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THE COPING STRATEGIES OF THE EKURHULENI EMERGENCY SERVICE EMPLOYEES

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in Industrial Social Work by Course Work and Research Report

Johannesburg, December 2010

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work and that I gave full acknowledgement to the sources used. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Industrial Social Work - Course Work and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university.

DMA MASHIGO

December 2010

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report to my two daughters, Masechaba and Bohlale for without being aware, planted the seed for my interest in coping strategies in general. Thank you for cheering me on throughout and challenging my potential

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ABSTRACT

A lot of studies continue to confirm that emergency service employees during the course of their work deal with traumatic events as well as disasters that are either natural or man-made. As a result, they are often exposed to mass death, the picking up of dead bodies, some burnt as well as mutilated body remains. This results in mental health problems that may lead to psychiatric disorders. In addition the coping strategies that they use may be functional or dysfunctional. Functional coping strategies with regard to emergency service workers have been found to be more problem-focused than emotion-focused. Factors like experience, training, age, marital status, personal traits, coping styles, resources and strategies have been found to have an impact on the coping strategies of emergency service employees. Resilience has been found to develop over time with longer service in the sector.

The present study explored the Ekurhuleni Emergency Service employees' perception coping strategies that work best for them, and those that do not. In addition from participants' responses, the extent to which these coping strategies are used as well as the outcomes thereof, were be established. By exploring these coping strategies, the researcher hoped to contribute to the awareness of functional coping strategies as opposed to dysfunctional ones. In addition, the researcher hoped that the findings would contribute to the promotion in the of awareness of, as well as the improvement or restructuring of existing wellness programmes, so that they are more easily accessible to the emergency services in a such a manner as will serve their best interests.

Nine fire stations were approached to conduct the study. A self-administered questionnaire was administered to 50 emergency service employees who were available during the researcher's visit for the purpose. The questionnaire included questions to elicit demographic information from the participants. Other questions focused on the understanding of the term coping, as well as coping resources and strategies in general that have been identified.

The results of the study confirmed findings by previous researchers. Social support especially the use of peers and family were found to be used by a significantly high number of participants. Although spousal support was established to have been perceived negatively by some previous studies, in the present study 32% participants relied a lot on their spousal partners, whilst peer support was perceived to be beneficial by 16% of the participants. Personal resources like prayer, engaging in sports and gym were identified as beneficial, whilst alcohol was found to have short benefits and not so helpful.

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