

# Anxiety in the workplace can lead to lower job performance

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John Trougakos is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior and HR Management in the Department of Management at University of Toronto Scarborough, with a cross-appointment to the Organizational Behaviour area at the University's Rotman School of Management. Credit: University of Toronto Scarborough

The effect of workplace anxiety on job performance is closely connected to the quality of relationships between employees, their bosses and their co-workers, according to a new study from the University of Toronto focusing on police officers.

U of T Scarborough and Rotman School of Management professors Julie McCarthy and John Trougakos, along with Bonnie Cheng from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, explored the effects of workplace anxiety among officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), a national police service. They found the high levels of [emotional exhaustion](#) that come from workplace anxiety can directly lead to lower job performance.

"Workplace anxiety is a serious concern not only for employee health and well-being, but also for an organization's bottom-line," says Trougakos, an expert on organizational behaviour.

It's no secret that [police officers](#)' work in high stress environments - not only do they confront violent offenders, crime scenes, and victims of abuse and death, they can also experience immense public suspicion and scrutiny. It's a challenging role especially while focusing on serving and protecting the public.

"Police officers, like all of us, have a finite amount of resources they can draw on to cope with the demands of their job," says McCarthy, an expert on work-life integration and stress management. "If these resources are depleted then high levels of workplace anxiety will lead to emotional exhaustion and this will ultimately affect [job performance](#)."

The study, which involved surveying 267 RCMP officers from across Canada, also found that the quality of relationships officers have with their peers and supervisors can help reduce the potentially harmful effects of workplace anxiety.

Supervisors and co-workers who are empathetic and provide emotional support by listening to their peers go a long way in fostering a positive work environment, notes McCarthy. These kinds of strong interpersonal relations are built on high levels of understanding and trust, which allows individual needs to be met.

"Our findings highlight the importance of programs that allow employees to recover, build resilience and develop strong social support networks in the workplace," she says.

Statistics about anxiety in the modern workplace are alarming, with one survey showing 41 per cent of employees from a range of industries reporting high levels of anxiety in the workplace. The hope, McCarthy says, is to highlight the importance of having strong [social support networks](#) not only in high-stress occupations, but in any line of work.

"Organizations like the RCMP have taken great strides in developing techniques to buffer the effects of anxiety among their officers," says McCarthy. "Our hope is that this research will trigger conversations among other organizations about the debilitating effects of a stressed-out workplace and the importance of developing strategies to help workers cope with workplace anxiety."

The research is available online and will be published in the upcoming edition of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

**More information:** *Journal of Applied Psychology*,  
[psycnet.apa.org/psycarticles/2015-36862-001](http://psycnet.apa.org/psycarticles/2015-36862-001)

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