

**JOB AND FAMILY STRESS AMONGST  
FIREFIGHTERS**

by

**RUDOLF MACHIEL OOSTHUIZEN**

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**PROMOTER: PROF P KOORTZEN**

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## **PREFACE**

“When the alarm sounds and the light comes on, it’s ‘show time’.

And just as a running back must think with his head and move with his body, so must firefighters as they  
dart their way through a flaming building or highway accident.

But there’s no referee to stop the action, and instead of a ball, there may be an endangered child in the  
firefighter’s arms and only split seconds to determine a difficult set of options.

Confidence, control, and concentration must surface.

It’s like no other game.”

- Mack, 1991 -

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## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the thesis, 'Job and family stress amongst firefighters', is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## **SUMMARY**

### **JOB AND FAMILY STRESS AMONGST FIREFIGHTERS**

by

RUDOLF MACHIEL OOSTHUIZEN

DEGREE: D LITT ET PHIL

SUBJECT: INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

PROMOTER: PROF P KOORTZEN

Firefighters providing emergency services to the public are involved with some of the most tragic aspects of the boundary between life and death, often in a context over which they have little or no control. The outcome of this may be that stress at work and at home are without doubt the reason that highly qualified and loyal firefighters give themselves over to alcohol or drug abuse, extramarital relationships and suicidal thoughts. The general aim of the research is to evaluate job and family stress amongst firefighters in the South African context, and to use the results in developing a developmental/counselling programme for firefighters and their families.

The research is quantitative and qualitative, consisting of a survey design and a phenomenological

design. Three measuring instruments were used, namely the Biographical questionnaire, the Experience of Work and Life Circumstances questionnaire, and the Stress questionnaire. Task characteristics, organisational functioning, physical working conditions and job equipment, career and social matters, remuneration, fringe benefits and personnel policy were identified as causes of job stress originating within the work situation.

Interviews were conducted to determine how these firefighters experience job and family stress. Marital dysfunction and divorce, limited time with the family, problems with children, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of exercise, suicide, anger aimed at family members, physical and emotional exhaustion, lonely marital partners, unavailability to help the family when needed and depression were identified as causes of family stress arising outside the work situation.

The main recommendation is to implement a developmental/counselling job and family stress programme. The programme can be instituted to enhance the wellness and psychological health of firefighters and their families, or for counselling of firefighters and their families who are experiencing job and/or family stress. The multi-dimensionality and flexibility make this programme unique and one of its kind in the South African context.

**KEY TERMS:** Job stress, family stress, firefighters, task characteristics, organisational functioning, physical conditions and equipment, career and social matters, remuneration

**OPSOMMING**  
**WERK EN FAMILIE STRES BY BRANDWEERMANNE**

deur

RUDOLF MACHIEL OOSTHUIZEN

GRAAD: D LITT ET PHIL

VAK: BEDRYFS- EN ORGANISASIESIELKUNDE

PROMOTOR: PROF P KOORTZEN

Brandweermanne wat nooddienste aan die publiek lewer, het te make met die mees tragiese aspekte van die grens tussen lewe en dood, wat dikwels in 'n konteks plaasvind waaroor hulle geen beheer het nie. Die resultaat hiervan mag wees dat stres by die werk en huis sonder twyfel die rede is dat hoogs gekwalifiseerde en lojale brandweermanne hulleself oorgee aan alkohol en dwelmmisbruik, buite-egtelike verhoudings en selfmoordgedagtes. Die algemene doelstelling van die navorsing is om werk- en gesinstres by brandweermanne in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te

evalueer en om die resultate te gebruik om 'n ontwikkelings/voorligtingsprogram vir brandweermanne en hulle gesinne te formuleer.

Die navorsing is kwantitatief en kwalitatief van aard, wat 'n opname-ontwerp en 'n fenomenologiese ontwerp behels. Drie meetinstrumente is gebruik, naamlik die Biografiese vraelys, die Werk en Lewensoriëntasie- vraelys en die Stresvraelys. Taakeienskappe, organisatoriese funksionering, fisiese werksomstandighede en toerusting, loopbaan- en sosiale aangeleenthede, vergoeding, byvoordele en personeelbeleid is as oorsake van werkstres wat binne die werksituasie ontstaan, geïdentifiseer.

Onderhoude is gevoer om te bepaal hoe hierdie brandweermanne werk- en gesinstres ondervind. Huweliksverbrokkeling en egskeiding, beperkte tyd saam met die gesin, probleme met kinders, alkohol- en dwelmmisbruik, gebrek aan oefening, selfmoord, woede en aggressie teenoor gesinslede, fisiese en emosionele uitputting, eggenote wat alleen is, onbeskikbaarheid om die gesin in tye van nood te help en depressie is as oorsake van gesinstres wat buite die werksituasie ontstaan, geïdentifiseer.

Die belangrikste aanbeveling is om 'n werk- en gesinstresprogram gebaseer op ontwikkeling en voorligting, vir brandweermanne en hulle gesinne te implementeer. Die program kan ingestel word om die welstand en psigologiese gesondheid van brandweermanne en hulle gesinne te bevorder, of vir voorligting van brandweermanne en hulle gesinne wat werk- en/of gesinstres ondervind. Die multi-dimensionaliteit en buigsaamheid van die program en die keuse van die mees toepaslike intervensiestrategie maak dit uniek en die enigste van sy soort in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:** Werkstres, gesinstres, brandweermanne, taakeienskappe, organisatoriese funksionering, fisiese werksomstandighede en toerusting, loopbaan en sosiale aangeleenthede, vergoeding