

ARTICLE



# Online Canadian police recruitment videos: do they focus on factors that potential employees consider when making career decisions?

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## ABSTRACT

Given their potential to reach a large audience, online recruitment videos are likely a useful way for police services to recruit applicants. To increase the likelihood of people applying, these videos should focus on issues potential employees consider when making career decisions. A literature review revealed six job factors that people consider when contemplating a potential career. A coding framework focusing on these factors (and their respective sub-categories) was developed and applied to all available recruitment videos created by Canadian policing organizations ( $N = 37$ ). The coding dictionary could be applied reliably and it revealed that only 23% of the job factors that emerged from the literature review are addressed in the videos and when they are, they are not particularly salient. Ways of using this study to develop more effective, data-driven, police recruitment videos are discussed.

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In order to provide effective services, Canadian police agencies need to hire an appropriate number of high-quality officers to meet their operational demands. However, many agencies encounter obstacles in attracting potential candidates, which has contributed to a significant police shortage in a number of Canadian police agencies (Statistics Canada, 2019). Considering their ability to reach a broad audience (e.g., Gruzd et al., 2018), online recruitment videos are likely an effective method of police recruitment. Unfortunately, despite the potential benefits of recruitment videos, their use has rarely been examined (however, see Koslicki, 2020). In an attempt to help fill this gap, the current study assesses whether current Canadian police recruitment videos depict information that young people appear to consider when making career decisions.

## *Police shortages in Canada*

Canada is currently experiencing a police shortage (Statistics Canada, 2018). There are currently 185 officers per 100,000 people in Canada, the lowest rate since 2011 when there were 203 officers per 100,000 (Statistics Canada, 2018). This rate is considerably lower than other developed countries (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018). The number of officers is likely to continue to decrease due to retention-related issues. In 2018, more officers left the field of policing than were replaced in six of the 13 provinces and territories (Statistics Canada, 2019). Further compounding this issue is the fact that the average age of officers is increasing, and more than 11%

of Canadian police officers are expected to retire within the next couple of years (Statistics Canada, 2018).

While it is not possible to determine the optimal number of officers that should exist in Canada, a variety of problems being experienced by Canadian police services have been attributed to police shortages. The two most commonly cited issues are an inability to effectively manage crime problems (Grant, 2018; Yogaretnam, 2018), including slow response times (Griffiths & Pollard, 2013), and the negative impact on the mental health of officers (Cottrill, 2017; D'Amore, 2019). This latter issue has been studied both internationally (e.g., Biggam et al., 1997) and in Canada (e.g., Ricciardelli et al., 2020), and urgent calls for change are now being made. In a recent report prepared by an expert panel responding to a spike in police suicides in Ontario, the authors stated that 'police resources in Ontario are strained to a breaking point in many locations around the province' (Report of the Expert Panel on Police Officer Deaths by Suicide, 2019, p. 10). The panel recommended adequate staffing as one way to address this growing crisis.

### ***Low applicant numbers in the policing field***

These staff shortages create a need to ensure that police recruitment strategies are effective. This is particularly important given that many young Canadians do not consider policing as an attractive career option (Ipsos Reid, 2009). There are a variety of potential reasons for this, including: (1) young people may be disinterested in policing as a career (Morrow et al., 2019), (2) policing is seen as a dangerous job (Elkins, 2016), (3) policing is seen as a profession that is likely to cause psychological distress (Ipsos Reid, 2009), (4) shift work is unattractive to many (Lord & Friday, 2003), (5) geographically relocating for one's work may be unappealing to some individuals (Dette & Dalbert, 2005), and (6) the policing profession is perceived negatively, either because of negative contacts with the police (Bradford et al., 2009) or negative media portrayals (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007).

### ***Lack of interest in policing as a career***

The most obvious reason for low applicant numbers in the policing field is that young Canadians are simply not interested in policing as a career. Ipsos Reid, Canada's largest market research and public opinion polling firm, conducted a survey to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Canadian youth from across the country about policing as a career choice (Ipsos Reid, 2009). In their sample of 1,521 Canadian youth aged 16 to 27 years, they found that 29% of respondents agreed they would consider a career in police work, and only 4% said policing was the career they were most interested in. Instead, young Canadians seem more interested in working in professional (e.g., accounting), paraprofessional (e.g., paralegal), technical (e.g., healthcare technician), industrial (e.g., electrician), administrative (e.g., office administrator), or customer service (e.g., server) occupations (Statistics Canada, 2016).

### ***Dangerous nature of policing***

In fulfilling their duties, police officers often put themselves at risk, which can be both physical and psychological in nature (Leino et al., 2011). The potential for danger that is inherent in police work may dissuade youth from considering a career in this field. Indeed, the Ipsos Reid (2009) survey described above found that 83% of respondents agreed that policing is a dangerous field of work, which is consistent with other research (e.g., Morrow et al., 2019). Interestingly, in other dangerous occupations, recruitment numbers do not always reflect the same issue that Canadian policing currently faces. For example, despite the obvious dangers of working in the Armed Forces, the number of military personnel has increased substantially in Canada in recent years (Chief Review Services National Defence, 2012). The reason for this difference between the two fields is not clear.

### ***Potential for psychological distress***

A third reason why young people appear to be disinterested in a policing career is the potential for psychological distress (Ipsos Reid, 2009). Police work is considered one of the most stressful occupations by police officers and their loved ones (Anshel, 2000), and this is reflected in officer well-being. In one study of over 4,000 Canadian police officers, half the respondents reported high levels of stress and 30% reported depressed mood (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012). Similarly, in a recent study of first responders in Canada, a relatively high number of respondents had been positively screened for a mental health diagnosis (Carleton et al., 2017). For example, 30% ( $n = 430$ ) of Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers who were surveyed had a positive screen for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, while 34.7% ( $n = 442$ ) and 37.3% ( $n = 448$ ) had positive screens for mood or anxiety disorders, respectively. Certain consequences of psychological distress also appear to be more prevalent among police officers. For example, when comparing suicide rates of police officers to firefighters, Violanti (2010) found that the police suicide rate was four times higher.

### ***Working rotating shifts, weekends, and holidays***

Another potential reason for the low level of interest in policing as a career among young Canadians is the fact that it often involves shift-work, including on weekends and holidays, which may be unappealing to potential applicants. This work schedule is a reality for many officers and has the potential to negatively affect their balance. Duxbury and Higgins (2012) found that 42% of their 4000+ police respondents worked rotating shifts, of which approximately one-third were working at least four shift patterns every month. Unsurprisingly, these researchers also found that the work patterns of officers impeded their home life, with 43% of officers reporting significant interference with their family life. Research in the U.S. has found similar results (Dierdorff & Ellington, 2008). The potential for work-life imbalance resulting from shift work will likely deter many young people from thinking about a career in policing (Lord & Friday, 2003), especially given that the younger generation seeks balance more than preceding generations (Twenge et al., 2010). Young people in Canada seem attuned to the realities of work-life conflict in policing. Indeed, 53% of respondents to the previously mentioned Ipsos Reid survey believed that maintaining balance is difficult for officers, and 77% agreed that officers are required to work long hours, including shift work (Ipsos Reid, 2009).

### ***Geographic relocation***

Another important factor that may dissuade some young people from seriously considering a policing career is the potential for geographic relocation (Dette & Dalbert, 2005). While this prospect may not necessarily be a drawback for all applicants (Chapa & Wang, 2014; Otto & Dalbert, 2012), it may be unattractive to those who wish to remain close to family and friends. Another potential detriment to relocating are potential consequences for an applicant's spouse. For example, a study examining military couples found that job relocation was associated with a reduction in spousal earnings by approximately 14% (Burke & Miller, 2018). In Canada, provincial and federal police services are responsible for large geographic areas and will send officers to locations that have higher operational demands. Therefore, the potential for relocation must be considered when deciding upon a career with these agencies. This appears to be understood by young people considering a career in policing, as 70% of youth believe that being willing to relocate is important for aspiring police officers (Ipsos Reid, 2009).

### ***Negative perceptions of police work***

Finally, negative perceptions of the police resulting from negative contact with officers (Bradford et al., 2009) or exposure to negative media coverage (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007) may play an important role in whether young people consider a career in policing. In Canada, negative aspects of policing have frequently been highlighted by mainstream media (Franklin et al., 2019), and this is unlikely to attract many people to the profession. For example, toxic culture (Bikos, 2017), police

brutality (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio, 2020), sexual harassment (Ayres, 2020), and systemic racism (Bowden, 2020) are common themes that the public are exposed to through the media and are an unfortunate reality in some police services.

### ***What do people look for in potential careers?***

Given the many reasons why young people may not want to become a police officer, how can police agencies draw people towards a career in this field? There are many possible answers to this question and given the multifaceted nature of the police shortage issue, no single response will be sufficient. Considering the widespread use of the Internet, one mechanism to effectively engage potential applicants is by targeting key job factors in recruitment material that Millennials (those born between 1980 and 1996) actually consider when thinking about career options. Existing literature highlights at least six job-seeking factors that are appealing to this group (see Table 1). While these factors are likely beneficial for all potential applicants, specific focus is placed on Millennials given that they are more likely to be seeking a career at this point in time (Gallup, 2016).

#### ***Financial stability and benefits***

Financial compensation is an important factor to take into consideration when deciding on a career. According to Gallup (2016), who compiled data from company surveys, indexes, and databases covering a demographic of over 24 million people, 48% of Millennials strongly consider financial compensation when looking for a new job, which is similar to 46% of the previous generation (i.e., Generation X; those born between 1965 and 1979). Given that the average salary in Canada in 2018, across all sectors, was \$55,806.40, the police industry has a competitive edge with an average salary of \$99,298 (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Other benefits, including pension plans, health insurance, vacation time, and parental leave have also been shown to be high on the list of ‘must-haves’ for individuals in the workforce. A survey conducted by Fractl asked 2,000 workers from the U.S. between 18 and 81 years old to rank 17 potential workplace benefits (Jones, 2017, February 15). The results showed that 88% of those surveyed assigned great importance to health, dental, and vision care, 80% value more vacation time, and 42% would benefit from paid parental leave. Furthermore, in a survey of 2,750 North American workers and retirees, it was noted that 78% of respondents rated pension plans and benefits as critically important when deciding whether or not to work for an organization (Dickie, 2018, April, p. 19). Somewhat surprisingly, in this survey, Millennials (82%) and Generation Xers (81%) appeared to value pension benefits even more than Baby Boomers (those born between 1945 and 1964; 74%) who are nearing their retirements. Like salaries, benefit packages in policing are often extremely attractive compared to many other employment sectors (Baldwin, 2015).

#### ***Good organizational reputation and management***

Reputations of organizations and their respective management teams can hold a lot of weight for potential job applicants. In a recent Gallup report (2016), quality of the management team was rated as extremely important by 58% of respondents who were in search of new employment or were

**Table 1.** Appealing job factors for millennials.

Factors	Sub-categories
Financial stability and benefits	Salary, overtime, premiums, pension, health, dental & vision care, paid parental leave, vacation
Good organizational reputation and management	Quality of management and leadership, reputation, values of organization
Job security	Guaranteed hours, long term job stability
Opportunity to develop	Continued education, promotions, opportunity to specialize
Flexibility	Working hours, work-life balance
Meaningful and fulfilling work	Opportunity to make a difference, helping others

newly employed. It was also important for younger generations to feel connected to the organization they work for and to know how their individual contributions fit into the productivity and accomplishments of their organization (Gallup, 2016). With respect to organizational reputation, this appears to also be critical when considering recruiting, not only because ‘job candidates appear to use reputation as a signal about job attributes’ (Cable & Turban, 2006, p. 2244), such as their belief that the job will provide good career paths, challenging and interesting work, and opportunities for new learning experiences, but also because ‘reputation affects the pride that individuals expect from organizational membership’ (p. 2244).

While we could locate little research that provided information about good management practices in policing, the available evidence suggests that Canadian police services are in a relatively good position to highlight their reputations when recruiting applicants. For example, the majority of Canadians appear to place a lot of trust in the institution of policing (Angus Reid Institute, 2016) and believe that police services are doing a good job (Cotter, 2015; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2019). That being said, a variety of factors, such as socio-economic status and contact with the police, appear to influence how people perceive the police in Canada (e.g., Chow, 2012).

### ***Job security***

When seeking employment, it is important to potential employees to know that the organization they are considering joining is not on the brink of closing its doors. Broadly speaking, job security has been found to be a primary reason why people choose their specific employer (Mercer, 2019), and this desire for job security is shared among Millennials and Generation Xers (Gallup, 2016). In the police context specifically, job security is a main motivator for people to pursue employment within policing (Elntib & Milincic, 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Schuck, 2020). Even with recent calls to defund the police, it is unlikely that police agencies will be closing their doors anytime soon, and the vast majority of Canadian police officers appear very satisfied with their job security (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012).

### ***Opportunities for development***

Many workers who are entering the workforce are Millennials and, unlike their older counterparts, they tend not to stay at the same job for the entire length of their career (Özçelik, 2015). Younger generations value opportunities to advance in their respective fields, with some rating this as more important than financial compensation (Gallup, 2016). As found by Gallup’s (2016) report, 87% of those surveyed prioritized the potential for professional development and advancement as very important when searching for employment. Similarly, according to Deloitte’s (2019) Millennial Survey, employees who were dissatisfied with their jobs and considered leaving their positions felt this way, in part at least, due to a lack of professional development opportunities. While more work certainly needs to be done to ensure that opportunities for development and advancement are available for all police officers, particularly female officers (Gau et al., 2013), police services have many opportunities for specialization (e.g., tactical team, forensic identification, etc.) and promotions that can be discussed in recruitment material (Cooper & Ingram, 2004; Toronto Police Service, 2020).

### ***Flexibility and work-life balance***

Younger generations appear to embrace a ‘work to live’ approach (Twenge et al., 2010). Preferring a more balanced lifestyle, these generations are reluctant to allow work to take over their lives, instead opting for more flexible work schedules and a greater focus on personal well-being (Gallup, 2016). In fact, job flexibility was ranked among the top three most important criteria when searching for a job in a recent study by Mercer (2019). As discussed above, balance is a challenge for many officers (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012); young people recognize this (Ipsos Reid, 2009) and see it as a barrier to a policing career (Lord & Friday, 2003). Police services need to continue

working on this issue and consider implementing strategies that have been proposed to alleviate work-life imbalance (e.g., see Duxbury & Higgins, 2012). Once such strategies are in place, police services should speak to these innovations in their recruitment material.

### ***Meaningful and fulfilling work***

Younger generations currently entering the workforce often want to do work that makes a difference. In fact, the ‘opportunity to make a difference’ was ranked among the most sought-after aspects of a career in a recent poll (Mercer, 2019). Studies examining motivations to pursue law enforcement careers find similar results, with altruistic motives (e.g., serving the community) being among the greatest motivators for those considering a job in this field (Schuck, 2020). While police work itself can be burdensome at times, officers are guaranteed variety and opportunities to make a difference (Gallup, 2016). Especially in the age of community-oriented policing, one simply needs to examine the sorts of activities that officers get involved in to get a sense of the contributions they can make – from traditional patrol, law enforcement, and investigation activities, to providing assistance to community members, problemsolving ways to tackle issues, and involvement in public events (Frank et al., 1997).

### ***Leveraging recruitment videos to convey important information about policing***

In 2007, Hay Group provided Canadian police agencies with recommendations to increase recruitment numbers, including widespread advertising (Hay Group, 2007). Although many advertising techniques exist, an effective way for police agencies in the technological age to attract potential applicants may be to have a well-established online presence since the Internet has been deemed the most influential resource for job information by younger generations (Castaneda & Ridgeway, 2010). Having a good online presence will allow potential applicants to see what is happening in their local police departments, obtain career-related information (e.g., salaries), and provide applicants with the opportunity to create a connection with the department of interest (Helldorfer, 2016).

One particularly useful way for police agencies to recruit applicants will be to use online recruitment videos. Indeed, such videos are arguably an ideal recruitment tool, which is why we have decided to focus on this strategy. We say this for three reasons. First, the public frequently access online material, especially younger people who will be considering career decisions (Lenhart et al., 2010). Second, this extends to the policing context, in that many people appear to access online material disseminated by police services (Ruddell & Jones, 2013). Third, most police services have a significant online presence (Hu et al., 2018), and this can generate interest in policing (Wood, 2020), especially if posted material includes video content (Hu et al., 2020).

Numerous Canadian police services actively use online recruitment videos. In this study, we examine the extent that recruitment videos reflect job-seeking factors identified as important in the literature. Rather than simply discussing the recruitment process or a typical day of police work, as many videos seem to do, police agencies need to ensure that what they are advertising is in fact what people seek in a potential job. If police agencies include this pertinent information in their recruitment strategies, such as the factors highlighted above, they may be able to increase job seekers’ motivation to apply.

## **Method**

### ***Materials***

#### ***Recruitment videos***

This study involves the examination of Canadian police recruitment videos currently available online. For the purpose of this study, a police recruitment video was defined as a video put online by

a specific police agency that includes information regarding the application process, a typical day on the job, eligibility criteria, values of the organization in question, and/or any other material used to attract potential applicants. The videos excluded from this study included those developed by police agencies that were not intended to be used as recruitment material, such as safety guides or media reports.

Police recruitment videos from all levels of policing in Canada (i.e., federal, provincial, municipal, Indigenous, and military) were examined.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to achieve an adequate sample, the official websites and social media platforms of 176 Canadian police services were searched. Of the 176 services, we could only find videos for 37 agencies (21%). The videos from all 37 agencies were included in the sample. When an agency had more than one video, the video with the most recent publication date was selected.

The mean length of the videos was 2 minutes and 14 seconds ( $SD = 1$  minute and 27 seconds), ranging from 30 seconds to 5 minutes and 54 seconds. The videos were produced between 2009 and 2020. Approximately 35% ( $n = 13$ ) of the videos were available on the agency's official website, while 65% ( $n = 24$ ) were available on social media platforms (e.g., YouTube). When examining the method in which the recruitment message was delivered, 24% ( $n = 9$ ) of sampled videos used narration, 38% ( $n = 14$ ) utilized written text, approximately 5% ( $n = 2$ ) used a combination of narration and written text, and 51% ( $n = 19$ ) included interviews with police and/or civilian members. A majority of videos (60%,  $n = 22$ ) prompted video viewers to visit the police service's website for further information.

### **Coding table, dictionary, and scoring**

According to the literature review, six job-seeking factors are often considered by those looking to begin a career. Each job-seeking factor also has distinct sub-categories that help to define the main factor (see Table 1). These job-seeking factors include: *financial compensation and benefits*, *good organizational reputation and management*, *job security*, *opportunities for development*, *flexibility*, and *meaningful and fulfilling work*. Using a coding table and an associated coding dictionary, which is available on the Open Science Framework,<sup>2</sup> each video was coded to evaluate whether the associated sub-categories were included in the video. The aggregate score of the job-seeking factor's respective sub-categories will be used to evaluate whether or not the factors are adequately portrayed in the videos.

The sub-categories for each job factor were coded as either absent (0) or present (1). To be deemed present, the sub-category had to be mentioned verbally, shown in writing, or presented in the form of an example of the sub-category. Next, each sub-category was coded for whether it was simply mentioned or shown explicitly. A sub-category was coded as explicitly portrayed if a narrator clearly presented information about the sub-category in question (e.g., for the sub-category *opportunity to make a difference*, a police officer stating 'every time I go to work, I make a difference in my community'), or if the words were shown in the video (e.g., 'make a difference in your community'). If the sub-category was explicitly portrayed in the video it received a score of 1, otherwise a score of 0 was assigned to the sub-category.

Finally, the sub-category was scored on how well it was portrayed (i.e., its quality) in the video using a scale from 0 to 3. If the sub-category was not present in the video, it automatically received a score of 0. For a score of 1, the sub-category had to be present, but not explicitly portrayed. For example, for the sub-category of *helping others*, a police officer might be shown assisting a small child, but at no point was *helping others* explicitly said or shown in writing (i.e., the quality of *helping others* had to be inferred by the viewer). For a score of 2, the sub-category had to be present and explicitly mentioned, but details or examples were lacking. For example, for the sub-category *continued education*, the video narrator might state that officers at a particular agency receive training to keep up with the most current policing guidelines no details are provided regarding the type of training and nothing is shown pertaining to continued education and training. To achieve a score of 3 for quality, the sub-category had to be

present, explicit, and details and/or examples had to be provided to enhance the portrayal. For example, for the sub-category *opportunity to move laterally and specialize*, the words ‘various specializations’ might be shown in the video while examples were being presented of specialized units, such as canine squads, tactical teams, or forensic identification. A quality score of 1 was considered poor, a score of 2 was considered good, and a score of 3 was considered excellent.

### **Procedure**

Each video was viewed by a ‘master’ coder in five-second increments to allow proper coding of factors and their sub-categories using the coding table and dictionary. A random subsample of the videos ( $n = 12$ , 32.4%) was coded by a second trained coder to ensure the coding table and dictionary could be used reliably. The size of the sub-sample we used for establishing inter-rater reliability (IRR) exceeds that used in other research, where selecting 20% of the total sample is common (Syed & Nelson, 2015). Cohen’s kappa was used to calculate IRR for the nominally coded variables (e.g., presence/absence) and intra-class correlation coefficients (ICC) were calculated for ordinal and count variables (e.g., quality).<sup>3</sup> Prevalence-adjusted kappa<sup>4</sup> was used as needed (Byrt et al., 1993). SPSS version 26 was used for all calculations (IBM Corp, 2018). The outcomes of the IRR analyses are reported in the Results section.

### **Study calculations**

Three calculations were computed for each video. First, each of the six job-seeking factors received overall scores for both presence and quality. This involved summing the values the video received on each of the sub-categories for both presence of the factor and its quality. An average quality score in the range of 0 to 1.4 was considered poor, an average score in the range of 1.5 to 2.4 was considered good, and an average score between 2.5 and 3 was considered excellent. Second, in order to examine the extent to which each job-seeking factor is present in the sample of videos, and the quality of its presentation, we calculated average presence and quality scores for *each* job-seeking factor across all of the recruitment videos. Third, in order to examine the extent to which the sample of videos contained all six job-seeking factors we took the average of *all* of the six job-seeking factors’ presence and quality scores combined respectively, across all of the videos. A score in the range of 0 to 1.4 was considered poor, an average score in the range of 1.5 to 2.4 was considered good, and an average score between 2.5 and 3 was considered excellent. Given that the study aims are addressed by the second and third calculations, we will present the results of these analyses below.

## **Results**

We first describe each of the six job-seeking factors and discuss the extent to which each of their respective sub-categories are present in the sampled videos, the quality of their portrayal if they are present, and the corresponding IRR.<sup>5</sup> We then present the extent to which all six job-seeking factors were present and their corresponding quality.

### **Financial compensation and benefits**

The category *financial compensation and benefits* was poorly represented in the recruitment videos. The *salary* sub-category was present in only one of the 37 videos (2.70%), it was explicitly presented, and it received a score of 2 (good) on quality. *Health benefits* were discussed in two of the videos (5.41%), this was done explicitly, and the quality of the presentations was good. None of the 37 videos in the sample covered any of the remaining sub-categories (i.e., *overtime*, *premiums*, *pensions*, *paid parental leave*, and *vacation*) and therefore, they received scores of 0 for presentation,



explicitness, and quality. The IRR was perfect for ratings of presence, explicitness, and quality for all of this factor's sub-categories ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ,  $PA\kappa = 1.00$ ,  $ICC = 1.00$ , respectively).

Overall, only two videos addressed at least one of the seven sub-categories related to *financial compensation and benefits*. Therefore, the average presence of this factor across all sampled videos was very low ( $M = 0.08/7$  sub-categories,  $SD = 0.36$ ). The total average quality ratings for *financial compensation and benefits* across all videos was also poor ( $M = 0.02/3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.10$ ). As above, IRR was perfect for the overall presence and quality ratings for *financial compensation and benefits* ( $PA\kappa = 1.00$  and  $ICC = 1.00$ , respectively).

### **Good organizational reputation and management**

With respect to *good organizational reputation and management*, the *quality of management and leadership* sub-category was portrayed in 40.51% of videos ( $n = 15$ ); only 16.22% of all videos ( $n = 6$ ) made this message explicit. The average quality for the 15 videos that portrayed *quality of management and leadership* was good ( $M = 1.67$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). Similarly, *values of the organization* was mentioned in 14 videos (37.84%), all of which made this message explicit, and the average quality of the message was excellent ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). In contrast to the other sub-categories, *reputation* was present in 92% ( $n = 34$ ) of the videos sampled, however, only six of the sampled videos (16.22%) made this explicit. The average quality for the 34 videos that portrayed *reputation* was poor ( $M = 1.29$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ). The IRR was strong for ratings of presence ( $\kappa = 0.83$ ), moderate for explicitness ( $PA\kappa = 0.66$ ), and good for quality ( $ICC = 0.80$ ) for the sub-category *values of the organization*. IRR was perfect for ratings of presence, explicitness, and quality for the sub-category *reputation* ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ,  $PA\kappa = 1.00$ , and  $ICC = 1.00$ , respectively). For *quality of management and leadership*, there was minimal reliability for presence ( $\kappa = 0.25$ ), moderate reliability for explicitness ( $\kappa = 0.62$ ), and poor reliability for quality ( $ICC = 0.34$ ).

Overall, *good organizational reputation and management* was present in many of the videos, with at least one sub-category of this factor being present in nearly 92% ( $n = 34$ ) of videos included in the sample. The total average presence of references to *good organizational reputation and management* across all videos sampled was good ( $M = 1.81/3.00$  sub-categories,  $SD = 0.83$ ). The total average quality of references to *good organizational reputation and management* across all videos was poor ( $M = 0.98/3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ). The IRR for this job-seeking factor was strong for presence ( $\kappa = 0.80$ ) and good for quality ( $ICC = 0.75$ ).

### **Job security**

With respect to *job security*, the *long-term job stability* sub-category was discussed in only one of the 37 sampled videos (2.70%). This video made this message explicit and received a score of 2 for quality (i.e., good). However, none of the 37 videos (0%) in the sample discussed *guaranteed work hours*. The IRR was perfect for ratings of presence, explicitness, and quality for the sub-categories of *long-term job stability* and *guaranteed hours* ( $PA\kappa = 1.00$ ,  $PA\kappa = 1.00$ , and  $ICC = 1.00$ , respectively, for both).

Overall, only one of the sampled videos addressed at least one of the sub-categories related to *job-security*. The average presence of *job security* across all videos sampled was poor ( $M = 0.03/2$  sub-categories,  $SD = 0.16$ ). The total average quality of references to *job security* across all videos was also poor ( $M = 0.03/3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.16$ ). The IRR for *job security* was perfect for presence ( $PA\kappa = 1.00$ ) and quality ( $ICC = 1.00$ ).

### **Opportunities for development**

With respect to *opportunities for development*, the possibility of *promotions* was mentioned in 10.81% of videos ( $n = 4$ ) and all mentions of this sub-category were explicit. The average quality for

the four videos that portrayed the possibility of *promotions* was good ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). Similarly, *continued education* was portrayed in 16.22% ( $n = 6$ ) of the sampled recruitment videos. Four of the sampled videos referred to this sub-category explicitly. The average quality of the portrayal of *continued education* for these six videos was good ( $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). In contrast to the two other sub-categories, *opportunity to specialize and move laterally* was present in 24 of the 37 videos (65%). However, only 13 of the sampled videos (35%) made this message explicit. The average quality of the portrayal of *opportunity to specialize and move laterally* for these 24 videos was good ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). IRR was perfect for ratings of presence, explicitness, and quality for the sub-categories of *promotions* ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ,  $\kappa = 1.00$ , and  $ICC = 1.00$ , respectively). IRR was moderate for ratings of presence, explicitness, and quality for the sub-categories of *continued education* ( $\kappa = 0.62$ ,  $PA\kappa = 0.70$ , and  $ICC = 0.73$ , respectively). The IRR was strong for presence and explicitness for the sub-category *opportunities to specialize and move laterally* ( $\kappa = 0.88$  and  $\kappa = 0.85$ , respectively), and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.91$ ).

Overall, at least one of this factor's sub-categories was present in nearly 68% ( $n = 25$ ) of the videos included in the sample. However, the average presence of *opportunities for development* across all videos sampled was poor ( $M = 0.97/3.00$  sub-categories,  $SD = 0.79$ ). The total average quality of *opportunities for development* across all videos was also poor ( $M = 0.63/3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). The IRR for *opportunities for development* was good for presence ( $\kappa = 0.84$ ) and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.90$ ).

### **Flexibility**

With respect to *flexibility*, *flexible working hours* was mentioned in only one of the 37 sampled videos (2.70%). This video explicitly portrayed this message and received a score of 3 (i.e., excellent) for quality. Similarly, *balance* was present in only two of the 37 police recruitment videos (5.41%). These videos also made this message explicit and received scores of 2 (i.e., good), and 3 (i.e., excellent) for quality. The IRR was perfect for ratings of presence and explicitness for the sub-categories of *flexible working hours* ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ,  $\kappa = 1.00$ , respectively), and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.94$ ). For *balance*, IRR was almost perfect for ratings of presence and explicitness ( $PA\kappa = 0.92$  and  $PA\kappa = 0.96$ , respectively), and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.90$ , respectively).

Overall, *flexibility* was presented in three of the 37 videos (8.11%). The total average presence of *flexibility* across all videos sampled was therefore poor ( $M = 0.08/2$  sub-categories,  $SD = 0.27$ ). The total average quality of *flexibility* across all videos was also poor ( $M = 0.11/3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ). The IRR for ratings of *flexibility* was near perfect for presence ( $\kappa = 0.97$ ) and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.96$ ).

### **Meaningful and fulfilling work**

With respect to *meaningful and fulfilling work*, *opportunity to make a difference* was present in 78.38% of sampled videos ( $n = 29$ ). Twenty-six of the sampled videos (70.27%) made this message explicit. The average quality of the portrayal of *opportunity to make a difference* for these 26 videos was excellent ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). In contrast, 20 of the 37 (54.05%) videos mentioned *helping others*, and 13 of the videos (35.14%) explicitly portrayed this. The average quality of the portrayal of *helping others* for these twenty videos was good ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ). The IRR for *opportunity to make a difference* was strong for ratings of presence and explicitness ( $\kappa = 0.81$  and  $\kappa = 0.88$ , respectively), and good for quality ( $ICC = 0.84$ ). For the sub-category of *helping others*, the IRR was almost perfect for ratings of presence and explicitness ( $\kappa = 0.91$  and  $\kappa = 0.92$ , respectively), and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.95$ ).

Overall, at least one sub-category related to *meaningful and fulfilling work* was portrayed in 33 of the 37 sampled videos (89.19%). The total average presence of *meaningful and fulfilling work* across all videos sampled was good ( $M = 1.38/2$  sub-categories,  $SD = 0.63$ ). The total average quality of

*meaningful and fulfilling work* across all videos was poor ( $M = 1.59/3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). The IRR for *meaningful and fulfilling work* was strong for presence ( $\kappa = 0.85$ ) and excellent for quality ( $ICC = 0.90$ ).

### Overall representation of all job-seeking factors

The average presence of all six job-seeking factors across all sampled videos was poor ( $M = 1.37/6$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ), as was the average quality ( $M = 0.45/3$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ). These results are summarized in Table 2. Each of the six job-seeking factors had strong to perfect IRR and the overall IRR of the coding dictionary revealed a strong degree of reliability ( $PA\kappa = 0.88$ ).

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to determine the degree to which online police recruitment videos focused on factors that are considered by young people contemplating their career choices. We were specifically interested in the degree to which six job-seeking factors were highlighted in these videos, and how these factors were highlighted. These job-seeking factors included *financial compensation and benefits*, *good organizational reputation and management*, *job security*, *opportunities for development*, *flexibility*, and *meaningful and fulfilling work*. Below, we discuss our results and highlight several study limitations.

### The surprising number of online recruitment videos

The first important finding had nothing to do with how the job-seeking factors were incorporated into the online recruitment videos, but how few online recruitment videos we could identify. Of the 176 Canadian police agencies we examined, only 21% ( $n = 37$ ) had recruitment videos on their website or social media pages. Further, many of the police agencies (65%) do not host their official recruitment video on their website, instead posting it on a social media platform (e.g., YouTube). Given that recruitment videos are able to provide a lot of information to potential applicants, reach an extremely large audience, and leverage the sorts of technology that young people use to locate

**Table 2.** Summary of the presence and quality of job-seeking factors in the sampled videos.

Job-seeking factors (JSF)	Overall presence of each JSF in all sampled recruitment videos	Overall quality of each JSF's portrayal in all sampled recruitment videos
Financial compensation and benefits	1.16% $M = 0.08/7$ ( $SD = 0.36$ )	0.77% $M = 0.02/3.00$ ( $SD = 0.10$ )
Good organizational reputation and management	60.36% $M = 1.81/3$ ( $SD = 0.83$ )	32.73% $M = 0.98/3.00$ ( $SD = 0.73$ )
Job security	1.35% $M = 0.03/2$ ( $SD = 0.16$ )	0.90% $M = 0.03/3.00$ ( $SD = 0.16$ )
Opportunities for development	32.43% $M = 0.97/3$ ( $SD = 0.79$ )	21.02% $M = 0.63/3.00$ ( $SD = 0.67$ )
Flexibility	4.05% $M = 0.08/2$ ( $SD = 0.27$ )	3.60% $M = 0.11/3.00$ ( $SD = 0.37$ )
Meaningful and fulfilling work	68.92% $M = 1.38/2$ ( $SD = 0.63$ )	53.15% $M = 1.59/3.00$ ( $SD = 1.00$ )
<i>Total average presence and quality of all JSFs in all sampled videos</i>	22.90% $M = 1.37/6$ ( $SD = 1.72$ )	14.84% $M = 0.45/3$ ( $SD = 0.59$ )

and consume information, it would be in every agency's best interest to have an online recruitment video and make these videos easy to find. By actively making such videos available, it may encourage job seekers to consider a career in policing and increase the attendance at important recruitment events.

### **The coding dictionary and its reliability**

A second important finding is that a coding dictionary could be developed to reliably capture the content of online recruitment videos. Only very few of the sub-categories of the six main job-seeking factors identified in our literature review (e.g., *quality of management*) could not be coded reliably, suggesting that these are particularly subjective factors that can be interpreted differently by different coders. The fact that such coding can be carried out successfully in the vast majority of cases is a positive finding and suggests that other researchers, and police agencies themselves, can undertake similar coding tasks to ensure that recruitment videos are conveying desired messages to potential applicants.

### **The presence and quality of job-seeking factors in the recruitment videos**

The third important finding relates to the results from our content analysis. When our coding framework was applied to the 37 recruitment videos, we found that they rarely highlighted the six job-seeking factors described in our review, and when they did, quality concerns were common. Although this did vary across the factors we examined, this is cause for concern given how much attention potential applicants seem to place on these factors. To be clear, we are not suggesting these factors are the only issues that need to be focused on for police recruitment to be successful. We are simply highlighting that ignoring these factors in recruitment videos may prevent the police from delivering persuasive messages about the actual benefits of a policing career.

One of the obvious questions that needs to be addressed is why online recruitment videos do not focus on these factors. There are a number of possibilities. Canadian police services may not be aware of the issues young people consider when contemplating their career choices, and therefore they do not know there may be value in speaking to these issues. Additionally, police services may feel that information related to the job-seeking factors is already adequately addressed in other parts of their recruitment strategy (e.g., in-person recruitment events). Moreover, some of the job-seeking factors (e.g., job security) may not be explicitly mentioned in the videos because police services assume that potential job applicants will understand they are a core part of the policing profession. Finally, it may be difficult for police services to portray some factors in their videos (e.g., work-life balance issues, given that police services struggle with this).

### **Recommendations**

We believe that most of the factors discussed in this study can be incorporated into police recruitment videos and doing so may increase the applicant pool. Below we provide some examples as to how each one of the job factors could be addressed in police recruitment videos. First, *financial compensation and benefits* would be easy to highlight by having someone in the video discuss the competitive salary and benefits that officers receive. *Good organizational reputation and management* could be highlighted by having lower ranking officers or civilians discuss the presence of strong leaders in their agency or by having a senior officer discuss their commitment to core organizational values. With respect to *job security*, agencies can point out that officers are guaranteed work hours and that given policing's essential role within society this is unlikely to change. Further, for *opportunities for development*, large agencies can emphasize available specializations and promotional opportunities, whereas smaller agencies (where specialized units may not exist) can stress the many opportunities that officers will experience given that they will likely be taking on

multiple roles simultaneously (e.g., patrol and investigations). *Flexibility* and *work–life balance* may be the most challenging to address. However, while it would be important to stress the demanding nature of the job, agencies can also identify ways they are trying to address work–life balance issues. For example, if an agency has a fitness center (e.g., Arora, 2019), has adopted efficient shift schedules (e.g., Amendola et al., 2011), or has done anything to minimize work demands (e.g., developing alternative response units to minimize pressure on patrol; e.g., Crosier, 2019), they can emphasize these things. Finally, *meaningful and fulfilling work* is already addressed in many videos; however, an example of how this could be done is by depicting officers helping their community.

### **Study limitations**

There are several limitations in the current study that should be considered. First, the coding of the recruitment videos was limited in various ways, which restricts our understanding of their potential value. For example, the coding in the current study was completely deductive (i.e., we applied a pre-set coding scheme to the videos), and therefore it did not capture much of the content included in the videos. Therefore, we cannot speak to what was included in the videos beyond the six job-seeking factors we focused on. A more inductive (i.e., data-driven) approach to coding could be adopted in future studies to address this issue.

Another limitation was the sample size. Relatively few online recruitment videos could be found. While an important finding in its own right, this means that we have to be careful about generalizing the results from this study to other jurisdictions. While this is not an issue within Canada, given that we believe our sample adequately represents the population of videos available, we urge caution when generalizing our findings to videos that are available outside of Canada.

Finally, we cannot speak to what Canadian police services are doing in their broader recruitment efforts beyond the online recruitment videos we examined. Police services rely on a number of recruitment strategies, including career fairs, in-person information sessions, recruitment-related website content, and so on. While we believe that online recruitment videos should be a key part of any recruitment strategy, the generally poor results reported above should not be taken as evidence that any police service's recruitment efforts are ineffective.

### **Future directions**

Below, we focus on avenues for future research given the limited research currently available on police recruitment videos. Once the issues highlighted below have been addressed, it will be possible to provide police services with more concrete recommendations for how they can improve their recruitment efforts. We focus on issues that go beyond addressing the sorts of limitations described above.

First, given that police agencies are trying to recruit applicants from diverse backgrounds (e.g., women, BIPOC, members of the LGBTQ2S+ community), further research should be conducted to assess the job-seeking factors that are important to these applicants. There is an assumption in our study that the same factors are important for all applicants, and this might not be true. For example, a study conducted by Schuck (2020) found that Black and Latino officers are more likely to respond to recruitment messages that emphasize the altruistic and financial aspects of a career. Another study conducted by Linos (2018) found that recruitment messaging that emphasizes the challenges of the job or career benefits is not only more effective than public service motivation messages but are also particularly effective for BIPOC and women. Understanding what motivates certain types of individuals to pursue a career in policing will be important and can be built into recruitment strategies.

Second, we recommend that research examines *how* police recruitment messages should be delivered, not just *what* messages are delivered. For example, it would be valuable to consider the characteristics of message deliverers including, but not limited to, their gender, race, age, and role/rank within the agency. Various features of a message deliverer can have a significant impact on

how messages are received (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), but we know of no research on this topic in the policing domain. It would also be important to consider how the characteristics of the message deliverer interact with the characteristics of the message receiver when considering the effectiveness of police recruitment messages.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, once greater clarity is achieved on the above issues and police services start to implement new recruitment strategies, they should carefully evaluate those efforts to determine their effect (compared to a pre-established baseline level of effect). This sort of tracking of police initiatives is rare (Huey et al., 2017), but such data will be critical to determine if changes to video content are having their intended effect.

## Conclusion

This study examined whether Canadian police recruitment videos address some of the factors that Millennials look for when making career-related decisions. The results found that, on average, both the presence and quality of these job-seeking factors in the sampled recruitment videos were lacking. These findings may negatively impact the power that these videos can have in altering the attitudes of viewers towards a career in policing or actual job applications. Our hope is that this study represents an important first step toward creating an evidence-based model to maximize the potential of online police recruitment videos.

## Notes

1. Railway policing recruitment videos were not included in the sample as none could be found online.
2. <https://osf.io/3qkdp/>
3. For Cohen's kappa, values  $\leq 0.20$  indicate no reliability, values between 0.21–0.39 indicate minimal reliability, values between 0.40–0.59 indicate weak reliability, values between 0.60–0.79 indicate moderate reliability, values between 0.80–0.90 indicate strong reliability, and values  $\geq 0.91$  indicate almost perfect reliability, with a value of 1.00 indicating perfect reliability (McHugh, 2012). For ICC, values  $\leq 0.5$  indicate poor reliability, values between 0.5–0.75 indicate moderate reliability, values between 0.75–0.9 indicate good reliability, and values  $\geq 0.90$  indicate excellent reliability, with a value of 1.00 indicating perfect reliability (Koo & Li, 2016).
4. Seeing as though kappa is highly dependent on the prevalence of measured variables, and many of the sub-categories were absent from the sampled videos, this metric could not always accurately measure IRR. Prevalence-adjusted kappa reduces the penalty of chance agreements thereby providing a more accurate representation of IRR (Sim & Wright, 2005). Prevalence-adjusted kappa is measured on the same scale as kappa and interpreted the same way.
5. The results presented are the coding completed by the first author as the IRR was quite high in most cases and it was decided through discussion that the author's coding was most accurate.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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