Journal of
COMMUNITY SAFETY & WELL-BEING

Barriers and bridges: Exploring the introduction of meditation and mindfulness training into Canadian policing

Les Sylven*

ABSTRACT

Canadian police organizations are under significant pressure to enhance the health and wellness of their employees. Growing research suggests that training in meditation and mindfulness can contribute to the well-being of police personnel and may even be a catalyst for police reform. Limited research, however, has been conducted that seeks to understand how these practices should be introduced into Canadian police organizations. This article contributes to this understanding by sharing results from an exploratory study that asked 11 Commissioned Officers, who regularly practice meditation, to identify the key factors that should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into their large Canadian police service. Using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and guided by a reflexive thematic analysis approach, six themes were developed. These can be viewed as both barriers (invincibility and stigma; overworked and overstressed; and checkbox cynicism) and bridges (credible champions; the whole person perspective; and the philosophy of servant leadership) to the successful introduction of meditation and mindfulness practices into Canadian police organizations. This study advances the literature on introducing mindfulness to policing as it is one of the first to focus on the perceptions of mindfulness practicing Commissioned Police Officers. It also offers practical suggestions for police leaders, and leaders from other public safety professions, to consider when contemplating the introduction of these mental practices into their organizations.

Key Words   Canadian police leadership; police employee well-being; introducing mindfulness to policing; servant leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Canadian police organizations were under significant pressure to improve the health and well-being of their employees (Edwards, 2023; Jackson & Theroux, 2023; Thompson & Tam-Seto, 2023). This call to action has grown stronger over the past 5 years as emerging research has led to a better understanding of the depth and breadth of trauma and stress carried by police and other public safety professionals (Carleton et al., 2018; Heber et al., 2023; Papazoglou et al., 2021; Ricciardelli et al., 2018).

A variety of interconnected occupational factors are reportedly driving this crisis in wellness. For example, Ricciardelli and Johnston (2022) identified chronic workload and burnout, work-life imbalance, poor perceptions of leadership,

and the stigma associated with seeking mental health treatment as major contributors. Similarly, Reid (2023) highlighted staff shortages, low morale, high levels of fatigue, and the existential threat to Canadian policing due to diminished public trust as driving factors. Regardless of the reasons, it is a serious problem that extends beyond policing, and directly impacts Canadian society. As Jackson and Theroux (2023) explained:

> The mental health and wellness of the workforce is not a sector-specific issue; it is a human issue – one facing every single police service in Canada and, indeed, globally […] We recognize that you cannot have safe, healthy, and resilient communities without a safe, healthy, and resilient police workforce. Full stop. (p. S4)

Identifying which evidence-based programs should be introduced to build a safe, healthy, and resilient police workforce is up for discussion. In February 2023, the Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being published a special issue that focused on ideas from around the world to promote first responder wellness (Taylor, 2023). Topics in the issue included: leadership interventions for alcohol abuse in police and public safety organizations (Rinkoff, 2023); peer-led workplace reintegration programs following significant injury or illness (Jones et al., 2023); mental health stigma and help-seeking intentions in police employees (Grupe, 2023); and the use of meditation and other contemplative practices by some Canadian police officers (Sylven, 2023a).

This study relates to the last topic, and was part of a broader research project that examined the practice of meditation and police leadership. More specifically, the current study explores the introduction of meditation and mindfulness training into Canadian police organizations. Much like the growing interest in mindfulness for other professions (Dhiman, 2021; Reina et al., 2022; Urrila, 2022b), interest in mindfulness for the well-being of police employees is also on the rise (Fleischmann et al., 2022; Stevenson, 2022; Sylven, 2023b; Withrow et al., 2023). However, a gap currently exists in the research literature on how best to introduce these mental practices into Canadian police organizations.

The purpose of this article is to advance the literature by sharing results from an exploratory qualitative study which asked 11 Canadian police managers, who self-identified as regular meditation practitioners, how mindfulness training should be introduced into policing. More precisely, the research question guiding this article was, "What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?"

The article begins by identifying the definitions of mindfulness and meditation that guided this study. A review of the selected empirical research on mindfulness and meditation training for policing is then provided, as well as a description of the methodology employed in the current study. Next, the themes are presented, which are supported by selected quotes from the study participants. A discussion then follows in which each theme is examined against aspects of the selected literature. The practical implications of each theme, as well as suggested areas for future research and potential limitations of this study, are also considered.

Study Definitions

Mindfulness training and meditation practice have been components of religious traditions for thousands of years; however, interest in the secular use of mindfulness has grown exponentially in the past three decades (Bartlett et al., 2019; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Eby et al., 2019; Good et al., 2016). With this growth, researchers have highlighted the importance of definitional clarity in mindfulness studies (Shabaz & Parker, 2021; van Dam et al., 2018). Accordingly, the following definitions of mindfulness, meditation, and regular meditation practice were used in this study.

Mindfulness

For this study, mindfulness was defined as a state of consciousness characterized by "an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality" (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). Although it is understood that everyone possesses a basic ability to be mindful, it is also understood that mindfulness as a temporary mental state, and an enduring dispositional trait, can be strengthened by regularly engaging in mindfulness training such as meditation and other related contemplative practices (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017).

Meditation

From the multiple available definitions of meditation, Walsh and Shapiro's (2006) definition was selected for this study. They proposed meditation is "a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" (pp. 228–229).

Regular Meditation Practice

With respect to what constitutes regular meditation practice, the definition from a previous phenomenological study exploring the influence of meditation on the leadership development of managers was adopted (Frizzell et al., 2016). They defined regular meditation practice as training at least three times per week, for at least 3 months. For the purposes of this article, mindfulness training, mindfulness practice, and meditation are used interchangeably.

Selected Empirical Research on Mindfulness and Meditation for Policing

Research into the health and wellness outcomes of mindfulness training for police employees has progressed significantly in the past 5 years (Fleischmann et al., 2022; Stevenson, 2022; Withrow et al., 2023). For example, early pilot and feasibility studies were conducted which involved police participation in mindfulness-based intervention training programs. These studies reported reduced aggression, burnout, and sleep disturbances in these police officers, as well as increased dispositional trait mindfulness, resilience, and emotional regulation (Bergman et al., 2016; Christopher et al., 2016; Eddy et al., 2021; Kaplan et al., 2017).

More recently, wait-listed randomized control trial (RCT) studies of mindfulness-based training interventions for police employees have been carried out internationally. These include studies with Brazilian police officers (Trombka et al., 2021), United Kingdom police professionals (Fitzhugh et al., 2023), and police officers working in the United States (Grupe et al., 2021a). Collectively, the findings from these RCTs suggest greater improvements in the quality of life and well-being for police employees who underwent a mindfulness training intervention than those participants who were assigned to a wait-listed control group.

However, information and research on how best to introduce mindfulness and meditation training into police organizations are limited. It is understood these practices were initially introduced by several police organizations in the U.S. to improve the mental wellness and performance of their employees (Effron, 2017; Kelly, 2017). Later, several mindfulness-based mind fitness training programs, tailor-made for policing, were developed and introduced to more police agencies (Zielinska, 2019). Recently, the International

Association of Chiefs of Police (2022) created a mindfulness toolkit for law enforcement officers with examples of meditation practices for officers to do on their own time.

Grupe et al. (2021b), in the book *Interventions, Training, and Technologies for Improved Police Well-Being and Performance*, provided suggestions for introducing mindfulness training to police organizations. These included the following: finding internal mindfulness champions; introducing a variety of voluntary mindfulness practices; taking a trauma-informed approach; and making a long-term commitment to the overall wellness of police employees.

In addition to the health and well-being benefits of mindfulness for police employees, Grupe et al. (2021b) also posited about the potential long-term benefits of mindfulness practice as a catalyst for police reform. They argued mindfulness practice "can contribute to widespread cultural changes in the policing institution that are needed to reimagine the profession, save lives, and bring greater justice to communities that have historically been marginalized by the criminal justice system" (p. 127). They also cautioned that, "To realize this ambitious and transformative vision, it is critical to think deeply and carefully about how these practices are adapted, introduced, and delivered to police officers" (p. 128).

In summary, it is clear that evidence supporting the effectiveness of mindfulness training for police officers is growing. It is also clear that more research is needed that explores how best to introduce mindfulness training into Canadian policing to improve the wellness of employees and potentially become a catalyst for police reform.

METHOD

The current study sought to answer the research question "What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?" To do so, an exploratory qualitative methodology (Yin, 2016; Klenke, 2016) was used to gather and interpret the perceptions of a cohort of Commissioned Police Officers who regularly practiced mindfulness.

More specifically, semi-structured interviews with individual participants, followed by focus group discussions were the two methods used to generate data. In this section, a brief description of the participant invitation, selection, demographics, and data collection processes are outlined. A description of the data analysis method used in this study, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun et al., 2022b), is also presented.

Participant Invitation and Selection
On March 18, 2021, following written institutional approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board and the police service's Human Resources Research Board, an "Invitation to Participate" was emailed to all 605 Commissioned Officers in a large Canadian police service. This strata of experienced police officers was selected as they typically hold managerial positions and have obtained senior officer status from the rank of Inspector to Chief or Commissioner (Statistics Canada, 2023).

In the study invitation, recipients were asked to contact the author if they were a Commissioned Officer who regularly practiced meditation and wished to confidentially discuss their meditation and leadership practices in semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A total of 13 individuals contacted the author and offered to participate. Eleven respondents met the study inclusion criteria of holding the rank of Commissioned Officer and having a regular meditation practice of at least three times a week for at least 3 months (Frizzell et al., 2016; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006).

Demographics of Study Participants (n = 11)
The age range of study participants was 45 to 57 years, with a mean age of 49.6 years. Participants self-identified their gender as either male (6) or female (5). Race or ethnicity were reported as White (8), Metis (1), South Asian (1), and Black (1).

Length of service in the police agency varied between 19 and 30 years, with a mean of 24.5 years. Participants reported they had been in formal leadership roles (defined as their first promotion in rank) between 10 and 21 years, with a mean of 15.5 years. The ranks of participants were almost exclusively Inspectors (10), with one Superintendent.

Finally, study participants were serving in a wide variety of roles including: Unit Commander (2), District Commander (2), Operational Support (2), Major Crimes Section (1), Workplace Health and Wellness (1), Integrated Proceeds of Crime Unit (1), Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (1), and Executive Officer to a senior executive (1).

Data Collection
Data were collected using two methods: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Combining semi-structured interviews with focus group discussions can be an effective approach to conducting qualitative research (Longhurst & Johnston, 2023; Yin, 2016). Furthermore, doing so in a sequential process may enhance the richness of the data and add to the trustworthiness of the results (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). In the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted first. After the interview data underwent analysis, each participant was invited back to join an online focus group to discuss the preliminary results. This focus group step resulted in additional data being generated that were used to answer the research question.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 9, 2021, and June 24, 2021. These were conducted in English and recorded on the Microsoft Teams video conferencing platform. Each interview was conversational in tone and often became deeply personal. For the purposes of the current study, the guiding interview question used was simply, "What might be some of the challenges of introducing meditation into policing?"

Eight of the eleven Commissioned Officers also chose to participate in one of the three focus groups which were conducted on Microsoft Teams between June 15, 2022, and July 5, 2022. The guiding question used in the focus group stage was "What are your thoughts on the preliminary results from the interviews?"

Data Analysis Process
The version of data analysis followed in this study was RTA as envisioned by Braun and Clarke (2019) and Braun et al. (2022a). RTA has been described as a qualitative approach that avoids any positivistic notions of data interpretation (Byrne, 2021). A hallmark of the approach is the premise that

a researcher's subjectivity is a valuable analytic resource to be highlighted, not diminished (Gough & Madill, 2012). This approach toward researcher subjectivity seemed important, as the author was also a Commissioned Canadian Police Officer who has practiced mindfulness and meditation for over 30 years.

Braun et al. (2022b) identified six iterative phases of RTA, each of which were adhered to in this study. These were familiarization with the entire data set (i.e., the semi-structured interviews and focus groups final transcripts); coding the smallest units of data related to the research question; initial theme generation by clustering codes into meaningful patterns; reviewing and developing the initial themes; further refining, defining, and naming the themes; and producing the research report.

RESULTS

In total, six themes were developed that the author believed best answered the research question, "What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?" Although each theme is distinct, some similarities are shared across some themes. Accordingly, these themes can be conceptualized as three barriers (invincibility and stigma; overwork and overstress; and checkbox cynicism) and three corresponding bridges (credible champions; the whole person perspective; and the philosophy of servant leadership). Each theme is described below and supported by quotes from study participants.

The Barrier of Invincibility and Stigma

The first theme addresses a potential barrier that invincibility and mental toughness are highly valued in this police organization, while mental health struggles are often ignored or stigmatized. As one participant explained in a troubling story:

> I had a group of people working for me and we investigated a horrendous fatal motor vehicle accident where three kids were killed. I ended up at the scene and it was probably the worst I'd ever seen. I remember coming back to the office, and at that time I was reporting to an Inspector, and I said, "I want to do a critical stress debrief with a mental health professional with these people." And he said, "No! Don't give them a fucking excuse to get off work!" I did it anyway.

This theme was also developed from the words of a participant who argued, "As adrenaline junkies and macho people, meditation is a big barrier because the mindfulness side of things contradicts all of that and takes people to a place that they don't want to be." As another participant shared, the stigma associated with mental health challenges also exists at high levels of formal leadership in this organization, which could be a further barrier to the introduction of mindfulness practice:

> I think this really is tied into mental health stigma. I had an officer who I worked with, she's my boss actually, and we had conversations about her mental health, and she said, "If I open that door, I'm not sure I can close it."

The same participant added that admitting struggles with mental health is particularly difficult in specialized sections such as organized crime, national security, or homicide investigation units. He explained, "People are fearful of two things. One, if I open this floodgate I'm going to be destroyed. Two, I'm going to be delegitimized and people aren't going to trust me anymore and I'm going to be ruined."

The Barrier of Overworked and Overstressed

A second barrier theme was that all employees are overworked and overstressed in this organization. As one participant explained:

> I think there's a risk of introducing meditation in a way where the police officers are saying, "You say you care about my wellness, yet you're working me like a dog. You only want me to be well so I can keep working, because right now I'm so close to breaking."

Similarly, another individual commented on the heavy workload in their workplace as a barrier to meditation practice, in a very literal sense:

> At least here, in terms of the challenges of introducing meditation, one is like, "How am I going to meditate when I'm rushing from call to call to call?" [...] I just wonder about how to really introduce meditation when we're in such a state.

Another participant identified the lack of trust between ranks in the organization, brought on by the heavy workload, as a barrier to introducing mindfulness practice. They explained, "My concern is that there seems to be some trust elements that are challenging right now organizationally. Introducing meditation may have to overcome resistance at that level."

The Barrier of Checkbox Cynicism

A final barrier to successfully introducing mindfulness training was based on the organization's track record with previous new initiatives. More specifically, some participants worried that the organization would create a mandatory online, one-time, mindfulness training course. This would be viewed cynically as just another checkbox that every employee must tick for the employer's benefit. As one participant bluntly explained:

> If this turns into some mandatory online course, people will just go straight to the exam and bullshit their way through it. There are so many courses like this in the police service where it's like "Oh checklist, checklist, okay yah, did it, did it, check, check." But this is so important, and I want people to be serious about it. If they're not going to be serious, don't bother. Don't bother.

Another participant bluntly shared his concern with the consequences of a checkbox approach to introducing meditation:

> Well, the way this police service will probably implement meditation is they'll send you an email and say

"Hey, go do this course" and no one's going to read the stupid thing. So, one of my main issues is that if we put something in place, it cannot be just a ticking the box kind of thing.

Another participant simply said, "I just don't think this should be an online course. I think it should be led by a practitioner or someone who really knows what meditation is and someone who understands the police world too", while another participant explained:

If we're going to be serious about this, it can't be seen as a fad, we don't want meditation and mindfulness to be the new Keto diet. Meaning that everybody's heard about it, everybody's tried it for about 2 weeks, and then they move on.

The Bridge of Credible Champions

The remaining three themes can be viewed as supportive bridges to the successful introduction of mindfulness practice. The first bridge leveraged the value placed on professional and personal credibility within policing. As one participant explained:

To me, people who champion meditation and mindfulness need to be true legitimate champions that are viewed as people who are credible in their positions. I think that would show people you can still succeed in high-performance, high-level things, and still be part of this.

One participant who spoke of the importance of using credible mindfulness champions, also stressed the need for the organization to defer to these experienced practitioners:

You need people who are high performers to say, "Yah I'm not just talking about this, I do this. I'm here, and I'm in this position." So, it has to be led by the right people, people who have experience. And sometimes the organization just goes and picks anyone. They need to listen to the people who have the experience to advise them.

Finally, the importance of credible mindfulness champions who are male, and also White, was brought up during a focus group by a participant who is neither of these. She explained:

I'm going to try to, I want to be diplomatically correct, ok? I'm quite happy to see two White males here, and I'll tell you why. Because of my background, people are like, "You? You are a police officer?" So, although sad to say, I think it gives a lot of credibility to meditation to have many White male practitioners. Because unfortunately, when you look at things, they are regarded as the people that have the solutions.

The Bridge of the Whole Person Perspective

A second thematic bridge is to plainly communicate the positive benefits of meditation practice for the whole person, not just as an employee. As one participant explained:

As police officers, we're often very analytical. The whole, "What's in it for me?" and "How will I personally benefit from it?" and "If I'm going to invest time in this, what is it going to give me?" I think that that has to be made clear. It can't be just theoretical.

A similar perception was shared by another participant who argued for communicating about mindfulness training clearly and pragmatically:

Make the links for people, like actually spell it out for them. Even to the community, "We are giving our people these tools to help them do things. And these things relate to a better home life, and by relating to a better home life, they also relate to a better workplace."

The same participant suggested simply telling others, "What we want to do is better tool and equip our employees to survive the harshness of police work, but also the pressures of everyday life, both within their personal life and everything else."

Finally, another participant suggested explaining to police officers, "This is a technical skill that can be honed, that can be developed and has broad effect on every aspect of your life.", while another shared, "We know this is going to help our people be better. They're going to be healthier. They're going to do better in retirement. They're going to do better at dealing with the stressors that we expect them to handle."

The Bridge of the Philosophy of Servant Leadership

The final theme was to introduce mindfulness training as a component of a larger leadership framework. In particular, the philosophy of servant leadership, with its focus on leaders first striving to meet the highest order needs of their followers (Greenleaf, 1997/2002), was specifically mentioned by multiple study participants, including one who stated, "Servant leadership is a great way to explain our ideals in police leadership."

Within the context of introducing mindfulness training, the philosophy of servant leadership would first prioritize the needs of employees. For example, training in a wide variety of meditation techniques would be offered, and numerous opportunities to revisit mindfulness training would be provided throughout a policing career. As one participant explained:

I think a broad range of meditation options that are going to be as individualized as the people that are participating is necessary. That would be my suggestion. The approach needs to be as broad as possible, to be inclusive as we can.

Several participants reflected on initially introducing mindfulness during basic police training. As one participant explained:

The police academy is a great place to start. We've always tried to give tools and set a certain mindset to assist our police officers and prepare them for the harshness that is going to come. The challenge of introducing it at the police academy is that people don't yet really understand

just how hard it's going to be out there in the field. But this is something that should still be taught at the police academy.

Referring to meeting the needs of police officers later in their careers, several participants argued that mindfulness training and practice should be adaptable. As one participant explained:

> The analogy I draw is this. Did I become a proficient shooter at the police academy? Yes. Did I become a really good shooter later when I was on the Emergency Response Team? Yes. So, there has to be a process where you're introduced to it, but then there's continuous learning throughout your career where it's buttressed or backstopped or adjusted based on change in practices and changes in learning needs.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the barrier and bridge themes are analyzed in relation to what is currently reported in the academic literature. The practical implications of these themes for police organizations, as well as suggested areas for future research, and potential limitations of this study, are also included.

The Barrier of Invincibility and Stigma

The theme of invincibility and stigma appeared often in the perceptions of participants. Working as a public safety professional, participants argued, requires effective resilience, coping, and sensemaking strategies. The mindset that I will not waiver, stumble, or fail, is instilled from the earliest moments of basic training, reinforced organizationally by co-workers and supervisors, and celebrated by the community in public award ceremonies (British Columbia Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2023).

It is possible that this mindset of invincibility helps officers engage with the trauma and danger inherent in their work. However, as study participants shared, there are occasions when a mindset of invincibility it is not effective and may lead to poor decisions and behaviours. More empirical evidence is needed to establish with any certainty that an untempered mindset of invincibility leads to police officer misconduct.

What appears more certain in this theme is that a culture of invincibility can reduce the expression of vulnerability and self-reflection. As reported by study participants, the absence of vulnerability in policing leads to stigma when seeking mental health support or engaging in activities that support mental well-being. This supports research by Grupe (2023) who concluded that perceived stigma reduced help-seeking intentions due to "Police employees' beliefs about what others might think if they sought out mental health support" (p. S36). This stigma could be a significant barrier for police officers who may want to participate in mindfulness practice to enhance their mental wellness.

The Barrier of Overworked and Overstressed

The second theme of public safety professionals feeling overworked and overstressed is well documented in the literature (Carleton et al., 2018; Ricciardelli & Johnston, 2022; Ricciardelli et al., 2018). What was unexpected was some participants' concerns that mindfulness training will be perceived simply as a tool to make overloaded police employees work even harder.

Reflecting on this further, it could be argued that what lies underneath this concern are police officers' feelings of being unsupported by their supervisors and leaders. This is consistent with the findings of Carleton et al. (2020), who reported that many Canadian public safety personnel feel a lack of organizational support. The outcome of not feeling properly supported could result in some police officers feeling suspicious or resistant to the idea of participating in mindfulness training. This is a practical implication that police leaders should consider.

The Barrier of Checkbox Cynicism

The third barrier theme points to another challenge. It can be argued that this theme may be rooted in the power structure of police organizations. For example, police agencies in Canada are paramilitary organizations with clearly defined ranks and lines of authority. Although rank structure and insignia help to quickly identify key decision makers during high-risk incidents, it can also enhance deference to authority in more complex, non-urgent situations (Herrington & Colvin, 2016). These non-urgent situations could include the successful development and introduction of new organizational programs or initiatives such as mindfulness training.

Based on the comments of study participants, they were concerned that introducing a new initiative, particularly mindfulness, will not be successful if it is implemented solely from the top-down, or if it is seen as another publicized metric to advance the organization's reputation in the community. Similarly, Grupe et al. (2021b) expressed that introducing mindfulness training as a one-time course or program would result in perceptions that it was yet another example of their organization "checking off a box to meet public demands" (p. 130). The theme of checkbox cynicism appears to support these findings and is a challenge police organizations should also consider.

The Bridge of Credible Champions

The importance of credible champions was also identified by Grupe et al. (2021b) in their experience introducing mindfulness to a U.S. police agency. They wrote, "It is critical to identify internal champions in a variety of roles, whose support and enthusiasm for this training is necessary for long-term success" (p. 141). They also acknowledged the special role of credible police leaders, writing "We have been fortunate to identify several champions for this work in department leadership whose authority and decision-making ability is needed to support future training opportunities and integrate this training into the fabric of the department" (pp. 141–142). It is argued that the results from this study extend the findings of Grupe et al. from the U.S. policing context, into the Canadian policing context.

Furthermore, one participant's suggestion that identifying credible meditation champions who are White males was unique. In the colonially rooted, hyper-masculine profession of Canadian policing, the current critical discourse identifies White male toxic hegemony as one of the most significant drivers of police organizational dysfunction (Pamminger, 2022; Roach, 2022; Silden, 2023). Showcasing White male

police leaders who practice meditation as exemplars for organizational change might seem paradoxical.

However, as the dominant demographic in Canadian policing (Statistics Canada, 2022), it is logical that this group could hold significant influence over the successful introduction of any change or new program. Therefore, intentionally seeking out and highlighting individuals from the dominant demographic could be important. Nevertheless, additional empirical research is needed to understand how, and exactly which, credible champions should be fostered.

The Bridge of the Whole Person Perspective

This theme can be viewed as a bridge to the barrier of overworked and overstressed police officers. More specifically, the concern that mindfulness training is only being introduced to make employees work harder may be assuaged by embracing the whole person perspective. The importance of the whole person perspective is found in other literature on police leadership. For example, Smith (2009) conducted research with training officers from U.K. police agencies and concluded that, "the negative aspects of operational police culture may stem from officers not being recognized and valued as whole people" (p. 7). Similarly, Smith et al. (2015) concluded that a wholistic approach that includes the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components of an individual should be considered when developing police officer resilience programs.

Study participants shared that the benefits of mindfulness practice extend beyond the employee to the whole person. Similarly, Grupe et al. (2021b) wrote that police officers need to feel there is a long-term, meaningful commitment being made by their organization to their full well-being. They reported police officers want evidence that "the organization is not just saying, 'we care about wellness' because this is a trendy topic but rather because they are genuinely committed to supporting their employees in a meaningful way" (p. 130). This is valuable information for police organizations to consider when communicating new programs such as mindfulness training.

The Bridge of the Philosophy of Servant Leadership

Of the three thematic bridges, this final theme could be the most challenging and rewarding to implement. As Herrington and Colvin (2016) explained, police organizations often follow "Traditional bureaucratic, hierarchical, and leader-centric conceptualizations of leadership" (p. 8). This way of leading emphasizes the needs of police leaders over the needs of employees. Inverting this power paradigm by adopting the philosophy of servant leadership would mean emphasizing the needs of the employees within the context of the timing, frequency, and variety of mindfulness training being offered. Although the philosophy of servant leadership was identified favourably by several study participants, it is a new leadership approach for most Canadian police employees and is only beginning to gain interest (Patterson, 2019; Sylven & Crippen, 2018; Taylor et al., 2022).

The need to introduce a new leadership philosophy in conjunction with a new wellness program has been recommended previously in Canada. In particular, Cohen et al. (2019), while exploring the culture of police officer wellness, identified several promising programs. However, they cautioned, "Programs alone will not change the culture. The real change comes from a new approach to leadership and to developing positive, supportive relationships across the organization" (p. 225).

Results from research outside of policing also suggest that the practice of mindfulness may develop servant leadership behaviours. For example, Reb et al. (2014) in their studies of mindfulness for leaders argued:

> Being fully present in an interaction with a subordinate may enable a supervisor to better recognize the needs of the other person, such as what kind of support that person requires. In this way, mindfulness may allow supervisors to engage in more effective leadership behaviours toward their subordinates. (p. 38).

Similarly, Verdorfer (2016) argued that mindfulness training can assist in the development of servant leadership behaviours, while more recently, Urrila (2022a), in her qualitative study of leaders ($n = 62$) who participated in mindfulness training, also reported servant leadership type behaviours were developed through mindfulness training. She explained, "Leader mindfulness training and practice supported leaders in becoming more other-oriented as it tapped into genuine feeling of wanting to support their followers, instead of supporting followers because it was within their job description" (p. 229).

Finally, when considering the outcome of introducing mindfulness practice to police organizations, Grupe et al. (2021b) argued that the benefits go well beyond individual officers and could be a catalyst for creating, "an organizational culture that is kinder, wiser, and more compassionate, with the ultimate goal of greater justice and well-being for all who come into contact with the system" (p. 143). Although more empirical evidence is required to establish a connection between servant leadership and mindfulness in Canadian policing, it is a promising idea worthy of further investigation.

Study Limitations and Suggested Future Research

There are several limitations to this study. As is the nature of qualitative research, the results of this study are not meant to be generalized to all Canadian police agencies. They can be viewed, however, as the beginning of a working hypothesis for future research (Yin, 2016). For example, the participants in this study were a cohort ($n = 11$) of Commissioned Officers from a single large Canadian police organization. Although this police organization is engaged in a wide variety of policing duties and has a distinct history and culture, it is only one of many in Canada. Therefore, conducting a similar qualitative study with police leaders from other large Canadian police agencies is recommended, as it may result in similar, or different, barriers and bridges for police organizations to consider.

Second, the interviews and focus groups conducted in this study were exploratory and focused on answering the research question, "What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large agency?" As such, discussions were strategic in nature, and did not delve into administrative details such as the human and financial resource implications of introducing mindfulness training. In the fiscally challenging

environment of Canadian public safety, this would be an important focus for future study, as Fitzhugh et al. (2023) have demonstrated in their study of the cost-effectiveness of implementing mindfulness practice to police forces in England and Wales.

Lastly, although several study participants, and some police mindfulness researchers (Grupe et al., 2021b), have suggested police mindfulness practice could become a catalyst for future police reform, additional qualitative and quantitative research is necessary to measure and advance this connection. Although it may be intuitive that developing police leaders to "embody leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion in the service of others" (Marturano, 2015, p. 11) may eventually create a tipping point in Canadian police culture, future research is needed that delves more deeply into how the outcomes of mindfulness practice might begin to reduce the deep-seated injustices present in the Canadian justice system.

CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset of this article, Canadian police organizations are under pressure to take immediate steps that enhance the health and wellness of their employees. Previous research has suggested that meditation and mindfulness training can contribute to the wellness of police employees and may even be a catalyst for police reform. However, limited research has been undertaken that explores what must be considered when introducing these practices into Canadian police organizations.

Through the interpretive analysis of the experiences and perceptions of 11 Commissioned Officers who regularly practice meditation, the six themes developed in this study have contributed to the literature by identifying barriers and bridges to introducing mindfulness practice into their large Canadian police organization. In light of this new information, it is hoped that further research will be conducted and that Canadian police organizations will now be more informed when introducing these practices into their own organizations, particularly as they strive to create healthier workplaces and more safe and just communities.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS
*PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada

REFERENCES
Bartlett, L., Martin, A., Neil, A., Memish, K., Otahal, P., Kilpatrick, M., & Sanderson, K. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of workplace mindfulness training randomized controlled trials. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *24*(1), 108–126. https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000146

Bergman, A. L., Christopher, M. S., & Bowen, S. (2016). Changes in facets of mindfulness predict stress and anger outcomes for police officers. *Mindfulness*, *7*(4), 851–858. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0522-z

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Hayfield, N. (2022a). 'A starting point for your journey, not a map': Nikki Hayfield in conversation with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *19*(2), 424–445. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2019.1670765

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Davey, L., & Jenkinson, E. (2022b). Doing reflexive thematic analysis. In *Supporting research in counselling and psychotherapy* (pp. 19–38). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13942-0_2

British Columbia Public Safety and Solicitor General. (2023, April 20). *B.C. officers honoured for valour, commitment to public safety.* https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023PSSG0026-000563

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(4), 822–848. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822

Byrne, D. (2021). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality and Quantity*, *56*(3), 1391–1412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Carleton, R. N., Afifi, T. O., Turner, S., Taillieu, T., Duranceau, S., LeBouthillier, D. M., Sareen, J., Ricciardelli, R., MacPhee, R. S., Groll, D., Hozempa, K., Brunet, A., Weekes, J. R., Griffiths, C. T., Abrams, K. J., Jones, N. A., Beshai, S., Cramm, H. A., Dobson, K. S., … Asmundson, G. J. G. (2018). Mental disorder symptoms among public safety personnel in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *63*(1), 54–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717723825

Carleton, R. N., Afifi, T. O., Taillieu, T., Turner, S., Mason, J. E., Ricciardelli, R., McCreary, D. R., Vaughan, A. D., Anderson, G. S., Krakauer, R. L., Donnelly, E. A., Camp, R. D., Groll, D., Cramm, H. A., & Griffiths, C. T. (2020). Assessing the relative impact of diverse stressors among public safety personnel. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(4), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17041234

Christopher, M. S., Goerling, R. J., Rogers, B. S., Hunsinger, M., Baron, G., Bergman, A. L., & Zava, D. T. (2016). A pilot study evaluating the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based intervention on cortisol awakening response and health outcomes among law enforcement officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *31*(1), 15–28. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-015-9161-x

Cohen, I. M., McCormick, A. V., & Rich, B. (2019). Creating a culture of police officer wellness. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, *13*(2), 213–229. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paz001

Dhiman, S. K. (2021). *The Routledge companion to mindfulness at work* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Donaldson-Feilder, E., Lewis, R., & Yarker, J. (2019). What outcomes have mindfulness and meditation interventions for managers and leaders achieved? A systematic review. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *28*(1), 11–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1542379

Eby, L. T., Allen, T. D., Conley, K. M., Williamson, R. L., Henderson, T. G., & Mancini, V. S. (2019). Mindfulness-based training interventions for employees: A qualitative review of the literature. *Human Resource Management Review*, *29*(2), 156–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.03.004

Eddy, A., Bergman, A. L., Kaplan, J., Goerling, R. J., & Christopher, M. S. (2021). A qualitative investigation of the experience of mindfulness training among police officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *36*(1), 63–71. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-019-09340-7

Edwards, G. (2023). I'm not faking being sick, I'm faking being well: The need for leadership in mental health for policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *8*(Suppl_1), S50–S56. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.294

Effron, L. (2017, March 8). *Arizona police chief says meditation should be a key piece of officer development.* ABC News. http://abcnews.

go.com/Health/arizona-police-chief-meditation-key-piece-officer-development/story?id=45966480

Fitzhugh, H., Michaelides, G., Daniels, K., Connolly, S., & Nasamu, E. (2023). Mindfulness for performance and well-being in the police: Linking individual and organizational outcomes. *Review of Public Personnel Administration.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X231155794

Fleischmann, M., Manova, V., Wisener, M., & Khoury, B. (2022). Mindfulness facets and self-compassion as moderators of the relationship between occupational stressors and mental health symptoms in Canadian police officers. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement, 54*(4), 347–353. https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000290

Frizzell, D. A., Hoon, S., & Banner, D. K. (2016). A phenomenological investigation of leader development and mindfulness meditation. *Journal of Social Change, 8*(1), 14–25. https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2016.08.1.02

Good, D. J., Lyddy, C. J., Glomb, T. M., Bono, J. E., Brown, K. W., Duffy, M. K., Baer, R. A., Brewer, J. A., & Lazar, S. W. (2016). Contemplating mindfulness at work. *Journal of Management, 42*(1), 114–142. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315617003

Gough, B., & Madill, A. (2012). Subjectivity in psychological science: From problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods, 17*(3), 374–384. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029313

Greenleaf, R. (1977/2002). *Servant-leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness.* Paulist Press.

Grupe, D. W., Stoller, J. L., Alonso, C., McGehee, C., Smith, C., Mumford, J. A., Rosenkranz, M. A., & Davidson, R. J. (2021a). The impact of mindfulness training on police officer stress, mental health, and salivary cortisol levels. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*:720753. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.720753

Grupe, D. W., Smith, C., & McGehee, C. (2021b). Introducing mindfulness training and research into policing: Strategies for successful implementation. In P. A. Arble & B. B. Arnetz (Eds.), *Interventions, training, and technologies for improved police well-being and performance* (pp. 125–149). IGI Global.

Grupe, D. W. (2023). Mental health stigma and help-seeking intentions in police employees. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being, 8*(Suppl_1), S32–S39. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.290

Heber, A., Schick, A., & Bose, E. (2023). Addressing the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on Canada's frontline workers. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being, 8*(Suppl_1), S9–S11. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.300

Herrington, V., & Colvin, A. (2016). Police leadership for complex times. *Policing, 10*(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pav047

International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2022). *Mindfulness toolkit for law enforcement.* https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/257860_IACP_Mindfulness_Toolkit_p5.pdf

Jackson, L., & Theroux, M. (2023). Police need wellness checks too: Embedding a culture of wellness and resilience in policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being, 8*(Suppl_1), S4–S6. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.311

Jamieson, S. D., & Tuckey, M. R. (2017). Mindfulness interventions in the workplace: A critique of the current state of the literature. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 22*(2), 180–193. https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000048

Jones, C., Spencer, S., Juby, B., O'Greysik, E., Smith-MacDonald, L., Vincent, M., & Bremault-Phillips, S. (2023). Stakeholder experiences of a public safety personnel work reintegration program. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being, 8*(Suppl_1), S23–S31. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.301

Kaplan, J. B., Bergman, A. L., Christopher, M., Bowen, S., & Hunsinger, M. (2017). Role of resilience in mindfulness training for first responders.

Mindfulness, 8, 1373–1380. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0713-2

Kelly, K. (2017, January 31). Menlo Park police officers will be trained to be mellow. *The Mercury News.* http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/01/26/menlo-park-police-officers-will-be-trained-to-mellow/

Klenke, K. (2016). *Qualitative research in the study of leadership* (2nd ed.). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. G. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(2), 228–237. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04559.x

Longhurst, R., & Johnston, L. (2023). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In N. Clifford, M. Cope, T. Gillespie, & S. French (Eds.), *Key methods in geography* (4th ed., pp. 168–183). Sage.

Marturano, J. (2015). *Finding the space to lead: A practical guide to mindful leadership.* Bloomsbury Press.

Pamminger, M. (2022). *Barriers to women in policing - traversing the gender gap: An examination into the perceptions and experiences of senior ranking policemen.* [Master's thesis, University of Victoria]. UVicSpace. https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/14524

Papazoglou, K., Milliard, B., Neofytou, E., Davis, J., Bellon, S., & Thompson, J. (2021). To tell or not to tell: Systemic and organizational stigma of police officers seeking mental health support. *Crisis, Stress, and Human Resilience: An International Journal, 3*(3): 85–103. https://www.crisisjournal.org/article/30787-to-tell-or-not-to-tell-systemic-and-organizational-stigma-of-police-officers-seeking-mental-health-support

Patterson, M. (2019). *Canadian police knowledge network: Leadership education survey.* https://www.cpkn.ca/wp-content/uploads/CPKN-Leadershiop-Education-Survey-Report-July-24-2019.pdf

Reb, J., Narayanan, J., & Chaturvedi, S. (2014). Leading mindfully: Two studies on the influence of supervisor trait mindfulness on employee well-being and performance. *Mindfulness, 5*(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0144-z

Reid, J. (2023). Canadian policing wellness check conference 2023. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being, 8*(2), 57–65. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.325

Reina, C. S., Kreiner, G. E., Rheinhardt, A., & Mihelcic, C. A. (2022). Your presence is requested: Mindfulness infusion in workplace interactions and relationships. *Organization Science, 34*(2), 722–753. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.1596

Ricciardelli, R., & Johnston, M. S. (2022). Police mental health and wellness. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of criminology.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.752

Ricciardelli, R., Carleton, R. N., Groll, D., & Cramm, H. (2018). Qualitatively unpacking Canadian public safety personnel experiences of trauma and their well-being. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 60*(4), 566–577. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjccj.2017-0053.r2

Rinkoff, P. B. (2023). Prevalence, pattern, and a leader's intervention: The impact of alcohol abuse in police and public safety organizations. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being, 8*(Suppl_1), S46–S49. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.299

Roach, K. (2022). *Canadian Policing: Why and how it must change.* Delve Books.

Shahbaz, W., & Parker, J. (2021). Workplace mindfulness: Fundamental issues for research and practice. *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work, 31*(2), 172–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2021.1878572

Silden, E. M. (2023). *Women, leadership and policing: Negotiating and navigating gendered experiences.* [Doctoral dissertation,

University of Victoria]. UVicSpace. http://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/14990

Smith, J. A. (2009). Police training for the whole person: An exploration of the spiritual dimension. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, *78*(11), 1–8.

Smith, J., Charles, G., Hesketh, I. (2015). Developing understanding of the spiritual aspects to resilience. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, *11*(1), 34–45. http://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-06-2014-0006

Statistics Canada. (2022, April 20). *Police personnel and expenditures in Canada, 2021.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2022013-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2023, March 27). *Police personnel by detailed rank, duties and gender.* https://doi.org/10.25318/3510007801-eng

Stevenson, R. M. (2022). Brief mindfulness training for Canadian public safety personnel well-being. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *7*(3), 88–92. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.263

Sylven, L. (2023a). Mindful of authority: A snapshot of the meditation and contemplative practices of some Canadian Commissioned Police Officers. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *8*(Suppl_1), S40–S45. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.291

Sylven, L. (2023b). Mindful police leadership: Opening essential new pathways to 21st-century police leadership and culture. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *8*(4), 157–165. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.338

Sylven, L., & Crippen, C. (2018). First to serve and protect, then to lead: Exploring servant leadership as a foundation for Canadian policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *3*(2), 22–26. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.77

Taylor, N. E. (2023). Special issue: Updating global efforts to promote and secure first responder wellness. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *8*(Suppl_1), S1. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.313

Taylor, N. E., Corley, C., McFee, D., & Torrigan, M. (2022). Law enforcement and public health. In I. Bartkowiak-Théron, J. Clover, D. Martin, R. F. Southby, & N. Crofts (Eds.), *Law Enforcement and Public Health*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83913-0

Thompson, J., & Tam-Seto, L. (2023). Resetting and informing a new baseline for wellness in policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, *8*(Suppl_1), S2–S3. https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.309

Trombka, M., Demarzo, M., Campos, D., Antonio, S. B., Cicuto, K., Walcher, A. L., García-Campayo, J., Schuman-Olivier, Z., & Rocha, N. S. (2021). Mindfulness training improves quality of life and reduces depression and anxiety symptoms among police officers: Results from the POLICE study - A multicenter randomized controlled trial. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, *12*, 624876. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2021.624876

Urrila, L. (2022a). *Be(com)ing other-oriented: The value of mindfulness for leaders and leadership development.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Vassa]. https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-395-053-5

Urrila, L. I. (2022b). From personal well-being to relationships: A systematic review on the impact of mindfulness interventions and practices on leaders. *Human Resource Management Review*, *32*(3), 100837. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100837

van Dam, N. T., van Vugt, M. K., Vago, D. R., Schmalzl, L., Saron, C. D., Olendzki, A., Meissner, T., Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Gorchov, J., Fox, K. C. R., Field, B. A., Britton, W. B., Brefczynski-Lewis, J. A., & Meyer, D. E. (2018). Mind the Hype: A critical evaluation and prescriptive agenda for research on mindfulness and meditation. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *13*(1), 36–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617709589

Verdorfer, A. P. (2016). Examining mindfulness and its relations to humility, motivation to lead, and actual servant leadership behaviors. *Mindfulness*, *7*(4), 950–961. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0534-8

Walsh, R., & Shapiro, S. L. (2006). The meeting of meditative disciplines and western psychology: A mutually enriching dialogue. *American Psychologist*, *61*(3), 227–239. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.3.227

Withrow, A., Russell, K., & Gillani, B. (2023). Mindfulness training for law enforcement to reduce occupational impact: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X231156710

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Zielinska, E. K. (2019, August 26). Mindful or suicidal: Recommendations for improved mental health among police officers. *EBP Society*. https://www.ebpsociety.org/blog/education/381-mindful-or-suicidal-recommendations-for-improved-mental-health-among-police-officers