


# An Investigation of Mental Health in the Fire Services



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# The Big Picture

- “In addition to having an increased risk of personal injury, they are exposed to grisly scenes and must perform their duties under adverse circumstances: They must consider all bodily fluids as biohazards, contend with administrations often driven by politics, and assist a public with whom litigation is an ever-present threat (Linton et al., 1993). One might question why a person might choose such a career (Linton, 1995, p. 567).”



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# What is the concern?

- High level of traumatic exposure in emergency service work.
- Traumatic exposure is linked to increased rates of mental illness (e.g., depression, anxiety, Acute/Posttraumatic Stress Disorder).
- Previous research has indicated that PTSD is occurring at epidemic levels within the fire services (Corneil, 1999).



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## Current Gaps in the Literature

- Previous research has focused on within participant comparisons. That is, the firefighters have been compared to standard tables or through the use of other similar techniques.
- No previous research has directly compared a group of professional firefighters with a group of equivalent controls.




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## Current Gaps in the Literature

- Clear evidence of mental health concerns in firefighters compared to a group of equivalent controls.
- Links between personality characteristics and vulnerability to traumatic stress symptomatology.




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## Participants

- 94 full-time, male firefighters from a single mid-sized fire department in Northern British Columbia.
- 91 full-time, male workers from the same community.
- The groups were evaluated for initial differences in demographic information (e.g., years of service, age) and no differences were found.




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## Methods

- Each participant was asked to complete a series of questionnaires with respect to:
  - Demographic information
  - Sensation-seeking
  - Attitudes towards risk
  - Type A Behaviour
  - Five-factor personality
  - Proactive Coping
  - Emotional Intelligence
  - Self-Esteem
  - Positive Beliefs about the World
  - Life Satisfaction
  - Relationship Satisfaction
  - Job Satisfaction
  - Mental Health
  - Post-traumatic symptomatology




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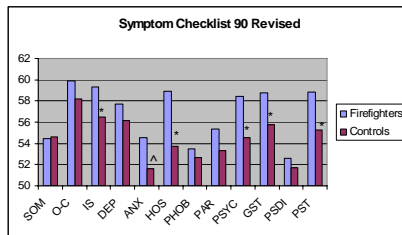
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## Results for Mental Health




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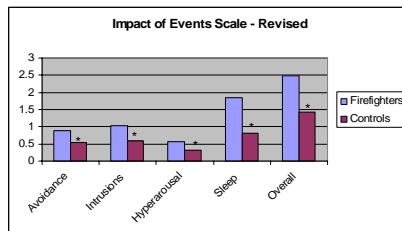
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## Results for Mental Health




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Links between Mental Health and Personality

- Neuroticism appears to be the greatest predictor of PTSD symptomatology in Firefighters.
- This relationship does not appear to hold in the Control group.



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Conclusions

- Compared to Controls, Firefighters experience greater symptoms of posttraumatic stress, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, hostility, and psychoticism.



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Conclusions

- Neuroticism seems to play a special role in the prediction of PTSD symptomatology for Firefighters.



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## Implications

- Concerns regarding the mental health hazards of fire service work should be taken seriously!
- Attention should be directed toward the prevention and management of these mental health hazards prior to the development of disabling mental illness.



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"This job has cost me my health, my family, and my soul. Can I get a receipt?"



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