

**EXPLORING FIREFIGHTERS PERCEPTIONS OF HOW
THEIR WORKING EXPERIENCE AND PERSONAL LIVES
INFLUENCE EACH OTHER**

By

NICOLETTE METCALF (LNGNIC006)

A Minor Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Masters of Social Sciences specialising in Clinical Social Work Practice.

Faculty of Humanities

University of Cape Town

Supervisor: Fatima Williams

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I, Nicolette Metcalf, do hereby declare that I empower the University of Cape Town to produce, for the purpose of research, either the whole or any portion of the contents of my dissertation entitled "Exploring Firefighters Perceptions of how their Working Experience and Personal Lives Influence each other," in any manner whatsoever.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore firefighters' perceptions of how their working experiences and personal lives positively and negatively influence each other. The purpose of this study was also to understand firefighters' perceptions of the support that is currently available to them and what further support they require, in order to cope with the demands of work and personal relationships.

The research was conducted in two research settings and permission was gained to conduct the research from the City of Cape Town's Research Department and the Fire Chief of the Fire and Rescue Department. A qualitative research design was used to conduct this study, and purposive sampling was used to select the sample. A total of twenty, male firefighters were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. A digital recorder was used to ensure that the interviews could be recorded accurately. The interviews were transcribed and analysed following Tesch's (1990) method of data analysis.

The findings from this study reflect that the participants' work experiences and personal lives do influence each other. The participants reported that the training and education they received to become a firefighter, their relationship with their colleagues, and shift work had a positive influence on their personal lives. At the same time a number of workplace stressors such as shift work, repeated exposure to trauma, challenging aspects of career advancement and the negative consequences of the rank structure, were identified as negatively influencing their personal lives.

Positive factors such as social support including support from family and work as well as religious support help buffer the negative effects of stress experienced by firefighters in their work. Personal and family challenges were seen to have a negative influence on firefighters working experience. Lastly, recommendations were made to various stakeholders including the Fire and Rescue Department as well as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and Wellness branch. These included the need for online surveys, sports days and informal meetings between management and firefighters. Recommendations to EAP and Wellness branch included continuous marketing of

EAP services, pro-active interventions such as stress management and building resilience for firefighters, management training as well as wellness events.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

1.1 Introduction:

The first chapter of the dissertation provides the statement of the problem, the rationale and the geographic location of the research. This will be followed by the research topic, questions and objectives. Key concepts will be clarified and ethical considerations and reflexivity will be discussed. Finally, an outline of the chapters of the dissertation will be presented, and a conclusion completes the chapter.

1.2 Statement of the problem:

Certain occupations, for example firefighting, are classified as “high risk” and are considered dangerous, stressful and demanding (Adamson, 2013), but within these occupations, employees are expected to be healthy, productive, proactive, energised, highly committed and should have the ability to perform efficiently regardless of the stressors that might arise (Airila, 2015). According to Deppa (2015) firefighting was listed as the most stressful occupation in the United States (US). Firefighting in South Africa (SA) appeared to be the second most stressful occupation in a survey conducted in 2012 (Joubert, 2012) and firefighters have to routinely deal with multiple stressors that can place significant strain and pressure on family life, particularly on marriages (Meadows, 2014). Workplace stressors for firefighters include shift work, overtime, and interrupted sleep, being constantly on high alert, emotional burden and dealing with departmental politics (Adamson, 2013; Deppa, 2015). It is said that these multiple stressors can influence other areas of life particularly that of the personal/intimate partner relationships (Meadows, 2014).

It is argued that the divorce rate for firefighters is over 60% and 48% of firefighters reported that maintaining a relationship with an intimate partner was highly stressful (Torres, Synett, Pennington, Kruse, Sanford, & Guliver, 2016). Research indicates that among 1456 firefighters across 31 departments in the United States 77% of male firefighters were married and 11.8% divorced compared to the general population of 57.5% married and 9.4% divorced (Jahnke, 2015). A South African study in 2007 found that firefighters who were married reported higher levels of

stress compared to those who were single (Torres et al., 2016). The divorce rate for firefighters is said to be thus higher as to compared to the general population (Jahnke, 2015). Research however also indicates that the quality of personal relationships of firefighters could play a key role in mediating the negative effects of occupational stress (Adamson, 2013). Firefighters who have healthy committed marriages/intimate partner relationships show greater potential in dealing with the demands of their career, increase in job satisfaction and mental health (Adamson, 2013).

There used to be an ethos in the fire service that despite the inherent stress and danger, firefighters were seen as weak if they asked for help (Howard, 2017). Firefighters were often told to not admit difficulties leaving a stigma attached to admitting emotional and psychological vulnerability (Norwood & Rascati, 2012; Deppa, 2015) and they are thus reluctant to seek psychological intervention. This stems from the notion that using an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or other health services will prevent them from advancing in their career. Confidentiality and the stigma attached to seeking professional assistance are other concerns and firefighters fear that their job will be negatively impacted should they seek psychological assistance (Norwood & Rascati, 2012).

This study focused on firefighters' perceptions and how their working experience and personal lives influence each other. In the two research settings where this study was conducted, firefighters were responsible for fighting fires and providing services related to preventing fires such as fire prevention/public education, as well as offering specialised emergency responder services which includes but are not limited to vehicle extrication as indicated by Deppa (2015). Firefighters are normally first to arrive on scene and first to provide assistance to victims however, it is argued that this comes at a cost where the nature of their work is extremely dangerous and stressful (Deppa, 2015). Firefighters could respond to one traumatic incident and then immediately after have to respond to another traumatic incident, and they could also respond to calls where family and friends could be involved, adding a personal element to the traumatic incident (Deppa, 2015).

1.3 Rationale:

In recent times newspaper articles in Cape Town have highlighted firefighters' concerns and according to Daniels (2018) in 2007 firefighter's agreed to work 24-hour shifts (i.e. Fire Agreement) which equates to a 56-hour week, higher than the general 40-hour work week. Daniels (2018) highlights that firefighters are working outside of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Fire Agreement has lapsed. Firefighters presently feel aggrieved that they are not getting paid fairly for all the hours worked and in recent times they marched to Parliament in Cape Town demanding to be paid for 24 hours worked (Palm, 2019). According to Etheridge (2018) other issues that have been raised by firefighters to management is the monthly meal allowance, policies on acting allowances, provision of danger pay, obstacles to promotion and challenges with career advancement.

Literature has indicated possible ways of supporting firefighters, such as the development of marriage enrichment programmes, which is aimed at strengthening their relationships. This is based on the premise that the quality of a firefighter's relationship plays a key role in mediating the negative effects of occupational stress (Adamson, 2013). It is recommended that developing a holistic wellness approach for firefighters that includes medical, fitness, rehabilitation and behavioural health (Shantz, 2002) and as well as gaining the trust of a firefighter is crucial (Wall, 2012). Wall (2012) recommends that clinicians should spend time at the fire station, go on ride alongs, familiarise themselves with the fire department culture all of which will contribute to greater understanding of their working experience and rendering more effective interventions. Wall (2012) further highlights the importance of couple/marital therapy with the aim of supporting firefighters to effectively deal with relationship difficulties as well as educating firefighters and their partners on occupational stressors which could possibly provide a supportive role in the couple's functioning. The purpose of this study was also to understand firefighters' perceptions of the support that is currently available to them and what recommendations would they give in terms of further support in order to cope with the demands of work and personal relationships.

The results of this research will be used in several ways by firstly adding to the existing body of literature of firefighters and their working experience. The findings of the research will also be made available and presented to the Fire and Rescue Department as well as the EAP and Wellness

branch of City of Cape Town as it will provide insight to firefighters' working experiences and it is hoped that support programmes can be developed or modified to support firefighters optimally.

1.4 Geographical Location of the study:

The City of Cape Town's Fire and Rescue Service (CTFRS) is a professional fire brigade that dates back to 1845; which consists of 30 fire stations, roughly 860 operational firefighters serving a population of 3.5 million people and covering an area of over 2 561 square kilometres (City of Cape Town, 2012/13). Other Districts in the Western Cape area such as the Overberg, West Coast, Eden, Central Karoo and Cape Winelands have their own fire departments (City of Cape Town, 2012/13). The South African National Fire Statistics (2014) highlights that the total amount of brigade calls for 2014 across South Africa was 46197, and the City of Cape Town District responded to the most calls, 11456 compared to the other fire departments and similar statistics was seen in 2013. During the 2018/19 season there was 15506 fires recorded for the metropole (Geach, 2019; Writer, 2019).

The type of calls the City of Cape Town Fire Department responded to in 2014 included; 501 transport accidents, 248 commercial fires, 2518 dwelling and informal dwelling and 7987 bush, grass, plantation and forest fires (Fire Statistics, 2014). In 2017/18 the City of Cape Town responded to the following type of calls; 781 transport fires, 683 building fires, 3342 dwelling and informal dwelling and 12091 special service calls including hazmat and motor vehicles accidents (Writer, 2019). City of Cape Town's fire statistics showed a steady decline in most categories for the 2018/19 season except for vegetation fires which saw an increase (Writer, 2019). In 2017/18 season City of Cape Town responded to 10129 vegetation fires whereas in 2018/19 there was a nominal increase where 11008 vegetation fires occurred (Writer, 2019). The other type of calls responded to in 2018/19 included; 698 transport fires, 575 building fires, 3225 dwelling and informal dwelling and 10371 special service calls (Writer, 2019). For the purpose of this research study information was gathered from the Epping and Goodwood Fire Stations. The researcher is currently employed as an EAP Practitioner for the EAP and Wellness branch (City of Cape Town), however the researcher was not known to the participants. The lowest client intake for assessing EAP services came from Goodwood and Epping Fire Station, therefore these two stations were selected.

1.5 Research Topic

Exploring Firefighters Perceptions of how their Working Experience and Personal Lives Influence each other.

1.6 Research Questions:

- What are firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience positively influence their personal lives?
- What are firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives?
- What are firefighters' perceptions of how personal lives positively influence their working experience?
- What are firefighters' perceptions of how personal lives negatively influence their working experience?
- What recommendations would firefighters give in terms of the support that they need?

1.7 Research Objectives:

- To explore firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience positively influence their personal lives.
- To explore firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives
- To explore firefighters' perceptions of how their personal lives positively influence their working experience.
- To explore firefighters' perceptions of how their personal lives negatively influence their working experience
- To investigate what recommendations would firefighters give in terms of the support that they need.

1.8 Concept Clarification:

Firefighter

A person who not only fights fire but also provides a range of services related to preventing fires such as fire investigation, fire inspection, fire prevention/public education as well offering specialised emergency responder services such as vehicle extrication (Deppa, 2015).

Perception

Perception is the process of obtaining information about both the external and internal environments, whereby people actively perceive, interpret and organise their experiences (Gould, 2003).

Working Experience

Working experience can be defined as perceptions employees have pertaining to their experiences at work, which influences the way individuals perceive their job as well as the organisation they are employed at (Grover, 2015).

Intimate Partner Relationships

Intimate partner relationships can be defined as having a voluntary relationship with someone; marked by love, passion, actual or anticipated sexual activity (Collins & Sroufe cited in Furman, Brown & Feiring, 1999). Thus intimate partner relationships have a higher level of commitment by both partners which supports the development of intimacy (Collins & Sroufe cited in Furman, Brown & Feiring, 1999).

Personal lives

Personal lives is the development of an individual's life and according to Sedikides, Gaertner & O'Mara (2011) the individual self is unique which consists of traits, goals, aspirations, experiences, interests and behaviours that distinguishes the person from others. In the study personal lives specifically makes reference to personal relationships.

1.9 Methodology:

This study used a qualitative research design where purposive sampling was used to recruit the sample. Twenty firefighters participated in this study, and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The methodology will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

1.10 Ethical Considerations:

The researcher followed certain rules and behavioural expectations based on a set of widely accepted moral principles, also known as ethics (Creswell, 2014). Ethical considerations that were pertinent to this study as discussed by Strydom (2011) and Creswell (2014) will now be discussed.

1.10.1 Informed Consent:

Informed consent is a voluntary agreement to participate in research, a process in the which the participants are fully aware of the potential benefits and risks (Shahnazarian, Hagemann, Aburto & Rose, 2017). The researcher obtained informed consent (see appendix A) by sharing information about the study with potential participants. Before proceeding with the interviews, the willing participants were given an opportunity to clarify any information pertaining to the study and allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage. According to Creswell (2014) when collecting informed consent, the participants should not be forced to sign the consent form. Coercion was prevented whereby participation in the study was voluntary. In this study a consent form was clearly explained to each participant before the interview and the form was signed by each participant and the researcher.

1.10.2 Avoidance from harm:

During the process of research participants can be harmed physically and/or emotionally with the capacity of emotional harm being far greater in most research (Strydom, 2011). It is ethical to forewarn participants by introducing the research areas before conducting the research as well as to respect their right to withdraw at any point (David & Sutton, 2004; Strydom, 2011). The interview questions should focus primarily on the content that is absolutely relevant to the research in order to protect the participants from revealing unnecessary personal information (Strydom, 2011).

In this study, the interview schedule consisted of carefully selected questions that focused on the research topic. The participants in this study were informed of any potential negative effects of the study, and were reassured that they could withdraw at any stage during the interview, and could refrain from answering questions that caused discomfort. After signing the consent form, no participants withdrew from the study. The participants were also offered debriefing should they have experienced any emotional harm as a result of their participation in the study, however none of the participants requested debriefing.

1.10.3 Violation of Privacy/Anonymity/Confidentiality:

Protecting the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were essential ethical considerations for this study, because the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Privacy refers to the researcher protecting the privacy of the participants ensuring that their information be kept confidential as possible (Strydom, 2011). In this study privacy was ensured by providing the participants with the opportunity to decide where they wanted to be interviewed. All the participants were happy to be interviewed at their place of work in a room which was private.

Anonymity refers the researcher protecting the privacy and identity of the participants and according to Creswell (2014) in qualitative research pseudonyms are used for individuals and places to protect the identities of participants. The information shared by participants in this study is presented in the research as anonymous quotes or general statements with reference to a theme thereby protecting the anonymity of the participants.

Confidentiality refers to the handling of data confidentially (Strydom, 2011). The researcher spent time with each participant prior to conducting the interview explaining confidentiality, that their privacy and anonymity will be safeguarded and that the recordings and transcriptions will be kept safe and confidential. In this study the researcher took care to protect each participants' confidentiality during and after the data collection process.

1.10.4 Debriefing of participants:

Debriefing gives the researcher an opportunity to rectify any misperceptions that might have arisen and give the participants the opportunity to work through their experience (Strydom, 2011).

Debriefing is a method to identify and address whether participants have been physically or emotionally harmed (Gilston, 2015). At the end of the interview each participant was asked about their experience of this process, whether they needed to ask further questions or discuss any concerns as a result of their participation. The researcher thus informed each participant at the end of the interview that debriefing was available if they felt the interview evoked any difficult emotions. However, none of the participants requested any debriefing during this study.

1.10.5 Actions and competence of the researcher:

The researcher needs to ensure that he/she is competent and skilled to undertake the proposed study (Strydom, 2011). The researcher believes that she was competent and had the necessary skills to undertake this study as a result of her experience and skills she acquired as a professional social worker and during her Social Work Honours studies. The researcher received supervision whereby her supervisor had overseen the research project and provided support throughout the entire research process.

1.11 Reflexivity:

The term reflexivity refers to the critical process whereby the researcher engages in self critique explaining how his/her own experience has or has not influenced the stages of the research process (Dowling, 2006). For the purpose of this study a qualitative research design was used, thus the researcher was the primary instrument in the selection and analysis of information. The researcher was constantly aware of any preconceptions, attitudes and experiences around this particular area of research as she is familiar with the fire department however, she did not allow her personal feelings to influence the study.

The researcher is currently employed as an EAP Practitioner for the EAP and Wellness branch (City of Cape Town), however does not work with any of the firefighters thus the researcher was not known to the participants. The researcher had to be constantly mindful during the interviews that her role was that of a researcher and not an EAP Practitioner. The researcher's supervisor and manager provided supervision and support respectively, where she could reflect on any potential challenges and/or difficulties pertaining to this dual-role throughout the research study. The researcher's personal training and working experience with firefighters have influenced the topic

of choice. The researcher feels that she could possibly better support and assist firefighters if more is known about their working experience and how this negatively influences their personal lives.

There appears to be a gap in knowledge about firefighters and how they can cope better with work and family demands as well as sustaining intimate partner relationships. Prior to collecting data, the researcher was feeling excited, ready to begin the data collection process. However, during the data collection process the researcher experienced anxiety pertaining to her role with the participants and had to be mindful that her role was that of the researcher and not social worker/EAP Assistance Practitioner. Upon completion of the study, the researcher felt satisfied that she had fulfilled the study's objectives. Furthermore, the researcher views this research as valuable as she feels that firefighters play a significant role within our communities and it is important in assisting firefighters to cope with the demands of their work.

1.12 Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises:

Chapter One – The Problem Formulation

Chapter one presents the problem formulation of the study.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Chapter two provides a literature review of previous research in this particular field.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Chapter three comprises of the methodology used to conduct this study.

Chapter Four – Discussion of Findings

The findings of the research is discussed in chapter four.

Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter five presents the conclusions and recommendations as a result of the findings.

1.13 Conclusion:

This chapter has introduced the study of choice, the problem context as well as the rationale of the study. The research questions and the research objectives were listed and key concepts in the study were defined. This chapter also included a discussion of ethical considerations and reflexivity.

Chapter two discusses the literature pertaining to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter discusses existing literature relevant to the study. The theoretical frameworks underpinning the study and the relevant legislation and policies which govern firefighters will be discussed. The practical challenges, operational requirements and personal challenges faced by firefighters will be explored and lastly the types of support and or intervention needed by firefighters will be highlighted.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks:

2.2.1 Systems Theory:

In the 1930's Ludwig Von Bertalanffy began the System Theory study where he believed that nothing could be understood by isolating one part of a component that could play a significant role in another system (Heil, 2017). Systems Theory is therefore based on the belief that individuals do not operate in isolation, but grow and develop in interaction with their physical and social environment (Teater, 2015). Psychologists realised the benefits of Systems Theory and began using this theory in family studies in the 1950's (Walker, 2012; Heil, 2017). In the mid 1970's social workers adopted Systems Theory as a model (Walker, 2012) which provided professionals with a holistic approach in not only understanding how people function but how they are affected by their inter-personal relationships (Walker, 2012; Heil, 2017).

Systems Theory is the study of complex systems divided into micro (small), mezzo (medium,) and macro levels (larger) which have sub-systems that are interconnected (Walker, 2012; Payne, 2014). The micro level refers to social systems such as individuals and couples, the mezzo level alludes to groups, support networks and extended family and the macro level consists of large sized groups such as communities and organisations (Friedman & Allen, 2014). At the micro, mezzo and macro level, systems are regarded as a separate unit delineated by boundaries from other systems which makes them unique (Friedman & Allen, 2014). For example, a family could be a system which defines their boundaries through sociological and legal definitions (Friedman & Allen, 2014).

However, a family system could also have subsystems with clearly defined boundaries such as marital, parental or sibling subsystems (Walker, 2012). Another example could be a firefighters' support group can define their boundaries through group membership in this way the system has a unique characteristic which assists in defining itself (Friedman & Allen, 2014). Lastly these invisible boundaries are thus able to regulate how individuals enter and exit the system (Friedman & Allen, 2014).

According to Walker (2012) Systems Theory is an ecological approach in that it posits that just as individuals are inter-linked within families, families are inter-linked within communities that are inter-linked with classes, ethnic groups and cultures. This theory views the individual person as part of larger systems, rather than isolated, and identifies that when an individual is impacted by one system, this impacts the other systems that they are part of (Payne, 2014). An example of this is that firefighters as individuals belong to larger systems such as families, religious affiliations, social groups as well as communities where they contribute and play a role in each of these systems. An important theoretical concept is the fact that change impacts and reverberates around the system in ways that are often unpredictable (Walker, 2012). For example, at the micro level the individual (i.e. firefighter) could potentially be experiencing stress at work, which could potentially impact and affect his/her relationship with his/her partner and extended family. Therefore, firefighters' role within the family system may be affected as a result of workplace stressors where they may not be able to fulfil their role and responsibilities within the family system. This is an example of a negative impact; however, the researcher was also able to identify positive aspects in firefighters' systems for example, firefighters who experienced a positive day at work felt that this positively influenced the way they relate to their partners.

Systems Theory is relevant to this study as it is important to recognise that firefighters in this study form part of larger systems such as families, the organisation in which they work and their communities. However, they also form part of subsystems such as marital, parental within their families and their experience of being a firefighter extends to these systems and subsystems.

The second theoretical framework underpinning this study is Psychosocial Theory (Boeree, 1997; Fleming, 2008) which will contribute to a greater understanding of the firefighters' life stage.

2.2.2 Psychosocial Theory

Erikson extended on Freud's work by describing stages of development from infancy through to old age (Fleming, 2008). Erikson believed that the development proceeds according to the epigenetic principle (Boeree, 1997; Fleming, 2008) whereby individuals develop through a predetermined unfolding of their personalities in the eight stages (Boeree, 1997). Erikson's Theory is considered a psychosocial theory as emphasis is placed on focusing on interpersonal, social and cultural influences across the life span (Fleming, 2008; Syed & McLean, 2017). Erikson's "psychosocial stages" are thus divided into eight stages across the lifespan from infancy to adulthood (Erikson, 1982; Boeree, 1997; Fleming, 2008; Hutchinson & Oltedal, 2014; Guglielmi, 2017). Erikson's eight stages include trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation and integrity versus despair (Boeree, 1997, Fleming, 2008; Hutchinson & Oltedal, 2014; Guglielmi, 2017).

Erikson saw that each stage of development presents its own unique challenges which he called crises which in turn presents challenges to one's individual identity (Erikson, 1982; Fleming, 2008). In each stage the individual is confronted with certain challenges and conflicts that they need to work through in order to move onto the next stage (Erikson, 1982; Hutchinson & Oltedal, 2014; Teater, 2015). The successful completion of each stage will result in positive and healthy psychosocial development (Teater, 2015). Successful development of each stage depends on meeting or overcoming the crises in each stage which is a requisite for successful development at later stages (Fleming, 2008). However, whether the conflict at a particular stage is resolved or not the individual is also pushed by both biological maturation and social demands into the next stage impacting the way the following stages evolve (Sigelman & Rider, 2003; Marasco, 2012).

According to Fleming (2008) Erikson believed that life's difficulties such as divorce, loss of a job or a loved one can set an individual back (i.e. lead to regression) and according to Erikson there are both unavoidable moments of progression towards growth as well as regression (Schneider, 2006).

The concept of balance is thus central to Erikson's Theory whereby each stage has a positive and a negative pole (Syed & McLean, 2017). Individuals are thus pulled between the positive and

negative poles whilst engaging in the developmental task during each stage with the aim of trying to find a sense of balance (Boeree, 1997; Syed & McLean, 2017). For example, take intimacy versus isolation if there is too much of the positive (intimacy) individuals might become too intimate, too freely without any depth to intimacy, which Erikson referred to as promiscuity (Boeree, 1997). In contrast to this is what Erikson called exclusion, whereby if there is too much negative (isolation) individuals isolate themselves from love, friendship and their communities (Boeree, 1997).

The participants are in Erikson's young adulthood stage (20 – 40 years old) called Intimacy Versus Isolation. According to Fleming (2008) Erikson viewed intimacy or closeness and mutual sharing as the basic strength of this stage and isolation as the danger. The primary goal during the intimacy versus isolation stage is thus for individuals to seek out companionship and intimate relationships, however fear of rejection can resort to isolation as young adults attempt to navigate the psychosocial crisis (Guglielmi, 2017). At this stage the intimacy versus isolation crisis focuses on young adult's ability to develop friendships by connecting and relating to another individual on a deep meaningful level, however intimacy here does not refer to sex (Guglielmi, 2017). Furthermore, relational communication is important to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Guglielmi, 2017). When young adults succeed in committing to an individual, forming an intimate bond, this may lead to the establishment of an intimate relationship (Guglielmi, 2017). When individuals successfully negotiate this stage, it leads to the psychosocial strength which Erikson referred to as love (Boeree, 1997). Individuals who have achieved the virtue of love, have the ability to put aside differences and hostility within their relationships (Boeree, 1997).

Erikson viewed an individual's occupational identity as key to one's overall identity, whereby if individuals have not developed a sense of self, then an occupational identity would be difficult to achieve (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). During young adulthood occupational choices are key fundamental issues whereby individuals develop goals pertaining to their career (Sokol, 2009). Fleming (2008) mentions that Erikson believed that intimacy between two people as a couple was only possible when each individual developed a strong sense of identity separately. Thus when

young adults each develop a separate reasonable identity, they are then prepared to share that identity in order to develop a successful intimate relationship (Syed & McLean, 2017).

Furthermore, communication plays an important role as it strengthens individual's identities that help build intimate relationships and assist in furthering intimacy (Guglielmi, 2017). Many couples marry at a very young age where the dilemma is that two people cannot grow and mature if they have not matured separately first (Fleming, 2008). Another dilemma could be that often young adults have often not advanced in maturity from adolescence, others do not arrive at this level until well into their thirties whilst others never do attain full maturity (Fleming, 2008). Hence divorce could be a common outcome for couples who marry when still quite young and are immature (Fleming, 2008). According to Marasco (2012) if the young adult has not resolved conflict in the previous stages, they may feel threatened by entering a long-term relationship or become overly dependent on their partner in order to resolve any identity issues. The failure to sustain a committed intimate relationship during Erikson's intimacy versus isolation stage could hinder development (Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates & Dodge, 2013) and loneliness and isolation occurs if relationships needs are not met (Fleming, 2008; Marasco, 2012).

This study focused on firefighters who are aged between 20 – 40 years old and the theory enabled the researcher to understand individuals having the ability to form intimate and close meaningful relationships with others. In this study firefighters are in a relationship or married and have developed relationships with colleagues therefore, Erikson's Psychosocial Theory gave the researcher further understanding of the participants' ability to develop connections with others. The theory also enabled the researcher to gain insight into challenges that participants encounter such as workplace stressors and the 24-hour shifts which may have a negative influence on personal relationships particularly that of their partners, leading to isolation. This theoretical framework is relevant to the study as it allowed for further exploration into the participant's relational communication which is important in maintaining and establishing friendships and intimate relationships (Guglielmi, 2017). Furthermore, Erikson Psychosocial Theory highlights the importance of individuals establishing an occupational identity (Kosine & Lewis, 2008) and the participants in this study made the career decision of becoming a firefighter. Erikson's developmental stages is therefore relevant to the study as it gave the researcher a deeper

understanding of the specific psychosocial tasks and outcomes inherent to the intimacy versus isolation stage.

2.2.3 Spillover – Crossover Model:

The third theoretical framework underpinning this study is the Spillover – Crossover Model which will contribute to a greater understanding of the fire fighters work-family interface. According to Rodriguez-Munoz, Sanez-Vergel, Demerouti & Bakker (2013) spillover refers to the transmission of experiences between domains for example from work to home and crossover refers to transmission within the same domain. This model is key to understanding the process by which a firefighter's work conditions carry over into the family domain and could potentially impact on their personal relationships. An employee's life domains consist of work and family, which are sources of both positive and negative events (Amstad & Semmer, 2011). It is argued that work experiences can impact behaviours, thoughts and feelings in the family domain and vice versa (Amstad & Semmer, 2011; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2013; Lavassani & Movahedi, 2014).

The Spillover - Crossover Model has been used extensively in work-family literature and is particularly useful for explaining how work experiences such as time and energy can often be carried over to the family domain impacting the marital relationship (Meadows, 2014). Therefore, as a result of the work strain that spills over to the family setting an individual could experience difficulty in performing adequately and conflict can arise (Allen, Crowe, Baran & Scott 2015). On the contrary the Spillover – Crossover Model also applies to positive experiences (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2013). Employees who have positive experiences at work and enjoy their work may go home in a positive mood and this is said to positively impact on their partner's well-being (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2013).

The following section focuses on policies that govern the work of firefighters.

2.3. Policies that Govern the Work of Firefighters

2.3.1 Basic Conditions of Employment Act:

The aim of the Basic Condition of Employment Act, 1997 (Act 75 of 1997) is to regulate the right to fair labour practices. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) stipulates that the employer must regulate the working time of each employee in accordance with the provisions of any Act governing occupational health and safety, with due regard to the health and safety of employees and with due regard to the Code of Good Practice on the Regulation of Working Time. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) highlights that an employer may not require or permit an employee to work more than forty-five hours in any week; and nine hours in any day if the employee works for five days or fewer in a week. Firefighters work twenty-four hour shifts which is higher than what the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) stipulates and many firefighters feel aggrieved as they feel they were employed to work 40 hours and in most instances they end up working 72 to 80 hours a week (Petersen, 2019). An agreement for firefighters to work different hours compared to other employees lapsed in 2010, where they recently protested and demanded to be paid for the extra hours, whilst others preferred to not want to work any additional hours (Mafolo, 2019).

2.3.2 The Occupational Health and Safety Act:

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (1993) stipulates that every employee should take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions. Firefighters are governed by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 (Act No 181 of 1993) where the aim of the act is to provide for the health and safety of persons at work and for the health and safety of persons in connection with the use of plant and machinery (i.e. firefighters operate and use machinery and drive specialised vehicles). The Occupational Health and Safety Act (1993) specifies that firefighters need to carry out lawful orders obeying the health and safety rules, report situations which are unsafe or unhealthy and if they are involved in any incidents which may affect their health, they need to report such incidents immediately to the employer and/or health and safety representative. Firefighters often do report such incidents but nothing happens and they are expected to continue working in unsafe conditions of practice (Morris, 2012). According to Morris (2012) it is the responsibility of the incident commander (i.e.

person in charge) to minimise firefighters' exposure to unsafe working experience and stop unsafe practices. Firefighters' have been trained to accept and not question orders from the incident commander, which often makes it very uncomfortable for them to say no to unsafe experience of practice (Morris, 2012). Firefighters should thus be allowed to report a safety concern through a structured process without the fear of being penalised or seen as weak (Morris, 2012).

2.3.3 The Fire Brigade Services Act:

A Fire Brigade Service is intended to be employed for preventing the outbreak or spread of a fire, fighting or extinguishing a fire, the protection of life or property against a fire or other threatening danger and the rescue of life or property from a fire or other danger (The Fire Brigade Services Act, 1987) and The Fire Brigade Services Act, 1987 (Act No. 99 of 1987) is the primary piece of legislation regulating fire services. The act provides for the establishment, maintenance, employment, co-ordination and standardisation of fire brigade services; and for matters connected therewith (The Fire Brigade Services Act, 1987). This act gives the Fire Department, management and firefighters guidelines and procedures to follow when a fire exists (i.e. they are allowed to block off a road and enter a house without permission). Knowledge of the Fire Brigade Services Act (1987) is relevant to the study as it is useful in understanding how the Fire Department operates and what is expected as the role of being a firefighter.

2.4. Working environment of firefighters

Firefighters have one of the most dangerous occupations and experience a number of workplace stressors (Jeanette & Scoboria, 2008; Cook & Mitchell, 2013), which will be discussed below.

2.4.1 Workplace stressors:

Employees can be exposed to and experience workplace stress, which cause a change in their physical and mental state as a result of challenges or threats perceived whilst at work (Mustafa, Illzam, Muniandy, Hashmi, Sharifa & Nang, 2015). Occupational stress is a major psychosocial risk at work and a great concern to the employer and employee (Joseph, 2013). For the employer there is the financial burden i.e. absenteeism, presenteeism and increased risk of injuries on duty (Sliter, Robert, Cheung & McFadden, 2014). The literature also indicates that negative outcomes such as poor work performance and diminished morale can occur due to firefighter stressors

(Fisher & Etches, 2003). Sources of workplace stressors include exposure to dangerous and harmful situations, shift work, repeated exposure to trauma, challenging aspects of career advancement, the need for training and the negative consequences of rank structure which will be discussed below.

2.4.1.1 Exposure to dangerous and harmful situations:

Firefighting is undoubtedly a job that poses many dangers to the individuals who perform this service. It is impossible to eliminate the occupational stressors entirely as they are inherent characteristics in a job such as in firefighting (Sliter et al., 2014) and there are a number of risks that firefighters face. Firefighters' job-related exposures to danger increases their risk of developing chronic illnesses such as heart disease and cancer (Fahy & Molis, 2019). They are frequently exposed to serious chemical and physical hazards to an extent that is unusual in the modern work force (Guidotti & Clough, 1992). Exposure to asbestos, gas, fumes and smoke is the leading cause of minor injuries whereas falling, slipping or tripping is the leading cause for more severe injuries among firefighters (Adamson, 2013). In addition to the above injuries 45% of firefighters die on duty as a result of cardiovascular events (Adamson, 2013; Kales & Smith, 2017). Firefighters encounter strenuous physical activity, emotional stress as well as environmental pollutants whilst working which put strain on the cardiovascular system and as a result increases the risk of cardiovascular disease (Kales & Smith, 2017). The likelihood for firefighters developing a variety of cancers is also high as a result of the exposure to harmful chemicals (Cook & Mitchell, 2013).

Whilst wearing protective equipment is necessary for protection from heat and fumes, it does affect the range of motion of firefighters (Scholz, Gordon, Ramirez, Sigg, Dyrks & Beigl, 2013) and also adds to the cardio metabolic demands on their body and can lead to hyperthermia and dehydration (Kales & Smith, 2017). A common cause of accidents in firefighting is getting lost in a building and very limited technology is available to prevent this kind of accident (Scholz et al., 2013). In recent times three firefighters passed away in Johannesburg and it is believed that one firefighter slipped and fell from the 23rd floor and another two firefighters passed away due to a lack of oxygen after they became trapped in a building (Maphanga, 2018). The recent fire disaster in Australia claimed the lives of two volunteer firefighters in December 2019, as these firefighters

were trying to fend off wildfires when the truck they were travelling in hit a tree and rolled (Albeck-Ripka, 2019).

2.4.1.2 Shift work:

The negative effects of working shifts have been noted in the literature (Carrico, 2012). Firefighter's face a number of work-related stressors such as having to work long hours which includes working 24-hour shifts and at times overtime (Adamson, 2013). Shift work is said to be a leading factor in contributing towards physical exhaustion (Adamson, 2013). Furthermore, it has been argued that fire departments employing the 24-hour shift schedule have found it difficult to manage fatigue especially when there are high call volumes (Cohen & Plecas, 2012). According to a Taiwanese study conducted in 2014 among 422 firefighters, high stress was related to the long working hours, where firefighters had difficulty attending to both work and family demands (Torres et al, 2016). Ongoing shift work removes firefighters from their households when their presence is needed (Fjelstad, 1978; Oosthuizen & Koortzen, 2007) and research has also found that when firefighters' working hours increase so do work and family conflict (Cohen & Plecas, 2012; Meadows, 2014). Working in the evening, on weekends and on special occasions, results in couples in spending less quality time together which could be detrimental for the relationship (Carrico, 2012; Adamson, 2013; Meadows, 2014) and increase the risk of separation and/or divorce (Oosthuizen & Koortzen, 2009; Meadows, 2014). Studies have also indicated that poor mood scores were prevalent amongst firefighters' who work shifts (Carey et al., 2011) and that firefighters' negative emotional state affects their marriages (Carrico, 2012).

However, literature highlights that working 24-hour shifts can balance out the negatives over time (Schorr, 2016). For example, working 24-hour shifts allows firefighters to spend more consecutive time with their family relatives (Cohen & Plecas, 2012), particularly if the firefighter's partner does not work. It was found that partners had greater appreciation for shift work as this gave the couple time to spend together (Carrico, 2012) and working shifts can therefore provide firefighters an opportunity for improved work-life balance allowing to connect with their family and friends (Litchfield & Hinckley, 2016). Another challenge for firefighters is the ongoing exposure to trauma and this will now be discussed.

2.4.1.3 Repeated exposure to trauma:

Firefighters are exposed to multiple trauma (Fjelstad, 1978; Monterio, Abs, Labres, Maus & Pioner, 2013; Scholtz et al., 2013; Heitman, 2016) which could place them at higher risk for developing mental health disorders (Adamson, 2013; O' Halloran, 2015; Torres et al., 2016).

Humanitarian workers including firefighters can experience vicarious trauma whereby they continuously witness trauma and help people who are in need and/or suffering (Pearlman & McKay, 2008). Vicarious trauma is a process of change that unfolds and has a cumulative effect on survivors (Pearlman & McKay, 2008) who regularly witness death, loss, and hear distressing stories. Symptoms of vicarious trauma include heightened levels of anxiety, depressed mood, discouragement (Sui & Padmanabhanunni, 2016) as well as difficulty managing emotions and a feeling of loss and hope (Pearlman & McKay, 2008). Behaviour and relationship signs include the following: difficulty setting boundaries and separating work from personal life, feeling disconnected from loved ones, even when communicating with them, increased conflict in relationships, general social withdrawal, sexual difficulties and impulsivity (Pearlman & McKay, 2008).

Research indicates that the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is common among firefighters (Adamson, 2013; Monterio et al., 2013; Stewart & Swartz, 2014) and firefighters experience the most traumatic stress following the death of a child and colleague (Meadows, 2014). The presence of PTSD symptoms among firefighters may negatively affect job satisfaction, increase in absenteeism or lead to earlier retirements (Jeannette & Scoboria, 2008). Studies have also found that elevated rates of PTSD among firefighters were highly correlated with problems at home, such as marital conflict (Meadows, 2013) and at work whereby there might be an increase in need to take time off (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). Many firefighters turn to alcohol, drugs and tobacco to deal with traumatic stressors which in turn may be detrimental for marital relationships (Adamson, 2013).

2.4.1.4 The need for training:

Training and development of employees is crucial to the organisation and has become an issue of strategic importance (Hameed & Waheed, 2011; Pillay, Dawood & Karodia, 2018) as individuals

are required to undergo rigorous training prior to becoming a firefighter and thereafter need to maintain continuing education (Adamson, 2013). Training is beneficial to both the employer and employee whereby employees acquire new skills that enables them to adapt and cope with organisational change (Pillay et al., 2018). Increased training thus helps employees feel more comfortable to perform their tasks, which in turn leads to higher self-esteem and internal motivation for the employee (Abuhashesh, Al-Dmour & Masa'deh, 2019). Many organisations do not care about employee development and only focus on achieving the organisational goals (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). When organisations do not care about their employees, employees in return do not have any feelings about their organisation (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013), which may negatively influence the individual as well as the organisation.

When organisations contribute towards and implements employee development activities (i.e. training, workshops and seminars) it was found that employees work harder, utilise their skills and efforts to achieve the goals of the organisation (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Therefore, employee development activities, enhances an employee's skills which improves the employee's performance and leads to an increase in organisational effectiveness (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Employee training thus benefits the organisation and leads to a positive impact on return on investment, low employee turnover and improved employee satisfaction (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Employees who have job satisfaction believe that their work has a purpose and that they are important to their organisation (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Furthermore, Laba & Geldenhuys (2018) argues that positive experiences at work have shown to enhance an employee's overall well-being.

In a study conducted in Southern Brazil among 27 firefighters it was highlighted that there appears to be a need for firefighters' working experience to be improved with specific reference to training (Cook & Mitchell, 2013; Monterio et al., 2013; Etheridge, 2018). There is a limited amount of courses, with no specialisation in any of the training for firefighters (Monteiro et al., 2013). Firefighters feel additional training is required to equip them to deal with emergency medical response or accident calls and emergency medical response is considered to be the most stressful type of work for firefighters as they have to deal with assisting distressed families (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). Furthermore, driving courses, specialist courses as well as refresher courses for

firefighters are also recommended (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). Training provides opportunities for career advancement which will be discussed below.

2.4.1.5 Challenging aspects of career advancement:

Career advancement can be referred to the progression through ranks to more senior positions within an organisation (Pillay, Dawood & Karodia, 2018), however, research alludes to the challenging limited career promotion opportunities for firefighters (Oosthuizen & Koortzen, 2007). The fire service has changed considerably with regards to the career advancement process whereby they no longer appoint individuals who have been around the longest nor choose the most popular person for the position (Carr, 2017). Each fire department has created their own benchmarks and requirements that is needed for advancement (Carr, 2017). According to the literature there are a few fire departments that have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that outlines pre-officer development including the requirements needed for advancement whilst many departments do not have guidelines on pre-promotional officer development (Carr, 2017). This can be seen as challenging, as promotion policies and procedures play a significant role in employee satisfaction (Abuhashesh et al., 2019).

Employees, however, who want to advance in their career are always willing to participate in additional training courses (Pillay et al., 2018) but research alludes to the limited amount of training available for firefighters as indicated previously (Monteiro et al., 2013). The National Fire Academy (NFA) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) highlight that training is an important element necessary for career advancement (Carr, 2017). Prziborowski (2008) argues that career advancement for firefighters is difficult and requires a lot of hard work, effort and energy. Furthermore, limited career advancement opportunities affect an employee's motivation and work performance negatively (Pillay et al., 2018). It was also found that when limited promotion opportunities occur in an organisation, employees did not want to participate in any employee development activities (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Firefighters who do not advance in their career start to blame others, cannot take responsibility and become bitter and frustrated (Prziborowski, 2008).

Many employees find that being in the same position and repeating the same daily tasks for many years is tedious, whereby they seek new challenges elsewhere if they are not successful in promotion (Abuhashesh et al., 2019). The challenging aspects described above of career advancement whereby a lack of opportunity for growth occurs leads to job dissatisfaction (Lukosi, 2015) and job dissatisfaction can have adverse effects on the employee's personal life (Abuhashesh et al., 2019) as well on the organisation as it can lead to an increase in absenteeism, accidents, grievances and tardiness (Aziri, 2011). Job dissatisfaction is closely linked to impulsive behaviours because employees who are dissatisfied with work, are likely to resign, disengage or retaliate instead of implementing adaptive behaviours such as problem solving (Lukosi, 2015).

The final challenge faced by firefighters refers to the challenges with the rank structure. This will now be discussed.

2.4.1.6 Negative consequences of rank structure:

The challenging aspects of the rank structure alludes to the fact that firefighters have been trained to accept and not question orders from the incident commander, which makes it very uncomfortable for them to say no to unsafe conditions of practice (Morris, 2012). There appears to be a lack of support from management, a lack of consistency in decision making by Commanders in operational situations as well as a lack of time to debrief after incidents which add to the stress experienced by firefighters and this in turn negatively impacts on families (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). The literature highlights that all firefighters become the incident commander's additional eyes and ears when responding to an incident therefore it is argued that they need to alert them of unacceptable or dangerous situations (Morris, 2011). If firefighters do not report unsafe situations, this may lead to an injury which can end their career, a rule should thus be put in place to allow firefighters to report a safety concern without fear (Morris, 2011).

The following section will focus on personal challenges which is divided into individual and family challenges that firefighters routinely face.

2.5. Personal Challenges

2.5.1 Individual Challenges:

Firefighters are used to solving other people's problems but when it comes to solving their own it appears to be a challenge for them. This is particularly with regards to self-care and wellness (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc & Couwels, 2015). It is seen as a weakness and a failure when firefighters admit to needing and/or seeking assistance, therefore firefighters are reluctant to do so. They are of the view that seeking help may negatively influence their career (Henderson et al., 2015). Fellow firefighters may feel the individuals who request assistance (needed for self-care) are seen as not stable and a risk to their personal safety when responding to incidents. This further prevents firefighters accessing help (Henderson et al., 2015). There is a strong sense of masculinity among firefighters and they have a tendency to hide their true emotions and feelings which may lead to job dissatisfaction when they are unable to cope (Norwood & Rascati, 2012; Adamson, 2013).

Firefighters are also at risk for mental health disorders (as indicated previously) which include clinical depression, suicide, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse (Fisher & Etches, 2003; Monterio et al., 2013). According to a Brazilian study the prevalence rate of PTSD among firefighter was 13 – 18%, moderate anxiety was 26%, hazardous drinking was 22% and harmful drinking was 3.7% (Monterio et al., 2013). It is estimated that 30% of firefighters have a substance abuse problem, which is twice the rate of the general population (Carrico, 2012; Cook & Mitchell, 2013). The literature indicates that there appears to be a link between the intensity of incidents that firefighters respond to and the intake of alcohol which is used to cope with the emotional distress generated by these incidents (Adamson, 2013; Cook & Mitchell, 2013).

Firefighter culture has created a stigma attached to mental health problems and it is seen as a sign of weakness, vulnerability and failure (Henderson et al., 2015). This in turn acts as barrier towards the acceptance and treatment of mental health problems for firefighters (Henderson et al., 2015). As a result of cultural stigma and untreated mental health disorders the fire service has growing rates of suicide (Henderson et al., 2015, Heitman, 2016). In Oosthuizen & Koortzen (2007) firefighters in South Africa expressed thoughts about ending their lives (suicidal tendencies).

Suicide is seen as a difficult topic to discuss in the fire service as firefighters may not understand why a person commits suicide, research however argues that suicide needs to be more openly discussed and programmes need to be implemented in combating suicide (Henderson et al., 2015). According to the literature workshops on suicide awareness and online suicide assessment tools can assist with screening for suicide risk among firefighters (Henderson et al., 2015).

Workplace stressors may also take a toll on firefighters' physical health where firefighters may not maintain a healthy lifestyle by overeating, becoming overweight and not engaging in physical activity (Adamson, 2013), which can be seen as unhealthy coping skills. Firefighters, however, require a high level of physical fitness for the job (Staley, 2008). The literature indicates that maintaining a high level of physical fitness seems to have changed, new recruits are strongly encouraged to engage in physical activity daily (Staley, 2008). Once candidates leave the academy this expectation seems to fade away (Staley, 2008). If firefighters do not learn healthy coping skills to deal with workplace stressors, this can be detrimental to their personal health and wellness (Adamson, 2013).

2.5.2 Family Challenges:

Firefighters and spouses experience stress as they try to balance family life and the occupation of a firefighter (Carrico, 2012). Couples experience frustration due to one spouse being a firefighter as they feel disconnected from each other (Carrico, 2012). For example, when firefighters return home after a distressing day, they distance themselves from family relatives (Deppa, 2015; Torres et al., 2016) and are more reluctant to not communicate with their partners (Adamson, 2013). Research indicates that greater withdrawal of firefighters is said to be associated with less intimacy between firefighters and their partners (Fisher & Etches, 2003; Torres et al., 2016). Firefighters upon returning home are exhausted and in need of rest (Schorr, 2016) as well as more irritable and easily frustrated as a result of workplace stressors (Carrico, 2012).

Spending quality time together is an important component for any marriage and many studies have found that quality time is positively correlated with marital satisfaction particularly for females (Meadows, 2013). Furthermore, firefighters working schedules is said to be hard on a marriage and their absence particular during important family events is stressful for the family (Meadows,

2013). In addition to the physical absence it has been found that firefighter's partners complain of psychological absence, whereby their husbands are home but often preoccupied about experiences that occurred at work (Meadows, 2013). From the above, it is evident that a number of challenges occur for both firefighters and their families, and the literature identifies that in order to cope with the stressors, the couple focuses on the positive aspects of the job such as financial stability (Carrico, 2012). Literature indicates that firefighters in some regions are paid competitive salaries which allows them to live comfortably (Prziborowski, 2017), placing less financial stress on the family which relates to the American context. However, according to Oosthuizen and Koortzen (2007) within the South African context firefighters have found it difficult to provide financially and are forced to work longer hours and more shifts. Hence firefighters have concerns regarding differences within salary structures (Nkomo, 2016). According to Charles (2020) SA Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) representing firefighters is demanding to go into a new agreement with the City to challenge the pay structure.

2.6 Types of support/intervention needed

2.6.1 Social support:

Firefighters continually need a strong social support network throughout their careers and that marriage and family were considered vital sources of support (Carrico, 2012). A firefighter's supportive relationship with his/her wife, has great potential to aid him/her in dealing with the demands of his/her career (Adamson, 2013). Thus, the quality of firefighter's personal relationship can play a key role in combating the negative effects of occupational stressors (Adamson, 2013). Research indicates that close bonds of marriage are important sources of emotional and social support which leads to improved health benefits for firefighters (Adamson, 2013). It was found that firefighters who were committed to their partners and had healthy relationships had the ability to deal with demands of their career and encountered less job stress (Adamson, 2013). Furthermore, literature indicates that a healthy marital relationship leads to overall global happiness for men (Adamson, 2013) and that a positive interaction between home and work leads to more satisfied, engaged and committed employees (Van Aarde & Mostert, 2008). Therefore, family support as well as external support networks such as extended family is imperative for firefighters in handling daily workplace stressors (Carrico, 2012; Henderson et al., 2015; Torres et al., 2016).

Firefighters spend 24 hours at a time together, cooking, cleaning, sleeping and forming daily tasks and responsibilities at the station and thus develop a family-like brotherly bond known as “brotherhood” where firefighters spend quality time together off and on duty (Adamson, 2013). Research also indicates that firefighters have an emotional closeness to their “brothers” feeling more comfortable to talk to their “brothers” instead of their partners (Adamson, 2013). Firefighters felt that family relatives did not share similar experiences therefore were not able to provide the same level of support as colleagues could (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). According to the literature firefighters’ partners often feel shunned at times or excluded as a result of the camaraderie their husbands experienced with fellow firefighters (Adamson, 2013). This is a particular example of asocial coping behaviour, where the firefighter’s needs are addressed, but harms those around them such as their spouse which is said to be associated with anger and poor relationship adjustment (Carrico, 2012).

Other type of support available is religious support, which will be discussed below.

2.6.2 Religious support:

Religion can reduce effects of stress as it has the capacity to provide a strong support network, similar to that of a family network, which can be drawn upon for advice and support (Litcher & Carmalt, 2009). Therefore, religious support may reduce the effects of stress because of its association with a social support system (Brianna, 2016).

Individuals tend to live healthier lifestyles in accordance with their religious beliefs (Holt, Clark & Roth, 2014) as all major religious traditions have rules and regulations pertaining to diet, sexual practices and other health related behaviours, leading to positive health outcomes for individuals who are religiously involved (Holt et al., 2014). For example, behaviours might include avoiding drinking alcohol excessively and not using illegal drugs or tobacco (Holt et al., 2014). Furthermore, having a close relationship with a higher power and through active participation in worship and church reinforces healthy lifestyle habits (Holt et al., 2014). Religious support also encourages the development of positive emotions such as gratitude, forgiveness, whilst reducing worry when faced with stressors (Brianna, 2016). Studies have indicated that positive religious experiences within firefighter’ families serve to strengthen family bonds (Carrico, 2012). For

example, families may have adopted various religious rituals and traditions such as reading sacred texts, praying together and attending religious services (Petts, 2019). A firefighter's job is inherently dangerous and stressful (Adamson, 2013) and religion can be used as a coping mechanism when faced with stressful events (Brianna, 2016).

2.6.3 Support from management:

Research indicates that officers should be able to identify symptoms of stress, fatigue and burnout and upon identifying, refer firefighters who need assistance to EAP and Wellness (Milen, 2009). Management can assist with arranging for a Chaplaincy to be selected and trained to assist firefighters with the following: providing spiritual support, assisting with on scene support, assisting with defusing as well as one to one support (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). Management can also assist with the implementation of physical fitness programmes for firefighters which will be discussed below.

2.6.4 Physical fitness programmes:

The nature and the physical demands of a firefighter's job indicates that they need to be 100 percent fit to attend work (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). However, there is no national mandatory fitness standard for firefighters, thus firefighter's fitness levels across fire station vary (Byczek, Walton, Conrad, Reichelt & Samo, 2004). The implementation of mandatory fitness programmes for firefighters is needed to promote firefighter fitness and to improve the overall health of firefighters (McFarland, 2009; Heitman, 2016). It is recommended that firefighters have access to physical activity at the station, as engaging in physical fitness programmes may also stimulate interest in maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Milen, 2009). Research indicates that firefighters who participate in physical training and fitness becomes more resilient to both systemic and traumatic stress (Fisher & Etches, 2003). Although physical fitness programmes are shown to be beneficial, throughout a firefighters career many fire departments do not require them to retain their initial level of physical fitness (Byczek et al., 2004) and fitness and health programmes that have been developed for firefighters, have not been evaluated for their effectiveness (Guidotti & Clough, 1992).

2.6.5 EAP and Wellness support:

An EAP is a worksite based programme that is designed to assist the employee and the organisation in the early identification and resolution of personal and performance problems (Newton, Hayday & Barkworth, 2005; Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008). EAP professionals are psychologists, professional counsellors, substance abuse counsellors and nurses (Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008; Attridge, 2009), with social workers being referred to as the discipline of choice due to their ability to intervene at micro, mezzo and macro levels therefore, having the ability to see the whole picture (Jacobson & Hosford & Lamb, 2008). EAP Practitioners assess an employee's presenting problem, how it affects the workplace and their ability to function at work (Attridge, 2009). Social Workers working as EAP Practitioners provide a range of services to employees which include short term counselling, crisis intervention, substance abuse assessments as well as suicidal risk assessments (Green, 2012) and workshops (Joja, 2004). In addition to assisting employees EAP Practitioners consult with other stakeholders within the organisation such as management, Employee Relations and unions on how to manage troubled employees, address factors involving work-life balance as well as to enhance workplace environment (Green, 2012).

According to the literature, developing a holistic wellness approach for firefighters that includes medical, fitness, rehabilitation and behavioural health is recommended (Shantz, 2002). However, Cook and Mitchell (2013) highlight that firefighters are reluctant to access support from EAP for a number of reasons: inadequate support from management to implement such programmes, reluctance to show any sign of weakness to fellow colleagues as well as management and a lack of confidence in the programme. In order for the EAP programme to succeed it is vital that management endorses the EAP programme, supports the overall aim and is actively involved (Mogorosi, 2009). EAP service would thus only be effective when the fire station chief supported and encouraged firefighters to use EAP counselling and trauma support services (Torres et., 2016).

In order to address the possible psychological concerns of firefighters, psychological listening and support, psychological interventions, and assistance from mental health professionals, which would include social workers, are recommended (Norwood & Rascati, 2012; Monterio et al., 2013). Psychological interventions such as counselling is provided by trained practitioners who provide short and/or long-term interventions to individuals with the aim of supporting and

enhancing their well-being (Aldrige, 2014). Counselling takes place in a private confidential setting whereby the counsellors listen attentively without judging and assist individuals with gaining insight into their feelings and behaviour (Aldrige, 2014). Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that EAP maintains confidentiality (Joja, 2004; Jacobson & Hosford-Lamb, 2008; Attridge, 2009; Norwood & Rascati, 2012). The gaining of the trust of a firefighter is crucial to any EAP service and Wall (2002) recommends that clinicians spend time at the fire station, familiarise themselves with the fire department culture all of which will contribute to greater understanding of their working experience and rendering more effective interventions (Henderson et al, 2015). It is also recommended that EAP offers educational trainings on coping skills and provide firefighters with family support resources such as childcare to benefit the spouses of firefighters (Torres et al., 2016). EAP and Wellness can also facilitate workshops on suicide awareness and implement online suicide assessment tools which can assist with screening for suicide risk among firefighters (Henderson et al., 2015).

Peer support programmes, and EAP crisis response for trauma exposure for firefighters is also recommended (Cook & Mitchell, 2013; Torres et al., 2016). There are many models of peer support which can either consist of firefighters who volunteer their time who have received specialised training in areas such as stress, alcohol abuse, family issues and provide initial support to firefighters whilst others combine the programme with EAP and refer if professional intervention is necessary (Norwood & Rascati, 2012). The objective of the peer support programme is to provide an ear or shoulder to lean on, assist with information and education, identify at risk firefighters, reduce stigma and serve as the link between the firefighter and EAP (Norwood & Rascati, 2012). Trained peer counsellors can also provide psychological first aid immediately to firefighters as they are directly involved and part of the group (Jeannette & Scoboria, 2008; Norwood & Rascati, 2012) and can assess whether further intervention is needed from a mental health professional (Jeannette & Scoboria, 2008).

2.6 Conclusion:

The chapter summarised previous research pertaining to the area of study and presented two theoretical models. The remaining sections focused on policies that govern firefighters, the

working experience and challenges that firefighters routinely face as well as the types of support and intervention needed. The following chapter discusses the methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction:

The third chapter will discuss the methodology that was used to conduct the research. This includes the research design, sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis and data verification. The limitations of the study will be presented. A conclusion completes the chapter.

3.2 Research Design:

This research used a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2009; 2014) qualitative research is recommended when the purpose is to understand a phenomenon where little research exists and is focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The exploratory nature of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014) enables the researcher to see the subject in a new way when investigating an area where there is not much known about (Morse & Richards, 2002). While there is extensive research on firefighters working experience there is very little studies on how firefighters working experience influence their personal lives and vice versa. Qualitative research is said to use words as data which is rich with “thick” descriptions of phenomena which numbers do not capture (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The nature of the research focused on participants’ perceptions of how their working experience positively and negatively influence their personal lives in ways that were rich and meaningful hence, a qualitative design was most suitable for the study.

A qualitative approach is an inductive mode of research whereby the researcher’s goal is to gather data by asking questions and then collects all necessary information which is then analysed into categories and patterns (Strydom, 2011). Thus a significant characteristic of qualitative research is that data is collected through direct contact with people in their own context. In this qualitative study the researcher examined firefighter’s perceptions of how their personal lives positively and negatively influence their working experience and vice versa.

The nature of the research required an exploratory approach. Exploratory research is used to gain insight into a problem or topic, rather than test a hypothesis by providing the researcher with a broader understanding (de Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2011; Reiter, 2017) of why and how something happened (Reiter, 2017). Furthermore, explorative research is said to provide new explanations that have been previously overlooked which can be done by the active involvement of the researcher (Reiter, 2017). Therefore, an explorative research design was used in this study to gain new insight into the unique perceptions of firefighters have pertaining to their working experience and personal lives in the South African context more specifically within the Western Cape.

3.3 Sampling:

Qualitative research does not involve a sample size that is statistically formulated which follows that non-probability sampling is generally used in qualitative studies (Strydom & Delpont, 2011). Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling that is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2007), whereby a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population (Strydom & Delpont, 2011). The researcher decides what needs to be known and finds people who can and who are willing to provide information by virtue of knowledge and/or experience (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling concentrates on people with certain characteristics who will be able to assist with the relevant research (Etikan et al., 2016).

The sample group in this study was firefighters employed at the City of Cape Town based at the Goodwood and Epping Fire Stations. The researcher selected participants that were able to provide insight into the research problem (Strydom & Delpont, 2011). The study focused on firefighters who are aged between 20 – 40 years old and Erikson's Psychosocial Theory enabled the researcher to understand individuals having the ability to form intimate and close meaningful relationships with others. In this study firefighters are in a relationship or married and have developed relationships with colleagues therefore, Erikson's Psychosocial Theory gave the researcher further understanding of the participants' ability to develop connections with others. A total of twenty male firefighters aged between age 20 – 40 voluntarily participated and two firefighters were used for the pilot study. The study focused on males as there are more males employed as firefighters

as compared to females, nationwide the firefighting profession overwhelming remains a male dominated profession with women making up only 4 percent of the firefighting population (McCoppin, Lourgos, Fabbre & Tribune, 2018). However, in City of Cape Town there are 120 female firefighters just shy of one in 10 against a male majority (Meyer, 2019). In the Garden Route District Municipality there are 7 female firefighters out of a group of 40 firefighters (Pieters, 2019). The lowest client intake for assessing EAP services came from Goodwood and Epping Fire Station, therefore these two stations were selected to ensure that the researcher was not known to the participants. A total of 10 male participants were selected from Goodwood Fire Station and a total of 10 male participants were selected from Epping Fire Station.

Permission was obtained from the Fire Chief (Fire and Rescue Department – City of Cape Town) as well as City’s Research Department where a formal application had to be submitted. Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher had to sign the approval letter and submit to City’s Organisational Policy, Planning and Research Branch.

3.4 Data Collection:

3.4.1 Pilot study

A pilot study is a prerequisite and imperative part of any research study because it is used to orientate the researcher to the project (Greeff, 2011; Strydom, 2011). Researchers can often be over-hasty and they should never start with implementation unless they are confident the chosen procedures are suitable, valid, reliable and effective (Strydom, 2011). The researcher conducted a pilot study in which one firefighter from Goodwood Fire Station and one firefighter from Epping Fire Station were interviewed separately. The pilot study enabled the researcher to test the questions used in the interview schedule and determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis were adequate and appropriate. Once the pilot study was complete, the researcher made minor changes which included rephrasing some of the questions based on these two interviews.

3.4.2 Data collection approach

Qualitative research commonly uses standardised semi-structured one-to-one interviews as a means of collecting data which can be used in a flexible way to guide the interview (Greeff, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and the participant to explore particular areas of interest that arise during the interview (de Vos et al, 2011; Greeff, 2011). Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perceptions of how their working experience and personal lives influence each other. Questions are mostly open ended and the approach of semi-structured interviews views the participant as the expert (de Vos et al, 2011).

There were two phases of data collection in this study, with 10 semi-structured interviews conducted at Goodwood Fire Station and 10 semi-structured interviews at Epping Fire Station. The total period of data collection lasted approximately two months. The duration of the interviews averaged 60 minutes, depending on the participants' willingness to share. Participants were given the freedom to decide where they wanted to be interviewed which included their place of work in a private office.

3.4.3 Data collection tool

The tool that was used to collect data was a semi- structured interview schedule. A semi-structured interview schedule is a set of predetermined questions that guide the interview where there is space for flexibility to allow the researcher to explore and probe the participant's responses (Smith & Bowers-Brown, 2017). The researcher constructed an interview schedule prior to the interviews as Greeff (2011) suggests that the researcher is then able to consider any difficulties that might arise in relation to the sensitive nature of some of the questions. The researcher took care in asking non-judgemental and open-ended questions to encourage participants to feel free when answering or expressing themselves.

The interview schedule was developed using the study's research objectives and the areas that the researcher intended to explore (see appendix B). As stated earlier, the interview schedule was tested in a pilot study and adjusted where necessary which allowed the researcher to conduct interviews that was relevant to the research topic.

3.4.4 Data collection apparatus

According to Greeff (2011) the use of a recording device should be used during interviews as it provides a more complete account of the participants' responses as opposed to taking notes. However, permission needs to be obtained from the participants prior to recording the interviews (Greeff, 2011; Al-Yateem, 2012). By recording the interviews, the researcher can be free to focus on the process of each interview, able to engage with the participants on a more personal level and keep an accurate record of the interviews (Al-Yateem, 2012). In this study interviews were recorded using a digital Dictaphone, with participant's permission (see appendix A). Thus written consent was obtained from participants giving the researcher permission to use the data collection apparatus. Recording the interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to continuously play back the interview recordings becoming familiar with the data, and complete data analysis transcribing all 20 interviews.

3.5 Data Analysis:

This study used Tesch's (1990) eight step model for data analysis as presented in Creswell (2014). Once the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were transcribed, analysed and the findings were arranged into themes, sub-categories as presented by Tesch's (1990) model by the researcher. The steps are:

- i) In the first step the researcher read through all the transcriptions in order to get a sense of the whole. During this step any thoughts that came to mind was written down.
- ii) The researcher selected one interview that was most interesting, wrote down any thoughts about the texts underlying meaning in the margin. This process was repeated for several interviews.
- iii) The researcher made a list of all the themes or topics and similar topics was clustered together.

- iv) Topics were abbreviated as codes, and the codes were written next to the appropriate sections of the transcriptions. This initial organising scheme was applied to assess whether new categories and codes emerged.
- v) The most descriptive wording for each topic was found, and the topics were formulated into categories. The topics that were related were grouped together to decrease the number of categories.
- vi) The researcher made a final decision on the abbreviation of each category and alphabetised the codes to ensure that no duplication occurred.
- vii) The researcher put the data belonging to each category together and performed a preliminary analysis.
- viii) The existing transcriptions were re-examined to assess whether it was necessary to recode them.

3.6 Data Verification:

In order to address the soundness of qualitative research in this study, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Babbie and Mouton (2007) were used. The quality of qualitative research relies on the notion of trustworthiness and trustworthiness involves establishing: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Babbie & Mouton, 2007).

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings, the following techniques may be used by researchers to ensure credibility of qualitative research: prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). A prolonged engagement in the field is recommended in order to increase the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement provides scope and persistent observation provides depth (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The researcher spent approximately 60 minutes interviewing each participant in order to gain a fuller understanding of the participants' perceptions of how their working

experience and personal lives influence each other. Referential adequacy is another recommended technique to ensure credibility (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014), which refers to the materials used to document the findings. For the purpose of this study as stated previously all the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to capture the content of the interviews accurately.

Transferability refers to whether the findings can be generalised by having applicability in other contexts (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014) and it is argued that generalising qualitative studies is challenging as subjective, personal experiences are explored, however, this can be countered by linking findings back to the literature (de Vos et al., 2011). The following technique may be used by researchers to ensure transferability in qualitative research: thick descriptions. The researcher attempted to provide readers with a thick (detailed) description of the research collected. This study used a deductive approach when analysing the data, some of the data was transferable as the data was linked back to the literature. Transferability of the data was achieved as the use of purposive sampling allowed the participants to be specifically selected due to their role within the topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2007).

Dependability involves the process of using techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar findings would be discovered (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). One of the best ways to establish dependability is to have an outside researcher conduct an inquiry audit on the research study to confirm the accuracy of the findings and to ensure the findings are supported by the data collected (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). If a study has the quality of creditability, it is sufficient to establish the quality of dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability can be seen as neutrality or the extent to which the findings should be influenced by the participants and not the researcher preferences, this in turn will eliminate bias (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Sufficient evidence should therefore be left to trace the findings and interpretations to their sources (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The researcher has physical evidence of data analysis which illustrates the concrete manipulation of the raw data into themes. However, prior to conducting the study the researcher was aware of her own biases, and they could potentially affect

the outcome of the study. The researcher also had regular supervision regarding the methodology and the research findings, which helped reduce researcher bias.

The limitations of the study will now be explored.

3.7 Limitations of the study

The inherent limitations of the study pertain to:

3.7.1 Research Design:

The study used a qualitative design interviewing firefighters and the data obtained was a subjective interpretation of the participants. The findings thus did not result in the provision of predictive factors as in quantitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The interpretations of researchers are limited and the personal experience and knowledge could influence the observations and conclusions related to the research problem (Datt, 2016). This approach however is the most appropriate because it suits the goal of the investigation which is exploratory. It is therefore only possible for the researcher to make assumptions and identify areas for further research.

3.7.2 Sampling:

Purposive sampling has a possibility of sampling bias and the sample selected may not represent the total population and could limit the generalisation of the findings (Griffin, 2004). The small sample does not allow for generalisability but it does allow for an in depth exploration of the firefighters' perceptions of how their work may present challenges to their personal lives. It cannot be assumed that the views and experiences of the participants in this study are shared in general by all firefighters. However, the purpose of this study was to delve into the participants' experience which the study achieved.

3.7.3 Data collection approach:

The quality of the interview relies largely on the skills of the researcher. Participants may not be willing to share information (Greeff, 2011) and the researcher will need to use the necessary interviewing skills to ensure participants cooperate and interact. There is a high risk of the

researcher changing the interview relationship into a therapeutic one (Greeff, 2011) thus the researcher needs to avoid falling into the therapist role by using her interviewing skills.

The researcher was continuously mindful of her role as researcher where she assured the participants of confidentiality, was non-judgemental, encouraged participants to openly share and as a result they felt comfortable to share. The researcher's interviewing skills also allowed for a more in-depth exploration of firefighters' perceptions pertaining to their working experience and personal lives.

3.7.4 Data collection tool:

It is pertinent that semi-structured interviews remain flexible in order to extract rich data (Greeff, 2011). The researcher made use of the semi-structured interview schedule but asked further questions and probed when needed. The pilot study gave the researcher an opportunity to practise the use of the semi-structured interview schedule and this allowed the researcher to be more flexible during the interviews, probing where the researcher felt was needed. As a result, more indepth and meaningful responses was elicited from the participants.

3.7.5 Data collection apparatus:

Recording interviews may pose potential challenges as it could make the participants feel uncomfortable during the interview and question confidentiality (Greeff, 2011). When the participants signed the consent form, the researcher discussed the purpose of recording the interviews and that only the supervisor and researcher would have access to the audio recordings. All 20 participants consented to the interviews being recorded (see appendix A) and were comfortable during the interviews.

3.7.6 Researcher bias:

The researcher avoided bias by being aware of her own perceptions and experiences, by remaining neutral in the interview, having peers review the findings and she received supervision. Supervision gave the researcher an opportunity to discuss any potential researcher bias as well as the researcher's ability to manage the interviews professionally prior to data collection.

3.7.7 Data analysis:

The process of reading through the data and categorising involves subjective interpretation as well as significant skill. It is important that the researcher follows and adheres to a data analysis strategy to validate the results using existing literature which is rooted in a larger theoretical paradigm (de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher followed Tesch's (1990) 8 steps of data analysis which involves a systematic process of analysing data (Creswell, 2014) which helped ensure that the themes are a reflection of the data collected.

3.8 Conclusion:

This chapter discussed the methodology used in this study pertaining to the research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis and limitations. The penultimate chapter will present the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction:

The penultimate chapter presents the findings of the research in accordance with the framework of analysis. This framework is structured around the research objectives of the study. It will include a profile of the participants and a discussion of findings.

4.2 Profile of the participants:

Table 1: Profile of participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Relationship Status	Number of Children	Position in the Fire Department	Number of years' in current position
1	Male	36	Married	Two	Senior Firefighter	19 years
2	Male	30	Married	Two	Firefighter	9 years
3	Male	27	In a relationship	None	Learner Firefighter	20 months
4	Male	35	In a relationship	None	Firefighter	10 years
5	Male	31	Married	One	Firefighter	6 years
6	Male	27	Married	One	Firefighter	8 years
7	Male	34	Married	Two	Firefighter	4 years
8	Male	40	Married	One	Firefighter	19 years
9	Male	35	In a relationship	One	Firefighter	9 years
10	Male	30	Married	None	Firefighter	8 years
11	Male	30	Married	Two	Firefighter	9 years
12	Male	34	Married	One	Senior Firefighter	2 years
13	Male	37	Married	Four	Firefighter	14 years
14	Male	31	Married	One	Firefighter	10 years
15	Male	30	In a relationship	One	Learner firefighter	3 years
16	Male	34	Married	None	Firefighter	11 years
17	Male	26	Married	Two	Firefighter	5 years
18	Male	30	In a relationship	One	Firefighter	11 years
19	Male	40	Married	One	Learner firefighter	1 year
20	Male	37	Married	Two	Senior Firefighter	15 years

The above table is a representation of all the participants who participated in the study. Each participant was assigned a participant number randomly, to ensure anonymity and these will be used as pseudonyms when using quotations. In terms of the demographics of the participants, all

the participants were male with an age range of 26 to 40 years old. The majority of the participants were married and most had children. Most participants' position in the fire department was that of a firefighter, with a few being a learner and/or senior firefighter. The number of years in current position ranged from one to nineteen years.

4.3 Framework for discussion of findings:

Table 2: Framework of analysis

THEMES	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
Exploring firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience positively influence their personal lives	Supportive factors in the workplace	Training and education received to become a firefighter Interpersonal relationships at work Job security
	Operational requirements	Shift work
	Positive personal consequences	Positive consequences on family life
Exploring firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives	Workplace stressors	Shift work Repeated exposure to trauma Challenging aspects of career advancement Negative consequences of rank structure
	Negative personal consequences	Negative consequences on family life Decrease in quality of communication
Exploring firefighters' perceptions of how their personal lives positively influence their working experience	Positive home environment factors	Rewarding aspects of home environment Supportive relationship with partner
	Positive environmental factors	Social support Religious support
Exploring firefighters perceptions of how their personal lives negatively influence their working experience	Negative home environment factors	Family responsibilities
	Effects of family challenges on the working environment	Decrease in quality of communication Level of concentration Decreased work performance
Recommendations in terms of support needed for firefighters	Individuals considering pursuing a career in the fire service	Individual personal factors Challenging aspects of working environment

	Workplace support	EAP and Wellness Programmes Management support Physical fitness Programmes
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4.4 Discussion of findings:

The findings of the research study will be presented in relation to the research objectives.

4.4.1 Objective One: To explore firefighter’s perceptions of how their working experience positively influences their personal lives

This section will look at participants’ perceptions of how their working experience positively influences their personal lives. The findings indicate that these influences are in relation to supportive factors in the workplace, operational requirements and positive personal consequences.

4.4.1.1 Supportive factors in the workplace

The supportive factors in the workplace refers to the training and education received to become a firefighter, interpersonal relationships at work and job security.

4.4.1.1.1 Training and education received to become a firefighter

Several participants felt that their employer offered training which has equipped them with knowledge and skills to become a firefighter which is perceived as valuable and in turn has allowed them to be able to transfer the skills to their personal lives. Participants learned skills such as respect, punctuality, how to be men and performing domestic duties which they have been able to implement in their personal lives. Participants felt that this has had a positive influence on their personal lives especially on their relationship with their partner, as their assistance with household chores puts less strain and pressure on the partner.

Participant 2: *“I don’t know if you know but we cook and they say we are the jack of all traits but the master of none so I take a lot of experience home when it comes to housework and my wife likes that. So before coming a firefighter I wasn’t as handy but I am now that is one of things that positively influences my relationship with my wife she can she see the development of many aspects”.*

Participant 10: *“The training is also benefit you can apply a lot of the things in your personal life as well um in your personal situation just problem solving skills that you learnt here you learnt, you can apply in your marriage so that is just something that is very rewarding”.*

Participant 15: *“Yes um from training I will say from training um we will get taught to be men and in that aspect you must know what to do even if nobody is watching so that also helps you in a relationship that you must always stick to your integrity you mustn’t do things because there is somebody watching you you must know that if you do something you must do it regardless of who is watching you so that also helps in being faithful to your partner”.*

This finding is supported by research that indicates that firefighters receive extensive training as new recruits (Hartman, 2017) where they need to demonstrate an ability to use tools effectively and safely (Deppa, 2005; Hartman, 2017) which alludes to the participants feeling skilled and equipped in firefighting. These findings demonstrate what Systems Theory argues, whereby Teater (2015) identifies that individuals grow and develop in interaction with their physical and social environment. Firefighters learnt new skills at work which also influences their home environment.

4.4.1.1.2 Interpersonal Relationships

Many participants shared that their free time at the station includes bonding with their colleagues through various activities. The participants refer to their team members as their second family and they refer to their colleagues as brothers, fathers and friends. Many participants felt that their colleagues are extremely supportive and that they receive advice from them when needed especially regarding a personal matter. The participants also debrief amongst each other after responding to a call and discuss possible ways of improving or what they could have done better. They felt that their colleagues could relate to their experiences as they had experienced and witnessed the same incident as compared to speaking to their partners.

Participant 5: *“... it’s also about bonding with your colleagues I mean um ja it’s like a second family”.*

Participant 14: *“I joined here as a 20-year-old and I have grown a lot I work with very very good guys I don’t um some of them I don’t see them as figures I see them as friends as father figures as well um I mean I have told them many a times I am the man I am today because of them or a lot has had to do with it so I can only say my working environment at station and the guys I am working with is positive, good advice moulding you as a person I am happy to be here”.*

Participant 20: *“In the workplace but I would rather share with someone that was there someone that have seen what I have seen they don’t always have the best advice but you know they can relate with me ja so um ja that’s the ways I sort of deal with the things that I experience share with the people that have been there with me and that has experienced it with me ja”.*

The above findings concur with the literature that indicates that firefighters spend 24 hours at a time together, cooking, cleaning, sleeping and forming daily tasks and responsibilities at the station and thus develop a family-like bond known as “brotherhood” (Adamson, 2013; Deppa, 2015). Further the findings of this study is supported by research that indicates that firefighters have an emotional closeness to their “brothers” feeling more comfortable to talk to their “brothers” instead of to their partners which could potentially cause relationship difficulties in their intimate partner relationship (Adamson, 2013). The importance of this support is highlighted as according to research firefighters who have a solid relationship with a fellow firefighter can better cope with the stressors that naturally come with this line of work and have greater job satisfaction (Carey et al., 2011; Adamson, 2013).

4.4.1.1.3 Job security

The participants felt that working for the Fire and Rescue Department of City of Cape Town, provided job security, limiting the fear of retrenchment. Many participants felt that they are able to contribute financially towards their households, which puts less financial stress on the family as well as their relationship with their partner.

Participant 7: *“You know um I expect of this job to be rewarding, first of all knowing that you have job security first of all working for the City of Cape Town you can never wake up being told that you going to be retrenched you know that”.*

Participant 12: *“I would say only because I am career driven um and I want to become a platoon commander is my next step so I am studying hard so that’s the main goal because I am career driven I advanced from learner firefighter to firefighter to Senior firefighter so financially it did help a bit but I am not where I want to be so obviously in aspect to my where I currently ja my working environment has strengthened the relationship due to financial increase basically”.*

This finding is supported by literature that indicates that firefighters within the American context are paid competitive salaries which allows them to live comfortably, and they make wise financial decisions employed as a firefighter (Prziborowski, 2017). This alludes to the issue of job security but firefighters have concerns regarding differences within salary structures (Nkomo, 2016). According to Oosthuizen and Koortzen (2007) within the South African context many firefighters have found it difficult to provide financially and are forced to work longer hours and more shifts. According to Charles (2020) SA Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) representing firefighters is demanding to go into a new agreement with the City to challenge the pay structure. The above section discussed supportive factors in the workplace, the second category that emerged was the influence of operational requirements.

4.4.1.2 Operational Requirements

4.4.1.2.1 Shift work

Many participants felt that shift work negatively influences on their families specifically on their relationship with their partner, however that it also has advantages. Participants felt that working shifts allowed them to miss their families particularly their partners, but it also enabled them to spend more consecutive time with their families as a result of the off days. Working shifts has also made firefighters realise the importance of appreciating their families and they tend to make up for lost time by assisting and spending time with their families. Among other advantages of

shift work is that their partners are able to visit the station over weekends, thus family contact provides a positive working experience for the participants in this study.

Participant 6: “*One thing that it does strengthen is that the fact that I work shifts it makes me feel that when I do return home the next day you have missed, I have missed my wife so I have that, so I intend to do more for her where I wouldn’t have done as much for her I wouldn’t say I wouldn’t have done much for her but I do more for her because I do not see her as often, I intend to make up for the loss time”.*

Participant 4: “*I think for my partner to be able to come and visit here and sometimes on Sundays when um the entire shift cooks together then she also comes here and has a meal with us so I would say yes the fact that she can actually come here and relax and spend time with me um ja is a very good thing”.*

This finding agrees with literature which highlights that working shift work has advantages which at times can balance out the negative aspects (Schorr, 2016). Research confirms that working 24hour shifts allows firefighters to spend more consecutive time with their family relatives (Cohen & Plecas, 2012), particularly if the partner did not work. It was also found that partners had greater appreciation for shift work as this gave the couple time to spend together (Carrico, 2012). Working shifts thus provides firefighters an opportunity for improved work-life balance allowing to connect with their family and friends (Litchfield & Hinckley, 2016). The third category that emerged in this section is positive personal consequences which will be discussed below.

4.4.1.3 Positive personal consequences

Participants identified that having a positive day at work had a positive influence on them personally as well as on their families.

4.4.1.3.1 Positive consequences on family life

Many participants shared that if they have a positive day at work, it influences how they relate to their partner. Participants reported that when they had a good at work, they were more friendly, have a positive attitude and take the positivity home which has a positive influence on their

relationship with their partner. Participants felt that when they were in a good mood the level of interaction increased between themselves and their partners.

Participant 2: *“I can honestly say um like days when I receive gratitude from people and good news and feelings of well-being I can go home and speak to my partner about it and show happiness um I am more friendly, I don’t know, um obviously it’s just the more positive and the better my day goes the better I will feel and the better I will relate at home, so I can say there is a difference between those days and the bad days”.*

Participant 5: *“It does have a big role to play um if I do have a positive day I do take the positivity home um so it doesn’t really influence the way that I live my life but ja a good day is a good day at home as well”.*

Participant 10: *“I would say it relates because I would have more energy um I would be more positive and that generally my mood would be better so how I interact with my partner would be more cheery and generally want to do more things”.*

These findings are consistent with literature whereby positive experiences at work have shown to enhance an employee’s overall wellbeing (Laba & Geldenhuys, 2018). Research has also shown that positive effects of work may spill over to one’s home environment, where individuals arrive home more cheerful, relaxed and in a positive state (Van Aarde & Mostert, 2008).

This study’s first objective was to explore firefighter’s perceptions of how their working experience positively influence their personal lives. From the findings it is evident that the participants felt that the training and education they received to become a firefighter, their relationship with their colleagues and shift work had a positive influence on their personal lives. However, this study was also interested in exploring firefighter’s perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives which will be discussed below.

4.4.2 Objective Two: Exploring firefighter’s perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives

Many participants in the study identified that several workplace challenges such as the 24-hour shifts, working overtime, repeated exposure to trauma, difficulties with career advancement and the negative consequences of the rank structure negatively influences their personal lives.

4.4.2.1 Workplace stressors

4.4.2.1.1 Shift work

As much as the shift work was identified by some participants as a positive factor, two thirds of the participants felt that working 24 hours takes a lot up of their time and means that they are away from their families for long periods of time. Many participants shared that when they return home from a shift their family relatives are at work which means they do not get to spend time with them. Working shifts thus puts pressure on the family, especially their partners who are home alone and having to take on responsibility for both parenting roles which can be very overwhelming for one parent. Participants also shared that their partners often feel neglected especially when they return from a 24-hour shift and want to sleep. Participants highlighted that they also often miss out on social events.

Participant 3: *“Being away for 24 hours is quite challenging, oh yes and on the festive season everyone during the festive season wishes to be free but our job does not allow it”.*

Participant 17: *“I would say negatively because I have had a few of these shifts where I just had not slept and my wife feels as if there is no time for her as well so all I do is just go home and sleep and then she feels a lit bit neglected and I mean longs for my time and attention”.*

Participant 16: *“Yes 24 hours the shifts because a lot of times I would come home in the morning and she is at work and then I would feel and my doctor also told me that I would rather sleep for 2 hours when I get home or I don’t sleep at all because of the fact that I had a sleep disorder how can I say when you sleep during the whole day and at night you don’t sleep at all because*

at work and then we always argued I am tired she is at work and then she comes home in the afternoon and then I just feel I am going to lay at home and relax and then she feels the opposite so the 24 hour shifts is a bit of challenging thing for us”.

Participant 20: *“Time away from home its 24 hours I have heard in the past from past experiences guys and it’s become sort of a almost a common thing around the fire service and the men in the fire service that they sort of get divorced and I have tried to figure out what is the sort of the problem what is the issue what is the cause of this type of thing ag I have only come up with the conclusion is time spent away from home can be difficult on your partner and your family and ja it is a 24 hour shift and your wife is possibly home alone sometimes lonely sometimes if you are away from home and you are going through a troubled time and you are not allowed to leave your workplace at any given time in fact sometimes the workplace feels like you know a sort of get away from your problems so ja that is where I am at with that”.*

The negative effects of working shifts including negative consequences for role performance in a marriage and increased risk of separation and/or divorce have been noted in the literature (Oosterhuizen & Koortzen, 2007; Carrico, 2012; Meadows, 2014). Working in the evening, weekends, on special occasions and celebrations, results in couples spending less quality time together which could also be detrimental for the relationship (Carrico, 2012; Adamson, 2013; Meadows, 2014). These findings also link to Psychosocial Theory, which views intimacy or closeness as the basic strength of this stage and isolation as the danger (Fleming, 2008). Ongoing shift also affects all the systems that firefighters are part of as they are away from their households when their presence is needed (Fjelstad, 1978; Oosthuizen & Koortzen, 2007) therefore as argued by System’s Theory, having to work 24-hour shifts could negatively influence their families (Payne, 2014).

4.4.2.1.2 Repeated exposure to trauma

Many participants shared that they are exposed to multiple traumatic incidents and the nature of the calls can be very challenging and can potentially have a negative influence on their relationship with their partner. Two thirds of the participants shared that their partners do not always

understand what they are experiencing and they often do not talk about the traumatic incidents experienced at work with their partners.

Participant 5: *“Look we all know we work with lives so obviously we see death um we see people badly injured and ja sometimes its not its not nice even when you look um what you call it the way people are living its kinda hard as well that they don’t really the have money or maybe the circumstances are bad that type of stuff”.*

Participant 18: *“It is a challenging job you will see a lot of things..... um you will get bodies....see people losing their homes”.*

Participant 19: *“Okay influences everything urh you have a bad call um you have a fire that escaped um you have um like I say you seeing trauma seeing devastation that goes home with you and there is times that obviously you don’t want to open up um you don’t want to tell all this gory details to your partner um so a lot of times you have to keep things to yourself so I would say it actually sometimes it sometimes it is detrimental to your relationship where I am not speaking to her and she does not understand why and I mean this causes a lot of arguments cold shoulders and I mean like I say at the end of the day you feel you trying to protect them from the trauma but you are not really doing that”.*

This finding is confirmed by literature that firefighters’ job is inherently dangerous, stressful and demanding (Adamson, 2013), where firefighters are exposed to multiple trauma which puts them at risk for mental health conditions (O’Halloran, 2015) and these stressors often “spill over” into their personal lives (Adamson, 2013). System’s Theory, according to Walker (2012) identifies that one action can invoke another reaction in a system, thus what negatively happens in the work system can affect the personal system. The third issue that emerged in this theme is the challenging aspects of career advancement.

4.4.2.1.3 Challenging aspects of career advancement

Many participants felt that career advancement process is slow and can be very challenging. Eight out of the 20 participants have been in the same current position for 10 to 20 years. Seven participants have been in the same current position for 5 to 10 years. Five participants have been employed in their current position for 1 to 5 years.

Participant 10: *“The systems they have running in terms of like advancement and things they are challenging they are very challenging um ja for various reasons”.*

Participant 11: *“Trying to get to go on training courses um I mean there is you wait a long time before you get sent on a course to that helps you um advance you in the job”.*

Participant 19: *“Management I would say knowing the person building a good relationship with your crew knowing how they tick, looking after their careers their growth making sure they sign up for courses”.*

This finding concurs with literature indicating there appears to be a need for firefighters working experience to be improved with specific reference to training (Cook & Mitchell, 2013; Monteiro et al., 2013; Etheridge, 2018). The literature also found that there appears to be very limited amount of courses with no specialisation in any of the training for firefighters (Monteiro et al., 2013) and this alludes to the challenging aspects of career advancement as reported by the participants. These findings also demonstrate the challenges to meeting the participants’ psychosocial tasks as indicated by Erikson which include developing goals towards their career (Sokol, 2009) and establishing an occupational identity is one (Kosine & Lewis, 2008; Guglielmi, 2017).

4.4.2.1.4 Negative consequences of rank structure

Many participants shared that the rank structure within the department influences them negatively and two thirds felt that the rank structure should be taken away. Participants felt that the rank structure prevents firefighters from accessing help because in order for them to get permission or approval, they have to go through the channel of command which they might not necessarily feel

comfortable with. Participants also felt that there should be less formalities and that management should interact with them at a more personal level.

Participant 4: *“I would say no because before you come here you hear what other people have to say about the job and once you are actually you here you actually realize there is so much politics um I would say management does not really care about the people going there that is actually doing the job um I think what we get paid for what we are doing is a joke I mean there has been a dispute with the council over our salaries which has been going on for months and no one is really giving us feedback from the council side”.*

Participant 13: *“Working in an environment where you don’t get to do what you want to do we work in a semi military environment which means we follow orders we follow instructions and for grown men to come into an organization and another man to tell you I want you to do this do that you have to be able do that so what I try to do or advise a lot of them is understand what you are getting yourself into”.*

Participant 15: *“The rank structure also affects us negatively because now even if you don’t want that person to know but in order to reach the person next you must start from him so sometimes you just feel you don’t want him to know so you just keep quiet”.*

The literature confirms that within fire services there appears to be a lack of support from management, a lack of consistency in decision making by commanders in operational situations as well as a lack of time to debrief after incidents thereby adding stress to firefighters and negatively influencing on families (Cook & Mitchell, 2013). The literature speaks to the challenging aspects of the rank structure which identifies that firefighters have been trained to accept and not question orders from the incident commander, which often makes it very uncomfortable for them to say no to unsafe conditions of practice (Morris, 2012). The negative personal influence of the work is discussed below.

4.4.2.2 Negative personal consequences

Participants identified that their working experience had a negative influence on them personally and on their families.

4.4.2.2.1 Negative consequences on family life

Two thirds of the participants felt that when experiencing a challenging day at work this affects their emotional behaviour. Close to half participants reported that when arriving at home after a stressful/challenging 24-hour shift they are easily frustrated, moodier and tend to isolate themselves, which has a negative influence on their personal lives especially on their relationship with their partners.

Participant 4: *“I think if you had a bad day at work it kind of rubs off on your partner you get home you are moody you are tired you have maybe not slept a lot now you still have things to do at home”.*

Participant 6: *“Depending on the type of shift if it was a tiring shift I would be very useless at home I’d sleep quite a bit also depending on the nature of the call the level of frustration you come at home I could be a bit short tempered the smallest things would irritate me, not to say that my wife did anything wrong but I’ll just have quite a short fuse”.*

Participant 9: *“There do come times whereby you feel you are always on edge as in you are quickly irritated after a very busy shift because it feels as if you have just given 24 hours of your time to the public and you just want your space”.*

The literature underscores this finding and highlights that when firefighters return home after a distressing day they distance and isolate themselves from family relatives who are a key source of support (Deppa, 2015; Torres et al., 2016).

Research indicates that greater withdrawal behaviour of firefighters is said to be associated with less relationship intimacy between firefighters and their partners (Fisher & Etches, 2003; Torres et al, 2016). These findings once again speak to how the participants’ developmental tasks can be

hindered in that in their life stage sees intimacy or closeness and mutual sharing as the basic strength of this stage and isolation is the danger (Fleming, 2008). Studies have indicated poor mood scores were prevalent amongst firefighters who work shifts (Carey et al, 2011) and that firefighters negative emotional state affects their marriages (Carrico, 2012). Therefore, literature indicates that firefighters upon returning home are exhausted and in need of rest (Schorr, 2016) as well as more irritable and easily frustrated as a result of workplace stressors (Carrico, 2012). The findings also demonstrate a key principle of System's Theory where Payne (2014) identifies that when an individual is influenced by one system, this influences the other systems they are part of. Thus what happens within the work system could negatively influence the personal system.

4.4.2.2.2 Decrease in quality of communication

Close to half of the participants reported a decrease in the quality of communication in their relationship when experiencing a challenging or stressful day. Participants felt that they tend to withdraw themselves when at home with minimal, unclear communication often resulting in them being abrupt with their partners or not wanting to engage in conversation at all.

Participant 8: *“And some of us do tend to take a little bit of what we have experienced during the day back home um maybe um other days your stress levels is slightly higher than what is supposed to be and can also give a negative influence on your partner because now for the last words she speak to you about or maybe she asked you something that's like very minimal in our relationship then you maybe give her a abrupt answer or maybe you tell her you want to relax a bit and ease your mind a bit”.*

Participant 9: *“... a lot of times you have to keep things to yourself so I would say it actually sometimes it sometimes it is detrimental to your relationship where I am not speaking to her and she does not understand why and I mean this causes a lot of arguments cold shoulders”.*

Participant 10: *“That's fairly easy if you are in a bad mood and um you rather not interact at all like sometimes I would not want to see or speak to anybody or I would have very little energy for anything I would not want to do anything be lethargic I would not want to speak to her or*

um ja I just want to do nothing and I would isolate myself”.

This finding is confirmed by literature, which states that after a stressful day at work firefighters are more reluctant to communicate with their partners in an attempt to shield them from the harmful effects of work stress (Adamson, 2013). Research indicates a decrease in communication when firefighters have higher levels of stress (Shantz, 2002). These findings also demonstrate what System’s Theory argues, whereby due to the stressful demands of the job, firefighters are exhausted and their work system negatively affects their ability to be present in their family system (Payne, 2014).

In summary there are a number of workplace stressors such as the shift work, repeated exposure to trauma which participants felt that it negatively influences their personal lives especially their relationship with their partners. If participants experience a stressful shift, this in turn affects their emotional behaviour as they tend to become moodier, easily irritated and tend to isolate themselves which negatively influences their relationship with their partners. A challenging day at work also negatively influences their communication with their partners. The findings of the third objective will now be discussed.

4.4.3 Objective Three: Exploring firefighter’s perceptions of how their personal lives positively influence their working experience

This section will look at home environment factors and environmental factors such as social and religious support that positively influence the participants’ working experience.

4.4.3.1 Positive home environment factors

Participants identified positive home environment factors which alludes to the rewarding aspects of being home and the supportive relationship they have with their partner.

4.4.3.1.1 Rewarding aspects of home environment

Many of the participants felt that the most rewarding aspect of their home environment is simply being home and getting the opportunity to spend time with family. Two thirds of the participants felt that fulfilling the role of being a husband and a father is rewarding, encouraging and indirectly motivates them and has a positive influence on their working experience.

Participant 1: *“Just to be at home and not to think about work stuff and being with my family my boy and my girl me and my wife, kids just running around and playing with them”.*

Participant 2: *“I always say this to my friends or my colleagues when I come home after a 24 hour shift or a 12-hour shift overtime the moment I open my door my boys run to me and they say daddy for me that is the best feeling for me when I walk into the door in the morning and just getting to spend time with them not making up the time but being with them and using the time to the best of my ability to make them happy when I am home, just seeing my kids and my family that’s the most rewarding thing just the fact every single time I come home I open the door they run to me calling out my name or saying daddy that’s beautiful I love that feeling”.*

Participant 14: *“Just being with my wife and child and um the time we have um obviously the calmness of being at home being in my space my own space ja that makes me happy”.*

Literature indicates that a healthy marital relationship leads to overall global happiness for men (Adamson, 2013) and that a positive interaction between home and work leads to more satisfied, engaged and committed employees (Van Aarde & Mostert, 2008). These findings are supported by Psychosocial Theory, whereby Erikson’s developmental stage highlights the importance of achieving intimacy, whereby participants were able to connect and relate to family members forming meaningful relationships (Gugliemi, 2017).

4.4.3.1.2 Supportive relationship with partner

Many participants felt that having a partner who supports and understands the nature of their job is rewarding, which positively influences their working experience. Participants thus regard the

strength of their relationships with their partners as a significant factor that positively influence their working experience.

Participant 4: *“I’ll say my partner has really supported me and she does a lot for me and ja like she wants me to come to work and have a really a good day”.*

Participant 8: *“The aspects at home that is rewarding is when your partner understands the nature of your job, so if I maybe have maybe a torrent time or a bit of a difficult incident the shift before then I can almost like relate to her and then we can discuss it and it will maybe improve of and I will have her input as well then she can also assist me with that aspect of helping me through the day”.*

Participant 14: *“I have a supportive wife um so ja she makes me she makes it easier to also um ja influence me positively at the end of the day”.*

This finding concurs with literature in that a firefighter’s supportive relationship with their partner, has great potential to aid a firefighter in dealing with the demands of his career and the quality of firefighter’s personal relationship can play a key role in combating the negative effects of occupational stressors (Adamson, 2013). Research indicates that close bonds of marriage are important sources of emotional and social support which leads to improved health benefits for firefighters (Adamson, 2013). These findings are supported by Systems Theory, where the participants belong to larger systems such as families and subsystems, where they contribute and play a role in each of these systems (Payne, 2014). Therefore, a positive experience from home directly has a positive influence on the participant as well as on their work system. The second theme that emerged is positive environmental factors which will be discussed below.

4.4.3.2 Positive environmental factors

Environmental resources such as social and religious support was regarded as an important element when dealing with stressful working experiences.

4.4.3.2.1 Social support

Many participants identified the invaluable support from family, friends, colleagues, the Employee Assistance Programme and the Chaplaincy which helps buffer the negative effects of stress and enables the participants to cope better with the demands of work.

Participant 9: *“um look the support that I have currently is what I have put in place for myself so for one I have a family that is quite supportive with my career”.*

Participant 17: *“I would say all the support is there like my colleagues um the management and EAP so we are quite informed and the chaplaincy is here as well and I have been speaking to the chaplain as well so I mean I make use of the support that’s there”.*

Participant 18: *“I have support from my family..... and we have support from our colleagues at work and then after that we can request for EAP session and ja we can request the chaplain”.*

Participant 19: *“Look the support that I have currently is what I have put in place for myself so for one I have a family that is quite supportive with my career um I have also said that I have joined a gym um that is my one thing that takes a lot away from my daily routine um and belonging to a church having a faith is also um and then like with regards to being here its good support obviously having someone readily available to speak to you especially when it comes to mental constraints mental issues”.*

This finding is confirmed by literature, which states that family support as well as external support networks such as extended family is imperative for firefighters in handling daily workplace stressors (Carrico, 2012; Henderson et al., 2015; Torres et al., 2016). Support from colleagues is said to be important as this is associated with positive outcomes for firefighters as it reduces the negative effects of trauma exposure (Meadows, 2014). Literature indicates that firefighters should reach out for social support after responding to a difficult call as this buffers in developing negative reactions to trauma (Carrico, 2012). Once again the findings demonstrate why Systems Theory

(Payne, 2014) is a relevant framework for this study as the interconnected of systems and how one system influences another can be seen in this finding.

4.4.3.2.2 Religious support

Many participants identified that they themselves and/or their partners are religious, and that religious support is helpful when experiencing stressful situations at work.

Participant 2: *“Okay so many a times I come home after having a challenging day or challenging shift my wife she is converted so it’s a positive thing for me because I am not as spiritual as she is but she would always have something good to say or something positive to say to make me feel a bit better”.*

Participant 7: *“What you need to do as a firefighter you need to associate yourself with a religious group people that will comfort t you free of charge that you can mix among so that you can find comfort amongst them so people that will be talking about things that you want to hear more of so I’ll say find or associate yourself with a religious group don’t be a isolated person as you will die of stress you will die of stress and end up in drugs doing drugs and all that”.*

Participant 8: *“Normally I am a strong person when it comes to dealing with incidents I can like switch off my mind from what I have experienced from the shift or call before um so and also because in my quite time I do pray to God and He is my strength and whenever I need or or in cases where I need to have a answer on how to react to something that I have experienced then God gives me that inner peace”.*

The literature confirms that religion can reduce effects of stress as it has the capacity to provide a strong support network, similar to that of a family network, which can be drawn upon for advice and support (Litcher & Carmalt, 2009). Studies have also indicated that positive religious experiences within firefighter families serve to strengthen family bonds (Carrico, 2012).

In summary a number of positive factors such as time spent with family and the ongoing support buffer the negative effects of stress that the participants experience in their work. Participants

identified various home and environmental factors that helped deal with the high levels of stress they experience.

4.4.4 Objective Four: Exploring firefighter's perceptions of how their personal lives negatively influence their working experience

This section will look at aspects of the participants' personal lives including home environment factors, negative affective responses as well as communication which negatively influence their work experience.

4.4.4.1 Negative home environment factors

Participants in this study identified various home environment factors that are challenging which negatively influences their working experience.

4.4.4.1.1 Family responsibilities

Many participants felt that having to take on and fulfil their roles as a husband and a father can be very challenging especially when returning home exhausted after a stressful 24-hour shift. One third of the participants reported that it is often difficult to fulfil their fatherly duties especially when their children are sick as they cannot get off from work easily. On the contrary one third of the participants felt that it was unfair towards the community taking family responsibility leave as they have a duty to serve the public as a firefighter.

Participant 6: *“I think getting work done at home in the sense of that I come at home at 9 I don't know how the shift has been I might be tired I don't always have time to get round to housework as in just tidying up the house but maintenance of the house as well so even though we are off 2 days its only really the second day that you can decide to fix something but by the time you are done cleaning the house the day has gone”.*

Participant 7: *“I must be a man at home after a long day at work exhausted and then I must still do my man urh my chores at home so I I find that challenging sometimes because we do*

not always have a relaxing day at work so when I get home I must still do my gardening and clean for the dogs and all that and do the children's homework and all that and see but honesty we as firefighters we are still fathers and brothers at home we still need to be brothers whilst at work so being a father is really challenging at home when coming back from work tired you really need to rest but you must still drive around and do shopping and whats expected of you”.

Participant 15: *“When my child is sick and I have to be at work I know um I have family responsibility leave I have annual leave I have emergency leave but it's also unfair to the public that they have to suffer a loss maybe of a pump for example if I don't come here to work then a certain pump has to come off run because there is not enough people to man the pump even though I have to be there for them but is very challenging to choose between my work and my because even though I have a family to provide for I need to lead my life as a firefighter”.*

This finding concurs with literature whereby it indicates that firefighters experience stress as they try to balance family life and work (Carrico, 2012), as the nature of the job and the long hours causes exhaustion (Adamson, 2013). It is evident that shift work is a leading factor in contributing towards physical exhaustion (Adamson, 2013), and this alludes to the issue of having difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities at home as reported by the participants. These findings also demonstrate Systems Theory, whereby Payne (2014) identifies that when an individual is impacted by one system, this impacts other systems they are part of. The negative consequences of shift work which causes exhaustion can have a negative influence over the participant's family system with specific reference to the marital and parental subsystems. The second theme that emerged is the negative effects of family challenges on the working environment which will be discussed below.

4.4.4.2 Negative effects of family challenges on the working environment

The negative effects of family challenges on the working environment refers to a decrease in the quality of communication with colleagues, as well as the level of concentration and work performance as identified by the participants.

4.4.4.2.1 Decrease in quality of communication

Many of the participants felt that when they experienced a challenging/stressful day at home it influenced their day at work especially with regards to their communication with colleagues. Two thirds of the participants identified that personal challenges affected their communication with their colleagues where they would not want to engage with their colleagues and conversations with each other was short and minimal. This in turn negatively influenced their working experience because when they are responding on scene, effective communication with each other is crucial.

Participant 3: *“It does automatically you can’t be the same the way you use to be like your mood will be low, I do not know how to explain it, like not talking keeping quiet which it is not good you need to talk when you are on scene”.*

Participant 6: *“I definitely come to work um a lot less verbal I don’t talk as much I do what is being told to me when conversations get started I tend to just comment and not elaborate on anything”.*

The findings are supported by the literature which indicates that when firefighter’s experience higher stress levels, there appears to be a decrease in communication (Shantz, 2002). It is evident that experiencing a stressful day at home influences the participants level of communication with their colleagues in this study. Their level of concentration and work performance will be discussed below.

4.4.4.2.2 Decrease in the level of concentration

Two thirds of the participants felt that when they are facing family challenges whether it be a family relative that is ill or an unresolved argument with their partner, this negatively influences their working environment with specific reference to concentration. Participants identified that this would affect their concentration at work negatively where their thoughts will be preoccupied with family challenges and not work. Participants identified that this is a problem as they need to concentrate fully when on duty because they work in dangerous situations.

Participant 7: *“So everything that happens at home will affect if I have children that are being let’s say my children are becoming a problem in a way I will I won’t have all my mind here at work I will be thinking about my family at home, cheating wife, financial problems, instabilities and all that”.*

Participant 15: *“It really influences it badly because for example maybe you had an argument and now you didn’t reach any conclusion as to based on that argument now when you are here at work your mind is at home thinking how can I solve this how can this be done and you wish you didn’t have to come to work until you have solved whatever was the problem so your main focus is not really here and it is very unsafe to have lack of concentration at work because we work under dangerous situations you have to concentrate 100% in order to be safe”.*

Participant 16: *“I would say for instance a lot of things coz my mother raised me alone and what challenges for me is listen here she is 70 now but when she is ill whatever I wouldn’t be able to straight focus at work.....I need to focus 100% because it can influence because it is a life threatening job so I can make a decision that can end up badly for a lot of us”.*

These findings are consistent with the literature which indicates that stress influences on an individual’s ability to function at work (Milen, 2009). Research has also shown that employees who are not able to deal with personal challenges can feel drained and distracted whilst at work (Meenakshi, et al., 2013) which alludes to the issue of their concentration levels identified by the participants in this study.

4.4.4.2.3 Decreased work performance

Most of the participants felt that when dealing with a challenging/stressful day at home, they find themselves not putting in 100% at work however, some participants felt that they try not to mix family dynamics and work and don’t allow their personal issues to interfere with their work performance. Many participants thus felt that experiencing stress can negatively influence their working environment.

Participant 1: *“Coming to work thinking about the wife is angry should I phone her or if she picks up then um what’s the word now almost like I don’t want to talk but you just want to make right if you had an argument thinking the whole day at work now then you not giving out your positive side but 50/50”.*

Participant 17: *“I would say negatively because it will just affect my work I would be lack lusto and do the basic and not go out of my way to what I need to do and try to find the short when doing the work”.*

The literature confirms that negative outcomes such as poor work performance and diminished morale can occur due to firefighter stressors (Fisher & Etches, 2003). Furthermore, an unmanageable or challenging home life may also lead to poor work performance (Meenakshi et al., 2013). Research indicates that firefighters who experience marital and family stress affects their capability to carry out their occupational roles at optimum levels (Fjelstad, 1978). These findings also demonstrate Systems Theory, whereby stressors experienced within participant’s family system negatively influences over their work system (Payne, 2014).

In summary, a number of home negative factors seemed to have a negative influence on firefighters’ working experience in this study. The next section discusses the recommendations that the participants of this study would give in terms of support needed. The findings of the final objective will now be discussed.

4.4.5. Objective five: Recommendations in terms of support needed for firefighters

This section will look at the recommendations made by the participants with regard to what people who are wanting to pursue a career in the fire service, need to consider. Workplace support will also be discussed which is categorised into EAP and Wellness Programmes, management support and Physical Fitness Programmes.

4.4.5.1 Individuals considering pursuing a career in the fire service

4.4.5.1.1 Individual personal factors

Many participants felt that individuals who would like to consider pursuing a career as a firefighter should do research, get enough information and speak to firefighters about what the job entails. The majority of the participants felt that individuals who would like to become firefighters need to be physically, mentally and psychologically strong. Many participants felt that it is important for these individuals to be eager to learn, to be open minded, that they should not isolate themselves and that support from family and friends is important.

Participant 3: *“To be disciplined if you want to be a firefighter you must be disciplined and you must have be eager to learn actually coz there is a lot that we doing here and be open minded to learning and not looking at everything negative”.*

Participant 7: *“Let’s say maybe you want to become a firefighter I would advise you that you need to do your research because firefighting is not about firefighting as the name stats there is more things that is happening in this area of work”.*

Participant 8: *“The advice I can give anyone is obviously from the attributes to being physical fit and all that they also need to also prepare their mind mentally”*

Participant 12: *“The advice that I would give is the person needs to have a very very strong support group type of like family needs to support that person that wants to become a firefighter family friends and even partner if he is involved he or she has a partner they must know what they are getting themselves into”.*

This finding concurs with literature which highlights that individuals wanting to pursue a career as a firefighter should do research and speak to firefighters prior to applying to the fire department (Prziborowski, 2010). Research indicates that individuals who would like to become a firefighter should have a personality that is able to deal with stressors as well as traumatic exposure as this is likely to influence negatively on firefighter’s physical and emotional well-being (Adamson, 2013).

4.4.5.1.2 Challenging aspects of working environment

Many participants felt that individuals who would like to pursue a career in the fire service need to be able to work 24-hour shifts which could be tiring and result in spending less time with family. The majority of the participants felt that individuals should be aware that the challenging aspects of a firefighters working environment include the repeated exposure to trauma, the 24-hour shifts, dangerous working conditions with the possibility of being exposed to verbal and physical abuse from the community.

Participant 1: *“They need to think uhm do they really want to become a firefighter because this is a very dangerous job, every day. Once you come to work and its a 24-hour job so it’s very demanding, stressors when you going out it’s very dangerous you get attack and stuff so you really need to think clearly and not only think it’s lights and sirens”.*

Participant 13: *“We have a lot of job shadowers that come in here and I try my best to paint a picture that is realistic to them like a lot of people think that when they join the fire department that they are going to be running into burning buildings and rescuing people and that is there mindset and that a very whooped mindset because that is very dependent on the fire station that you are going to be working at you have quieter fire stations you have busier fire stations a lot of people don’t even know that the fire department has a medical aspect so the different aspects of the job I try to clarify that also to them and make they understand that I’m trying to put into them that you are going to be working shifts and for that you will be missing out on a lot of family time”.*

These findings are consistent with the literature which indicates that firefighting is a very dangerous and stressful career where firefighters are exposed to multiple traumatic events over time (Fjelstad, 1978; Monterio et al., 2013; Scholz et al., 2013; Heitman, 2016).

4.4.5.2 Workplace support

Workplace support refers to EAP and Wellness Programmes, management support as well as physical fitness programmes, which will be discussed below.

4.4.5.2.1 EAP and Wellness Programmes

Two thirds of participants are aware that EAP and Wellness services are available to them and one third of the participants felt that they would like further support from the EAP and Wellness branch. Many participants felt that the EAP and Wellness Programmes should be holistic including medical, psycho-education as well as therapeutic interventions. Participants felt that the process of accessing EAP services should be shortened and recommended that clinicians should visit the station on a regular basis to make firefighters feel comfortable and to gain their trust. Most of the participants recommended that EAP and Wellness branch should provide quarterly awareness sessions to market EAP services.

Participant 8: *“I think on that question is um they can maybe come to the fire station more often from their side they can also ask who needs more support and um maybe more programmes interacting with the fire departments because life is tough out there and um the fact that we need to go to communities and be in circumstances and sometimes the staff members do not want to talk about it they bottle it up so when if they do come home then the problems come out there you know so um if there is more involvement of the EAP group it will be beneficial to the firefights and also to the City of Cape Town coz then you will have better firefighters better equipped and also better well beings”.*

Participant 15: *“I would say um more interaction more interaction I know that you don’t have a lot of stuff for the stations but more interaction will be appreciated because we face things on a daily basis at work and at home however now we also feel you have to have a special booking it has to be a process if they can shorten the process of the firefighters seeing the EAP”.*

Shantz, (2002) concurs and posits that developing a holistic wellness approach for firefighters that includes medical, fitness, rehabilitation and behavioural health is recommended. The literature also highlighted the issues raised by the participants (Wall, 2012; Henderson et al., 2015). Research confirms that interventions are needed for firefighters and should include psychological listening and support, psychological interventions and assistance from mental health professionals (Norwood & Rascati, 2012; Monterio et al., 2013). Peer support programmes, EAP crisis response

for trauma exposure, emotional support to firefighters and families as well as ongoing education on stress and coping for firefighters are recommended (Cook & Mitchell, 2013; Torres et al., 2016).

4.4.5.2.2 Management Support

Several participants recommended that management should be more pro-active by being more readily available especially on a personal level, visit the stations regularly and have informal meetings allowing firefighters to raise any concerns they might have regarding their working environment. Many of the participants felt that management should show more appreciation towards firefighters, be more friendly and have an open-door policy.

Participant 10: *“Change management style and implementing the management style like more of a personal style and more of a hands on approach coz um management skills can sometimes be lacking coz being a qualified officer does not mean they are qualified to be a manager”.*

Participant 14: *“I think there must be I don’t if you can call it informal meetings but just to sit down with the guys and just to listen to the guys and more of there is a lot of um high ranking officers that has open door polices that you feel you can go to if you want to address a certain situation or problem but there is some that is not so approachable like the others um so from me for me from management side just to make more contact with the guys sit down with the guys and listen to them um just be have a more open door policy and more welcoming and more loving”.*

Participant 18: *“Management should come out more to the stations so we know basically know who our managers are and last thing is to listen what the employees want to better their job with”.*

These findings concur with the literature where there appears to be a lack of support from management, a lack of consistency in decision-making by Commanders in operational situations as well as a lack of time to debrief after incidents thereby adding stress to firefighters and negatively influencing on families (Cook & Mitchell, 2013).

4.4.5.2.2 Physical fitness programmes

Several of the participants felt there should be more emphasis on fitness by either improving current gym equipment and allocating more time for firefighters to engage in physical activities.

Participant 8: *“The advice I can give management is to give us a little bit of more time of our own to have more PT sessions available”.*

Participant 11: *“Like improving our gym equipment and putting in fitness programmes”.*

Participant 20: *“Sports programme and those type of things you know pay attention to those type of things and I think you will get urh ag a much more happier and then in turn healthy firemen”.*

This finding concurs with literature where the implementation of mandatory fitness programmes for firefighters is needed to promote firefighter fitness and to improve the overall health of firefighters (McFarland, 2009; Heitman, 2016). Research indicates that firefighters who participate in physical training and fitness becomes more resilient to both systemic and traumatic stress (Fisher & Etches, 2003). However, there are fitness and health programmes that have been developed for firefighters, but have not been evaluated for their effectiveness (Guidotti & Clough, 1992).

The final objective of this study was to ascertain the recommendations in terms of support needed for firefighters. Participants recommended several factors that individuals should consider prior to joining the fire service. The participants identified the different types of support which included support from management and EAP Practitioners.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of this study using the research objectives as a framework for analysis. It was found that even though participants felt that working experience positively influenced their personal lives, they still experienced negative workplace challenges. Participants also felt that their personal lives positively influenced their working experience, however also

identified negative home environment factors negatively influencing their working experience. The final chapter presents conclusions pertaining to the study and makes recommendations for future research as well as the Fire and Rescue Department and EAP and Wellness branch.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter will present the main conclusions of the study and the researcher's recommendations will be discussed. Recommendations will be made to the Fire and Rescue Department as well as the EAP and Wellness branch of City of Cape Town. Recommendations for further research will also be explored before concluding the dissertation.

5.2 Conclusions

The main conclusions that follow are based on the findings in relation to the research objectives.

5.2.1 Firefighters perceptions of how their working experience positively influence their personal lives

The findings in this study reveal that the participants working experience positively influence their personal lives in many aspects. The positive aspects of the participants' working experience such as training and education received to become a firefighter, interpersonal relationship with colleagues and shift work is said to have positive consequences on family life. It is evident that the participants have been able to apply the training received within the fire department, within their personal lives. Participants felt that the skills they were taught such as how to do washing, cleaning and make food has allowed them to be able to assist their partners and this has reduced the pressure on them to do the domestic duties at home.

It is evident that colleagues play a significant role in the participants' lives. Colleagues are seen as a second family and as an important support system. One can also conclude that participants feel they are at times better able to relate to their colleagues than to their partners and they often receive advice regarding personal matters from colleagues.

The importance of job security is also evident in the study as the participants believe that they are able to contribute financially towards their households, which plays less financial stress on families.

One can also conclude that there are several positive aspects to shift work which include that working shifts allows them to miss their families particularly their partners. Working shifts has also made firefighters realise the importance of appreciating their families and they tend to make up for lost time by assisting and spending time with their families when they are off-duty.

It is evident from the study that experiences at work do influence how participants relate to their partner. The findings indicate that when participants had a good day at work they were more friendly, had a positive attitude and took the positivity home, which had a positive influence on their relationship with their partner. One can also conclude that participants felt that a positive mood influenced the level of interaction between themselves and their partners and this made the relationship a happier one.

5.2.2 Firefighters perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives

The findings indicate that being employed as a firefighter also comes with an array of challenges despite the overwhelming positive rewards of the work. These workplace challenges include shift work, repeated exposure to trauma, career advancement and the negative consequences of the rank structure. It is evident that participants felt that working 24-hour shifts, whilst being a positive factor at times does take them away from home for long periods of time which meant that they often missed out on family celebrations and traditions and they struggled to fulfil their domestic roles. Based on the findings, ongoing shift work takes participants away from their households when their presence is needed.

The multiple exposure to trauma is another factor which negatively influences intimate relationships. It is evident that the fact that partners did not share the trauma meant that the participants were reluctant to share their experiences with their partners. One can also conclude

that participants tended to isolate themselves and communicate minimally with their partners after experiencing a stressful day and once again it can be concluded that the participants' work experiences do influence their personal lives.

Participants listed several challenges with career advancement and this can be seen in the findings which indicates that more than half of the participants have been employed in the same position for 2 to 20 years. The challenges with admission for training courses hampers career advancement and this is a barrier as these courses are required for promotion.

The rank structure in the service is also a deterrent to accessing help because in order for firefighters to get permission or approval they have to go through the channel of command. The findings of this study conclude that the less formalities and that lack of personal engagement with management also detract from help-seeking.

5.2.3 Firefighters perceptions of how their personal lives positively influence their working experience

Participants' personal lives positively influenced their working experience in a number of ways. The participants listed several positive home and environmental factors that positively influenced their working experience. It is evident that the participants felt that fulfilling the role of being a husband and a father was rewarding, encouraging and indirectly motivated them within their working environment.

There are also other positive environmental factors such as social support and religious support which aid in combating the negative effects of workplace stressors. This includes having a partner who is supportive and understands the nature of their work experiences. One can also conclude that the invaluable support from family, friends, colleagues, the Employee Assistance Programme and the Chaplaincy enabled the participants to cope better with the demands of workplace stressors.

5.2.4 Firefighters perceptions of how their personal lives negatively influence their working experience

As discussed previously, there are certain aspects of firefighters personal lives that positively influence their working experience, however it is also evident that their home environment factors when challenging negatively influences their working experience. One can conclude that an unmanageable or challenging home life negatively influences firefighters working experience and this once again indicates that the participants perceived that their work experiences influence their personal lives and vice versa.

This includes family responsibilities whereby it is evident that firefighters experience stress as they try to balance family life and work. Other personal challenges which negatively influences the participants' working experience includes a decrease in quality of communication with colleagues, decrease in the level of concentration at work and decrease in work performance.

5.2.5 Recommendation that firefighters would give in terms of support they need

The recommendations made by the participants in this study were in response to and informed by the challenging aspects of their work. The importance of prospective firefighters doing thorough research about the job, prior to joining emerged strongly from the findings. Furthermore, the need for physical, mental and psychological resilience was emphasised. Due to the challenging and stressful aspects of a firefighter's job as identified in the findings the importance of social support to assist in combating the negative effects of workplace stressors was elucidated.

The findings of this study identified the challenging aspects of working shifts, predominant workplace stressors as well as the repeated exposure to trauma. The importance of prospective firefighters visiting fire stations and engaging in conversation with firefighters was strongly recommended by participants in this study.

The recommendations made by the participants in this study were in response to the EAP and

Wellness Programme and management. Many of the participants are aware of the EAP and Wellness Programme, however, it emerged strongly from the findings that the process of firefighters accessing this service should be shortened. Furthermore, participants strongly recommended that EAP Practitioners visit the fire stations regularly to market EAP services, familiarise themselves with the fire department culture as well as to gain the trust of firefighters as this will contribute towards greater understanding of their working experiences and assist with rendering more effective interventions.

The importance of the supportive role of management is clear and a number of recommendations were made by the participants in this regard. This included that management be more pro-active, be more readily available especially on a personal level, management should visit the stations more regularly, have an open-door policy and have informal meetings allowing firefighters to raise any concerns they might have regarding their working environment. It can be concluded that there is a view that management do not always have insight into some of the workplace challenges as identified in the study. It is also evident from the findings that the issue of staff appreciation is a concern and numerous participants suggested that management should show more appreciation towards firefighters, be more friendly and have an open-door policy.

Physical fitness appears to be a central component of working as a firefighter and recommendations were made around a need for increased attention to the provision and monitoring of fitness programmes.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations based on the conclusions will now be discussed.

5.3.1 The researcher's recommendations for the Fire and Rescue Department

The first recommendation is to consider conducting an employee satisfaction survey which can serve as a vehicle for collecting information on firefighters working experiences. These surveys can be conducted online through email and remain confidential. The surveys can provide management with feedback pertaining to firefighters working experience where they can measure

their level of satisfaction and identify core areas that they feel should be improved. The surveys are an important way of opening up the lines of communication between management and the firefighters and can serve as a driver for change. The surveys can be seen as a pro-active approach showing firefighters that management cares by reaching out and listening.

The second recommendation is considering a sports day once a year where firefighters can participate in physical activities. The researcher is aware of practical challenges including budget constraints therefore it might be helpful to invite internal stakeholders within the organisation to assist with the planning and implementation thereof. The sports day could also be a great initiative for team building where firefighters can form teams in various sports activities and compete against each other.

It is imperative to consider a closer collaboration between management and firefighters and this could be achieved through the implementation of informal meetings. The researcher is aware that this could be time consuming and that management may have other commitments, and therefore recommends that a roster system could be created with proposed dates to accommodate this. The roster system will allow management to plan ahead and make alternative arrangements should they not be available to attend the informal meetings. This action could prove valuable to the organisation as the knowledge gained in these meetings could assist management in identifying and addressing workplace challenges faced by firefighters in order to boost the morale of the firefighters.

It is evident from the study that participants felt management should show more appreciation for good work performance. The fourth recommendation considers staff reward and recognition and the researcher recommends that firefighters are regularly appreciated and recognised for the work they are doing. The researcher is aware that the department might have implemented staff reward and recognition appraisals already but could possibly consider doing this monthly or quarterly in the form of verbal communication in meetings, or letters or via email. If firefighters feel appreciated for the work, they are doing this could boost employee morale and improve work performance.

5.3.2 The researcher's recommendations for the EAP and Wellness branch

The researcher has identified six recommendations based on the findings of this research to the EAP and Wellness branch aimed at improving firefighter health and wellness. The first recommendation considers wellness events which are aimed at promoting and adopting healthier behaviours addressing some of the following: smoking, hypertension, healthy lifestyle, unmanaged cholesterol, unmanaged diabetes, and high blood glucose levels. The researcher is aware that the EAP and Wellness branch might already have similar wellness events in place, however additional wellness events targeted specifically for firefighters is recommended. The researcher also recommends that the wellness events take place at the stations as firefighters are not always able to leave the station. There may be practical challenges to implementing these events therefore, it is recommended that Wellness Champions or the Peer Counsellors (ambassadors for EAP and Wellness) assist with the planning and implementation of the wellness events.

It is also recommended that the EAP and Wellness branch implements surveys quarterly to determine firefighters needs in terms of health and wellness. Surveys can be done online via email where the EAP and Wellness branch can collect and gather information pertaining to what is needed to improve firefighters' health and wellness. This could be done by the graduate interns with the assistance from the Peer Counsellors supported by management.

The third recommendation speaks to quarterly awareness sessions at stations whereby the Peer Counsellors can market EAP and Wellness service offerings, as there is a perception among firefighters that they need to obtain permission from their senior officer. The Peer Counsellors can share EAP and Wellness contact details and inform the firefighters of how to access the service as many of the participants recommended that the EAP and Wellness branch needs to continuously market their services. Continuous marketing thus will clarify the perception that firefighters have where they do not need to obtain permission from their senior officer, as firefighters can access EAP when they are not working, especially when they do not want management to know.

The fourth recommendation considers the implementation of pro-active interventions for firefighters as well as management training. Due to the stressful and challenging aspects of a

firefighters' working experience, the EAP and Wellness branch can implement interventions focusing on building resilience and stress management. The interventions can be requested via the EAP and Wellness branch whereby a needs analysis can be done with the firefighters to ascertain what their challenges and developmental needs are. Upon completion of the needs analysis a report can be compiled to management where the EAP and Wellness branch can recommend possible interventions for firefighters that can assist with the challenges and developmental needs identified.

The researcher also recommends that continuous support be made available to management so that management can contact the EAP and Wellness branch for assistance and guidance pertaining to difficulties experienced within their team. It is recommended that the EAP and Wellness branch facilitate a workshop with management with an aim to equip managers to be able to identify at risk employees, what the supervisory role in EAP is and the EAP referral process. Management plays a vital role within the organisation especially when it comes to supporting employees hence supporting this structure is important.

Finally, the researcher recommends that the EAP and Wellness branch considers implementing support programmes for firefighters with the assistance from the Peer Counsellors (i.e. quarterly debriefing at station); as a result of the multiple exposure to traumatic incidents.

5.3.3 Researcher's recommendations for future research

The sample of this study was relatively small and consisted of only males. It would be important to conduct future research with a bigger sample that could be more representative, and with female firefighters as a comparison to see if their experiences would be similar or different to those of male firefighters. Furthermore, this study was conducted with firefighters working in urban areas, and further research could be conducted in rural areas to explore whether experiences would be similar or different for firefighters working in rural areas in South Africa.

This study focused on firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience and personal lives influence each other, future research could be conducted with firefighter's partners to explore

whether their experiences would be similar or different particularly pertaining to the type of support needed for their relationship. The researcher is of an opinion that by studying firefighters' partners, one could gain a deeper understanding of how to reduce stress in firefighters and in turn, potentially reduce presenteeism and poor work performance.

This study identified a complex dilemma pertaining to a lack of support from management as participants felt that management should consider adopting an open-door policy and be more readily available in order to assist in improving firefighter health and wellness. The researcher recommends that future research could explore management's perceptions of what is needed to improve firefighter health and wellness as well their experiences of having to manage a difficult service.

5.4 Conclusion

This study sought to explore firefighters' perceptions of how their working experience and personal lives influence each other. This chapter has presented the main conclusions from the research. Recommendations were made to the Fire and Rescue Department and the EAP and Wellness branch which have been discussed. It is evident that while the findings are consistent with literature, there is still room for future research in this area.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Research Topic: Exploring Firefighters Perceptions of how their Working Experience and Personal Lives Influence each other

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. These questions are part of a study that seeks to understand the perceptions that firefighters have of how their working conditions and personal lives influence each other. The interviews are being conducted as part of the fulfilment of a researcher's Masters in Clinical Social Work at the University of Cape Town. The information that will be published will not provide any information that will identify you, and your information will be kept confidential.

The study is completely voluntary. Even if you give consent to participate, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to, and you can opt out of the study at any point. Without prejudice. Signing this document indicates that you understand the information provided above and are in agreement to the terms below. By signing this form, you are providing consent to take part in this study. Thank you for your participation.

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research project, which is being conducted by Nicolette Metcalf, in completion of her Masters in Clinical Social Work at the University of Cape Town.
- I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.
- The interview will be one-on-one and will last approximately 60 minutes. It will take place in a private setting of my choice.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

I have read and understood the points and statements of this form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

.....
Participant Signature

.....
Date

.....
Researcher Signature

.....
Date

For further information, please contact:

Researcher: Nicolette Metcalf

nicolette.metcalf@capetown.gov.za

Research Supervisor: Fatima Williams

fatima.williams@uct.ac.za

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Research Topic: Exploring Firefighters Perceptions of how their Working Experience and Personal Lives Influence each other.

Date of Interview:

Name of participant:

1. Opening and demographic details

1.1 Name?

1.2 Gender?

1.3 Age?

1.4 Relationship status?

1.5 Number of children?

1.6 Position?

1.7 How long have you been employed in this position?

2.1 Exploring firefighter's perceptions of how their working experience positively influence their personal lives:

2.1.1 What were your reasons for becoming a firefighter?

2.1.2 Describe a typical day at the fire station?

2.1.3 Is being a firefighter what you hoped it would be? If yes, please elaborate? If no, please elaborate?

2.1.4 What aspects of your job are rewarding?

2.1.5 If you had a positive day at work, how if at all do you feel this influences how you relate to your partner?

2.1.6 In your view what aspects, if any from your working environment has supported/strengthened your relationship with your partner?

2.2 Exploring firefighter's perceptions of how their working experience negatively influence their personal lives:

2.2.1 What aspects of your job do you find most challenging?

How have you attempted to deal with these challenging aspects of your work?

2.2.2 If you had a challenging day, how if at all do you feel this influences how you relate to your partner?

2.2.3 In your view What aspects, if any from your working environment has challenged your relationship with your partner?

3.1 Exploring firefighter's perceptions how their personal lives positively influence their working experience:

3.1.1 What aspects of your home environment do you find most rewarding? What about these aspects are rewarding?

3.1.2 What aspects of your home environment has strengthened/supported your working environment?

3.1.3 If you had a positive day at home, how if at all does this influence your day at work?

3.2 Exploring firefighter's perceptions how their personal lives negatively influence their working experience:

3.2.1 What aspects of your home environment do you find most challenging? What about these aspects are challenging?

3.2.2 What aspects of your home environment has challenged your working environment?

3.2.3 If you have a challenging day at home, how if at all does this influence your day at work?

4. To investigate what recommendations would firefighters give in terms of the support that they need:

- 4.1 What advice would you give to someone who would like to become a firefighter?
- 4.2 What support is available to you? Do you feel you need further support in order to cope with the demands of work and personal relationships?
 - 4.2.1 If yes, what would the support entail?
 - 4.2.2 If no what are the reasons for this?
- 4.3 What recommendations would you give EAP and Wellness branch to improve firefighter health and wellness?
- 4.4 What recommendations would you give to management to improve firefighter health and wellness?