

# 34% of participants screened positive for at least one posttraumatic stress injury in 2024 compared to 24% in 2019

## Paramedic mental health in the post-COVID era

### Introduction

In Canada, there is limited data about paramedic mental health post-COVID. Our 2019 study found that one in four paramedics screening positive for a posttraumatic stress injury (PTSI). The pandemic resulted in significant and sustained operational pressure, potentially worsening mental health.

### Aims

This study was a replication and extension of pre-pandemic research in one large, urban paramedic service in Ontario. Using the same validated self-report screening tools, we assessed for changes in PTSI prevalence, including the use of a novel, individualized feedback strategy for participants.

### Methods

Using pen-and-paper surveys during continuing education, the survey assessed symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), major depressive disorder (MDD), suicidal ideation, as well as demographics.

Participants were given the option to remain anonymous or provide their email address to receive an individualized report.

### Results

Of 704 eligible paramedics, 679 (96%) chose to participate, with 62% opting to receive an individualized report.

Overall, 12% screened positive for PTSD, 27% for MDD, and 23% for GAD. Suicidal ideation within the past 14 days was reported by 10% of participants. After adjusting for demographic characteristics, career length was associated with an increased risk of PTSD (OR 1.03 per year, 95% CI 1.01-1.06,  $p=0.005$ ). The risk of a positive screen for MDD or GAD did not vary as a function of participant demographics.

Compared to our 2019 study ( $n=589$ ), the prevalence of PTSD was similar (9% vs. 12%,  $p=0.05$ ), but MDD (15% vs. 27%,  $p<0.001$ ) and GAD (15% vs. 23%,  $p<0.001$ ) increased significantly. In total, 34% of participants screened positive for at least one PTSI in 2024 compared to 24% in 2019 ( $p<0.001$ ).

### Conclusion

The prevalence of MDD and GAD has increased substantially since 2019. PTSD prevalence remains consistent but still elevated compared to population levels.

A strength of this approach was in connecting participants to mental health care through individualized reports.

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