



MILITARY POLICE TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Date: November 23, 2022

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 23, 2022, Master Warrant Officer (MWO) John Palmer, CD, presented on *Military Police Trauma and Mental Health Support*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS-Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the mental health and impact of trauma on Military Police (MP) personnel, the diverse range of services which are coordinated through the different Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) programs, and the realization of how MP personnel are continually exposed to trauma sources (domestic and outside of Canada deployments).

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

The key point of MWO Palmer's presentation was the importance of recognizing that the CAF and MP have the resources to address the mental health of their members; however, the challenge is the persistent stigma of seeking mental health support. This has resulted in serious concerns about the health and welfare of deployed personnel and whether the personnel are at their optimum operational capabilities. The impact of this stress on families, communities, and personnel was also discussed.

Question & Answer Period

The question-and-answer period brought out one of the major challenges the MP faces in terms of recruitment, the potential benefit (for MP personnel) of dealing with a different operational tempo from other police forces, and the CAF's changes in dealing with mental health challenges.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

The CAF's MP is one of the few CAF trades that are 100% operational all the time, at home and abroad. This results in MP being continually in the *reacting* stage of the Mental Health Continuum Model. As a result, the CAF MP leadership has developed a broad array of trauma and mental health services to address the continued operational exposure. These services include the Psychosocial Services Program, Mental Health Program, and Operational Trauma and Stress Support Program. Combined, these services provide CAF MP personnel and their families the resources necessary to address trauma and mental health issues.

Some of the domestic trauma sources include suicide and sudden death response, incidents resulting in serious injury or death, training incidents, domestic and child abuse, violent assault (including sexual assault), and moral injury. Outside of Canada trauma sources include deployments in austere conditions, combat, suicide, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) incidents, suicide attacks, mass casualty incidents, staffing shortages, etc. MWO Palmer also gave a general overview of the general health services, mental health resources, and programs available to MP personnel.

MWO then stated that the range of support services offered to CAF personnel is based on a multidisciplinary healthcare model of doctors, mental health professionals, and (where necessary) CAF personnel addressing career issues. MWO Palmer noted that it was also important to include family and the community into the support network. This approach ensures that the MP is supported at work, and, when posted outside of Canada, the family is supported too.

In terms of the training provided to MP personnel, MWO stated that the career training for new recruits provides the building blocks to maximize performance and enhance resilience. As they progress through the ranks, training focuses on their well-being (and their subordinates), institutional policy and processes, and additional performance training.

Additionally, training is offered before and after deployment, where pre-deployment training helps prepare CAF members for the new environment, while post-deployment training prepares them to make the necessary adjustments for

when they return home. The family training program helps family members manage the stress of military life, including deployment.

Question & Answer Period

During the question-and-answer period, MWO Palmer stated that a challenge the MP faces is the highly competitive recruitment environment amongst various police forces (city, regional, provincial, and federal) who are recruiting from the same pool of candidates interested in law enforcement as a profession. This has also resulted in some MP members moving to civilian positions that provide better compensation, benefits, or more career opportunities.

MWO pointed out that the operational tempo of the MP is different from larger police forces or allied police forces, which might help in terms of mental health because the stress level is lower even if there are ongoing investigations; however, MP members also want to be more engaged in *policing* activities.

MWO also highlighted that although there are generational differences in attitudes about mental health, trauma, and stress management, the CAF's efforts to address the mental health challenges of MP personnel have resulted in remarkable changes (such as a MP personnel recognizing, discussing, and getting assistance). Moreover, MWO noted that there needs to be continued support to make this change effective. Finally, he also noted that organizational change is a continuous process, and it is important to continually seek opportunities to keep the momentum going.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- The MP is one of the few CAF trades that are 100% operational all the time, which results in MP personnel being continually in the *reacting* stage of the Mental Health Continuum Model.
- The Mental Health Continuum Model provides a quick and concise means of understanding where MP personnel are on the health continuum.
- Domestic and outside of Canada trauma sources can range from moral injury and staffing shortages to violent assault and mass casualty incidents.

- MP leadership needs to be aware of the signals of mental health status of their personnel and make accommodations to get their members assistance.
- The training that the MP provides to members focuses on enhancing resilience, furthering well-being and performance, and preparing them pre- and post-deployment; a training program for family members is also offered.

Question & Answer Period

- Recruiting challenges continue to affect all police forces because they are all recruiting from the same pool of candidates interested in law enforcement as a profession.
- The operational tempo of the MP differs from other police forces, reducing the stress level, which might be beneficial for mental health.
- The introduction of mental health in the early training stage has resulted in more personnel open to supporting other MP personnel.



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