

# Heart behind the Helmet: Lived Experiences of Career Firefighters

Aizle F. Eres

College of Criminal Justice Education, Guimaras State University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400411>

Received: 16 April 2026; Accepted: 21 April 2026; Published: 12 May 2026

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of career firefighters during firefighting operations at the Jordan Fire Station in the Province of Guimaras. Specifically, it examined their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations in real-life emergency situations. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to capture the depth and meaning of the participants' lived experiences. The study involved five (5) Bureau of Fire Protection personnel selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews using a validated interview guide and were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework.

The findings revealed that firefighters are constantly exposed to high-risk and life-threatening situations, including physical danger and traumatic incidents, which significantly impact their emotional and psychological well-being. Despite these challenges, participants expressed a strong sense of fulfillment derived from serving the public and saving lives. However, they also encountered operational and environmental constraints, such as limited resources, inadequate manpower, and accessibility issues, which affect their efficiency in responding to emergencies. In coping with these challenges, firefighters rely on camaraderie, personal resilience, and organizational support mechanisms such as debriefing and mentorship. Furthermore, the study found that firefighters aspire for continuous professional growth, improved resources, and better institutional support, alongside personal goals related to financial stability and self-development.

In conclusion, the study highlights that while firefighters demonstrate resilience and dedication, there is a pressing need for enhanced psychological support, resource allocation, and training programs to sustain their well-being and operational effectiveness. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the human dimension of firefighting, particularly in a provincial context.

**Keywords:** Firefighters, Lived Experiences, Thematic Analysis, Occupational Challenges, Coping Mechanisms

## INTRODUCTION

Firefighters are understood as protective service workers whose role goes beyond extinguishing flames (Igboanugo et al., 2021). The International Labour Organization (2012) describes firefighters as workers who prevent, fight, and extinguish fires, assist in other emergencies, protect life and property, and conduct rescue efforts. In the Philippine context, firefighters are formally defined through the mandate of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP). Republic Act No. 11589 states that the BFP is responsible for preventing and suppressing destructive fires, responding to natural or man-made disasters, conducting rescue operations, handling medical emergencies, and containing hazardous materials.

De Castro and Cabarrubias (2023) found that BFP officers in Dagupan City described firefighting as a profession that shaped their identity while also exposing them to danger, work-life imbalance, lack of manpower, inadequate equipment, and limited emotional support. Similarly, Amorcillo et al. (2024) reported that firefighters in Misamis Occidental experienced fear, responsibility, emotional strain, and concern over negligence and inadequate protective equipment during fire incidents. Moreover, Sablan et al. (2025) showed that female fire officers in Samar balanced job satisfaction and resilience with barriers such as underrepresentation, staffing shortages, equipment deficiencies, and emotional strain.

Furthermore, Heydari et al. (2021) explored firefighters' resilience and argued that resilience is not merely an individual trait but a combination of physical, mental, occupational, and organizational factors. Likewise, Topçu et al. (2025) found that firefighters with higher post-traumatic stress symptoms experienced re-experiencing, avoidance, hyperarousal, lower occupational functioning, and a greater need for social support. In the same vein, Campbell et al. (2025) showed that organizational sentiment among New Zealand firefighters improved when interventions addressed leadership visibility, workload, and workplace connection rather than focusing only on individual coping.

Additionally, Achmat et al. (2024) found that career firefighters in Cape Town with coronary heart disease risk factors were often insufficiently physically active and needed better workplace guidance and mental health support. Meanwhile, Rosca et al. (2021) found that job demands were positively associated with emotional exhaustion among Romanian firefighters, while work meaning reduced that exhaustion and softened the impact of pressure. Similarly, Llorens et al. (2022) found that organizational demands in Portuguese fire brigades were associated with higher burnout and lower work engagement, whereas proactive coping related to better well-being. Finally, Wolffe et al. (2023) found that UK firefighters exposed to trauma, high stress, disrupted sleep, and contaminant-related practices were more likely to report mental health problems, with sleep issues strongly associated with anxiety and depression.

Studies have examined the experiences of firefighters in various contexts, there remains a significant gap in localized and phenomenological research within the Philippine setting. Previous studies have primarily focused on broader occupational challenges such as stress, resilience, and organizational factors among firefighters, often conducted in urban or international contexts.

Furthermore, studies conducted in the Philippines have explored the experiences of firefighters in selected cities and regions, emphasizing issues such as inadequate equipment, emotional strain, and work-related risks. However, there is limited research focusing specifically on firefighters assigned in provincial or island municipalities such as Guimaras, where geographic isolation, limited resources, and unique community dynamics may significantly influence their experiences. Thus, existing literature lacks contextual depth in understanding how these factors shape firefighters' daily realities in such settings.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by focusing on active Bureau of Fire Protection personnel assigned at the Jordan Fire Station in the Municipality of Jordan, Province of Guimaras. Specifically, it seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of career firefighters during firefighting operations, including their perceived meanings, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations. By doing so, the study contributes a localized, experience-based perspective that enriches the existing body of knowledge and provides deeper insight into the human dimension behind firefighting service in a provincial Philippine context.

## Statement Of the Problem

This study aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of career firefighters during firefighting operations at the Jordan Fire Station in the Province of Guimaras. Specifically, it seeks to capture the meanings, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations of firefighters as they perform their duties in real-life emergency situations.

In particular, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants during firefighting operations?
2. What challenges do the participants encounter in the course of firefighting operations?
3. How do the participants cope with the challenges they experience during firefighting operations?
4. What aspirations do the participants hold regarding their roles in firefighting operations?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. This is an approach that focuses on understanding human experiences, perceptions, and meanings through in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives. Moreover, qualitative research emphasizes context, subjectivity, and interpretation, allowing researchers to uncover the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals (Firmin et al., 2018). Additionally, phenomenological qualitative studies specifically aim to describe how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, providing deeper insights into human behavior and emotions (Dahal et al., 2024).

In this study, a qualitative research design was employed to explore the lived experiences of firefighters during firefighting operations. Specifically, the phenomenological approach enabled the researchers to capture the personal narratives, emotions, and interpretations of the participants regarding their roles and challenges. Furthermore, this design facilitated an in-depth understanding of how firefighters perceive and cope with real-life situations in their profession.

The researchers acknowledged their positionality as human engage in the field of criminal justice, which may influence the interpretation of participants' narratives. To minimize bias, bracketing was employed by setting aside personal assumptions and focusing on the participants lived experiences throughout data collection and analysis.

### Participants of the Study

Participants in a research study refer to the individuals who provide the necessary data and insights relevant to the research objectives. In qualitative research, participants are often selected based on their direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation, ensuring the richness and relevance of the data collected. Furthermore, purposive sampling is commonly used to identify participants who are knowledgeable and capable of providing meaningful information about the study (Campbell et al., 2020). In addition, having a smaller number of participants is acceptable in qualitative studies, as the focus is on depth rather than generalization (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In this study, the participants consisted of five (5) selected Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel assigned at the Jordan Fire Station in Guimaras. Specifically, the study involved a small group of firefighters who were chosen based on their direct involvement in firefighting operations and their ability to share relevant experiences. Moreover, the number of participants was limited to ensure in-depth data collection and detailed analysis of their lived experiences. The participants varied in terms of rank, role, and years of service, providing diverse perspectives on firefighting operations while preserving anonymity. Therefore, the selected participants provided valuable insights into the challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations within firefighting operations.

Participant Profile Table						
Participant	Rank	Age	Sex	Civil Status	Years Service in	Current Role / Assignment
P1	SFO1	36	Male	Married	13 years	Acting Chief, Investigation & Intelligence Unit / Firefighter
P2	FO2	Not specified	Male	Single	8 years	Firefighter / Ambulance Team Member
P3	FO1	Not specified	Male	Married	5 year 3 months	Firefighter

P4	FO2	38	Male	Not specified	9–10 years	Fire Arson Investigator / Driver/ Firefighter
P5	Not specified	Not specified	Female	Single (with children)	8 years	RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) / Firefighter

### Research Instrument

A research instrument is a tool used by researchers to collect data systematically and accurately. In qualitative studies, interview guides are widely used instruments that consist of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses from participants. Moreover, a validated interview guide undergoes expert review to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the data collected (Naz et al., 2022). Additionally, validation ensures that the instrument effectively captures the intended information without bias or ambiguity (Teixeira et al., 2024).

In this study, a validated semi-structured interview guide was utilized as the primary data collection instrument. The guide contained open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely express their lived experiences while maintaining consistency across interviews. Furthermore, the instrument was reviewed by experts to ensure its validity and appropriateness for the research objectives. As a result, the validated interview guide enabled the researchers to gather comprehensive and meaningful data relevant to the firefighters’ experiences.

### Data Gathering

First, the researchers prepared and sent a formal letter requesting permission to conduct the study to the Regional Office of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP). This step was necessary to secure official approval before any contact with the participants was made. After the request was reviewed and approved, the researchers proceeded with the necessary coordination for the conduct of the study.

Subsequently, after the approval was granted, the researchers scheduled the interviews based on the availability of the participants. This ensured that the selected firefighters were given sufficient time and convenience to participate in the study. In doing so, the researchers considered the participants’ work responsibilities and station duties so that the interview process would not disrupt their professional obligations.

Moreover, before the actual conduct of the interview, the researchers explained the nature and purpose of the study to the participants. Ethical considerations were strictly observed by assuring them of confidentiality, anonymity, and their voluntary participation in the research. Afterward, informed consent was secured first before the interview officially began, ensuring that the rights and welfare of the participants were protected throughout the study.

Thereafter, the researchers conducted the face-to-face interviews using the validated semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were carried out in a time and place convenient for the participants, and with their permission, the sessions were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data gathered. Furthermore, the interview process continued until data saturation was reached, or when no new information and themes emerged from the participants’ responses. Data saturation was determined when no new themes, codes, or significant insights emerged from subsequent interviews, indicating that the data collected were sufficient to capture the depth of the phenomenon.

After the completion of the interviews, the recorded responses were transcribed verbatim for accuracy and completeness. The transcriptions allowed the researchers to carefully review the participants’ statements and prepare them for deeper examination. Finally, the data were analyzed through thematic analysis in order to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, generate codes, and develop themes that reflected the lived experiences of the firefighters.

## Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor of the study, the researchers employed strategies to establish trustworthiness. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and member checking. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail of the research process. Confirmability was established by grounding interpretations in participants' verbatim responses and minimizing researcher bias through reflexivity. Transferability was supported by providing rich, contextual descriptions of the study setting and participants.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. The researchers then familiarized themselves with the transcripts through repeated reading, allowing immersion in the participants' narratives.

Subsequently, initial codes were generated through a line-by-line analysis of significant statements, focusing on meanings relevant to the study's objectives. These codes were developed inductively and refined through an iterative process, where similar codes were grouped into categories based on patterns and relationships.

Furthermore, categories were organized into sub-themes and overarching themes that reflected the core dimensions of the participants' lived experiences, including their challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations. The themes were continuously reviewed and refined using constant comparison to ensure consistency and coherence across the dataset.

Finally, the themes were defined, named, and interpreted to capture the essence of the phenomenon, ensuring that all findings remained grounded in the participants' actual accounts. This analytical process enabled a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of firefighters in relation to the study's research questions.

## RESULT

Statement of the Problem (SOP)	Themes
1. What are the lived experiences of the participants during firefighting operations?	1.1. Exposure to High-Risk and Life-Threatening Situations
	1.2. Meaning and Fulfillment in Public Service
2. What challenges do the participants encounter in the course of firefighting operations?	2.1. Operational and Environmental Constraints
	2.2. Resource and Workforce Limitations
	2.3. Emotional and Psychological Strain
3. How do the participants cope with the challenges they experience during firefighting operations?	3.1. Camaraderie and Peer Support
	3.2. Personal Coping Strategies and Resilience
	3.3. Organizational Support and Debriefing
4. What aspirations do the participants hold regarding their roles in firefighting operations?	4.1. Desire for Professional Growth and Development
	4.2. Improvement of Resources and System Support
	4.3. Personal Aspirations and Life Goals

---

## Exposure to High-Risk and Life-Threatening Situations

Firefighters' lived experiences are deeply characterized by direct exposure to hazardous and life-threatening situations. Participants narrated encounters with death, severe injuries, and unpredictable fire environments, which reflect the inherently dangerous nature of their profession. These experiences are not only physically demanding but also emotionally overwhelming, as responders are often the first to witness traumatic events.

A significant statement supporting this theme is reflected in the account of Participant 1, who stated, *"It really affects you... you face death directly... you couldn't revive a life that wasn't saved."* Similarly, Participant 3 shared, *"I was electrocuted... that was the most difficult experience I've had."*

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how firefighters operate in environments where uncertainty and danger are constant. The findings suggest that repeated exposure to such incidents contributes to the development of resilience, while simultaneously increasing vulnerability to emotional and psychological strain.

More importantly, these experiences reflect how firefighters construct their professional identity around risk and sacrifice. Exposure to life-threatening situations becomes normalized over time, shaping their perception of duty and strengthening their capacity to manage fear. This indicates that firefighting extends beyond technical performance, representing an existential commitment to public service in which personal safety is continuously negotiated against the responsibility to save lives.

## Meaning and Fulfillment in Public Service

Despite the risks associated with firefighting, participants expressed a strong sense of meaning and fulfillment derived from serving the community. They emphasized that saving lives and protecting property provide a sense of purpose that outweighs the challenges encountered in the field. Moreover, recognition and gratitude from the public further reinforce their commitment to the profession.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 3, who stated, *"The most rewarding aspect is being able to help others... the thanks we receive... make it all worthwhile."* Similarly, Participant 4 shared, *"Serving the people... that's the most fulfilling thing."*

Taken together, these accounts suggest that intrinsic motivation plays a central role in sustaining firefighters' engagement despite the demands of their work. The emotional rewards associated with public service function as protective factors against burnout, reinforcing their dedication even in adverse situations.

More importantly, these experiences reveal that fulfillment in firefighting is deeply rooted in a sense of purpose and social responsibility. Helping others becomes more than an occupational duty—it forms a core aspect of their professional identity. This indicates that firefighters derive meaning not only from the outcomes of their actions but also from the moral value of service itself, which sustains their commitment in the face of continuous risk and sacrifice.

## Operational and Environmental Constraints

Firefighters encounter numerous operational challenges that hinder effective response during emergencies. These include inaccessible terrain, long distances, and insufficient water supply, which delay firefighting operations and increase risks. Such conditions create additional pressure on responders, particularly in time-sensitive situations where immediate action is critical.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 1, who stated, *"The area is not accessible... mountainous areas... it's difficult to respond."* Similarly, Participant 3 shared, *"The most common shortage we experience is water... it's difficult for us to respond."*

Taken together, these accounts highlight how operational effectiveness is significantly shaped by environmental and logistical constraints. The findings suggest that external factors—often beyond the control of firefighters—play a critical role in determining the success or limitations of emergency response.

More importantly, these challenges reveal that firefighting performance is not solely dependent on individual skill or preparedness but is deeply embedded within broader structural conditions. Limitations in infrastructure and resource accessibility can compromise response efficiency and increase risk exposure, underscoring the need for systemic improvements. This indicates that enhancing firefighting effectiveness requires not only individual competence but also institutional and policy-level support to address environmental and logistical barriers.

### **Resource and Workforce Limitations**

A recurring issue identified by participants is the lack of adequate resources and manpower. Firefighters often operate with limited personnel and insufficient or outdated equipment, requiring them to adapt and improvise during emergencies. These constraints place additional strain on responders, particularly in high-risk situations where adequate support is critical for effective response.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 4, who stated, *“There are only three of us... that’s not enough personnel.”* Similarly, Participant 2 emphasized, *“We are lacking in equipment... we rely on our resourcefulness.”*

Taken together, these accounts underscore a significant gap between operational demands and the resources available to firefighters. The findings suggest that while firefighters demonstrate adaptability and resilience, their reliance on improvisation reflects underlying structural limitations within the system.

More importantly, these conditions reveal that resource scarcity is not merely an operational inconvenience but a critical factor that can compromise efficiency, safety, and overall response effectiveness. The need to compensate for inadequate manpower and equipment places firefighters at greater risk and may affect the quality of service delivery. This highlights the importance of sustained institutional investment and policy support to ensure that firefighters are adequately equipped to perform their duties safely and effectively.

### **Emotional and Psychological Strain**

Firefighters experience significant emotional and psychological burdens due to repeated exposure to traumatic incidents. Feelings of regret, stress, and self-blame are common, particularly when outcomes are unfavorable. These emotional responses often persist beyond the incident itself, affecting both personal well-being and professional functioning.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 3, who stated, *“You feel regret for not responding on time.”* Similarly, Participant 4 described, *“Even when I sleep, I hear the alarm... it’s like post-traumatic.”*

Taken together, these narratives reveal the presence of ongoing emotional distress and potential post-traumatic responses among firefighters. The findings demonstrate that exposure to critical incidents does not end at the scene but continues to manifest in cognitive and emotional experiences, such as intrusive memories and heightened stress.

More importantly, these experiences highlight the internal tension between professional responsibility and emotional vulnerability. While firefighters are expected to remain composed and effective during operations, they simultaneously carry the psychological weight of traumatic events. This suggests that firefighting involves not only physical endurance but also sustained emotional labor. Consequently, the need for structured psychological support systems is critical to maintaining firefighters’ mental well-being and long-term operational effectiveness.

### **Camaraderie and Peer Support**

Camaraderie emerged as a central coping mechanism among firefighters. Strong interpersonal relationships and teamwork create a support system that enables them to manage stress and perform effectively during operations. These social bonds are developed through shared experiences in high-risk environments, fostering trust and mutual reliance among team members.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 2, who stated, *“Nobody has your back except your brothers and sisters.”* Similarly, Participant 3 emphasized, *“If you don’t have teamwork... you could die.”*

Taken together, these accounts underscore the critical role of camaraderie not only as a source of emotional support but also as a fundamental requirement for operational survival. The findings reveal that firefighting is inherently interdependent, where individual safety and effectiveness rely heavily on the reliability and coordination of the team.

More importantly, these relationships extend beyond professional collaboration, forming a sense of brotherhood that strengthens resilience in high-pressure situations. Camaraderie functions as both a psychological buffer against stress and a practical mechanism that enhances coordination and response efficiency. This indicates that social cohesion within firefighting units is essential not only for emotional well-being but also for ensuring safety and effectiveness during emergency operations.

### **Personal Coping Strategies and Resilience**

Firefighters utilize various personal strategies to cope with stress, including faith, emotional regulation, and continuous self-improvement. These mechanisms enable them to maintain psychological stability and adapt to the demanding and unpredictable nature of their work. Such strategies reflect an individual effort to manage both the emotional and cognitive challenges associated with repeated exposure to critical incidents.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 1, who stated, *“I read the Bible... to relieve stress.”* Similarly, Participant 5 shared, *“You just have to rise above it... stress is always there.”*

Taken together, these responses indicate that coping among firefighters is both internally driven and adaptive in nature. The findings reveal that stress is not perceived as something that can be eliminated but rather as a constant condition that must be managed through personal effort and mindset.

More importantly, these strategies highlight the role of personal resilience as an ongoing and active process. Firefighters engage in self-regulation, faith-based practices, and cognitive reframing to sustain their emotional balance and functional capacity. This suggests that resilience is not merely an inherent trait but a developed capability that enables firefighters to navigate the psychological demands of their profession while maintaining performance and well-being.

### **Organizational Support and Debriefing**

Organizational mechanisms such as debriefing, post-fire analysis, and mentorship play a significant role in helping firefighters process their experiences and improve performance. These structured practices provide opportunities for reflection, feedback, and shared learning, which are essential in high-risk and high-stress operational environments.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 3, who stated, *“We have post-fire analysis... we review what happened.”* Similarly, Participant 5 emphasized, *“Debriefing is important... without it, it will get to you.”*

Taken together, these accounts underscore the critical role of structured organizational support in both operational and psychological domains. The findings indicate that such mechanisms facilitate not only technical improvement but also emotional processing, allowing firefighters to make sense of their experiences and reduce the accumulation of stress.

More importantly, these practices reflect an institutional approach to resilience, where the organization actively contributes to the well-being and development of its personnel. Debriefing and mentorship serve as formalized spaces for learning and emotional release, reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement and support. This suggests that effective firefighting is not solely dependent on individual capability but is also shaped by the presence of strong organizational systems that promote both competence and psychological sustainability.

---

## Desire for Professional Growth and Development

Firefighters expressed a strong aspiration for continuous learning and skill enhancement. They recognize the need for ongoing training to improve their effectiveness and adapt to the evolving and unpredictable nature of firefighting operations. This emphasis on development reflects an awareness of the increasing demands and complexities of emergency response work.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 5, who stated, *“We need more training... to improve our performance.”* Similarly, Participant 1 shared, *“Learning is a continuous process... I don’t want to be stagnant.”*

Taken together, these responses underscore the importance of continuous professional development as a central driver of performance and adaptability. The findings reveal that firefighters perceive learning not merely as a requirement but as an ongoing responsibility essential to their role.

More importantly, these aspirations reflect a commitment to growth that is closely tied to their identity as public servants. Continuous learning enables firefighters to remain competent, responsive, and prepared in high-risk situations. This suggests that professional development is not only instrumental in improving service delivery but also fundamental in shaping a proactive, capable, and resilient firefighting workforce.

## Improvement of Resources and System Support

Participants highlighted the need for stronger institutional support, including modern equipment, increased manpower, and improved operational facilities. These needs reflect ongoing challenges within the firefighting system, particularly in relation to resource availability and organizational capacity.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 2, who stated, *“We need proper equipment... especially firetrucks.”*

Taken together, this response underscores the critical role of institutional support in shaping the effectiveness of firefighting operations. The findings reveal that limitations in equipment and infrastructure are not isolated concerns but are indicative of broader systemic constraints that directly affect response capability.

More importantly, these concerns highlight the dependence of operational performance on organizational and governmental support. Inadequate resources not only hinder efficiency but also increase risk exposure and limit the ability of firefighters to perform their duties effectively. This suggests that improving firefighting outcomes requires sustained investment in equipment, manpower, and infrastructure, reinforcing the need for policy-level interventions to strengthen the overall system.

## Personal Aspirations and Life Goals

Beyond their professional roles, firefighters expressed personal aspirations related to financial stability, family well-being, and future career development. These aspirations reflect their desire to secure long-term stability while continuing to grow beyond the demands of their profession.

This is reflected in the account of Participant 3, who stated, *“I want to be a businessman... to help others.”* Similarly, Participant 4 noted, *“You have to build yourself... your life doesn’t stop here.”*

Taken together, these responses reveal that firefighters perceive their profession as one component of a broader life trajectory. The findings indicate that while they remain committed to public service, they also actively pursue personal goals that extend beyond their occupational roles.

More importantly, these aspirations highlight a dual orientation toward service and self-development. Firefighters navigate the demands of a high-risk profession while maintaining a future-oriented perspective that prioritizes personal growth and stability. This suggests that firefighting is not viewed as the entirety of their identity, but rather as part of a larger life path shaped by both professional dedication and individual ambitions.

## Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single fire station in the Province of Guimaras, which may affect the transferability of the findings. While the study provides in-depth insights into firefighters' lived experiences, future research may include multiple stations or regions to enhance generalizability.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of career firefighters during firefighting operations at the Jordan Fire Station, revealing that their work is characterized by constant exposure to high-risk and life-threatening situations. Firefighters encounter physically dangerous and emotionally distressing events, including injuries, fatalities, and unpredictable fire environments, which significantly shape their professional and personal lives. Despite these challenges, they derive a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment from serving the community, particularly in saving lives and protecting property.

Moreover, the findings highlight that firefighters face multiple operational challenges such as limited resources, inadequate manpower, and environmental constraints, which affect their response efficiency. These challenges are further compounded by emotional and psychological strain resulting from repeated exposure to traumatic incidents. However, firefighters demonstrate resilience through strong camaraderie, personal coping strategies such as faith and emotional regulation, and organizational support systems like debriefing and mentorship.

Furthermore, the study revealed that firefighters aspire for continuous professional development, improved resources, and better institutional support to enhance their performance. They also maintain personal aspirations related to financial stability and personal growth beyond their profession. Overall, the study concludes that while firefighters exhibit resilience and dedication, there is a critical need for enhanced support systems to sustain their well-being and effectiveness in emergency response operations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the overall well-being and operational effectiveness of firefighters. First, there is a need to strengthen psychological support systems within the Bureau of Fire Protection. Firefighters are frequently exposed to traumatic and life-threatening situations; thus, implementing structured mental health programs such as regular counseling, stress debriefing, and psychological assessments is essential to help them cope with emotional and psychological strain.

Moreover, the improvement of firefighting equipment and resources should be prioritized. The study revealed that limitations in equipment, water supply, and fire trucks significantly affect response efficiency. Therefore, government agencies and concerned stakeholders must ensure the provision of modern, functional, and sufficient resources to support firefighters in carrying out their duties safely and effectively.

In addition, increasing manpower and improving workforce allocation are highly recommended. The shortage of personnel places excessive workload on firefighters, which may compromise both performance and safety during operations. By recruiting more personnel and ensuring proper distribution across stations, emergency response can become more efficient and manageable.

Furthermore, continuous training and professional development programs should be reinforced. Firefighters must be equipped with updated knowledge and advanced skills in firefighting, rescue operations, and disaster management. Regular training will not only enhance their competence but also boost their confidence in handling complex emergency situations.

Equally important is the improvement of infrastructure and accessibility, particularly in remote and high-risk areas. Local government units should invest in better road networks, installation of fire hydrants, and other support systems to ensure faster response time and effective fire suppression operations.

Additionally, promoting community awareness and fire prevention programs is essential. Educating the public on fire safety practices and the importance of timely reporting can significantly reduce fire-related incidents and minimize delays in emergency response. Strengthening community participation can also foster cooperation between firefighters and the public.

Lastly, initiatives that promote work-life balance should be considered to support firefighters' overall well-being. Given the demanding nature of their profession, programs that allow time for rest, family engagement, and personal development can help reduce stress and improve job satisfaction. Future researchers are also encouraged to further explore the long-term psychological impacts of firefighting and to conduct comparative studies across different stations to broaden the understanding of firefighters' experiences.

## REFERENCES

1. Achmat, G., Erasmus, C., Kanaley, J., & Leach, L. (2024a). Perceptions experiences and challenges of physical activity among firefighters with coronary heart disease risk factors in the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Services. *Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.2174/0118749445327343240821051143>
2. Achmat, G., Erasmus, C., Kanaley, J., & Leach, L. (2024b). Workplace accommodation and physical activity support for firefighters at risk of developing cardiovascular disease. *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, 30(4), 184–188. <https://doi.org/10.62380/ohsa.2024.30.4.3>
3. Amorcillo, M. C. R., Jayson, R. R., Segovia, J. L., Bongcawil, B. R. C., Maldepeña, K. M. V., & Cuevas, J. F., Jr. (2024). Navigating the firefighters' experiences in responding to fire incidents: Through photovoice. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 9(11). <https://ijisrt.com/assets/upload/files/IJISRT24NOV1238.pdf>
4. Bureau of Fire Protection. (n.d.). Agency profile. Freedom of Information Philippines. <https://www.foi.gov.ph/agencies/bfp/>
5. Campbell, J. L., Darby, J., Oswald, P., Mackay, L., & Schofield, G. (2025). Shifting organizational sentiment: Qualitative insights from a mental ill-health prevention program for New Zealand firefighters. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 142, 152615. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2025.152615>
6. Cooperative Development Authority. (n.d.). Profile of the Region: Region VI. <https://cda.gov.ph/region-6/about/>
7. De Castro, C. A., & Cabarrubias, C. (2023). Lived experiences of Bureau of Fire Protection officers of Dagupan City. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 9(9). <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra14345>
8. Heydari, A., Ostadtaghizadeh, A., Ardalan, A., Ebadi, A., Mohammadfam, I., & Khorasani-Zavareh, D. (2021). Exploring the criteria and factors affecting firefighters' resilience: A qualitative study. *Chinese Journal of Traumatology*, 24(6), 340–345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cjtee.2021.06.001>
9. Igboanugo, S., Bigelow, P. L., & Mielniczuk, J. (2021). Health outcomes of psychosocial stress within firefighters: A systematic review of the research landscape. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 63(1), e12219. <https://doi.org/10.1002/1348-9585.12219>
10. International Labour Organization. (2012). International Standard Classification of Occupations: ISCO-08, volume 1. <https://webapps.ilo.org/ilostat-files/ISCO/newdocs-08-2021/ISCO-08/ISCO-08%20EN%20Vol%201.pdf>
11. Llorens, S., Salanova, M., Chambel, M. J., Torrente, P., & Ângelo, R. P. (2022). Organizational drivers of burnout and work engagement: A multilevel study in Portuguese firefighter brigades. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 4053. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19074053>
12. Obuobi-Donkor, G., Oluwasina, F., Nkire, N., & Agyapong, V. I. O. (2022). A scoping review on the prevalence and determinants of post-traumatic stress disorder among military personnel and firefighters: Implications for public policy and practice. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(3), 1565. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031565>
13. Republic Act No. 11589. (2021). An act strengthening and modernizing the Bureau of Fire Protection and appropriating funds therefor. Supreme Court E-Library. <https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/2/93845>

14. Rosca, A. C., Mateizer, A., Dan, C.-I., & Demerouti, E. (2021). Job demands and exhaustion in firefighters: The moderating role of work meaning. A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(18), 9819. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18189819>
15. Sablan, K. O., Sabijon, D. F., Pensotes, J. R. A., Reposo, M. J. L., & Piczon, R. C. L. (2025). Looking after for safety against the ire of fire: Work experiences of female fire officers. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(5). <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2025/5/56691.pdf>
16. Topçu, G., Bastug, G., Ergül-Topçu, A., & Ozel-Kizil, E. T. (2025). A qualitative investigation of the occupational perceptions of firefighters with or without post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2025.2538251>
17. Wolffe, T. A. M., Robinson, A., Clinton, A., Turrell, L., & Stec, A. A. (2023). Mental health of UK firefighters. *Scientific Reports*, 13, Article 62. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-24834-x>
18. Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652–661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
19. Dahal, S., Gautam, R., Adhikari, R., & Bhandari, P. (2024). The use of phenomenology in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23(1), 1–10.
20. Firmin, M. W., DeWitt, K., Ellis, H. M., Smith, L. A., & Tiffan, N. (2018). A qualitative study of the motivations and affiliation dynamics involved with a firefighting career. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 60–73.
21. Naz, N., Gulab, F., & Aslam, M. (2022). Development of qualitative semi-structured interview guide for case study research. *Competitive Social Science Research Journal*, 3(2).
22. Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
23. Teixeira, E., Silva, C., & Vicente, A. (2024). Development and validation of an interview guide for examining the effects of sports careers on the quality of life of retired Portuguese football players. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1374784. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1374784>