Operational Strengths and Institutional Challenges of the Bureau of Fire Protection (Bfp) in Firefighting: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Firefighting is a vital public service that requires strong organizational capacity, skilled personnel, and adequate institutional support to ensure effective emergency response. This study examined the operational strengths and institutional challenges of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in firefighting through the lived experiences of its personnel. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with twelve purposively selected firefighters, officers, and administrative staff with diverse ranks, lengths of service, and training backgrounds. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method to systematically capture shared meanings and key themes emerging from participants' narratives. To enhance analytical rigor, variations in experiences across ranks and functional roles were examined, allowing for a deeper understanding of organizational dynamics within the BFP. While the study primarily relied on interview data, participants' accounts were contextualized using established operational frameworks and existing literature on firefighting performance.

The findings revealed that the BFP's operational effectiveness is largely attributed to its adherence to standard operating procedures, effective implementation of the Incident Command System, and strong teamwork reinforced by interagency coordination. These factors enabled organized and timely responses during emergency situations. Despite these strengths, participants identified persistent challenges related to limited manpower, outdated firefighting equipment, and inadequate access to advanced training and technological resources. Such constraints were perceived to negatively affect response efficiency, particularly during large-scale or complex incidents. Participants also highlighted the need for continuous improvement through equipment modernization, expanded specialized training, and strengthened collaboration with local government units and community stakeholders.

The study concludes that while the BFP demonstrates a commendable level of operational readiness, sustained institutional investment and coordinated support are necessary to address existing limitations. The findings offer practical insights for policymakers and fire service administrators seeking to enhance firefighting capacity, improve emergency response systems, and promote community resilience.

Keywords: Emergency response; institutional capacity; organizational performance; constraints; limited manpower

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

Fire safety continues to be a pressing public concern worldwide, as fire services face persistent challenges in operational efficiency, personnel welfare, and resource adequacy. Research indicates that fire fighting is a high risk, technically demanding profession that requires sufficient staffing, advanced equipment, and technological preparedness to ensure effective emergency response (Coulthard, 2021). Studies from Africa, Australia, and selected regions in Asia further reveal that fire incidents lead to significant loss of life, property damage, and socioeconomic disruption, particularly in areas where training, resources, and response systems are limited (Akter, & Grafton, 2025; Goswami, et al., 2025). These insights underscore the ongoing need to enhance institutional capacities in fire prevention and disaster management.

In the Philippine context, the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), established under Republic Act 9514 and operating under the Department of the Interior and Local Government, serves as the primary agency responsible for fire safety. Despite its mandate, the BFP faces persistent operational constraints, including limited resources, outdated technology, and increasing fire incidents that strain both personnel and logistics (Lagata et al., 2022; De Castro, 2025). While existing literature provides valuable national and regional perspectives, there is a notable gap in empirical studies examining city-level operations, such as those in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental. This lack of localized research restricts understanding of how BFP units manage readiness, allocate resources, and implement effective response strategies, creating a barrier to targeted policy and operational improvements (Salili et al., 2022).

To address this gap, the present study investigates the strengths and weaknesses of the Bureau of Fire Protection in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental, focusing on firefighting resources, preparedness, and response strategies. Specifically, the study examines the operational conditions, technological and logistical support, training adequacy, and coordination mechanisms of local BFP personnel. By exploring the lived experiences and insights of firefighters, officers, and administrators, the research aims to generate evidence-based knowledge that can guide local policy formulation, optimize resource allocation, and enhance the effectiveness of city-level fire response systems. The outcomes are expected to benefit local government units, BFP management, and the wider community by strengthening disaster preparedness, operational resilience, and public safety governance.

METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of personnel from the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with firefighters, officers, and administrative staff to examine perceived operational strengths, existing limitations, challenges encountered during firefighting activities, and potential areas for improvement.

Participants were deliberately selected to represent different ranks and organizational roles, enabling the exploration of both frontline and supervisory perspectives. This approach allowed the study to capture role specific experiences and institutional dynamics within the BFP.

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were fully informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were ensured in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

The interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step qualitative analysis method. This process involved repeated review of transcripts, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and clustering of themes to capture shared and divergent experiences. To reduce potential interpretive bias, thematic patterns were cross-checked across participants' ranks and roles, and findings were continuously compared with existing empirical literature and institutional frameworks relevant to firefighting operations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the operational readiness of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in one of the cities of Misamis Occidental is strongly supported by foundational training, regular drills, and effective collaboration among personnel. Participants emphasized that basic firefighting and rescue training provides essential skills for emergency situations, while routine drills and physical conditioning enhance alertness and endurance. Effective coordination and communication were identified as critical to successful operations, highlighting the importance of teamwork and discipline in high-risk scenarios (Renner et al., 2025). These observations are consistent with prior research underscoring continuous training and team cohesion as fundamental to firefighting preparedness and safety (Flannery, 2025).

Regarding response efficiency, participants reported that organized protocols and prompt mobilization improve operational performance. Clearly defined incident command structures were particularly important during

complex emergencies requiring coordination with local government units, law enforcement, and healthcare services (Griffiths,2022). Support from the community and government also contributed significantly to operational success. These findings align with literature emphasizing that systematic command frameworks and interagency collaboration enhance emergency response outcomes (Zadeh et al., 2021).

Despite these strengths, limitations in resources and equipment were identified as key constraints. Participants noted that outdated equipment, insufficient fire trucks, limited personnel, and inadequate technological resources hindered timely and safe operations. These challenges often result in delayed responses and increased physical strain on staff (Regif, & Pattipeilohy, 2024). Similar constraints have been reported in developing contexts, where limited infrastructure and funding adversely affect firefighting effectiveness and public safety (Hidayat, 2024).

The study also highlighted gaps in advanced training and specialized skill development. Limited access to scenario-based and high-level courses was seen as reducing preparedness for complex incidents, particularly in remote or resource-constrained areas where logistical difficulties are common. This finding corroborates earlier studies demonstrating that unequal training opportunities undermine operational readiness and adaptability (Hatcher, 2025).

Finally, participants advocated for strategic improvements in systems and capabilities, including modernizing equipment, expanding specialized training programs, and enhancing community engagement in fire safety education. These recommendations reflect broader evidence suggesting that integrated approaches—combining technological advancement, professional development, and public participation—are essential for sustainable improvements in firefighting performance (Bisht, & Singh, 2022.; Руденко et al., 2025). Overall, the findings underscore the critical role of continuous institutional support in strengthening local firefighting systems and promoting community resilience.

CONCLUSION

Grounded in the narratives of the participants and the themes that emerged from the phenomenological analysis, this study concludes that the Bureau of Fire Protection demonstrates a strong level of operational readiness and organizational coordination. The consistent application of rapid-response procedures and the Incident Command System reflect a well-structured operational framework, effective teamwork, and a clear commitment to efficient emergency management.

However, differences in perspectives across ranks and roles reveal underlying organizational dynamics that influence how operational strengths and challenges are experienced and addressed**.** Insufficient manpower, aging equipment, and limited access to advanced technology and training opportunities were identified as critical factors that hinder response efficiency and operational effectiveness.

While the study relied primarily on interview data, the findings provide credible and contextually grounded insights into institutional realities. Future research may further strengthen validation through the inclusion of direct observation, official incident reports, or response-time records to triangulate personnel accounts and enhance methodological robustness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen institutional capacity and improve firefighting performance. The Bureau of Fire Protection at the national level may further enhance operational readiness by reinforcing the consistent application of standardized response protocols and expanding interagency coordination mechanisms. Sustained leadership development and teamwork-focused training programs are recommended to ensure that personnel remain responsive, cohesive, and prepared for complex emergency situations.

Local government units, in coordination with the Department of the Interior and Local Government, are encouraged to prioritize financial support for the modernization of firefighting resources. Increased investment in updated equipment, additional fire trucks, and the recruitment of qualified personnel is essential in

addressing existing resource and manpower constraints. Such measures are expected to improve response capability and reduce delays during emergency operations.

At the regional and local levels, collaborative capability-building initiatives should be strengthened through the provision of advanced and specialized training programs tailored to emerging firefighting demands. Future assessments of firefighting performance may benefit from integrating qualitative insights with operational records, such as incident documentation and response metrics, to support evidence-based planning and policy development.

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