



INTO THE FLAMES: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BUREAU OF FIRE PROTECTION PERSONNEL ON FIRE INCIDENTS RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

Firefighters face dangerous situations that test their physical strength, mental health, and emotional resilience. This study, conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year and completed in May 2026, explored the lived experiences of ten Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel in Negros Oriental. It employed a descriptive phenomenological research design and applied Colaizzi's seven-step method of data analysis to examine the narratives of ten (10) BFP personnel who had at least two to three years of service and had responded to a minimum of three actual fire incidents. Through semi-structured interviews, the researchers captured the participants' first-hand accounts of their experiences. The findings revealed two (2) emergent themes: “Emotional Experiences in Fireground Response” and “Operational Experiences During Fire Incidents”. Under the first emergent theme, the following subthemes emerged: (1) Fear in Life-Threatening Situations, (2) Trauma from Exposure to Critical Incidents, and (3) Fulfillment in Saving Lives and Property. Under the second emergent theme, the identified subthemes were: (4) Urgency in Emergency Response Situations, (5) Adaptability in Unpredictable Fire Environments, and (6) Application of Skills and Training in Firefighting. The findings showed that BFP personnel face many challenges but remain dedicated to their work and that they rely on teamwork, training, and community support to cope with the demands of their job.

Keywords: *BFP Personnel, Firefighters, Fire Incident Response, Lived Experiences, Phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

Fire personnel are known to be involved in high-risk situations, intense physical demands, and psychological stress. Fire preparedness is one of the four stages of fire emergency management, and its purpose is to reduce the risk of fire disasters. It is a never-ending cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, practicing, evaluating, and upgrading tactics to make sure that fire emergency response is well-coordinated and that skills are improved (Adegboro & Ojoye, 2019). Fires caused more deaths than any other type of disaster, yet the city encountered numerous challenges in its fire preparedness efforts. Therefore, this study explored the lived experiences of Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel in responding to fire incidents.

In the Philippines, fire departments respond to numerous emergency calls to save lives and protect valuable property. However, firefighters continue to face significant challenges that make their work difficult and dangerous, both for themselves and for the people they are trying to rescue, particularly in areas such as Cabancalan, Mandaue City (Empinado et al., 2023). The impact of fire incidents is substantial, as the damages extend beyond financial loss, destroyed materials, and damaged structures; they also result in injuries, emotional suffering, and loss of life among victims (Lagata et al., 2022). Fires pose serious threats to human safety, contribute to economic losses, and cause environmental damage. Despite existing fire safety measures, fire incidents continue to occur due to several underlying and often overlooked factors that contribute to the outbreak of building fires. The public commonly associates with the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) with the heroic act of firefighting. While fire suppression remains one of its primary responsibilities, the duties of BFP personnel and designated chiefs of office extend far beyond responding to fires, encompassing fire prevention, public safety education, disaster preparedness, and community protection (Sabalosa, 2024).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of firefighters in responding to a fire in their respective municipality. Working under such adverse conditions invariably escalates the stress levels experienced by firefighting personnel in the line of duty. Existing research mainly explored how firefighters responded after an accident while neglecting the immediate challenges they faced. In light of this, the study examined the personal difficulties faced by firefighters during fire incidents. This research not only explored their struggles but also highlighted their courage, dedication, and determination in fulfilling their duties.

By focusing on them through exploring their lived experiences, the research aimed to reveal the true nature of their work and recognize the sacrifices they made in the line of duty. It also sought to provide valuable insights that might contribute to improving their safety, mental health support, and overall job performance. Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel are regularly exposed to hazardous environments, extended working hours, and traumatic incidents. However, limited understanding of how these experiences affect their physical and emotional well-being may result in inadequate support systems, potentially leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness in emergency response operations.

Research Questions

This inquiry determined the lived experiences of BFP personnel in responding to fire incidents. It sought to answer the grand question: “What are the lived experiences of the BFP Personnel when responding to fire incidents in their Municipality?”.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological design to explore and describe the lived experiences of Bureau of Fire Protection personnel who responded to fire incidents within various municipalities. Phenomenology was suitable for this study because it focuses on understanding how individuals personally experience and interpret a phenomenon, in this case of fire response operations as originally conceptualized by Edmund Husserl.

With the participants’ consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to accurately capture the important data needed for the study. By focusing on firsthand accounts, this design allowed for an in-depth exploration of the meanings that BFP personnel attached to their experiences during emergency situations (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Furthermore, phenomenological research is suitable for examining professional experiences involving emotional, physical, and psychological dimensions, making it ideal for studies involving emergency responders.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in various municipalities in Negros Oriental. These municipalities are characterized by a combination of rural and urban settings, where residential communities, commercial areas, and agricultural lands coexist. The areas are composed of multiple barangays with varying population densities and household distributions. Every municipality has its fire station under the Bureau of Fire Protection responsible for emergency response, rescue operations, and fire suppression. The municipalities share similar conditions that contribute to fire risks, such as narrow roads, traditional housing structures, and limited fire response resources. As a result, fire prevention efforts largely depend on community awareness, preparedness, and cooperation with local authorities.

Research Participants

In this study, the main participants were the personnel of the Bureau of Fire Protection who have direct and firsthand experience in responding to fire incidents in their respective municipalities. The study sought to explore and understand their lived experiences, particularly the risks they encountered, their emotional and psychological responses, and the operational challenges they faced during fire response operations.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess relevant knowledge and meaningful experiences related to the phenomenon being studied. The selection criteria required that participants must be active BFP personnel, have actual experience in responding to fire incidents, and be willing to share their experiences openly during the interview process. This ensured that the data gathered were rich, credible, and grounded in real-life firefighting situations.

Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. Data saturation occurs when no new themes, ideas, or significant information emerge from the participants' responses. After conducting interviews with ten participants, the researchers observed that similar experiences, insights, and patterns were repeatedly expressed, indicating that sufficient and comprehensive data had already been obtained to fully understand the phenomenon under study.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized as the primary instrument for data collection. This approach enabled the researchers to follow a consistent set of open-ended questions while allowing flexibility to further explore the participants' responses and experiences relevant to the study. The interview questions were designed to obtain detailed narratives regarding the lived experiences, emotions, and challenges encountered by personnel from the Bureau of Fire Protection during fire incidents response operations.

To ensure accurate documentation of the interviews, a voice recorder and transcription application were used to capture and transcribe the conversations between the researchers and participants. In addition, field notes were recorded to document significant observations, non-verbal cues, and contextual details observed during the interview process. These supplementary records supported the researchers in achieving a deeper understanding of the data gathered during analysis. All collected information, including audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes, was treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for research purposes. Participant identities were protected through the use of codes or pseudonyms in compliance with ethical research standards.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted on February 23 and 24, 2026. Prior to the conduct of the study, the researchers sent formal letters to the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) offices to request permission to interview selected personnel. Upon approval and after obtaining informed consent from the participants, face-to-face interviews were scheduled at a convenient time and place. The researchers asked open-ended questions regarding the firefighters' experiences in responding to fire incidents. Audio recording and note-taking were utilized to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. All responses were

transcribed, organized, and analyzed while maintaining confidentiality and ensuring voluntary participation throughout the study.

Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, the researchers used Colaizzi's method to analyze the data. This method helped organize and interpret important statements from the participants so the researchers could clearly understand their experiences.

First, the analysis began with careful reading and rereading of all interview transcripts. The researchers immersed themselves in the narratives of the BFP personnel to gain a holistic understanding of their stories. This repeated process allowed the researchers to become familiar with the flow of each firefighter's experience; from the moment they received a fire alarm to the emotional and physical impact after every operation. Through this immersion, initial impressions and emotional tones were noted.

Second, the researchers identified significant statements with specific lines or expressions directly related to the experiences of responding to fire incidents. These statements included descriptions of challenges, fears, strengths, teamwork, decision-making, and emotional reactions. Each statement was carefully extracted from the transcripts and recorded separately.

Third, each significant statement was interpreted to uncover the underlying meaning expressed by the participants. The researchers analyzed what each firefighter intended to convey beyond the literal words. This step involved transforming the participants' exact statements into clearer conceptual meanings that captured their intended message. These formulated meanings served as building blocks for later theme development.

Fourth, the formulated meanings were grouped based on similarities. The researchers organized them into theme clusters, which represented common experiences among the BFP personnel. Meanings related to fear and uncertainty during operations were grouped together, while those about teamwork, responsibility, or resilience formed other clusters. These theme clusters eventually led to the identification of broader core themes that described the essence of the firefighters lived experiences.

Fifth, using the identified themes, the researchers wrote an exhaustive narrative description of what it means to be BFP personnel responding to fire incidents. This description was integrated into themes and described not only the physical actions involved during fire response but also the emotional, psychological, and interpersonal dimensions of their experiences.

Sixth, from the exhaustive description, the researchers refined the data into a fundamental structure representing the essence of the phenomenon. This structure captured the central meaning of the firefighters lived experiences—what was universally

true for all participants despite differences in specific situations. This step allowed the researchers to present a clear and concise summary of the core of the phenomenon.

Lastly, the researchers conducted member checking by returning the fundamental structure and exhaustive description to the participants. This step allowed the BFP personnel to review the findings and confirm whether the interpretations accurately reflected their real experiences. Any clarifications, additions, or corrections from the participants were noted and integrated into the final presentation of the results. This validation enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS

After the researcher's thorough analysis of the transcripts, the findings revealed two (2) emergent themes: "Emotional Experiences in Fireground Response" and "Operational Experiences During Fire Incidents". Under the first emergent theme, the following subthemes emerged: (1) Fear in Life-Threatening Situations, (2) Trauma from Exposure to Critical Incidents, and (3) Fulfillment in Saving Lives and Property. Under the second emergent theme, the identified subthemes were: (4) Urgency in Emergency Response Situations, (5) Adaptability in Unpredictable Fire Environments, and (6) Application of Skills and Training in Firefighting.

Emergent Theme 1: Emotional Experiences in Fireground Response

Explored the complicated feelings firefighters faced as they worked in the high-pressure world of emergency response. It showed the ongoing clash of emotions: the rush of excitement and job satisfaction from saving lives versus the constant fear, anxiety, and uncertainty about their safety and the risk of building collapses. Firefighters often felt deep empathy and emotional pain when they witnessed the tragic losses of victims. This emotional strain often led to informal self-comfort or peer-led debriefing to cope with job-related stress. The data showed a shift from the initial shock and confusion of a newcomer to the calm, focused mindset of a seasoned responder. These emotional experiences highlighted the strength and mental toughness needed to remain stable and lead the public while dealing with the painful realities of the fireground.

Sub-Theme 1: Fear in Life-Threatening Situations. Fear in life-threatening situations that happen for a firefighter; fear is always present, especially when responding to fires, accidents, or disasters. When entering a burning building, a firefighter may feel afraid of the unknown, such as sudden explosions, collapsing structures, or being trapped inside. The heat, thick smoke, and limited visibility can increase this fear. However, firefighters are trained to control their fears. Instead of panicking, they use their knowledge, skills, and experience to stay focused on their duty. In real-life situations, a firefighter may feel nervous at first, especially when seeing large flames or hearing people calling for help. But as they continue responding to emergencies, fear becomes more manageable and turns into alertness and awareness. Experience plays a big role. A new

firefighter may feel more fear and excitement, while an experienced one becomes calmer and more confident.

Participant 1 expressed a deep empathy and emotional pain felt when witnessing the total loss experienced by the community, *masakit kaayo sa pagbati kung makakita ka sa mga tagbalay nga nasunugan kay halos tanan nilang paningkamot mawala ug mobalik sila sa zero.* (Trans: It's very painful emotionally to see houses that have burned down because almost all of the homeowners' hard work is gone, and they have to start over from zero.)

Participant 2 highlighted the psychological toll of responding to medical emergencies and seeing severe physical trauma. He stated:

Usahay man gud sa pag-trabaho namo sa pag-respond sa mga aksidente makakita jud ka og dugo, kanang grabeng samad, ug mga biktima nga dili na makalihok, ug kini nga mga sitwasyon makahatag og dakong epekto sa emosyon sa usa ka bomber.

(Trans: Sometimes, during our work responding to accidents, you really see blood, severe injuries, and victims who can no longer move, and these situations can greatly affect the emotions of a firefighter.)

Participant 9 described the self-comfort and relief felt when a mission was completed without loss of life, *gi tawag namo nga self-comfort ahh self-comfort na sya kay happy kay murag ma feeling namo happy gyud kaayo mi nga mahuman ang sunog nga walay casualty, malipay gyud mi ana. Bahalag na sunog, bahalag na hurot basta kay walay namatay.* (Trans: We call it self-comfort. It's a way of comforting ourselves because we feel truly happy when a fire is extinguished with no casualties. We really feel joy in that. No matter how big the fire is or how exhausting it was, as long as no one died, we are happy.)

Sub-Theme 3: Fulfillment in Saving Lives and Property. Fulfillment in the service of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) comes from a deep sense of purpose and responsibility in protecting lives and property. Firefighters experience a unique kind of satisfaction knowing that their actions directly prevent harm, reduce loss, and sometimes mean the difference between life and death. One major source of fulfillment is saving lives during emergencies. Responding quickly to fires, rescuing trapped victims, and providing immediate assistance gives firefighters a strong sense of achievement and pride. Even in dangerous and life-threatening situations, the knowledge that someone's life was saved because of their courage makes the risk worthwhile. Another important aspect is protecting property and communities. By controlling fires and preventing them from spreading, firefighters help families avoid devastating losses. This not only preserves homes and businesses but also supports the stability of the community.

Participant 4 described an emotional reward that transcended the physical exhaustion of the job. He emphasized that the joy of saving any living creature, whether human or animal, was the primary driver of his dedication. He stated:

Kanang pag responde namo nga naka sinati mig tawo or bata, mao nay lami kaayo nga paminaw... nga naka save mi og bata. Kung ma save gani mi og isa ka life bisag animal, samot na og tawo, dako kaayo namo og pagka-lipay sa among pag-responde.

(Trans: When we respond and encounter a person or a child, that's what feels truly rewarding and knowing that we were able to save a child. If we can save even just one life, even an animal, but especially a human, it brings us great joy and fulfillment in our response.)

Participant 5, despite being relatively new to the service, perceived the role as a fire investigator to be deeply meaningful. He highlighted that while the work was tough, saving lives provided a level of satisfaction that outweighed fatigue. He shared:

Among experience lang jd sa, so far sa akoha ahh as a bag ohan paman pd ko 6 years paman sad ko sa bureau of fire pero so far ahh sa responses namo kay as an as a fire investigator kanang ano siya ahh fulfilling and kuan siya at the same time kanang kapuy siya pero fulfilling siya at the same time kay its more on saving lives dili mi, dili mi more on combat pero saving lives man gud amoa so ahh.

(Trans: Based on my experience so far, I'm still relatively new. I've been with the Bureau of Fire for about six years. As a fire investigator, our responses are both fulfilling and exhausting at the same time. It can be tiring, but it's also rewarding because our work is focused more on saving lives. We're not mainly about combat; our priority is really saving lives.)

Participant 9 reinforced this by identifying saving lives as the ultimate priority and a sacred oath. This participant introduced the concept of self-comfort, a psychological state of happiness reached when an operation concluded with zero casualties, regardless of the property damage sustained. He explained:

As a firefighter kaningmurag na amoa na gyud na sya ba nga it's with us nga saving lives is our priority. So imo man gyud ni gipanumpa, so physically makabati gyud mig kakapoy specially dugay ang operation, dugay kaayo mahuman, dako kaayo ang sunod so dugay pd mahuman, physically kapuyon gyud mi pero ang mentality namo bahalag kapoy basta kay walay casualty mao gyud na sya.

(Trans: As firefighters, it has already become part of who we are, saving lives is our priority. It's something we have sworn to do. Physically, we really feel the exhaustion, especially when operations take a long time or when the fire is large and difficult to control. It can be very tiring, but mentally, we tell ourselves that no matter how exhausted we are, as long as there are no casualties, it's all worth it.)

He further elaborated on the humanitarian essence of the profession, noting that true fulfillment comes from a selfless dedication to others, where the firefighter is willing

to risk their own safety without hesitation. He stated:

Kuan lang ahhh iyahang gilig-on ang akong pagka humanitarian jud, kay hanang kabalo ka kung bombero ka wala na sya pili, once na bombero ka willing ka mo save ug lives ahh without kana bang unsa na ahh thinking sa imo kaugalingon.

(Trans: It really strengthened my sense of being humanitarian, because you know, as a firefighter, you don't choose. Once you're a firefighter, you're willing to save lives without thinking about yourself.)

Emergent Theme 2: Operational Experiences During Fire Incidents

The real-life experiences of Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel while responding to fire incidents. It highlighted the high-pressure, and risky nature of firefighting operations, where responders must act quickly to save lives and protect property. Firefighters were often exposed to dangerous environments, including intense heat, thick smoke, and unstable structures, requiring both physical endurance and technical skills. It captures the importance of teamwork, coordination, and adherence to protocols during emergency responses. Firefighters relied on structured command systems and effective communication to carry out their tasks successfully. Despite the risks and challenges, BFP personnel demonstrated strong commitment, discipline, and dedication to public service, ensuring that they fulfill their duty to protect communities during fire emergencies.

Sub-Theme 4: Urgency in Emergency Response Situations. Firefighters often face rapidly changing conditions, where delays of even a few seconds can mean the difference between containment and catastrophe. This urgency is influenced by factors such as the intensity of the fire, the presence of trapped victims, hazardous materials, and environmental conditions. It also reflects the psychological and physical demands placed on responders. They must remain calm, focused, and alert despite high-stress situations, ensuring that their urgency does not compromise safety or judgment.

Participant 2 shared his experience with early assignments such as serving as an ambulance driver, which provided firefighters with valuable exposure to emergency situations and helped develop their experience in responding to different types of incidents, *nagsugod akong kasinatian sa serbisyo sa dihang gi-assigned ko isip ambulance driver, diin didto nako nasinati ang lain-laing sitwasyon sa emergency og nakakat-on unsaon pag-atubang sa mga biktima sa insidente.* (Trans: My experience in service began when I was assigned as an ambulance driver, where I encountered various emergency situations and learned how to handle victims of incidents.)

Participant 5 emphasized that a 1-minute maximum reflects the intense pressure and rapid response required in emergency situations. He said:

We only have 1-minute maximum time, to prepare mag-ilis then larga dayon mi mura nay maximum nga ihatag sa amoa, adrenaline rush, excitement

and at the same time kulba kay wala pa sad mi kabalo ug unsa ka dako sa sunog.

(Trans: We only have a maximum of one minute, we change quickly and leave immediately. That's the most time given to us. It's an adrenaline rush, exciting, and at the same time nerve-wracking because we still don't know how big the fire is.)

Participant 9 said they followed the standard two-minute response time. They explained that this is challenging because they could not immediately know when a fire occurred; they relied on someone to inform them so they could respond quickly. She stated:

Challenged namo is kanang always moingon ang tawo ba kana ganing dugay kaayo ang bombero bisan amo nang gi follow ang two minutes responds time so ah 7 minutes responds time, so kana sya nga panghitabo challenged kaayo na sa amo nga part kay dli man ingon nga pag naay sunod makabalo dayon mi, so we need someone to inform us nga naay sunog para maka responde dayon mi.

(Trans: One of our challenges is that people often say that firefighters take too long to arrive, even though we follow the 2-minute or 7-minute response time. That situation is really challenging on our part because it's not like we automatically know when there's a fire we need someone to inform us first so we can respond immediately.)

Participant 10 emphasized the need to think quickly and act decisively during emergencies while strictly following official protocols and instructions, noting that their actions were always under the scrutiny of both the public and the media. He said:

Kabalo me unsa dapat buhaton ang tawo ang gd ang public galantaw biya permi sa amoa ang media gahulat rana unsay masayop, so dapat kuan me quick thinkers me at the same time cautious pd me nga ang tanan namong gibuhit kuan siya inline sa amoang mandato og tanang nga instruction from upper offices.

(Trans: We know what we're supposed to do, but the people, the public, are always watching us, and the media is just waiting for any mistake. So, we have to be quick thinkers and at the same time be cautious, making sure that everything we do is in line with our mandate and all the instructions from our higher offices.)

Sub-Theme 5: Adaptability in Unpredictable Fire Environments. The ability of firefighters to adjust quickly and effectively in constantly changing and uncertain fire situations. Fire environments are inherently unpredictable conditions such as fire spread, smoke behavior, structural stability, weather, and the presence of hazardous materials can shift rapidly without warning. Because of this, responders cannot rely solely on fixed plans; they must continuously assess the situation and modify their actions in real time. Reflects the importance of experience and training in handling uncertainty. Through

repeated exposure and drills, responders develop confidence and competence to remain effective even in unfamiliar or high-risk conditions. Overall, adaptability in unpredictable fire environments highlights the need for resilience, quick judgment, and the capacity to respond appropriately to dynamic and potentially dangerous situations.

Participants 1 said, *kadugayan naanad ra ko ug nahimong normal na sa akoa.* (Trans: I got used to it over time, and it eventually became normal for me.)

He also said that he experienced confusion and lack of familiarity with procedures and equipment, *sa akong unang experience sa sunog, nagkalisod gyud ko kay dili ko kabalo unsa akong buhaton bisan sa pagsul-ob sa akong gear, pero kadugayan naanad ra ko ug nahimong normal.* (Trans: In my first experience with a fire, I really struggled because I didn't know what to do, even when it came to putting on my gear. But over time, I got used to it and it eventually became normal.)

Participant 3 said they were trained to work under pressure facing challenges, pressure and fear is normal in their line of work. He stated:

Sa amoang ahmmm..... On our line of job man gud kay, normal man gud challenge, fear. So, we are trained to work under pressure. So, as long as i-follow na mo ang protocols na mo, we have 10 steps during fire incidents. (Trans: In our ahhhmmm..... On our line of work, challenges and fear are normal. We are trained to work under pressure. As long as we follow our protocols, we have 10 steps to follow during fire incidents.)

Participant 3 highlighted the importance of resting to recover, while remaining committed to responding to demanding fires, especially in fire incidents. He said:

Most of the time, post fires, gas fires. Exhausted ka physically, kay dugay man mahuman, labi na kong gas fires. Dugay mahuman ang firefighting. And then, dako ang wide ang area. So, physically, pero naman may saying sa fire na, rest if you must, but don't quit. So, physically, mentally, exhausted, but after a rest, maka-recover. (Trans: Most of the time, after fires, especially gas fires, you become physically exhausted because they take a long time to finish. Firefighting can last for a long time, especially with gas fires, and the affected area is usually wide. So physically and mentally, you get exhausted. But there's a saying in firefighting: 'Rest if you must, but don't quit.' After some rest, you're able to recover.)

Sub-Theme 6: Application of Skills and Training in Firefighting. It focuses on how firefighters effectively utilize their acquired knowledge, technical skills, and formal training during actual fire incidents. It highlights that successful emergency response is not solely based on physical strength or bravery, but on the proper execution of learned procedures such as fire suppression techniques, search and rescue operations, equipment handling, and safety protocols. In real-life situations, firefighters apply what

they have practiced in drills and simulations, allowing them to respond systematically even under pressure. Their training guides decision making, helping them assess risks, choose appropriate strategies, and coordinate with team members efficiently. This ensures that operations are carried out safely, reducing the likelihood of errors or injuries.

Participant 1 said that effective fire response depended on teamwork, coordination and strict adherence to the command structure, *sa among trabaho importante kaayu nga mosunod gyud sa sugo sa ground commander ug magtinabangay ang tanang bombero aron mapalong dayun ang sunog*. (Trans: In our job, it is very important to strictly follow the orders of the ground commander and for all firefighters to work together so the fire can be put out quickly.)

Participant 4 emphasized helping one another in order to have a successful operation. As a team, the firefighters need to have strong cooperation, coordination, and communication. He said:

Kami dai kanang kinahanglan jud namo ang kaning naa miy cooperation. Magtinabangay mi during sa operation para ang trabaho namo madali ra. Dapat jud coordination, og kaning unsa b ani ahhhh.....magkasinabtanay gud mo tanan usa jud na siya sa kinahanglan sa successful operation.
(Trans: We really need cooperation. We help each other during operations so that our work becomes easier. There should be coordination and mutual understanding—everyone should be on the same page, and that is one of the key requirements for a successful operation.)

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were strongly supported by related literature and studies, which validated the lived experiences of BFP personnel in responding to fire incidents within their municipality. Through Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, the researchers were able to identify meaningful themes that reflected the physical, emotional, and psychological realities encountered by firefighters in the line of duty. The integration of related literature and studies (RRL) strengthened the credibility of the findings, as the participants' experiences were found to be consistent with existing studies regarding the occupational hazards, emotional challenges, and professional responsibilities of firefighters.

The first sub-theme, "Fear in Life-Threatening Situations," was justified by previous studies emphasizing the hazardous nature of firefighting. Firefighters were constantly exposed to dangerous environments, including intense heat, collapsing structures, smoke inhalation, and hazardous materials, which place their lives at risk during emergency operations. Firefighting is one of the most dangerous professions due to the physical and psychological risks associated with emergency response. This

supports the participants' accounts of fear and anxiety while responding to incidents where injury or death was possible.

The second sub-theme, "Trauma from Exposure to Critical Incidents," was supported by literature discussing the psychological burden experienced by firefighters after repeated exposure to traumatic events. Fire responders frequently witness injuries, fatalities, and destruction of property, which may result in emotional exhaustion, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Studies conducted by Empinado et al. (2023), revealed that firefighters often experience depression, anxiety, stress, and other mental health concerns due to the emotionally demanding nature of their work. These related studies validated the participants' experiences of trauma and emotional distress brought about by repeated exposure to emergencies and critical incidents.

The third sub-theme, "Fulfillment in Saving Lives and Property," reflected the firefighters' sense of purpose and accomplishment despite the risks involved in their profession. Firefighters dedicated themselves to protecting lives, homes, and communities from destruction caused by fire incidents. The studies of Longa and Perena (2024), Sabalosa (2024), and Fianitog (2024) emphasized the significant role of firefighters in preserving lives and minimizing property damage during emergencies. These studies supported the participants' narratives that successfully rescuing victims and controlling fire incidents provided them with feelings of fulfillment, satisfaction, and professional pride.

The fourth sub-theme, "Urgency in Emergency Response Situations," was justified by studies highlighting the pressure and stress experienced by firefighters during emergency operations. Firefighters were expected to respond immediately and perform efficiently despite limited time, heavy workloads, and unpredictable conditions. According to Sianturi et al. (2021), time pressure and operational demands contribute significantly to work-related stress among firefighters. Likewise, Lagata et al. (2022) and Zeraat Herfeh et al. (2022) explained that firefighters encounter emotional frustration, physical exhaustion, and psychological strain while responding to emergencies. These studies validated the participants' experiences regarding the urgency and pressure associated with emergency response situations.

The fifth sub-theme, "Adaptability in Unpredictable Fire Environments," emphasized the importance of flexibility, resourcefulness, and quick decision-making during firefighting operations. Firefighters often faced unpredictable situations, limited resources, and operational delays that require them to adapt immediately to changing conditions. The studies of Lagata et al. (2022) and Risondi et al. (2024) supported this finding by explaining that resource limitations and delayed emergency responses affect the effectiveness of firefighting operations and increase the challenges encountered by firefighters. These studies justified the participants' need to remain adaptable and capable of making rapid decisions in unpredictable fire environments.

Lastly, the sixth sub-theme, "Application of Skills and Training in Firefighting," highlighted the importance of professional competence, preparedness, and continuous

learning in effective fire response operations. Firefighters relied heavily on their training, technical knowledge, and practical skills to manage emergencies safely and efficiently. According to Cabañas et al. (2017), understanding the nature and behavior of fire is essential in developing appropriate firefighting strategies and techniques. Similarly, Farooq and Chalkumarn (2023) emphasized that fire prevention and response require continuous training, implementation of safety strategies, and community education programs. These studies supported the participants' statements regarding the importance of skills, knowledge, and training in ensuring effective firefighting operations and protecting community safety.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel in responding to fire incidents and revealed that firefighting is a profession characterized by both significant emotional challenges and demanding operational responsibilities. The findings showed that firefighters regularly encounter fear when responding to life-threatening situations, particularly when faced with dangerous and unpredictable conditions such as collapsing structures, intense heat, and limited visibility. Despite these fears, firefighters rely on their training, experience, and adherence to protocols to maintain composure and perform their duties effectively. The study also revealed that repeated exposure to critical incidents can result in emotional distress and trauma, especially when witnessing injuries, fatalities, and the loss of property. However, firefighters cope with these challenges through self-comfort, peer support, and a strong commitment to their profession.

Operationally, the study demonstrated that firefighting requires urgency, adaptability and reflective application of skills and training. Firefighters must respond rapidly to emergencies, make quick yet sound decisions, and adapt to constantly changing fireground conditions. Their success depends not only on individual competence but also on teamwork, coordination, communication, and strict adherence to established procedures and command structures. Continuous training and practical experience were found to be essential in enabling firefighters to perform effectively under pressure and ensure the safety of both responders and the communities they serve.

Overall, the study concludes that the experiences of BFP personnel extend beyond the physical demands of firefighting. Their work involves navigating complex emotional realities while simultaneously performing high-risk operational tasks. The findings underscore the resilience, courage, professionalism, and humanitarian commitment of firefighters, highlighting the importance of providing adequate emotional support, continuous training, and organizational resources to help them effectively fulfill their vital role in safeguarding lives and property.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study on the lived experiences of BFP personnel in the various municipalities, the following recommendations are offered:

Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP)

1. BFP management may strengthen mental health support programs by conducting regular psychological debriefings after a fire incident.
2. Enhance training programs focus not only on technical firefighting skills but also on emotional resilience, stress management, and coping strategies.
3. Reinforce adherence to fireground protocols, teamwork, and command structure to improve urgency, adaptability, and operational efficiency during emergency responses.

Local Government Units (LGU)

1. The municipal governments should prioritize clearing narrow roads, enforcing parking regulations, and investing in additional fire hydrants, especially in densely populated areas, to directly address the response delays reported by firefighters.
2. Local governments can establish local ordinances providing mental health wellness programs, and family support initiatives (*e.g., stress management seminars for families*) to help mitigate the work-life balance challenges and family impact identified by participants.

Families of Firefighters

1. Families may provide emotional support and understanding to help firefighters cope with the demands and stress of their profession.
2. Family members can participate in family-oriented programs or counseling sessions designed for emergency responders.

Academic Institutions

1. The Universities may integrate this study into their curriculum to provide students with a real-world understanding of the psychological, emotional, and physical demands faced by firefighters, moving beyond theoretical fire suppression techniques.
2. Academic departments can work with the BFP to create basic training on stress management, resilience, and post-fire debriefing, based on participants' need for psychological support.
3. Future researchers may use this study as a foundational reference to explore related phenomena, such as the long-term mental health impacts of firefighting, the effectiveness of community fire prevention programs, or a comparative study between rural and urban fire stations.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researchers ensured that all ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the conduct of this study. Prior to data collection, Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel were provided with a comprehensive briefing on the objectives, procedures and potential implications of the research. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, affirming their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice. This process guarantees transparency and

respect for the autonomy of the respondents. Confidentiality and privacy were safeguarded by removing personal identifiers from transcripts and securely storing all collected data. Only the research team had access to the information, ensuring strict confidentiality protocols were upheld. The principle of non-maleficence guided the interviews, with care taken to avoid sensitive or distressing questions that could cause psychological discomfort. Participants' narratives were treated with dignity, and their lived experiences were documented faithfully without distortion.

Finally, ethical clearance was secured from the appropriate Institutional Review Board, affirming compliance with national and institutional research standards. The study was conducted in alignment with established ethical frameworks such as the Belmont Report and the Declaration of Helsinki. By adhering to these principles, the research ensured that the voices of BFP personnel were represented responsibly, with integrity, and in a manner that contributes meaningfully to understanding fire incident response.

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