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Predictors of posttraumatic stress disorder among firefighters

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Research Title: Predictors of posttraumatic stress disorder among firefighters in Johannesburg.

ABSTRACT

Emergency first responders such as firefighters are exposed to higher levels of traumatic events through the course of their work. Accordingly, chances of such exposure resulting in negative psychological consequences are elevated. Previous research implicates the experience of trauma incident(s) and other organisational factors, among other factors, as causes of the development of consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder and the variance thereof. However, research exploring these implications is limited. As a result**,** firefighters in the Emergency Medical Services were surveyed in the attempt to identify experiences of posttraumatic stress symptoms resulting from history of exposure to work-related traumatic events, perceived life threat during those incidents, general work-related stress and their perceived organisational support. The purpose of this study was to explore the predictive relationship PTSD symptoms and four predictors namely; perceived life threat, perceived organisational support, history of trauma and job-related stress, among Johannesburg firefighters. The sample was drawn from the City of Johannesburg Emergency Medical Services. A sample (N=100) of trauma-exposed firefighters was recruited for the study. Participants were recruited using a non-probability, convenience sampling strategy in which participation in the study was voluntary. The sample was made of 89 male participants and 11 female participants. All variables included in the study were measured using self-report instruments. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire to gather information pertaining to gender, age, organisational tenure and race. The following questionnaires were used to ascertain scores for the predictor variables: Survey of perceived Organisational Support, General Work Stress scale, Life Threat scale and a self-developed history of trauma scale. The Revised Impact of Event scale was used to measure the firefighters' experience of PTSD related symptoms. Participants reported an average score of 29 on the IES-R scale indicating a stress reaction with the possibility of posttraumatic stress disorder. However, using a multiple regression analysis, this present study found that the four predictor variables explored did not have a substantial impact on the development of PTSD among firefighters. Secondary analyses were conducted to explore the individual association between each

independent variable and PTSD. The results are reported. Overall, the results yielded suggest that there are other factors that exert a greater impact on the development of PTSD among firefighters. Future research among firefighters could focus on exploring other risk and protective factors associated with the development of PTSD. Alternatively, if this study is to be replicated, the researcher could employ a longitudinal, qualitative approach to explore the predictive relationship between history of trauma, perceived life threat, perceived organisational support, work-related stress and PTSD related symptoms.

KEYWORDS: Post-traumatic stress disorder, perceived life threat, perceived organisational support, job-related stress, history of trauma