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Understanding Factors Impacting Volunteer Firefighters' Work, Family, and Volunteer Balance to Serve

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the women and men of all ages who volunteer in the fire service and whose value cannot be understated. These community members selflessly sacrifice their time from family, work, and life's pursuits in service to their neighbors and communities, saving their community's increased costs for fire service delivery.

"Nothing is stronger than the heart of a volunteer." - Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle, April 18, 1942, played by Alec Baldwin, from the movie Pearl Harbor (2001)

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Abstract

The volunteer fire service in the United States is experiencing a decline, presenting the opportunity to study factors impacting current and former volunteer firefighters' ability to serve. A qualitative case study of volunteer fire service organizations in southern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania was undertaken through semi-structured interviews with 13 volunteer fire service members to understand this phenomenon. The findings of this study reveal that volunteer firefighters balance their time commitments through prioritization and self-regulation. The findings also indicate that volunteer firefighters are uncertain whether their communities understand the fire service delivery model serving their communities, the potential challenges the volunteer fire service organization faces, or how this may impact the community financially. The discussion advances that recruitment and retention efforts should focus on the return on involvement and the level of involvement of volunteer firefighters throughout their fire service lifecycle. Additionally, recruitment and retention efforts should be directed at the community more determinedly.

Keywords: firefighters, volunteering, balance, motivation, time-management, volunteer lifecycle; decision-making

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Decline of the Volunteer Firefighter

There are tame and wicked problems, and the declining number of volunteer firefighters across the United States is a wicked problem (Alford & Head, 2017; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Head & Alford, 2015; Schultz, 2020). A single community or volunteer fire service organization within a single municipality is not immune to the decline. This problem crosses permeable borders across jurisdictional boundaries and requires expanding beyond existing long-standing mutual-aid agreements between volunteer fire service organizations (Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Newland, 2015; Schultz, 2020). As membership in the volunteer fire service decreases, elected and appointed officials at all levels of government and fire service leaders will need to provide appropriate and responsive fire services while balancing costs (Schultz, 2020). This predicament should come as no surprise. Multiple publications and numerous reports over time have identified the decline of volunteer firefighters (Center for Public Safety Excellence [CPSE]/ International City/County Management Association [ICMA], 2020; Evarts & Stein, 2020; National Volunteer Fire Council [NVFC], 2015; United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2007; Senate of Pennsylvania, 2004, 2018). Recommendations in these reports remain unfulfilled, yet the issues are now more severe, complex, and extensive (Schultz, 2020).

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) established the United States Fire Department Profile report in 1983, collecting data from fire departments across the country (Evarts & Stein, 2020). The last reported data in 2020, for the year 2018, recorded the lowest levels of volunteer firefighters since the survey began. At the same time, a Senate Report in the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania reported a decline over the past 40 years of nearly 262,000 volunteer firefighters from 300,000 to 38,000, thus declaring fire to be in crisis (Senate, 2018).

Scarce public resources and expanding requirements put increasing pressure on volunteer fire service organizations. However, creating sustainable fire service delivery will rely partly on the public sector's ability to make them more efficient and deliver more for less. With a decline in volunteers, this is a dilemma.

This decline is due to time demands and changes in the dynamics of the family and work schedules, reducing the time to serve as a volunteer. However, volunteer firefighters find ways to serve their communities. Individuals continue operating in the volunteer fire service in the face of consistent challenges, jeopardizing their physical, emotional, and financial well-being on behalf of strangers.

Background of Problem

The volunteer fire service has a long-standing history in the United States, providing valued public service and reducing financial costs to communities across the nation. These cost savings cannot be understated. NFPA (2017) estimates the time donated by volunteer firefighters saves local communities across the country $46.9 billion per year (NVFC, 2020). However, the volunteer fire service is in flux as there has been and continues to be a decline in volunteer firefighters.

If this trend continues, communities serviced by these venerable public servants will be affected. The costs to transition from a volunteer to a combination or a paid fire service model are daunting given personnel and operations expenditures. Given the reactive nature and time-consuming processes by elected and appointed officials to address public policy issues, volunteer fire service organizations and communities serviced by them must address the decline now.

Problem Statement

Leading organizations such as the United States Fire Administration (USFA) and National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) have published information as to the decline in volunteers (NVFC, 2015; USFA, 2007). A 2018 study conducted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate Committee 6 Report identified a loss of over 260,000 volunteers since the 1970s (Senate, 2018). Volunteer fire service organizations and communities serviced by them will remain stressed to recruit and retain volunteers or face the cost implications of transitioning to combination or paid fire services. The alarm is sounding.

Purpose of Study

Time demands and changes in the family dynamics and work schedules constrain the time an individual has to volunteer. Individuals who volunteer in the fire service are not immune. The purpose of this study was to understand factors impacting volunteer firefighters and how they balance their daily lives. Understanding why individuals join the volunteer fire service, why some persist, and why some leave may lead to new strategies to recruit and or retain volunteers to mitigate and stabilize the decline in volunteer firefighters. Considering the implications will provide volunteer fire service organizations and communities receiving their services opportunities to develop innovative recruitment and retention strategies that focus on the individual.

Primary Research Questions

Specific to understanding why individuals participate in the volunteer fire service, the central research question for this problem is what factors impact volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve. More specifically:

1. What motivates an individual to volunteer given the time demands of work, family, and volunteering in one of the most dangerous occupations in their community?

2. How do volunteer firefighters decide between work and family versus responding to emergency incidents or other activities of their volunteer fire service organization?

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. The instrumentation used to collect data was a brief demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, general observations of current and former volunteer fire service members, and extant artifacts such as official agency reports.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized a constructivist grounded theory approach based on Charmaz (2006). Through collection and analysis of data of the direct, lived experience of participants provided an opportunity to identify and expose a gap in existing research to develop theories around what motivates individuals to serve. This framework builds off Glaser and Strauss's construction of theoretical explanations of social processes (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Limitations, & Scope (Delimitations)

Limitations. Research is not without limits, and this study was not different. The study sample size was limited to 13 current and former volunteer fire service members representing four volunteer fire service organizations servicing five municipalities within two states. Although the findings are valid, qualitative research is not generalizable to other volunteer fire service organizations as service delivery models vary by organization and location, such as remote, rural, suburban, and urban.

Limitations with this study also include self-selection bias from a diversity perspective. The sample was from volunteer fire service organizations in predominately Caucasian rural and

suburban response areas. This raises the question of whether the participants' views are or are not reflective of the broader group representing other regions with more diversity (Lantz and Runefors, 2021). Future research can explore this.

  Delimitations. This study focused on the decline of volunteer firefighters and its financial implications to communities served by them by considering factors that an individual must balance to join and remain involved as a volunteer firefighter. As a long-time volunteer firefighter and former municipal manager, the researcher is uniquely positioned to understand the value of the volunteer fire service to a community and the ignorance of communities as to that value. It goes beyond just serving but understanding the loss of the service and how that will impact communities' long term. Studying those who do volunteer may yield a perspective and concept not considered by the researcher.

Definition of Terms

  The key terms in the study are given the following operational definitions.

Paid fire service organization (PFSO)

  A PFSO refers to a salaried staffed 24/7 fire department.

Combination fire service organization (CFSO)

  A CFSO refers to a staffed combined or hybrid fire service organization with career and volunteer members. There is no classification distinction regarding the distribution of volunteer and paid staff in defining a CFSO. For purposes of this study, a CFSO is defined as a fire service organization having a minimum of one paid staff.

Volunteer fire service organization (VFSO)

  A VFSO refers to a staffed fire service organization using only volunteers.

Legacy

A legacy is a volunteer firefighter at a VFSO who has family ties to a current or former volunteer of that organization.

Summary

Volunteer firefighters comprise 67% of the firefighters serving in the United States (NFPA, 2020). Communities served by volunteer fire service organizations (VFSOs) and combination fire service organizations (CFSOs) depend on them for various emergencies. The reliance on the volunteer firefighter should not, and cannot, be taken for granted. This valuable human resource amount of donated time saves local communities an estimated $46.9 billion annually (NFPA, 2017). There is no national average of a volunteer firefighter's time to their community. Still, the time demand includes responding to emergencies, training, fundraising, apparatus, equipment maintenance, station maintenance, and administrative activities.

The strain of fire service organizations to recruit and retain enough volunteers to provide enough services will continue. With the mission of providing services to more than 70% of communities throughout the United States (Rielage, 2021), volunteer recruitment and retention is becoming a national problem.

The future of the volunteer fire service will rest upon individuals serving in VFSOs, individuals who lead VFSOs, elected and appointed officials, and the communities that depend on VFSOs. Communities relying on volunteer fire services and hope to continue receiving cost-saving fire services in the future must also be willing to address the issues impacting recruitment and retention that negatively impact the service today. Ignoring these issues will lead to what Watkins and Bazerman (2003) call "predictable surprises," those events or outcomes that catch us by surprise, yet both were predictable and preventable (CPSE/ICMA, 2020). If the decline of

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volunteer firefighters continues, elected and appointed leaders and their communities will be confronted with the difficult choices about how to provide the fire services needed and the level of services to be provided. By understanding what factors impact volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve now, the sustainability of the volunteer fire service can be addressed.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of a traditional literature review in qualitative studies is to predominantly enhance the research question, establish any gaps in previous research and identify an appropriate design and data method for a planned inquiry. However, in a grounded theory approach, concepts are generated from empirical data rather than existing literature through an iterative process. There is some debate between the two founding scholars on grounded theory as to whether the literature should be considered before the actual research. Glaser's (1998) position is that the researcher should avoid the literature so as not to establish any preconceptions and remain open-minded. On the other hand, Strauss and Corbin (2015) believe a review should be conducted to position the research. Each approach has pros and cons to a grounded theory literature review. Interactions between the researcher and the participants, and the differences between the participants in helping to construct the researcher's previous knowledge, a preliminary literature review establishes the researcher's orientation on the subject and creates, or builds, from there through iteration.

The primary purpose of this literature review was to understand influences and motivations affecting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance and how individuals decide between them, ensuring they meet their minimum obligations to the VFSO they serve. This literature review examined issues and concepts in volunteering, volunteerism, motivation, and public service ethos. Understanding why an individual volunteers in public service drives recruitment. In addition, the review of the literature examined a secondary framework of time management, role conflict, and volunteer lifecycle for an individual to remain in the volunteer fire service. Through an interpretive methodological position, the understanding of the meaning-making practices of human actors such as volunteer firefighters in the field in

recruitment application may be understood. Individuals who serve as firefighters and their lived experiences are a source of evidence of what it means to be a volunteer (Klosk-Gazzle, 2016; Yarnel et al., 2004).

Volunteering has a long-established history in the United States, dating back to the country's origins (Smith, 1978). The volunteer fire service is one of the highest-profile volunteer responsibilities in the country (Cravens, 2015). Several scholars have studied volunteer firefighters in the last four decades (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; Cowlishaw et al., 2008, 2010; Dawson et al., 2015; Perkins, 1989, 1990; Perkins & Metz, 1988; Thompson & Bono, 1993). These studies coincide with a decline in volunteer firefighters. Some scholars have looked at individual motives to volunteer in the fire service (Clary et al., 1996, 1998; Haski-Leventhal & McLeigh, 2009; McLennan et al., 2004; McLennan & Birch, 2005; Schmidthuber & Hilgers, 2019; Thompson & Bono, 1993). Others have focused on recruitment and retention efforts (Aitken, 1999; Henderson & Sowa, 2017; Jones, 2015; Lantz & Runefors, 2021; McDonald, 2016; McClennan, 2004; McLennan et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2014). However, volunteer engagement and the environment of volunteer firefighting are limited, indicating a gap needing attention (Cravens, 2015; McDonald, 2016).

Declining volunteerism in the fire service is not exclusive to the United States. Several scholars have studied this phenomenon in Australia (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; Cowlishaw et al., 2008, 2010; Dawson et al., 2015; McClennan, 2004; McLennan et al., 2009; O'Halloran & Davies, 2020), Finland (Malinen et al., 2020; Malinen & Mankkinen, 2018) and Sweden (Lantz & Runefors, 2021). O'Halloran & Davies (2020) point out that rural Australia faces volunteer attraction and retention issues. Notably, while many communities face volunteer

shortages, the magnitude of this shortage is not the same in all communities (O'Halloran &

Davies, 2020, p. 423).

Previous research has focused on the demographics of those who volunteer, individual

and organizational profiles of volunteers in the fire service, and those responsible for attending to

these issues, volunteer fire chiefs (Colibab et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2014). Some of these studies

utilized surveys to extract data, while others conducted qualitative interviews. The findings of

these studies have contributed to the growing literature of the volunteer fire service but miss the

opportunity to look at this issue from the lens of those more responsible than those that lead

them, as noted by Yoon et al. (2014) and Lantz & Runefors (2021), the individual volunteer

firefighter.

That is not to say that volunteer fire leaders cannot address this issue, but leaders at times

mute, unintentionally and intentionally, those who provide the most significant contribution to

conducting the organization's mission, the volunteer firefighter. For some VFSOs, the decline of

volunteers impacts the organization's ability to perform that mission efficiently and effectively.

Volunteer fire service organizations have traditionally been the locus for community

organization and solidarity (Thompson & Bono, 1993, p. 324 as cited in Yoon et al., 2014).

However, Holmes et al. (2019 in O'Halloran & Davies, 2020) call attention to a general lack of

awareness in the broader community about the reliance on volunteers for firefighting. Therefore,

it makes sense that viable solutions remain local. Perspectives and collaboration from various

community sources, including fire service leaders, elected and appointed officials, business and

civic organizations, and the community at large with support from other levels of government

and organizations positioned to assist, will be essential. Before getting to that point,

understanding factors influencing individuals to give their time freely to their communities and how they balance their lives to serve their neighbors is necessary.

The starting point is volunteerism, motivation, public service ethos to serve (i.e., recruitment). Once an individual joins, the shift is to retention. While VFSOs consider retention strategies, the focus should consider balancing time (i.e., time management, decision-making, and prioritization) and the role of conflict during the volunteer life cycle.

Volunteerism in the Fire Service

Volunteerism, in general, has been a long tradition in the United States, as noted by Alexis de Tocqueville's writings in the 1830s (Smith, 1999). However, even with widespread interest in volunteering, few empirical studies evaluating the impacts of volunteering have been done (McPherson, 1981; Smith, 1999). McPherson (1981) echoed this, finding longitudinal evidence on voluntary affiliation focuses on the organizational histories rather than individual behavior (p. 706). These findings are consistent with the decline of volunteer firefighters serving one of the oldest volunteer organizations in the United States. The fire service in the United States has relied on volunteerism since the early 18th century, long before independence. Volunteer firefighters contribute nearly $49.9 billion per year of donated time to the total cost of fire in the United States of an estimated $140 billion per year (Hall, 2014 as cited in McDonald, 2016; NVFC, 2020). The cost to communities throughout the country will increase should it be necessary to establish a CFSO or PFSO to supplement the decline in current volunteers if the volunteers become nonexistent as donated time will shift to actual dollars.

The literature on volunteerism is abundant. Existing scholarly journal articles, periodicals, textbooks, reports, and internet articles provided a broad review. The available research on volunteer firefighting has focused on organizational fire department data supplied by

the fire departments and demographic information provided through quantitative research surveys and secondary sources such as professional periodicals and internet resources. In addition, official reports, such as the US Fire Department Profile 2018 (Evarts & Stein, 2020), Pennsylvania Senate 60 Report (2004), and Senate 6 Report (2018), address the decline in volunteer firefighters. These reports also focus on their impacts on response, including but not limited to why individuals no longer volunteer due to changes in demographics, training requirements, and two-income households. Nevertheless, though the numbers are declining, individuals continue to join VFSOs. Given time demands and changes in the dynamics of the family and work schedules and their ability to serve their communities, it is essential to understand why these individuals volunteer.

Concepts and theoretical contexts vary across the literature, but several themes are evident. Individuals volunteer in not-for-profit organizations, including government, community-based, and for-profit organizations. These organizations may use volunteer resources in short-term, long-term, conservation, recruitment and placement, and emergency and relief programs. According to Putnam (2000), giving time and money is a long and distinguished tradition in American society. Active volunteer firefighters are involved in firefighting, training, and other ancillary activities, including any active part-time (paid or volunteer) firefighters (Evarts & Stein, 2020. p. 1). Of the total number of firefighters, 370,000 (33 percent) were career, while 745,000 (67 percent) were volunteers (Evarts & Stein, 2020; NVFC, 2020).

Volunteerism in the fire service requires sacrifice, time, and effort but includes the potential risk for injury or death (Simpson, 1996). Other than emergency calls, most other volunteer functions are routine such as training and meetings. However, the standards and requirements to become a certified firefighter have increased over time. While these standards

and conditions may be prudent at the initial introduction level, the continued expansion of requirements may have unintended consequences.

Several studies focused on the decline of volunteer firefighters in rural areas of Australia (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; Cowlishaw et al., 2008, 2010; Dawson et al., 2015; McClennan, 2004; McLennan et al., 2009; O'Halloran & Davies, 2020). One potential contributing factor is the role family issues play in the resignation of volunteers (Cowlishaw et al., 2008; Simpson, 1996). However, Simpson (1996) argues that the new middle class rejects participation in VFSOs. They introduce the Work-Life Conflict model, which suggests that time- and strain-based pressures may be important sources for balancing volunteers and family (Simpson, 1996, p. 17). The effort concludes that VFSOs have to develop policies that better support the volunteer families.

The decline in volunteers is complex and includes work, an aging population, and population drift (Cowlishaw et al., 2008; Henderson et al., 2018; Meijs &Ten Hoorn, 2008). By extension, family obligations may also be a contributing factor that results in community members from volunteering. In addition, municipalities are exploiting volunteers who provide less costly fire protection services than paid departments (Simpson, 1996). However, innovative systems in emergency services can attract new middle-class volunteers (Simpson, 1996).

Individuals are motivated for different reasons to join the fire service family. Many are legacy members following a dad or mom; for others, it is about giving back to the community. Here, Cowlishaw et al. (2008) and Simpson (1996) part ways. Beyond the individual volunteer firefighter's family, the firehouse becomes the broader community by extension specifically. The firehouse recognizes all phases of the life cycle of members and families (Simpson, 1996, p. 22).

Smith (1994) considered the determinants of participation in volunteer associations. His position is that volunteer participation impacts the participant and the larger society (p. 243). These determinants consider factors that characterize an individual's environment and its impact on volunteer participation and the effect of regional and organizational influences, including the individual's social background, social role characteristics, personality traits (enduring, trans-situational, general response dispositions of an individual). Such factors have significant potential as part of the explanation for volunteer participation. Other factors include attitudinal affecting volunteer participation; situational considering the individual's immediate situation; and social participation dealing with how an individual participates in such social activities as friendship, politics, associations, church, neighboring, outdoor recreation, and mass media activity (Smith, 1994).

The subfield of inquiry reviewed here seeks to understand why people participate in volunteer programs and voluntary associations (Smith, 1994, p. 244). Smith (1994) examined social background variables that identify volunteer participation involving an individual giving time without coercion or remuneration (p. 244). Furthermore, volunteer work is generally a public benefit activity, while participation in the association is either a public benefit or member benefit activity (Smith, 1993). However, the values that distinguish one person from others beyond member benefit, especially in service to others, were considered.

Public Service Ethos

Public service is enormously consequential and is a critical pillar of a functioning democracy (Perry, 2021, p. xv), requiring voice at all levels of government. Public Service Motivation (PSM) originates from beliefs that unique motives found among public servants are different from those of their private sector counterparts (Perry et al., 2010, p. 681). Perry et al.

(2010) define PSM as "an individual's predisposition to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organization (p. 368)." Perry (2021) speaks to an attraction to public service and commitment to values. Booth-Smith and Leigh (2016) support the idea that a public service ethos is central to all public services.

What motivates someone to volunteer their time generally speaking and specifically to a public organization? First, there is a lack of trust in the government (Kettl, 2021). Still, the volunteer fire service organization is viewed outside of that context as many VFSOs are independent of the local governments in the communities they serve. Second, VFSOs have long been a social fabric within a community and have enjoyed a positive reputation. Third, research in public service motivation (PSM) focuses on motives and actions in the public sector intended to serve the community and the well-being of society (Christensen & Wright, 2011; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Perry et al., 2010; Perry & Wise, 1990). Finally, millennials have demonstrated high levels of volunteer motivation; however, that does not translate to the fire service, although people are more likely to volunteer if they think they can make a difference (Brown, 1999; Rose, 2013).

Volunteer firefighters emerge from this brief sketch as highly qualified and committed individuals whose substantial collective effort provides vital and deeply valued services to their communities. What motivates these volunteers to bestow their productive energies in this manner freely is the topic of the next section (Thompson III & Bono, 1993 p. 325).

Moynihan and Pandey (2007) argued that work-related rules and norms are organizational institutions that shape public servants' organizational behavior and the fundamental attitudes these actors hold about the value of public service. In this context, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) are building off of Perry's theory (2000) from the individual to the

organization that PSM theory does not only motivate individuals but that public organizations, such as VFSOs, are social institutions that individuals interact and influence in the context of a structured environment. Perry presented such an instrument and defined public service motivation as "an individual's" predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions" (Perry, 1996, p. 5 as cited in Naff & Crum, 1999, p. 7). This predisposition led to the development by Perry (1996) of six dimensions: attraction to public policymaking, commitment to the public interest, social justice, civic duty, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Perry's scale measures rational, norm-based, and affective motives (Naff and Crum, 1999).

The public sector's approach to the public service ethos should be less focused on 'defending' it and more about communicating what it means in practice, in particular to the public, and what drives specific individuals to seek public sector employment (Booth-Smith & Leigh, 2016, p. 22). Leigh (2016) pointed out that younger public servants (aged 26-40) versus seasoned older peers appear less committed to public service values. These include accountability, customer service, and integrity. The younger generation values career advancement, creativity, pay and benefits more aligned with the private sector.

Leigh (2016) defined the public service ethos as a set of principles or values that all public servants adhere to when performing their duties. The fundamental attributes of public service ethos most consistently identified in the public sector include accountability, community responsibility, customer service, and integrity. These hold a close similarity to those core values identified nearly a century ago—the idea of public service ethos, summarized by personal motivation (Booth-Smith & Leigh, 2016).

The idea of a public service ethos suggests a subtle trace of volunteerism. While modern public sector workers are not volunteers, some of the earliest versions of what we would recognize as public services and welfare were voluntary. Booth-Smith and Leigh (2016) believed there is value in public service ethos; however, it must reflect the generational changes of today's world, differences in public service organizations, and the emerging role of place. Younger workers have a weaker attachment to the traditional elements of public service ethos: pay and career override volunteering to one's community. Public service organizations must focus on public service ethos connected to the place of the local community (Booth-Smith & Leigh, 2016). What motivates these volunteers to bestow their productive energies in this manner freely is the topic of the following section (Thompson III & Bono, 1993 p. 325).

Motivation

Research is extensive on why people choose to engage in volunteer activities. Volunteer effort is significant because of its impacts on and benefits communities, society, and individuals (Oostlander et al., 2014). Volunteers are likely to remain motivated and continue their volunteer service by addressing their concerns (Clary et al., 1998). Therefore, the understanding of volunteer motivations is by organizations that depend on this gratis labor is vital for recruitment and retention. Clary et al. (1998) examined a functional approach to volunteers and highlighted individual differences in motivation. Oostlander et al.'s (2014) study of volunteers similarly examined the unique differences of volunteers but from the perspective of autonomy and control. Using Social Determination Theory (SDT) through survey questionnaires of nearly 2,000 volunteers, a positive correlation between autonomy and less control positively impacted volunteering. Haivas et al. (2012) also considered self-determination theory (SDT) and how individuals satisfy three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Functional theorizing looks at one's attitudes, social relationships, and personality in social psychology. Clary et al. (1998) identified six motivational functions of volunteerism: values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement. It simply may be that volunteers value altruism and are rewarded by the fundamental act of volunteering (Bussell & Forbes, 2001). Shye (2010) proposed that instead of asking what motivates a volunteer, ask to what extent volunteering rewards the individual with several benefits. Whether it is an individual's belief system, attitude, or receipt of subsidy, understanding what motivates a volunteer firefighter to manage their daily lifestyle to service may be critical in balancing their everyday activities. In any context, the notion that someone would make a personal sacrifice for another individual, especially when the other individual is a stranger, is an exciting phenomenon and a motivating factor in itself (Clary et al.,1998).

The giving of oneself in the form of service is a critical factor of motivation. Benefits and pride, also known as hygiene and motivation, are two factors that produce a motivated volunteer (Herzberg, 1964; Smeby, 2022). This combined factor, also known as two-factor theory, or Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory developed by Frederick Herzberg (1964), offers that one set of factors causes satisfaction, and a separate set causes dissatisfaction. Some examples of satisfaction from Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory include a fair salary and compensation package, work hours, health/medical, pensions, and length of service awards (LOSAP) for volunteers (Herzberg, 1964). In addition, motivational factors include modern and well-maintained equipment (i.e., apparatus and personal protective equipment), appropriate certifications and qualifications, and a demanding training program. Pride is a factor that benefits the individual, especially considering volunteers serve without pay or remuneration if adequately motivated (Smeby, 2022). When these factors are applied to the organization motivator and

hygiene factors are improved and sustained. This can be done by providing direct feedback and supporting professional development within the organization. Support and attention can also keep employees from feeling dissatisfied, leading to volunteer firefighters not retaining.

Dissatisfaction may include time requirements to train an individual as a volunteer firefighter, meetings attendance, and other related fire service activities. Over time the available hours to commit to organizations have been reduced. Demands have increased personally and professionally, and societal values have impacted the volunteer fire service (Smeby, 2022). Collectively, the more demands on the individual's time act as a disincentive. Individuals require basic needs to serve, including recognition, belonging, and satisfaction of helping others and serving their communities (Smeby, 2022). Satisfaction of volunteer firefighters impacts retention, indirectly impacting recruitment (Carter & Rausch, 2017). However, the literature remains undecided, with some scholars like Smeby (2022) and Carter and Rausch (2017) contending that volunteers leave the organizations like the fire service because of a lack of appreciation. Carter and Rausch (2017) further support this position, observing that volunteer firefighter satisfaction is dependent on psychological awards that include signs of appreciation. The failure to recognize these signs can lead to volunteers moving on from the organization, again impacting retention.

Retention is an integral part of sustaining the ranks of volunteer firefighters, especially once recruited. Over time, strategies to recruit and retain, including LOSAP programs, stipends, and other incentives, have been applied. Incentives are well deserved but do not typically increase the volunteer firefighter ranks through recruitment and retention. If incentives are not motivating individuals to join or stay, what will? Like paid employee retention, volunteer retention is one of the most significant challenges for volunteer-dependent nonprofit

organizations (Garner & Garner, 2011). Few stop to realize the role volunteers play in various public services like the fire service (Rehnborg, 2009).

 Time Management

Many time management studies consistently demonstrate positive effects on an individual's perceived control of time and job satisfaction (Claessens et al., 2007). However, much of the literature's focus has been on undergraduate students. A volunteer firefighter's time is limited, like a student's time. Time as a resource can be managed effectively by some, others not so much.

Britton and Tesser (1991) studied the effects of time-management practices on college students. They identified time as a limited resource and, like other limited resources, can be managed. Their research looked at differences among individuals in their time management practices and how they account for how much they may or may not achieve.

Britton & Glynn (1989) and Britton and Tesser (1991) built off a time management theoretical model that specified several time management components: choosing goals and subgoals, prioritizing the objectives, generating tasks and subtasks from the purposes, prioritizing the tasks, listing the functions on a "to-do" list, scheduling the tasks, and then carrying out the tasks. The time management theoretical model considers how an ordinary computer (CPU) time management program operates to carry out specific tasks such as list-making, goal specification, and the setting of priorities. Like computers, students utilize information processing tasks that factor in the length of the tasks, task complexities, task priorities, deadline, and proneness to interruptions – in short, students are overloaded much like a volunteer firefighter.

Britton and Tesser's (1991) findings suggested that successful students develop short-term planning skills and positive attitudes toward time. This incremental tactic lets them manage what is on their plate and control it. However, long-term planning presents more of a challenge. Students extrapolate that the more complex tasks daily, the more difficult long-term planning versus short-term except for less unpredictability and more stable situations. The relationship between time management and skills for students may hold in other fields. Replicating this study in the volunteer fire service may support or add to their findings.

Emergency response is the most visible and the single most time-consuming firefighter activity. Still, auxiliary activities consume more than two-thirds of the average firefighter's total time in the department (Thompson & Bono, 1993). Training time is rapidly expanding with the growing need for emergency medicine, hazardous materials, and occupational safety and health expertise. The magnitude of the overall time commitment required of volunteer firefighters cannot be understated. Additional requirements- demonstrates either a lack of concern or willful indifference of agencies that recommend these added load requirements and those that adopt them. For example, Firefighter II is a second-level progression above Firefighter I. The purpose is to demonstrate the next level competency for firefighters, but is it necessary to mandate it as a requirement versus a permissive professional development activity? Mandating this requirement forces additional time demands that the literature has identified as an issue in recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. The average firefighter sampled donates 236 hours, or the equivalent of six 40-hour workweeks, annually. Despite the demands, 69% of volunteer firefighters never considered resigning (Thompson III & Bono, 1993 p. 325).

Roe (2007) provided an overview of at the time of current time management research, finding that time management behaviors positively relate to perceived time control, job

satisfaction, health, and negative stress. However, one limitation is the attention given to job and organizational factors. The research included employees who had heavy workloads that included working full-time, studying part-time, working full-time, and running households with children. Thus, an individuals' workload demands could be viewed in a family context.

Time management literature provided several definitions. Claessens et al. (2007) suggested a definition of time management as "behaviors that aim at achieving effective use of time while performing some goal-directed activity, such as completing a work task or an academic duty, which is carried out in a way that implies effective use of time (p. 262). However, this definition does not appear to account for activities in the daily routine of life not delineated as goal-directed such as the daily ritual of getting a child ready for school or getting oneself prepared to go to work.

Kaufman et al. (1991) defined time assessment behaviors as awareness of here and now or past, present, and future and self-awareness of one's time use, which helps to accept tasks and responsibilities that fit within the limit of one's capabilities (Claessen et al., 2007). On the other hand, Britton and Tesser (1991) and Macan (1994, 1996) considered planning behaviors, such as setting goals, scheduling tasks, prioritizing, making to-do lists, and grouping tasks to use time effectively. Monitoring behaviors aim to observe one's use of time while performing activities, generating a feedback loop that allows a limit to the influence of interruptions by others (Fox and Dwyer, 1996; Zijlstra et al., 1999 as cited in Claessen et al., 2007, p.263). Claessen et al. (2007) was also concerned with the lack of a time management theory.

Mosadeghrad et al. (2001) focused on job stress in healthcare workers, which in turn causes hostility, aggression, absenteeism, turnover, and reduced productivity (p. 170). The concern related to volunteer firefighters is absenteeism, turnover, and reduced productivity.

Reduced productivity for volunteer firefighters could include diminished attendance for emergency response, training, and other non-fire activities required of its members.

Mosadeghrad et al. (2001) found that sources of stress were inadequate pay, inequality at work, too much work, staff shortage, lack of recognition and promotion prospects, time pressure, lack of job security, and lack of management support (p.170). Thus, there is too much work, staff shortage, time pressure, and possibly a lack of management support. Lack of management support could be the failure of VFSOs leadership in recognizing the need to amend or establish standards that work with the volunteer firefighter's existing lifestyle.

Mosadeghrad et al.(2001) defined the quality of working life (QWL) as an employee's satisfaction with working life (p. 171). Quality of working life is a multidimensional concept that looks at several factors of employees' work, including but not limited to the work environment, job satisfaction, training, and professional development opportunities, work stress, and the relationship between on the clock and off the clock (Mosadeghrad et al., 2001). High QWL organizations see improved employee productivity, reduced absenteeism, and lower turnover.

Additionally, Mosadeghrad et al. (2001) considered how job stress, QWL, and intention to leave voluntarily from the organization are evident in low QWL organizations. Job stress, therefore, leads to considerable turnover in healthcare organizations which comes at a substantial cost and negatively impacts the organization by reducing its capacity to meet its mission and provide quality care (Mosadeghrad et al., 2001). By extension, the decline in volunteer firefighters also reduces the VFSOs ability to meet its mission and ensure quality fire protection.

Factors that may influence the level of employees' job stress are demographic variables of gender, age, years of work experience, graduation level, place of work, type of employment, type of hospital, employees' QWL (Mosadeghrad et al., 2001, p. 179).

Stress has been defined as pressures from the environment, then strain within the person (Michie, 2002, p.67). However, Michie (2002) accepted the definition as the interaction between the situation and the individual. Stress results when an individual's resources are insufficient to manage the demand and strains of the problem. In the context of volunteer firefighters, the position represents the situation.

Signs of stress affect an individual's behavior. Responses to stress may include fatigue and lack of motivation. Stress may be caused by time-limited events, such as the pressures of examinations or work deadlines, or by ongoing situations like family demands, job insecurity, or long commuting journeys (Michie, 2002, p. 67). Consideration for volunteer firefighters includes the pressure of meeting the VFSOs requirements and incident response, along with family and job demands.

Michie (2002) associated the following factors in the context of absenteeism, including overload and pressure, the effects of excess and strain on their personal lives, and the lack of control over work. A factor that is out of a volunteer's control is an emergency call. The various demands may adversely impact the volunteer firefighter's overall quality of life. Success in managing and mitigating stress depends on the organization's culture (Michie, 2002). However, VFSOs who maintain rigid requirements fail to address this. While this may not bring new volunteers into the organization or prevent others from leaving due to job relocation, it may help manage the existing active volunteers and stabilize the ebb and flow of volunteers showing up sporadically versus consistently.

Learning from those who have provided years of service to the volunteer fire service may shed additional insight into community recruitment. However, the focus of this cannot take place in a vacuum. The community must understand the implications of the decline from a cost

perspective. A continued decline could increase taxes to cover the cost of supplementing volunteers with part- or fully paid firefighters. Furthermore, the reduction could reduce response time while waiting for mutual aid assistance from outside their immediate area; or change the community's expectations, but that is a community's decision. Lastly, considering time demands on burnout to volunteers must be contemplated.

Burnout results from prolonged exposure to stressful working environments, yet some volunteer firefighters seem to manage long years of service balancing their work, life, and volunteer activities (Khamisa et al., 2015, p. 653). Stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and general health of volunteers must be seen as essential considerations when developing strategies and interventions to improve volunteer firefighters' outcomes that may offer new recruitment and retention considerations. Burnout may lead to concerns of role ambiguity or role conflict.

Role Conflict

Role conflict is at play in the context of deciding work, family, or volunteer commitments. Role conflict resolution theory supports the notion that choice is the reaction of conflict, with compromise and avoidance being factors (van de Vliert, 1981). Phillips et al. (2014) studied whether role ambiguity or role conflict impacted hospice volunteers in Australia. The research looked at factors that affected recruitment and retention for hospice services to maintain this service. Hospice volunteers were leaving their positions within the first two months of serving due to factors of career, illness and family, geographical relocation, and service-based issues (Phillips et al., 2014). The similarities may transfer to volunteer firefighters; however, the research focused on a gap between role ambiguity and role conflict in attrition with paid staff but not its impact on volunteer staff. The conclusion was that role ambiguity and role conflict were not concerns for hospice volunteers. The hospice volunteers' structured setting and the

organizational support they received, including training, provided self-care strategies (Phillips et al., 2014). These results may be transferable to other volunteers, including volunteer firefighters who have persisted in the fire service for many years. Additionally, the literature considered the relationship between role conflict and burnout (Jones, 1993; Jawahar et al., 2007; Phillips et al., 2014).

Volunteer Lifecycle

When considering recruitment and retention factors, consideration must be given to an individual's time with an organization. Omoto and Snyder (1993, 2002) referred to this time as the volunteer life cycle. Similar to other socialization theories, Omoto and Snyder (1993, 2002) divided the process into three modules: antecedents (including motivation to volunteer), the volunteer experience, and the consequences of volunteering. They described the characteristics of the agency, the volunteer, and the social system in each stage but did not explain the process volunteers undergo in the roles they undertake.

Additional scholars such as Farmer and Fedor (1999), Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), Mumford (2000), Simon et al. (2000) have studied this phenomenon. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) reviewed the organizational socialization of volunteers, defined as the process through which one learns the job, internalizes organizational values and goals, and becomes an effective and involved volunteer (p. 67). They developed the Volunteering Stages and Transitions Model (VSTM), focusing on five different phases in a volunteers' socialization (nominee, newcomer, emotional involvement, established volunteering and retiring (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). However, Mumford's (2000) focus was on volunteer training and how an organization may increase the organizational identification of volunteers (Simon et al., 2000).

Conclusion

The nature of volunteering has changed over time (Malinen & Mankkinen, 2018, p. 605). Volunteer commitment is declining, as the new type of volunteering is more "reflexive" – volunteers increasingly focus their efforts on their interests rather than on groups or the community (Malinen & Mankkinen, 2018, p. 605). The contribution of volunteer firefighters and VFSOs serving communities across the country cannot be understated. Individuals within organizations work beyond their formal employment contracts, and by extension, so do volunteer firefighters (Rayner et al., 2012).

Volunteer fire service organizations are ubiquitous institutions throughout the non-urban American landscape. Although their original mission was fire suppression, VFSOs currently respond to all natures of emergencies (Thompson III & Bono, 1993, p. 324). They provide essential public goods and are a locus for community organization and identity. The uniqueness of firefighting among volunteer activities arises mainly from its monopoly over its mission and its vital, indispensable character (Thompson III & Bono, 1993).   Emergency response is the most visible uncontrollable firefighter activity. Calls for emergency service come at all times of the day and night. There can be several calls in a day, or there may be no calls for days and weeks. In addition, ancillary activities consume more than two-thirds of the average firefighter's total time in the department, including training, company business, and community service. Volunteer firefighters are highly qualified and dedicated individuals whose generous mutual effort provides their communities with essential and deeply respected services. There is no dispute in the literature on this issue.

In addition, VFSOs are experiencing challenges recruiting and retaining these individuals. Closely studying volunteer firefighters and learning their perspectives from their

different experiences when they joined the fire service by addressing the decline, understanding

factors that may impact that decline, and recommending actions to mitigate it or even change

may lead to new strategies to recruit and retain future volunteer firefighters.

CHAPTER III: DATA AND METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research methodology for this qualitative

case study regarding understanding factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and

volunteer balance to serve. This approach allowed for a deeper comprehension of why

individuals volunteer in the fire service and how they manage their time related to family, work,

school, recreation, and finding time to serve their community as a volunteer firefighter. The

applicability of grounded theory and an interpretive approach for this study are discussed further

in this chapter. The organization of this chapter includes the central research question and

subquestions, including the methodology, study participants, procedures, data collection and

analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

The central research question studied for this problem is what factors impacted volunteer

firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve. Understanding why individuals join

the volunteer fire service, why some persist, and why some leave may lead to new strategies to

recruit and retain volunteers to mitigate and stabilize the decline in volunteer firefighters.

Subquestions include:

1. What motivates an individual to volunteer given the time demands of work, family, and

   volunteering in one of the most dangerous occupations in their community?

2. How do volunteer firefighters decide between work and family versus responding to

   emergency incidents or other activities of their VFSO?

Understanding factors that impact volunteer firefighters' and how individuals choose between

them while meeting their minimum obligations to the VFSOs they serve can provide a deeper

appreciation of what motivates individuals to volunteer. This understanding may lead to new

strategies to recruit and retain volunteers for independent fire service organizations and municipal fire service organizations that rely on volunteers to serve their communities.

Methodology

A qualitative case study methodology was used to explore this phenomenon to collect insightful explanations for why individuals choose to serve as volunteer firefighters and remain committed to the fire service. The study included a single instrument design to gain an in-depth inquiry into this phenomenon. The unit of analysis was the volunteer fire service and utilized convenience sampling. Sampling included current and former volunteer firefighters from rural and suburban fire service delivery organizations in all-volunteer and hybrid organizational models in seven municipalities in three counties in southern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. The study consisted of a brief demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, and general observations of current and retired firefighters who may provide the opportunity to understand causal inferences and explanations from individuals who serve as volunteer firefighters.

Case Study

A qualitative case study was utilized to understand factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve. This approach permitted an exploration of a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case), allowing for a deeper comprehension of the volunteer fire service using multiple cases (i.e., volunteer firefighters) across multiple sites (i.e., fire companies/departments) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through an interpretive lens, a case study approach provided exploration and development of a thick description of an individual's experiences as a volunteer firefighter and affords reasonable methods for collecting, synthesizing, examining, and hypothesizing qualitative data for theory

construction (Charmaz & Bryant, 2019). Since a case study approach is not a specific paradigm, it allowed the utilization of various qualitative methodologies, including data analysis.

Grounded Theory

The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research design that refers to a theory generated inductively from data. A theory is a set of relationships that suggests reasonable explanations of the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 2015; Moghaddam, 2006). Although grounded theory methodology is a discovery process of undetected topics, the undertaking is to build a theory from the ground. According to Moghaddam (2006), a review of the pertinent literature reveals current thinking in the area. Although the case study considers the existing development of theory and grounded theory should have no predetermined idea or hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the flexibility of the case study offers the use of grounded theory as a mechanism to identify the gaps and undetected topics in volunteer firefighting,

The primary goal of a case study is to understand the perspective of those inside the case (Stake, 1995; Hesse-Biber, 2017). This goal aligns with the interpretive approach through the lens of the volunteer firefighters gaining a deeper understanding of the calling of the volunteer firefighter and the complexities in this unique context (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, through an interactive interview process, the probing of the participant's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings, and perspectives provided valuable data in the pursuit of the central question and subquestions of this study (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007 as cited in Pham, 2018).

Study Sample

The participants studied were current and former volunteer firefighters. Volunteer firefighters live these experiences every day. When they are summoned to respond to an incident,

they may be at home, enjoying their family, or working. Some employers may permit them to leave; however, others may go as prescribed by law. They are husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents, and friends. They are young and old, and everything in between. Each of them has joined the fire service vocation for reasons known only to them and shared with those they choose.

Data Collection

Data collection was through a purposeful and convenient sampling of current and former volunteer firefighters. Although the topic of volunteer firefighters is not new, research syntheses on a similar issue for a different purpose allowed the sampling approach to be fitted for this study (Suri, 2011). Participants were recruited by direct invitation to participate through researcher contacts in VFSOs in rural and suburban settings. The direct outreach included six VFSOs representing seven municipalities in two southern New Jersey and one eastern Pennsylvania counties. The researcher requested approval to recruit directly to members of the VFSOs at meetings or duty crew nights. The study sites granted permission via letter or email for recruitment access and the use of the fire station for interviews.

Data is qualitative through semi-structured interviews of current and former volunteer firefighters. Data sources also included a participant demographic questionnaire before the interview. This strategy compared demographics, including but not limited to gender, age, ethnicity, education, employment, household income, and whether any possible hypotheses developed from the demographic data. Furthermore, by interviewing individual current and former volunteer firefighters, insight into their motivations and behaviors can be extracted to understand how they manage their time, family time, and work time to find time to give to their community. It may also explain why they continue to serve and remain committed, leading to a

better understanding of what drives them while others leave. For example, was family compelling it, i.e., their upbringing, or how they managed their fire service demands.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

An application was submitted to the West Chester Institutional Research (IRB). The application included the informed consent document, demographic questionnaire, interview guide, and permission letters and emails from the targeted VFSOs. The IRB approved the research on August 13, 2021.

Recruitment of Participants

The sample was recruited in a two-step process. The first step was an outreach to fire service delivery organizations' fire chiefs or presidents. These fire service leaders were provided a general idea of the research and a request from the researcher for permission to attend upcoming monthly company meetings or duty crew nights to give an overview of the study to recruit current, active, non-active, and former members in attendance. The researcher secured permission from six VFSOs representing seven municipalities in two southern New Jersey and one eastern Pennsylvania counties; however, one of the study sites was unresponsive when scheduling the direct recruiting of the participants.

The researcher recruited the sample attending VFSOs monthly meetings and duty crew nights. The researcher presented a study overview and contact information, i.e., cell phone number and email. Those volunteer firefighters interested in participating in the study contacted the researcher directly. This resulted in 13 experienced volunteer firefighters being interviewed in September 2021, representing four VFSOs serving five communities in three counties in southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey.

Study Sites

Interviews were hosted on Zoom and in-person at secure training rooms within the permitting fire service organizations. Due to the nature of volunteer fire organizations, interviews were not scheduled at the fire stations during active events to avoid meeting and training events. Furthermore, interviews were scheduled around the participant's schedule and at locations of the participant's choosing for convenience. Interviews took place at a participant's home or, if preferred, at an alternate location of their choosing, such as a public library.

Zoom interviews were encouraged due to Covid-19. Face-to-face interviews followed Covid protocols. Protocols included the researcher wearing a mask covering the nose and mouth within spaces where three feet of social distancing was not possible. The researcher handled all recording equipment, disinfecting before and after the interview concluded, and ensured that the participant was seated behind a desk or table with a minimum six-foot buffer from the researcher.

Informed Consent

Before the interview, participants were emailed the informed consent document via Qualtrics to review and ask any questions before submitting it. The informed consent document was reviewed again before the interview commenced. If the participant did not submit the informed consent document electronically, they were emailed or texted the link to "sign" and submit or provided a hard copy to sign at their preference.

Demographics Questionnaire

Participants were first asked to complete a questionnaire about their basic demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, educational level, employment status, household income, and the number of years as an active volunteer. The questionnaire was included in the

initial email inviting the participants to complete the informed consent via the Qualtrics survey form. The questionnaire was able to be completed by the participant after "signing" and submitting the informed consent document. If the participant did not submit the questionnaire as part of the Qualtrics informed consent document electronically, they were emailed or texted the link to execute the informed consent document and complete the questionnaire or provided a hard copy of both to complete at their preference. These activities took approximately 15 minutes.

Interviews

Data were collected from the participants in separate semi-structured interviews, scheduled directly with each participant. Participants were either one-on-one via Zoom or face-to-face. Zoom participant interviews were recorded. Face-to-face participants were recorded using Otter.ai to record and transcribe the interview. A digital recorder was also deployed as a backup. The interviews took approximately 1 hour.

Incentives

No incentives were provided to participants for their contribution to this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was by grounded theory coding of participants' transcripts. The use of transcription provided more options to analyze data. The research used a grounded theory coding scheme and memoing to identify additional themes outside of what the literature found in previous studies. Coding and memoing were done using qualitative software. Individual and cross-case themes were identified through case descriptions (i.e., interviews and observations) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Coding

Using the coding process, the grounded theory method assigned concepts to volunteer firefighters' examined data and experience. Open coding occurs at the beginning of a study (Moghaddam, 2006) and asks the what, the who, the how, the when (how long, where, how much), and the why. Furthermore, open coding wants to understand the research phenomenon's approaches and strategies. As the data was collected, it was continually compared, analyzed, and organized until reaching saturation. Saturation is when new data will not provide additional information for the development of categories (Creswell, 2002, p. 450 in Moghaddam, 2006).

Once saturation was met, the process moved from open coding to axial coding and the formation of constructs. Here, the goal is to reduce the number of codes and aggregate them to demonstrate their relationship. Goulding (1999 in Moghaddam, 2006) described the concepts and revealed a 'gestaltian' theoretical explanation of the phenomenon under study. As the constructs have been identified, the processes of axial coding commenced.

The final step of data analysis was selective coding. At this stage, the constructs were sufficiently created to justify an extensive re-review of the congruent literature to support the relationship with the research findings. Here the objective was to determine the main category by relating it to the other categories and validating the relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.116). Through selective coding, the categories were synthesized and developed into theory.

Memoing

During the analysis and interpretation process of coding, memoing was deployed. Memoing allowed for the operation of thinking through the data and writing it down (Hesse-Biber, 2017). A summary of thoughts, descriptions, ideas was written down from notes and

transcripts of participant interviews. This helped visualize relationships in the data from open coding to selective coding.

MAXQDA Use

The evolution of electronic data analysis methods provided for examination of participant transcripts. Category creation, coding, and decisions regarding what data to retrieve and codify remain the researcher's (Basit, 2003). The program assisted in collecting, marking up, coding, sorting, reorganizing, and memoing the researchers' duties rather than more traditional methods using note cards, scissors, and paper (Weitzman and Miles, 1995)

Ethical Considerations

Researcher Bias/ Positionality

A researcher begins the project with a positionality defined by Hesse-Biber (2017) as a particular set of values and ideas about the social reality and ways it can be known (p. 44). Positionality suggests that the social-historical-political situation of a researcher affects their leanings, i.e., that they are not independent of the social processes they study (Holmes, 2020). This involves ontological assumptions about the researcher's worldview or the position the researcher is coming from (Holmes, 2020). The current paradigm includes a contemporary view of the fire service. The researcher's belief that the volunteer fire service needs to progress from long-standing traditions and cultural norms could influence participant response bias or social desirability.

Reflexiveness

Positionality provides the viewpoint of the researcher in the study context. However, safeguarding that viewpoint comes from the researcher's ethical standpoint throughout the study. Being reflexive during the process acts as an essential internal guide (Hesse-Biber, 2017). As a

researcher with a background in the fire service, continual self-monitoring through reflexivity as a check and balance of researcher positionality was adopted. This self-reflection and reflexiveness were necessary and ongoing throughout the study (Holmes, 2020).

Triangulation

Triangulation is used to increase the credibility and validity of the study findings. Using various data to support the phenomenon of the decline of volunteer firefighters enhances the study and assist in explaining the results. For this study, Denzin's (1970 as cited in Noble and Heale, 2019) methodological triangulation was deployed utilizing participant interviews, observations, and artifacts from scholarly sources, official reports, and professional publications.

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology to probe factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve. The study employed a constructivist grounded theory tactic allowing for a deeper grasp of why individuals volunteer in the fire service and how they manage their time related to family, work, and other life pursuits, and finding time to serve their community as a volunteer firefighter. This chapter addressed the methodology, study participants, procedures, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations in pursuit of understanding the central research question and subquestions.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter covers the findings of this study conducted to consider the central research question for this problem of what factors impact volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve. The findings are expressed in the following three sections. The first section gives a demographic summary of the participants. The second section provides context for factors around recruitment, including volunteering, motivation, and public service ethos. The final section addresses factors concerning retention. These factors focus on the balance of time and role conflict necessary to continue serving and remaining involved in the VFSOs during the participant's lifecycle.

Participant Demographic Summary

In the semi-structured interview process, 13 participants shared their experiences as volunteer fire service members to understand why volunteer firefighters volunteer given work, family, and volunteering time demands. Specifically, what motivates an individual to volunteer in one of the most dangerous occupations in their community, and how do volunteer firefighters decide between work and family versus responding to emergency incidents or other activities of their VFSO?

The questionnaire asked eight demographic questions, including acknowledging consent to participate. The remaining seven questions asked the following demographics: age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, employment status, household income, and the number of years as an active volunteer firefighter. Fifteen participants completed the demographic questionnaire, with 13 participating in the interviews. The participants were all Caucasian males, except for one Caucasian female. Participants' ages ranged from the mid to late twenties to the early seventies.

Six participants represented the 45-54 group; four represented the 24-34 range, three in the 65 and older, and two in the 35-44 range.

Nine of the participants were married, while the balance were single. Eleven were employed as either part-time, full-time, or self-employed—the remaining listed other, with two being retired and one a stay-at-home father. The two retired participants and one stay-at-home father remain active in the fire service in support roles.

There were five participants whose income fell in the $50,001 to $100,000 range and five who fell into the $100,001 to $200,000 range. Two were in the $25,001 to $50,000 range and one over $200,000.

Six participants served actively in the fire service between 6 and 10 years, three in the 11-to-15-year range, two in the 16-to-20-year range, one in the 21-to-25-year range, one in the 26-to-30-year range, and two over 30 years. Each participant was at different stages of their lives and volunteer life cycle. All remained invested in volunteering but at varying levels of involvement.

The participants were unclear whether their communities understand the fire service delivery type to be a volunteer-type and the potential challenges the volunteer fire service faces. Participants based their responses on interactions with residents in their communities. Many residents were not aware that volunteers served them and others, who were, were supportive. Although supportive, aware community members did not translate into membership. Further study should include the community perspective.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

Demographic factors	Participants	Percent
Gender		
Male	14	93
Female	1	7
Age		
25-34	4	27
35-44	2	13
45-54	6	40
65 or older	3	20
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	15	100
Marital Status		
Married	9	60
Single	6	40
Employment		
Full-time	8	57
Part-time	1	7
Self-Employed	2	14
Retired/Other	3	21
Annual Household Income		
$25,001-$50,000	2	13
$50,001-$100,000	5	33
$100,001-$200,000	5	33
$200,000 or more	1	7
Prefer not to answer	2	13
Years Active		
6-10	6	40
11-15	3	20
16-20	2	13
21-25	1	7
26-30	1	7
30 or more	2	13

Note. N=15

Recruitment Factors including Volunteering, Motivation and Public Service Ethos

What motivates an individual to volunteer in one of the most dangerous occupations in their community?

Participants were asked, "why did you choose to join the volunteer fire service?" Participants' responses varied from being a legacy, having friends in-service, giving back to the community, a childhood goal, and time to give. Participants were not asked if they considered the risks or dangers associated with firefighting activities when they joined, nor did any participants offer insights to this in their response to why they joined.

Finding 1.1 Giving Back to the Community

The most common response to why individuals joined the volunteer fire service is to give back to the community. Participant's responses included "it was an opportunity to give back to the community," "you want to volunteer and give something back to the community," "I wanted to do something for the community," "I felt like I still had a little bit to give to the community," and "really just being part of something bigger for the community, the giving back to the community portion like I always thought that there was a piece of me that wanted to go into the military or some form of service," and "me being a volunteer I love giving back to the community."

Individuals in society will continue to want to give back to the community. Altruism, public service motivation, and ethos remain a factor in society.

Finding 1.2 Legacy

Legacy was the second most answered reason from participants for entering the fire service. Volunteer Firefighter 1 (VFF1) stated, "so the fire service has been in my family; my grandfather, my father, my stepfather were all members of the fire service." Other participants described following a parent, grandparent, or sibling as the impetus to join. They described joining via legacy as "it's a family thing," "I am a third-generation firefighter, my grandfather started in 1956 my dad in 1985, I started in 2009," "my brother was a volunteer firefighter at the

same time with a neighboring company, and he was part of their junior program, so both my other brother and I joined (Interview VFF13)."

In this context, as long as an existing family member is volunteering in the fire service, there remains an opportunity for legacy to continue. However, barriers exist that were not present in the past for this entranceway to stay viable. For example, work commitment may prevent an individual from following a family member. Lack of affordability to remain in the community may act as a barrier as well. VFSOs cannot rely on legacy, although it remains a path for entrance into the fire service.

Finding 1.3 Other Factors

Friends, time, and childhood goals were the remaining reasons individuals joined the volunteer fire service. These connections provided paths and continuity into VFSOs and remain viable. One participant described joining as "every boy's dream" and "lifetime goal (Interview VFF6)."

If legacy was not a path to the volunteer fire service, friendship was. VFF4 "felt the camaraderie like a brotherhood, which was very important," and VFF12 stated, "because it was fun to ride with a bunch of our friends."

Summary

The reasons individuals join the fire service vary. Giving back to the community and legacy paths remain feasible. However, the volunteer fire service cannot rely on these reasons to replenish the ranks. Traditional approaches need to be augmented to strengthen recruitment.

Retention Factors including Balance of Time, Role Conflict, and Decision-Making

How do volunteer firefighters decide between work and family versus responding to emergency incidents or other VFSO activities? Participants were asked several questions about

decision-making and prioritizing their time between volunteer activities with their VFSO and their families or work, including how they felt after making the decision and how their family or employer reacted. Questions included deciding between an important family or work commitment and a fire call or activity, processing the decision, how the decision made the participant feel, the reaction of the family or employer, and how the participant would handle a similar decision the next time. Furthermore, participants were asked if anything would help balance their family, work, and volunteer fire service obligations. Determining the number of hours a member gave to their VFSO was not discussed.

Finding 2.1 Deciding between an important family or work commitment and a fire call or activity

All the participants have had to decide between an important family function or work commitment and responding to a call or participating in a VFSO activity. Some participants were torn with the choice before them, while others were clearer and definitive. Factors that impacted the decision process included family or employer support, marital status, and type of emergency call.

Family, job, and fire service or job, family and fire service was the consensus factor in deciding whether to attend a fire service emergency call or other activity or family or work obligations. For many participants, this was clear. Extracts supporting this include: "although family is first, my job I guess at this point becomes second," with the caveat that the "fire service becomes first, especially when I know it's a confirmed fire or extrication or water rescue and I know someone's really in danger, versus an alarm call (Interview VFF12), "...I gave time to the fire company, to the detriment of time spent with my family. It's a hard thing to do; you never know when the call is going to come in, and you know, if you don't go, the fire company's going to be shorthanded (Interview VFF5).

Participants experienced conflict and frustration as to their obligations. According to Interview VFF8:

> "This is my first kid. I've never had to balance work, family, a baby, and then the firehouse on top of it; whereas I don't want to have to give up the firehouse because of the baby, but that being said, if I have to, obviously that's going to be the first to go and limit my time there because, obviously, my work pays my bills and then my family I can't say no to them it's got to be the firehouse so that'll limit the time for a little while." (Interview VFF8)

"The family kind of throws a wrench in things. I feel like it's definitely a lot harder to turn the pager on because I either hear it and can't necessarily go at the time" (Interview VFF13).

Finding 2.2 The decision process

Participants were influenced in their decision-making process. The process considers family or employer support, marital status, and type of emergency call. The type of emergency call is a factor as well. If the participant deemed a call a non-emergency such as an alarm system, they might not respond or, at minimum, delay their response. For example, VFF3 stated, "if it's wires, if it's an alarm, if it's something like that, I'm not going to go if it's a family function, but if it's one of the other more severe situations, then I go."

Some participants cited the inclusion of their family's in the decision-making process. VFF5 said he had "to think long and hard at times, and obviously, my wife asked to be part of that decision-making. And there were some things which obviously took priority over the fire company." "You only get so many birthdays and with kids and your grandparents and all that stuff " (Interview VFF8).

Work was also a factor in the decision-making process. Participants' focus on ensuring the ability to earn a living and pay their bills was a factor. The risk assessment of one participant was clear "basically, I don't leave work for fire calls. I can't. It's not worth risking my job or anything like that to run a fire" (Interview VFF8). Participants will impose a deadline when they do not respond to calls to ensure they arrive to work on time. "Between I work Monday through Friday 7:30 AM to 4 PM so anything before six o'clock in the morning I don't go because I don't want to risk my job" (Interview VFF11). This participant expressed it this way:

> "I stopped running called at midnight because I can't risk being late for work and potentially losing my job because of a call. I mean I need my job, I need to make my money, so I can pay my bills as much as I would love to run to that structure fire two o'clock in the morning, I have to make a decision that obviously my work is more important right now, and I can't risk or have any bad remarks on me as an employee." (Interview VFF8)

Conclusions

This chapter comprises the findings of the study analysis and connects the research back to the concept questions.

The decline in volunteer firefighters is real and impacts VFSOs ability to provide reliable and efficient fire protection and related emergency services to the communities it serves. Barriers identified in the literature review remain factors influencing the time and energy of individuals willing to volunteer. However, the study also exposed that volunteer firefighters have managed to balance their fire service activities with their personal and professional worlds through prioritization which influences their level of involvement throughout their member life cycle. VFSOs would be prudent to work more collaboratively with the individual recognizing where

the individual is at in their life when recruited and continuing if possible. A key theme to emerge from the study was the return on involvement, and the level of involvement begins as soon as the individual joins.

Volunteer firefighters manage their lives based on available time through prioritization. Participants identified several instances in which family or work will override any activity with their fire service obligations. The risk of loss of income or missing a significant family event such as a child's birthday or spousal anniversary factors into the decision-making process. Although some participants mentioned employer and family being sympathetic and supportive, there was a pause when answering how the family or employer reacted.

Participants appear to self-regulate as they progress in the fire service. Unlike career firefighters who train on the job and clock in and out for their shift, the effort to be a volunteer is quite substantial and, at times, can be moderately overwhelming. This effort may not translate to other organizations that rely on volunteer personnel.

Some participants joined in their late teens and early twenties, while others joined later in life. Some joined to follow family and friends' footsteps others because they wanted to give back to their community. Once recruited, some had time to be fully involved and committed to attending many calls (day and night), training, meetings, and ancillary activities. Others gave what time they had. All participants at some point had to make decisions as to what their level of involvement would be over time. Triggers included work, school, family (i.e., parenthood), and leadership issues. Some triggers took the participant away from the organization and community, and others remained in the community. Those remaining participants adjusted their level of involvement based on prioritizing what mattered most. Earning a paycheck was high on that list; therefore, participants who needed to be at work on time would limit their fire service

availability to hours when they were home from work leading up to an hour in the morning that they imposed as a deadline of unavailability. For example, one participant would not respond to calls after midnight, and another participant would not respond after 5 AM.

Understanding this, a VFSO could work with each individual to ensure they understood their availability and work within those constraints to maximize the participants' involvement when available to the VFSO. This requires effort from the VFSO from a volunteer management perspective. It starts at the recruitment stage and continues throughout the member's tenure with the VFSO. Working with the member is not one and done upon recruitment. It should be done in the context of an annual performance review found in career organizations of all fields. By sitting down with the member at the end of the year to review how involved they were and then looking ahead to the coming year. For example, a member who has maintained a high level of involvement has announced they are expecting a baby. The VFSO would want to understand how the participant's level of involvement might change up to and including at least the baby's first year after the pregnancy.

Volunteer firefighters are not convinced that the community is aware that they are serviced by a volunteer or combination fire service delivery model. Holmes et al. (2019 in O'Halloran & Davies, 2020) call attention to a general lack of awareness in the broader community about the reliance on volunteers for firefighting. If the community is indifferent, this may impact whether prospective volunteers will be recruited into the fire service.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Responses yielded a variety of reasons one becomes involved and why one remains engaged as a volunteer in the fire service. Some of these reasons are grounded in the literature, while others are not. While the literature speaks to time demands, a shift in societal demographics, and leadership, the study revealed some reasons. As constant comparative analysis progressed, the notion of return on involvement emerged. Return on involvement in the literature refers to consumerism. While this may be appropriate in the business field, it has application in the social sciences when considering an individual's return on involvement in the context of opportunity cost or sunk cost.

An individual who decides to volunteer, and continues to volunteer, must address what they get out of volunteering throughout their volunteer life cycle. Several participants joined when they were single or after their kids required as much attention when they were younger and more in need. The stage of their lives factored into their decision-making between family or the VFSO.

The result by which an individual becomes a volunteer firefighter depends on circumstances and influences in one's life. These circumstances and influences evolve throughout an individual's life experiences. The effect of family, friends, and teachers, for example, impact one's values system in an assortment of ways and at different junctures in one's life. Public service ethos is an expression of that impact for some at an early stage in life, while it may take years to manifest for others. Whether one entered the volunteer fire service earlier than others, sustaining in the service remains an individual's choice and reason(s). The same goes for those who choose to leave and their reason(s) to do so.

The fire service enjoys a long-standing tradition that often involves generations of families from a historical context. For example, a volunteer firefighter joined because his father was a member. The influence, specifically of family, impacts legacy volunteers. Whether it was a parent, a grandparent, sibling, or other family members, joining the fire service was the following event. It was a natural transition from hanging out at the station or participating in non-emergency activities for some. They may be second, third, and even fourth-generation volunteers. Yet, legacy members have their reason(s) for enduring or abandoning the fire service. Unfortunately, VFSOs cannot count on legacy recruitment. Children of current volunteer firefighters are not necessarily following in their parents' footsteps, nor can the VFSO count on members of their community to give their time as in the past (Edwards, 2010).

Besides legacy, other underlying factors include time demands, stringent training requirements, population shift, change in community dynamics, leadership issues within the VFSO, and a decline in civic responsibility. Leadership, culture, diversification, marketing, and other benefits are fundamental elements to support the effort of recruitment and retention to identify new strategies and opportunities (Edwards, 2010). Volunteer firefighters who consider benefits are not overly zealous when the return on their time investment or payment from a length of service award program is in the distant future and add no immediate value (Compton & Granito, 2002). The value of any VFSO depends on its people. The best way to safeguard its quality is to recruit and retain highly motivated and devoted individuals (Witt & Patton, 1999).

Volunteer firefighters also understand the time demands required to serve. There are no illusions. Demands vary across local VFSOs for training, response, meetings, and other activities such as fire prevention, community events, parades, etc. Requirements are within the control of

the VFSOs from the participants' perspective and are generally flexible but do not necessarily account for the individuals' time.

Managing and accounting for that time and ensuring minimum staffing for response coverage remains a challenge. VFSOs and municipalities may be exposed due to risks to firefighter safety and availability of mutual aid when called upon to meet the public's expectation of timely response and incident stabilization.

When considering volunteering, public service ethos, motivation, time commitment, and other factors, we think of what an individual gives or contributes more than what they receive in return... satisfaction, camaraderie, family, and friends, to name a few. This return on involvement is what fire service leadership must consider when recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. Each individual has unique reasons for joining the service or remaining in it. When they have reached diminishing returns on their involvement, they are most vulnerable to leaving the service. Their sunk cost has reached the limit they are willing to go. Unless the fire service works with the individual to accommodate what will keep them involved beyond the recruitment stage is critical to receive the maximum involvement from them while they are willing and able to contribute. This includes addressing causes of why volunteers abandon the fire service, including but not limited to poor leadership, poor management, time demands, and training requirements.

Volunteer fire service delivery organizations must find ways to keep people involved. For example, determining the return on involvement for the people they are recruiting, whether flexibility with time or other benefits that the VFSO may provide through legislative, regulatory, or local means.

The Return on Involvement (ROI) concept requires the engagement of the VFSO at the point of entry (recruitment) and through member retention. The VFSO should recognize that the

ROI for each member will fluctuate over time. Participants identified at the entry point were single, married with no children, or married, but children were independent. Full involvement may be realized at this stage of their service with the VFSO. The member is not tethered and has minimal outside obligations interfering with their involvement. Rigid VFSO requirements are not a barrier. The individual has time to attend the many hours of basic certification training to become a firefighter or, if already trained, to participate in VFSO training, meetings, and other activities. Their time limitations may be restricted to work or school and annual activities such as birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other milestone events.

Volunteer fire service organizations cannot let their guard down at this level of involvement. Periodic direct engagement with the volunteer to determine lifestyle changes should be ongoing to prepare for a shift on the involvement scale (see Figure 1). For example, a member announces they are expecting their first child. Full involvement may move to moderate involvement during the pregnancy, then to some involvement to no involvement once their baby is born. As the baby gets older, the level of involvement may reverse. How a VFSO plans for this with the member may be essential to retaining the member long-term and getting some availability from the member during the no to low involvement period.

The individual member defines how much an individual participates with the VFSO relative to balancing family, work, and other life pursuits and meeting the organization's requirements and level of involvement. The literature and findings identify that factors influencing involvement include family, work, school, other interests, personal needs, and goals. This author defines the levels of involvement as follows:

➢ No Involvement (NI): member has stopped attending VFSO emergency calls and activities.

- ➤ Some Involvement (SI): member participation is limited to minimum responses to calls, training, and meeting attendance.

- ➤ Moderate Involvement (MI): member participates in all activities when available.

- ➤ Full Involvement (FI): The member participates in all activities and makes themselves available when they are typically unavailable.

The levels will fluctuate over the members' volunteer life cycle from recruitment through retirement, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Levels of Involvement

Volunteer Life Cycle
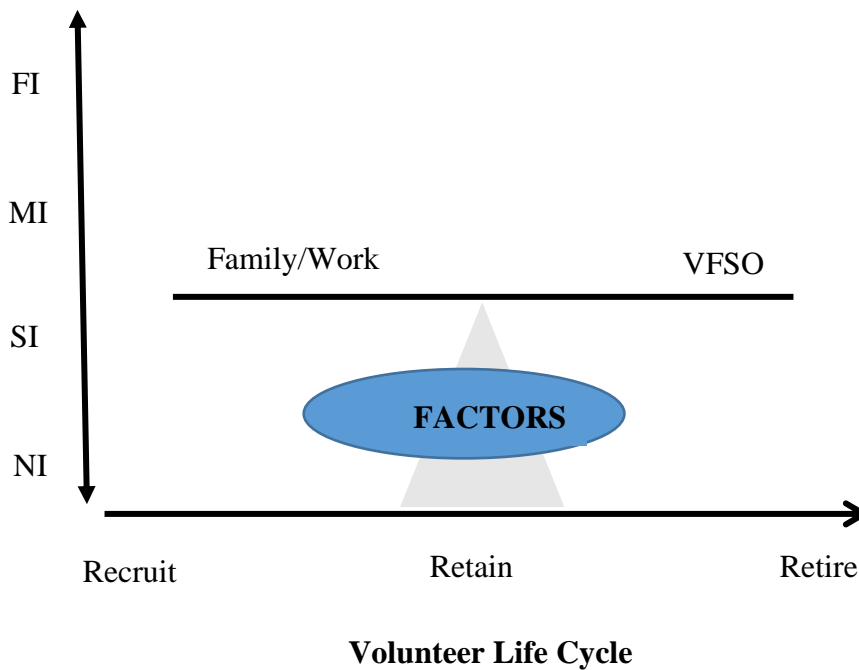
Individuals self-regulate their work-life volunteer balance based on various factors they experience throughout their volunteer life cycle. Prioritization and decision-making determine the level of involvement at those moments. The VFSO must work through engagement points during this cycle to ensure the return on involvement (ROI) is more than less involvement of the

volunteer firefighter. The engagement may require a more individual approach against rigid requirements, threatening the ROI. For example, a member who can provide support involvement but cannot make the response requirement may not be incentivized to attend the support activities if there is no benefit compared to a member who meets response requirements. These roles are essential to the day-to-day operations and mission of the VFSO but may be valued differently.

Factors already impacting the decline in volunteer firefighters are influencing participation and involvement. Therefore, VFSOs need to be mindful of issues affecting their members to address these declines. The days of simply having standards that apply to everybody, cultural issues within the department, such as family members who hold key positions, long-term chiefs, and administrative officers, all have a bearing on whether someone remains involved or not in some respects as well as the volume of training, family, life, and things of that nature.

The decline in volunteer firefighting should be a red flag to communities that receive services from VFSOs. The drop is not new, and it has been trending down for many years, as identified in Pennsylvania Senate 6 Report Pennsylvania (Senate, 2018) and other data (CPSE/ICMA, 2020; Evarts & Stein, 2020; NVFC, 2015; USFA, 2007; Senate of Pennsylvania, 2004, 2018). Previous research identified time demands, training requirements, other activities (e.g., fundraising), leadership, the lack of affordability to reside in a community, the community not understanding the type of service delivery it receives, and other factors. Traditional recruitment strategies continue but are not as effective as maybe other opportunities through innovation could be.

Return on Involvement from the VFSOs perspective is critical in recruitment and retention of human capital to ensure the organization's mission is achieved short-term on each

response and long-term for the viability of the VFSO. This perpetual succession requires a collaborative engaged long-term commitment from the VFSO, the local government, and the community. County, state, and the federal government must be included in the collaborative governance to ensure sustainability. Perpetual grants should not be relied on as the answer. At best, grants serve as a band-aid approach. Leaders must look at innovative ways than on the traditional reliance and expectation of the volunteer fire service. For many communities, the loss of the volunteer fire service will be financially devastating. This issue is not just a domestic issue but a global one. The time is now to slow or stop the decline.

Recommendations

Factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve, what motivates an individual to volunteer given the time demands of work, family, and volunteering in one of the most dangerous occupations in their community, and how volunteer firefighters decide between work and family versus responding to emergency incidents or other activities of their VFSO were explored and discussed in this study. Traditional recruitment and retention strategies may yield nominal results for some VFSOs and communities, while others struggle. Given the implications of the decline in volunteer firefighters and the cost to establish combination or paid fire services, the following applied and scholarly research recommendations should be considered. The applied recommendations focus on potential and current volunteer firefighters, VFSOs, and communities served by volunteer firefighters. Future scholarly research focus considers whether the dangerous nature of firefighting impacts the decision to volunteer, and on whether there is a relationship between leadership and retention; and the emerging themes of the return on involvement to the VFSO and the individual volunteer firefighter's level of involvement.

Recommendations to Potential and Current Volunteer Firefighters

There is no single formula, and balance is not equal for all individuals. Balance is about personal choices and distributing time and energy across important areas of the individual's life cycle. There is no right or wrong. When considering joining a VFSO, the individual must define what is important to them and prioritize from there. Balance will vary over time, and change is merited due to the individual's experience with the VFSO. The correct balance for a single person will be different when one has a partner, having children, starting a new career, or retiring. Recognizing factors such as unrealistic demands, unexpected circumstances, time constraints during their life cycle with the VFSO will allow a volunteer to consider time to unplug or "me time," family time, or time for work, from the VFSO even if it is one night per week or one weekend per month for example.

Recommendations to Volunteer Fire Service Organizations

Volunteer fire service organizations should consider how the individual prioritizes their time and be supportive from recruitment through retirement from the fire service. Working within the structure of requirements required by the organization, the VFSO should be as flexible as possible in finding alternative solutions in the management of its volunteers. Just as employees may feel trapped in a rigid system such as civil service, volunteers may feel trapped in a strict system to make specific minimum response and attendance requirements (Kettl, 2021). This may be a partial catch-22 regarding training, meeting attendance, and response. However, consideration should be given to the volunteer's lifestyle and point in their life cycle. For example, some participants joined in their late teens and early twenties, while others joined later in life. Some joined to follow family and friends' footsteps others because they wanted to give back to their community. Once recruited, some had time to be fully involved and committed to

attending many calls (day and night), training, meetings, and ancillary activities. Others gave

what time they had. All participants at some point had to make decisions as to what their level of

involvement would be over time. Triggers included work, school, family (e.g., parenthood),

leadership issues. Some triggers took the participant away from the organization and community,

and others remained in the community. Those remaining participants adjusted their level of

involvement based on prioritizing what mattered most. Earning a paycheck was high on that list;

therefore, participants who needed to be at work on time would limit their fire service

availability to hours when they were home from work leading up to an hour in the morning that

they imposed as a deadline of unavailability. For example, one participant would not respond to

calls after midnight, or another participant would not respond after 5 AM.

Understanding this, a VFSO could work with each individual to ensure they understood

their availability and work within those constraints to maximize the participant's involvement

when available to the VFSO. This requires effort from the VFSO from a volunteer management

perspective. It starts at the recruitment stage and continues throughout the member's tenure with

the VFSO. Working with the member is not one and done upon recruitment proposition. It

should be done in the context of an annual performance review found in career organizations of

all fields.

The VFSO should consider implementing an annual involvement or activity review

similar to a yearly performance review. This should coincide with longitudinal strategies to

determine what influences the member's life and how that may equate to involvement with the

fire service in that given year. Volunteer fire service organizations would be prudent to work

more collaboratively with the individual recognizing where the individual is at in their life when

recruited and continuing if possible. By continuing this process and engaging the volunteer, the VFSO is better positioned to manage the volunteer's total capacity of involvement over time.

Recommendations to Communities Served by Volunteer Firefighters

The participants were unclear whether their communities, including the elected officials, really understand the fire service delivery type to be a volunteer-type and the potential challenges the VFSO is facing, nor how this may impact the community financially. Participants based their responses on interactions with elected leaders and residents in their communities. Community members who were aware and supportive did not translate into membership. Considering this general lack of awareness, further research should include the community perspective.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is essential to navigate the relationship between members and VFSOs, recognizing that work-life balance is challenging for the volunteer firefighter as they manage full-time and part-time work schedules, families, and other commitments outside of the fire service. Volunteer fire service organization's involvement in member mentoring and monitoring is critical to its success in the volunteer fire service.

Leadership. This study exposed factors mentioned by the participants but requires further inquiry. For example, two participants, both former volunteers, discussed leadership as an issue. In response to a question to return to the local VFSO, one of them stated, "But on the other side of it to know the organization, the way that it's built today and the leaders that are there, it'd be very difficult mentally to go back." Although the participant works per diem serving another municipality, his hometown no longer benefits from his service. The other participant offered that the officers are good at management but poor at leadership, stating specifically: "I get the sense that our company was run very well. From a management perspective, like there was never

any hint of scandal, no one was stealing, the bills are paid. We had up-to-date equipment of the date certifications, but that's management that's not leadership. They're very different. There seemed to be no person in a leadership position." Leadership impacts are a known factor that should continue to be addressed, and VFSOs must recognize this in managing volunteer retention. Future research should focus on the leadership factor, particularly regarding retention.

Emerging Themes. The decline in volunteer firefighters is existent and impacts VFSOs ability to provide reliable and efficient fire protection and related emergency services to the communities it serves. Factors identified in the literature review remain, influencing the time and energy of individuals willing to volunteer. Research should continue to inform these factors, further impacting volunteers' efforts to balance their lives to persist as volunteers and understand other motives besides altruistic public service motivation to recruit more volunteers. In addition, research should be conducted relative to the non-answer of how dangerous the occupation of firefighting impacts the decision to volunteer.

The study also exposed that volunteer firefighters have managed to balance their fire service activities with their personal and professional worlds through prioritization which influences their involvement throughout their member life cycle. Furthermore, existing studies have considered the "life cycle of a volunteer" but lack a connection between the volunteer's level of involvement. Two key themes emerging from the study were the return on involvement to the VFSO and the individual's level of involvement, both beginning as soon as the individuals join. Future research should develop these themes further.

Summary

The volunteer fire service in the United States is experiencing a decline. The decline in volunteer firefighters should be a red flag to communities that receive services from VFSOs.

Time demands and changes in the family dynamics and work schedules constrain the time an individual has to volunteer. However, volunteer fire service organizations are not alone in providing important public services.

Volunteering has a long-established history in the United States in public service. Individuals volunteer in not-for-profit organizations, including government, community-based, and for-profit organizations. These organizations use volunteer resources in a variety of programs serving the public. The decline in volunteers should be a concern for all who rely on gratis human resources to achieve their missions. By understanding factors impacting volunteer firefighters and how they balance their daily lives, VFSOs, the communities they serve and other volunteer organizations will be in a better position to address opportunities to develop innovative recruitment and retention strategies that focus on the individual.

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Appendix A

IRB Notice Approval

IRB #: IRB-FY2022-8
Title: Understanding factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve.
Creation Date: 7-12-2021
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Christopher Schultz
Review Board: West Chester University Institutional Review Board
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

Key Study Contacts

Member		Role		Contact	
Member Angela Kline		**Role** Co-Principal Investigator		**Contact** AKline@wcupa.edu	
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Member Christopher Schultz		**Role** Primary Contact		**Contact** cs934423@wcupa.edu	

Default Report

Schultz Dissertation

October 6th 2021, 6:14 am MDT

Q_RecaptchaScore

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Q_RecaptchaScore	0.90	1.00	0.96	0.05	0.00	15

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines

Interview Guide

Name of Principal Investigator: Christopher Schultz

Name of Participant:

Place of Interview:

Date of Interview: *Time:*   **AM/PM**

Pre-Interview Script:

Hello, my name is Chris Schultz, and I am a Doctor of Public Administration student at West Chester University. I am researching the factors impacting work, life, and volunteer balance on volunteer firefighter's time commitments to serve. I am interested in your experiences as a volunteer firefighter. The purpose of the research is to understand if there is a gap between individuals who currently enter the service and those that stay in the service versus individuals that do not enter the service and those that leave to consider alternatives to traditional recruitment and retention strategies to slow the decrease and/or increase the ranks of volunteer firefighters. Your participation will involve this interview which will last approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. There is a possibility for follow up calls to clarify any information. The research has no known risks. This research will benefit me as I work to develop my dissertation which I hope will benefit the fire service community to find nontraditional ways to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters thus reducing stress from time demands on volunteers as well as cost savings to municipalities and fire service organizations who may need to hire part-time or full-time firefighters.

The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. You and/or your name will not be disclosed in any way.

Would it be all right if I recorded our interview? Saying no to the recording will not affect the interview. I will also be taking notes. You may choose not to answer any question or stop at any time.

Thank you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Schultz Dissertation

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Project Title: Understanding factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve.

Investigator(s): Christopher Schultz; Angela Kline

Project Overview: Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Christopher Schultz as part of his Doctoral Dissertation to understand the factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve in an effort to consider alternatives to traditional recruitment and retention strategies due to the decline in volunteer firefighters. Your participation will take about about 1 hour to complete a brief questionnaire, and complete an interview. There is a potential benefit by identifying alternative recruitment strategies to recruit new volunteers, and alternative retention strategies to keep current volunteers from leaving resulting in less stress and demand on current volunteers to you as the participant, and this research will help the development of new recruitment and retention models to increase and sustain volunteerism in the fire service, and mitigate human capital and financial pressure on the volunteer fire service organization and local governments they serve.

The research project is being done by Christopher Schultz as part of his Doctoral Dissertation to understand the factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve in an effort to consider alternatives to traditional recruitment and retention strategies due to the decline in volunteer firefighters. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Christopher Schultz any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study? Understanding the factors impacting volunteer firefighters' work, family, and volunteer balance to serve in an effort to consider alternatives to traditional

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