



## The Work-Related Stress among Members of Integrated Rescue Service and Influence of this Stress to Couple Relationship

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### Abstract

*Integrated rescue system members (firefighters, police officers, and rescue workers) are affected by specific stress factors for example: intercourse with death and human suffering, health damage, or feelings of helplessness [1]. Their work is usually psychologically, physically and emotionally demanding and they must work in shifts [2]. It can affect couples and family relationships. A working stress can be transferred to family members. Following this, as more than 50% of marriage end with divorce, it is particularly important to determine how much the performance in profession can affect family stability [3]. Unfortunately, not only in the Czech Republic, the issue of the partner life of IZS members has been given very little attention [1]. However, with regards to occupational health and life-safety workloads and increased work-related stress, it would be advisable to prepare IRS members and their partners for this situation [4]. Using effective coping strategies, it could have a considerable positive impact on partners' life, but also on the work performance of both partners as well [2]. Of course there are also positive impacts on the whole society, because society needs this professions and its members.*

**Keywords:** *working distress, transfer of stress, couple relationships, integrated rescue system, IRS;*

### 1 Introduction

Several studies reports on the context of the two-way influence on the performance of the profession and on the partnership or family cohabitation [5, 6, 7]. There does not seem to be any reason why this connection should not be expected in assisting professions (firefighters, doctors, rescue workers, nurses, police officers ...) [3], following the number of divorce marriages (reported more than 50%), point out that one of the aspects affecting family stability may be the performance of the profession. Unfortunately, there was a deficiency in research into the partner life of members of the helping professions, despite the fact that these are very important circumstances influencing the performance and employment of workers responsible for the safety, health and life of citizens [8, 9, 10]. The aim of this paper is to outline the psychological and sociological specifics stemming from the performance of the profession within the integrated rescue system (referred to as IRS). However, it is obvious that even the specific background of partner cohabitation of IRS members can lead to common partner conflicts. Deepening knowledge on this topic can appropriately influence the education and training of newly-arrived members and staff.

### 2 Specifications of individual individuals in the field of IRS

Members of IRS are exposed to a usual work-related stress. But we have to focus on specific factors of their works whose can determine their working self-efficiency and couple relationship too [1, 11]. Factor analysis of coping with the stress after the intervention discovered four basic strategies: seeking of meaning; mastery through individual action); regaining mastery through interpersonal action and philosophical self-contemplation [12].

#### 2.1 Police

Police work is generally considered one of the most stressful e.g. [10]. Due to their work, policemen are often more suspicious and alert, generally less likely to be distrustful of people and their motives. They are also more cynical and their partners often feel "as if interrogated" [13, 14]. Police officers are more likely to experience stress: irritability/anguish; greater isolation from the family (spends more time without her); lower engagement in family events; more often they have unsatisfactory marriages [15]. Many police officers tend to create "intensive zone protection" around their people - trying to keep them away from their experience at work. Sometimes, when they ask for support from a partner, they suddenly pull back and do not want to talk about it. However, this approach may negatively affect



marriage [16]. In addition, it has been found that policeman suffering PTSD also affect their partners and they may also suffer more often from psychological problems and more often from domestic violence [17]. The impact of police work on the family is generally understood to be negative. Severe negative factors are perceived: shift work, long working hours, holiday cancellation. Conversely, no impact has been identified: risk/dangers of work, work with people of the opposite sex [18]. As a result of it, the police officers should be systematically prepared to control their emotions and how to communicate their negative experiences of work to their partners, as evidenced by studies [19, 20]. If superiors provided more work-emotional support to police officers, they showed lower impacts of work-related stress and emotional strain, as well as better functioning in family and partners life [21].

## 2.2 Firefighters

It is evident that in the profession of firefighter there is presence of concrete specifics e.g. contact with human misfortune, health and life injuries etc. Therefore, the firefighters may suffer from PTSP [22]. There is no evidence that the male firefighters would divorce more often than the rest of the male population. However, this does not apply to female firefighters with more than three times the prevalence of divorce in the US than for other women in the population [23]. In addition, it appears that firefighters tend more often to commit the suicide or have the suicidal thoughts. These factors are appeared to be the most threatening: lower position in the hierarchy of firefighters, shorter length of practice, membership of voluntary fire brigade units, experience of interference with the suicide attack or death, and experience of active military service [24]. On the other hand, the more senior firefighters are claiming they don't feel that strong social support (they don't feel appreciated and supported by their surroundings) and have a lower perceived personal efficiency [25]. Women practicing the profession of firefighters involved in suicide also show more severe psychiatric symptoms and are at increased risk of their own suicide (compared with colleagues without exposure) [26]. It is rather probable that one of the important factors for the presence of the suicidal thoughts and behaviour is increased level of alcohol consumption (to which may the firefighters tend to) [27].

The consequences of performing the profession must then be balanced by their partners. The most frequent threatening aspects were: shifts and different working hours and their impact on the family; transferring experiences from traumatic and dangerous situations to the family; a social atmosphere linked to firefighting [28]. The marriage may be very important for the firefighters as the married firefighters tend less to alcoholism and depression [23].

## 2.3 Rescue workers/paramedics

Rescue workers were identified to be the high risk group for PTSP and other psychiatric symptoms linked with trauma because of the unique requirements for their work. [29, 30, 31, 32]. Rescue workers are daily exposed to actions that include human pain and suffering. They are very often the witnesses of violence caused by one person on the other. Even though they are used to these situations, sometimes they are, under the circumstances, led to create the connection with the victim or his /her family. If it happens, the rescue workers have the increased level of traumatic stress [33]. This could be one of the reasons for which, rescuers can also appreciate the availability of professional emotional support through their intervention [34]. It should be mentioned that under the influence of acute stress, rescue workers may carry out mistakes in investigations, care provision and dossier completion [35, 36].

One of the strategies how to cope with the stress is emotional insensitivity– filtering emotions and focusing on cognitive aspects of work [33]. However, this could lead to negative effects in marriage, as the result may be lack of interest, separation, emotional unavailability, or reduced ability and willingness of parents to interact with their children [37].

## 3 Conclusion

The high risk of a profession of a police officer, rescue worker, or firefighter may even increase the negative impact on the family. These people are put into an extreme situations and have to cope with very different physical, mental and emotional burden than the other profession do. It is hard to assume, that it is always possible to manage the traps resulting from the exercise of their profession without psychological and emotional stress even though they are carefully selected and trained. Despite the often high efforts of their members, these stressors spill over into family life. The stressor and support factors in the IRS family members should be given more attention. Find proven and functional solutions for couples (families) that have overcome professional trauma, gain information



about relationship development, and help to prepare or inform young couples and families to ensure their care and work-life balance.

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