



Investigation of Firefighters Who Lost Their Relatives in Disaster in Terms of Disaster Psychology; The Art Of A Firefighter's Self-Defense

Afetlerde Yakınlarını Kaybeden İtfaiyecilerin Afet Psikolojisi Açısından İncelenmesi; Bir İtfaiyecinin Kendi Savunma Sanatı

ABSTRACT

Unfortunately, there are some systemic and managerial problems in fire departments, as in every institution in our country. In addition, like everyone else in business life, we are faced with difficulties that we have not yet overcome, such as middle and senior level managers not being able to adequately understand the personnel working with them, having difficulty in empathizing, and trying to prove themselves. Managers are trying to get the other party to accept their ideas without being exposed to the light of science, experience and knowledge. and this problem continues to be a heavy burden on the package of life. This is a real event that we are going to tell, but it also seems like a fairy tale. The hero of this event will be remembered as a firefighter, and we will talk about our institution as the fire department. Because our aim here is never to offend or criticize our institutions in a destructive way, on the contrary, it is to turn some negativity into a positive awareness through the event. Unfortunately, the two major earthquakes that occurred in February 2023, affecting 13 provinces centered in Kahramanmaraş, caused great losses, destruction and unforgettable pain. Our hero, the firefighter, is a rookie firefighter who has just started working in the fire department during this earthquake, but he is also a rescue firefighter with high potential and love. As soon as the news of the earthquake came, he called his family and loved ones and understood the gravity of the situation. All his loved ones, his family, his memories, his life, everything was destroyed. He immediately made a decision and had to go there as a rescuer to help his family and loved ones. In this study, in addition to the self-sacrificing work of heroic firefighters and fire brigades, their effects on the psychology of earthquake victims and rescuers will also be examined.

Keywords: Firefighters, Disaster Psychology, Fire Departments

ÖZET

Ülkemizde her kurumda olduğu gibi maalesef itfaiye teşkilatlarında da bazı sistemsel ve yönetsel sorunlar bulunmaktadır. Bunun yanında orta ve üst düzey yöneticilerin yanlarında çalışan personelleri yeterince anlayamama, empati yapmakta güçlük çekme, kendi gücünü kanıtlamakta; karşı tarafa kendi fikirlerini bilim, tecrübe ve bilgi ışığına hiç uğramadan, kabul ettirmeye çalışmak gibi henüz üzerimizden atamadığımız bazı iş hayatı zorlukları da herkes gibi bizlerin de hayat bohçasında ağırlık yapmaya devam ediyor. Bu anlatacağımız gerçek ama bir o kadar da aslında masalsı gibi duran yaşanmış bir olay. Bu olayın kahramanı itfaiyeci olarak anılacak olup, kurumumuzdan da itfaiye teşkilatı olarak bahsedeceğiz. Çünkü burada ki amacımız asla kurumlarımızı rencide etmek veya yıkıcı şekilde eleştirmek değil tam tersi olay üzerinden bazı olumsuzlukları, olumlu yönde bir farkındalığa çevirmektir.

Kahramanmaraş merkezli 13 ili etkileyen 2023 şubat ayında meydana gelen iki büyük deprem maalesef büyük kayıplara, yıkıntılara ve unutulmaz acılara neden olmuştur. Kahramanımız itfaiyeci bu yaşanan depremde itfaiye teşkilatına yeni başlamış çaylak ama bir o kadar da potansiyeli ve sevgisi yüksek bir kurtarmacı itfaiyecidir. Deprem haberi gelir gelmez ailesi ve sevdiklerini aramış ve durumun vahametini anlamıştır. Tüm sevdiği, ailesi, anıları, yaşamı her şey ama her şey yerle bir olmuştur. Hemen karar almış ve ailesine ve sevdiğine yardım için bir kurtarmacı olarak oraya gitmeye karar vermiştir.

Bu çalışmada kahraman itfaiyeciler ve itfaiye teşkilatlarının özverili çalışmalarının yanında depremde ve kurtarmacı psikolojisi üzerindeki etkilerine de göz atılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İtfaiyeciler, Afet Psikolojisi, İtfaiye Teşkilatları (Times New Roman, 9 Punto).

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INTRODUCTION

Love and helpfulness lie at the core of the firefighter profession. The core value of this profession lies in love for people, love for animals, nature and living things. Firefighters strive to do justice to this sacred profession with the power, strength and energy they receive from this love, absolute motivation and irresistible focus.

Our young brothers who are considering choosing the firefighter profession should understand with their heart what the profession means and what they should be ready for with their body and soul. The firefighter profession is an international profession. That's why all firefighters are actually brothers. Because no matter where in the world, a firefighter can respond to fires, traffic accidents, earthquakes, floods, and landslides; In short, it responds to all disasters and emergencies. While intervening in these events, they often experience dramatic and difficult times of life with people they have never met. Of course, they also witness incredible miracles in these dramatic moments of life. Firefighters are real heroes who do not wear capes, who disregard their own lives to bring people back to life, all over the world, when the lives of people in difficult situations pass before their eyes. (Tengilimoğlu & Aydoğan, 2022)

There are many factors that affect a person's career choice. The thoughts of relatives are also one of these factors. Our hero, a firefighter, was influenced by his brother in his choice of profession. Because his brother is a hero who is devoted to the profession of firefighters and represents this profession in the best way; he is knowledgeable, skilled, experienced and attaches great importance to the core values of the profession. Since fire departments are local organizations and dynamic organizations based on a 24-hour basis, they are ready to intervene in case of any disaster and are institutionally and psychologically strong organizations. In other words, it is the natural nature of the profession to constantly intervene in fires, traffic accidents and holistic rescue events, and to keep the internal dynamics and psychological resistance level at a high level. Compared to other emergency groups, firefighters are responsible for other emergencies, including transportation accidents, fires or explosions, serious accidents at work, at home, or during recreational activities, life-threatening natural disasters, violent death, severe human suffering, body recovery, and toxic substances. are exposed to more traumatic events than emergency teams. (Sahebi et al., 2020).

Fire brigades vary in the number of emergency incidents they respond to and the variety of incidents depending on the city's size, population, and risk factors. Istanbul Fire Brigade, which is the largest fire brigade in our country, is one of the largest fire brigades in the world. This situation gives us the following data. The incident statistics of metropolitan fire brigades are higher than other non-metropolitan provincial and district organizations based on their population density. In other words, having worked in organizations such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir means seeing more firefighting incidents. Each fire incident counts as an experience in your professional portfolio and provides benefits in terms of your professional development. The reading we can derive from here is as follows. Having worked in Anatolian fire brigades for 5 years and working in metropolitan fire brigades for 1 year are likely to coincide with each other in terms of the number of incidents and the diversity of incidents.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The duties of firefighters are listed in the municipal fire department regulations as follows:

Duties

ARTICLE 6 – (Amended:OG-18/12/2021-31693)

(1) The duties of the fire department are as follows:

- a) Intervening and extinguishing fires.
- b) To intervene in all kinds of accidents, collapses, explosions, strandings and similar situations requiring technical rescue and to provide first aid services; To carry out all kinds of search and rescue operations in the field, on and under water.
- c) To intervene in floods.
- c) Participating in search and rescue efforts in disasters and emergencies.

...

2) Fire brigades carry out their duties regarding disasters and emergencies within the scope of the Disaster and Emergency Response Services Regulation and the Turkey Disaster Response Plan (TAMP), which were put into effect by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 2013/5703 dated 26/8/2013.

It is said. As can be seen, fire departments have to work in all kinds of emergencies and disasters and they have to be prepared for these duties.

When the statistical data from the Istanbul Fire Department website is examined, in 2023, 4642 personnel and 925 vehicles responded to 85,671 fire incidents. The data also reveals how dynamic the Istanbul Fire Department has.

In fire departments, the master-apprentice relationship appears as a corporate culture. Firefighters contribute to the development of the organization by transferring the experiences they have gained over the years to less experienced and rookie firefighters. In real life, firefighting events are not like what is written in books, like the information obtained in the academy, and like the situations that occur in practice. You immediately understand that you need to be very strong mentally, even when you first encounter a fire or a traffic accident.

Epidemiology studies worldwide have found that 70% of people experience one or more traumatic events in their lifetime (Benjet et al., 2016) and 4% of the population experiences post-traumatic stress disorder after trauma (Kessler et al., 2017). However, this prevalence varies depending on various factors such as the type of work performed. First responders or emergency workers have been found to encounter a variety of potentially traumatic situations more frequently than the general population (Carleton et al., 2019).

The first thing you need to do in disasters such as earthquakes, which cause great psychological and financial damage, is to prepare yourself mentally and physically for the negativities. When a rookie firefighter arrives at an earthquake zone, he immediately realizes that the first thing he sees is chaos. Because everything is extraordinary now. Everyone is in a rush, but it is a rush that is done unconsciously and without knowing what they are doing. Every disaster victim expects help from you, everyone tries to hold you by the arm and take you to their relatives. No plan or program is more important than the idea of survival and the survival of loved ones.

Fire Sergeant Ozan Karapınar, who was caught in the great disaster that occurred in February 2023, as both an earthquake victim and a rescuer, gave an interview: He was trapped in his apartment with his wife and child, and then he rescued them, took up his duty without wasting any time, and saved many lives. After taking his family to a safe place, he stated in a cool and fully motivated manner that all he had to do was help people.



Picture 1: Iskenderun Fire Brigade Building damaged during the earthquake



Picture 2: Hatay Fire Brigade damaged in the earthquake

Firefighters who work as rescuers during earthquakes live in fire buildings that they see as a home in many cities. Unfortunately, the buildings became slightly, medium and heavily damaged. Despite this, the fire brigades carried out their duties with dignity.

Depending on the magnitude of the earthquake, individuals' reactions vary depending on many factors. These processes, it can be explained in four parts:

Psychological shock process: It can last more than 24 hours. Individuals experience reactions such as physiological reactions, inability to concentrate, forgetfulness, hallucinations and rigidity.

Response time: Appears after two to six days. Individuals are angry, insecure, anxious and fearful; physically, nausea, palpitations, constant restlessness, etc. like. You see the reactions.

Awareness process: It occurs after a week. He does not want to know what happened, the mourning process begins, emotional intensity, inability to concentrate, conflicts appear.

Recovery process: Long after the disaster I'm trying to adapt. It reduces resistance, calmness, kindness. you see the situation; During the disaster process, goals begin to be determined. It begins to be seen as a part of it. All these processes differ from person to person. There are individuals who give the appearance of a great crisis or a surprising calm. (Özkan and Kutun, 2021)

In the 1970 Gediz earthquake, the 1999 Marmara earthquake, the 2011 Van earthquake and the most recent 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquake, fire brigades that were expected to provide first aid in search and rescue were damaged like other buildings and even fire trucks were trapped under buildings.

By the nature of the fire profession, rescuers invariably encounter seriously injured or dead bodies, witness the emotional reactions (distress, grief, and anger) of devastated survivors, experience disappointment when they fail to save a life, and expose themselves to potential physical harm. All of these stressors may increase the likelihood of negative psychological outcomes among rescuers compared to the general population not exposed to a disaster. The negative psychological effects of disaster on rescue workers include acute distress disorder, anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance use/addiction disorders. (Mao et al, 2018)

Our hero works as a rookie firefighter in a fire department. Meanwhile, an earthquake occurs and a phone call reaches his family and loved ones. After receiving information about the earthquake, he immediately applies to the fire brigade to participate in the work in the earthquake area. But this application is not accepted by middle level managers. In human psychology, it is very difficult to focus on other tasks if your family and loved ones are in danger. That's why our hero decides to go to the earthquake zone by listening to his heart instead of the authorities. Our firefighter hero works hard in the earthquake zone, selflessly, with the power, strength and belief that comes from his heart. Meanwhile, he helps not only his family but also many of his fellow citizens. It helps many people survive. He helps effectively because he knows and is experienced in sociological aspects of the local people and their reactions, attitudes and language.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our hero, the firefighter, leaves the earthquake zone and returns to the organization where he works, and he is asked to prepare a defense because he participated in the response efforts even though he was not allowed. The defense of our hero, the firefighter, is as follows:

.....To the Fire Department

.... Fire Department Group Headquarters Based on the attached report dated 06.03.2023 and dated 06.03.2023, I have been requested to make a defense.

As a result of 2 consecutive major earthquakes that affected 13 provinces centered in Kahramanmaraş, among the provinces affected by the earthquake were It is also located in the Province District. It is also my hometown As one of the districts most damaged by the earthquake; 452 buildings were damaged, 96 destroyed, 332 heavily damaged, 58 moderately, directly and indirectly.

Among these buildings, 27 buildings were damaged in the form of debris, and search and rescue activities were generally carried out on 27 buildings.

In our district, the land where I was born, I constantly receive phone calls from my relatives, friends and family friends from the rubble and its surroundings, informing me that there are people around me under the rubble. For this reason, I conveyed to my superiors that many buildings in and around our district have collapsed, that there are many citizens under the rubble, and that I would like to join the teams formed by taking into account my level of communication with the region as much as possible. Based on the negative information I received, I was informed that a person's relatives, on a family and conscientious basis, were destroyed by the debris. Considering the reflexes it might give while under pressure, I planned to go to the scene by taking annual leave betweenX. I reached the district affected by the earthquake with my own means. From the moment I reached him, I contacted my brother, who came to the district from the first hours of the earthquake and coordinated the search and rescue teams, as an experienced firefighter who had previously worked inY. My brother is an experienced firefighter who has worked in the Fire Department for over 10 years. He received information about the work from my brother and told me that the teams in the district were insufficient and qualified personnel were needed. I started working in the building where my relatives were also under the rubble, and we pulled out three of our citizens alive and 36 of our citizens die.

Governor ofA, Mr., who is the district coordinator governor, and Mr.B, our district governor, reached out to me and personally thanked me and congratulated me for the work we did. Based on what I wrote;

In the earthquake, my very close relatives, family friends and friends with whom we lived together for years lost their lives by being trapped under the rubble.

Spending time just watching my close circle remain in rubble during the earthquake would not suit me or my sense of being a fireman in the fire department ofX. If I had not worked in the earthquake zone, I would have acted with conscience, humanity and a sense of public responsibility and felt regret for the rest of my life. At the point of representing fire brigade X in such a big earthquake

I believe that he made a good representation both in the debris work and with the congratulations and thanks of the coordination committee members in the surrounding area.

I wear the Heat-Resistant Firefighter Suit (PBI) in accordance with the rules of use while working in the debris, without causing any damage, and I use it at Fire StationC where I currently work.

I would like to inform you that I felt a pleasure and happiness that is difficult to describe, as I rescued three of our citizens from the rubble, thanks to the protective suit that was seen as a mistake, and was taken to the earthquake zone.

Considering that, according to the minutes prepared by you and the relevant articles, firefighter uniforms are not at a higher level than human life, I would like to inform you that I made a mistake by taking protective clothing to an earthquake zone because I did not know that it was a crime to take it to another region outside the province without permission.

Although I regret the minutes taken for justified reasons in the relevant articles, I express my regret for the mistakes I made and apologize by committing to not repeat such a situation again.

Hoping that you will understand my situation, I wrote it down with my most sincere feelings and through the filter of my conscience. I would like to request that the situation attributed to me in the relevant articles and what I wrote be evaluated by taking into account the humanitarian, conscientious and public interest elements.

The discretion belongs to the very valuable managers ofX .fire department. I will respect every decision made.

Our hero, the firefighter, does not receive any punishment after this defense and continues to work with determination, dedication and love in the organization she is assigned to.

Many studies show that firefighters are at high risk of experiencing psychological symptoms after performing rescue duties. Some interventions are needed to reduce negative psychological outcomes and promote resilience in rescuers. This finding provides us with the idea that it is a detail that should highlight the importance of carefully selecting rescue workers and giving them rigorous training before deployment, as well as providing appropriate psychological support to rescue efforts after deployment.

First of all, regardless of the fire brigade, it is very important to think analytically when choosing personnel to go to the earthquake region.

The personnel who will go to the earthquake zone will learn about the sociological structure, addresses, weather, in short, a lot of information about that region, which will be very useful to fire brigades during the intervention.

Since fire brigades are the first teams to respond during an earthquake, fire brigades should be built as very strong and smart buildings.

Fire departments should organize drills and trainings, knowing that the public, especially those who want to work voluntarily, will benefit greatly as a secret force in the intervention part. It should not be forgotten that the first aid will always be given by the earthquake victims themselves. Therefore, making this first intervention consciously, courageously and successfully requires continuous training and continuous development. For example, only a Hilti concrete drilling tool and a pair of iron cutting shears can save the lives of dozens of people in the first moments of an earthquake. Because hundreds of people may have fallen into this situation while escaping, just under a piece of block or with a part of their body stuck in the concrete area. Good organization of the public will greatly contribute to successful crisis management.

After an earthquake occurs in the earthquake area, electricity is often cut off, but energy is needed to use rescue equipment. This can only be done through a generator or, if there is still energy in the street lamps, by pulling the power line from those lamps.

As all fire departments, we need to analyze the lessons we need to learn from this incident and try to understand that whatever we do from now on will be better, more effective and more successful.

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