

Firefighters: Are They the Ones Who Need Saving?

As the siren blared, the fire trucks barrel down the highway in hopes of saving the beloved members of their community. At any given moment, firefighters face more traumatic scenes than imaginable. Many people do not realize the toll these scenes take on an individual's mental health, and luckily, a vast majority of people do not face them in their lifetime. For others, they see these scenes everyday. The mental trauma these scenes pose on firefighters are often experiences these brave men and women spend a lifetime dealing with. Regardless of professional help or other methods of emotional efforts of healing, the scenes they see ultimately leads to various amounts of depression or stress, which leads to suicide or suicidal thoughts. This plague torments many first responders, and it is important for these brave men and women to find ways to cope in order to deal with their traumatizing mental experiences.

When the brave firefighters get called, they know not what is ahead. That is something the general public finds difficult, but for these firefighters, this is an everyday experience. Not knowing what is happening next, often causes firefighters to show symptoms of depression because of the constant sense of anxiety. According to *Fire Engineering*, depression rates found in firefighters were found to be five times higher than the rates in the regular civilization population. (Wilson, 1) Anxiety plagues many individuals around the world, but it is an everyday experience for firefighters. Without proper ways to cope with the repercussions of anxiety and depression, many other, commonly worse, emotional-related illnesses arise.

In addition to depression because of anxiety, the overall stress of the job is enough to inflict many mental issues upon an individual. Many people handle stress on their own by doing everyday chores, keeping their minds busy with projects, or spending time with their loved ones. For firefighters specifically, these options are not available because of their long work schedules and on-call responsibilities. In many instances, this takes a toll on firefighters, and many studies show a spike in the number of firefighters resorting to drinking in order to cope. A study, outlined in “Firefighters and Addiction” by *Drug Rehab*, found that fourteen percent of firefighters participated in hazardous drinking, and fifty-eight percent participated in binge drinking. (Tagliareni, 1) Not only is this a dangerous coping mechanism, but the individuals do not solve their problems; it simply aids in forgetting the experiences witnessed throughout their shifts.

Likewise, the experiences firefighters witness cause them to ultimately experience many of the symptoms of mental deprivation in many different magnitudes. If any of these symptoms become experienced at the same time, any person expects to possess mental issues. In 2019, deaths by suicides in firefighters constituted thirty percent more deaths than the ones in the line of duty, according to *Fire Engineering*. (Wilson, 1) For firefighters, suicide, or suicidal thoughts, commonly occur throughout the industry. For many, the resources for help are available, but it is often frowned upon given the profession. Given that only forty percent of all suicides were reported in 2019, according to *Fire Engineering*, this proves few firefighters seek help before it is too late. (Wilson, 1)

In order to overcome this issue, ways to help are available; coincidentally, a firefighter overcomes this issue with a great support system, such as friends, family, and coworkers. However, the first step in helping firefighters is to look for the warning signs. These signs are

substance abuse, isolation from others, extreme mood swings, and talking about being trapped and wanting to commit suicide. The second step is the final step, talk to them and get them the help they need. Finding the proper help is crucial for firefighters personal health because mis-assigning the proper aid, makes their situations worse, increasing their symptoms. The way firefighters deserve to be remembered is not by the horrible scenes they see, but by the outcomes, the people they save. As a veteran firefighter reported in “Silent Suffering: Firefighting and Depression” once said, “The most challenging part of the job is seeing things the human minds were not designed to see. That is the most frustrating and mentally challenging thing about being a firefighter.” (Staff, 1) This calls for new outlets for firefighters to find the help they need to continue to serve the community. These important members of society are crucial to ensuring a safe community for everyone because in the moment of crisis, these are the first people there to help. Therefore, instead of waiting on them to save the members of the community, it is time for the members of the community to stand up to save the firefighters.

Works Cited

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