

OPP Suicides

EDITORIAL

Another police officer has recently committed suicide, this time in the Kanata detachment of the Ottawa OPP.

While no reason or method was publicly given, his death represents the 13th suicide of an active or retired member of the OPP since 2012.

Last year, shortly before he retired, OPP Commissioner Vince Hawkes ordered an internal review of suicides within his provincial force, giving the task to two high-ranking officers with a wealth of investigative experience

The result and conclusion of that investigation, expected sometime in early April, is needed now more than ever.

For one thing, it's been too long in coming.

Back in 2012, then Ontario Ombudsman Andre Marin conducted the biggest investigation his office had ever undertaken to get to the bottom of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) within the force which seemed like an epidemic among OPP officers, and was too often looked upon by senior officers and unit commanders as a weakness among those who couldn't 'suck it up and buck up.'

At the time of Marin's report, which he credited to an award-winning series in the Toronto Sun for getting his attention, 23 OPP officers had committed suicide since 1989?which was two more than those killed on duty.

It was a real eye-opener.

Despite a lengthy analysis of the causes and expectant reaction to being afflicted with PTSD, and recommendations to assist officers in their treatment, it would seem obvious from the outside looking in that not enough was done.

Did the OPP simply let Marin's report gather dust on a shelf, or did it truly try to address the problem?

There may be some truth to complaints from with the OPP's union that officers are over-worked because of understaffed detachments who have to answer to their municipalities when it comes to their funding.

But the OPP does not have to bargain for its funds because the tax on the municipality is not negotiable.

It is what it is.

So, what then is at the root of what would appear to be an epidemic within the provincial force?

It takes a certain mindset to be a frontline police officer. It's not for those with a weak stomach or paper-thin sensitivities.

The job can be ugly. Ugly things are witnessed.

Is it the fault of the selection process that people who can't handle the stress of witnessing tragedies of all sorts are wrongly hired?hence the suicide crisis.

Is it not taking PSST seriously enough?

The internal review ordered by Hawkes will hopefully shed some informative light on the scenario.

It cannot afford to not.