Research Project Details	
Title	Feasibility and effectiveness of early psychoeducation intervention programs for psychologically injured first responders and their spouses/partners: A return-to-work small sample controlled trial study
Investigator(s)	Dr. Kelly Dean Schwartz, University of Calgary
Funding Period	2025-2028
Budget	$97,375.00
Issue/Rationale	The work of emergency first responders (EFRs; i.e., police, fire, paramedic) exposes members to daily and substantial potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTEs). Their service places EFRs at an increased risk for posttraumatic stress injuries (PTSIs), including operational stress injuries (OSIs). In many cases, workplace PTSI and OSI requires the EFR to seek professional help (i.e., psychiatrist, psychologist), and may necessitate a prescribed medical leave of absence (LOA). The consequences of these OSI and the medical LOA extend beyond the individual EFR to family members, many of whom may be negatively affected by the OSIs and/or PTSIs of their EFR family member, all the while being expected to act as their EFR's primary support. In response to these OSIs, and as the EFR begins the treatment plan, many members likely enter the process without a basic understanding of operational stress, the effects of prolonged exposure to PPTEs on cognitive, emotional, and behavioural health, and its impacts on relationships.
Objective(s)	The proposed research project is designed to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of two psychoeducational programs—BOS and RBF—when introduced early in the treatment of EFRs on a medically prescribed LOA due to OSIs. The intervention includes the EFR and their spouse or partner, recognizing the family as an essential support system and integrated unit.
Anticipated Results/ Impact	We anticipate that providing BOS and RBF will help both EFRs and their spouses to have better understanding of the psychological injury, which we expect will help normalize the challenges EFRs and their families are facing. By providing the empirically informed interventions of BOS and RBF, we expect the claim process to be less stressful for EFRs and their family members. We anticipate that EFRs and their family members will be better informed about the psychological symptoms they have developed, and that they will feel more hopeful about their recovery and the treatment process. EFRs are expected to better engage in the treatment process as they will have a better understanding of what caused their psychological injury and the kinds of skills they need to recover and stay healthy when they return to work. Additionally, we expect that spouses will be supportive of the recovery process for their partners, particularly because they have been included as critical and deserving of their own intervention and support while their partner goes through the WCB claim process.
Keywords	First responders, psychological injury, psychoeducation, return-to-work, spouses, family support, recovery