



PUTTING OUT MENTAL FIRES: COGNITIVE STRATEGIES OF FIREFIGHTERS



Daniel B. Hollander,¹ Jennifer K. Hollander,² Megan Gordon,¹ Hannah Reck,¹ and Bryan Needham³

Southeastern Louisiana University, Department of Kinesiology and Health Studies,¹
Department of Psychology,² Hammond Fire Department, Hammond, Louisiana³

Introduction

Mental strategies are important for firefighters and sport scientists who work with them. Responses to emergent dangers require mental management and training scenarios for effective extrication of endangered individuals, fire abatement, and emergency medical care.

Purpose

- How do fire athletes manage emergent situations?
- Preparing for the emergency
- Managing thoughts in the truck
- Decisions during the event
- Debriefing

Methods

- 41 fire fighting athletes completed interviews.
- Interview interpretations were triangulated with a second researcher.
- Categories were formed.
- Labeling of themes were organized.
- Representations of themes were categorized in tables.



Results

Fire Alarm

- Preparation route planning
- Recognizing increased adrenaline/excitement
- Assessing the seriousness of the emergency listening for the sounds that convey type of emergency
- Assessment of truck equipment.

In Route

- Preparing for possibilities
- Relying on training
- Surveying who was on truck
- Listening for details about the call

On The Scene

- Doing a windshield survey of the scene
- Determining the safest approach
- Relying on training
- What equipment was needed
- What needed to be done

Debriefing

- Talking with peers
- Talking with family
- Tuning it out/burying it
- Practicing hobbies
- Laughing about funny or unique parts of the call
- Replaying what went wrong
- Listening to music/podcasts

Conclusions

Fire Alarm

- Relying on training
- Reading the auditory and visual cues practiced in scenarios
- Self and equipment assessment.

In Route

- Assessment of equipment
- Individual skills of team

On The Scene

- Determining a safe approach
- Proceeding with caution but urgency.

Debriefing

- Social support seeking
- Individual reflection/distraction
- Burying/denial

Practical Applications

Training scenarios, reliance on discipline for success over reaction, and assessment of available assets

It was further identified that the fire athletes may need mental health support for coping with multiple emergency exposures.

Further research is needed to assist these emergency responders manage the “mental fires” of rapid response.

References

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