

A Case Study of Job Demands, Job Control Mechanisms, and Social Support Systems among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations: A Public Administration Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the job demands, job control mechanisms, and social support systems experienced by firefighters in Davao del Norte during emergency medical services and rescue operations. Guided by the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model, a qualitative single-case study design was used to analyze the operational and organizational experiences of full-time firefighters assigned to selected fire stations in Davao del Norte, Philippines. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that firefighters face complex occupational demands, including expanded operational responsibilities, multi-role functions, physical and psychological strain, manpower shortages, limited resources, and increased administrative workload. Despite these challenges, firefighters exercised job control through operational autonomy, scheduling flexibility, adherence to command structures, and participation in decision-making processes. Social support from peers and family members, as well as post-operation debriefing activities, contributed significantly to stress management, recovery, and resilience. The study emphasizes the importance of balancing high job demands with sufficient control and institutional support systems to maintain firefighter well-being and operational effectiveness. From a public administration perspective, the findings highlight the need for strengthened organizational policies, improved manpower and resource allocation, enhanced mental health programs, and responsive governance mechanisms to ensure sustainable and efficient emergency service delivery.

Keywords: firefighters, job demands, job control, social support, emergency medical services, rescue operations, JDCS model, public administration

INTRODUCTION

Firefighting is recognized as one of the most demanding professions in the public sector, requiring personnel to operate in unpredictable, high-risk, and physically strenuous environments (Gonzalez et al., 2024; Farinha et al., 2024). In recent years, the scope of firefighting has expanded beyond traditional fire suppression to encompass emergency medical response, disaster risk reduction, and community-based safety initiatives, reflecting the broader responsibilities of public safety institutions in addressing complex societal needs (Qian et al., 2022). Consequently, firefighters are now expected to fulfill multiple roles that require not only physical endurance but also psychological resilience and rapid decision-making under pressure (Wahl et al., 2021).

The expansion of responsibilities has intensified firefighters' working conditions, exposing them to a broad range of occupational challenges that affect both performance and well-being. Research indicates that increased workload, hazardous environments, and repeated exposure to traumatic events significantly contribute to occupational stress and burnout among firefighters (García-Iglesias et al., 2021; Khoshakhlagh et al., 2024). Additionally, manpower and resource limitations have been identified as critical factors that exacerbate job

demands and diminish operational efficiency in emergency response contexts (Bandalos, 2024; Qian et al., 2022). In this context, understanding how firefighters experience and manage these demands is essential, particularly from a public administration perspective, where effective service delivery relies on organizational capacity and workforce sustainability. The relationship between job demands, job control, and social support provides a useful lens in examining these experiences, as these factors collectively influence how individuals respond to occupational stress and perform their duties. The Job Demand–Control–Support (JDCS) model explains that high job demands may lead to strain when not balanced with sufficient control and social support (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Conversely, the presence of adequate control mechanisms and strong support systems can buffer the negative effects of job demands and enhance employee performance and well-being (Johnson & Hall, 1988). In high-risk professions such as firefighting, this balance is particularly critical.

Although there is an expanding body of literature on firefighter health, occupational stress, emergency response performance, and organizational support, there remains a need for context-specific studies that examine firefighters' experiences in local emergency medical services and rescue operations. Existing research primarily addresses physical risks, burnout, trauma exposure, and operational performance. However, limited attention has been given to the interaction among job demands, job control, and social support in the daily work of firefighters assigned to provincial fire stations, particularly in the Philippine public administration context. This gap is significant, as firefighters in local settings often assume expanded responsibilities amid limited manpower, equipment constraints, and rising community expectations.

In Davao del Norte, firefighters are responsible not only for fire suppression but also for emergency medical response, disaster response, rescue operations, public education, inspections, and community safety programs. These diverse responsibilities necessitate a detailed examination of how firefighters experience their workload, the extent of their control over tasks and decisions, and the role of social support in coping with occupational demands. Addressing this research gap can provide evidence-based insights to improve firefighter welfare, reinforce institutional support systems, and enhance emergency service delivery at the local level.

This study aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By investigating the occupational demands, control mechanisms, and support systems of firefighters, the study contributes to promoting the health and well-being of emergency responders, supporting safe and decent working conditions, strengthening disaster preparedness and community resilience, and enhancing the capacity of public institutions to deliver effective emergency services. Therefore, the study is relevant not only to firefighter welfare but also to sustainable public administration and community protection.

To further understand the operational and organizational experiences of firefighters in emergency medical services and rescue operations, this study examines the conditions of job demands, job control, and social support within their work environment. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What job demands characterize the work of firefighters in emergency medical services and rescue operations?
2. What forms of job control are exercised by firefighters within the organizational structure of emergency response services?
3. How do social support systems facilitate firefighters' coping with job-related demands?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a single-case qualitative design to examine firefighters' experiences regarding job demands, job control, and social support in emergency medical services and rescue operations. This design is appropriate for studies that seek an in-depth understanding of a particular case within its real-life context, especially when

examining participants' experiences, meanings, and work-related realities. The study's analysis was guided by the Job Demand–Control–Support (JDCS) model, which served as the theoretical framework for examining how occupational demands, control mechanisms, and support systems interact to shape work-related outcomes.

Research Site

The study was conducted in selected fire stations in the Province of Davao del Norte, Philippines, under the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP). These stations serve as frontline units responsible for emergency medical services and rescue operations within their respective jurisdictions.

Selection of Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on full-time firefighters actively engaged in operational duties and with relevant experience in emergency response. This sampling technique is commonly used in qualitative research to ensure the inclusion of individuals with rich, relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants were selected based on their experience, availability, and willingness to share insights about their work environments, particularly regarding job demands, job control, and social support.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using a structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions aligned with the study variables. Interviews and written responses were used to capture participants' operational and organizational job demands, job control mechanisms, and social support systems in their work environments (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). This approach allowed for detailed responses while ensuring that the collected data remained focused on the study's objectives (Kallio et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

Data analysis used thematic analysis, with systematic coding and categorization to identify recurring patterns and themes across participant responses. This method is widely used in qualitative research to identify and interpret patterns of meaning in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interpretation of the findings was guided by the JDCS framework to ensure alignment between the empirical results and the study's theoretical foundation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and provided voluntary consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage without consequence. The data gathered were used solely for academic purposes. The author declares no known competing financial or personal interests that could have influenced the conduct of the study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the study was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with participants and validation strategies such as member checking (Creswell, 2014). Transferability was achieved by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research process, allowing for consistency in data handling and analysis (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability was ensured by maintaining neutrality and grounding findings in the participants' actual responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. This role involved conducting interviews, facilitating discussions, and interpreting participant responses (Creswell, 2014). To ensure

objectivity, the researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the study by being aware of personal biases and minimizing their influence on data interpretation (Berger, 2015). Field notes and careful documentation were utilized to support accurate and consistent analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS

The analysis identified three primary result areas consistent with the JDCS model: job demands, job control, and social support. Eight major themes emerged under job demands: expanded emergency response operational responsibilities, multi-role operational functions, emergency response skill demands, firefighters' physical strain, firefighters' psychological stress, firefighting resource limitations, firefighters' manpower constraints, and administrative burden in emergency service delivery. Four themes were identified under job control: autonomy in operations, flexibility in scheduling, command and hierarchy, and input into decision-making. Four themes were identified under social support and coping: peer support, family support, debriefing and team reflection, and coping mechanisms for stress.

Job Demands among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations.

This section presents the major themes and core ideas that describe the job demands experienced by firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations. Grounded in qualitative case study analysis, the themes capture the multifaceted, high-pressure nature of frontline emergency work in a public administration context. The findings illustrate how firefighters operate in complex and dynamic environments characterized by simultaneous exposure to life-threatening incidents, resource limitations, and organizational workload pressures. These job demands extend beyond traditional firefighting functions, encompassing expanded operational responsibilities, multi-role performance, continuous skill requirements, physical exhaustion, psychological strain, manpower shortages, and administrative obligations. Collectively, these thematic categories provide a structured understanding of the occupational realities faced by firefighters as they deliver essential emergency services under conditions of uncertainty, urgency, and institutional constraint.

Table 1 Major Themes and Core Ideas on Job Demands in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

Core Ideas	Major Themes
Responding to fire, medical, and disaster emergencies	Expanded Emergency Response Operational Responsibilities
Handling flood, landslide, and rescue operations	
Operating in unpredictable and high-risk environments	
Managing multiple emergency calls and rapid response situations	
Performing firefighting, driving, rescue, inspection, and lecturing functions	Multi-Role Operational Functions
Demonstrating role flexibility based on operational needs	
Shifting responsibilities during emergency situations	
Demonstrating technical and operational competencies	Emergency Response Skill Demands
Engaging in continuous training and skill development	

Core Ideas	Major Themes
Adapting to diverse emergency scenarios	
Requiring physical strength and endurance	Firefighters Physical Strains
Experiencing physically exhausting conditions	
Engaging in hazardous rescue operations	
Encountering life-threatening situations	Firefighters Psychological Stress
Experiencing emotional burden from traumatic incidents	
Maintaining mental alertness and decision-making under pressure	
Experiencing insufficient firefighting equipment	Firefighting Resource Limitations
Exercising personal initiative in securing resources	
Encountering challenges in resource allocation	
Managing limited personnel and uneven workload distribution among firefighters	Firefighters Manpower Constraints
Relying on volunteer augmentation (e.g., CFAG)	
Conducting inspections and documentation	Administrative Burden in Emergency Service Delivery
Preparing operational and incident reports	
Delivering fire safety lectures and community programs	

Expanded Emergency Response Operational Responsibilities. The first result area concerns the job demands encountered by firefighters in Davao del Norte. Participants described firefighting as a profession that requires them to respond not only to fire incidents but also to medical emergencies, floods, landslides, vehicular accidents, and rescue operations. One participant explained, "As firefighters, we respond not only to fire incidents but also to calamities like floods and landslides. We are required to be versatile and perform different tasks" (P1). This statement reflects the theme of expanded emergency response operational responsibilities.

Multi-Role Operational Functions. Participants also reported performing multiple roles, including firefighter, driver, rescuer, inspector, and community educator. One participant reported, "I perform several tasks, such as being a firefighter, a driver, and also a community educator. Sometimes I need to switch roles quickly depending on the situation" (P2). These multi-role operational functions require flexibility and rapid adjustment to changing operational necessities.

Emergency Response Skill Demands. Emergency response skill demands also appeared as a significant theme. Firefighters emphasized the need to be competent in fire suppression, rescue,

equipment handling, and emergency medical response. As one participant stated, "Firefighters need to be well-rounded. We require skills in fire suppression, rescue, and medical aid. We need constant training to ensure we are prepared" (P1).

Firefighters Physical Strain. Firefighters' physical strain was apparent in tasks that require strength and endurance, as well as in exposure to hazardous conditions. A participant noted, "The job requires a lot of physical strength, especially in rescue operations where you need to carry victims or climb difficult terrains" (P3).

Firefighters' Psychological Stress. Participants also described psychological stress from traumatic incidents and life-threatening situations. One participant stated, "It is mentally exhausting, especially when responding to traumatic incidents. You must stay calm and focused even when encountering life-threatening situations" (P4).

Firefighting Resource Limitations. This major theme additionally intensified job demands. One participant said, "We often do not have enough equipment, so we make do with what we have. Sometimes we need to rely on our creativity and teamwork to manage the situation" (P5).

Firefighters Manpower Constraints. Another participant explained, "We are often understaffed, so we rely on volunteers. In rural areas, we do not have the luxury of a large team, which makes the workload heavier" (P4).

Administrative Burden on Emergency Service Delivery. Administrative workload was also reported, particularly inspections, documentation, reports, and fire safety lectures.

Job Control among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

This section presents the major themes and core ideas that describe the job control exercised by firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations. Grounded in qualitative case study analysis, the themes capture how firefighters manage their work within a structured emergency response organization. The findings illustrate that while firefighters operate under established rules, protocols, and command systems, they still exercise a certain degree of control through operational autonomy, scheduling flexibility, adherence to hierarchy, and participation in decision-making. These job controls help firefighters respond effectively to emergencies while maintaining coordination, discipline, and accountability within the Bureau of Fire Protection.

Autonomy in Operations. The second major theme concerns the job control utilized by firefighters in Davao del Norte. Participants described having some degree of autonomy during emergency operations, particularly in suggesting rescue strategies, assessing field situations, and contributing ideas to the team leader. One participant stated, "We have autonomy in our group."

Table 2 Major Themes and Core Ideas on Job Control among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

Core Ideas	Major Themes
• Making field-level judgments during emergency operations • Suggesting rescue plans and strategies to the team leader • Contributing ideas based on actual conditions in the field • Exercising practical judgment while following officer direction	Autonomy in Operations
• Coordinating duty arrangements with relievers • Negotiating work schedules depending on station needs • Adjusting duty schedules based on emergency response requirements • Balancing personal availability with operational demands	Flexibility in Scheduling

• Following the established chain of command • Observing discipline, order, and authority during operations • Coordinating emergency response through clear leadership • Using command structures to maintain safety and accountability	Command and Hierarchy
• Suggesting improvements in rescue procedures • Identifying training needs based on field experience • Recommending tools and equipment needed for operations • Providing operational input while final decisions remain with officers	Input into Decision-Making

We have autonomy to formulate plans, like in rescue operations, and suggest ideas to the team leader" (P6). This statement reflects the theme of operational autonomy, where firefighters can exercise judgment and participate in operational planning while still working under their officers' direction.

Flexibility in Scheduling. Participants also reported that flexibility in scheduling served as another form of job control. Although emergency work is unpredictable, firefighters shared that they can sometimes coordinate duty arrangements based on reliever availability, station needs, and internal agreements. One participant explained, "In terms of work schedule, we can control our schedule depending on our reliever and stations. We are given the privilege of negotiating with our station on how many days we will be on duty" (P2). This statement shows that firefighters have limited but meaningful control over their work schedules, although such control remains constrained by duty requirements and emergency calls.

Command and Hierarchy. Command and hierarchy also appeared as a significant theme. Firefighters emphasized that emergency response requires clear authority, discipline, and coordination to ensure safety and operational efficiency. One participant stated, "We follow the chain of command, but sometimes higher officers are also relying on the lower units as to training to be conducted, tools, and equipment to be purchased" (P3). This statement indicates that while the organization follows a structured command system, frontline firefighters still provide practical information based on their field experience.

Input into Decision-Making. Input into decision-making was also evident among the participants. Firefighters shared that they could suggest improvements in rescue procedures, training needs, tools and equipment, and operational strategies. One participant noted, "We are given ideas on how to execute rescues, but as subordinates, it still depends on the direction or approval of our officer" (P6). This indicates that firefighters can participate in decision-making processes, although final authority remains with senior officers.

Job control among firefighters is expressed through autonomy in operations, flexibility in scheduling, command and hierarchy, and input into decision-making. These findings show that firefighters do not have unrestricted control over their work, as emergency service delivery requires discipline, coordination, and compliance with organizational protocols. However, their ability to suggest plans, manage certain schedule arrangements, follow clear command structures, and contribute field-based insights allows them to maintain a sense of participation and control within a highly demanding work environment.

Social Support among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

This section presents the major themes and core ideas that describe the social support systems and coping mechanisms of firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations. Grounded in qualitative case study analysis, the themes capture how firefighters rely on interpersonal relationships, team interaction, family support, and personal coping activities to manage the demands of emergency work. The findings illustrate that social support plays an important role in helping firefighters recover from physical exhaustion, emotional stress, and traumatic incidents. These support systems strengthen resilience, promote emotional stability, and help firefighters continue performing their duties despite the pressures of emergency service delivery.

Table 3 Major Themes and Core Ideas on Social Support among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

Major Themes	Core Ideas
- Receiving assistance from colleagues during difficult operations - Sharing workload and responsibilities among team members - Gaining encouragement and emotional reassurance from co-workers - Maintaining physical conditioning through team support	Peer Support
- Receiving emotional comfort from family members - Releasing work-related stress through family conversations - Maintaining work-life balance through family understanding - Gaining motivation from family support during stressful periods	Family Support
- Discussing what happened after emergency responses - Identifying what went well and what needs improvement - Processing stressful or traumatic operational experiences - Using team reflection as both learning and emotional recovery	Debriefing and Team Reflection
- Engaging in gaming, sports, exercise, and relaxation - Using eating, rest, and social interaction to release tension - Managing stress through personal recreational activities	Coping Mechanisms for Stress

Peer Support. The third result area concerns how social support helps firefighters cope with the demands of their work. Participants noted the importance of colleagues' support in managing physically and emotionally demanding situations. One participant stated, "We always maintain physical conditioning 24/7. Coping with this demand involves sustaining physical conditioning with team support" (P1). This statement reflects the theme of peer support, where firefighters rely on teamwork, encouragement, and shared responsibility to manage the challenges of their work.

Family Support. Participants also reported that family support served as an important coping resource. Firefighters shared that talking with family members helped them release stress and maintain emotional stability after difficult operations. One participant stated, "We also have strong support systems from our family. Talking with them helps release the stress from work" (P4). This statement shows that family members provide emotional comfort and help firefighters balance the demands of work and personal life.

Debriefing and Team Reflection. Debriefing and team reflection were also significant forms of support. Participants explained that after emergency responses, firefighters usually discuss what happened, identify what went well, and determine what could be improved in future operations. One participant explained, "After a response, when we are back at the station, we talk about what went well and what could be improved. It helps us recover mentally" (P5). This statement indicates that post-operation reflection helps firefighters process stressful experiences and improve future emergency response practices.

Coping Mechanisms for Stress. Coping mechanisms for stress were also evident among the participants. Firefighters identified personal activities such as gaming, sports, exercise, relaxation, eating, and social interaction as ways of managing stress. One participant explained, "Aside from talking with colleagues, I also enjoy gaming to release stress. Stress-eating is another way to cope" (P6). These activities function as stress-relief practices that help firefighters recover from the emotional and physical demands of their work.

Social support and coping among firefighters are expressed through peer support, family support, debriefing and team reflection, and personal coping mechanisms. These findings show that firefighters manage occupational stress not only through individual resilience but also through supportive relationships within the station,

emotional support from family members, and activities that help them recover from demanding emergency work. Social support, therefore, serves as an important buffer that helps firefighters sustain their well-being and continue performing their roles in emergency medical services and rescue operations.

DISCUSSION

Job Demands among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

Firefighters in Davao del Norte face complex, overlapping job demands in emergency medical services and rescue operations. These demands include expanded emergency response operational responsibilities, multi-role operational functions, emergency response skill demands, physical strain, psychological stress, resource limitations, manpower constraints, and administrative burden. Taken together, these results indicate that firefighters' work is no longer limited to fire suppression. Their role has expanded to include medical response, disaster response, rescue work, inspection, public education, documentation, and community safety responsibilities. Thus, the job demands of firefighters are both operational and organizational.

The firefighters' overlapping job demands in emergency medical services and rescue operations are supported by Gonzalez et al. (2024), who emphasized that firefighters face diverse occupational threats due to the unpredictable and hazardous nature of their work. Similarly, Marciniak et al. (2024) explained that different emergency call types create varying workload intensities among active-duty firefighters, which supports the present finding that firefighters respond not only to fire incidents but also to medical, disaster, and rescue emergencies. Farinha et al. (2024) also supported the findings by emphasizing that firefighter performance is linked to both physical and emotional parameters, consistent with the participants' accounts of physical exhaustion and psychological stress. Moreover, García-Iglesias et al. (2025) and Khoshakhlagh et al. (2024) reported that occupational stress, burnout, depression, and sleep-related problems are major concerns among firefighters, supporting the present study's finding that repeated exposure to traumatic incidents and life-threatening situations creates mental and emotional strain. Qian et al. (2022) further support the finding on resource limitations, as emergency response performance is affected by resource allocation and institutional capacity.

The findings have important theoretical implications for the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model. The results affirm the first component of the model by showing that firefighters are exposed to high job demands, including workload, physical effort, emotional pressure, skill requirements, limited resources, and administrative obligations. The findings also extend the JDCS model by showing that in the context of emergency services, job demands are not only personal or task-related but are also shaped by institutional capacity, manpower availability, equipment adequacy, and public service expectations. This means that firefighter stress should not be interpreted only as an individual experience but as a product of organizational and administrative conditions.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest the need to strengthen manpower, equipment provision, training programs, and administrative support for firefighters. Since firefighters perform multiple roles beyond fire suppression, policies on staffing, budgeting, and resource allocation should reflect the actual scope of their work. Fire stations should be provided with adequate personnel, updated equipment, and continuous training in fire suppression, emergency medical response, rescue operations, and disaster response. Administrative tasks should also be reviewed to prevent unnecessary workload from reducing operational readiness.

From the researcher's standpoint, through the lens of public administration, the job demands of firefighters reveal a governance concern. Firefighters serve as frontline public servants whose effectiveness depends not only on individual commitment but also on public institutions' ability to provide adequate support. In public administration, efficient emergency service delivery requires responsive systems, sufficient resources, and policies that protect both the community and the personnel who serve it. Therefore, improving firefighter working conditions is not only a welfare issue but also a matter of public safety, institutional accountability, and sustainable service delivery.

Job Control Mechanisms among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

Firefighters exercise job control through autonomy in operations, flexibility in scheduling, command and hierarchy, and input into decision-making. These mechanisms show that firefighters have some degree of control over how they perform their work, especially in suggesting rescue strategies, coordinating schedules, following command protocols, and providing field-based recommendations. However, their control is not absolute, as firefighting operates within a disciplined, hierarchical organization where final decisions rest with senior officers. Thus, job control among firefighters may be described as structured participation within an organized command system.

The findings are supported by Johnson and Hall (1988), who emphasized that workplace control and social support can reduce the negative effects of job strain. In the present study, firefighters' ability to suggest plans, participate in operational discussions, and influence certain decisions provides a form of control that may help reduce occupational strain. Karasek and Theorell (1990) also support the findings through the Job Demand-Control framework, which explains that decision latitude helps workers manage the pressure of high-demand work. The findings are further supported by van der Doef and Maes (1999), who explained that job control becomes important in reducing psychological strain when employees face high work demands. Payne et al. (2019) also support the findings by showing that resources and control can help buffer the negative effects of high job demands on firefighter well-being. Additionally, Qian et al. (2022) underscore the importance of field-level input, as emergency response effectiveness depends on operational decisions that account for available resources and actual field conditions.

The theoretical implication of this finding is that job control in the JDACS model must be understood differently in emergency service organizations. In ordinary workplaces, job control may refer to broad decision-making freedom. However, in firefighting, job control is established through protocols, command structures, and operational discipline. The findings suggest that autonomy and hierarchy are not necessarily contradictory. Firefighters may follow a chain of command while still exercising professional judgment and contributing practical field knowledge. This expands the application of the JDACS model by showing that job control in high-risk public service work can take the form of guided autonomy, structured participation, and field-based consultation.

The policy implication is that the Bureau of Fire Protection and related public safety institutions should strengthen participatory mechanisms without weakening command discipline. Firefighters should be given clear channels to provide input on training needs, equipment procurement, rescue procedures, and operational improvements. Station-level consultation, post-operation evaluation, and feedback systems may improve decision-making while maintaining authority and accountability. Scheduling policies should also consider fairness, rest periods, and personnel availability, especially given the unpredictable and physically demanding nature of emergency work.

From the researcher's standpoint, through the lens of public administration, job control among firefighters underscores the importance of participatory governance within public organizations. Firefighters are not only implementers of orders; they are also knowledge holders who understand field realities. Their practical experience can help improve public service delivery when properly incorporated into planning and decision-making. In public administration, effective leadership does not depend solely on top-down authority but also on institutions' ability to listen to frontline workers. Therefore, structured participation should be viewed as a tool for improving morale, operational effectiveness, and organizational learning.

Social Support and Coping among Firefighters in Emergency Medical Services and Rescue Operations

Social support helps firefighters cope with job-related demands through peer support, family support, debriefing and team reflection, and personal coping mechanisms. These findings indicate that firefighters rely not only on individual strength but also on interpersonal relationships and support systems to manage stress. Peer support helps them share workload, maintain morale, and receive emotional reassurance. Family support provides comfort and stress release outside the workplace. Debriefing and team reflection allow them to process difficult

incidents and improve future responses. Personal coping activities such as gaming, sports, exercise, relaxation, eating, and social interaction also help them recover from emotional and physical strain.

These findings are supported by Wang et al. (2023), who found that social support is associated with lower depressive symptoms among firefighters, particularly when negative coping is reduced. Zhao et al. (2025) also support the findings by showing that perceived social support strengthens firefighters' psychological capital through resilience and self-efficacy. Bowers et al. (2025) further support the importance of peer support programs among first responders, emphasizing that peer-based systems may help personnel manage trauma and stress. Traynor et al. (2024) also supports the role of family and relational support in making sense of duty-related trauma among first responders and their families. In addition, MacDermid et al. (2025) support the need for resilience-based mental health interventions among firefighters, which is consistent with the present finding that debriefing, reflection, and coping activities help firefighters recover from demanding operations.

The theoretical implication of this finding is that social support functions as a protective factor within the JDCS model. The findings affirm that when job demands are high and job control is limited by hierarchy and emergency conditions, social support becomes an important buffer against stress. Support from peers, family members, and the team helps reduce the negative effects of occupational demands and strengthens resilience. The findings also extend the JDCS model by showing that social support is not limited to workplace relationships. For firefighters, family support and personal coping strategies also contribute to emotional recovery and sustained work performance.

The policy implication is that mental health and psychosocial support should be institutionalized in fire service organizations. Peer support, debriefing, counseling referral systems, stress management programs, and resilience-building activities should be incorporated into regular organizational practice. Fire stations should also promote family-sensitive support programs because families play an important role in helping firefighters manage work-related stress. Post-operation debriefing should not be treated only as a technical review but also as a mechanism for emotional processing and team learning.

From the researcher's standpoint, through the lens of public administration, social support among firefighters indicates that public service performance depends on human well-being. Firefighters cannot provide effective emergency services if their emotional, psychological, and social needs are neglected. In public administration, caring for frontline workers is part of strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring sustainable service delivery. Therefore, social support should not be viewed solely as an informal or personal matter. It should be recognized as an organizational responsibility and a governance strategy for protecting both firefighters and the communities they serve.

The findings show that firefighters in Davao del Norte work in a high-demand environment characterized by expanded responsibilities, limited resources, physical and psychological strain, and an increased administrative workload. However, they manage these demands through job control mechanisms such as operational autonomy, scheduling flexibility, command structures, and participation in decision-making. They also rely on social support from peers, family members, team reflection, and personal coping mechanisms. These findings affirm the relevance of the Job Demand-Control-Support model in understanding the occupational realities of firefighters in emergency medical services and rescue operations.

The study further shows that firefighter well-being and emergency service delivery are interconnected. High job demands require adequate institutional support. Job control requires participation but disciplined governance. Social support requires formal recognition through mental health and psychosocial programs. From a public administration perspective, the findings suggest that improving firefighter welfare is not separate from improving public safety. Rather, protecting firefighters is a necessary condition for building responsive, resilient, and sustainable emergency service institutions.

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