who reported not feeling safe and respected in the workplace stated that "The two options I was thinking was [*sic*] either kill myself or quit." Noting how much a sexual assault by colleagues had affected her, another participant remarked that "It's just been so difficult because I was in such a bad place as a result of all this that I thought I wasn't going to make it out alive and breathing." Finally, yet another officer reflected on the suicidal ideation that has resulted from years of workplace sexual harassment and bullying:

> I thought of suicide all the time, like to the point where I actually bought books on suicide so that I could read about it so that I could try. It's kind of funny that I actually tried to deal with it very academically once I couldn't stop 'cause my brain wouldn't, I had to hold my brain, wouldn't shut off. So I couldn't sleep. My brain was racing. I'm like, what the hell is wrong with me? I need to fix myself. I can't tell anybody how I'm

feeling 'cause they're gonna lock me up. So I ended up buying a bunch of books on

suicide just to try to understand what was wrong with my brain and why I was thinking

the way I was thinking… Do I still think of suicide? Absolutely I do. I don't think about

it every day. I wouldn't even say I think about it every week. I used to think about it

multiple times a day before.

The mental health disorders and symptoms reported by the women in this study were a result of

both occupational and organizational stressors. However, as later sections will explore,

organizational stressors reported by female officers in Canada may be different than those that

first come to mind. According to the officers in this study, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and

bullying can have significant impacts on officers' mental well-being.

      Perceived Support from their Organization. Officers interviewed for this study

reported having both supportive and unsupportive organizations when it came to their

employees' mental health. One participant explained that at her organization:

…We are very lucky with the things that we have, the support that we have, and the

things that we do for our members…I'd say mental health where I work is much more

talked about, much more open. We have a lot of support.

Although some organizations are seen as supportive, this is not always well received by

the staff. One participant highlighted the possibility that the ways that an organization supports

the mental health of its member are not always appreciated:

They're checking on you; there's posters everywhere, there's e-mails every day. You're

just inundated with it. Like, let's go to a ceremony where we explore feelings, and I'm

like, "What are you talking about?! I don't care about my feelings or yours, frankly, and I

don't need to explore them because nothing is wrong. Stop mandating me to go to this

stuff that I have zero interest in, and I don't want it!"

When it comes to organizations advertising mental health supports, many participants

reported that they did not believe that the support was genuine. One participant who has never

felt supported by her organization stated that:

There's absolutely no effort on the part of the organization as in, you know, as far as

getting you help or assisting you to getting help. There's none. So it's just lip service. It's

just to look good on paper. But they don't do it in a favourable light.

This sentiment was echoed by a few participants, with one saying that "[Mental health] is a hot

topic right now and I feel like that's what they're trying to jump in on…It's more for show than

it is, you know, rather than in practice." One officer who battled suicidal thoughts for many years

due to issues with police culture explained:

It's not like I think our Chief is okay with people killing themselves, but I don't think any

of them care enough to do anything about it, and I don't mean on an individual level.

They keep saying that they want to change culture, but then they keep doing everything

the same, so they keep hiring senior officers that treat people below them like shit.

Overall, the stories and experiences collected in this study suggest that the level of mental health

support from the organizations are highly variable across Canada and across organizations.

Additionally, female officers' receptivity to mental health support provided by their organization

is also variable.

Stigma of Taking Mental Health Leave. Many participants reflected on their

experiences with taking mental health or stress leave or with the reactions of their colleagues

when others have done so. The stigma and labels that follow an officer taking stress leave can be

difficult to shed. In another example of thematic overlap, an officer who had taken stress leave following mental health struggles due to sexual assault by colleagues explained:

> I'm still paying for it… Having been off that six months a couple of years ago. I'll never live it down. I mean, it's just the way it works. And not just in this organization, but everywhere else…Basically, they label you as being part of the rubber gun club, which means in essence, that you know, you're not, you wouldn't be qualified to carry anything but a rubber gun because you're crazy. And once that gets into the community also that you're off on stress leave or whatnot, people kind of view you in a different light.

In addition to labelling the officer who has taken leave, colleagues often assume that the officer is abusing the system in some way. One participant who took stress leave after years of sexual harassment and discrimination explained:

> When it was physical, it's visible, right? Like, you hurt your ankle, you have a hard time walking, so they see it. You can't be operational. But when it's mental, people think that you're taking advantage of the system… Mine happened to be in May, so I had the whole summer off, so, and my husband was building us a house, and people were saying things behind my back that I wanted to take the whole summer off to build my house, and they didn't think it was justified. But people will judge, right? And now I don't care, but back then, I did.

This was echoed by another officer who said, "It's not viewed well…You know, 'That's nice, you can go have barbeques all fucking summer because you took your stress leave in the summer.' People will always find something to criticize you on. It is totally horrible." In addition to believing that officers struggling with their mental health are taking advantage of the system,

"One of the concerns that people have had is that if we all take a knee, who's gonna be left to work?" as described by another participant.

  Fear of Disclosing Mental Health Struggles. For officers who worked in organizations and work cultures that were not supportive of mental health, disclosing these types of struggles can feel like career suicide. One participant reflected on this when she said, "I just didn't do anything about it. I was just so afraid of committing career suicide by, you know, getting help." Not only does disclosure of mental illness risk stigmatization at the hands of their peers, but officers can also feel like it could stall their career. A participant who refuses to talk about her mental health with anyone at her organization explained:

  I have a diagnosis of PTSD, but nobody knows, so that's how I deal with it. I'll go and

  get the help I need, but I can't tell anybody, and the reason why I can't is (because if)

  anybody has any inkling of that, my opportunities for advancement are gone… I can't

  come in here and take a knee because people are gonna say, "Oh, she's a female, she's

  kind of weak." Right? Or I'll get passed over for my opportunities, so I don't tell

  anybody… I'd love to be out front telling people what it's like but also kind of want to

  get promoted, so not gonna do that.

  Even officers who report loving their work culture and feel supported by their organization divulge that they would rather not disclose any mental health struggles to coworkers or supervisors that they do not trust. An officer who fits this description explained:

  Yeah, like I don't [talk about mental health]… Except for the guys that I am really close

  with at work, because then we'll all kind of tell each other like "Oh, you know, shit, I had

  to go get counselling today," and we'll make jokes about it. But then it's kind of like

  we'll be able to talk about it with a couple of my close buddies or whatever. But yeah,

outside of that, no, I haven't ever told any superior officers or anything like that because I

don't want that to colour anything.

Therefore, one of the content themes that arose from this research study is that those female

officers do not feel that they can share concerns about their mental health with their organization

without the possibility of facing stigma or career-impacting consequences. Mental health and the

support, or lack thereof, from organizations, play a significant role in the experience of Canada's

female police officers' willingness to seek help and support.

Sexual Harassment

A core theme that emerged in this study was the presence of sexual harassment. Sexual

harassment was mentioned in some participant quotes when they were referring to their mental

health. For many participants, sexual harassment is enmeshed in police culture as well as officer

well-being and mental health. Through the experiences shared by the participants of this study,

the researcher understood that sexual harassment at the hands of colleagues and superiors in law

enforcement could have extremely detrimental effects on the mental health of female officers.

The theme of sexual harassment is best introduced by using one officer's explanation of what has

been most difficult for her as a female police officer:

> I can think of a number of calls that I have been to and things that I have seen on this job
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> that I have definitely talked about in therapy and needed to talk through. And there are
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> things that will be kind of emblazoned in my memory for the rest of my life. There are
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> things I can't forget and un-see. But I'm not gonna go with those as my most difficult
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> thing. And the reason for that is because the work culture that I have had to deal with has
>
> been more damaging to me, and I have needed more therapy for it and will continue to

probably need more therapy for that than those calls combined. So I'm going to go with

sexual harassment in the workplace.

In recent years, workplace sexual harassment in law enforcement has been studied in

many countries, including Iceland, England, Japan, Australia, the Netherlands, and the U.S.

(Brown et al., 2018; de Haas et al., 2009; Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2016; Haarr & Morash,

2013; Kobayashi, 2018; Steinþórsdóttir & Pétursdóttir, 2017). The current study's central theme

of sexual harassment aligns with the findings of researchers in these countries.

Sexual harassment and gender discrimination in Canadian federal policing were

investigated during the Merlo and Davidson v. Canada class action, and the Federal Court of

Canada approved a settlement on May 30, 2017 (Merlo & Davidson v. Canada, 2017). The final

report of this settlement revealed similar exampled of sexual harassment and assault experienced

by the participant in this study (Bastarache, 2020). The Merlo Davidson investigation also

revealed a lack of accountability and repercussion for perpetrators of sexual harassment and

assault (Bastarache, 2020). Additionally, CTV's *W5* aired a documentary television segment

called "The Tarnished Badge" that covers the experiences of two Canadian female police

officers who have experienced sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace (CTV,

2020). The central theme of sexual harassment that emerged from the current study aligns with

the concerns shared by the women interviewed in "The Tarnished Badge".

Before diving into the content themes of fear of speaking out about sexual harassment,

repercussions of disclosure, lack of accountability, and the need to tolerate sexual harassment,

the researcher will outline examples of sexual harassment experienced by officers in this study.

This will serve the purpose of providing a textual description of the type of sexual harassment,

and in certain instances, assault, that officers who participated in this study have experienced.

Examples of Sexual Harassment. Female officers described experiences of sexual harassment that spanned from verbal advances and comments to unwanted sexual attention and touching, with some even reporting sexual assault. One officer reports comments made by a supervisor:

> I have had a senior male officer when I was probably, I might have been two years on at this point, and he was another Constable, but way senior to me, like, I wouldn't have said anything to him at this point in time. I had two minutes on the job, but he came up to me and told me that I should tuck my shirt into my pants differently so that they could see my ass better.

A few other participants recalled unwanted sexual advances from colleagues. One participant shared:

> I had a guy actually ask me in the car one day if I would exchange bodily fluids with him… He goes, "Oh, we could go around the back of the plaza and exchange bodily fluids." I said, "I think we'd look pretty stupid sitting back there spitting on each other."

Another participant who experienced sexual harassment when a colleague asked her to drive that day explained:

> The guy threw me the keys in front of the entire platoon and the Sergeants… He's like, "If you could do me a solid, I'm feeling a little tired tonight if you could drive." But he goes, "Hey, I'll do you a favour, and I'll go down on you in the car…" And the other officers sort of just stared…

Beyond comments about female officers' sexual activity, appearance, and unwanted advances, one officer recounted instances of colleagues exposing their genitals to her in the workplace:

…Having men expose themselves to me, at the front desk of a police station, in the middle of the day. Like, one guy, he unzipped his fly, he grabbed his junk… And then another day… I walk around the corner to go up the stairs. He undid his fly and pulled his penis out, and started wagging his hips back and forth so his penis would swing back and forth, in a police station in broad daylight.

Many experiences of unwanted sexual touching and assault were reported by participants. One participant explained that her sexual assault dates back to being in training as an officer. Although this assault did not happen in the workplace, the perpetrators were other officers whom she knew. She recounted:

…To put it bluntly, on one occasion I found myself having consumed too much alcohol, which was, you know, I was surrounded by my troop mates and whatnot. We went back to an after-party, and I was sexually assaulted by two members.

With regard to psychological safety and the commonality of inappropriate touching, one participant explained:

If you can't sit on a chair without a guy's hand sitting there for you to sit on, you don't have psychological safety…You're the passenger in a car, you get in, and someone's hand is there. I'm like, "What are you doing?" "Oh, sorry, I forgot I left it there." Um, that's sexual assault, you know. How cops can rationalize this behaviour to themselves and think it's okay… but if they got called to something like this, they'd be arresting that person.

The examples of sexual harassment shared in this section do not depict all of the accounts that were shared during interviews but were chosen to represent the different types of sexual harassment that many of the participants have encountered in the span of their careers.

Fear of Reporting Sexual Harassment. Some of the participants in this study who had experienced sexual harassment spoke about the fear of reporting these incidents to their organization. The fear of reporting revolved around the process of investigation, stigma and labelling, and the negative impact that it could have on their career. On the process of the investigation being a factor, one participant said:

> I also know it's hypocritical of me because doing our job, and we deal with victims of
>
> sex, sexual assault all the time, and we encourage them to speak up and to cooperate and
>
> to face their assailants in court. But I could never do that myself. Because I know how...
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> What happens to victims or what happens to people that have been sexually assaulted.
>
> And it's just an awful, awful time through the process. You know, going through the
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> judicial system, you're re-victimized, you're blamed. They will dig up any kind of dirt
>
> that they can find on you. And most of the time, nobody gets convicted. So that's one of
>
> the reasons why I never came forward.

In terms of the stigma and labelling feared if one brings sexual harassment claims to their organization, one officer explained:

> I did not want the reputation as like the P.W. [police woman] that fucking reports
>
> somebody for sexual harassment. Because I was like, oh, God. Like now, all the guys are
>
> to be super careful about what they say about me and how they respond to me. You
>
> know, "Oh, bro. Like, you know, that's some P.W. that reports people for saying
>
> something inappropriate, like make sure you don't say anything around her."

The stigma and labelling that can happen after a female officer comes forward with a complaint about a colleague can lead to her being ostracized from the team, as one officer described:

…As soon as you're accepted, you're part of the team. Right? That's all you want. That's all anybody wants. And on this job, it's lifesaving. Because if you're ostracized, I've seen women who have come forward with things… I've seen women who have stood up to other males over something or reported their behaviour in some way. You're done. You're ostracized. If you're looking for back up, it's not coming. So there is a real survival need to be accepted.

The same participant continued on to say that "If you want your career to continue, you cannot say anything." The fear of disclosure having an impact on the victimized officer's career was also commented on by another participant who said:

They want you to report it, but then at the same time, they just want a sacrificial lamb to get rid of the poison, and it doesn't matter. They just look at it like, well, it's your career, not mine, so who cares.

A different participant explained that she did not come forward due to her hoping to make it to a specialized unit later on in her career:

I didn't say anything because I didn't want to be not liked and that… I wasn't too vocal back then because it's, you know, it's your first few years in the force, and you're trying to make your reputation, and there's always that transfer over your head, and so you want to get somewhere. Like, I wanted to get to drug section in [a city] so, I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings, and so, these were all reasons for not speaking up.

The fear of speaking up about sexual harassment at work was shared by women who both like and dislike their work culture, suggesting that despite having positive views of police culture, there is still fear of stigma, career repercussions, and injustice.

Repercussions of Reporting Sexual Harassment. Of the participants who had experienced workplace sexual harassment, some of them had chosen to report it to their organization. Many of these officers shared that they experienced social and professional repercussions and, at times, even further harassment and discrimination. In many instances, reporting sexual harassment took an additional toll on the reporting officer's mental health and well-being. An officer explained the reaction she received from a female superior after she disclosed a sexual assault incident:

> I had a direct Supervisor that I disclosed information to her about a sexual assault on me
> by another officer, and instead of her taking it as if I was a person off the road or
> whatever, like a member of the public, she basically turned, flipped the switch on me
> because the officer that I was reporting about was a son of another well-known officer, so
> it was, like, "Well, you can't go after that family, how dare you," type thing. So instead,
> she flipped it and made me out to be, like, you know, "You deserve this, you know, if
> that's what happened, it happened because of the way that you look and the clothes
> you're wearing," and that kind of attitude, so I was floored by the response that I got.

A different participant commented on the risk to one's career if they disclose sexual harassment to their organization:

> If you do want to advance in [my organization], you have to subscribe to this kind of
> behaviour, and you have to be part of the in-group, and you have to go along with it, not
> say anything. And that's when you are viewed as worthy of being somebody. The
> [organization's] not wanting you to speak up, not wanting you to speak up for yourself or
> you defend yourself. They don't like that. And I've seen members lose their career over
> it.

The act of reporting sexual harassment and assault occurring within a policing organization can lead to further harassment, with one participant reporting:

> Well, I finally made a complaint, and when they heard that I made a complaint, I got threatened by one of the guys that, you know, he would get me out of the office with a kick in the ass… So I made another formal complaint against him, and I said, you know, I can't believe he's a cop, first of all, making a threat. He's committing a criminal offence against me.

Another participant noted how being ostracized following her report of sexual assault had put her in dangerous operational positions when she said, "I'm on my own, one hundred percent. They've refused to come to domestic calls with me because it's too far of a drive, and night shift starts in an hour."

> The repercussions of reporting workplace sexual harassment and assault can take a devastating toll on an officer's mental health, with one participant explaining:

> The way that it was handled told me that as a victim, what I have to say really isn't important, so I'm just going to shut up because it's easier and less damaging to me. And that's what I've learned. And that's what I've learned not only myself in my organization, but I've learned that through other women who have talked to me and other women who have gone forward with certain things and gotten nowhere, really. It is less personally and mentally damaging to just keep it to yourself, unfortunately.

Another participant echoed the previous one by illustrating:

> I felt like I was the one being investigated. I felt like I was getting no support and no answer about anything… I took a year to investigate that, and throughout this year, I was still being treated like that, and, at the same time, I knew that the higher ups were looking

at me like I was the one that was crazy, you know. I don't know it's just the, yeah, I think

the process…I think it was more detrimental than the harassment itself.

The consequences of reporting sexual assault for the women in this study who had done so

suggest to the researcher that the fear of disclosure is supported since repercussions can be

serious and affect many aspects of the officer's life.

Lack of Accountability for Perpetrators. Multiple participants who had experienced

sexual harassment at work commented on the lack of accountability for members who are

reported for sexual harassment. This can be seen in the lack of investigation altogether, lack of

communication with the victim about consequences, or insignificant punishment that would not

prevent reoffending. One participant explains that sometimes the organization does not bring the

complaint forward at all and that if they do, barely anything happens:

I brought it up to my immediate Supervisor, who actually is an amazing man, and I adore

him… He brought it up to that office on my behalf and recognized that I was hurt by

what happened, and I wanted to deal with it. And the response from that office that I got

was basically before they even investigated or talked to me or talked to the other guy or

anything, the first response I got was, well, don't expect him to be fired over this or

anything… And then knowing (that) if they do bring it forward, watching that absolutely

nothing happens to the male in question. Every single time that happens, it's like

somebody kicking you in the gut over again. Really it's like having a wound on your arm,

it's like almost healed, and then somebody picks the whole scab off, and it starts bleeding

again, profusely. Like, every time… And it happens all the time.

Another officer shared that the lack of accountability is not only with regard to sexual

harassment and that the consequences often fall on the victim:

But there is no, absolutely no way, that anyone could be punished for basically anything

that they do. I mean, unless they shoot somebody and it's a murder, and it's considered a

murder in court, they will protect you. They will not protect you if you speak out.

In one participant's experience, there are three possible outcomes if her organization decides to

implement consequences following a sexual harassment claim:

If it is, quote, "punished," and I used the quotes there because people have been punished

in the past, but the punishment is not punishment. Usually, what happens is they'll take

the victim of something, someone who's come forward, so the female, they'll move her

to a different spot, or they'll move the male offending party in question to a different

placement, doing the exact same job, and/or they'll promote him.

In the end, participants painted a picture of being victims of sexual harassment with tangible

evidence that reporting this unacceptable, and at times illegal, behaviour could bring about even

more harm to their well-being and mental health. Although almost all participants noted that the

majority of male officers they worked with were respectful individuals whose company they

enjoyed and whom they respected, as one participant clearly puts it, "…An organization's entire

culture it really sort of defined by the worst behaviour that's tolerated, right? And the behaviour

that I've just been describing to you is tolerated. It's not punished."

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination in law enforcement emerged as a core theme of this study. Many

participants described experiences with discrimination at the hands of their colleagues,

supervisors, and organizations. This theme is made up of three content themes: "You're either a

bitch, a slut, or a dyke," women need to "work twice as hard to prove they're half as good," and

the disadvantages of taking maternity leave. Overall, participants reported that gender discrimination in police cultures is typically done openly and tolerated.

In line with our results, recent literature has found that gender discrimination is still prevalent in police cultures internationally (Graue et al., 2016; Langan et al., 2019; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). The current literature not only supports the central theme of gender discrimination in our findings but also the three content themes that fit within it. In the U.S., Graue et al. (2016) reported that female officers were being perceived by their male coworkers as fitting into only two categories: sluts and lesbians. This aligns with the researcher's findings that women are likely to be categorized into one of three categories: "sluts," "bitches," and "lesbians," although our study did yield the third category, "bitches," that Graue et al. (2016) did not report.

Bastarache (2020) found that female RCMP officers were excluded from promotional opportunities and specialty units. Graue et al. (2016) and Prenzler and Sinclair (2013) also found that women felt they experienced discrimination bias when it came to promotions and moving into positions of power. Additionally, their results mirrored the current study in that female officers felt that they had to work harder than men to prove their abilities as police officers. Generally, they found that women were less likely to fit into police culture.

The researcher's findings that women experience additional discrimination when pregnant and working or taking maternity leave is supported by Langan et al.'s (2019) study of Canadian female police officers. Langan et al. (2019) provided insight into the influence that hegemonic masculinity in the workplace can have on the discrimination of pregnant mothers and the view that these female officers are unfit for duty. Bastarache (2020) also reported that female RCMP officers experienced discrimination following pregnancy announcements and that

changing this is an important point of ceasing the discrimination of female officers. Both this study and the one conducted by Langan et al. (2019) have found that pregnant officers experience discrimination in terms of where they are permitted to work and how maternity leave can have an impact on future career opportunities.

'You're either a slut, a bitch, or a lesbian': Discriminatory categories. Multiple participants reported that as a female police officer, both male and female colleagues often decide which category you fit into: the "sluts," "bitches," "lesbians." One participant with over two decades of service explained:

> I remember first getting in 10 years ago, and this was a thing if you were a female police officer, you were either… And I'm going to say some not nice words, but they said you're either a slut, a bitch, or a dyke. Like you're one of those. You fit in one of the three.

Despite that report being on the policing culture 20 years ago, another member with half the length of service reported similar categorizing of women:

> The guys will ask you when you join. They'll ask the females how they want to be referred to; if they want to be the slut, the dyke, or the bitch… So I started out being nice and friendly and you know, bubbly and all that kind of stuff, so I was the slut. Now I'm obviously a little bit older in age, and I stick up for myself now, so I am a bitch.

The same discriminatory labelling was reported by yet another participant who was asked the same question by a female training officer:

> I remember one thing that my first trainer, the one that I didn't get along with, told me fairly early on when I was working with her, and she told me that there are only three kinds of females that become cops – bitches, lesbians, and sluts – and you have to decide

which one you're gonna be. And I was like, well, I'm not either of those things, so then

what does that make me?

The fact that some participants experienced this categorization by female colleagues calls for

further research. It would be beneficial to gain more understanding about male officers'

perspectives of women to understand the theme from all angles. When asked what she would

change about her work culture if she could change one thing, another officer with a decade of

experience said:

It would be that being a strong female doesn't make you a bitch. Or doesn't make you

being mean. I find that… If I were to be a male and act the same or talk the same, it

would be perceived as somebody being really strong or like a really good leader.

Overall, women reported that fitting into one of these three categories was a discriminatory

process that may be male driven but can also be perpetuated by other female officers. The reason

behind why some women also identify themselves and other female officers as belonging to

these categories is currently unknown and requires further research.

Women Need to 'Work Twice as Hard to Prove that They're Half as Good.' Many of

the officers interviewed for this study reported feeling that they had to work much harder than

their male partners to prove that they are suited for police work. This was sometimes due to male

colleagues seeing them as fragile, emotional, or overly sexual. One participant noted that her

actions and personality get interpreted as her being shy, cute, or flirty:

You know, I had [a supervisor] be like, "Sweetie, it's okay, you don't have to be so…"

He's talking to me like I was a little nervous puppy!... This isn't me being a cute, timid,

little coy thing. I'm being respectful… You're seen as this coy, little, nervous, adorable

thing. And you're just like, "No dude. I'm just addressing you by your proper rank and

being respectful…"

In addition to being over-sexualized and associated with feminine traits deemed unsuitable for

police work, female officers reported that the language around being a female officer could be

derogatory. One participant with over 30 years of service explained:

Yeah, 'girl' is very much a slur. Just like 'woman.' You could do something wrong, and a

guy would look at you and go, "Woman." Like, just the word woman itself is a slur. They

used to call us P.W.s, short form for a policewoman. "Oh, let's get a P.W. to do that. Oh,

let's get a P.W. Oh, look at all those P.W.s." It was never in a positive way. It was always

a negative connotation. It still is, frankly. They're not supposed to use it anymore, but it's

not like I'm gonna complain if someone calls me a P.W.

Due to the way that female officers are perceived in law enforcement, many participants

revealed that they felt the need to prove themselves to members of their squad and organization.

As one participant plainly put it, "You are so dominated by males… And there are so many alpha

personalities; you truly do as a female have to work twice as hard to prove you're half as good."

Another officer echoed this quote:

It sucks that you almost have to prove yourself even more than a guy would just to get the

same rank. You have to do double the work than a guy would just to get to a normal rank

or get a course or be this or do that… But then there's a flip side, and if you get it, people

will say, "Oh, how many dicks did you suck to get that?" I know I busted my ass to get it.

Overall, many women in this study stated similar statements to this one quoted from one

participant "We have to work a lot harder to prove ourselves and to get their respect at a work

level with our coworkers," and this one by another officer, "As a woman, I am automatically less than."

       Maternity Leave and Discrimination. Participants who have either had children or are planning on having children expressed the discrimination that pregnant officers can face in the workplace. One officer who reported wanting to have kids in the near future recalled what she was told by a supervisor as a new recruit, "Don't have babies until you want your career to die and probably just don't do it at all." In addition to women sometimes being openly discouraged from having children, male and female officers tend to receive different responses when they announce a pregnancy, another participant explained:

      I don't know; it just doesn't ever seem like women who get pregnant on the job are really

      treated with the same happiness as when a guy knocks his wife up. It's like, "Hey man,

      high five, you got your wife pregnant!" I've had a number of female coworkers that want

      to have families, become pregnant and then, of course, you can't be working on the street

      anymore. They just find some sort of busy work for you to do until it's time to start mat

      leave but then it just kind of feels like they're treated sort of as an inconvenience and a

      liability.

Not only does pregnancy lead to being pulled off the street as per organizational policy, but female officers who are expecting can be left feeling like they are a burden on their teammates and organization. Many women commented on the impact that child-rearing can have on their law enforcement careers. One participant explained:

      If I was buddy buddy with my Supervisor, I'd probably have more opportunities to be

      acting corporal or whatnot, but you don't get that. And coupled with being off for

      maternity leave and having kids and starting a family, it's just like, it's always an uphill

battle. And so many women choose not to have kids for that reason because they know

they're going to be stagnating in their careers.

Officers who have taken maternity leave report that this can have a negative impact on their

chances of being promoted in the future. For example, one participant experienced being told

that she could not apply for a job due to having taken maternity leave in the past:

> So, I applied for a promotion that I thought everybody at work knew I would be going
>
> for…So when it came time to apply, I just applied; I didn't think I even needed to tell
>
> anybody. So, I did my whole application up. I took it to my direct Supervisor… At that
>
> time, he said, "Oh well, you don't have seven years' service." And I said, "Uh, yeah, I
>
> do," and he said, "No, you don't, you have five years plus two children, and that doesn't
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> equal seven years' service." But it does, so says Human Rights Canada… So he said he
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> would not sign off on my paperwork because I have two maternity leaves under my belt,
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> and until I could work seven straight years like any male officer, he refused to allow me
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> to promote. So, in that case, I only had a year back from mat leave at that time, so I
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> would have had to work another six years in a row in order to promote, which is
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> ridiculous… You can take three pat leaves in a row, like, you can literally not be a police
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> officer for four straight years and come back and get into a homicide unit. How in the hell
>
> does that work? That's what I want to know. Whatever he's doing, I want that.

In terms of police culture and organizational support, the theme of discrimination against current

and expecting mothers is especially highlighted by another participant who reported:

> The injustice bugs me…Our union, which has a property outside of the city that has a hall
>
> you can rent, and they let people camp there, has a big Fathers' Day thing, but they don't
>
> have a Mothers' Day thing. It's like, come on guys, really?

As Langan et al. (2019) explained, it seems that pregnant women are seen as unfit to serve typical officer duties and can be seen as a liability to their team. This type of gender-discrimination be a result of hegemonic masculinity in law enforcement's male-dominated culture and could be a factor that continues to perpetuate a culture that continues to discriminate against women. According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (n.d.):

> Health and safety in the workplace is important, and should be balanced with the right of a pregnant employee to participate fully in the workplace. Doctor-ordered restrictions should be followed, but in the absence of this, employers should not assume a woman is unable to perform her duties merely because she is pregnant…If an employer believes that workplace conditions will result in a serious health or safety risk to a pregnant employee, this should be discussed with her. Where possible, employers should find ways to reduce or eliminate the source of harm, protect the pregnant employee in her substansive [sic] job, or find temporary options to avoid health risks during the pregnancy period. The pregnant employee should work with the employer to find alternate ways to reduce risks and still fulfill the core functions of her job. Temporary reassignment to another position, or temporary leave, may be possible solutions in some workplaces.

Although the Canadian Human Rights Commission recommends that action be taken to remove pregnant employees from harm, many of the women who mentioned this practice in the current study felt that they could have carried on their regular duties for longer than they were allowed to. This may mean that increased communication between pregnant officers and higher ups is needed in order to involve the officer and her doctor in the decision-making process.

Female Officers are Skilled in De-escalation and Reduced Use of Force

A final theme that emerged about the experience of being a female police officer in Canada was that participating officers see themselves as needing to use less force and being able to generally de-escalate situations while engaging in operational duties. This should not be confused with not being willing to use force but, instead, was described as female officers believing that being perceived as approachable by the population and having better communication and de-escalation skills than some of their male counterparts allows them to refrain from using force in many situations. This is an important theme to include in this study as it explores the operational advantages that women see themselves as having and the strengths that they bring to law enforcement teams.

Previous literature on the possible gender differences in the use of force of police officers has mixed findings. The emerging theme of needing to use less force during operational duties aligns with some of the research, which highlights that female officers attract less inappropriate use of force complaints than their male colleagues (Porter & Prenzler, 2015; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). Schuck and Rabe-Hemp (2014) have suggested that this gender difference may be mediated by the finding that law enforcement organizations with more female members tend to have more rules and structures in place. Since the literature on this topic is mixed, our findings are divergent from Paoline III and Terrill's (2004) findings that there are no gender differences in the use of force for police officers. It is important to note that the majority of literature on this phenomenon is quantitative and, therefore, difficult to compare to this qualitative study.

Approachability. Many officers who participated in this study explained that certain populations, notably female victims of domestic violence and children, were likely to see them as

more approachable than their male colleagues. Despite this being a common occurrence, many

officers made a point to mention that this was not due to differences in competence between

male and female officers but, rather, the way that these populations view women in society. One

participant explained:

> I've seen lots of my male coworkers who are absolutely incredible in being able to
>
> connect with victims of any age and gender, for sure. So I don't want to take that away
>
> and make an assumption that just because I'm female, that I'm better at it because I don't
>
> think that's fair or true… When I joined, my coach hadn't really worked with any female
>
> officers before. He's like, "…I'm really glad we have a female on the team." And I've
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> had a couple of the guys say this now cause I feel like it is different when you talk to
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> domestics cause a female, if it is a female victim, they generally are more willing to
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> speak with you and tell you what's going on, which can really help the investigation and
>
> can make the difference between having the grounds to charge somebody or not.

On being approachable, another officer said:

> I'm not as intimidating as some guy who's six foot five. Or even the guy who's five foot
>
> ten but who's got that strong storm trooper mentality. So the big advantage is being able
>
> to actually help people without scaring the crap out of them.

This content theme of approachability with certain populations was robust across participants,

regardless of whether officers believed that this was an appropriate reaction from the public or

not. Overall, it was seen as being an advantage not only to the female officer in question but to

the entire investigative team. Another officer echoed this thought:

> I think that in policing a lot of the vulnerable sectors that we deal with, so domestic
>
> violence, child abuse, prostitution, a lot of vulnerable victims are female, quite honestly,

females and children, and I just think females and children tend to trust other females

quicker. So, there is [*sic*] some avenues of policing that we can just get to the bottom of

what's happening faster than the males can, and people will open up to us faster than they

will [to men].

Communication Skills. Communication skills were reported to be critical in women's

ability to reduce their use of force while working. Some women implied that having strong

communication skills as a female officer can be a way to keep themselves safe and give them

additional time to call for back up. One participant remarked that "I think communication skills

are significantly better in a lot of females than males." This was elaborated on by another officer

who explained:

> I've talked myself out of so many situations that, you know, I know certain other officers,
>
> some male officers, would have turned into a fight in a phone booth in two minutes. You
>
> don't have to do that. And in most cases, you should never do that, so your tongue's kind
>
> of your first weapon, and you should really use communication to your best advantage.

An officer with over a decade of experience in law enforcement highlighted the adaptive nature

of being able to communicate with a member of the public:

> In order to stay safer, I feel like we use our voice and our negotiation skills faster, and
>
> we're more reliant on them than male officers are. Like, I do not want to go hands-on
>
> with a client ever unless I can't talk him in, and it's my last thing that I have, I guess like
>
> the last tool I have is that I need to put my hands on that person.

This was echoed by another participant who stated:

> …If I can prolong a situation through talking and verbal communication, trying to de-
>
> escalate things until at least some backup can get there, where I know that there's a good

chance we're going to get physical, then at least I'm going to save myself from getting

my butt kicked before my partner shows up. So I think as a female officer, it's something

I will use to my advantage…

The accounts of participants regarding the use of communication skills to peacefully intervene in

dangerous situations highlight techniques that female officers bring to the male-dominated

profession of law enforcement.

Discussion

The researcher set out to explore the phenomenon of being a female police officer in

Canada with regard to how to experience their work culture and mental health. Specifically, the

researcher wanted to answer the question: does the work culture of female police officers in

Canada impact their mental health? By means of thematic analysis, the researcher found that the

experiences of Canadian female police officers with regard to their work culture and mental

health is variable and extremely complex. As outlined in the results section and in each theme

exploration, the present study's findings generally aligned with previous literature on each

central theme. However, as is most typical in scientific research, the findings still diverged from

some of the current literature.

Several factors made comparisons between the current findings and the existing literature

difficult. First, the majority of studies conducted on the themes that emerged were quantitative

studies. Although these are extremely valuable to the understanding of the topic at hand,

comparing qualitative and quantitative can be challenging. In addition, the information regarding

RCMP officers presented in the final report of the Merlo Davidson settlement written by

Bastarache (2020) was conducted as an inquiry of claims. It is important to note that the Merlo

Davidson findings were not a formal research study but a thorough and detailed investigation of legal claims.

The current study did not involve any quantifiable measures and replied to the stories told and experiences shared by participants. This means that each participant shared their personal perspective and interpretation of the phenomenon. While this information is invaluable in understanding the experience of participants and provides the researcher with deeply textured information and understanding, it cannot provide us with statistics and numbers to compare to other studies. Therefore, it is important to note that the comparisons made to existing research have been made to the best of the researcher's abilities.

The second challenge in comparing our findings to the literature is that very few studies addressing our results have been conducted in Canada. Many studies were conducted either in the U.S. or internationally. This raises the concern that political climate, cultural differences, and other factors that are dependent on the location are at play in how law enforcement is organized and directed. Therefore, comparing Canadian police culture to other countries' police could be omitting the general differences in cultural climate between studies.

Despite the difficulties in assessing how the current study measures up to the existing literature, the current findings contribute to Canadian literature on the mental health of female police officers. These findings suggest that the police culture in Canada is variable based on where officers work and who their leaders are. Our findings highlight that many officers feel that police culture has had a significant impact on their mental health. By identifying the major themes that appear between mental health and work culture, the researcher contributes the knowledge that police culture's reactions to mental health and organizational supports play an important role in how female officers feel, that sexual harassment and gender discrimination in

the workplace are still present and damaging, and those female officers bring valuable skills to their squads and teams.

Researcher Reflections

Throughout the course of the study, the researcher engaged in mindful reflection and noted her thoughts and feelings about both the content of the study and the processes of conducting the research. As the researcher, I will now share my reflections on the interview process since this part of the research was the most surprising to me.

I approached the interviews as the researcher with the intention to create a safe space for the participants to share their views, experiences, and feelings. Beyond the prepared questions, I was intentional with my further inquisition and wanted to ensure that I was getting a clear picture of these women's experiences. I made every effort to remain unbiased and neutral during the interviews; however, this proved to be extremely difficult.

The interviews surprised me in many ways. First, I realized that I had a preconceived notion that police officers might be difficult to talk to and guarded about personal experiences and feelings. I realized that I was nervous about speaking with officers. Luckily, as I began engaging with participants, my nerves quickly dissipated. The women who participated in this study were breathtakingly inspiring, and I soon realized how much I had to learn from them.

Although I anticipated the content of the interviews to be emotionally charged, the intensity of certain experiences still surprised me. I had heard about sexual harassment in Canadian police forces, but I was not prepared for the type of sexual harassment that participants were going to share with me during the interviews. At times, I felt disgusted for what some of the officers had experienced and angry that this kind of behaviour was coming from men who are in positions to be serving our country. Following the particularly difficult interviews, I would either

debrief with my supervisor or reflect on my thoughts and feelings by journaling. This allowed

me to process my own emotions and return to the research, having put my feelings aside. In the

end, I was humbled and grateful for the opportunity to interview these women. Their resilience

and perseverance through adversity shone through each and every time.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be considered in the interpretations

of its results. One of the main limitations of this study is that the participants were recruited

using an advertisement that explained that the study was interested in the interaction between

mental health and work culture. It is probable that this advertisement would have attracted

female officers who had experienced work cultures that had an impact on their mental health.

Therefore, the themes that emerged from this study could be skewed in reporting how common

they are across Canadian police cultures.

A second limitation of this study is the breadth of topics covered. In an effort not to lead

participants in questions, a wide range of experiences were shared. Although this is helpful in

understanding the diversity in experiences of female officers, it means that a wide range of

themes emerged in data analysis. This made the data challenging to interpret. While it appears as

though saturation was met, there were central themes that did emerge that were not always

expressed by all participants. In addition to the themes reported in this study, additional

information that was not related to the research question was acquired. Therefore, with a second

or third look at this data, it is possible that more studies could be generated using the same data

set.

A third limitation of this study occurred in the process of data analysis. Due to time

constraints and limited resources, the data was not analyzed by a second researcher. This is a

weakness of this study because it leaves a greater chance that researcher bias could have an impact on the results. Thematic analysis of the data would be more rigorous had another researcher conducted an analysis.

A fourth limitation of our study is that we were unsuccessful in recruiting female police officers from the northern territories or a First Nations Police Service agency. Therefore, our data excludes an important part of Canada as a whole and is not representative of First Nations policing culture. This means that our findings should not be generalized to these populations and regions since the overall culture is most likely extremely different.

A fifth limitation of this study lies in its inability to be generalizable to other populations. It is important to note that the participants of this study were cisgendered women who were mostly Caucasian and of heterosexual orientation. Considering the wide range of experiences shared by these participants, the researcher recognizes that not only can these results not be generalized to all female police officers, but that they should not be generalized to other minority populations in law enforcement. In order to better understand the experiences of minorities in police work, further research would be required.

A final limitation of our study is the fact that we did not interview any male police officers. Although this was not the intent of conducting the study, it is necessary to recognize that including their perspective on their female colleagues as well as their work culture would have likely changed the themes that emerged in our research.

Clinical Implications

The current study provides a wealth of information that can be used to generate clinical implications and recommendations for mental health providers. Three main clinical implications can be drawn from this research: (a) work culture, including sexual harassment and

discrimination, should be included in stressors to inquire about when working with clients who are female police officers; (b) establishing trust and robust confidentiality with this population should be of utmost importance; and (c) female police officers may require culturally sensitive counselling.

Including Work Culture in Organizational Stressors

If there is any message that should be taken away from this study, it is that work culture should be considered as a potential stressor on female police officers' mental health. The results of this study suggest that many aspects of work culture, including rumours, labelling, mental health stigma, sexual harassment, and discrimination, can have detrimental effects on mental health. In this group of participants, these aspects of work culture led to anxiety, depression, and for some, thoughts of suicide. Mental health professionals working with this population need to shed the common misconception that the hardest part of being a police officer is operational stressors such as threats from the public, gruesome deaths, and vicarious trauma. This kind of bias can be prevented by understanding the stressors that female officers can experience and asking open-ended questions about all aspects of the client's work and personal life.

Establishing Trust and Confidentiality with the Client

Based on the interviews conducted for this study, female officers expressed that establishing trust and ensuring confidentiality was of utmost importance to them. When inquiring about the study process, officers were generally concerned about how their anonymity would be maintained. A few officers admitted to googling the researcher and her supervisor prior to reaching out to ensure that the study was legitimate. Although informed consent and confidentiality procedures are always important in research, this population ensured that all measures were taken to protect their identities. The researcher suspects that additional time

would be needed for a mental health professional to establish trust in the working relationship with a female police officer.

Culturally Sensitive Counselling

Although work culture is not typically what comes to mind when therapists think of culturally sensitive counselling, the researcher believes that having an understanding of police culture when working with officers would be extremely beneficial. This study's results suggest that lack of support, sexual harassment, and discrimination are still significant parts of police culture in our country. Mental health professionals should keep in mind that there can be strong pressure for officers to remain tight-lipped about these incidents and that reporting them to their organization may not always be in their best interest. Taking the time to understand the clients' work culture and the impact that it has on their mental health and treatment is vital to culturally appropriate counselling for female police officers. Resisting the urge to apply this study's findings to all female police officers is equally important. Although the themes that emerged are concerning and had an impact on many participants' mental health, a number of participants were happy with their work culture and felt that the support offered by their colleagues and organization was beneficial to their mental health.

Future Directions for Research

The exploratory nature of this qualitative study calls for future research in a number of areas. First, the literature on female police officers' general experiences in Canada is limited. Although studies conducted in other countries can shed light on some of the struggles that these women may face, their experience of work culture should be further explored within the Canadian political and cultural climate.

The current study's wide breadth of subjects covered allowed the researcher to have a general picture of how work culture could influence the mental health of female police officers; however, it failed to provide specific details of the relationship between the two. Future studies should narrow down specific aspects of work culture and explore, both qualitatively and quantitatively, how aspects of work culture have an impact on the mental health of police officers. Future studies could explore gender differences in the impact of operational and organizational stressors on police officers. This could provide more insight into how to support police officers for law enforcement organizations and mental health providers.

Another interesting avenue for further research would be to conduct a study exploring the coping strategies of female police officers. This could also include officers who had previously sought out professional support. By understanding what has helped these women, mental health providers could be informed about potential avenues of treatment and support.

Conclusion

The current study explores aspects of police work culture in Canada that can have devastating effects on female police officers' mental health. Despite feminist movements and increased attention to women's rights and well-being in our country, deep-rooted hegemonic masculinity still exists in the Canadian law enforcement system. Female police officers bring important diversity to police organizations across the nation. They help bridge the gap between vulnerable populations and law enforcement while bringing new perspectives and ideas to their organizations. The women who protect our cities, provinces, and countries deserve better than the treatment they receive from their colleagues, supervisors, and organizations. The results of the current study will help mental health service providers better understand the range of stressors that female officers may experience. By sharing these women's stories, the researcher

hopes to encourage female police officers to seek mental health support when necessary. The experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination in the police workplace are current and ongoing, and victims of these behaviours are not alone.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Policing:
- What makes a good police officer?
- What do you find most rewarding/challenging about your job?
- What drew you to police work?
- Are there any advantages to being a female police officer?

Mental Health:
- Have you ever had to take more than 1 week off of work due to illness?
- If you were experiencing mental health concerns, how would you deal with your symptoms?
- What is the most difficult situation you have had to face as a police officer?
  - How did it affect you?
  - Who did you talk to about it?
  - What helped and what didn't?
  - How much do you ruminate about what happened in this situation?
  - Does this situation still have implication for you both personally and professionally?
- Did you notice any changes in your mental health from the time before you started working as an officer and after?
- Have you ever struggled with substance use?

Work Culture:
- Can you describe your work culture?
- How does your work culture view mental health struggles?
- If you could change one thing about your work culture what would it be?
- What do you find the most challenging about your work culture?
- Who are your supportive people at work?
- Have you had to tolerate or participate in behaviour that undermines women within your work force?
- What is difficult about being a woman in the police force?

Family Life Balance:
- Do you take your work home with you? If yes, what does that look like for you?
- Are you able to disengage easily from "work mode"?
- Do you do work related things on your days off?