

# Exploring the impacts of firefighting on the families of volunteers

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## Introduction

There is evidence indicating that some families experience negative outcomes as a result of having a family member who is a firefighter (Regehr, Dimitropoulos, Bright, George & Henderson, 2005). However, almost all the scant evidence available has come from investigating career (employed) emergency services personnel. Notwithstanding that the bulk of fire protection to Australian communities is provided by volunteers, little is known about how fire service volunteering impacts on the families of these volunteers.

**The purpose of the research is to inform procedures that fire agencies might adopt to support the families of their volunteers.**

## Design

In order to achieve the aims of the project, a three-stage research plan will be carried out over 2 years.

### Stage 1: Interviews with 'expert observers'

*Description:* Interviews will be conducted with 20 brigade support staff and operations officers from CFA. The staff to be interviewed will have



considerable experience working with volunteers and their families. This stage of the research has already been approved by CFA.

**Anticipated Outcome: An organisational-perspective account of the experiences and needs of the families of volunteers.**

### Stage 2: Survey of volunteers and their partners

*Description:* Volunteer firefighters and their spouse/partner will be surveyed about the typical experiences of families of volunteer firefighters: stressors, sources of satisfaction, ways of coping, how families might be more effectively supported by the organisation.

It is hoped that a number of agencies will participate in this stage.

**Anticipated Outcomes: A systematic and comprehensive account of the experiences of firefighter families, informing agencies about the needs of families of their volunteers.**

### Stage 3: Daily Diary Investigation

*Description:* Stage 3 will involve firefighters and their partners, who

agree to participate, completing regular diary entries over the course of a fire season (prompted by a 'reminder' system), describing the immediate experiences and interactions that occur between family members.

**Anticipated Outcomes: A detailed account, over time, of how a fire season impacts on the families of volunteers.**



## Project Outcomes

**The major anticipated outcomes of the project will include reports to fire agencies detailing the experiences of families of volunteer firefighters, their needs, and ways in which organisations might meet these needs more effectively.**

Feedback, questions, and suggestions will be appreciated greatly, and can be directed to Sean Cowlshaw; email: [s.cowlshaw@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:s.cowlshaw@latrobe.edu.au)

## References

Regehr, C., Dimitropoulos, G., Bright, E., George, S., & Henderson, J. (2005). Behind the brotherhood: Rewards and challenges for wives of firefighters. *Family Relations*, 54, 423-435.

## Acknowledgements

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