

MARRIAGE, CHILDREN, AND THE FIREMAN'S WIFE:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A DISSERTATION

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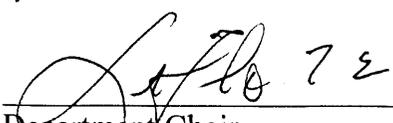
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kim L. Bonneau entitled "Marriage, Children, and the Fireman's Wife: A Qualitative Study." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family Therapy.


Linda J. Brock, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:




Department Chair

Accepted:


Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memories of my grandmothers,
Rosa Saenz Armendariz and Ernestina Campos Zelaya,
and to the memory of my mother,
Maria Teresa Zelaya Armendariz:
Strong creative women who modeled courage, resilience, and humor.

Dedicated also to my children,
Lisa, Robert, and Paul;
Who never wavered in loving encouragement and support
of all my educational endeavors.

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I wish to thank the women who so generously volunteered for this research project. They permitted me to share in their laughter, sorrows, and concerns. I have nothing but the greatest admiration for wives who knowingly and unselfishly share their lives living with men who engage in the dangerous profession of firefighting.

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In a special way I want to thank Dr. Linda Ladd who, at a crucial moment in my undertaking as a researcher, gave me words of understanding that made the arduous process appear do-able after all. I wish also to thank my Irish son, Michael, who with his usual enthusiasm and energy contacted the wives of his firefighter buddies for this project. He and his wife generously took me in, housed, and fed me during the period I was busily interviewing firefighter wives out-of-state. Finally, I wish to thank my family, especially my son, Paul, and my friends who never wavered in their belief that I would complete this journey.

ABSTRACT

KIM L. BONNEAU

MARRIAGE, CHILDREN, AND THE FIREMAN'S WIFE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

MAY 2010

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how a fireman's wife experienced her marriage in terms of marital quality and her perception of parenting. A phenomenological perspective guided the research in order to capture the lived experiences of women married to firefighters (FF). Participants' experiences were viewed through the theoretical lens of family stress theory.

Participants (N=15) were recruited from three different states: five each from Texas, Illinois, and Alaska. Ten of the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face. Those from Alaska were conducted by speaker phone. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was asked to reply to two statements: Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter. Tell me about your experiences raising children as the wife of a firefighter. Four major themes emerged from the data: 1. Marriage to a firefighter is different, 2. creating support systems, 3. coping with special stressors, and 4. managing anxieties about husband's job-related situations. Wives of firemen managed stressful situations and enhanced marital quality by changing the subjective meaning of the stressor, accepting the role of firefighter's wife with all its attendant concerns, and ascribing positive values to the husband's firefighting career.

Wives relied on support systems of family, other FF wives, and the “brotherhood” of firefighters to help with the stress of raising children when husbands were on shift duty.

Selected participant responses to illustrate themes are included in the findings. The research findings were discussed and conclusions were made about the findings. Limitations of the research were noted as well as suggestions for future research. Suggestions for the practice of marital and family therapy for distressed couples in the firefighting community were offered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
COPYRIGHT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xi
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Statement of Purpose.....	2
Research Questions	2
Research Lens.....	3
Family Theoretical Frameworks	3
Definitions	4
Assumptions	5
Delimitations	6
Person of the Researcher	6
Summary	7
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	9
Couple Characteristics.....	9
Firefighters	12
Firefighters' Wives.....	13
Research Lens.....	16
Family Theoretical Frameworks	16
Narrative	17
The Need for Research	17
Summary	19

III. METHODOLOGY	20
Research Design	20
Data Collection	22
Research Questions	22
Interview Questions	23
Participants	23
Sampling Procedures	24
Protection of Human Participants	25
Interview Procedures	26
Pilot Study	29
Treatment of Data	30
Data Analysis Procedures	30
Person of the Researcher	31
Credibility	32
Ethical Considerations	33
Summary	34
IV. RESULTS	36
Sample Description	36
Findings	43
Marriage to a Firefighter is Different	44
Depending on Support Systems	50
Coping with Special Stressors	52
Managing Anxieties about Husband’s Job-Related Situations	57
Other Findings	63
Summary	66
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	68
Discussion	68
Marriage to a Firefighter is Different	69
Depending on Support Systems	72
Coping with Special Stressors	73
Managing Anxieties about Husband’s Job-Related Situations	76
Other Findings	78
Conclusions	78
Limitations	79
Implications	81

Recommendations for Future Research	82
Summary	83
REFERENCES	84
APPENDICES	
A. Recruitment Flyer	92
B. Recruitment Process Script.....	94
C. Consent Form.....	97
D. Interview Protocol	101
E. Demographic Information.....	105
F. Counseling Referral Lists for Women of Texas, Illinois, and Alaska	107
G. Research Model	112
H. IRB Approval Letter.....	114

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Participant's Study Number, Residence, Age, Race, and Religion.....	39
2. Participant's Occupation, Education, and Family Income	40
3. Participant's Number of Years Married, Prior Marriages, and Number of Children.....	41
4. Participant Husband's Rank, Years of Active Duty, and Firefighter (FF) Family History	42

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the American Community Survey of 2005-2007 there were 1,625, 512 firefighters, male and female, in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau American Fact Finder). Of those firefighters, it may be assumed that the majority were married or in relationships with significant others (Rogers & May, 2003). However, despite the vast amount of anecdotal and research literature written by and about firefighters and their jobs, little has been written by and about the wives of these professional first responders. “[Whereas] support of family is paramount to reducing the impact of highly stressful work . . . [and] is a primary factor in mediating distress, almost no attention has been paid to families of firefighters” (Regehr, Dimitropoulos, Bright, George, & Henderson, 2005, pp. 424, 431).

Statement of the Problem

Wives of firefighters have been neglected in social science research studies. As firefighters are highly visible in the public eye due to their often dangerous and life-threatening jobs of fire abatement, search and rescue, and first response during natural and manmade disasters; they have been the focus of social science and statistical research studies. Stress levels, trauma-related symptoms (Beaton, Murphy, Johnson, Pike, & Corneil, 1998; Brown, Mulhern, & Joseph, 2002; Bryant & Guthrie, 2005; Bryant & Harvey, 1996; Del Ben, Scotti, Chen, & Fortson, 2006; Harris, Baloglu, & Stacks, 2002; Lourel, Abdellaoui, Chevaleyre, Paltrier & Gana, 2008; Smith, Petruzello, Chludzinski,

Reeds, & Woods, 2005) coping behaviors (Cowman, Ferrari, & Liao-Troth, 2004; North et al., 2002), and resilience (Freedman, 2004) of active-duty firemen have been explored.

However, minimal research (Regehr et al., 2005), counseling research (Kirschman, 2004; Matsakis, 2005) and anecdotal (Farren, 2005; Kisonas, 2004) literature has been written concerning the impact of the firefighters' often dangerous profession on his wife. An Associated Press interview by Kisonas and an outcome study by Regehr et al. suggested relationship disruption between parents, and parent and child, occurred after traumatic incidents were experienced by the firefighter. Discord also occurred due to the nature of shift work necessitated by the job (Regehr et al.).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how a fireman's wife experienced her marriage in terms of marital quality and her perception of parenting. A phenomenological perspective was used.

Research Questions

The lived experiences of women who are wives of firefighters have been neglected in research studies. The following research questions were explored:

Research Question 1. How does a fireman's wife experience her marriage?

Research Question 2. How does a fireman's wife experience parenting?

Interview questions permitted each participant to begin the interview at any point at which she felt comfortable. The statements were the following:

Interview Statement 1: Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter.

Interview Statement 2: Tell me about your experiences raising children as the wife of a firefighter.

Research Lens

A phenomenological approach was employed as an empirical framework for this research study. Phenomenology is the study of conscious experience from a subjective point of view (Leonard, 1994; Smith, 2005). It addresses the meanings given to human experience, that is, the significance of events, time, the self, and others in social interactions as they are experienced in the real world. (Creswell, 2003; McCoy, 1981; Schwandt, 2003; Smith). Phenomenology addressed the meanings a wife gave to her husband's role and behaviors as spouse, parent, and professional firefighter. Phenomenology also addressed the meanings a wife gave to her own role and behaviors as a firefighter's partner, a parent, a caregiver, and a wage-earner. Phenomenology addressed the meanings wives gave to the daily lived reality of possible death or injury of a loved one.

Family Theoretical Frameworks

The stresses experienced by firefighters and their families as a result of their profession fit well within the conceptual framework of family stress theory. Hill (1958) conceptualized family stress theory through the ABCX crisis model in which "A (the stressor event) – interacting with B (the family's crisis meeting resources) – interacting with C (the definition the family makes of the event) – produce X (the crisis)" (as cited in McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, p. 8). Family stress theory proposes that multiple factors; social, psychological, and intrafamilial, interact with each other to produce family crisis.

Unresolved accumulated stress may result in increased vulnerability to physiological, emotional, or relational breakdown (Bryant & Harvey, 1996; Matsakis, 2005)). By its very nature, a firefighter's job is subject to stressors that negatively impact his wife, marital quality, and parent-child relationships (Voydanoff, 2004). Therefore, family stress theory served as a foundation for this research.

The participants in the study were allowed to speak freely of their lives. Co-constructed narrative, or storytelling, is an important component of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is through storytelling that human beings convey information to each other about themselves, their culture, and their lives. Narrative storytelling conveys to the researcher how social reality and everyday life is created in conversation and interaction (Schwandt, 2003).

Definitions

Several terms idiosyncratic to this study were operationally defined for purposes of clarification:

First Responder: A person whose job it is to be first at the scene of an emergency and through special training, alleviate or mitigate the negative impact of the emergency.

Fireman/Firefighter (FF): A first responder to fires and fire emergencies as well as to other incidents of trauma.

Firefighter/paramedic: A career fireman who rides the fire department ambulance and is trained as a paramedic. Presently fire academies train firemen as paramedics or emergency medical technicians (EMT) either before or after their fire training. For purposes of this study, firefighter or fireman refers to firefighter/paramedic.

Post-traumatic Stress Reaction: A negative emotional, physiological, or mental response to an event that occurs after the precipitating event has resolved (Bryant & Guthrie, 2005).

Critical Incident: Exposure to personal loss or injury, traumatic stimuli, mission failure, or human error. Also refers to unrelenting deployment to traumatic situations, excessive media attention, and contact with dead or severely injured children (Harris et al., 2002).

Ritual: Actions and words that serve to commemorate an event or mark life transitions. Also used to confer or ask for spiritual protection as in a prayer or dance ritual.

Couple: Two heterosexual individuals, male and female, who are married to each other.

Marital Quality: Consists of three components: activities with spouse, marital disagreements, and marital happiness (Voydanoff, 2004).

Marital Happiness/Marital Satisfaction: Subjective attitude reflecting positive or negative feelings about marriage (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004; Voydanoff, 2004).

Spillover: Subjective response in one domain, such as work, that affects responses in another domain, such as marital relationship (Rogers & May, 2003).

Stressor: An actual or perceived event that has the potential of producing change in the family social system (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

Assumptions

It was assumed that:

1. Wives of firefighters responded to stress in a manner that was different for each wife.
2. Wives of firefighters adapted to stress in a manner that was unique to each wife's social and family background.

3. Children of firefighters had either positive or negative responses to their father's job depending on the child's age.
4. The researcher bracketed her experience as a wife, mother, and family therapist and assumed the role of researcher/participant.

Delimitations

In qualitative research, delimitations are used to narrow the scale or range of a research study (Creswell, 2003). This study was delimited to a particular population, firefighters, and involved a specific member of that population, wives of firefighters.

1. As the majority of firefighters are heterosexual males, only wives currently living with their spouses were interviewed.
2. Participants were at least 25 years of age.
3. Participants were married for at least five years.
4. All participants had children.
5. Husbands had been active-duty firefighters for at least two years.
6. Husbands were career firemen.
7. Effects of fathers' job on children were based on mothers' perceptions.
8. Participation in the research study was voluntary.

Person of the Researcher

At the core of the phenomenological qualitative interview is the establishment of a human-to-human relationship with participants (Hersht, Massicotte, & Bernstein, 2007; Madriz, 2003). There was a desire on the part of the researcher to hear and comprehend the story (Fontana & Frey, 2003) of a participant's experience of being a firefighter's

wife. She bracketed her life experiences in order to reduce researcher bias as much as possible.

The researcher has no history of firefighting in her family. However, she has been a wife and mother who has experienced being alone with her small children when her spouse was on extended business trips. The researcher has also worked in the emergency room (E.R.) of various hospitals and has worked with patients of trauma brought into the E.R. by firefighters. The researcher is a family therapist and has listened to the stories of couples who are struggling with the demands of the professional firefighter's job.

In researching the literature of firefighting the researcher realized that much had been written of the firefighter's struggles with the responsibilities and stresses of his chosen profession, but a minimal amount of research had been devoted to the wife's struggles with her unique responsibilities and stresses as the wife of a firefighter. As a family therapist, the researcher has learned to listen fully and with empathy to the stories of her clients. Consequently, she was able to listen fully and with empathy to the stories firefighters' wives shared with her.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how a fireman's wife experienced her marriage in terms of marital quality and her perception of parenting. Research and interview questions were stated and terms related to firefighting and marital quality, as used in this study, were defined. Assumptions about the participant sample were based on the particular nature of the study and delimitations were recognized as

necessary in order to both clarify and add credibility to the research results.

Phenomenology and life stress theory were the theoretical bases for the study

The findings from this study add to the research literature concerning couples' marital quality as perceived by wives. It serves as a resource for family therapists and other mental health professionals involved with couples. The researcher bracketed her life experiences as wife, mother, health care worker, and family therapist in order to more fully hear the story of participant wives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research literature on the stresses and strains of the firefighter's job are many. However, marital satisfaction studies as related to the wives of men in the firefighting profession have been minimal. In this chapter marital quality, as indicative of the marital relationship, was discussed. Included in the discussion were marital characteristics and marital interactional processes as indicators of marital quality, that is, activities with spouse, marital disagreements, and marital happiness. Characteristics of firefighters and the firefighting profession were described. Research related to the participant population, wives of firefighters, was explored.

The theoretical framework guiding the research consisted of phenomenology and family stress theory. Phenomenology is a system of interpretation that explores the meanings humans give to the lived context of their behavior and relationships (McCoy, 1981; Wagner, 1983). Hill (1958) proposed that multiple factors; social, emotional, and psychological, interacted with each other to produce family crisis (as cited in McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Narrative storytelling conveys to the listener how reality is interpreted and experienced (Schwandt, 2003) by research participants.

Couple Characteristics

Voydanoff (2004) found there were three components of marital quality: activities with spouse, marital disagreements, and marital happiness. Craddock (1991) noted positive correlations between marital happiness and financial stability, shared activities,

the presence of children, and the sharing of household tasks (as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). According to Kalmijn (1999), the quality of marriage is enhanced when the father is involved in child-rearing. “[It] appears [that] wives are more satisfied with their marriages when they don’t need to carry the entire burden of childrearing [*sic*] by themselves” (p. 420). Research by Rosen-Grandon et al. found the most important characteristics of marital satisfaction were “respect, forgiveness, support and sensitivity” (p.65). Loyalty to the marital relationship system was also found to be characteristic of marital satisfaction. Research outcomes by Rosen-Grandon et al. indicated that characteristics of a loving relationship were not sufficient to achieve marital happiness. The presence of marital characteristics and marital interactional processes were both important in measuring marital satisfaction.

Whereas a firefighter’s wife may have positive marital characteristics as indicated by Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004), she may not be able to rely on the interactional marital processes of shared activities, household tasking, and child-rearing in order to achieve a sense of marital satisfaction. By its very nature, the firefighter’s profession is not conducive to shared marital activities. The partner of the firefighter may not count on unequivocal loyalty to her family as her spouse often considers his firefighting community as a second or even the primary family unit (Farren, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Matsakis, 2005; Regehr et al., 2005)

Activities with a spouse may be limited by a husband’s long work hours as he is restricted in his physical and emotional availability to his partner. Long work hours were predictive of decreased marital satisfaction due to discrepancies in relationship quality,

shared household tasking, and child care (Voydanoff, 2004; Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005). Short work hours may be least likely to provide economic resources that enhance marital quality. Conversely, the additional family time provided by shorter work hours may enhance marital quality. Mothers may benefit from a partner's shorter work hours as resources gained in time together and co-parenting (Voydanoff). Wives who experienced job loss through retirement, quitting, lay-offs, or being fired, experienced increased levels of marital satisfaction and decreased levels of marital conflict (Faulkner et al.).

In terms of job satisfaction, flexible work hours in which the worker can exercise discretion and autonomy was an important factor in work and marital satisfaction according to Costa, Sartori, and Akerstedt (2006). Variability that is subject to employer control and discretion was associated with impaired health and well-being. Shift and night work also had a significant negative effect on marital quality as job variability and time pressure affected sleep, digestion, cardiac problems, individual stress, and activities with family (Costa et al.).

Rogers and May (2003) found that marital quality and job satisfaction were related and marital quality was the more influential domain. There was considerable spillover from marital satisfaction to increased job satisfaction and marital conflict spilled over to decreased job satisfaction. Faulkner et al. (2005) reported relationship inequality, as experienced by wives, led to increased levels of marital conflict especially by employed wives who felt they worked extra shifts at home. Negative spillover from husband's job to negative marital satisfaction was linked to economic strain or wives'

perception of relationship inequality due to unequal division of household labor, childcare, and fewer activities spent together (Faulkner et al.; Voydanoff, 2004).

According to Voydanoff (2004), marital happiness is subjective and an individual attitude reflecting positive or negative attitudes about marriage. Voydanoff found that mothers' job satisfaction was positively related to marital happiness. Community satisfaction, i.e., contentment with home, neighborhood, and city or town, was positively related to activities with spouse and marital satisfaction for both mothers and fathers.

Firefighters

In 2005-2007 there were 1,625,512 firefighters in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau American Fact Finder). Firefighters are typically first responders at incidents that require quick action, clear thinking, strength, agility, and endurance (Smith et al., 2005). The job requires the ability to suppress fires, provide emergency medical care, direct and participate in rescue efforts, manage crowd control, and participate in body recovery (Del Ben et al., 2006; North et al., 2002). As first responders, firefighters are generally the first rescue personnel at structural fires, wildland and brush fires, floods, tornados, vehicular accidents, plane crashes, and bombings. These critical incidents, if occurring in rapid succession or are unrelenting in scope of disaster, can create emotional, psychological, and physiological stress for firefighters (Bryant & Harvey, 1996; Del Ben et al.; Freedman, 2004; Harris et al., 2002; Kirschman, 2004; Lourel et al., 2008; North et al.; Regehr et al., 2005).

The nature of the firefighters' job requires that at times he be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In order to be available on a moment's notice, firefighters

typically work 24, 48, or 72 hours of shift duty at the fire station. They may be at the fire station five days on and five days off, or some similar arrangement (Farren, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Kisonas, 2004; Matsakis, 2005; Regehr et al., 2005). Unlike many jobs, the firefighter may be needed in cities, towns, or rural areas not in his own district, but that have been overwhelmed by a large disaster (Farren; Freedman, 2004; Kirschman).

Because of the intense nature of the job, constant training, and the 24 hour or more close living arrangements with other firefighters, firefighters often refer to themselves as a “brotherhood”. They consider themselves a community and family separate and apart from their domestic families and community (Cowman et al., 2004; Farren, 2005; Freedman, 2004; Kirschman, 2004).

Firefighters' Wives

As high profile search and rescue efforts of firefighters have been made the focus of research, firefighters' wives have been neglected in research studies. Despite the lack of public recognition, firefighters' wives tended to be highly supportive and proud of their partners' profession (Farren, 2005; Kisonas, 2004; Kirschman, 2004; Regehr et al., 2005).

Regehr et al. (2005) in a research study with 14 participants found that many women described their husbands as being perfect for the job of firefighting. Farren (2005) was a fireman's wife who wrote of her life experiences with her FF husband. She described her husband and his firehouse colleagues as being caring, kind, helpful,

intelligent, and loyal. According to Kirschman (2004), a psychologist who trained with firemen, the firefighter's personality is extroverted, friendly, and values teamwork.

The public often put firefighters on a pedestal (Freedman, 2004) that at times created tension for wives. "Women pay a lot of attention to them because of the uniform. . . . like they're big studs. So girls are all over them" (Regehr et al., 2005, p. 428). "[He] being a firefighter, seemed to have made him a magnet for women" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 63). Because of perceived public attitudes, particularly from women, some wives felt their needs were not as important as their husbands' needs and felt guilty for demanding equal time and attention from their husbands (Regehr et al.).

Another problem wives faced was a sense of loneliness, particularly for those women with small children (Farren, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Regehr et al., 2005). Shift work, overtime, and emergency call response often kept men from daily contact with their families. Many firefighters held second jobs to supplement income (Kirschman, Regehr et al.), thereby increasing the hours a wife spent alone with her children.

A firefighter being on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week was another stressor for families of firefighters. Wives reported being left alone at restaurants, weddings, Christmas dinner, and birthday parties because of husbands' shift schedules, overtime, and emergency calls (Farren, 2005; Kisonas, 2004). The sense of loneliness tended to be exacerbated by the firefighter husband's involvement with his firehouse family. Wives stated they often felt left out because of the firehouse camaraderie and tight male bonding that occurred between firefighters (Farren; Regehr et al., 2005). Wives also felt ignored when husbands talked endlessly on the phone to colleagues or did not share trauma-

related feelings with wives who wanted to be available as sounding boards for their husbands (Kirschman, 2004).

According to North et al. (2002), the most common coping method for firefighters after the Oklahoma City bombing was turning to friends or relatives (50%). Despite the perception by some wives that their husband's did not turn to them for emotional support, apparently 50% did turn to familial support systems in that time of disaster. Wives stated they had to try and read their husbands' moods (Farren, 2005; Regehr et al. 2005) when firefighter husbands did not want to talk about job-related traumas. A common theme that emerged from the literature was that wives were able to tell from mood, facial expression, or body language that their partner had experienced a critical incident (Farren; Kirschman, 2004; Regehr et al). The longer a couple was married, the more easily a wife was able to give her husband the help he needed by not demanding information, by giving him emotional space, and by reducing emotional volatility (Regehr et al.).

Another common theme that emerged from the research (Regehr et al., 2005), counseling literature (Kirschman, 2004; Matsakis, 2005), and memoirs (Farren, 2005), was how to deal with the fear that a husband might be injured or killed on the job. Many wives stated they felt reassured by the constant flow of educational information and excellent training their partners received (Regehr et al.; Farren). According to Regehr et al., the longer couples were married, the more wives seemed able to accept that injury was possible. Many older wives said they coped by putting thoughts of injury and death out of their minds. Many wives said their husbands coped well with stress. However, Regehr et al. maintained that husbands may have deliberately withheld information

regarding dangers on the job and, rather than confronting their fear, wives tended to share in the avoidance strategy of their husbands (Farren; Kirschman; Matsakis; Regehr et al.).

Research Lens

Phenomenology as an empirical framework, is the study of conscious experience from a subjective point of view (Leonard, 1994; Smith, 2005). According to Edie (1976), humans are dynamic and intentional and structure their behaviors based on the meanings they give to experience. Humans have “intentional consciousness” that is correlated to their particular life world (p. 152). The life world is defined by the relationships, practices, and language of the culture in which persons live (Edie; Leonard).

Phenomenology provides a method for viewing ourselves, others, relationships, and the systems that impact and drive behavior (Wagner, 1983). Phenomenology is a system of interpretation that requires human behavior to be examined in a context that has significance for the experiencers. Were the context not explored and given meaning, human behavior and interaction would be inexplicable (McCoy, 1981; Wagner).

Family Theoretical Frameworks

Family stress theory was conceptualized by Hill (1958) as a way of explaining how families react to stress. Hill formulated a model he called the ABCX crisis model in which “A (the stressor event) – interacting with B (the family’s crisis-meeting resources) – interacting with C (the definition the family makes of the event) – produce X (the crisis)” (as cited in McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, p. 8). Since Hill’s theoretical formulation, various researchers (McCubbin & Patterson; Pearlin & Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983) have refined and redefined Hill’s family stress theory, as they

maintained not all stressor events precipitate crisis. According to Pearlin and Schooler; Reiss and Oliveri; stressors are circumstances, events, or experiences with which families are able to cope, that is, families modify a situation so that it becomes manageable. Families modify the stressor event by changing interactions, roles, values, or the subjective meaning they give to the stressor (McCubbin & Patterson).

Narrative

Human beings use language as a means of interpreting themselves and their actions to others. It is through linguistic communication, or storytelling, that humans are able to create possibilities and conditions for behavior (Leonard, 1994). “[S]tories demonstrate that meanings are lived out on the background of shared understandings that develop within a sociocultural background” (Smithbattle, 1994, p. 145). Narrative storytelling conveys to the researcher how social reality and everyday life is created in conversation and interaction (Schwandt, 2003).

The Need for Research

Wives of firefighters have been neglected in social science research. Wives have expressed frustration that the importances of their supportive and caretaking roles have been ignored (Kirschman, 2004). Researchers have also ignored the effects of the firefighters’ job on the marital relationship despite many research studies on the individual and couple qualities (Kalmijn, 1999; Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004; Voydanoff, 2004) that support or harm a satisfactory marital relationship.

The wives of firefighters are subject to daily stressors that may take a toll on the most stable of relationships (Matsakis, 2005). Wives have to contend with husbands

being called away from meaningful family events, shift work of anywhere from 12 to 72 hours (Regehr et al., 2005). Wives whose husbands are called away to fight wildland fires may spend weeks and sometimes months alone taking care of children, dealing with family emergencies, managing the household, and perhaps holding down a job as well (Kirschman, 2004). In addition to these tasks, firefighters' wives have to contend with the daily strain of wondering if their husbands will be injured or killed in the line of duty (Farren, 2005; Kirschman; Matsakis; Regeher et al.) Wives of firemen have husbands who run into situations other people are running away from (Farren).

However, among the most stressful incidents a firefighter's spouse can experience is serious injury or death of a partner. In 2002 approximately 80,800 firefighters were injured in the line of duty (Kirschman, 2004). Fifty percent of the injuries were fire-fighting-related (Kirschman). Serious injury can put strain on a relationship due to a firefighter's self-perception of being strong, healthy, well-trained, and in control. Dependence on a wife and perceived loss of respect from colleagues may cause psychological and emotional injury that may be difficult for a wife to understand and support (Farren, 2005; Kirschman; Matsakis, 2005). Research conducted after the Oklahoma City bombing found that marital disruption was the most common result of post-trauma stress followed by an increase in the incidence of alcohol consumption (North et al., 2004).

Due to their extensive training in systems concepts, family therapists are in a unique position to help wives and their husbands cope with and resolve issues that may arise due to husbands' post-trauma stress, sick time off, rehabilitation, and the

firefighter's sense of loss in his firehouse community. In the case of death of a firefighter, family therapists are in the position of being able to offer grief counseling and support to the entire family, not just the partner. However, research is necessary so mental health professionals will be aware of the distinctive requirements for counseling women and men, and the families of women and men, who engage in high-risk professions.

Summary

A minimal amount of research has been conducted that explored the stresses and strains of women married to firefighters. This literature review covered areas related to components that make up marital quality. Family stress theory and phenomenology were discussed as theoretical frameworks for investigating the lived experiences of wives of FFs. It is important that the emotional and psychological needs of FF wives as determined by marital quality be explored so that family therapists and other mental health professionals may better serve the distinctive needs of couples in which husbands are firefighters.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Wives of firefighters have been neglected in social science research studies. The purpose of this study was to explore how a fireman's wife experienced her marriage in terms of marital quality and her perception of parenting. Qualitative methodology was utilized to collect and analyze data. In this chapter the researcher discussed research design, the participant sample selection, data collection, and the data analysis procedures. A phenomenological perspective was employed in order to capture the varied and complex meanings a woman gave to her relationship as the wife of a firefighter.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was used in this study. A qualitative research perspective focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality. The researcher seeks answers to questions that explore how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This research approach permitted the researcher to explore the stressors that wives of firefighters experience, the meanings they gave to the stressors, and how they modified situations so situations perceived as stressful became manageable (Pearlin & Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983). Qualitative research permitted the researcher to explore the many layers of human response at the emotional as well as the rational level (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln).

In qualitative research the person of the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting data (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The researcher became a piece

in the participants' socially constructed reality and affected how information was communicated and received (Creswell). She used her own socially-acquired, interpersonal skills and engaged participants in sharing their personal stories (Fontana & Frey, 2003). At the same time the researcher maintained an awareness of her own meanings concerning marital quality as she listened to the stories of the research participants' experiences of their relationships as wives of firefighters.

A phenomenological approach was employed as a theoretical basis for the research study. Phenomenology is the study of conscious experience from a subjective point of view (Edie, 1976; McCoy, 1981; Leonard, 1994; Smith, 2005). Phenomenology addresses the meaning given to human experience, that is, the significance of events, time, the self, and others in social interactions as they are experienced in the real world (Edie; Creswell, 2003; Leonard; Schwandt, 2003; Smith). The significance of living with a spouse who runs into situations other people run out of (Farren, 2005) was explored through the conceptual lens of family stress theory (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Pearlin & Schooler; 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983).

According to family stress theory, a stressor event interacts with the meaning the family gives to the event, engages a family's resources, and the family will either be in crisis or modify the situation so it becomes manageable (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Pearlin & Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983). Families modify a stressor event by changing interactions, roles, values, or the subjective meaning given to the stressor (McCubbin & Patterson). The definition of stressor as an objective event that incurs a manageable subjective response applied to the situations in which firefighters' wives

found themselves. The firefighting profession is one in which wives must cope with ongoing stressors such as unavailability of spouse, shift work, 24 hour on-call for emergencies, and the knowledge that their partners are in a profession in which injury and death is a constant possibility.

Data Collection

The interview is the primary method for conducting phenomenological research (Edie, 1976; Langellier, 1981; Smithbattle, 1994). The interviewer involved participants in a storytelling narrative (Edie; Langellier; Morrissette, 1999) about their experiences living with a fireman husband, particularly as the lifestyle affected the marriage or relationship, and their perceptions of parenting. The personal stories of meaning about life with a firefighter and its effect on marital quality and parenting became data and were collected through personal, face-to-face interviews. The interviews were audio-taped in a private site and at date and time of the participant's choosing. Participants in Alaska chose dates and times that were convenient for them to be interviewed via land-line speaker phone.

Research Questions

“The most crucial development aspect of the research process is the research question. . . . Without a well-honed research question . . . a qualitative researcher is in danger of losing their way and of becoming ensnared in the enormous quantity of detail of the research material” (Burck, 2005, p. 240).

The research questions guiding this interview were the following:

Research Question 1. How does a fireman's wife experience her marriage?

Research Question 2. How does a fireman's wife experience parenting?

Interview Questions

Interview prompting statements rather than questions were used in order to open up the interview (Appendix D). Additional prompts were used to encourage more depth of narrative (Burck, 2005; Creswell, 2003; Madriz, 2003).

Interview Prompting Statement 1: Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter.

Interview Prompting Statement 2: Tell me about your experiences raising children as the wife of a firefighter.

Participants

Participants were recruited who were currently living with a firefighter spouse at the time of the study. Criteria for inclusion in the study were: female participants at least age 25 who were currently living with a firefighter who was a career fireman at the time of the study. Participants had to be married at least five years and have children. Husbands had to be active-duty career firefighters for at least two years. Participation had to be voluntary. Initially a target population of 30 participants was to be recruited with the intent of getting at least 28 interviews with eligible participants.... "[P]revious qualitative studies suggest that thematic saturation levels are reached approximately at or before this number of interviews" (Hersht et al., 2007, p. 446).

Saturation refers to the concept that at some point successive interviews will not yield any new themes beyond those already in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Morse, 1995). Morse indicated that saturation is determined by the researcher after the researcher

evaluates the adequacy and completeness of the data. "Richness of data is derived from detailed description, not the number of times something is stated" (p.148). The researcher must thoughtfully consider all data equally during analysis and variation must be valued over quantity (Morse). The target number of 30 participants was unable to be realized and a minimum of 15 participants were recruited from three discrete regions of the United States. Five participants each were recruited from Texas, Illinois, and Alaska. The richness of data derived from this regional cross-section of participant narratives lent credibility to the research results.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure was purposive as the criteria limited the research to women married to firefighters. Participants were recruited through the use of flyers posted in fire stations and given to friends, acquaintances, or spouses of career firefighters. Snowball sampling techniques were also used (Babbie, 2004) as interested participants knew and contacted other wives who were interested in participating in the research study. A fireman in Illinois, known to the researcher, was asked to recruit wives from among his firefighter colleagues. The researcher also spoke to firefighters in fire stations in Texas and Illinois in an attempt to recruit their wives as participants.

In an attempt to recruit ethnic minorities the researcher contacted the Dallas Black Firefighters Association and the National Hispanic Firefighters Association via their web-sites. A paramedic who is a member of the Tlingit native tribe of Alaska and also known to the researcher was contacted. She posted recruitment flyers in firehouses in her area of Alaska and told friends who were married to firefighters about the research.

Protection of Human Participants

The research study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of Texas Woman's University to insure that all guidelines for participant protection were followed (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2003). Consent forms (Appendix C) explained the purpose of the research, the research procedures, the potential risks and benefits, and the manner in which the confidential interview information was handled. All information was thoroughly discussed with participants before they were asked to sign the consent form (Babbie; Creswell). A copy of the signed consent form was given to each participant for their records. The consent form had the name and contact number of both the researcher and the research advisor in the event there were questions that arose after the interviews were completed. In addition, participants were given a referral list of mental health service providers (Appendix F) in the event they felt a need to discuss any discomfort or concerns the interviews might have created.

Participants were assured that confidentiality would be maintained through a coded filing system (Babbie, 2004). Names did not appear on the demographic forms (Appendix E) or transcripts. Numbers rather than initials were used to identify participants. All recordings, notes, demographic forms, consent forms, and transcripts were kept in a locked and secure area. All information was destroyed two years after completion of the study. Participants were assured that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without question or penalty (Creswell, 2003).

Interview Procedures

In qualitative research, interviews are generally conducted face-to-face (Burck, 2005; Creswell, 2003). Qualitative interviews are either unstructured or semi-structured and utilize open-ended questions (Burck; Creswell; Fontana & Frey, 2003). The questions are intended to elicit a narrative about life experiences and the meanings attached to those experiences by participants (Creswell; Edi, 1976; Smithbattle, 1994). In the semi-structured interview of this study participants were free to move away from the interview questions and introduce related topics the researcher may not have previously considered (Burck; Creswell; Madriz, 2003).

At the core of the phenomenological qualitative interview is the establishment of a human-to-human relationship with participants and a desire on the part of the interviewer to hear and understand their story (Hersht et al., 2006; Madriz, 2003). The researcher was aware that stories are told in the language and culture of the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Leonard, 1994; Madriz). Each participant had her own language for conveying meaning. Meanings were embedded in her unique culture based on her lived experience in her family of origin as well as her lived experience with her spouse (Leonard; McCoy, 1981; Morrissette, 1999). It was imperative that the researcher suspend her biases and not project her valued meanings on the stories she heard (Creswell, 2003).

This researcher conducted her research through a three-stage interview process. First, she met participants through the initial telephone contact in which she established rapport with interested participants (Appendix B). At that time participants were given

interview procedural information and the interview prompting statements were disclosed as central to the participant's narrative. Second, the researcher conducted the personal interview at a site, time, and date that was convenient for the participant. Third, the researcher had a follow-up call a week after the interview to determine if the participant had any information she may have recalled after the interview. The follow-up call was not considered the pilot study as the pilot study provided feedback to the researcher about the adequacy of the research questions and the interview format (Burck, 2005; Creswell, 2003).

The qualitative researcher presented herself as a caring, interested listener. Focused interest resulted in a reciprocal interest (Fontana & Frey, 2003) of participants willing to share their stories. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry in which the researcher participates (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) as one who is sharing the life experience of a participant. Participants were invited to share their experiences and the meanings they gave to the experience of living with a firefighter.

The manner in which the interviewer presents herself is important as self-presentation can create an impression of trust or caution on the part of participants. The participants' impressions of the researcher can greatly influence the relative success, or lack of success, of the study (Fontana & Frey, 2003) as indicated by participants' sense of ease in responding to interview questions and prompts. As the researcher was interviewing individuals across the age, cultural, and socio-economic spectrum, she dressed in what is commonly called business casual, that is, tailored slacks, blouse, and

jacket. It was important to minimize status differences (Fontana & Frey) that might be emphasized through choice of wardrobe.

The researcher arrived at the agreed-upon site at the agreed-upon date and time. In the case of the participants who lived in Alaska, the researcher called them via land-line telephone at a date and time determined by the participants. She thanked participants for their willingness to share their stories. The researcher followed the interview protocol (Appendix D). The purpose of the study was explained as well as the potential risks. The researcher reviewed the consent form (Appendix C) with the participant and made sure the participant understood it before she signed the form. The researcher gave the participant a copy of the consent and a copy of the counseling referral list before the interview began. The researcher emphasized the confidential nature of the interview and all the related documents. She encouraged the participant to ask any questions or voice concerns before the interview. She reminded them that she was audio-taping the interview and all names would be edited out of the transcripts. After again checking for questions, the researcher reminded the participants they could take a break at any time or refuse continued participation at any time.

The audio-recorder was started. The first interview prompt was stated, "Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter." The participant was given adequate time to respond. If at any time the person appeared to be at a loss for words, the researcher waited quietly for the person to gather her thoughts and then used additional prompts to encourage the participant to continue her story. Prompts were also used to clarify aspects of the story not completely understood by the researcher (Appendix D). At the end of the

interview the researcher asked the participant if there was anything she might like to add to the information already given. She then asked the participant to fill out the demographic form (Appendix E) that was placed with the audio-tape. The researcher again thanked the participant for her participation and again made sure she had the counseling referral and signed consent form before she left. In the case of participants who lived in Alaska, the researcher had mailed two consent forms, one demographic form, and one counseling referral list with a self-addressed stamped envelope. One signed consent form and the demographic form were returned to the researcher who then discussed the interview protocol with participants before the telephone interviews began.

Pilot Study

Pilot studies are a means for providing feedback to the researcher about the adequacy of the research questions and the interview format (Burck, 2005; Creswell, 2003). Pilot studies also permit the researcher to monitor questions that will explore the issues. In a pilot study research participants are asked to reflect on their experience of the interview questions and the interview process. They are also asked to note any significant deficiencies in the questions or the process. Consequently, the use of pilot studies enhances the credibility of a qualitative study (Burck; Creswell). The researcher mailed their interview transcripts to the first three participants interviewed and asked them to give their opinions and suggestions in reference to the interview questions and interview process. Changes, if needed, would have been made in the questions and interview format based on the pilot study participants' responses but they suggested no changes.

Treatment of Data

Documents such as the demographic information, audio-tapes, and transcripts were coded and dated to indicate the identity of the participants. All identifiers such as names and places were deleted from the transcripts. The demographic information and audio-tapes did not have identifiers on them other than the code numbers. All documents were kept in a locked area in the researcher's home office.

The researcher listened to the audio-taped interviews. She typed the interviews verbatim to hard copy transcripts that were also kept in a separate locked area in the researcher's home office. Any notes made during the interview and notations made while listening to the tapes were kept in a locked area as well. Signed consent forms and the master list with names and their assigned codes were kept in a locked area separate from the demographic information, tapes, and transcripts. All data were destroyed two years after completion of the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Phenomenologists attempt to clarify and articulate the essence or meaning of the participants' experiences (Edie, 1976; Leonard, 1994; Smith, 2005; Smithbattle, 1994) that are being explored. Experiences are comprised of the actual event and meanings given to the events. The meanings given to the event may be construed as themes (Morrissette, 1999) or data (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2003).

Themes are discovered by following a protocol of thematic (Morrissette, 1999) or data analysis (Babbie, 2004). Each interview was transcribed by the researcher and included all the words, pauses, and inflections of the participants. Non-verbal expressions

were also notated during the interview and noted on the transcriptions as they were being written (Creswell, 2003; Morrissette). Each transcript was read several times in order to get a sense of the tone of each encounter. Significant statements about life as a firefighter's wife were highlighted in terms of the feelings and meanings given to the experience (Creswell; Morrissette) of the participants.

The analysis of themes or concepts was detailed through a coding process (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2003). Coding places the data in specific categories that are similar in theme (Morrissette, 1999). For example, data were coded for purposes of describing how a woman felt about being left alone at family gatherings because her husband responded to an emergency call. There were codes concerning the participants' perceptions of being a single parent when husbands were on extended shifts or wildland wildfire duty. Data about the wife's social support systems were also coded.

Person of the Researcher

In qualitative research the researcher takes on "multiple and gendered images" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). As a researcher I was a participant in, as well as an observer of, the narratives I was exploring. As the participants gave meaning to the experiences under discussion, so I brought my own meaning to the discussion as well (Creswell, 2003). I bracketed my life experiences and the meanings I brought to the research in order to make more credible, the narratives I communicated to the readers of the research study.

Whereas there is no history of firefighting in my family, I do have characteristics in common with participants. I am female. I have been married and raised children. I

have experienced the frustration of raising children alone when my spouse was on extended business trips. I have worked in the emergency rooms (E.R.) of hospitals and have been present when firefighters brought in victims of trauma. At the same time as I was listening to wives discuss the manner in which their husbands managed critical incidents, I remembered my own responses to critical incidents in the E.R. As a participant/researcher I kept such memories to myself.

As a family therapist I have listened to the stories of couples who were struggling with the demands of the professional firefighter's profession. In researching the literature of firefighting I realized that much had been written of the firefighter's struggles with the responsibilities and stresses of his chosen profession. A minimal amount of research studies were dedicated to the wife's struggles with her unique responsibilities and stresses as the wife of a firefighter. As a family therapist I have learned to listen fully and with empathy to the stories of clients. As a researcher I listened fully and with empathy to the stories firefighters' wives shared with me.

Credibility

There are various strategies used by qualitative researchers in order to check the credibility of research findings. Three strategies that were used by the researcher were triangulation, writing a rich, thick description, and reflexivity (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Piercy & Benson, 2005). Triangulation is the use of different methods to test the same finding (Babbie). It is a strategy in which the researcher uses multiple perspectives (Creswell; Denzin & Lincoln) in order to identify and validate common themes. Two doctoral-level peer reviewers with experience in

qualitative research methods read and analyzed the data in order to verify the researcher's analysis and confirm or disconfirm researcher bias (Creswell). The researcher gave each peer reviewer three randomly chosen transcripts to read. The reviewers' analysis of the themes agreed with those of the researcher.

A second strategy that was used was writing rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2003). By this is meant the use of vivid and accurate imagery to convey the setting, the participants' stated emotional tone, and the description of events as experienced by the participants (Creswell; Fontana & Frey, 2003). The use of rich descriptions puts the reader in the mind set of the participants and gives the reader a fuller sense of the participants' experiences.

A third strategy that was used was reflexivity (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2003). The researcher acknowledges that her inquiry was affected by her biases and these may have shaped the study (Creswell). The researcher also acknowledges that what she did or did not do may have affected participant narratives (Babbie). According to Babbie, sensitivity to this issue provides additional support for a credible research study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues can arise at all phases of a research study (Creswell, 2003). In the introduction it is essential to identify the research problem and state the rationale as to its significance for social science. The research should benefit either the individuals being studied or like groups (Creswell). When participants being studied belong to a stigmatized or marginalized group, the researcher must not add to participant stigmatization, disempowerment, or marginalization. Participants had a clear

understanding of the purpose of the study (Fontana & Frey, 2003). They were encouraged to feel free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Relative to this freedom, participants did not feel coerced by issues of power differentials between them and the researcher (Creswell; Fontana & Frey). The researcher engaged in reflexivity in terms of her biases and values and so was aware of the possibility of power differentials.

The researcher was aware of the possibility that harmful or personally sensitive material might be disclosed during the interviews. "In these situations, the ethical code for researchers is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in the study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 65). Anonymity must be protected (Creswell; Fontana & Frey, 2003). In analyzing the data the researcher protected the identity of the participants through coding. Names mentioned during the interviews were deleted. All data including demographic information, audio tapes, transcripts, and master lists were kept in secure locked areas and were destroyed two years after completion of the study.

In addition to ethical considerations to participants, researchers also have an ethical obligation to colleagues to report accurate information of the data (Babbie, 2004; Fontana & Frey, 2003). This includes information that runs counter to the expected themes in the data. Presenting discrepant data is not only an ethical obligation, but also lends credibility to the study (Babbie; Creswell, 2003).

Summary

Phenomenology and family stress theory were the theoretical frameworks that

guided this study. Fifteen wives of firefighters from Texas, Illinois, and Alaska served as volunteers for this qualitative research. The interviewer employed semi-structured narrative interviews that were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Two post-doctoral peer reviewers read randomly selected transcripts and themes were noted by them that were consistent with those of the researcher.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of a phenomenological research study designed to explore how women married to firemen experience their marriages and the raising of children. The study was qualitative and utilized semi-structured questions and statements to permit the participants to more fully share their lived experiences. Fifteen women married to career firefighters (FFs) volunteered to be interviewed. Five interviews each were conducted face-to-face in Texas and Illinois. Five interviews from Alaska were conducted by speaker phone. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Confidentiality was assured through numeric coding of each participant's transcript and demographic information. In this chapter the sample is described and the themes that emerged from the data are discussed as well as participant responses that elucidated the themes.

Sample Description

The sample consisted of fifteen (N=15) adult women married to career firefighters. All the women were White and ranged in age from 32 to 56 years with a mean of 41.4. Religious affiliations were Lutheran (n=1), Baptist (n=1), Christian Church (n=1), Bible Church (n=2), Christian (n=3), Catholic (n=6), and non-denominational (n=1). Not religious (n=1) was also stated. The participants lived in small towns and urban areas of North Texas (n=5). Participants also lived in and about a large metropolitan area of Alaska (n=5) and in a large metropolitan area of Illinois (n=5). The

research sample's states of residence, ages, race, and religious affiliations are found in Table 1.

Participants had educational attainments that were 20% (n=3) master's degree, 20% (n=3) bachelor's degree, 13% (n=2) associate's degree, 7% (n=1) two years college, 7% (n=1) some college, and 33% (n=5) high school. Occupations were varied and stated as: teacher (n=1), retired librarian (n=1), registered nurse (n=2), respiratory therapist (n=1), hair dresser (n=1), homemaker (n=6), waitress (n=1), self-employed realtor (n=1), and fire department dispatcher (n=1). Family incomes ranged from \$40,001 to \$60,000 (n=1), \$60,001 to \$80,000 (n=1), \$80,001 to \$100,000 (n=6), and greater than \$100,001 (n=6). Income not stated (n=1). Participants' occupations, educations, and family incomes are listed in Table 2.

Fourteen (n=14) of the wives were in a first marriage. One (n=1) was in a second marriage of 16 years duration. Number of years married ranged from 8 to 31 years with a mean of 15.5. The women had from one to four children with 20% (n=3) having one child, 47% (n=7) had two children, 20% (n=3) had three children, and 13% (n=2) had four children. The children ranged in age from 12 months to 29 years of age with a mean of 10.9. Number of years married, participants' prior marriages, and number of children are listed in Table 3.

Demographic information concerning participants' firefighter/paramedic husbands was also included as husband's career informs the nature of participants' phenomenological experiences. In Texas, Illinois, and Alaska, career firemen are also

trained as paramedics or emergency medical technicians (EMTs). They fight fires and perform ambulance duty as required by their respective fire departments.

Participants' firemen husbands had been in active duty fire service for periods ranging from 6 to 33 years with a mean of 15.4. The firemen held various ranks that included lieutenant, captain, driver, engineer, and firefighter/paramedic among other ranks. Participants and their husbands often had a family history of career firefighters. Nine (60%) of the 15 participants had active-duty, retired, or deceased firefighters among family members including in-laws. In all there was a familial connection to 12 career firemen with two on a fire department wait-list (n=14) among nine participants. Firemen rankings, years of active duty, and FF family history are listed in Table 4.

Table 1

Participant's Study Number, Residence, Age, Race, and Religion

<u>Participant #</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Religion</u>
01	Texas	35	White	Lutheran
02	Texas	56	White	Baptist
03	Alaska	35	White	Christian Church
04	Texas	47	White	Bible Church
05	Texas	41	White	Catholic
06	Texas	35	White	Christian
07	Alaska	34	White	Christian
08	Alaska	32	White	Catholic
09	Alaska	43	White	Catholic
10	Illinois	46	White	Catholic
11	Illinois	46	White	Bible Church
12	Illinois	48	White	Catholic
13	Illinois	43	White	Non-denominational
14	Illinois	47	White	Catholic
15	Alaska	33	White	Not Religious

Table 2

Participant's Occupation, Education, and Family Income

<u>P #</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Family Income</u>
01	Teacher	Master's Degree	\$40,001-\$60,000
02	Librarian (Ret.)	Master's Degree	\$100,001+
03	Registered Nurse	Bachelor's Degree	\$80,001- \$100,000
04	Respiratory Therapist	Associate's Degree	\$100,001+
05	Hair Dresser	High School	\$100,001+
06	Homemaker	Bachelor's Degree	\$60,001-\$80,000
07	Homemaker	Some College	\$80,001-\$100,000
08	Registered Nurse	Associate's Degree	\$100,001+
09	Homemaker	Bachelor's Degree	\$80,001-\$100,000
10	Homemaker	High School	Not Stated
11	Homemaker	High School.	\$100,001+
12	Homemaker	Master's Degree.	\$80,001-\$100,000
13	Waitress	High School.	\$80,001-\$100,000
14	Realtor/Self-Employed	High School	\$80,000-100,000
15	Fire Department Dispatcher	Two Years College	\$100,001+

Table 3

Participant's Number of Years Married, Prior Marriages, and Number of Children

<u>P #</u>	<u>Years Married</u>	<u>Prior Marriages</u>	<u>Number of Children</u>
01	11	no	Two
02	31	no	One
03	10	no	Three
04	25	no	Two
05	16	no	Two
06	12	no	Three
07	10	no	Two
08	08	no	Two
09	22	no	Three
10	18	no	Two
11	16	no	Two (1 stepchild)
12	21	no	Four
13	09	no	One
14	16	yes	Four
15	08	no	One

Table 4

Participant Husband's Rank, Years of Active Duty, and Firefighter (FF) Family History

<u>P #</u>	<u>Husband's Rank</u>	<u>Years Current Active Duty</u>	<u>Combined FF Family History</u>
01	Driver/Paramedic	16+	None
02	Captain	33	Son (Active Duty)
03	Captain	10	Uncle (Ret.) Brother in-law (Incomplete Probation / Illness)
04	Driver/Engineer	20	None
05	Lieutenant	18	None
06	Driver	06	Brother (Active Duty)
07	Captain	12	None
08	Engineer/Paramedic Acting Captain	12	Father (Active Duty)
09	Engineer/Acting Captain	08	None
10	Lieutenant	26	Brother (Ret., FF disability)
11	Captain	30	Brother-in-law (Deceased: Line of Duty Death) Stepson (on FF wait-list)
12	Firefighter/Paramedic	24	Father (Deceased) Grandfather (Deceased)
13	Firefighter/Paramedic	19	Uncle (Active Duty) Nephew (on FF wait-list)
14	Lieutenant	29	Brother (Active Duty) Great-great-grandfather (Deceased)
15	Captain	12	None

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the wife of a career fireman experiences her marriage and the raising of children. Two research questions guided the study:

1. How does a fireman's wife experience her marriage?
2. How does a fireman's wife experience parenting?

Two interview prompting statements permitted the participant to begin her narrative at any point at which she felt comfortable. The prompting statements were: Tell me how you experience your marriage as the wife of a firefighter. Tell me how you experience raising children as the wife of a firefighter. A pilot study was conducted using the first three participants who received copies of their individual transcripts. The interview process as well as the statements and questions posed by the interviewer were found to be satisfactory by the participants. The participants did not suggest any changes in the interview process, statements, or questions.

The researcher analyzed the transcripts of the narratives and engaged two peer reviewers who analyzed three transcripts each. The peer-reviewers noted themes that were consistent with those of the researcher. From the narratives that ranged over a wide variety of topics related to the experiences of women married to firemen, four themes emerged with subthemes that lent substance to the main themes:

1. Marriage to a firefighter is different
 - a. Adjusting to shift schedules
 - b. Children and childcare

- c. An honorable profession
- 2. Depending on support systems
 - a. Family
 - b. Friends
 - c. The “brotherhood”
 - d. Faith
- 3. Coping with special stressors
 - a. Husband’s sleep patterns
 - b. Children with impairments
 - c. Weather
- 4. Managing anxieties about husband’s job-related situations
 - a. Fires
 - b. Crime/Disease
 - c. Sharing trauma

Marriage to a Firefighter is Different

Each of the participants discussed three areas they found to be different from those of women married to men in traditional occupations when one is married to a firefighter. A fireman’s wife must adjust to shift schedules, solo parenting, and accepting firefighting as a chosen profession. Wives adjusted to their husbands’ shift schedules in various ways. Many wives found that acceptance of shift work helped them to be flexible

in their expectations of the husband's presence in the home and even enhanced his presence when he was home

Being married to a firefighter is different because they're gone for a full day. Scheduling vacations or family events gets tricky because you have to keep in mind the 24-hour schedule and with kids and getting to school and doing things like that....I sometimes deal with it by just not counting on him being there at all and being pleasantly surprised when he's available....[T]he calendar is your best friend as a fireman's wife. (# 01)

Um, it's been an interesting experience I would say just because of the way the shifts work, the dynamics of his job, of the stresses associated with his job. How he deals with those. What he brings home with him. How it affects us in our marriage. How it affects us as a family. I think in some ways our marriage has been enhanced by the fact of what he does simply because of the shift work... having that break from each other for 24 hours at a time has helped us.... I think we just appreciate each other more and want to be able to spend time with each other. (# 12)

I guess the biggest thing about being married to my husband who is gone a lot for his work is that, and I don't mean this disrespectfully to him at all, I almost can't count on him being home on any given day because his schedule rotates through the month....and you just have to be very flexible and be independent because

you just don't know if they're going to come home after a shift for awhile....So [pauses] that is a very big part of being married to a firefighter. (# 03)

I found this firefighting career to have many different stages in your life you know? When you're first married getting used to the time away and then enjoying the time they're away....Now you have kids into the mix. (# 10)

Well first there's scheduling issues. We have different work schedules than the rest of the world. Um, it's a different world. The firefighting world is a different world. (# 13)

All the participants found that having babies and pre-school children was particularly difficult to manage when husbands were on duty. However, many wives found shift work had advantages as well. Wives stated that as children entered school parenting became easier. Working wives adjusted their schedules to alternate with their husbands' shift schedules so husbands could share parenting duties.

It was a little bit difficult when he was a baby and that's one reason he's an only child because I could not have continued to work and with two little children and a husband gone every third day. (# 02)

I really can't count on him coming home after a shift because if there's a big fire or something that just puts a little bit more pressure on, uh, to maybe have to find

other childcare or a backup plan...but we don't do daycare. We alternate our work schedules. I work around my husband's schedule and the flexibility works great for what we do. (# 03)

When the kids were little it was definitely more of a challenge because you very much act like a single parent....We had four kids under the age of seven and it just requires a lot of time. There have been many trips to the emergency room [laughs ruefully] for different things when he hasn't been around. (# 12)

The good part was that we didn't have to have a baby-sitter very often. Um, we could raise the kids on our own. Financially that was very beneficial and I think our kids benefitted from it. They have lots of memories of us being at home with them. But the bad part is that whenever, *whenever* [with emphasis] one of the kids got sick I was always the one at home with them. I drove them to the E.R. by myself and uh, then have to turn around and go to work myself in the morning. (# 04)

He has a lot more time to raise our daughter which is great. (# 13)

I work part-time and then I pick up the kids from school. I do most of the home stuff. I do almost all of the home stuff. I do all of the kids....When the children were little it was very difficult because there was no one else to be here so for 24

hours I didn't get a break. They're older so it's easier....They aren't little babies anymore. (# 14)

Despite the stresses of adjusting to husbands' shift schedules and the tasks of parenting and homecare, all the wives spoke with understanding and pride of their firefighter husbands' chosen career.

His approach to the fires and the excitement in his voice and when he talks to other firemen about fires and calls and whatever, I mean you ask him, "Why are you a fireman?" and he'll say, "It's my calling. It's my duty," and I, besides my children and my husband, I don't have any kind of passion like that. (# 01)

I'm very comfortable that if [husband] were to die in the line of duty he'd die doing something he absolutely loved to do. I can't say that about my job. (# 04)

It's the way God made them. I mean I truly believe that my husband was born to be a fireman....If I had anybody who wanted to be a firefighter? I mean my husband's the one for the job. (# 08)

I'm very proud of him. I believe it does take somebody special....It does take a calling....You're sworn to serve and protect. You don't have to but if you see an accident you stop. I mean my husband always has a pair of surgical gloves in his

car, you know, because he never knows who he's gonna have to [help] and I'm like, "Oh, god, do we gotta stop again?" (# 10)

So since the eighth grade, so for as long as I've known him, he's had this drive to be a firefighter or to help people in, um, an active capacity and in immediate situations....He's always been this person. (# 15)

Firefighting as a career appeared to be a proud tradition passed down through the generations in some families. One participant spoke of her inter-connectedness to firefighting families and many wives spoke of their children wanting to be firemen.

Well, almost all my friends are married to firefighters and that's unusual because like [girlfriend] I've known since kindergarten...we didn't know we'd marry firefighters. One of my very close friends from childhood is my husband's sister. So I married my girlfriend's brother and he had a brother-in-law who was a firefighter. So that family was firefighter-oriented and then I have another friend [from childhood] who married a firefighter....When I came to be with the family, you know, with my husband and stuff they were all firefighting family. (# 11)

...and so he told one of his friends, who told us, that [son] wanted to be a firefighter. So we kind of set [*sic*] him down and said, "If that's what you want to do, do it [with emphasis]!" (# 02)

Go for it! Well, for my son, definitely go for it! My daughter's pretty petite [so] I'm not sure how that would work. (# 08)

Well my 15 year old talks about it. I honestly don't think he's got the stomach for it. I let him talk. He wants to be [because] he's so proud of his father. (# 10)

Depending on Support Systems

Participants stated they needed different levels of support at different times in their married lives. Participants identified support systems they found helpful. Some wives had large supportive families living close-by. Others relied on friends. Many wives stated they could call on the "brotherhood" of firefighters to help out when husbands were not available. Still other wives spoke of their religious faith as a strong sustaining element in their lives.

Police and fire, we're all one big family. If I needed anything I could call in to the fire station. They'd come and help me....[Participant speaks of a newlywed wife] and we told her, "There are parts of this job that really suck and that's when you call us [firefighter wives] and that's when you can lean on us and he's gone," and her husband does wildland wildfires, too. (# 01)

I have my family....You know we're Christians so we have a strong faith. We pray every time before he goes on shift. Before he leaves the house he makes a

point of gathering up whoever is awake and he prays for safety before he goes....

We always pray. That's our ritual. (# 06)

[Firefighters] really take care of each other. They really take care of us. They're connected. It's what you would expect from a really nice church family. If you have problems they take care of you. When [husband] was gone in Iraq the guys were calling. They promised him they would take care of us. (# 07)

We have a huge support system. All of our family is up here and then we also have our fire-fighting family. That is, pretty much they'll do anything for you at the drop of a hat. If I ever need anything while my husband's at work I can have people lined up at the door willing to help me. (# 08)

We have a large family up here. I don't have a large outside core friend group. There's a lot of firefighters' wives....I've always thought of them as cliques and I've never really gotten along with them as a group. (# 15)

First of all I think your faith has a lot to do with how you handle things and I think the Lord only gives us what we can handle....We always say grace before our meal and when dad's at work we always add, "Please watch over daddy and bring him home safely." I would like to reiterate the fact that I really feel that

faith in something, a belief in a higher power has helped us tremendously, has helped me personally. (# 12)

I believe in God and so I get a lot of strength and support in my relationship with the Lord and my time with the Bible. (# 03)

Coping with Special Stressors

Wives of firefighters revealed special stressors in their narratives. Special stressors were indicated as husbands' sleep patterns after coming off shift, children with physical impairments, and for Alaskan wives, the weather.

Participants spoke of their husbands' sleep-deprived behaviors when they came off a shift. Husbands who worked at "slow" firehouses often were able to get several hours of sleep at the firehouse. However, the sleep was reportedly fitful in anticipation of making a medical or fire-related call. Firefighters at "busy" firehouses reportedly got little if any sleep due to the large volume of medical or fire-related calls. Wives often expressed exasperation but also acceptance of husbands' sleep-deprived behavior.

When we were first married he was up all night and then he would sleep all day. He would sleep 'til 11, 12, one, two o'clock and maybe he'd have a little side job, maybe he wouldn't....But now he's getting older so even though he works at what they call "the retirement home" [a slow firehouse] he'll still come home and say how exhausted he is and then that day he's worthless. That whole day that he

comes home from the firehouse he's just absolutely worthless. He's not really himself until he gets that Daley day where he's off for five days in a row. (# 14)

When my husband comes off his shift he's horrible [laughs], like a two-year old. Like a two-year old that needs a nap! When he's up 24 hours, when he's at work he's up 24 hours 90% of the time [because] he's at a very busy firehouse and so when he gets home he has to take a nap....But the problem with the 24 on and the 48 off in my eyes it that it takes them that long to recuperate. (# 11)

My husband likes to be active so he doesn't like to go to the slow stations. They won't get a lot of their calls 'til after midnight...so it's not uncommon for him to come home and not had more than maybe an hour and-a-half of sleep....It's really hard because he feels tired and grumpy and you know, you understand why he's grumpy but it doesn't make you feel any better [laughs]...and so a lot of my job is to help him de-stress and make his life go as smooth as possible until he can get his sleep [laughs ruefully] and not be so grumpy. (# 09)

[At the fire station] he's not usually up a lot at night. They might get a couple of calls. Usually they can get some sleep at night, generally but not always, and if he's been up a lot in the night then the next day he'll either need to take a nap at some point or the next day he'll sleep in quite a bit, not a lot but longer than usual and then it'll take him awhile to get back into the groove. (# 01)

Three participants had an added stress of children with physical impairments and one of the wives had a firefighter husband with an impairment as well. Seeking medical interventions and acceptance of the disability appeared to be the strengths that helped wives and their children cope with the struggles of physical impairment.

I make all the decisions for the kids....I do all their doctor's appointments and then they both wear hearing aids. [Husband] is hearing-impaired as well [and] that was really hard. [Older son] was diagnosed right away as a baby so they wanted him to wear hearing aids all the time. It was just really difficult having a baby with a hearing impairment and trying to get hearing aids on him...and [husband] insisted he didn't need to wear his hearing aids right away and he'd lose them....Not as a baby they didn't recommend it but once speech was going to develop they did and he still didn't see that. So there were arguments about that but that was more [husband's] personality and he didn't need it [early hearing aids]. Anyway [son] ended up in speech therapy and we didn't discover [younger son's] hearing loss until he was in kindergarten....So that was difficult. It was very difficult. It was very emotionally draining because it was, you know, there's something wrong with your baby....Well you take them to the audiologist and you see a lot more kids with horrible things that they've had happen to them and you adjust and they adjusted just fine. (# 14)

Our son, oldest son, is hearing-impaired and he's talked about the possibility of working for the fire department some day and rather than tell him that's probably

never going to happen because of your, the fact that you're hard-of-hearing. Instead I'll say, "Well, we'll just have to wait and see," you know, rather than squelch his dream and make him think he can do something he has no control over. (# 12)

My baby boy has a health issue that stresses us to the max [laughs ruefully]. [Baby] has what they call "breath-holding syndrome." He, um, will hold his breath and actually pass out when he is triggered by an emotional stimuli...he takes a big breath in [mom breathes in sharply to demonstrate] and he's silent about it so if you're not watching his face...you won't know it and there's been times when he's passed out at the top of our stairs and rolled down ten stairs and hit the hard tile floor. It's very scary. There've been times when he wrecked his tricycle in the middle of the cul-de-sac. Luckily he had a helmet on. But he passed out onto the concrete....There was an incident where he was in the bathtub and nearly drowned. He actually had a full respiratory arrest. I called his station, 9-1-1, as I'm giving rescue breaths to [baby] and he came to before 9-1-1 arrived....He is a stressor for us, you know?...Doctors say he'll outgrow it between the ages of four and six and we're just counting the days [laughs ruefully]....But it's just been a challenge for us because of not wanting to have babysitters come over unless they're fully CPR-trained. (# 03)

Finally, participants in Alaska had to cope with the additional stressor

of a winter that spanned the months of October to March with a minimum of midwinter daylight. Acceptance of the weather and keeping busy appeared to help wives cope with the stress of long dark winters and short summers.

A couple of winters ago I think I was pretty depressed....I'm so kid-oriented when I'm home. I'm home alone....The winters are long and dark. Um, you know you get a little cooped up. It's harder to go outside and do a whole bunch when you have three kids in snowsuits...my baby was about eight months old. At that point my daughter was potty-training so every time we'd get in our big ol' snowsuits and go outside she'd tell me she peed her pants so we'd have to come back in [laughs]....At the peak of winter solstice we get about four-and a-half hours of daylight in [Alaska]....I personally cope with winter [now] by planning for success. I plan to stay busy. (# 03)

In the wintertime we usually spend it up at the cabin as much as we can....My son, he was six weeks old when he had his first snow machine ride in 30 below weather all the way up to our cabin....The cold here you learn to deal with it. As long as you're active the cold doesn't bother you. It's the people who don't have activities to do who go stir-crazy. (# 08)

We just stay busy and we find things to do outside....[Winter] lasts from October to March...and it's pretty cold and the darkness is the other issue....I know it bothers a lot of people....My husband can't stand it. He doesn't like it

and...actually we just bought a property in North Carolina so he's really looking forward to it.(# 07)

Managing Anxieties about Husband's Job-Related Situations

Participants found themselves directly involved in their firefighter husband's jobs in three significant ways: Knowing the danger their husbands faced every day from fires, knowing that their husbands often faced dangers not related to fires but to a criminal element, and finally, listening to the stories of the traumatic events their firefighter husbands had to deal with.

Wives dealt with the knowledge that their husbands faced dangers from fire. Participants accepted that fire events were part and parcel of a firefighter's job. Many wives indicated they did not dwell on the dangers associated with their husbands' job. Others stated they didn't want to know about the dangers until after it was over.

As far as the danger of it...I don't want to know what's going on until after it's over and then he can tell me about it even if it's dangerous. (# 02)

So I'm very much aware that every day that he goes to work his life is literally on the line. I choose not to dwell on it. (# 04)

Yes, it's dangerous and yes, there's all the extra dangers and concerns that go along with being a firefighter...and as the wife you have to realize that this is

what my husband is and you accept them for what they are and you just deal with it as it comes. You can't, you can't borrow worry from another day. (# 08)

One participant spoke of the only time she had ever been truly frightened by the nature of her husband's job. This participant's story exemplifies the strength of the wives in this particular sample. The wife's husband was working a fire in a downtown high-rise building.

Um, there was one in particular, downtown, a high-rise fire that he was involved in and um, probably the only time that I have ever felt frightened by what he does for a living is because he called me from that fire.

[Interviewer gasps].

Wife: He was in the building and it was raging in there. It was two or three floors that were involved. There were people that died in it, the fire, and he called me and I could hear the fire in the background. He called me to tell me that he loved me [starts to get tears in her eyes].

Interviewer: [Long pause] that must have been so difficult and the memory is painful.

Wife: [Quietly] yeah.

Interviewer: [Pause, sighs] I can't imagine that!

Wife: That was the only time that I really, really was frightened [chokes up]. He called me several hours later [voice brightens] and uh [sniffing] they were out of the building but he called me just to let me know that he was ok. So that was a

good sign really [smiles]. It was bad. It was really bad and they didn't know. They really didn't know if they were going to make it out of there. (# 12)

Some participants indicated they often worried more about criminal elements and blood-borne diseases when their husbands were at work on ambulance duty.

I don't really [have concerns about his safety]. Honestly I think I had more concerns when he was a paramedic. Uh, cause he can get diseases. I worry about that more so than fighting fires. (# 13)

Well I did [have concerns] when he was in the bad ambulance districts where they were burning and things like that were going on....He worked in the projects for awhile and there were times when he had been shot at. There were times when he's been threatened with a knife. There were times when he had to hide under the ambulance because somebody was looking for him intending to do him harm....Unfortunately it goes along with his job...but he's been in those situations where he's been literally under attack. Uh and he just does the best that he can in that particular situation. But as the spouse I have to understand that I have to accept that those are the dangers that he will come across. Whether it's a fire, whether it's a situation where, you know, he's threatened by somebody.
(# 12)

You know I don't worry. I've often thought about it but, you know, am I just naïve or just blunted in some way? But I don't worry about him so much because I know that he's good at what he does [said with conviction]. I know that he is not going to put himself or someone else in a stupid situation. I worried more about him as a medic than I do him as a firefighter because they're often forced...into situations that are not as safe as they could be in terms of personal safety. Um, because of ...a stabbing or a shooting or you know, a domestic assault...The positions they have to place themselves into to get to patients are not as safe. Um, the exposures that they risk through disease and those types of things, for me, were more frightening than worrying about him falling through a floor. (# 15)

Participants stated they were supportive and empathetic when listening to their husbands' narratives of trauma if the husband indicated either verbally or non-verbally that he needed support. However, wives also became emotional when telling the interviewer about some of the traumas their husbands responded to. As they spoke, it became apparent the wives responded with great sensitivity to their husbands' stories.

Um, there was a medic call that came in maybe five years ago. I was actually a nurse in the E.R. at the time and, a school, um, elementary school, there was a gentleman who was mentally ill come onto the property and slit the throats of children. It was pretty sickening and actually I was at home asleep after my night shift in the E.R. and [husband] came home and I could hear him out of my dead sleep. He's like, "You need to wake up and talk to me." [It's] exactly what he said

and he told me about the children [starts to cry] and his, um, experience with them. I'm sorry [apologizes for crying]. He had a hard time with that one...but it's just hard to watch [still crying] and that was before we had kids. (# 03)

But, um, he won't talk about anything specific. The only time he ever talked about anything specific, he couldn't stop crying and that was some lady that had her baby in a car seat but had never locked it in because she was drunk, and, uh, she got in a collision and the baby flew out through the front windshield and landed on the highway and he had to go and pick it up and the baby was just a bag of mush and bones and it disturbed him so that he couldn't stop crying. He talked to me about that[B]ut you know, as far as the day-to-day tragedies, he would never talk to me about those and now I think that's one reason why he has PTSD. (# 04)

Our daughter was just a few months old when [husband] responded to a baby's death and he called me and told me about it. He was upset and I asked him if he wanted to see our baby. He said no, but I fed the baby, wrapped her up and took her to the station so he could see her and hold her. I would want to see and hold my baby after dealing with something like that. You know it was upsetting to him. It's the kids. When it's kids it's upsetting to them. (# 05)

Well, most of the time, uh, the only time it really affects him is if it's children and his big thing is adults basically ask for it most of the time. If an adult gets hurt it's usually because they did something stupid and they could have prevented it and you know, for him, with children they have no control over it...and then also having children of his own and you can see, I mean those calls [with kids] really affect him. I mean he's gone to calls where he's [sighs] seen people commit suicide and they've hung themselves or they've crashed...and they got brain matter all over the place and that sort of thing and those things don't affect him. You hear about those calls with kids in them [pauses] and he acts a lot different when he comes home. He'll just, it's a real point to him you know, that I make sure that with his kids [gets choked up], we make sure they're safe. (# 09)

Again, if he needed me I was there for him but otherwise.... Well I mean I would listen to him because I was his wife. But he could tell me there was a bad fire, um, you know we saved somebody or we lost somebody. Um, he could tell me there was a bad accident. I just didn't want the details. (# 11)

Um, but when there's a big fire and there's problems you can tell. It's written all over his face you know? It's not good. Now I remember when we first got married, um, he didn't come home until 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning Usually they come at seven you know when the shift is over and he had been in a fire for hours and rescued two babies and a couple of other kids died and it was horrible.

You know you just see the look. I mean, well they did everything they could but then [pauses]. So he doesn't share anything. He doesn't like to bring attention to himself at all....So I asked him and it was a horrible, horrible thing. (# 11)

If he's had a particularly bad night or rough run I can tell by his tone of voice, by his demeanor when he walks in the door and sometimes I'll ask him, "Are you ok?" His response is usually, "Yes." But most of the time I just let him know if you want to talk about it, you know I'm here or if you don't want to talk about it that's ok. But usually I let him come to me on his terms rather than push for information because I don't think, you know, anybody that's been exposed to a traumatic situation it's probably best to reveal that information in their own time rather than to be pressed for it. That just makes it harder. (# 12)

Other Findings

As the researcher evaluated the thematic data it became apparent that participants in this particular sample had three qualities in common: acceptance, flexibility, and empathy. It would appear that these qualities may have contributed to the fact that of the 15 participants, 14 were still in a first marriage of from 8 to 31 years. Only one participant was in a second marriage and that marriage was of 16 years duration. In reference to marriage and divorce with firemen, participants stated:

I mean if you can deal with the schedule. I think that's what hangs up [marriages].

The divorce rate in firefighters and their wives is huge. It skyrockets. (# 08)

[Speaking slowly]...a fireman that's already a fireman, you're more likely to be divorced than if you know him and he becomes a fireman and I think that's really true. Especially from the divorces and things that you see and the other thing they say is that firemen have three things: a truck, a mustache...and a divorce because the divorce rate is so high. (# 01)

[A retired fireman stated to the wife quoted above], "Just tell your husband don't spend too much time at the fire station....[T]hat's the reason our marriage ended, because I couldn't separate myself from full-time and volunteer." (# 01)

They get a camaraderie where they...become very, very close and when they do that you sometimes feel...kind of left out. But they do have, they have more emotion for these guys than they sometimes have for the person they married. (# 11)

What should they [the public] know? It is, it is a strain on your marriage with your spouse gone every third day. I mean it's not a normal life. (# 10)

This participant went on to give a somber appraisal of what can happen when a fireman has to deal with the stresses of the job and perhaps a foundering marriage:

I don't know the time frame, if it's a year or two years [but] five firemen have suicided [*sic*] and...again, I think being gone. I mean for some people being gone and coming home...perhaps the wife is always bitching...and underlying you hear snippets of alcohol abuse." (# 10)

Another topic of concern introduced by some of the wives, but not as a general theme, was the manner in which firefighting changed their husbands' attitudes in a negative way.

When he's mad he's really ugly. He is um, hardened. That is one of the things the fire department does to you, is they do callous the men. They callous the men....He doesn't have patience for a lot of emotion. [When daughter had a tick embedded in her head] she started crying and he had no tolerance for that, "Quit your crying,"...and I thought, "Oh, my gosh, I'd be crying" [laughing]...and she's only seven. So it's that kind of thing I'm talking about. (# 11)

That's a lot of stress, a lot of stress. You know you get more jaded over the years.

Interviewer: When you say jaded what do you mean?

Wife: Cynical. [He's] cynical about people. (# 13)

...and you know [son] will fall. He's a boy climbing trees and he'll come in, "Dad, my arm hurts. My arm hurts," and you get a lot of, "Suck it up, buttercup, you'll be fine." I don't know if it's because he sees so much of it he doesn't want

to deal with it at home....[H]is favorite line is, "Pain is temporary and pride is forever. Don't climb the tree if you can't fall out of it." (# 01)

One participant who lived in a small town served by her husband's fire station commented on the necessity of wives keeping confidences about members of the community. Maintaining confidentiality was a concern not shared by wives whose husbands worked in large urban areas in relative anonymity.

[W]hen our husbands go to work and they deal with [pauses] dying or dead babies, or mass casualties, or people whose homes have burned down...they have to treat it very professionally because that's their job...and if you live in the town you work in you [the wife] may know those people and...you have a confidentiality, too....So if you know the lady across the street and over a block is getting beat up by her husband and your husband took care of her, you see her in the grocery store and want to put your arm around her and say, "You know, it's going to be ok," but you can't. (# 01)

Summary

This chapter described the demographic characteristics of 15 participants, five each from Texas, Illinois, and Alaska. Participant narratives were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Four main themes with sub-themes were derived from the data. The four themes were: 1. Marriage to a firefighter is different with sub-themes of adjusting to shift schedule, children and childcare, and an honorable profession.

2. Depending on support systems with subthemes of family, friends, the “brotherhood, and faith. 3. Coping with special stressors with sub-themes of husband’s sleep patterns, children with impairments, and weather. 4. Managing anxieties about husband’s job-related situations with sub-themes of fires, crimes and disease, and sharing trauma. Sub-themes lent substance to the main themes. Other findings were also noted. Specific participant responses were chosen to illustrate the themes, sub-themes, and other findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how women married to career firemen experienced their marriages and their role as parents. Fifteen women at least age 25 years, married to career firefighters, and with at least one child participated in semi-structured interviews. Interviews with 10 women were conducted face-to-face. Five interviews were conducted by land-line speaker phone. Each participant was presented with two statements: Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter. Tell me about your experiences raising children as the wife of a firefighter. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were read by the interviewer and also by two doctoral-level peer reviewers with experience in qualitative research. Common themes were noted. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings as well as conclusions drawn from the research data. Limitations, implications for family therapists and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Discussion

Despite the great amount of research that has been written about firefighters in terms of their physically demanding, high stress, and dangerous jobs, minimal research has explored the experience of women married to firefighters (Regehr et al., 2005) and the stressors they experienced as a result of their careers as the wives of firefighters.

This qualitative study utilized phenomenology as the method for understanding the lived experiences of participants married to firemen. Family stress theory was the theoretical lens used to examine participants' responses. Family stress theory proposes that families modify a stressor situation so that it becomes manageable. Families modify the stressor event by changing interactions, roles, values, or the subjective meaning given to the stressor (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Pearlin & Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983).

Marriage to a Firefighter is Different

The participants in this study stated husband's shift work as the variable with which they most defined themselves as being "different" as wives of firefighters. Shift work was the topic first mentioned at the beginning of almost every participant's narrative. Husbands' shift work generally occurred as 24 hours on duty and 48 hours off duty for three duty cycles with three, four, or five days off after the third duty cycle. Participants stated that adjusting to shift work was most difficult when first married or after children were born. As participants got further along in their marriages and children entered school, husbands' absences became easier to tolerate.

Disadvantages of shift work were mentioned as difficulty scheduling vacations, family reunions, and children's holidays. Some participants stated they often felt as if they were single parents as most of the early child-care responsibilities fell on them. For example two wives mentioned having to rouse babies and preschoolers from bed in order to run to the store in the evening when they ran out of milk or diapers. Two wives specifically mentioned having to take children to the E.R. by themselves because their

husbands were on duty. However, most participants indicated they had creative ways of managing the holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter for their children.

Advantages of shift work were cited as wives' enjoying the break when their husbands were on duty and some felt husbands' 24 hour absences enhanced the quality of their marriages. Wives were able to save money on childcare by alternating work schedules, and children had their fathers home for anywhere from 3 to 5 days at a time.

In the research literature Voydanoff (2004) found there were three components of marital quality: activities with spouse, marital disagreements, and marital happiness. According to Craddock (1991) factors leading to marital happiness were financial stability, shared activities, the presence of children and the sharing of household tasks (as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). Marital happiness for the participants in this sample appeared to be consistent for financial stability and presence of children but inconsistent in terms of shared activities and household tasks. Only one participant spoke directly of finances as being of acute concern. However all the participants spoke of husbands being unavailable many times for childcare and household chores.

According to the literature, negative spillover from husband's job to negative marital satisfaction was linked to economic strain or wives' perception of relationship inequality due to unequal division of household labor, childcare, and activities spent together (Faulkner et al., 2005; Voydanoff, 2004). According to Kalmijn (1999) when wives can share the burden of parenting with their husbands, wives appear more satisfied with their marriages. Participants stated coping with husbands' shift schedules was most difficult when children were babies or pre-school-age. As children aged into the school

system and the marriage evolved, participants stated they actually enjoyed the days their husbands were on shift as they had free time for their own activities. Some participants stated the shift separations decreased time spent in disagreements, increased appreciation of each other, and so enhanced marital quality. The stressors were modified and changed to positive interactions as wives changed the subjective meaning (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Pearlin & Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983) of their husbands' absences.

Working wives, with the exception of two participants, said they deliberately chose jobs in which they could arrange their work schedules to alternate with husbands' shift schedules. Modifying the stressor situation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982; Pearlin & Schooler, 1983; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983) resulted in minimal to no child-care expenses, enhanced finances, and firefighter fathers who assumed many of the duties of childcare when off-shift. Participants who did not work stated they enjoyed shared activities with husband on his days off, but still had the burden of childcare during husbands' shift cycles.

Despite the stresses that husbands' shift work placed on participants all of the wives stated they were proud of their husbands and their husbands' career choice. Many wives stated that their husbands felt they had a calling, they were made for the job, or they had a drive to be a fireman from a very young age. Participants stated that husbands wanted a lifestyle that was full of meaning and activity and firefighting fulfilled that need. Participants stated their children were proud of their fathers. With the exception of one participant, wives with sons said they would not discourage them from following fathers' career path. The pride in husbands' career choice indicated that the positive value

(McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Pearlin & Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1983) placed on the husband's calling served to offset some of the stress associated with negative aspects of a firefighting career.

The research literature echoed the same sentiments as did wives quoted in this participant sample of firemen's wives. Firefighters' wives tended to be highly supportive and proud of their husbands' profession. Wives described their husbands as being caring, kind, helpful, intelligent, and loyal (Farren, 2005; Kisonas, 2004; Kirschman, 2004; Regehr et al., 2005). Regehr et al. found that many women described their husbands as being perfect for the job of fireman. Regehr et al. also found that children of firemen often wanted to follow in their fathers' footsteps.

Depending on Support Systems

"Social resources are represented in the interpersonal networks of which people are a part and which are a potential source of crucial supports: family, friends, fellow workers, neighbors, and voluntary associations" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1982, p. 113). Where persons turn for support may depend on individual characteristics, circumstances, and availability of resources (Pilisuk & Parks, 1982). As noted in the literature (Farren, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Regehr et al., 2005), participants depended on various social support systems to help them with childcare, household tasks, to forestall loneliness and to give emotional support.

Whereas many wives depended on other firefighters' wives as a support group, some participants, particularly Alaskan participants, had large extended families that they could turn to for practical help and emotional support. Several wives mentioned the

“brotherhood” of firefighters (Cowman et al., 2004; Farren, 2005; Kirschman, 2004) as being dependable and helpful when husbands were on duty and a wife needed help with a particular household task. When a firefighter was called to active duty in the armed services or there was a death, particularly a child’s death in a firefighter’s family, participants and their husbands stepped in to help with chores, cleaning, and meals during the crisis.

Resources may also be classified as a characteristic of how people identify themselves independent of their roles (Pearlin & Schooler, 1982). For example, a participant may consider herself a Christian independent of her role as a fireman’s wife. Many participants stated they relied on a deep faith as a support and prayed often for the safety of their husbands when they were on duty. Prayer may have represented a concrete coping response typical of what some people utilized as a resource (Pearlin & Schooler). Still others said their faith helped them personally to get through a day filled with loneliness and the tasks of childcare. Some participants specifically mentioned Bible study as a special time in their week to regroup and re-energize for the week’s tasks.

Coping with Special Stressors

Participants mentioned husbands’ sleep-deprived behaviors as a special stressor about which they could do little other than accept it. Wives complained that the first day off after a 24 hour shift cycle, husbands were too tired to do much around the house. Husbands often had to nap and when they did not nap, husbands were described as being grumpy or crabby. Many participants said they worried that their husbands’ sleep habits were not normal, and endangered their health. Kirschman (2004) and Regehr et al. (2005)

found sleep deprivation and related behaviors were common among firefighters. Wives stated that it was their job to help their husbands de-stress and keep life as smooth as possible when husband was home.

Firehouses were categorized as “fast” or “slow.” Even at a slow firehouse men might not get a deep rest in anticipation of the toner (fire alarm) going off. According to Kirschman (2004), at a busy firehouse firefighters can be called out 14 times in one 24-hour shift. Consequently they might get less than two hours of sleep during the entire 24-hour shift.

Another stressor that occurred among three participants was the birth of an impaired child. One wife had two hearing-impaired children and an active-duty hearing-impaired FF husband. One participant had one hearing-impaired child and another participant had a child with an un-diagnosable neurological-type disability. This latter wife had been reassured by doctors that her child would outgrow the condition by the time he entered kindergarten. The participant with two hearing-impaired children stated that her hearing-impaired husband caused her much marital distress because he did not appear to be as upset about the children’s diagnosis or treatment with hearing aids as she was. According to Nash and Nash (1981) and Jacobs (1980), a deaf educator, deaf parents are less likely to define the diagnosis of deafness in their children as a tragic crisis.

If wives did not have a large family to support them, they often had to depend on friends and neighbors to help them through the difficult times of emergency room visits and doctor’s appointments. Added to the cost of medical intervention was the cost of

special physical aids as well. Worries about how their child would have a normal life added to the stresses felt by mothers of impaired children. However, mothers of the hearing-impaired children stated they and the children had adjusted well. Furthermore, these mothers indicated they were supportive of their children's career choices.

In two different studies separated by 26 years and with two different populations, researchers noted "a rather unexpected finding; specifically, results suggested that parents [of deaf children] who reported more stress also reported higher satisfaction with life" (Åsberg, Vogel, & Bowers, 2008, p. 496). McCubbin et al. (1982) found that high-conflict families coping with a child with cerebral palsy scored consistently higher on all coping scales than did low-conflict families. Researchers of both studies hypothesized that parents of impaired children may find dealing with a child's disability leads to a sense of mastery and may be most valued and most apparent in stressful situations (Åsberg et al.; McCubbin et al.).

A very different stressor endured by Alaskan wives was the long, cold, dark winter. Winter in Alaska can get as cold as 30 degrees below zero. In the middle of the winter solstice there is a total of 4 ½ hours of daylight and consequently 19 ½ hours of night-time. One Alaskan wife with young children said she had felt depressed as it was difficult to get out with small children who had to be bundled up in snowsuits to spend a few minutes outdoors. Wives stated it was imperative that they stay busy in order to keep from going "stir-crazy." Participants said their firefighter wives' support groups were particularly helpful during the long cold winter months.

Managing Anxieties about Husband's Job-Related Situations

Participants found themselves directly involved in their firefighter husbands' jobs in three significant ways. Knowing the danger their husbands faced every day from fires, knowing their husbands often faced dangers not related to fires but to a criminal element or blood-borne diseases, and finally, listening to the stories of the traumatic events their firefighter husbands had to deal with. Many participants stated they did not worry in a conscious way about fire-related dangers their husbands faced. They said they felt their husbands were well-trained, would not take careless risks, and felt confident in their husbands' co-workers' abilities; a coping mechanism that was noted by other researchers (Kirschman, 2004; Regehr et al., 2005). Many wives said they accepted the fact that fire events were part and parcel of a fireman's job.

Wives stated they worried more when they knew their husbands were working in a bad area of town in which there were criminal elements. Fire trucks often accompanied fire department ambulances in cases where there was a multiple trauma or when there might be an injured or sick person too heavy for two men to lift into the ambulance. Wives knew their husbands had to deal with gang members, drug houses, and domestic assaults, in addition to being first on the scene of drive-by shootings, rapes, and homes in which there had been child mistreatment or spousal abuse.

Wives worried about their husbands being injured by gang members who wanted the person they just shot to die, not be saved by a firefighter/paramedic. One wife told a story of her husband hiding under an ambulance to keep from being deliberately harmed. Other wives spoke of like incidents and also of incidences in which husbands could suffer

injury from blood-borne diseases, a concern mentioned by Kirschman (2004). One wife stated she worried less about her husband falling through a floor in a fire than when he was working the fire truck or fire department ambulance on a medical call. According to the literature participants' worries were well-founded. Both physical and psychological injury to firefighters can result from repeated exposure to high stress on-the-job incidents (Beaton et al., 1998; Bryant & Guthrie, 2005; Del Ben et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2002; Kirschman; Lourel et al., 2008; North et al., 2002).

Another stressor participants had to manage was listening to husbands' traumatic experiences. Whereas participants said husbands often kept such incidents to themselves, firemen often seemed compelled to share child-related deaths and traumas with their wives. Harris et al. (2002) and a literature review by North et al. (2002) noted, "Several authors have commented on the especially distressing nature of exposure of disaster workers to child victims" (p. 174). Wives said they most often listened quietly and supportively to their husbands. Many said they could tell by a husband's facial demeanor and body language that he had had a particularly bad day. In a study by Regehr et al. (2005), participants noted that emotional distancing or irritability was often a sign of a bad day. In many cases a participant stated she would tell her husband she was available to listen and would permit her husband to come to her in his own time and in his own way. That participants were as equally affected as their husbands by child and infant traumas was apparent in that many cried in the retelling of the incident, even if it had occurred years earlier.

Other Findings

Many participants spoke of the high divorce rate among firemen and their wives. Several participants suggested that shift work puts a heavy strain on many marriages. Some wives stated they felt secondary to husbands' firehouse family. One participant suggested marital problems due to shift work and alcohol abuse may have been critical elements in the suicides of five urban-area firemen within a two-year period.

Another finding that emerged was an observation by many participant wives that a career of firefighting hardened their husbands emotionally. Participants cited instances in which their husbands showed little sympathy toward their own children's traumas and appeared to be more cynical in general about people and their motives. Participants theorized that perhaps the traumas firemen/paramedics dealt with on a daily basis over many years caused firemen to block or disregard their own feelings and those of their families. Yet another finding, not considered in the research literature, was the need for small town and rural participants to maintain confidentiality about traumatic incidents suffered by citizens known to wives in the communities their FF husbands served.

Conclusions

Participants in this qualitative study spoke about their experiences as the wives of firemen. They spoke of the stresses and strains that they experienced as the wives of firemen.

Family stress theory proposes that families modify stressors so they become manageable. Families modify a stressor event by changing interactions, roles, values, or the subjective meaning given to the stressor (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Pearlin &

Schooler, 1982; Reiss & Oliveri, 1982). This sample of participants appeared able to manage the stressors in their lives successfully by modifying the subjective meaning of shift cycles from negative to positive the longer they were married. The feelings of being single parents appeared to be offset by expressions of pride in the nature of their husbands' service to the community and the high regard held by the community for their husbands. Participants also engaged in interactions with support systems of family, friends, other firemen's wives, and the "brotherhood" of firefighters. Most participants stated they also utilized a deep spiritual faith as a resource.

Wives accepted the roles their husbands had chosen and were able to change the meaning of a dangerous situation by reassuring themselves that their husbands were well-trained and would not take careless risks when engaged in dangerous situations. Wives also placed value on their roles as listener when their firefighter husbands needed to unburden the feelings of grief and sadness that their jobs sometimes engendered, particularly as concerned child and infant trauma situations.

Finally, participant wives appeared sensitive to the problems that resulted in divorce and the unrelenting stress that appeared to create cynicism and callousness in their FF husbands. Wives who lived in small towns or rural communities were sensitive to the need to maintain confidentiality when their husbands, in a professional capacity, were dealing with problem situations in their communities.

Limitations

Several limitations apply to this qualitative study. The study had a small number of participants (N=15). All the participants except one were in first marriages which may

not be characteristic of many wives of firemen. All participants, with the exception of one, expressed deep religious convictions which again, may not be characteristic of many wives of FFs. Commitment to marriage and religious belief may have influenced the women to volunteer, thereby limiting the study to a particular group of women with deep religious convictions. All participants were White and had similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds. All, with the exception of two participants, were upper middle income. One was middle income and one did not report family income on the demographic form. Participants who were employed were either self-employed or worked in allied health care or teaching professions indicating post-secondary educations. Of the six self-described homemakers, one had a master's degree. Two had bachelor's degrees. One had "some college" and two had completed high school.

Five of the participants lived in the same neighborhood of a large metropolitan city in Illinois, five lived in and about a large metropolitan city of Alaska, and five each lived in different small towns in North Texas. The researcher was deliberate in recruiting an equal number of volunteers from discrete regions of the United States in order to get cross sections of participants from vastly different areas of the country..

Ethnic minorities were not represented, despite being solicited through the Dallas Black Firefighters Association and the National Hispanic Firefighters Association by the researcher. Participants in the study also agreed to try and recruit ethnic minority wives of firefighters. The researcher also solicited Alaskan Native-American FFs through a contact who was a paramedic and a member of the Tlingit native tribe of Alaska. There

were no ethnic volunteers from any of those contacts. One participant was married to a Latino but the husbands of all other participants were White.

Ten of the interviews were audio-taped during face-to-face interviews. The Alaskan participants were interviewed via speaker phone which may have affected the quality of the interaction between participant and interviewer in some manner. Qualitative research by definition depends on the interaction between interviewer and participant in order for the interviewer to get the full lived experience of the participant through non-verbal cues as well as verbal statements.

Implications

The results of this research suggest that women married to firemen have experiences that are unique and potentially damaging to a marriage. Many of the participants mentioned the high divorce rate among firefighters and their wives. Alcohol abuse and even suicide were mentioned as problematic among firefighters. Firefighters are subject to personal danger and unimaginable traumas. Critical incident debriefers were available for firefighters, but not for their wives who at times appeared to suffer from secondary trauma related to their husbands' traumatic narratives.

It is important that marriage and family therapists, as well as other mental health professionals, provide outreach to the families of firemen. In order to be more effective, it is equally important that marriage and family therapists become familiar with the training, shift scheduling, and fire and medical calls that firefighters respond to. The systemic nature of family therapy would then be more able to address the hardships of shift-work for FFs, their wives, and children; loneliness experienced by the wife;

depression; and post-traumatic feelings experienced by both husband and wife. Another concern mentioned by wives was the apparent callousness exhibited by FFs toward their own children's feelings.

All of these issues could and should be addressed by marriage and family therapists. That wives are open to family therapy was expressed when wives in this sample stated to the interviewer how happy they were that someone was listening to their stories. Wives in this participant sample appeared to manage their own stressors by changing their subjective reaction to stressors and by placing positive value on their husband's profession and their role in providing emotional support. Firemen's wives also managed stress through interactions with support communities of family, friends, other FF wives, the "brotherhood" of firefighters, and a belief in the efficacy of prayer. Finally, this participant sample of firemen's wives exhibited a combination of acceptance, flexibility, and empathy; qualities that could be encouraged in all wives and their firefighter husbands who present at the family therapist's office.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research with the wives of firefighters is extremely limited despite the hundreds of peer-reviewed journal articles concerning firefighters and their job-related stresses and strains. Research is needed to better understand the particular marital stresses and strains experienced by FF wives and so provide mental health services to them and their husbands. The following is suggested for future research:

1. Replicate the study to include a larger number of participants.

2. Replicate the study to engage ethnic minority wives and wives in bi-racial marriages as their experiences, even when husbands are working in the same firehouse as White firemen, may be markedly different than those of White firefighter couples.
3. Replicate the study to include larger and more diverse geographic areas as the experiences of wives in Alaska were decidedly different than wives in the lower 48 states due to the extreme climate.
4. Design a study comparing urban wives of firemen to rural wives of firemen as the researcher found the types of fires, economic compensation, and wives' duties in the field were distinctly different between rural and urban FFs.
5. Replicate the study to include the male spouses of female firefighters.
6. Design a study that will address divorced spouses of firefighters so family therapists may become knowledgeable about the unique ways in which families manage or do not manage problems that lead to divorce.

Summary

This chapter included a discussion of the themes that emerged from the research findings. Conclusions, limitations and implications of the study were also discussed. Recommendations for further research were suggested. Additional research that examines the experiences of women married to firefighters is needed as this is a population that does not readily present itself to family therapists. Additional research would add to the marriage and family literature and educate therapists on the most productive ways to help firefighter families in distress.

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APPENDIX A
Recruitment Flyer

RECRUITMENT FLYER

PARTICIPANTS REQUESTED

Texas Woman's University Dissertation Research Project

My name is Kim Bonneau. I am a Ph.D. candidate conducting a qualitative research study. I am really interested in you as the spouse of a firefighter. I have read a great deal about firemen, their jobs, their training, their firehouse family, and how they handle the stresses of their job. But there is very little written about you, the wife of the firefighter. I decided it was important to talk to you. I want to understand how you experience your marriage and the job of parenting as the wife of a man whose job is to run into danger rather than away from it. So I am inviting you to participate in this important research study. Your participation will consist of one interview at a time, place, and date convenient to you. The interview will last approximately one hour.

- **Confidentiality will be assured.**

If you are interested in participating in or learning more about this study; or if you have questions regarding the study, please contact me at (contact information deleted) or kbonneau@mail.twu.edu. You may also contact my research advisor, Linda J. Brock, Ph.D., at 940-898-2173. You may e-mail her at LBrock@mail.twu.edu. If you know of any other wives of firefighters who might be willing to participate in this study, please share this flyer with them or have them contact me or my advisor. Thank you for taking time to read this flyer. Your interest is appreciated.

APPENDIX B
Recruitment Process Script

Recruitment Process Script

“Hello. Yes, this is Kim Bonneau. May I ask who is calling? You say you are calling about the research your friend told you about or you saw the flyer? Thank you Ms. _____ for inquiring. I’ll be happy to tell you about the research and answer any questions you may have. I’m a student at Texas Woman’s University and I’m doing this research project to complete my education. As students, we are free to choose the topic we wish to explore. I’m also a family therapist and I’ve become very interested in the lives of women who are married to firefighters. As a researcher I’m interested in exploring how you experience your marriage and your role in parenting.”

“When I began researching this topic I became very aware that there were many and various research studies done on the stresses and strains of being a firefighter, but very little written about his partner. I hope to fill the research gap with this study. I think it’s important that family therapists and counselors know and understand how wives of firemen experience their marriages and parenting.” *(Pause and wait for comments or questions.)* “There are certain criteria for this study. Are you at least 25 years of age?”

(Pause) “Have you been married for at least five years?” *(Pause)* “Do you have children?” *(Pause)* “Has your husband been an active duty fireman for at least two years and is he a career fireman?” *(Pause)*.

(If the participant does not meet the criteria), “Thank you so much for the time you took to call and inquire about this very important research. I’m so sorry but you don’t meet all the criteria. Although I cannot use you as a participant, I would very much have liked to have had you participate as you appear to be very invested in your husband’s career and

your awareness of how important this research is. Again, thank you for calling. I truly appreciate your interest.”

(If they do meet the criteria), “Do you have any questions?” *(Pause and wait for questions and comments)*. “If you have any additional questions or concerns before making a decision to participate you may call me at 940-484-6120, or call my research advisor, Linda Brock, Ph.D., at 940-898-2713 for additional information about the study. If you know now that you are interested in participating in this study I will give you additional information at this time. Confidentiality will be assured to the extent provided by law. You will be given a consent form to read and sign immediately before the interview begins. After reading the consent form you may refuse to participate at that time and your name will be removed from the participant list. The interview will occur at a place, time, and date that is convenient for you. The interview will be audio-taped and should take approximately two hours from start to finish. There will be a demographic form to fill out after the interview.” *(Give additional procedural details)*.

Feel free to call me if any questions or concerns come up even after you have made a decision to participate and we’ve made arrangements to meet. It is important that you understand that you are free to not participate in this study at any time should you change your mind. If you know any other firemen’s wives I would appreciate it if you would tell them about this study and ask them to contact me or my advisor if they are interested. Thank you very much for calling and expressing an interest in contributing to this very important study.

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Marriage, Children, and the Fireman's Wife: A Qualitative Study

Investigator: Kim Bonneau, M.S.....Contact information deleted

Research Advisor: Linda Brock, Ph.D. 940-898-2713

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Ms. Kim Bonneau's dissertation at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of the research study will be to explore how a firefighter's wife experiences her marriage and how she experiences parenting.

Research Procedures

For this study the investigator will conduct face-to-face interviews of participants. The interview will occur on a date, time, and at a private location agreed upon by you and the researcher. You will be audio-taped during the interview. The purpose of the audio-taping is to provide a transcript of the information discussed in the interview and to assure that the researcher accurately reports the information. Your maximum total time commitment in the study will be approximately two hours.

Potential Risks

A possible risk to you as the result of your participation in this study is release of confidential information. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will occur on a date, at a time, and in a private location agreed upon by you and the researcher.. A code number, rather than your real name, will be used to identify the demographic information, audio-tapes, and transcripts. Only the investigator will have access to the audio-tapes. All interviews will be **transcribed by the researcher** only. The investigator, her advisor, and two doctoral-level peer reviewers will have access to the transcripts. All information will be typed on a computer and the information will be stored on a universal serial bus (USB) device, also called a flash drive or jump drive. The information **will not** be stored on a computer hard drive. The audio-tapes, USB device, and hard copies of the transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the investigator's home office in Denton, TX to which no other person has access.

Initial _____

Page 1 of 3

All identifiable data such as that on the names-with-codes list and demographics questionnaire will be kept in a separate locked space in the researcher's home office and will be shredded two years after completion of the study. At that time the audio-tapes and USB device will be destroyed with a high-intensity magnet designed for that purpose.

As there may be loss of confidentiality in email, downloading, and internet transactions, no personal information will be transmitted by email. No interviews will be conducted by email. You may contact the researcher by email. The researcher will not contact you by email. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be published in the investigator's dissertation as well as in other research publications. However, no names or other identifying information will be included in any publication

You may also experience emotional discomfort or distress due to the personal nature of the interview. You may refuse to answer any particular question at any time without having to explain why. You may discontinue participation in the research study at any time without penalty and your name will be removed from the participant list. Before the interview the researcher will provide you with a referral list of names and phone numbers of mental health professionals that you may use to discuss any discomfort that may arise during or after the interview. However, counseling services are not free.

You may refuse to respond to any question, comment, or statement made by the researcher. The researcher will make every effort to be considerate and discerning when asking for clarification of any topic you may care to discuss. You may discontinue participation in the study at any time.

You may also feel fatigue or physical discomfort during the course of the interview. To avoid fatigue or physical discomfort you may take breaks as often as needed during the interview. You may withdraw from participation at any time if physically fatigued.

The researcher will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researcher know at once if there is a problem and she will help you. However, Texas Woman's University does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might occur because you are taking part in this research.

Initial _____

Page 2 of 3

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this research study is completely voluntary and you may discontinue your participation in the study at any time without penalty. There is no direct benefit of this study to you other than at the completion of the study a summary of the research results will be mailed to you upon request.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researcher and her advisor. Their phone numbers are the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

You have read the contents of this consent. You have been given a copy of the dated and signed consent form. You have been given a copy of the referral list with the names and numbers of mental health professionals.

Signature _____ Date _____

*** If requested, please provide an address to which a study summary may be sent:**

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Participant's Code: _____

Date of Interview: _____

“Before we begin, I want you to know there will be two documents you will be reading. One is the consent form that I will ask you to read and sign after the interview and the second is a demographic questionnaire that you will also complete before the interview. The questionnaire asks for general information about your income, ethnicity, and family. There will also be questions that pertain to your husband's job, rank, and years in the firefighting service. I will ask you to read and fill out the questionnaire before the interview. Do you have any questions about the demographic questionnaire?”

“The purpose of this study will be to explore how you experience your marriage and your role in parenting. By sharing the story of your marriage and how you parent, you will be aiding social scientists fill a gap in the information about the lives of women who are living with firefighters. Much research has been done involving your partners, the jobs they do, and the stresses they experience as part of the job. Little is known about you or your role as the spouse of a firefighter. The questions I will ask you are designed to permit you to tell your story and how you experience your marriage and raising children.”

“I will be audio-taping your story and may take some notes as you are speaking. I may ask you questions in order to clarify the relationship of any person you may name. I will edit their names out of the transcript and will only use a general description such as the mother, the brother-in-law, the friend, etc.”

“Before we begin the interview, let us go over the consent form.”

“Do you have any questions about the consent form? After you sign the form I will give you a copy to keep for your records. I will also give you a copy of the counseling referral list.”

“You may take a break at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

“I’m going to turn on the tape recorder now.”

Initial Prompt: “Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter” (*Pause and give the participant time to begin the story in her own time and in her own way.*)

Second Prompt: “Tell me about your experiences raising children as the wife of a firefighter.” (*Only use this prompt if the topic does not come up during the narrative.*)

Prompts

Facial expression showing focused attention and interest.

Attentive silence

Umm Hmmm.

What do you remember most?

Tell me more about that.

Who did you tell?

Who else did you tell?

How did you make sense of that?

What did that mean to you?

How was that helpful?

Tell me the first thing that popped into your head when I asked that.

Because?

And then what happened?

So then you . . . ?

And the response?

You look thoughtful . . . (or sad, or happy)

“Now that the interview is over here is a brief information form for you to fill out before you leave. If you have any questions about the information requested on the form, I’ll be happy to clarify them for you. You don’t have to answer any question you don’t feel comfortable answering.”

APPENDIX E
Demographic Information

Demographic Information

Date of Interview _____ Participant Code _____ Age _____

Occupation _____

Last Educational Level Completed _____

Combined Income Level

Below \$20,000 _____ \$20,000 to \$40,000 _____ \$40,001 to \$60,000 _____

\$60,001 to \$80,000 _____ \$80,001 to \$100,000 _____ More than \$100,001 _____

Race/Ethnicity

White _____ African-American _____ Hispanic-Black _____ Hispanic-Latina _____

Asian-American _____ Native American _____ Other _____

Religious Affiliation

Denomination _____ Non-Denominational _____ Not Religious _____

Relationship Status

Number of Years Married _____ Prior Marriages Y ___ N___ To a Fireman Y___ N___

Number of Children _____ Ages of Children _____

Number of Years Partner has been an active Firefighter _____

Husband's Rank _____

Husband's Shift Schedule(s) _____

Distance from Home to Firehouse _____

Past or present Family members in the Fire Service, Active or Retired _____

APPENDIX F

Counseling Referral Lists for Women of Texas, Illinois, and Alaska

Counseling Referral Lists for Women of Texas, Illinois, and Alaska

Denton, TX

Ron Perrett, M.S.S.W., L.C.S.W.
1100 West Oak St.
Suite 211
Denton, TX, 76201
940-382-0823

Jo Giddens, M.S.S.W., L.C.S.W.
303 Carroll Blvd.
Suite 120
Denton, TX, 76201
940-243-8000

Flower Mound, TX

Peter Bradley, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.
Cross Timbers Family Therapy
2904 Corporate Circle
Suite 129
Flower Mound, TX, 75028
469-635-7540

Fort Worth, TX

Mary Jane Hooper, M.S., L.M.F.T.
2501 Parkview Drive
Suite 304
Fort Worth, TX, 76102
817-348-8222

Allen, TX

Corey D. Allen, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.
1506 N. Greenville Ave.
Suite 250
Allen, TX
214-629-6133

Dallas, TX

Mary A. Reed, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.
1409 S. Lamar St.
Dallas, TX, 75215
214-428-0322

Internet Access to Therapists

www.therapistlocator.net
www.psychologytoday.com

Chicago, IL

Jack Sanders, MSW, LCSW
6650 N. Northwest Hwy. #201
Chicago, IL 60631
773-464-1154

Park Ridge, IL

Sue Chelminski, PsyD, LDN, LCPC
ACP Consultants
2604 Dempster Ave. #501
Park Ridge, IL 60068
847-824-1235, Ext. 6

Javier Steven Alonso, LPC, AMFT, CADC
New Leaf Counseling
1460 Renaissance Drive #211
Park Ridge, IL 60068
847-875-2979

David Marks, MS, LCPC
Marks & Associates
1580 N. Northwest Hwy. #215
Park Ridge, IL 60068
847-299-3400

Vernon Hills IL

John Beltramo, Psychologist
3 Parkside Court Unit 10
Vernon Hills, IL 60061
847-571-4105

Internet Access to Therapists

www.therapistlocator.net
www.psychologytoday.com

Anchorage, AK

Mary Ann Mattingly, LPC
2600 Denali St.
Anchorage, AK 99503
907-552-2010

Mike Blakey, LPA
Greatland Clinical Associates
1400 W. Benson
Anchorage, AK 99503
907-929-4009

Peter Strisik, PhD
2605 Denali St. Suite 203
Anchorage, AK 99503
907-222-0899

Claudia Behr, LCSW
3820 Lake Otis Parkway Suite 200
Anchorage, AK 99508
907-334-3378

Internet Access to Therapists

www.therapistlocator.net
www.psychologytoday.com

APPENDIX G

Research Model

Research Model

Research Questions

How does a fireman's wife experience her marriage?

How does a fireman's wife experience parenting?

Interview Statements

Tell me about your marriage as the wife of a firefighter.

Tell me about your experiences raising children as the wife of a firefighter.

Themes and Sub-themes

1. *Marriage to firefighter is different*
 - a. adjusting to shift schedules
 - b. children and child-care
 - c. an honorable profession

2. *Depending on support systems*
 - a. family
 - b. friends
 - c. the "brotherhood"
 - d. faith

3. *Coping with special stressors*
 - a. husband's sleep patterns
 - b. children with impairments
 - c. weather

4. *Managing anxieties about husband's job-related situations*
 - a. fires
 - b. crimes/disease
 - c. sharing trauma

APPENDIX H
IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 Fax 940-898-3416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

June 26, 2009

Ms. Kim Bonneau

[Redacted address]

Dear Ms. Bonneau:

Re: Marriage, Children, and the Fireman's Wife: A Qualitative Study

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp and a copy of the annual/final report are enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms and final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from June 12, 2009. According to regulations from the Department of Health and Human Services, another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way, and the IRB must be notified immediately regarding any adverse events. If you have any questions, feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

[Handwritten signature of Dr. David Nichols]

Dr. David Nichols, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

enc.

cc. Dr. Larry LeFlore, Department of Family Sciences
Dr. Linda J. Brock, Department of Family Sciences
Graduate School