Title: Wildland Firefighting and its Impacts upon the Personal Relationships of Firefighters

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Abstract

Wildland firefighting places a wide variety of demands upon those who engage in it. Due in part to the many days away from home and the unpredictability of work schedules, the interpersonal relationships of firefighters can be adversely affected. In order to further understand the degree to which these factors impact those who fight fires, a brief survey was administered to 249 wildland firefighters (216 males, 33 females). Firefighting experience of those surveyed ranged from less than two years to over thirty years, and the survey sample included a wide array of different resources (Type I crews, Type II crews, Helitack personnel, Engine personnel, Smokejumpers, Dispatchers, and a variety of overhead positions). Responses suggested that firefighters can have a difficult time adjusting to the schedule demands of the job, and that it presents challenges in firefighters relationships with non-firefighting family and friends. Firefighters reported that maintaining intimate relationships with others is difficult, due in large part to the schedule demands of the profession. Those who have managed to maintain intimate relationships in the face of these difficulties listed a variety of different coping strategies, including: educating a partner early in the relationship about the work demands of the profession; establishing partner relationships with another firefighter as they better understand the time demands; looking for partners with the qualities of independence and self-confidence who will be better able to handle the time apart; and, maximizing time off opportunities to build and solidify relationships. Further research in this area is needed to clarify the significance of the impacts that firefighting has upon relationships, and to better understand what types of support can be provided to firefighters to help them with these challenges.