



The mental health of Australian career and volunteer firefighters

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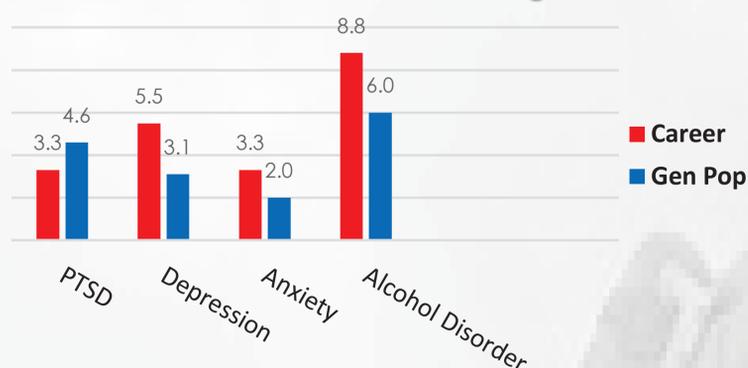
Research questions

What is the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse disorders (AUD) in career and volunteer firefighters, and what individual, operational and organisational factors contributed to and protected from their development?

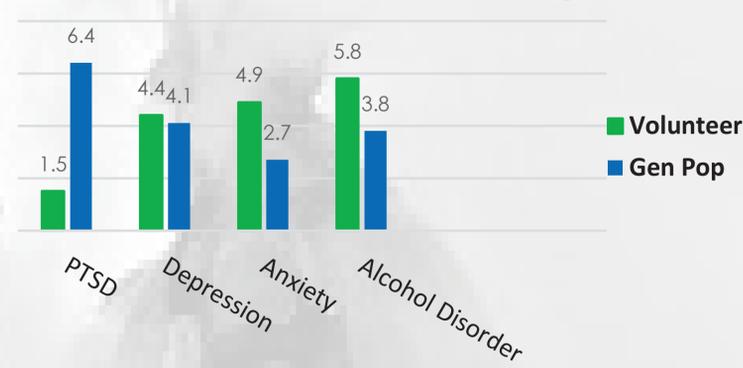
RESEARCH DESIGN

A prospective design was chosen to best address the aims, questions and hypotheses for this study, and incorporated the completion of an on-line, self-report survey at baseline and follow-up, 12-months apart, as well as a clinical interview conducted with a sample of participants who completed the survey.

Mental health prevalence rates (percentages) for career firefighters



Mental health prevalence rates (percentages) for volunteer firefighters



Note: Career firefighters were compared with male general population rates (Slade et al, 2009)

MENTAL HEALTH PREVALENCE

There was no significant difference in the rates for PTSD, depression, anxiety, or alcohol use disorder between the career firefighters and the general population. However, volunteer firefighters had a lower rate of PTSD, but higher rates of anxiety and alcohol use disorder than the general population.

FINDINGS AND RESEARCH USEFULNESS

1. Resilience of the career firefighter participants' mental health in comparison with the general population
2. Higher rates of anxiety and alcohol use disorder in the volunteer firefighter participants
3. Evidence of different patterns of and contributing factors to mental health disorders between the career and volunteer firefighters and the need for independent research to increase our understanding of the differences
4. Evidence of the persistence of mental health symptoms and the need for regular monitoring and assessment to identify and treat them as early as possible
5. Career firefighters' high job satisfaction related to the routine operational characteristics inherent in their role protected them against the development of symptoms of PTSD, depression and anxiety
6. Confirmation of the impact of exposure to PTEs on symptoms of PTSD and depression in the career firefighters and PTSD in the volunteer firefighters and the need for fire services to monitor PTE exposure

END USER STATEMENTS

'I believe what you are proposing will be of great use to our industry ... ACT Fire and Rescue would be very keen to be involved in your study.'

Paul Swain AFSM Chief Officer ACT Fire and Rescue

'AFAC can see great value in this project and are very supportive and willing to be consulted as required.'

Stuart Ellis AM CEO AFAC