

Operating Grant: COVID-19 Mental Health & Substance Use Service Needs and Delivery

Instructions:

The [Operating Grant: COVID-19 Mental Health & Substance Use Service Needs and Delivery](#) aims to address the specific mental health and/or substance use crisis response needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the strategies to contain and mitigate its impact.

As outlined in the conditions of funding, funded teams are required to submit a quarterly knowledge mobilization update. The purpose of this report is to inform CIHR's knowledge mobilization efforts, promote the work being done by teams funded in this competition, and better understand the challenges that research teams are experiencing and how those challenges may influence the effective mobilization of this knowledge.

Information recorded in this report may be made available to [knowledge users](#), including policy makers, healthcare and service providers, partners, and the general public, and may be used to facilitate additional CIHR knowledge mobilization activities, and enable linkages between research teams and partners and/or knowledge users.

Email completed report to COVID19MH-COVID19SM@cihr-irsc.gc.ca by **February 25, 2021**.

Date: February 25, 2021

Project Title: *Traumatic Stress and Mental Health Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Front-Line Workers in Homeless Services*

Nominated Principal Investigator (name and primary affiliation):

Jeannette Waegemakers Schiff, PhD, MSW. University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work

Please list any websites and/or social media accounts affiliated with this project that CIHR may wish to link, tag or amplify:

Website: FLWresearch.com

Facebook:

https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/6o4M10oxIDY8XITguVBJvtjm02LOD_hKdGRIYrViCptUyva2q55_5AuLJYWKN6E29NhlrBq0vmVvrW9PUDm1U8FGMENdxWDCWfI

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHgY32BljZs&feature=youtu.be>

Target/priority population(s) under investigation:

Frontline workers in homeless services in seven Canadian cities

Key Messages (maximum 100 words):

- Traumatic stress widely experienced by those who work directly with people experiencing homelessness. This has been greatly exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, as homelessness has increased, the number of shelter spaces is insufficient, close contact is a continuing risk factor and staff are forced to work in vulnerable and high-risk situations. This study documents the extent of increased traumatic stress in staff, and seeks to understand what mitigating organizational and individual responses may lessen this impact. It will also look at the extent to which COVID has increased psychosocial work-related disability claims have impacted the services system.

Provide a plain language (lay summary) update on the current status of this project to be published on CIHR's website <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52079.html> (maximum 100 words):

The project launched a series of webinars to provide education on psychosocial stressors and trauma informed practices for organizations who have been recruited for this study. We also produced a You Tube video to present the study to staff at participating organizations. Data collection is ongoing in 4 cities and three others are expected to start within the next several weeks. We have also completed interviews with 12 senior administrators in participating organizations and we are analyzing the results. Two additional organizations in Toronto have requested to become part of this study and we are presently finalizing the details of this addition.

What are the potential implications of this work? (e.g. for policy, health care practice, mental health and substance use service delivery; maximum 100 words)

There is widespread misidentification of the stress encountered by frontline staff in homeless services as most often it is labelled "burnout". There are inordinately high rates of traumatic stress that require specific mental health interventions. We anticipate that a strong commitment for staff education on trauma-informed care for staff, based on the research findings that this will significantly reduce staff stress. The results will also provide evidence for policy makers and funders to recognize the critical importance for staff training and supports as well as renewed commitment for education in fundamentals of working with vulnerable, homeless, people.

List any specific challenges to conducting this research within the COVID-19 context (maximum 100 words):

The second wave has led to temporary reduced staff and organizational availability, slowed recruitment and data collection. We anticipate that this will resolve in the next couple of months. We have ethics approval from all REB boards, but they have changed requirements, lengthened the approval process, and at times overstepped their mandate by attempting to dictate research methodologies. Research staff are required to maintain social distancing and not be present at shelters and programs where staff work while participants work in programs where social distancing is not possible. The disparate rules affecting researchers and their study participants requires careful and sensitive attention.

List any factors that are facilitating the progress and/or uptake of this research (maximum 100 words):

Our knowledge translator and disseminator in Toronto has a wide network that has been mobilized for knowledge dissemination. We have presented to several city-wide committees, and our work has been brought to the attention of members of parliament as well as the provincial legislature (Ontario). We have commitments to present results to these bodies as they emerge.

List up to 10 keywords specific to this project to facilitate website search filters and sorting:

(e.g. depression, virtual care, autism, opioids, racism, chronic pain, sleep, etc.)

Traumatic stress, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, PTSD, frontline staff, work-related disability, homeless services