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A case study of the marital and familial relationships of fire-rescue personnel as they relate to marriage survivability

Carolyn Morgan Henderson

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**A CASE STUDY OF THE MARITAL AND FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF
FIRE-RESCUE PERSONNEL AS THEY RELATE TO MARRIAGE
SURVIVABILITY**

by
Carolyn Morgan Henderson

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Richmond
in Candidacy
for the degree of
MASTER
of
Human Resource Management

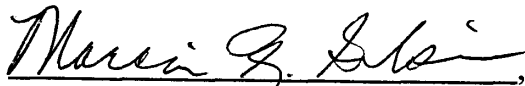
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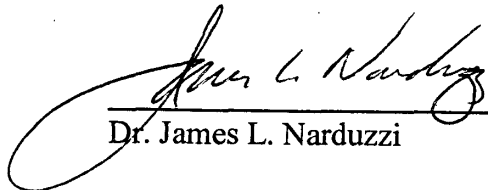
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I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master in Human Resource Management.

By Thesis Committee


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ABSTRACT

Carolyn Morgan Henderson

Master of Human Resource Management

A Case Study of the Marital and Familial Relationships of Fire-Rescue Personnel As They Relate To Marriage Survivability [49 pages, 5 chapters]

Directed by Dr. Marcia Gibson

(145)

Marriage is considered the traditional and moral standard for all relationships. There are other relationship types that exist in the life of fire-rescue personnel, but this study explores only marital relationships. Marriage demands are many and not everyone is equipped to handle them. Marriage requires devoted energy and continuous negotiation and compromise. Firefighters and paramedics are subjected to rigorous training to obtain the skill for their respective jobs. Their training equips them for rescuing the sick, injured, and extinguishing fires. However, there is not a protocol or training manual for marriage. This study examines the probable cause and effect that leads to marital dissolutions amongst fire-rescue personnel. This data will be obtained through interview, questionnaire, and document analysis. The case study evaluates occupational and familial relationships as they relate to job accountability, job stress and marriage survivability with focus on a single case study participant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my husband William L. Henderson for his continued support and encouragement throughout this endeavor. To the members of the Tidewater Seven, who make up the University of Richmond cohort, I wish to thank you for your support over the last two years. A very special thanks goes to fellow cohort Beth Bruner. Lastly, a warm appreciation is extended to Dr. Marcia Gibson for her support as thesis advisor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are millions of occupations world wide, but few have the challenges of a fire-rescue service. Such challenges as: observing the beauty of birth, seeing death up close and personal; being a part of these wonders and/or disillusion creates a different type of employee. The evolution of the “new fire department” came about when fire departments and emergency medical services began to initiate mergers. Such a merger occurred between the Norfolk Fire Department and the Norfolk Paramedical Services. The two entities became bound in a marriage of sorts for the greater good of the community. This merger created Norfolk-Fire Rescue (NFR).

Norfolk Fire-Rescue has a proud and rich history. NFR is a fire-rescue organization located in the city of Norfolk, Virginia. It is comprised of over 500 dedicated professionals who protect a 66 square mile urban city. The population of Norfolk is approximately 250,000 persons. On any given work day the men and women of NFR can provide over 350,000 citizens (including visitors and daily workers) with emergency care and/or fire suppression services if required. On average, NFR responds to more than 40,000 calls a year. Approximately sixty-three percent of those are EMS and about thirty-three percent are fire calls (Norfolk, 2006). Norfolk responds to 38% more EMS calls annually than the national average. See Figure 1 in Appendix A.

NFR offers one of the better salary packages in the Tidewater area. The starting salary for a firefighter/EMT recruit is \$34,626. The firefighter/paramedic can earn up to \$64,105 annually. Officers within the department earn from \$46,688-\$90,351 annually. The current Fire Chief has a salary ranging from \$81,548-\$141,018 per year (Norfolk

2007). Compare these salaries to the median salaries of other local municipalities. See Table 1 in Appendix B.

The employees of NFR have unique jobs. Due to the amount of occupational stress involved in these unique jobs they will face unusual dilemmas. Exactly who are these individuals who have such unique and stressful jobs and will face these unusual dilemmas? They are the men and women running into buildings as others are fleeing. Exhibiting superhuman courage, they deliberately with full knowledge of the dangers they face, risk their lives for a stranger or a stranger's property (Kirschman, 2005a). Fire-rescue personnel (Smith, 1988) are dedicated, committed and courageous persons that enter the blind, boiling, darkness of a building on fire and confront the flames head-on. According to Kirschman (2004b) they are also:

lifting heavy patients, performing medical procedures, dragging heavy equipment into burning buildings, inhaling toxic fumes, being exposed to hazardous materials, extricating people from trapped cars while standing in the middle of busy freeways, performing confined space rescues, walking on burning roofs, and getting jolted awake from a dead sleep (p.131).

Employees of most fire-rescue services tend to develop an overwhelming commitment to the goals and purposes of their respective organizations. The fire service has always been called a brotherhood; and for all intent and purposes it still is. In a study of the Oakland, California Fire Department assistant professor Carol Chetkovic of Harvard University concluded that it is a deeply held definition of a firefighter as being male and that the job to many documents one's masculinity. Furthermore while African-Americans and other firefighter of color may be treated unfairly due to the racism of the

dominant group, women are categorically excluded by their gender and are resented for it (Chetkovich, 1999).

Women are slowly coming into field. Women represent only 2.8 percent of career firefighters in the United States, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). This number matches similar statistics reported by Women in the Fire Service (Number, 2005). These co-workers become partners, bunkmates, lunch and dinner companions, classmates, and friends. Fire-rescue personnel have in truth acquired a second family. "Living, training, eating, risking your life, and relaxing on and off duty with the same group of people year end and year out breeds an intimacy that comes close to the intimacy one usually shares with one's real family" (Kirschman, 2004c p.7).

The lines between the firehouse families and the real families sometimes become blurred. A discussion of this phenomenon will vary dependent upon perception. In her memoirs Susan Farren was flabbergasted when her husband came home from his first day on the job and said that one of his new colleagues declared, "Wives may come and go, but the department will always be here for you; we're your second family now" (Farren, 2004a p. 31). For many fire-rescue families this creates a major issue. The research delved into the familial sacrifices sometimes associated with Public Safety workers that are fire-rescue personnel. Researching factors that were indigenous to relationship dissolution was crucial to this investigation.

Thesis and Hypothesis

Research will support the following thesis statement: *Fire-rescue personnel must give their marriages extraordinary attention if they are to survive the rigorous toll of occupational and human relationship issues.*

The motivation to address and research the questions outlined in this study are obvious. Human Resource Management teaches that employees are the most valuable resources of any organization. It is beneficial to employers that employees remain healthy body wise as well as in their familial relationships. The hypothesis for this research is: *There is a probable correlation between occupational stress and marital dissolution.*

Marital dissolution is believed to be more prevalent with the target population because of the outside elements they encounter. Occupational stress can apply unusual pressures on couples. It is expected that the research hypothesis will be accepted.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine the probable cause and effect that can lead to the dissolution of marital relationships amongst fire-rescue personnel. This research was obtained through case study methodology. Research was based on a single case study using triangulation approach. There was an examination of archival records, structured interview, phenomenological research, and document analysis. This case study evaluated occupational and familial relationships as they related to job function, job accountability, job stress, and marriage survivability of fire-rescue personnel. These questions were pursued:

1. What are the primary causes of relationship decline in the marriages of fire-rescue personnel?
2. How are the cause and effect of occupational and familial related stress in fire-rescue relationships relative to their decline?
3. How does the elitist status sometimes associated with fire-rescue members

affect them and their spouses?

4. What steps should an organization take, if any in assisting members with marital and familial relationship discord?

Methodology

This case study methodology will use triangulation where multiple methods of inquiry are used to examine the real-life situations of fire-rescue personnel. The qualitative research was gathered through subject interview, stress questionnaire, document analysis, and theory.

Target Population Representative

The target population is Norfolk Fire-Rescue. From this population a single case study participant was established as a representative of this population. The respondent has been in fire-rescue service for 20-30 years. The respondent embarked on this service career for reasons that are well known to other fire-rescue personnel. The respondent started out like thousands of other fire-rescue personnel, as a volunteer. Volunteers perform the same duties as paid firefighters and may constitute the majority of firefighters in a residential area. They staff seventy percent of all fire companies according to the U. S. Fire Administration (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Throughout this research the participant will be known as Case Study Participant #55 (CSP #55). The use of this participant was reviewed and approved by the IRB, University of Richmond. The IRB approval form as well as the informed consent document can be found in Appendix C.

Delimitations

One of the limitations identified in this research is the inability of the researcher to obtain any qualifying literature with numbers of the actual divorce rates of firefighters. A second limitation is the use of a single-participant-case study. There is no way to control for the participant's biases for or against certain research theories that were undoubtedly colored by the experiences of the participant.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the research that has already been accomplished with regard to the research questions. The research literature describes supporting theories on the primary causes for the relationship decline in the marriages of fire-rescue members, the cause and effect of occupational and familial related stress in fire-rescue relationships relative to their decline, the effect of the elitist status sometimes associated with fire-rescue members and their spouses, and organizational support for the members experiencing marital and familial relationship discord.

Marriage is considered the traditional and moral standard for all relationships. There are other relationship types that exist in the life of fire-rescue personnel, but this study explores only marital relationships. Marriage demands are many and not everyone is equipped to handle them. Marriage requires partners to be able to negotiate and compromise.

Firefighters and paramedics are subjected to rigorous training to obtain the skills for their respective jobs. This training equips them for rescuing the sick, the injured and extinguishing a fire. However, there is not a protocol or training course for marriage.

The article, "Behind the Brotherhood: Rewards and Challenges For Wives of Firefighters," suggests that even though they are supportive and proud of their spouses' work, wives nevertheless encountered several challenges. Specific areas of challenge were (a) the effects of shift work on the family, (b) the transfer of firefighter's reactions to dangerous and traumatic events to family, and (c) the social atmosphere associated with the fire service"(Regehr, Dimintropoulos, George, and Henderson, 2005).

Along with negotiation and compromise there should be a commitment for marriage survival. The dual lifestyle of firefighters, having a home and work persona, requires a different set of social skills for each one (Kirschman, 2004b). Whether or not a fire service employee can separate the two could determine the continuation or decline of a marriage.

Primary Causes for Relationship Decline

Typical occupational stress along with day-to-day relationship issues could cause the marriages of fire-rescue members not to survive. Support of family is paramount to reducing the impact of highly stressful work on firefighters. However family members, particularly spouses, as a result of the stressful job of firefighting experience high quantities of stress themselves (Regehr, et al.).

Because of the very nature of the job, aligned with stress and other human relationship factors, fire-rescue personnel put their marriages on the line. Occupational stress can have an adverse effect on any marriage, but even more on the fire-rescue marriage. Hans Selye a pioneer of stress research developed a simple stress model that is still in use today. Selye's response based model assumes that all stimuli trigger the same cascade of physiological responses and that the nature of the response (activation and resolution vs. activation and exhaustion) ultimately dictates the health outcome (Linden, 2004).

The same personality characteristics that attract firefighters to the fire service, such as the ability to perform under pressure; and that help them to be effective firefighters also have a negative side. The same characteristics increase stress on the job

and can ruin relationships at home. (McEvoy, 2005). Researchers have demonstrated how job-related stressors experienced in a variety of working environments can be transmitted to other family members once the individual returns home. Further evidence suggest that traumatic exposure in the course of the work may result in trauma symptoms in wives of firefighters and longstanding changes in the marital relationship (Regehr, 2005).

Cause and Effect of Occupational and Familial Related Stress

Critical Incident Stress Syndrome (CISS) as an occupational hazard for fire-rescue was explored. CISS is a very real and potentially fatal danger to search and rescue personnel, it can cause the break up of families, lost of jobs, and more (Critical Incident, 1999). Marriages will usually decrease in survivability as stressors increase. These marriages can become casualties of what can be called occupational marriage dissolution.

Emergency service personnel are also at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal are the three main symptoms seen in PTSD. (Haslam, 2003). See Table 2 in Appendix B. "Webster gives an acceptable definition of PTSD. It is a psychological reaction occurring after a highly stressing event that is usually characterized by depression, anxiety, flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, and avoidance reminders of the past," (Mish, 1993). Many fire-rescue personnel can have a traumatic experience and the emotional effect of the event may subside. When it does not high anxiety will occur.

Twenty-four hour shift work contributes to the disintegration of the family, especially if the working schedule of the firefighter clashes with that of his partner

(Fishkin, 1991). Firefighters must be on duty 24 hours a day to handle unexpected emergencies. The duty of firefighters is characterized by their heavy social responsibility and the various risks they encounter in fire extinguishing and lifesaving activities (Takeyama, 2005). Shift work is a chronic stressor in the fire service that compels families to adjust and adapt to changing patterns of availability and prolonged absences (Regehr et al.).

The greatest causes of occupational and familial stress is the fear of a death in the line-of-duty. Farren spoke of her unnatural night fear and dreading the middle of the night phone call as a source of a great deal of frustration for her (Farren, 2004b).

Firefighting is extremely strenuous work and imposes great stress upon the firefighters respiratory and cardiopulmonary systems. Firefighters die at a higher rate to heart attacks when compared to occupational categories that have similar periods of down time followed by intense activity (Incident, 2004). A governmental report done in 2006 still lists sudden cardiac death as the leading cause of death in the line of duty for both volunteer and career firefighters. In both categories of firefighters, most heart attacks occurred among people 45-54 years of age. Most of the deaths were attributed to stress and overexertion (Proudfoot, 2006).

In a past screening by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) Heart Healthy Firefighter Program more than 10,000 career and volunteer firefighters were tested. High incidents of elevated cholesterol, hypertension, and obesity were found (Smith, 2004).

Effect of the Elitist Status

The occupation of the firefighter-paramedic has taken on a new and lofty position over the last decade. Research question number three alludes to this elitist phenomenon. This lofty status has been aided by the onslaught of television shows and movies that glamorize the profession. “Self-inflation is an organizational hazard for most emergency responders. In a closed culture that is constantly reinforcing itself, it is understandable how a firefighter could confuse doing important work with being an important person” (Kirschman, 2004e p.32). A recent poll just conducted by Salary.com has named the job of firefighter as the “sexiest job “ on the planet standing side-by-side with the job of CEO. Malachowski wrote, “In 2006, it turns out that bravery, as well as making a lot of money, make a job the sexiest” (Malachowski, 2006).

Self-inflation and egotism exist in all professions. But being in public service, donning a uniform and exhibiting extraordinary bravery has classic appeal. Unlike rock stars and movie stars that are usually beyond reach, your friendly neighborhood firefighter-paramedic can be right next-door.

For all their elitist status fire-rescue personnel would rather not be called “hero.” A common theme among firefighters (McKeown, 2005) is not to render the term hero meaningless with overuse but instead let it signify a very special honor. Wives that had participated in a study remarked on the positive public image of firefighters, the idealized image, and the fact that their spouses are put on pedestals. A direct quote from one wife stated, “Women pay a lot of attention to them because of the uniform. Society has this huge thing, like they’re big studs. So girls are all over them” (Regehr et al.).

Organization Support for Fire-Rescue Personnel

Employees are an organization's most valuable assets. Thus an employee's marital and familial problems are linked to organizational performance. Employers in general are concerned with the contentment and retention of their employees. The city of Norfolk uses the Bon Secours Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a professional support network. EAP supplies confidential and comprehensive employee assistance. Their highly trained members specialize in crisis and critical stress debriefing techniques (EAP, 2006).

Overstressed individuals take sick days at work more frequently, have trouble sleeping, tend to abuse drugs, alcohol, overeat more often, have increased relationship troubles, suffer more depression and often exhibit avoidance behaviors such as quitting jobs or job hopping (McEvoy). In addition to these concerns there may also be incidences of infidelity and depression that could eventually lead to suicide.

The horror of September 11, 2001 brought extreme havoc into the lives of all Americans. Fire-rescue personnel around the world are still affected by this event. Even before the events of 9:11 there was sufficient evidence in medical and psychological journals to demonstrate that a strong relationship exist between stressful life events and the emergence of a broad range of physical and mental health disorders (Ussery, 2004). Dr. Portia Rawles, clinical psychologist, suggest that suicide strikes at the very core value of the profession of firefighting. Dr. Rawles alludes to the demographic coincidence that statistically firefighters are most white males. Certain risk factors, divorce, exposure to traumatic events and numerous stressors are associated directly with firefighting. The

population group most likely to commit suicide mirrors the general population of the fire service (Rawles, 2003).

Infidelity amongst fire-rescue personnel may be no more prevalent than any other occupation. However there are several well-documented cases thanks to the “home wrecking scandal” involving the New York City Fire Department. It is called the “September 11 Widow Syndrome.” At least a dozen of New York’s “Bravest” have left their wives for the spouses of their comrades killed in the terror attacks of 9:11 (MacIntosh, 2003). This type of behavior by anyone would be hard to accept from a supposedly devoted mate. It proved to be a most devastating and heartbreaking situation for the affected spouses. Other firemen’s spouses would have read this headline with dread.

Drugs have factored into several cases involving the Sacramento Fire Department. During an investigation instigated by the Sacramento Bee (the local newspaper) some startling information came into the light. The newspaper highlighted the case of a paramedic, who, while high on drugs and alcohol proceeded to steal money from his patient instead of treating her life-threatening injuries. According to the court records of another case one paramedic was stealing morphine for his own addiction to the drug. The paramedic was replacing the stolen drug with saline and tap water, thus depriving patients of the authentic painkiller (McIntosh, 2007).

Fire-rescue personnel are but ordinary people who have positioned themselves into extraordinary jobs. They are in jobs that can overwhelm them and remind them that they are indeed human. An organization must offer formidable and continuous support

for these workers. The occupational stressors that they face create unique challenges for them. Organizational support is paramount.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The single-case methodology was selected to do this research. This research strategy was used primarily because the topic of inquiry is organizational phenomenon within a real-life context. The case study may stand-alone or be used as part of triangulation. In this case triangulation is the multiple method approach used in the research. Investigation or inquiry was done through use of the discussion interview, stress questionnaire, data analysis and ethnography. The case study participant (CSP #55) represents certain uniqueness for this particular research. CSP #55 is representative of the target population. CSP #55 has been married, divorced, and remarried. In understanding and evaluating a single case you shed light upon others. Linking the collected data to previous propositions was done through pattern matching and explanation building. These analytical techniques along with acceptable theory will form the case study. When patterns coincide, the results strengthen the internal validity of the case. Explanation building is a form of pattern matching which simply sets out to explain a phenomenon and present causal links to the case (Yin, 2003a).

Information and research gathered in this study involved the case study participant's view on his individual relationships. Discussion of relationship issues such as finances, communication, honesty, and parenting as these relate to the research were explored. Anonymity was required for IRB approval for this research and CSP #55 will remain anonymous.

Design Apparatus

To assist in gathering data from CSP #55 these instruments were used: The Case Study Discussion Questions, the Stress Questionnaire and the Informed Consent Document. The Discussion Questions were formulated to elicit from CSP #55 information that aligns with the research questions. CSP #55's information along with the other collected research will formulate the theory of the case. Existing data has provided the theoretic framework on which the case was grounded. The Stress Questionnaire used for this study was created as a variation of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCL-25). More on the HSCL-25 will be discussed in chapter four.

The Informed Consent Document was formulated by use of a University of Richmond template. The appropriate information was inserted into the document. This document was part of the IRB approval packet.

Measures

The unit of analysis for this study is the marriages of fire-rescue personnel, with particular focus on CSP #55. The independent variable for this research is the marital and familial relationships of fire-rescue personnel. These relationships and their relativity to the case study propositions, hypothesis, and grounded theory provide a framework for the case. The dependent variable is marriage survivability.

Assessment of Risk

The risks to the participant involved in this study were minimal. Using discipline-specific considerations (anonymity of responses, the participant, and aggregate data reports) helped to ensure that risks were minimal. The case study participant was known

only as Case Study Participant (CSP) #55. The primary researcher conducted interviews and met with the participant as listed in procedures.

The case study participant is part of an organizational culture that is very different from most other organizations. That is not to say that CSP #55 is not an ordinary person. However Public Safety personnel such as fire rescue individuals rarely wear their emotions on their sleeves. The very nature of their business has led to this group being very resilient. They have erected emotional walls that buttress them against many emotionally traumatic situations. To be firefighters and rescuers of the sick and injured is to be involved with daily stress and unusual job requirements. These workers are indeed ordinary people who once engaged on the job can become extraordinarily and highly adaptable.

Procedures

The procedures for conducting the case study research are:

1. The primary researcher meets with the case study participant. The Informed Consent Form is read and acknowledged by CSP #55.
2. Researcher explains that the discussions will span a period of three weeks for a minimum of ninety minutes per week for discussion. The participant is assured of anonymity.
3. The participant also agrees to limit his or her discussion of this research and consequent data to the primary researcher.
4. The Stress Questionnaire is administered.

5. This case study research is a single-case study methodology. This single-case design relies on theory relative to the individual subject rather than a large population.
6. An explanatory and information stance will be taken. The participant will expound on occupational and stress elements as they relate to the survivability of martial and familial relationships of fire-rescue personnel. This will be a detailed examination of relationship conflicts of this group.
7. The researcher initiates the discussion interviews, allowing the case study participant to have open-ended responses. The primary researcher reserves the right to post follow-up questions, if any given data is relative to the current research questions.

A copy of the Case Study Discussion Questions, Stress Questionnaire, and Informed Consent Documents are attached in Appendix C.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. The interviews will appear to be guided conversations rather than constructed queries (Yin, 2003b). The discussion or interview questions for this case study have been developed using a definitive case study protocol. Having a protocol increases the reliability of the research. The protocol (Yin, 2003c) for this case study includes (1) an overview, which includes case study objectives, issues and information relevancy, (2) field procedures that include credentials, general sources of information, and procedural reminders,

(3) case study interview and questionnaire, and (4) a final guide for the case study report. This chosen protocol follows the sections outlined in Yin's book.

The interview is the main road to multiple realities. Getting acquiescence to interviews is perhaps the easiest task in case study research. Getting a good interview is not easy (Stake, 1995). Case Study Participant #55 was an excellent respondent for this study. CSP #55 answers to the discussion questions were transcribed and submitted to the respondent for accuracy of content.

The respondent is part of a culture to which there are strong ties. The common cultural understanding of the respondent as it relates to the phenomena under investigation will add to certain theory building and improve external validity. This is the respondent's story.

Discussion Narrative

The respondent is a member of NFR, a fire-rescue service. Having started out in the occupation over twenty-five years ago, the respondent is well entrenched in the fire-rescue genre. As a young individual, fire was in his blood. He had already seen himself in the super hero role. The respondent began his career as a volunteer fireman.

Having wanted to be a career firefighter for most of his life, he jumped at the chance to join the real fire department.

The respondent married after being in the fire department for six years. Initially his spouse seemed intrigued about his chosen occupation. However early into the relationship she began to resent his time spent away from the family. His working at night was considered a night out to his wife. The spouse resented the time he spent away from the home. The resentment of the spouse intensified once children came along. Later as the marriage slid into decline, the respondent was informed that he had stymied his spouse's dreams. One morning after a long night at work the respondent was told to go back to his family, his real family. She was referring to the Fire Department. His spouse believed she was in a competition with his job.

The real family versus the firehouse family is very real. The brotherhood runs deep. The literature describes the firehouse as a place where you are living on duty and off duty with the same people year after year. An intimacy is created very similar to the bond of a real family. Whether or not the fire-rescue can separate the two is vital to the keeping a marriage together. The firehouse bond is not always understandable to spouse and family.

The dangers of the fire-rescue profession are many. The respondent talked of fires that can literally burn you alive and toxic smoke that can kill with the blink of an eye. Those are the things he can see. The invisible things viruses, bacterium and gases, they are out there as well. The plague of AIDS is on everyone's mind. CSP #55's first spouse had a habit of never saying good-bye as a sort of safety mechanism against her worst fears; that she could be saying good-bye for the last time. The respondent's spouse feared CSP #55 would be killed and become a statistic. Heart Attack, burns, asphyxiation, trauma, and heat exhaustion are a few of the mechanisms by which fire-rescue personnel have become fatalities. See Figure 2 in Appendix B.

The respondent is currently married to a second spouse. He describes a more compatible life with his present spouse. She was able to accept what he did for a living and wanted to involve herself in his work. The respondent readily admits he believes that his first marriage ended because of his occupation. To the respondent the more he did for the family the more he became alienated. The family of the respondent lived an above average life style. However the respondent felt that his best was never good enough.

The bonds that were made on the job were deep for the respondent. He describes some of the deeper bonds as brother and sister-like. The bonds created with the second firehouse family caused severe problems for his first wife. She was unable to accept the brotherhood bond and the thought of a platonic relationship with a female was totally unacceptable. The first marriage of CSP #55 ended without any resistance from the respondent. No assistance or counseling was tried prior to dissolution.

CSP #55 says he is able to easily separate what is real from fantasy. He has little concern about his occupation reaching a sort of cult and elitist status. The respondent believes that television and movie depictions of fire-rescue personnel definitely tend to glamorize the profession. The media has turned fire and rescue personnel into sexy heroes. This media storm has gone to the head of some of his constituents. CSP #55 describes those that believe all of the hype as becoming superheroes in their own minds. They have become unable to separate what is real from untruth. At home this creates problems. The elitist phenomenon becomes threatening to a spouse. The respondent says at some point the spouse has created an umbrella of suspicion because the mate is being considered a sex symbol.

Having one of the most dangerous professions in the world should always be on your mind as you go about your duties. If you allow yourself to forget that the respondent casts you as a fool. This dangerous profession creates both occupational and familial stress. CSP #55 describes the meeting of job and family stress coming together to create a problem child. This problem child can quickly tear a family apart.

Fire-rescue personnel do not wish to be known as heroes. They are human, with human vulnerabilities and problems. The respondent describes himself as just a regular human being, not a superhero. He has seen things he wishes he had not. He remains fearful of the things that could happen to him on the job. He has seen co-workers turn to booze, dope, cheating on spouses, and even having thoughts of suicide. CSP #55 presently denies using these avenues as coping mechanisms for his choice of occupation.

As a group the respondent feels most fire-rescue personnel give all to their jobs. He sees his job and family life deeply connected. He has seen one marriage succumb to occupational and familial stress. Realizing that, he has attempted to offer a balance for occupational and marital harmony, he appears ready to accept appropriate assistance if needed. The Employee Assistance Program offered by the City of Norfolk has helped some of his co-workers. However, there is a reluctance to use the service because of confidentiality concerns. The program is helpful but CSP #55 suggests it may not be sufficient for fire-rescue personnel. He would like to see something geared toward them specifically.

The respondent was not surprised to find out that heart attack was the number one killer of firefighters. He has seen many fire ground injuries and had placed them high as a killing trend amongst fire-rescue personnel.

Shift work had a detrimental effect on the respondent's first marriage. Even though his spouse was aware of what he did for a living, she hated it. She deeply resented the respondent being gone from the family overnight. Missed holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries were the norm for this family. The job afforded the respondent and his family a very good life financially. However his first wife blamed the job and the twenty-four-shift for all their problems. The respondent describes a second marriage that has been entirely different from the first.

The respondent actually likes some things about the twenty-four-hour shift. Only working ten days a month has its benefits. Less memorable disadvantages are the

deprivation of sleep and literally having to have long periods of recovery from some shifts.

CSP #55 admits to bringing elements of the job home. He has described things that he feels should not be seen by anyone. He has seen people burned beyond recognition, babies beaten to death, and other traumas that he would like to forget. "It is like a monkey on your back and you can't shake it." He describes a suffering and wanting to have someone suffer with him. His second wife apparently is willing to share his suffering and pain. He basically said what he is able to share with his spouse is almost cathartic. He relishes being able to talk to her about his work.

As a long time member of the fire service and the more recent version of a fire-rescue service, CSP #55 has seen many things come and go. The good old boy's club is not a myth in his occupation. He describes women as being negatively received when they first came into the department. This was an accepted view of the majority of members and it was the initial view of the respondent. Speaking as the person he has become today he was not proud of the stance he once had taken. He compared the entry of women and African-Americans into the department as having some similarities. However, the respondent was quick to point out they were very different issues. The respondent's view of women in the brotherhood has changed.

In addition to the Discussion Questions as part of this research, CSP #55 participated in a questionnaire that evaluated some of the consequences of stress. The questionnaire was created as a variation of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCL-25). The HSCL-25 is a well-known and widely used instrument whose history dates

from the 1950's. It is a symptom inventory, which measure symptoms of anxiety and depression (Derogtis, 1974). The questionnaire was crafted to evaluated symptoms of stress and high anxiety that can be present during the work cycle and home life of fire-rescue personnel. The questionnaire was not used to make any mental health diagnoses or identify any clinical illnesses. As a method of calculating whether or not a depressive state existed for CSP #55, the respondent's answers for the Stress Questionnaire were tabulated by adding up the total of all answers if twenty or more of the twenty-five items were answered. Each answer never, seldom, often, and always was rated 1-4 respectively. A mean score is then calculated. This calculation is based on the method used in the study by Frojdh, Hakansson, and Karlsson (Frojdh, 2004). In this particular study the HSCL-25 was used to calculate depressive states in the elderly. CSP #55 had a score of 1.48. Frojdh identifies 1.75 as a cut-off for probable depressive states. A score of 1.48 was indicative of not suffering from stress and high anxiety at the time the questionnaire was given.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Research will support the following thesis statement. Fire-rescue personnel must give their marriages extraordinary attention if they are to survive the rigorous toll of occupational and human relationship issues.

The motivation for this study is the NFR employees and their families, and the avenues of support from the NFR organization. It is beneficial to both employers and employees to remain healthy physically and mentally with work and family relationships. Marital dissolution is believed to be more prevalent with the target population because of outside elements. Occupational stress can apply unusual pressures on couples. Since this is a single-case study approach the research hypothesis cannot be either accepted or rejected. However, this case study seems to support the acceptance of the hypothesis that there is a probable correlation between occupation stress and marital dissolution.

Discussion

At the beginning of this research four questions were formulated. The collected data addressed many of these specific areas.

1. What are the primary causes of relationship decline in the marriage of fire-rescue personnel?

Unlike most jobs a fire-rescue occupation is very risky business. Those in the field must be able to perform under enormous pressure and stressful situations. Most marriages will fail under ordinary circumstances - lack of finances, lack of

communication, lack of honesty, and lack of true commitment to the marriage. A firefighter-rescue marriage will not only have these circumstances, but a plethora of other relationship stressors.

McEvoy (2002) discusses the relationship stressors of loyalty, danger, negativity, and lack of understanding. He goes on to say that a firefighter's loyalty may be divided. This is specifically so because of the two-family phenomenon that surrounds the occupation. The literature through the case study interview and documentation exposes the real family and the firehouse family phenomenon.

The world we live in has changed tremendously. With the advent of "The War on Terror" danger is lurking everywhere. Even before this world madness began firefighting was one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. The families of fire-rescue personnel live with this knowledge day after day. The events of 9:11 highlighted dangers that had become buried under the glamorization of the occupation.

According to McEvoy (2002) negativity can be manifested in two ways: (1) toxic thoughts and critical analysis of others appearing in personal interactions and (2) emotional stress on the job also causing firefighters to bring negativity into the home.

Rawles (2003) list three common occupational stressors that add to marital woes. These are organizational, demographic, and environmental stressors. They are associated respectively with departmental changes, current census changes, and erratic conditions in working conditions. Any or all of these stressors can aid in the decline of a fire-rescue marriage.

2. How are the cause and effect of occupational and familial related stress in fire-rescue relationships relative to their decline?

Fire-rescue relationships are different from the ordinary marriage relationship. The occupational and familial stressors associated with the fire-rescue genre put the marriages of fire-rescue personnel under unusual stress. Take these haunting examples of on the job stress that remain branded on the brain even though they happened to the author of this case study years ago. A stillborn baby was delivered whose rotting flesh peels from his body at your touch. Arriving on the scene you see a car that looks like a crunched up sardine can but there are four people inside. A young thirteen-year-old boy out at 3:00 AM is lying on the cold ground with a bullet hole in his chest the size of a quarter. He is squeezing your hand and asking if he is going to die? A woman is stone cold dead with her hands and feet bound and a ligature around her neck. What do you say to the child that asks if her mommy and daddy are okay when they lay in the next room with bullets in their heads--an apparent murder-suicide? A house is fully involved with fire blazing seemingly from every escapable opening. A husband is screaming hysterically that his wife and child are inside. You scream too, silently, because you know there is nothing you can do. This type of occupational stress will and does affect everyone. Occupational stress will now become familial stress as the incidents replays again on rewind once you are away from the job and on the home front.

3. How does the elitist status sometimes associated with fire-rescue members affect them and their spouses?

The elitist status that is associated with this occupation has basically taken a life of its own. This new status has erupted from the bevy of television shows and movies that glamorize the profession. Sexy fire department calendars and dozens of media appearances keep the profession of fire-rescuer on the front burner. The exposure is welcomed from Human Resources departments around the country. This type of exposure helps with recruitment. Little kids grow up dreaming of becoming firemen and firewomen. At the first opportunity they may follow those dreams.

September 11, 2001 forever changed the world as well as the way fire-rescue personnel will forever be viewed. This tragedy also adds to the elitist and hero status. As well it should, because the heroism shown that day by fire-rescue personnel and public safety workers in general cannot be replicated. The most notable backlash for all of this attention to America's heroes may have been for the spouses and families of the individual heroes. To voice an old cliché, everybody wants one. The deterrent of the hero being part of another family or someone else's spouse seems to matter little. Without a doubt the hero and the family are affected.

4. What steps should an organization take if any in assisting members with family relationship discord?

Open any Human Resource Management book and it will discuss the employees of an organization as its most valuable asset. With that in mind any organization would definitely be well served to address the issues of their employees. However employers will find that in general employees tend to keep family matters private. A very prudent position to take would be to have a trained peer member available and on call to offer

assistance if it is requested. The peer member would offer basic assistance that could be as simple as listening to the problem or problems. The peer offering support would be trained to a level whereas they are able to spot behavior and circumstances that merits referral to a more appropriate level of care.

Recommendations

The statistics of Divorce Magazine tell us that approximately half of all marriages now end in divorce. The National Marriage Project puts the numbers closer to forty-three percent (Frolick, 2005). Whatever the actual statistics the high risk occupation of fire-rescuer threatens the survivability of a marriage.

Organizations such as NFR must show great concern about the well being of their members. Helping employees maintain a balance between work and family is highly recommended. NFR already has in place an Employee Assistance Program. These types of programs have proven very helpful, however, employees appear to be skeptical of them. Confidentiality seems to be the largest drawback. In addition to an EAP program it is recommended that the City establish a support group consisting of peers, a chaplain with 24-hour accessibility, annual in-house workshops, and a more structured fitness program.

The peer support group was detailed earlier in chapter five. This group must undergo sufficient training to enable them to recognize the onset of certain conditions that manifests itself amongst fire-rescue personnel. When recognized, a member of the peer group can direct the member to the appropriate assistance.

A chaplain can offer spiritual support and comfort. Being able to touch base and receive guidance from a minister of God opens a different element of assistance. The nondenominational status of a chaplain makes him or her available to all members.

Annual workshops or seminars that open a forum on the problems of the target population are advisable. Seminars that feature expertise of individuals on subjects such as job stress, family stress, budgeting, parenting, and interpersonal conflict is recommended as an additional step.

NFR and its employees would benefit greatly from a more structured fitness program. Assisting employees in their quest for fitness is commendable. The literature alludes to firefighters having issues with obesity, hypertension, and a propensity to develop heart disease. Eliminating some of the risk factors for these diseases will be the goal. Employees that understand the importance of fitness in body and mind may experience a longer life span.

Rawles (2003) points out that divorce is just one event in the process of marital break-up. The dissolution of a marital relationship begins long before and continues after a legal divorce. A final organization-related recommendation is to add to the fire-rescue curriculum, classes that expose recruits to the occupational stress levels of the job. If fire-rescue personnel know ahead of time what they will face in the workplace, it may help them with potential job-related stress. This knowledge may help to alleviate the onset of some element of familial stress. As stated in the introduction of this case study, fire-rescue personnel must give their marriages and familial relationships extraordinary

attention if they are to survive the rigorous toll of occupational and human relationship issues.

Stress Questionnaire Findings

CSP #55 was not suffering from stress and high anxiety during the study.

Conclusions

CSP #55 had a first marriage that succumbed to a variety of occupational and family stressors. See Table 3. CSP #55 describes job stress and family coming together to create a “problem child.” The organizational and familial stressors that the first marriage of the respondent was under doomed the marriage. Intervention was not an option used during this marital decline.

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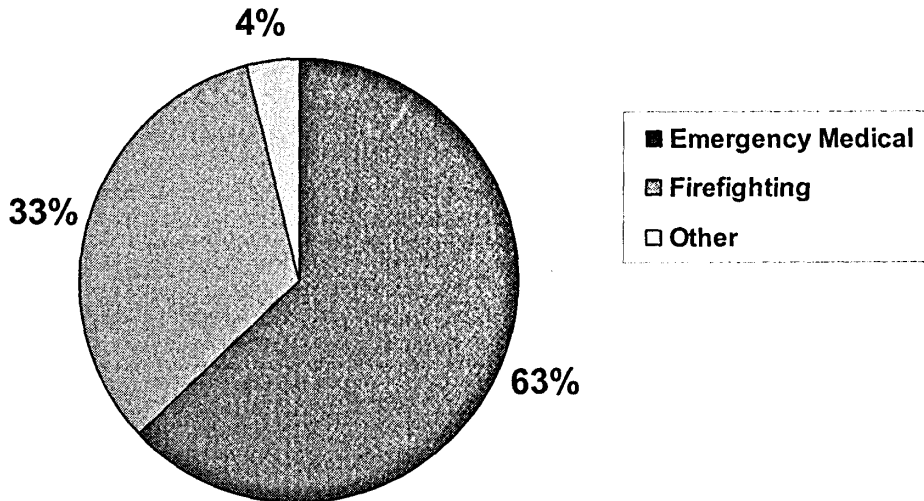
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APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 1. A comparison of NFR emergency responses and the national responses.

Annual Percentage of Norfolk Fire Rescue Responses



National Annual Percentage of Fire Rescue Responses

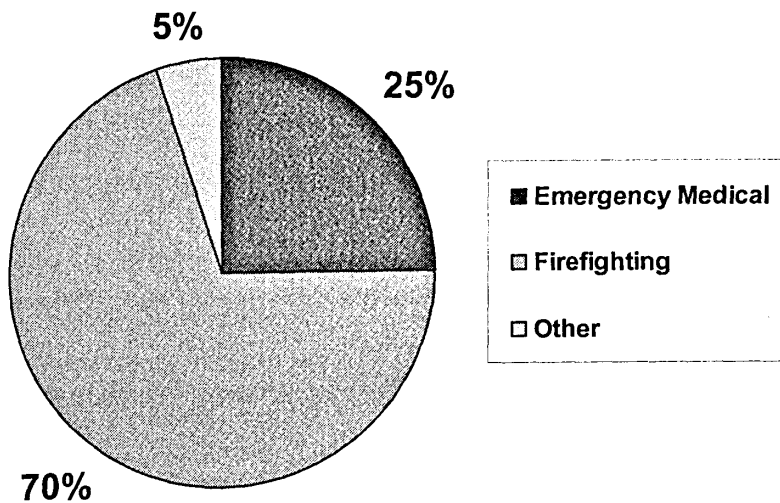
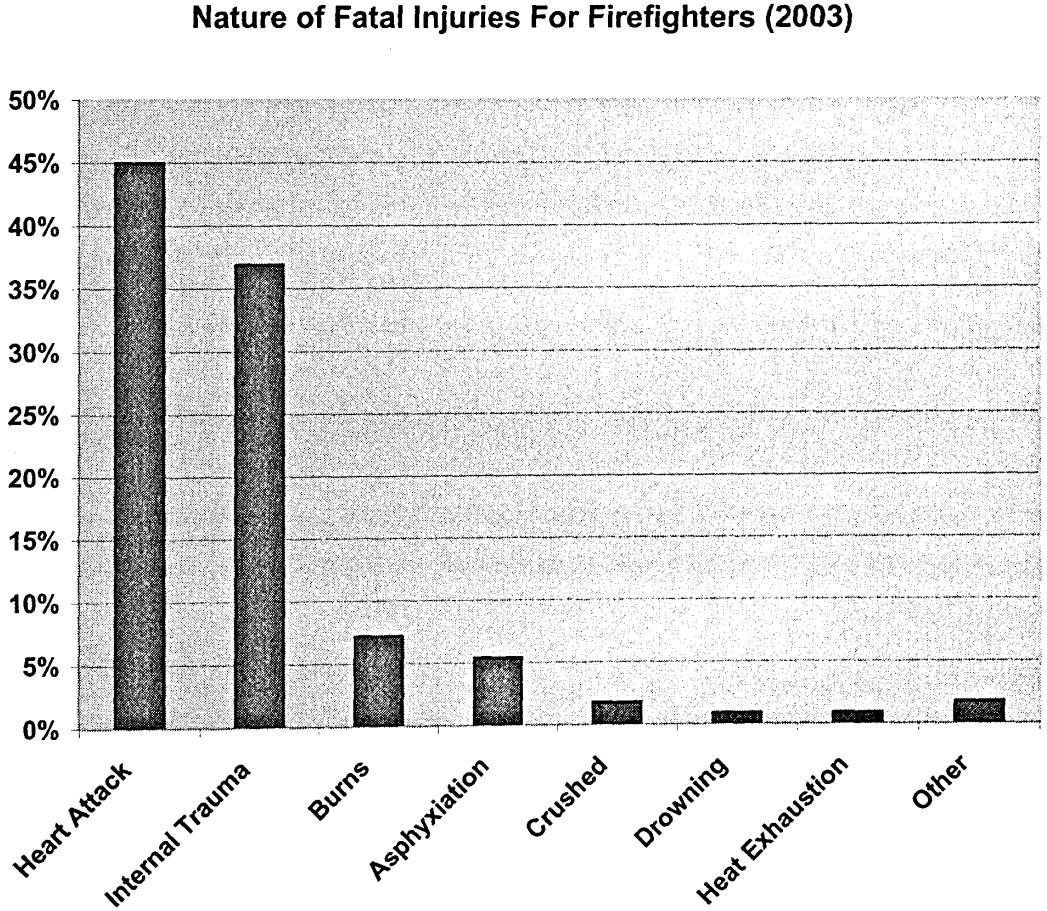


Figure 2. A chart depicting the percentages and the causes of fatal firefighter deaths for 2003.



APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table 1. Comparative Budgets and Salaries of Tidewater, Virginia and Surrounding Municipalities

Agency	Budget	Total	FF/ Start	FF/Top	Medic/ Start	Medic/ Top
Chesapeake Fire	33.2	358	33,467	48,961	39,036	57,126
Fairfax Fire Rescue	128.6	1280	43,377	70,658	47,823	70,658
Henrico Fire Rescue	34.8	462	33,922	80,170	33,922	92,278
Newport News Fire	27.1	353	32,640	60,360	32,640	60,360
Norfolk Fire Rescue	33.0	502	34,626	52,690	42,128	64,104
Portsmouth Fire	21.0	242	31,144	51,828	43,631	57,140
Richmond Fire Rescue	33.0	427	33,349	63,588	N/A	N/A
Suffolk Fire Rescue	12.6	214	32,344	59,180	32,344	59,180
Virginia Beach Fire	35.0	531	37,915	54,977	41,850	60,684

From The Heat Sheet, Norfolk Professional Firefighters Local 68. Compiled by and the courtesy of the Norfolk Fire-Rescue Pay Committee.

Table 2. Three Types of Symptoms that Characterize Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder

Re-experiencing	Avoidance	Arousal
Flashbacks	Avoidance of People	Increased jumpiness
Intrusive Memories	Avoidance of Places	Irritability
Dreams	Removal of Relevant Thoughts	Sleep disturbances
Distress at Memory of the Event	Selective Recall	

Compiled from "A preliminary investigation of post-traumatic stress symptoms among firefighters" by Cheryl Haslam and Krissie Mallon.

Table 3. Commonly Found Stressors Amongst fire-Rescue Personnel

Occupational Stressors	Familial Stressors
Heavy work load	Finances
24-hour shifts	24-hour shifts
Traumatic events	Lack of communication
Burnout	Parental issues
Persistent dangers	Divided loyalty

APPENDIX C
DOCUMENTS

Discussion Questions

1. Do you acknowledge that you are Case Study Participant (CSP) #55?
2. How long have you been with the Fire-Rescue Service?
 - a. 1-5 years
 - b. 6-10 years
 - c. 10-20 years
 - d. 20-30 years
 - e. 30+ years
3. Discuss your decision to embark on a fire-rescue service career.
4. Discuss how if any the rigor of your occupation has affected your family life.
5. Discuss your “firehouse family” versus your “real family.”
6. Your chosen profession is acknowledged as one of the most dangerous jobs on the planet. Discuss your concerns about this, in reference to your family.
7. Which one best describes your familial status?
 - a. Married
 - b. Divorced
 - c. Separated
8. Discuss how your chosen profession has had any effect, good or bad, on your present or past familial relationships.
9. Do you have any concerns about your occupation reaching a sort of cult and elitist status?
 - a. Discuss your take on TV shows such as “Rescue Me” and movies like “Ladder 49” and “Blackdraft.”
 - b. What effects have you seen on your real life from these “reel life” phenomena?

10. Discuss some elements of job stress and family stress amongst fire-rescue personnel.
11. In your opinion should an organization assist its members with marital and familial problems.
 - a. What suggestions would you make?
 - b. Would you be a participant in these types of programs if you had a need?
12. A recent governmental study has listed heart attacks as the largest threat to U.S. firefighters. Many of these fatal heart attacks are happening on the fire grounds during operations. Are you surprised at this finding?
13. Talk about shift work and its effect on you and your family.
14. Often the dangerous and traumatic events that can occur on a daily basis in your profession can be brought from the workplace to the home. Have these type of events ever followed you home?
15. Discuss your view of women in the fire-rescue service.

Stress Questionnaire

This questionnaire will list some of the consequences of stress. Please list how often in the last seven days you have experienced the following consequences. Check the observation that is applicable to you.

	Never	Seldom	Often	Always
1. Headache				
2. Nervousness				
3. Dizziness				
4. Loss of sexual interest or pleasure				
5. Feeling critical towards others				
6. Difficulty to remember things				
7. Worried about untidiness or carelessness				
8. Feeling easily agitated				
9. Experience of pain in the chest				
10. Experience a lack of energy or exhaustion				
11. Thoughts to end your life				
12. Trembling				
13. Poor appetite				
14. Crying easily				
15. Feeling trapped				
16. Suddenly scared without reason				
17. Uncontrollable outbursts of anger				
18. Blame yourself for things				
19. Pain in the lower back				
20. Feeling hindered in your attempt to do things				
21. Feeling lonely				
22. Feeling despondent				
23. Unusually worried about things				
24. Are not interested in things				
25. Feeling concerned				

Informed Consent Document

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge from a single case study of fire-rescue service member and his or her familial relationships. Job accountability, job stress, and marital relationship issues as they relate to relationship survivability will be researched. Your participation involves participating in discussions relative to this research and completion of a stress questionnaire. The in-depth discussions will take place over a two to three week period. The stress questionnaire can be answered in a matter of minutes. This questionnaire is only an evaluation of some of the consequences of stress and high anxiety that may be experienced by persons in the fire-rescue profession. It is not in any way a diagnostic tool to identify any clinical illness.

My name is Carolyn M Henderson and I am the principal investigator of this study. You may contact me at 757-495-3788 or carolyn.henderson@richmond.edu. The study is being done for thesis research at the University of Richmond. My advisor and instructor is Dr. Marcia Gibson. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact her at: mgibson2@richmond.edu or 757-577-5732. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Kathy Hoke, Chair of the University of Richmond's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Research Participants at 804-289-8417 or khoke@richmond.edu.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Confidentiality is paramount. Your name will never be used in connection with this research. The results of this study will be treated in strict confidence. Interview and questionnaire data will be collected, analyzed, and written into the research paper by the principal researcher only. The raw data will then be shredded.

This study requires you to reflect on issues such as job stress, marital relationship issues and life issues in general. Some of the questions may trigger personal or social emotions that you may like to discuss with someone who can assist you. If so, please contact the City of Norfolk's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You may call 757-398-2374 or 800-327-3257. For more information on this program log on to <http://www.bonsecourshamptonroads.com/services/eap.html>.

In order to ensure confidentiality, we will not ask you to sign a document indicating that you agree to participate. The principal researcher will verify at the beginning of the interviews or discussions that you are Case Study Participant (CSP) #55. Again, if you have any questions contact me at 757-495-3788 or 757-441-1857.

Thanks for your participation,

Carolyn M. Henderson

**UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE
PROTECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NOTICE OF ACTION**

Date: October 12, 2006

Name(s): Carolyn Henderson

Faculty Student Other

Faculty Mentor: Marcia Gibson

Is this for a class? yes no

If yes, department and course number

Project Title: A Case Study of the Marital and Familial Relationships of Fire-Rescue Personnel as They Relate to Marriage Survivability

The IRB has reviewed your research protocol by full review expedited review.

Your application is:

- Exempt from further review Your project does not fall within federal or university guidelines requiring review. If the nature of the project changes, you must resubmit this project for further review.
- Approved Please review the criteria for approval at the end of this form.
- Approved with conditions Please respond via email to the Chair of the IRB how you plan to address the concerns outlined at the end of this form.
- Third party verification required.
- Disapproved The IRB has some concerns regarding your proposed research; therefore, your project cannot be approved at this time. Please contact the Chair of the IRB to discuss the issues outlined at the end of this form.
- Incomplete A decision on your protocol has been temporarily withheld until the information listed at the end of this form is provided for IRB consideration. Please send this information to the Chair of the IRB via email.



Kathy Hoke, Chair
Institutional Review Board (8089)

October 12, 2006
Date

Biography

The author holds a B. S. Degree in Biology from North Carolina A & T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has spent the last 27 years employed by the city of Norfolk, Virginia as both a firefighter and paramedic. She currently resides in Virginia Beach, Virginia with her husband.

Pledge

On my honor I hereby affirm that this work was created by me. The writing and conclusions are entirely my own. All of the research for this thesis as well as all ideas from others are properly cited and referenced. This work is an original and has not been used for credit in any other context.