

# Volunteer firefighting: A suitable job for a woman?

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## Introduction

Women make up between 10% and 25% of fire agency volunteers—mostly occupying non-operational, or support, roles. In their review of the scant literature concerning women volunteer firefighters Beatson and McLennan (2005) noted that increasing the participation rates of women in volunteer brigades could: (i) ease pressures on agencies faced with dwindling brigade memberships; and (ii) promote closer links between brigades and their host communities, thus increasing effectiveness.

Beatson and McLennan noted also that research into career firefighting suggested that: **(a) there were significant barriers to women becoming volunteer firefighters;** **(b) nothing was known about the motives for women volunteering;** and **(c) women volunteers were likely to experience discrimination and harassment.**



## Methods

Three studies were carried out:

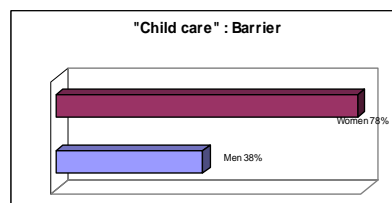
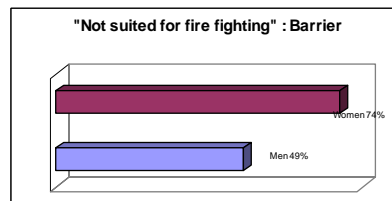
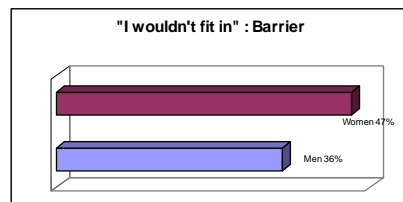
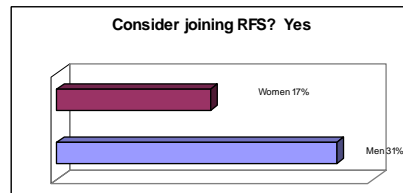
1. Survey of 1,188 non-volunteers in communities in the NSW Grain Belt.
2. Survey of 391 new CFA volunteers.
3. Survey of 442 women operational volunteers in the SA CFS.



## Findings

### Grain Belt Community Survey

#### Barriers



### Survey of New CFA Volunteers

#### Motives

Women and men did not differ on mean levels of:

- Community-oriented motives.
- Safety-oriented motives.
- Self-oriented motives.

### Survey of SA CFS Women Volunteers

#### Experiences

"I am accepted by the Brigade"	93%
"I have to act like one of the boys"	14%
"...told women don't belong"	18%
"I have experienced discrimination"	24%
"I have experienced harassment"	11%
"Difficulties with size/fit of PPE"	33%

## Conclusions

- There are barriers: Attitudinal, stereotypical; & childcare.
- There are no apparent differences between men and women in motivations for volunteering.
- Agencies are not as "female friendly", overall, as they might be.

--detailed findings are in McLennan et al. (2007)

## References

- Beatson, R. & McLennan, J. (2005). Australia's women volunteer firefighters: A literature review and research agenda. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 10(2), 18-27.
- McLennan, J., Birch, A., Beatson, R., & Cowlshaw, S. (2007). Volunteer firefighting: A job for a woman? *Proceedings of the 7th APS Industrial/Organisational Psychology Conference*, Adelaide, June (pp. 201-206). Available from: [j.mclennan@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:j.mclennan@latrobe.edu.au)

## Acknowledgements

Photograph (left) courtesy of QLD Fire & Rescue Service – Rural Operations. Above: *The Age*, 19 January, 2007