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Familial Challenges of Women Emergency Managers for No- Notice Activations

Linda Josephine Gonzalez
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Familial Challenges of Women Emergency Managers for No-Notice Activations

by

Linda J. Gonzalez

MSCJ, Saint Leo University, 2015

BACJ, Saint Leo University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Women employed as emergency response personnel have faced familial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goals of this research were to identify the perceived underlying causes of work-life conflict for women serving in emergency response roles and how such work-life conflict can be addressed. In-depth interviews were used to collect data in this qualitative research study. The snowball method was used to recruit the nine study participants; inclusion criteria focused on a distinct group of emergency response professionals. Transcription analysis was applied to the data collected from the interviews. Thematic analysis uncovered five themes from the data: (a) more women are serving in the emergency response field; (b) women face discrimination; (c) women face familial challenges because of their duties in the workplace; (d) women responders are heads of household or primary breadwinners, and (e) women with unique family makeups should be considered when developing response plans. The results indicate that women working in emergency response need social support and resources to overcome the increasing work pressures and familial challenges. Implications for positive social change that could result from this research include the potential to help women care for their families in emergencies through employers acknowledging the familial challenges this population faces and providing services to support them.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the single women or the women with partners who are gone for long periods who work in emergency response, hold down their jobs, maintain their homes, and take care of their families. You have shown that a work-life balance is possible and working in emergency management is attainable even when you have a family dynamic that differs from your coworkers.

Acknowledgment

To my husband Eric, I could not have done this without you. You were there pushing me to get it done through all the times I wanted to quit. Thank you for caring for the home, dinner, and the “kids” when I had to write or research. To my sister, Alexandria, thank you for everything you do to keep the wheels turning at home. I am so thankful to you for your sisterhood, loyalty, and being my voice of reason. I also want to say a deep and heartfelt thank you to my dissertation committee chairman, Dr. Tony Gaskew. Thank you for providing industry expertise and leadership and pumping me full of motivation with the prospect of significant positive social change in our industry. I am forever grateful for your mentorship. I also thank Dr. David Dibari and Dr. Michael Klemp-North, dissertation committee members, for their time, patience, advice, and professionalism. Thank you to my family for loving me as only a family could. Lee and Chin, my second parents, thank you for caring for me like your own daughter when mom was/is away. I wish both Moms (mine and Eric’s) could be here for this accomplishment but having you support me makes up for the loss. My best friend Marylyn because when I needed a personal cheering section, you were always there, but you also were nice enough to let me take a break when I needed one. My friends Lee, Victoria, Rudimae, Syndi, Rob, and everyone else for just being friends with me; because I know how much of a challenge it is. Thank you for sticking it out and remaining my friend at the end of the day. Finally, my kids, Rue, “Sanchez,” Brae, and all the others, without my insane need to make you proud of me, I do not think I would have gotten as far as I did as fast as I did. I share this accomplishment with all of you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Women with careers in the growing field of emergency management, such as firefighters, police officers, and medical responders, face challenges accurately and efficiently responding to disasters because of simultaneous concerns about their families when actively deployed. Women in these critical, life-saving careers face the choice of responding to emergencies as required by their employers or remaining with their families. The choice is a difficult one but can be resolved through planning. Options of planning can include having another household member available to tend to the family, having the employer offer a safe alternative location for their families, or operating without them, so the responder does not have to choose between work and family. Alternate solutions often result in the responding woman focusing on response and recovery and the task at hand (Nakhaei et al., 2015, p. 170).

The need to respond during disasters is often quick, unscheduled, and unplanned. The need to find care for family members at home is often complex if the planned solution involves a woman with career responsibilities having to deal with a disaster. The problem is particularly acute for responders who are parents without family support. Usually, an organizational policy determines who in a company is required to respond to an emergency. These policies will sometimes state that women cannot take a role in active positions because these demands are contradictory to home life needs. A further issue is the new challenges brought in by industry changes and varying degrees of emergency requirements (Gaillard et al., 2017, p. 445).

Women in roles whose presence is required during emergencies or disasters may find that their support needs are different from their male counterparts. In addition, some women have to battle the attitudes of those who do not understand their family dynamic. Agocs et al. (2015) argued that female police officers who are mothers, for example, navigate “challenges because of social expectations” that inevitably come into place once their “mother” identity is known (p. 266). This stigma shows a general expectation for women to choose between work and family.

Background

Emergency preparedness and response has existed since 1803. After terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and devastation from Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. public understood what emergency management was and saw the magnitude of responsibility on the workers responding to these events (Strategic Foresight Initiative, 2011). Family makeup and dynamics have changed significantly over the past two decades, and more women are serving as primary earners in households. Medved (2016) noted that 40% of U.S. women—a 30% increase from 1960—are primary breadwinners in families with children. (p. 254).

Additionally, more women serve in occupations previously dominated by men, such as emergency medical services (EMS), firefighting, and police. Male-dominated careers are considered occupations in which the percentage of women is less than 25% and include EMS, firefighting, and the police force (Azmat & Rentschler, 2017, p. 325). While this shift brings particular challenges, such as discrimination and sexual harassment, the problems facing women are more pronounced regarding work-life

conflict (Helfgott et al., 2018, p. 240). The population of women in the labor market in the United States has increased by 25% since 2008. Women now handle multiple roles in their families and careers (Stanczyk et al., 2017, p. 251). These women may also experience time-based strife, including excessive family responsibilities, inflexible work schedules, and extended working hours, as well as strain-based battles, including the absence of a spouse or other family support, role ambiguity, and behavior-based conflict.

Women are venturing into fields where working conditions have not been made favorable to them in attempts to have women equally represented in the labor market (Knörr, 2011, p. 101). Existing work policies fail to recognize that women will experience challenges while employed as emergency response personnel, mainly if familial challenges exist. While emergency response roles come with challenges that affect both male and female employees, the effects are disproportionate (Messing et al., 2016, p. 12).

These differences and difficulties create a work environment that automatically decreases the quality of output of women employees with familial challenges. Women want to work in these roles that involve responding to emergencies or disasters. However, the uncertainty of work schedules or negative attitudes from employers or coworkers may deter women from exploring these careers (Beaty & Davis, 2012, p. 624). In general, policymakers and administrators have not responded to this issue (Golden, 2020). Policymakers and administrators prefer to address employees' work-life balance instead of addressing the type and nature of an employee's emergency responding needs (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Women have become significant players who actively participate in mainstream employment opportunities to contribute to their families (Medved, 2016, p. 245). However, societal gender and family roles have not changed commensurately, and women are often still viewed as being in charge of family needs and affairs. To sustain an enriched environment of quality growth and affection, a woman ensures the family is socially knitted and bound tightly.

Societal gender roles have caused many women, some acting as single parents and caretakers of elderly parents, to look for employment opportunities in understaffed job areas like the military, the police force, firefighting, or healthcare (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016, p. 255). Women who seek solutions to achieve work and family conflict resolution have not yet found lasting solutions to their problems. This lack of solutions is often more pronounced for women who have reached the top of their careers, such as organizational managers (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016, p. 259).

Research indicates that women are the sole breadwinner in four in 10 households; this trend increases (Medved, 2016, p. 249). These data are concerning for stakeholders who know that women, as critical players, have significant social and work ties. Women are becoming the primary breadwinners in their households. The familial dynamic differs from others in the same fields, especially for women serving in first-responder roles. Challenges arise when people, especially women, need time to take care of their families. There is also the call to commit their time to carry out their duties at work (Gerson, 2016, p. 114). This conflict has prompted organizations to define when people should be working and specify when employees report to and leave work. For vital roles that

require continuous involvement, shift work has been developed to allow workers to handle these roles.

Nonetheless, personal challenges persist concerning the needs of women handling a vital role that involves emergency calls and reporting to work (Gerson, 2016, p. 117). Emergency response roles pose significant challenges for women when the need for activation during disasters conflicts with family caretaking. This requirement may demand commitment beyond the usual working hours, especially when emergency response is required. I explored the position of women in critical roles and the need to realize the social role of family care in the execution of duties in the emergency services industry.

Problem Statement

Women's challenges in responding to emergency calls when they have family responsibilities may impact their employment prospects. The challenge of responding to emergencies and the family dynamic has prompted employers to consider not employing women (Agocs et al., 2015, p. 274). This lack of understanding occurs not only in particular industries such as city management. The challenge is more pronounced in areas that require a rapid response from employees, such as disaster management departments, the medical profession, fire departments, the military, or the police force. Gerson (2016, p. 118) outlined various reasons women choose not to work as city managers or other government officials and compared the differences and similarities with their men counterparts working in the same roles. Many women who have no one else to help them take care of their families may not respond to urgent calls to work. Women (with children

or other special family needs) who do double duty in the police force usually find it challenging to adequately address their families' needs and work requirements. The elements that drive this challenge include long working hours, constant schedule changes, and little or no time off. Some women may have young children who cannot tend to themselves. When women leave to respond to a disaster or emergency, the children are often left alone or with a neighbor (Agocs et al., 2015, p. 269).

Furthermore, when a woman police officer's status as a parent is revealed, they face more challenges at work. Agocs et al. (2015, p. 270) acknowledged different unique work schedules, but police work was not in that category. Agocs et al. conducted interviews with female police officers and included their experiences. Police officers who are mothers might find it challenging to respond to emergencies when they have no one to take care of the families they leave behind (Agocs et al., 2015, p. 272).

Sheikh et al. (2018) studied the incompatibility between the demands of the family of a working person and the needs of work. Female employees who have gained success in their careers have also explored and achieved greater prosperity and considered them for management roles. However, they are successful because their home life was not affected (Coury et al., 2020). A lack of need to worry over family life can open up the talent pool for all roles. This success of balance is sometimes not available for women in emergency management.

The introduction of new policies regulating work and changes in organizational work structures results in increased research, including studies like this one. This knowledge can advise women employees with family considerations about the best

direction to fulfill their job requirements (Al-Asfour et al., 2017, p. 195). The results of this study have the potential to elevate information on how women employees can manage a career in emergency management and maintain their households. Results can also inform employers of the options they have to access this dynamic talent pool.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to improve understandings of the familial challenges faced by women employed as emergency response personnel. Women are not well represented in career fields requiring rapid response (Eagly et al., 2020, p. 302). Women in these roles face more problems than their male counterparts, mainly because most males with families have someone else available to tend to their families if they have to respond to a disaster (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 5). In this study, I collected and analyzed data on the experiences of study participants to identify common concerns regarding the phenomenon.

Several researchers have investigated the challenges of work-life balance among female employees in different sectors. However, few of them have addressed the role of women who respond to emergencies and the challenges faced by this specific population. These challenges have led to fewer female employees in emergency response roles (Feeney & Stritch, 2019). Many women shy from these professions, and some are termed *incompetent* or *unreliable* (Stanczyk et al., 2017, p. 257); addressing problems in emergency response roles for women is necessary to increase the number of women in these careers. When the platform is made equitable for both men and women, as Sheikh et al. (2018, p. 13) argued, a competition involving fair and quality output will be

maintained. Support from employers that includes more compassion for existing family dynamics would be valuable in reaching this goal (Sheikh et al., 2018).

Research Questions

Three research questions served as the foundation for this study on the challenges women face managing family and work responsibilities.

RQ1: What are the perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles?

RQ2: How can these perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles be eliminated or minimized?

RQ3: What are the challenges that women first responders experience in needing to respond to urgent work calls when they have no one to look after their families?

Conceptual Framework

The most logical trajectory for this study would be a phenomenological approach. Derived from the works of Edmund Husserl, the phenomenological approach is used to describe how human beings experience a given phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012, p. 6). This approach can lead to understanding people's experiences by putting aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human feelings, experiences, and responses to certain situations. This approach allows a researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the perspectives, understandings, perceptions, and feelings of the people who have lived a phenomenon or situation (Smith, 2015, p. 15).

Accordingly, phenomenology is a direct investigation that describes a phenomenon through people's conscious experiences. The phenomenological approach

requires in-depth interviews with a small sample of participants. The typical sample size for a phenomenological approach is fewer than 10 participants (Vagle, 2018, p. 178). The method allows an investigator to make valid generalizations regarding what it is like to experience a given phenomenon through the experiences of people living it.

With no regard to traditions, preconceived ideas, cultural norms, and other factors, the phenomenological approach centers on participants' experiences. Lived experiences, including lived body, time, human relations, and space, are the primary focus of phenomenology (Vagle, 2018, p. 174). A researcher uses open-ended questions to understand an individual's experiences through the qualitative data collected. Through the identification of major common themes, a researcher can make generalizations on the data collected. The results can be valuable indicators for further work (Vagle, 2018, p.176). The phenomenological approach allows for understanding the challenges women face working in emergency roles. After collecting data on the lived experiences of women working in emergency management, I was able to form themes about the challenges women face and present them without preconceived assumptions. These themes will help in understanding the work-family conflicts experienced by women emergency managers. As the information evolves, the factors perceived will change, and the actual factors leading to the work-family conflict will become apparent.

Through the phenomenological approach, I can find the shared experiences of women working in emergency management. Because the responses to the interview questions are expected to be similar, their shared problems should also result in post-research expertise sharing with others. The shared experience, or the essence of the

shared experience, must exist in a phenomenological approach to be understood within the group (Patton, 2015, p. 116). If the experiences are not similar, then how participants perceive the interview questions will differ as well.

Beaty and Davis studied why women venture away from city manager positions (Stabile et al., p. 207), outlining one of the reasons for this trend as a lack of set scheduling and childcare. With the absence of overnight or odd-hour childcare, needing to be on location for an emergency during off-hours was virtually impossible for women with family obligations (Stabile et al., 2019, p. 209). Gerson (2016, p. 112) noted that more women had become the breadwinners of their families. Gerson studied a growing trend that more women were becoming their homes' leading or sole financial providers.

The general framework was used to identify the underlying causes of women's challenges in the workplace and their consequences. The goal of this research was to help eliminate the challenges women emergency responders—who are also the head of their household—experience when they are required to be on scene to respond to emergencies and natural disasters (Gerson, 2016, p. 118). The results will help guide the end goal of this research, which was increasing the morale and quality of output for female employees with family responsibilities where equitable changes to existing policies can improve it.

As an additional benefit, this study's findings may improve women working in this profession, as the working environment will be brought to workers' attention and their future employers. The research framework focused on the causes of work-family conflict and the challenges for women serving in emergency response roles, their effects,

and measures for their mitigation. I focused on policies that may motivate women to join these professions and increase the quality of their work.

Nature of the Study

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with female emergency responders. In-depth interviews helped me better understand the familial challenges that women serving in emergency service roles face. Through this approach, I sought to tell a story of the experiences of a given group of people. Focused on the narrative rather than numbers, a researcher using a qualitative research approach starts with an open mind (Vagle, 2018). This type of research mainly applies the inductive procedure, where a researcher collects data and then attempts to explain the available information. The traditional deductive quantitative approach starts with a specific hypothesis and then collects data to test it empirically. Accordingly, the qualitative approach is exploratory and aims to provide insights into how the study subjects perceive a given situation.

I used the qualitative approach to gain insights into the challenges women in emergency management face because of work-family conflicts related to the nature of their work. I explored the nature of work in emergency management and how it affects women's ability to perform family chores and responsibilities. The expectations from data collected through this study will act as a guide to conduct further specific research. The study aimed to provide informed recommendations to employers and show women in emergency response professions that achieving a balance between family and work is possible.

The appropriate methodology for this study was the use of structured interviews. Structured interviewing involves interviewing in a standardized manner. All participants answer the same questions in the same order (Gubrium et al., 2012). This standardization ensures a possibility of aggregating the answers and identifying common themes in the data collected. Structured interviews require an interviewer to administer the questions rather than depending on the participants to self-administer. Through structured interviews, a researcher ensures that questions are answered within the same context. Accordingly, structured interviewing helps minimize context effects (Gubrium et al., 2012, p.199).

In Appendix A, I list the questions that guided the in-depth interviews with participants. A researcher can minimize the extreme effects of context from the data collected for a study through structured interviews. The discussion rationale is to draw in-depth analysis and information on women responders' opinions, feelings, and perceptions regarding challenges in the work environment and their family balance. While structured interviewing provides an opportunity for controlling the interview, it may result in limited exposure to the topic for a researcher (Gubrium et al., 2012, p. 199). Consequently, the discussions should be relaxed to increase the scope of the information collected. Through informal interviews, an investigator allows participants to freely explore the subject and provide as much information as possible through the discussion. Therefore, a significant amount of time is required for the interview to use this data collection method.

In a previous study, a researcher investigated the willingness of first responders to work during disasters using focus groups and interviews to promote relaxation and build a relationship with the participants (Smith, 2015, p. 3). In this study, I collected information from women who shared the same challenges I face as a woman responder who also cared for another adult. There were times when I had to be at work during a hurricane and was worried about them and their safety. The focus was on how the experiences are described and detailed and the tone of the responses. The style and articulation of the responses acted as indicators of emotions, hardships, and the importance that participants place on experiences. The challenge was eliminating personal involvement. The need to remove self-prejudice and personal viewpoints are crucial for conducting an objective study. I relied on tested theories that support the findings from the primary data collected from women responders.

Social Role Theory

Social role theory is often used to explain gender differences and stereotypes that have led to the division of labor in society. The origin of social roles assigned to men and women lies primarily in the evolution of physical sex-related differences, such as men's perceived physical power and women's reproductive and gestational functions (Stinchcombe, 2017, p. 12). These sexual differences and their interaction in society—where men perform certain activities more efficiently while women effectively carry others out—have caused gender stereotypes. These sex-typical role performances are facilitated through socialization, enabling men to develop appropriate personality traits according to their sex (Stinchcombe, 2017, p. 27). Accordingly, the interweaving of

biology and psychology facilitates role performance. Social role theory responds to the psychological vantage point that highlights social roles and interweaves processes related to the part. However, other perspectives show a robust analysis of sex differences and parallels.

Social role theory applies to interactions in all contexts addressing assertive power-related and social-emotional behavior. According to this idea, in similar contexts, women are perceived to act more emotionally and less instrumentally than men. Further, the theory posits that while in highly salient situations, the differences are significant, but they tend to be absent in informal institutions (Turner, 2016, p. 15). In this study, I used social role theory to predict expected behavior by women in emergency management. Because emergencies happen in unexpected and unforeseen circumstances, these situations can be seen as highly salient and informal (Stinchcombe, 2017, p. 31). Consequently, women are expected to behave less strategically in an emergency, meaning that the performance and productivity of women in an emergency will be lower than those under normal circumstances or compared with their behavior in other situations.

Conflict Theory

Coined by Karl Marx, *conflict theory* suggests that society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for resources that are limited by nature. According to the theory, social order is maintained by dominating power rather than conformity and consensus (O'Neil et al., 2017, p. 32). With people who own resources trying to hold onto them by all means possible, the poor and powerless are suppressed. The theory aims

to explain the existing social arrangement, explaining why different institutions exist today. This theory is mainly focused on the power and control of different resources in society. Conflict theory holds that, among other things, an individual's social status and the role they can take in society are determined by gender.

The theory further suggests that social conflict occurs because of differences between groups and classes. The distinguished group aims to suppress the inferior one to maintain power (O'Neil et al., 2017, p. 36). Due to their relatively low capacity to respond to an emergency, women in emergency management are inferior, while men are in power. Consequently, this theory suggests that men make it hard for women to work in emergency management effectively. In the study, I sought to understand the mechanism by which men, as the class in power, suppress the ability of women to work in emergency management.

Attitude-Behavior Theory

Attitude-behavior theory seeks to establish consistency between an individual's attitude and behavior toward a given situation or phenomenon. To a certain degree, people's attitudes and opinions about a given phenomenon affect their actions and behavior toward it (Siegel et al., 2019, p. 211). An attitude is a set of emotions and beliefs toward an event, object, person, or thing resulting from experience and upbringing. Attitudes have a solid ability to influence behavior; they determine people's evaluation of others, objects, and issues around them that may be harmful or positive. While attitude is learned, it can change to match the behavior and adapt to individual circumstances

(Siegel et al., 2019, p. 218). However, how attitude affects behavior is the most important as it determines how people experience a specific phenomenon in society.

According to attitude-behavior theory, an individual's attitude can predict their behavior toward certain phenomena. In this study, I used attitude-behavior theory to predict women's behavior working in emergency management (Siegel et al., 2019, p. 217). Accordingly, women's attitudes toward careers in emergency management are expected to affect their behavior and effectiveness in emergency response. Therefore, women with a negative attitude toward careers in emergency management are expected to exhibit poor performance and not be effective and productive in their workplaces. I measured both behavior and intentionality to perform tasks.

Definitions

The following are definitions of common terms used throughout this study:

Evacuate: To withdraw from a place in an organized way, especially for protection from an emergency or disaster (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

First responders: Individuals who, in the early stages of an incident, are responsible for the protection and preservation of life, property, evidence, and the environment, including emergency response providers (Homeland Security Act, 2002).

Assumptions

Interviews were used to collect primary data, firsthand experiences from women serving as emergency response personnel. Data were collected until data saturation was reached. A criterion for participation in the study was that the participant must have familial challenges. Pools of participants came from the International Association of

Emergency Managers (IAEM) from Region X, located in the northwest section of the United States. Region X comprises Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. This study may not have a sufficient number of women who responded who have familial constraints. It was assumed that participant responses would be honest and forthcoming. As the interviewer, I sought to establish trust and rapport with each interviewee. A final assumption was that the data received would not be used or shared with employers and family members. As the interviewer, I ensured participants understood that all information was confidential and coded to ensure anonymity.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I aimed to address that, under normal working conditions, there is limited time allocated for the family of women first responders, which can be interrupted by work and vice versa. The need to respond to work during a disaster can be interrupted by tending to family. Attempts made by women to excel both in their families and at their places of employment have met significant resistance (Agrawal & Srivastava, 2018). I explored different approaches that have worked for some women and approaches that have been attempted and failed. In order to stay within the chosen framework, participants were limited to a specific region.

Limitations

The number of study participants was limited to a reasonable number of participants without missing the data's purpose. A manageable size for a phenomenological study is 5–10 women responders (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 8). The research may have been limited due to the time available. Because that data gathered

involved personal issues, there may have been data sensitivity issues that could have limited data availability and analysis; I attempted to mitigate sensitivity and timing issues through proper planning. Additional limitations include keeping biases away from the study. Personal thoughts or feelings toward the topic of the study needed to be removed to conduct the research and witness the phenomenon of the participants' connections and experiences.

Significance

In an attempt to be equally represented in the labor market as their male counterparts, women today are venturing into fields that have not been made favorable to them (Knörr, 2011, p. 101). Existing work policies fail to recognize that women will experience challenges while employed as emergency response personnel if familial concerns exist. Emergency response roles come with challenges that affect both male and female employees, but the challenges have been found to affect women more than men (Messing et al., 2016, p. 6).

These differences and difficulties create a work environment that automatically decreases the quality of output of women employees. Women want to work in roles that involve responding to emergencies or disasters. However, the uncertainty of work schedules or a negative attitude from employers may deter them (Stabile et al., 2019, p. 220). However, policymakers and administrators do not seem to be aware of this issue. Often policymakers and administrators address employees' work-family balance instead of focusing on policies that address a female emergency responder (Moen, 2015).

The results of this study may support professional practice by contributing to a field of research where little is known: the familial challenges of women in emergency response jobs. This study aimed to address challenges unique to the profession that have caused female employees to leave the career fields because they found them unsupportive in practical terms. The findings of this study highlight areas that administrators and policymakers should focus on in addressing the attrition and performance of female employees in the profession. The study aimed to show where further contributions can be made for change to ensure that women employed in emergency response roles do not choose between their duties to the public and their families.

Summary

The sampling model used in this study should provide the best and most unbiased recommendations based on the study outcome. Data gathered from employers who have supported women employees when they experience familial challenges will be helpful in future policy planning. If employers have a greater understanding of supporting women employees with family responsibilities, they may be less likely to have absences when they are most needed. Women may also respect employers who have successfully created a work-family balance and encourage others to work for the same organizations.

The findings of this study may be helpful for policy development and administrative protocol requiring emergency services planning. An analysis of different options that women, who have sole responsibilities for taking care of their families, employ when they need to respond to emergencies is meaningful to addressing this problem. The goal of this research was to encourage women to continue to seek

employment in first-responder roles. The industry and research are lagging in finding solutions for women to continue employment in their desired careers and maintain confidence in their home life during unscheduled disasters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, I sought to understand the familial challenges affecting women working in emergency response. Because women are generally responsible for meeting the needs of their families (Joannou et al., 2017), they often face more challenges than men in emergency careers. With familial responsibilities, women may not be able to respond to emergencies effectively and rapidly. Therefore, in this study, I sought to understand precisely how women are affected by familial roles in their response to emergencies and how they respond to these challenges.

This chapter explores the existing literature to explain how mothers can be impacted and challenged by emergency work requirements. I review qualitative studies to identify gaps in research on the subject. I begin with a literature review in which I look at what people have done in the industry concerning the plight of mothers with special cases and the job requirements they experience. Then I explore the theoretical framework underpinning this research and address the fundamental theories used to help understand women's organizational and social values. Despite their challenging social and work roles, I also explain other theoretical developments for women's home economic duties.

The literature review also covers the global pandemic from the recent novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and how it has affected women working in emergency response roles. Furthermore, I consider other health pandemics that have similarities to the COVID-19 pandemic in analyzing how parents feel the effects, including the effects felt

by single parents as the breadwinners and sole proprietors when children were at home after the closure of schools for social distancing practices.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature was identified using a thoroughly prepared search strategy. I identified these resources from several databases, including PsycInfo, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Academia Search Complete, and included peer-reviewed and published articles within the past five years. In addition, articles included were complete with proper research conducted and details of data collection provided. For the literature search strategy, I used several keywords and terms to identify the most relevant articles for this research: *emergency response, women in emergency careers, emergency management, first responders, emergency managers, challenges, familial challenges, work-life balance, work-family balance, and barriers to women's workplace.*

The conceptual framework (See Figure 1) shows the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The independent variables include determining the challenges that particular women employees have faced when responding to urgent job calls. They have families but no one to help them take care of family members. The independent variables also include the need to analyze the approaches that women employ to address their challenges in allocating quality time between their family and job needs.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework*

Women who are single mothers or take care of siblings, elderly or sick parents, are trained for and seek employment opportunities in the emergency response field. These women may need to work jobs that require them to leave their families with no notice and then stay away from their families for extended periods. The kind of arrangements needed by employees with family commitments in such situations is unique.

Theoretical Framework

Different theories can help guide explanations and explorations into the work that affects women with particular challenges. Specific theoretical models help define the critical requirements of the factors that inform the roles assigned to any given gender in

society. Women who have social duties and requirements, such as taking care of siblings, parents, and children, have magnified challenges that need to be analyzed and discussed. Some fundamental theories that can be used to explain the position of women toward the development of suitable models and structures include social roles theory, feminist theory, and conflict theory. Each of these theories is useful in explaining a key element that will be useful in addressing women's needs in society. Each theory is used to understand specific impacts on society, thus helping to improve women's experiences in the market and society.

Social Roles Theory

Social roles theory is used to understand the difference in roles for men and women and what this difference means to each gender (Young, 2017). Social roles theory posits that the main difference between men and women is behavior based on society's gender assumptions. Therefore, social role theory relies on the belief that a man or a woman relies on social approvals within a community.

According to the theory, some types of behavior are reserved for men, while others are reserved for women. Anyone who moves across and identifies with behavior not specific to their gender is considered a person who has done what is unnecessary (Young, 2017). Social theory approves of the caretaking role in women who care for children, siblings, and older parents. However, when there is a need for a woman to support a family through emergency roles financially, the social role theory suggests that such persons become special case individuals in society. Society, therefore, should

provide ways to help reduce the adverse effects of the conditions such women undergo to achieve their work goals through emergency work roles.

Feminist Theory

According to feminist theory, there is a need to examine society through reflection on the roles and responsibilities placed on certain genders and identify inequalities in such role assignments (Price & Shildrick, 2017). Feminist theory, therefore, focuses on the examination of society based on the biased roles placed on women and men. The theory further explains that women have been assigned far fewer roles than men (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). Apart from taking care of families, women are also expected to help search for basic needs for the family (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). This inequitable division of family roles can lead to complexities and inefficiencies in executing these roles.

Feminist theory is used to advocate for equity across genders. Such equity should be fundamental in gender role assignment and values (Price & Shildrick, 2017). Therefore, the best approach is to ensure there is quality in the development of role assignments. People who have the socially assigned role of taking care of a particular group's interests in society, such as women taking care of their families, who are still expected to undertake emergency response roles, should be given deeper consideration and possible help (Price & Shildrick, 2017). Their assigned roles are diverse, and it is impossible to undertake them individually.

Conflict Theory

According to Karl Marx, who developed conflict theory, society is in a state of continuous conflict between individuals and groups interested in owning resources in limited supply (Goldman et al., 2017). Therefore, the challenges that people experience are varied and may sometimes lead to misunderstandings based on who should be in charge of any given resource at any given time. Therefore, according to social conflict theory, it is helpful to understand that even the people in charge of conflict need to understand the values of the theory because special women have families to take care of alongside their emergency assignments. Women with unique case families, such as siblings, children, and old parents, also need their full attention. Those in charge must find solutions ideal for developing accurate scope and structures (Goldman et al., 2017). The theory can also be used to explain and address the needs of society based on the core requirements in the areas of resource availability and usage.

Therefore, using these theories is essential in explaining special women's roles, execution, and position in society. *Special women* are those charged with the responsibility of taking care of their family members who are not in a position to take care of themselves and who, at the same time, seek to secure basic needs by undertaking notable roles in society (Goldman et al., 2017). Women may have younger children of their own, or possibly siblings, or they might have old and ailing parents who need care, but the jobs they do may also require urgent attention. Therefore, they run into situations that require their attention from both ends. They may want to remain home and provide

nursing care to family members, but their deployment takes them away from families in emergency role assignment cases. Such commissions may lead to conflicts.

Literature Review

Women and Employment

The role of women in U.S. society has been changing since the end of the Civil War. Women are increasingly participating in socioeconomic activities, including employment, education, leadership, and family roles. For example, in the 19th century, women rarely attended school, but more female students than male students in the U.S. education system (David, 2015). Notably, most higher education degrees were earned by women—bachelor’s degrees, 57.3%; master’s degrees, 59.4%; and doctoral, 53.3%—in the United States (Snyder, 2018, p. 41).

The U.S. workforce is also changing, and more women are involved in income-generating activities. The participation of women in the labor force peaked in 1999 at 60% (Byars-Winston et al., 2015, p. 59). Women workers remain vital to the nation’s success as they have a solid ability to push for change (Kivel 2017). The need to increase the role of women in the workforce has also led them to take several steps toward achieving equality (Swirsky & Angelone, 2015). Women have continued to take on leadership positions and make changes within the organizations they lead (Coury et al., 2020). According to Snyder (2018, p. 36), in 2018, women held at least 51.5% of management positions. However, while efforts to increase the role of women in the workplace exist, there are systematic hindrances to these efforts.

Although more women than men have been achieving higher levels of education, the proportion of women workers to men remains low in crucial areas. According to Harnois and Bastos (2018, p. 286), most senior positions in public and private organizations are still occupied by men. In addition, the U.S. boards of governance are male-dominated (Byars-Winston et al., 2015, p. 62). Harnois and Bastos (2018, p. 298) also noted a disproportionate share of women acting as CEOs of their organizations. Women have not yet achieved full status when it comes to employment. Several researchers have concluded that women are scarce in the highest-paying jobs. However, even in moderate-to-low-paying jobs, there are notable differences in the compensation provided to women.

Apart from differences in the salaries of men and women, there are other notable differences in some career fields. Such areas as security, emergency management, technical and trade jobs, and technology remain male-dominated. For example, in 2016, only 36% of women worked in the Department of Homeland Security (Byars-Winston et al., 2015, p. 67). Such differences are attributed to emergency management, security, and technology roles often require constant and unprecedented responses that may not be possible for women.

Working Women and Family Responsibilities

The participation of women in employment is a significant trend in society. Women's involvement in mainstream roles and employment opportunities are hailed as effective measures of improving family finances (Sheikh et al., 2018). Over the years, women involved in the family income stream have benefited their husbands and

improved family success. However, the more women get involved in economic activities, the higher the complexities of their quest to make urgent job calls despite their family and economic or work-related needs.

Women play vital roles in the family, especially in doing house chores (Medvedev, 2016). The activities that require their attention at home are demanding. At work, women have been taking on roles that they have not been doing before. The boldness of women has resulted from the self-belief and determination that arises from school, where they learn the skills that people had initially reserved for men (Agocs et al., 2015). Women have performed well in examinations and evaluation processes, even taking what was initially referred to as technical courses. Given a chance, women have also performed well in job markets. Therefore, there should not be discrimination in the workplace based on the abilities of the different genders and, at the same time, orchestrated from the elements of gender bias.

Women Working in Emergency Response

Careers requiring responses to emergencies are some of the most pressure-filled jobs in the world. First responders work in areas that help ensure people and communities' protection, safety, and health. The daily operations of a first responder involve the management of crises and working in situations that are often dangerous and unstable (Verniers & Vala, 2018, p. 1). Such jobs include those in firefighting, police departments, healthcare, and other roles where responders can be called in at any moment. Careers in emergency response require a worker to be ready at all times, day and night, to be called to work on prevailing challenges (Mercado et al., 2017, p. 1932).

Therefore, specific characteristics are vital for people working in areas that require a fast response.

Today, most people working as first responders are men aged between 24 and 50 years. According to Verniers and Vala (2018, p. 1), three out of four paramedics and emergency medical technicians are men, seven out of eight police officers are men, and 19 out of 20 firefighters are men. With first responders working in dangerous situations that can cause individual harm, the safety of self is a necessary consideration. First responders have more work-related injuries due to transportation accidents, physical exertion, and violence (Verniers & Vala, 2018, p. 2). With the dangers related to careers in first response, individuals who intend to join this area of employment often have to make serious considerations.

People in emergency response roles need to possess the ability to quickly adapt to emerging situations and other factors in their environment. Adaptability and flexibility are essential traits of people involved in emergency response (Mercado et al., 2017, p. 1931). Re-prioritizing and changing an individual's mindset allow them to channel resources to emerging environmental issues (Sinha et al., 2018, p. 154). This trait requires that individuals let go of personal and family issues when a disaster strikes. Also, an effective emergency responder should be cool-headed, able to remain calm under stress and chaos. Being able to remain calm is an effective method of subduing panic and allowing people to follow their leader to avoid the aggravation of an emergency (Verniers & Vala, 2018, p. 1). An emergency responder should be ready for anything in order to respond without delay.

The International Labor Organization (2020) puts the number of women health workers at 70% globally. This number shows that there are more women health workers, and it also shows that they are the most affected gender during the COVID-19 pandemic. These numbers also show that women health workers constitute the highest number of frontline workers to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, women are taking up the role of nurses and caregivers as they end up facing double the burden during the pandemic, such as longer shifts and care work at home (Cattaneo & Pozzan, 2020). The pandemic has also increased the responsibilities of female health workers, who have to double their responsibilities. They have had to deliver on their typical responsibilities before the pandemic and during the pandemic.

In developed nations such as the United Kingdom, women health workers account for 80% of the total health workers (Cattaneo & Pozzan, 2020). These developed nations were the most hit by the pandemic and continue facing the challenges of the pandemic. Women health workers have had to ensure that the overwhelmed medical institutions remain stable. Women health workers accounted for 71.8% of the total health workers while responding to the pandemic, showing that women are a significant force that has been on the frontline in fighting the pandemic. (Guo et al., 2020).

Compared to their male counterparts, women nurses have been on the frontline in fighting the pandemic. There are more female than male nurses as nursing, since its origin, was considered a female profession. Community health workers are also playing an essential role in fighting the pandemic. They are trained and form part of the response team during the pandemic. Some countries have trained community health workers in

substituting nurses during the pandemic. According to Bhaumik et al. (2020), 77% trained male community health workers in India, while their female counterparts account for 23%, addressing the number of women helping fight against the pandemic.

Open-mindedness is also a vital trait for an emergency responder. Open-mindedness and the ability to look at a situation through multiple perspectives help identify a solution and a specific plan to contain an emergency (Mercado et al., 2017, p. 1933). Other essential traits necessary for an emergency responder include strong communication skills, good listening capacity, responsibility, and prioritizing ideas (Mercado et al., 2017, p. 1932). These traits ensure effectiveness in responding to disaster situations. According to Mercado et al. (2017, p. 1933), while some traits can be instilled in people, most are acquired through upbringing and social constructs. Among them, being male or female is not a critical factor in determining whether one possesses the key characteristics of an emergency responder.

Women as First Responders

Researchers agree that women are first responders and vital resources in cases of emergency. In countries frequently affected by disasters such as war, famine, and natural calamities, women have a lower life expectancy than men (Mercado et al., 2017, p. 1932). According to Sinha et al. (2018, p. 156), women are 14 times more likely to lose their lives during a disaster than men, denoting the vulnerability of women in disasters and the necessity of equipping them with response strategies to use when disaster strikes. As people responsible for taking care of their homes, women often make significant decisions in preparation and response to disasters (Mercado et al., 2017, p. 1931). In

disaster-prone areas, women provide high-quality leadership in emergencies. The efforts of women in emergencies can be seen in the evacuation of the elderly and the injured and preparing for safe places where they can rest (Veenema et al., 2016, p. 51). Women often respond to health, financial, and other emergencies at home on behalf of their families. Accordingly, building the capacity of women to respond to disaster situations is vital in managing emergencies.

Several studies indicate that women are better than men in the management of disasters. While studying the effectiveness of disaster response after significant disasters, Mercado et al. (2017, p. 1931) noted that women adopted a different approach than men in preparing and responding to emergencies. The most notable difference was the way men and women interacted with disaster-prone individuals. Not wanting to scare people away, women first responders visited them and calmly informed them of the coming disaster and the need to get to safety (Sinha et al., 2018, p. 162). Women were often effective in dealing with disaster victims and providing them with a haven to rest during a disaster. In responding to disaster, women were the reason recovery of a community from stresses and shocks was practical, and future disaster preparation was enabled in planning (Veenema et al., 2016, p. 52). Therefore, there is a need to recognize the unique abilities women possess and use them in disaster response to improve the quality of emergency management.

While women are traditionally responsible for responding to emergencies in their homes, working as forefront responders in emergency response is, in most cases, challenging. Challenges for female first responders start at recruitment, where some

women fail to meet the requirements (Veenema et al., 2016, p. 53). In such cases, women are barred from entry to careers as first responders. In studying the barriers American women face in joining the fire department, Hollerbach et al. (2017, p. 3) noted that women often struggle to pass the physical test required by public and private employers in the area. Men's upper body strength aids them in passing physical tests while women struggle to make the minimum threshold for the physical fitness test (Sinha et al., 2018, p. 158). Similar barriers are also seen in other departments that require an emergency response, including the police and forest service.

Women are often considered incapable of having successful careers in firefighting because most employers still depend solely on physical attributes to recruit candidates (Hollerbach et al., 2017, p. 21). The results are seen in the small number of women in firefighting departments across the country, only requiring a physical element. According to Hollerbach et al. (2017, p. 21), due to the discrimination against women in recruitment for firefighting jobs, women only hold 4% of all employment opportunities in the area.

According to Hunziker (2019, p. 144), female medical students are slower than their male counterparts in responding to a disaster. Despite several studies that show that women are better medical caregivers than men, a study has shown a difference between the two genders in responding to medical emergencies. In a study conducted by University Hospital Basel, gender differences were noted in how employees responded to emergencies that required cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) (Tramèr et al., 2020). According to Tramèr et al. (2020), women showed fewer delays in starting CPR for patients with chest complications. Also, women spent less time with the patient during

the emergency. According to Hunziker, the delay in providing emergency response has been attributed to analysis paralysis and slow decision-making rates among women.

Challenges for Women First Responders

Several studies indicate the challenges women first responders face carrying out their responsibilities. Trying to understand the low number of women among firefighting departments, Lewis-Schroeder et al. (2018, p. 217) noted that female firefighters are at a higher risk of poor physical and mental health than their male counterparts. Due to the relatively low number of women in firefighting, women working in this sector are at a higher risk of sexual harassment than those in other areas (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018, p. 219). Also, Hollerbach et al. (2017, p. 5) noted that women first responders subjected to sexual abuse and discrimination are more likely to develop mental health issues.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women health workers faced several initial challenges, such as a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) (Fateen et al., 2020). The PPE meant to protect women's health workers were initially designed for men (Cattaneo & Pozzan, 2020). In addition, incorrect sizes of PPE resulted in considerable health risks of infection for women health workers, including first responders, nurses, physicians, and surgeons. The risk, coupled with increased global demands and supply of resources, restricted women's health workers' capacity to perform their duties (Hick et al., 2020). Women first responders have had to cope with using the limited resources to fight a pandemic in which the infection rate is high. The World Health Organization has been calling for the protection of female frontline workers, who make up the bulk of the team (Cattaneo & Pozzan, 2020). However, with these limited resources and the fact that

women first responders have to work without protective gear, the risk increases. The virus infects people through contact, and these responders encounter infected people daily.

These responders are the caregivers of the most vulnerable group during the pandemic. Older adults were ranked as the most vulnerable group and those with existing conditions like diabetes and cancer. They depend on female health workers who take care of them daily. However, increased risks posed by the lack of protection have made it difficult for caregivers to tend to the most vulnerable groups (Green et al., 2020).

Furthermore, there has been an upsurge in violence against female health workers during the pandemic. Harassment, abuse, and violent attacks on female health workers have been witnessed in Mexico and Pakistan (Green et al., 2020). Nurses and physicians have been spat on, yelled at, beaten, and stoned. The threat is worse for women, who are usually the most vulnerable in society, and they have faced the bulk of these violent activities due to their vast numbers as health workers. The lockdown restrictions impacted freedom of movement, and those who relied on public transport to get to the places of their employment had to search for other means of transport. The restrictions increased the vulnerability of this group as they became more targeted for sexual violence. The lack of police protection during the pandemic has also increased the threat of violence for female health workers.

Women also face violence from within the medical institutions. Violence from patients and family members during the pandemic has also increased (Yacker, 2020). Global reports on workplace violence indicate that female health workers faced more

threats during the recent pandemic. A study in Italy reported that 45% of medical workers, primarily women, reported acts of violence within the institutions (Yacker, 2020). The uncertainty created by the novel corona virus created fear and anxiety among patients and their family members, which increased agitation and reported acts of violence from patients and their family members. Between January and March 2020, there was limited information about the novel corona virus, and medical workers had to treat patients with limited information. The increased number of deaths and high infection rates created panic and anxiety among the patients.

There were conflicting demands for women first responders with increased work demands due to the pandemic and familial responsibilities (Yacker, 2020). The responsibilities are the same, but the workload increased. The emergency and outpatient departments are the most extensive areas of contamination (Siegler, 2020). Some patients do not exhibit any virus symptoms and are likely carriers, and others may deliberately hide their signs and symptoms. Some lie about contacting those already infected by the novel corona virus (Siegler, 2020). These are some workplace challenges facing women responders during the pandemic. They are in contact with infected patients daily. Those working in the emergency and outpatient departments must deal with surging patient numbers, with some of the already infected patients lying about their symptoms (Siegler, 2020). The risk of infection is the highest for those working in the emergency and outpatient departments, and little has been done to protect these frontline workers. Hospital-associated transmission is the most significant route of spreading the novel

corona virus. Health workers on the frontline are at the highest risk of contracting the virus (Zhou et al., 2020).

This daily exposure has created fear among women health workers. The fear of exposing loved ones at home to the virus has led to many of them quitting their jobs, reducing the already depleted team (Yaker, 2020). This fear also includes causing adverse health outcomes for patients, family, and colleagues at work. The pandemic-related curfews and lockdowns also mean a lack of childcare, with many frontline workers reporting they have to stay at home to take care of their families.

Studying the impact of work-related stress on women firefighters, Stanley et al. (2017, p. 97) found that female firefighters are at a higher risk of indulging in smoking behavior than women in the military. In addition, tobacco use is higher in women than men firefighters (Stanley et al., 2017, p. 99). I noted that compared with the general population, female firefighters have high rates of alcohol consumption. In conclusion, the study outlined that women firefighters indulged in harmful behavior predisposed them to ill health. Apart from behavior-related health impacts on female firefighters, there are concerns about occupational exposure to female reproductive health. According to Hollerbach et al. (2017, p. 15), both male and female firefighters are exposed to conditions likely to cause congenital disabilities. Moreover, cancer risk is higher among male and female firefighters when compared with any other population.

Familial Challenges Facing Women First Responders

While other challenges play a crucial role in the effectiveness of first responders, the most critical role is the one women hold in their households. Childcare

responsibilities make it difficult for women to provide quick responses during emergencies (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018, p. 221). Women serve as wives, mothers, teachers, health officers, disciplinarians, and other functions (Joannou et al., 2017, p. 417). Due to these responsibilities, women are often required to stay at home or work in occupations that are not highly tasking. However, today an increasing number of women are choosing first responder roles. Balancing familial responsibility and rapid response during emergencies is the critical challenge facing women in emergency management (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018, p. 227). Several researchers have evaluated this phenomenon to understand how it impacts women first responders.

Adams and Stewart (2015) indicated that the New Orleans Police Department faced significant challenges in deploying rescue teams comprising women with family ties, including nursing children. Notably, rapid response teams work based on the needs that arise when a calamity strikes. In some cases, people need to be called upon to work even if they are not scheduled. The report presents a complex case of women responders with family ties that may hinder their handling of emergency work requirements. Some challenges had already been identified in earlier disaster response requirements, such as during Hurricane Katrina (Executive Office of the United States, 2006).

The current study focused on women's challenges in their roles and how they responded to urgent job calls when they also have a family. The study and focus do not mean men have do not face similar challenges. Like women, men face the need to create quality time for family and achieve work-related goals. However, according to Dresden et al. (2018), some gender roles are given to women through nature that cannot change or be

transferred within families. Elements such as carrying an unborn child and taking significant time for breastfeeding and nursing are core challenges that cannot be delegated (Agocs et al., 2015). However, career decisions are changing because women may not balance adequate time for family ambitions when job requirements need consideration.

Dresden et al. (2018) noted that women face significant gender-based bias in male-dominated jobs and careers. Women are discriminated against and denied opportunities for further training and promotion at places of work. Further, some women are discriminated against in terms of salary and benefits. Women are paid less compared to their male counterparts. The reasons for the different types and causes of gender-based discrimination at work are dynamic and varied.

In some cases, women have not been given critical training opportunities to fear that they may soon want to take maternal leave, thus challenging the organization's need to sponsor an employee for vital training (Dresden et al., 2018). These situations lead to challenges to women's progress at work. Men who can attend additional training and are given additional opportunities become better informed and more promotable than women.

The challenge of unpredictable schedules has also followed women in other industries and traditionally requires rapid response. For instance, Henly and Lambert (2014) indicated that women employees could not respond to emergencies that may result from the nature of work. Unpredictable work timing has been noted as one of the biggest challenges women have realized in the labor market for women (Kellmereit, 2015).

Women in emergency management find it especially difficult to respond to work in these careers after having children. Joannou et al. (2017) studied the challenges of police mothers and found that their challenges begin the moment they announced their pregnancies. Canadian police departments deem mothers unsuitable to work in the field. Most policewomen feel that becoming pregnant causes them to lose the professional gains they achieved before the pregnancy (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015).

It is difficult to regain the ground that police mothers lose during pregnancy and after childcare leave. To get back to the position held before pregnancy, women must repeatedly prove themselves and sustain a strong position. After returning to work, there is a general perception that women are less dedicated to their careers than before because they now have to look after children (Joannou et al., 2017). Such issues discourage women and reduce their chances of succeeding in careers.

While some police departments provide non-tasking work to women with children, most do not consider the roles of these responders at home when assigning tasks. According to Peterson et al. (2018), the top challenges that “mother” first responders face included time management and balancing work and family. Mothers who work for long hours or have children with health or developmental challenges are more likely to experience challenges with work-family balance. Because emergency managers tend to work long hours, they are likely to have problems balancing their careers with family life.

The challenges of managing work, family responsibilities, and financial resources are often followed by maternal anxiety and guilt among mothers who work outside the

home (Ladge & Greenberger, 2015). Such anxiety can cause a decline in psychological well-being, reduced job satisfaction, and lower commitment to carrying out job responsibilities. As first responders are often away from their children without due notice, they are most likely to suffer these consequences, including guilt and anxiety. Therefore, single mothers or mothers with unique challenges find it difficult to find sustainable ways to meet urgent job response times balanced with family requirements when they have no one to care for their children.

These challenges have been experienced by women first responders during the COVID-19 pandemic. This current study shows the work and family challenges faced by women first responders while offering recommendations on how these challenges can be solved. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the global community and exposed challenges and inefficiencies women in the health sector face. These challenges result in a high risk of infection for health workers during the pandemic (Alsubaie et al., 2019).

In addition to work challenges, the pandemic resulted in temporary lockdowns where schools were closed indefinitely, transportation was paralyzed, economies were shut, and health institutions were overwhelmed. The biggest challenge for women has been balancing familial responsibilities and work responsibilities. The pandemic has resulted in more emotional exhaustion for women when compared to their male counterparts (Bhumika, 2020).

Giuliano (2015) noted that society has various demands for women, as they are regarded as the caretakers of children and the elderly. This role of women as caretakers has been there throughout history. The man is regarded as the provider in the family, and

the women remain as caretakers. However, family dynamics have been changing as the 21st century has presented a different role for women in society. Women remain caretakers in the family while also providing for the family. The 21st century has seen an increase in single mothers who take care of their children while working. Women play a leading role in families during change as they help them adjust (Giuliano, 2015).

The role of caretakers was affected by the pandemic as schools closed, and transportation was paralyzed. Women in healthcare have had to work as frontline workers and also worry about their families at home. They have to risk being infected and infecting their family members, including the most vulnerable groups of people. Women in their dual roles as caretakers and workers struggle to balance work and roles during the pandemic. Bhumika (2020) highlighted that nationwide lockdown increased emotional exhaustion for women more than men. Increased shifts at medical institutions meant less time for women in their roles as caretakers at home. The number of infected persons kept increasing, which led to an increase in the number of patients in medical institutions. At times, women had to spend their nights in hospitals.

The pandemic also meant the health workers had to stay in the hospitals or designated hotels to limit contact with families. This move ensured that their families were safe from infections as health workers constantly contacted infected persons. The move meant that the women had to go for days, weeks, or even months without seeing their children and partners. This solution was even more problematic for single mothers who had to take care of their children or older adult parents, were seen as the most vulnerable, and had no one to help them.

When the schools closed, the mothers traditionally served as primary educators for their children. This home-schooling role was especially challenging for mothers in the medical profession. Four percent of the U. S. workforce worked in places where they are frequently exposed to the virus (Baker et al., 2020). Women could not risk the threat of infection because of the fear of infecting loved ones. Families had to face the challenge of either being unavailable to the family or quitting her job and taking care of the family. These options become difficult for the mothers who are the breadwinners in the family, as quitting is not an option. Some limited caretakers could or would look after the children while the mothers were on duty. This dilemma explains the anxiety and depression women health workers experienced during the pandemic (Li et al., 2020).

The role of women in the family is broken down into the roles they play in the home. These include their roles as wives, home administrators, financial managers, and mothers. Other roles had been delegated to men, such as income earners in the family, which women currently perform in many cases (Bair, 2018). Different factors influence how women respond to this additional responsibility, including family policy, cultural values, and social context.

Income earners have faced various challenges during the pandemic, with nations being on lockdown and people being forced to work from home. Women first responders, such as firefighters and others in emergency response, have had to go through job cuts, challenging their roles as income earners. This current study explored the role of women as mothers and the challenges that women face when they have to leave their families due to work.

Women in the Middle of a Pandemic

The 20th century witnessed three pandemics, while the 21st century witnessed the biggest ever COVID-19 pandemic. The role women have played during the COVID-19 pandemic is not limited to healthcare. Cattaneo and Pozzan (2020) highlighted the role of women during the COVID-19 pandemic both at home and in health institutions. In health institutions, women make up over 70% of the workers, and their role has multiplied as the shifts have had to increase due to an increase in the number of infected patients. The result means more time at work and less time at home. Their role as health workers means they come into daily contact with the infected. Over 100 million women work globally in health institutions and care facilities (Cattaneo & Pozzan, 2020). Many of these women face similar challenges during the pandemic, as they have to balance their roles at work and familial responsibilities.

The role of women during the pandemic is often more complex than that of their male counterparts. The pandemic has shed light on the challenges women face both at the workplace and home. The fear of being infected and infecting family, friends, and colleagues have permeated the health workers' role and impacted their mental health (Khanal et al., 2020). Healthcare workers are at increased risk of developing mental health complications.

The role of caretakers has become more complex with the outcomes of the pandemic, including the closure of schools, job losses, forced lockdowns and mandated curfews in certain areas. Khan et al. (2020) established that inadequate quarantine would increase the risk of the pandemic. Governments had to limit the risk of the pandemic,

with the United States being among countries that imposed lockdowns to limit the spread. The role of women becomes more emotionally exhaustive due to the challenges of work-family balance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhumika, 2020). Often men and women prioritize work and family differently. Women are typically known to prioritize family over a job, so the pandemic impacted their role in the family (Khan et al., 2020).

Effects of Pandemics on Emergency Management Responders

The pandemic presented various challenges for emergency management responders. Resources became limited as the cases became overwhelming. They had to cope with rising numbers daily as working hours became longer. Khan et al. (2020) suggested that containing the further spread of the virus would require hospitalization, quarantine, and safety measures. Hospitals became overwhelmed as the number of infected cases began rising. Emergency management responders, such as health workers, had to deal with the rising numbers of patients, increasing the risk of developing mental health problems for health workers (Khanal et al., 2020). Khanal et al. (2020) concluded that 41.9% of health workers had anxiety symptoms, while 37.5% had symptoms of depression, and 33.9% had insomnia symptoms.

This was the first time these health workers were facing a pandemic of such magnitude. This pandemic had affected the way they lived and their work; it meant longer working hours to cater to the increasing numbers of patients, impacting the mental health of the health workers. The longer working hours led to many workers experiencing insomnia symptoms because they had to work erratic shifts. Some had to stay away from home due to the fear of infecting family members. Hospitals organized lodging for health

workers, which meant they had to stay away from their loved ones during a specific period (Li et al., 2020). Due to the limited number of emergency management responders, those available had to work for extended periods. Baker et al. (2020) highlighted how occupational characteristics such as interoperating with the public increased the risk of infection. Working with the public meant that close contact at work increased the rate of community transmission of the disease.

Women who have children were more affected and showed signs of depression, anxiety, and stress. They faced the dilemma between working and family care and dealt with the fear of infecting family members. Emotional exhaustion from juggling familial responsibilities and work responsibilities for women also increased mental health problems. The pandemic highlighted emergency management responders' mental health issues as they had to deal with occupational exhaustion (Khanal et al., 2020).

Palliative care responsibilities for both physicians and nurses were affected as contact with the elderly became limited. Society dictates that the elderly should be cared for, and history shows that women are tasked with looking after the elderly. However, the pandemic meant that care facilities were the most affected during the pandemic. Deficiencies exposed by the novel coronavirus impacted the services provided by the nurses and other medical professionals. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health care facilities has led to some of these facilities closing down, resulting in the loss of jobs for emergency management responders.

The economic impact of the pandemic has also affected the lives of emergency management responders. People have had to survive on government aid as jobs have

become scarce. Emergency management participants were also affected by this economic crisis, as some jobs were declared redundant. The loss of jobs meant that those still employed had to face the challenges of increased workloads. Others have had to work from home due to a lack of childcare. The lack of income for those who have lost their jobs is devastating to emergency management participants.

The risk of infection for emergency responders is higher than that of workers in different industries. Baker et al. (2020) explained that the key to containing the virus was to focus on the workplace, which would help protect both workers and the communities they serve. Emergency personnel are in daily contact with those who have been infected. Their workplace causes them to interact with others, increasing the risk of infection for the responders.

They also face other challenges, such as a lack of PPE. Working in high-risk departments was the number one risk factor for COVID-19-related health impacts (Shaukat et al., 2020). The other risk factors included an infected family member, lack of proper hand hygiene, poor hand hygiene before and after contact with the sick personnel, unprotected exposure, prolonged contact with the infected persons, and lack of proper PPE (Shaukat et al., 2020). Among all these risk factors, 80% have a direct impact on emergency management participants.

Homeschooling their children was a significant challenge for women in emergency management, which could hamper children's psychological and personal development (Gupta & Jawanda, 2020). If the mothers had to leave the children and go to work, they had to rely on others for their care. They also had to rely on the internet and

social media, which was one of the adverse impacts of the pandemic for children, especially when they were left alone for extended periods.

Summary

The literature review reveals that several research projects have been developed to help even out the role of women in society. Some studies, including Joannou et al. (2017), have shown the challenges women face, such as discrimination, being left out of significant events and training opportunities, and sexual harassment in their emergency management careers. Studies have focused on the gender roles assigned to women in society based on the roles assigned to men.

In addition, several studies have explored gender inequalities. Joannou et al. (2017) and Hunziker (2019) show that being a woman often leaves an individual during a recruitment exercise. The economic role that women have undertaken in society has also been given much attention. Women workers offer additional sources of income for families and are the sole sources of livelihood for many women-headed households (Verniers & Vala, 2018). A few studies have identified familial roles as an impediment to the ability of women to carry out their roles as first responders. Notably, Verniers and Vala (2018) found that family responsibilities cause women to delay their ability to respond to emergencies.

However, there is one area that the studies have not addressed: the case of women from unique families with a need to take care of their children or elderly parents or siblings who need daily attention, and the possibility of having assigned roles that are of an emergency nature. While existing studies look at women in emergencies in general

and identify some challenges they often face as mothers, none of the studies look at women with particular types of families, such as woman-headed families, families comprising sick or elderly persons who need care, and other types of special needs, which may adversely affect their role as first responders.

The current study used qualitative methods to identify some of the work and family challenges women in emergency management careers face that would limit their ability to perform their duties. While quantitative evidence suggests the presence of familial challenges that impede women from working effectively as emergency responders, it does not provide a clear understanding of how these challenges affect them at the point of emergency response (Harnois & Bastos, 2018). Therefore, the current study was critical in ensuring a closer understanding of the work and family challenges women face.

Moreover, while there is much research on women's challenges in first responder roles, no study was found that details how women cope with those problems. Some studies, including that of Ladge and Greenberg (2015), suggest methods that could be used to solve the familial challenges that face women due to their involvement in first responder roles. However, these are mere suggestions and are not based on empirical evidence. Adopting a qualitative approach will also help identify some strategies women use in emergency roles to overcome the challenges they face in their careers. By applying a qualitative research approach, the research explored how women in first responder careers deal with their challenges while balancing their work and family lives.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this study, I examined the familial challenges faced by women working in emergency management careers. Previous researchers have shown that women in first-responder careers, such as firefighting, police, and healthcare, face more problems than their male counterparts due to their household roles as mothers and caregivers. In this chapter, I describe the research method and the techniques used to answer the research questions in this study. I explain the research design (phenomenological) and the rationale for choosing the given methodology.

I discuss participant selection, my relationship with study subjects, and the methods for addressing researcher bias in participant selection and data collection. The methods for data collection and analysis are also part of the chapter. Concerns of external validity, dependability, and confirmability are addressed as well. Finally, I discuss the ethical procedures that allowed for confidentiality to protect participants' information.

Research methods include the steps, strategies, and procedures a researcher uses to collect and analyze data for a study (Vagle, 2018). The method includes how a study went from beginning to end. Accordingly, the research methods section of this chapter includes the design, sample, setting, data collection, methodological limitations, and techniques used to analyze data. The techniques used in the research are described in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

This phenomenological study was designed to improve the current understanding of women's familial challenges in emergency response careers. I collected and analyzed data to identify the factors that cause challenges for women who have family responsibilities at home. The following research questions guided this research:

RQ1: What are the perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles?

RQ2: How can these perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles be eliminated or minimized?

RQ3: What are the challenges that women first responders experience in needing to respond to urgent work calls when they have no one to look after their families?

First responders include a range of careers, including those in healthcare, firefighting, police, and emergency response; such employees are often called upon to work without prior notice. Women working in these first responder careers often find it hard to balance work and family due to role conflicts (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). While many researchers have looked at the challenges that cause this conflict (Vagle, 2018), specific role challenges have not been addressed. Most researchers have employed quantitative research approaches to identify the challenges faced by women in their capacities as both first responders and critical parts of family life. However, they have not acquired a significant amount of information. Therefore, I took a different approach to analyze the situation to acquire additional insights in this study.

In this study, I used a phenomenological approach to explore women's experiences balancing work and family life while working in first responder roles. The main aim was to increase knowledge on the subject and identify suggestions for solutions used by the women in these roles. Women working in first responder roles, including police, firefighters, and medical personnel, face various challenges based on the job and the specific details of their lives. For example, Snyder (2018) noted that women who are single parents find it hard to leave their families during the night in case of an emergency. In addition, the response mechanisms to the familial challenges related to work-family balance vary. For women doctors who are married, the responsibility of caring for children during an emergency may be left to the husband (Gerson, 2016).

On the other hand, Lewis-Schroeder et al. (2018) noted that nonmarried female healthcare workers often fail to respond to emergencies due to a lack of help with family responsibilities. The challenges are different for women in other first responder roles, such as emergency management in natural disasters. Therefore, I used the phenomenological approach to help identify specific familial challenges, career-specific situations, and solutions provided by female participant first responders, depending on their specific situations.

Researchers have used qualitative research for extensive and in-depth study of behaviors, opinions, motivations, and themes. Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in a way that cannot be achieved through quantitative methodologies (Vagle, 2018). Consequently, while the data derived from quantitative methods relate to quantities, amounts, and other measurements, the qualitative method

provides characteristics, attributes, and features of a given phenomenon evaluated thematically.

In a basic quantitative methodology study, data may be easy to collect; in qualitative research, a researcher needs to understand the phenomena under study. Researchers use their own words to interact with participants and gather information (Vagle, 2018). The qualitative method allows a researcher to include participants' concerns and increase knowledge on a subject more significantly than a quantitative approach. In this research, the qualitative approach allowed me to identify the familial challenges women face in first responder careers and create a deeper understanding of how these challenges relate to the participants' different experiences.

The qualitative methodology can help understand the differences and similarities in subjects' experiences and form a cause-and-effect relationship to guide efforts to eliminate them. The most common qualitative methodologies are case study, ethnography, narrative theory, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Vagle, 2018). All these methods have characteristics that make them suitable for studying different phenomena and require different researcher activities. I used the phenomenological approach to study the subject in this research.

The phenomenological approach looks at the experiences, events, and occurrences with minimum regard to external factors. In a phenomenological study, directly felt or perceived experiences are more reliable than interpretations (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). Ideas are generated through induction and human interests from rich data collected through an in-depth entry into the phenomenon, capturing it vividly. Through

phenomenology, a researcher acquires a basic set of individual conditions and believes this guides the phenomena (Smith, 2015). The approach deals with the worldviews of the person conducting the research. The phenomenological approach is essential when research participants have experienced a familiar situation (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Vagle, 2018). Therefore, it is relevant to study the phenomena where women experience familial challenges while dealing with emergency response work.

Through phenomenology, I obtained a strong pattern of the participants' thinking and the flow of their thoughts concerning the familial challenges they face due to their work as first responders in an emergency. The phenomenological approach effectively forms people's meaning and helps to adjust issues and ideas as they emerge through the research process (Smith, 2015). Phenomenology is specifically valuable for studying topics and concepts that have not been studied before, as it increases the general knowledge of the situation. Data gathered through the phenomenological approach are natural rather than artificial, meaning they are accurate and related to the phenomena under study in more ways than other methods (Sinha et al., 2018). Using phenomenology in this study provided a means to identify ideas that may not have been discovered before.

Generally, the analysis of a phenomenological study involves condensing, grouping, and comparing results to identify standard features and differences between the participants. A researcher is expected to discuss the underlying factors and structures of the phenomena under study. Through a phenomenological study, I examined the issues related to the challenges of women. Therefore, the data collected were subjected to

proper analysis to identify the issues and ideas underlying the condition of women in first responder careers.

In different phenomenological studies, researchers use various methods with slight differences in how research is conducted. Existential, hermeneutical, realistic, and constitutive phenomenology are common phenomenological approaches (Smith, 2015). Realistic phenomenology holds the metaphysical realism of the universe constant and hence suspends the beliefs and facts known to the researcher (Vagle, 2018). Consequently, a researcher starts from the point of no information. Hermeneutic phenomenology is mainly interpretive rather than purely descriptive, and every form of awareness is taken to be already interpreted (Sinha et al., 2018). However, in this study, I used the constitutive phenomenological approach to understand the subject.

Constitutive phenomenology is mainly transcendent and emphasizes processes in conscious life (Smith, 2015). Constitutive phenomenology is concerned with the constitution of matter, where it is used to describe the synthesis of intention in the consciousness of a subject. Unlike in realistic phenomenology, there is a pre-predictive experience where objects are willed, perceived, and valued but not created into formed states. The constitutive approach is a broadened understanding of the natural world that includes culture and human understanding of a phenomenon (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). Hence, it is used to seek subjective ideas that have potential scientific outcomes. Therefore, for research to be constitutive, it must delve into what the subjects—women working in first responder careers—make of the challenge of being mothers and having impromptu calls to respond to emergencies.

Role of the Researcher

Primary researchers are expected to have specific skills and characteristics to make appropriate decisions during a study. According to Vagle (2018), a researcher must have specific attributes that allow them to interact with participants effectively and form the necessary mindset that will allow them to gather information without making undue conclusions. Accordingly, researchers should examine their beliefs, biases, preconceived ideas, and other factors that may limit their ability to study the phenomena in question objectively.

Researchers use one standard in their study to eliminate bias and create a fresh mind on a subject, i.e., create epoché. In phenomenological studies, epoché is the process in which a researcher blocks biases and assumptions to objectively explain a phenomenon with its inherent meaning system (Vagle, 2018). This process is a suspension of judgment to prevent making conclusions in a given scenario. I intend to use this technique to eliminate any prior assumptions or conclusions regarding the topic in my research. However, I do not hold any assumptions or biases concerning the subject. Consequently, my personal views on challenges facing women working as first responders were bracketed to allow objective data to be collected and analyzed. Due to bracketing, the biases and personal feelings that could influence my interactions with participants were eliminated and allowed me to collect reliable data.

With this research being partially motivated by my interaction with women first responders, I recognize that my view of the subject might be affected by previous interactions. While these interactions might have positive and negative influences on

handling the subject, they could also cause bias. Consequently, I employed the bracketing technique to eliminate any preformed ideas. Qualitative researchers use bracketing to mitigate any potential adverse effects of preconceived ideas that would affect the process of research (Sinha et al., 2018). Bracketing is vital for anyone using the phenomenological research approach.

I am an open-minded individual who allows for the prevalence of more than one opinion on a matter. Open-mindedness is another critical characteristic of a qualitative researcher (Smith, 2015). This characteristic allows for many other attributes required to conduct an interview, including listening effectively. Listening skills can increase understanding of the world and create a positive circle. Active listening allows an individual to create an environment where people are attracted to this quality. I used my active listening skills to create a positive relationship with participants.

Another vital skill that I used during the research and in interacting with participants is writing. I used my writing skills to keep a diary and proper record-keeping during the entire study period to promote my understanding of the topic.

Observation skills and a strong sense of ethics are vital characteristics that were vital in this study. My observational skills enabled me to research the subject effectively. Ethics allow researchers to address the main ethical concerns, such as anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality. According to Smith (2015), the nature of qualitative studies brings challenges in terms of confidentiality and keeping information anonymous.

I am skilled in qualitative research methods, including data collection, transcription, and analysis. I have participated in research projects as an assistant. Consequently, I am well-versed with data collection methods such as interviews, observations, case studies, and identifying potential participants for a study. Through these qualities, I knew I would conduct research without causing any ethical risks.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The target participants for this study were women working in emergency response careers. Emergency responders work in such careers where they are called upon whenever there is a disaster. Such careers include public safety officers, emergency management planners, disaster response technicians, firefighters, emergency room physicians, and emergency nurses. The jobs and responsibilities of these careers include working without notice and off-the-office work (Smith, 2015). The women targeted for the study needed were at least 21 years of age. The study also required that women selected for participation have additional familial responsibilities of living with a dependent person. A dependent person is defined as an individual who directly depends on the support of the first responder at home. These people include children, elderly parents, disabled relatives, and other persons living with the first responder.

In selecting participants, the first step is identifying and accessing eligible people for the research according to the set parameters. Sinha et al. (2018) noted that the researcher must first ensure that they can access the people who experience the phenomenon studied in qualitative research. With the methods used for data collection in

qualitative research often being laborious, including in-depth interviews and observation, the researcher must identify people willing to talk and cooperate (Smith, 2015). Vagle (2018) suggested establishing ties with the population to identify the participants used in qualitative research. Consequently, to identify the participants for my study, I used my networks in the community, such as associations, that helped me identify and recruit the candidates. I identified friends, families, and people who work in emergency response careers for this research. As such, I used the snowball method for continuous identification and selection of participants. The snowball method of participant selection is used where participants are hard to find and involves participants helping recruit other participants. With the small sample size required for the research, I did not have to worry too much about identification.

Sampling

According to Azmat and Rentschler (2017), it is typical for qualitative studies to utilize a relatively small sample. Given the data collected from such studies, the quantity might lead to confusion and challenges with analysis and finding links. Smith (2015) held that a qualitative study should include a sample size of six to 10 participants to be effective. However, other researchers require the use of other methods to determine the sample size for qualitative analysis. According to Vagle (2018), saturation, quality, and study nature should determine sample size. By saturation, the ease of finding participants is taken into consideration. Consequently, for this study, a sample size of six to 15 participants was determined to be appropriate. The range takes care of the relative

difficulty in finding participants and the need to draw conclusions based on evidence rather than simple observer bias or assumptions.

Nonprobability testing is the most effective sample acquisition procedure used in this study to select the sample. In nonprobability sampling, I can adjust the sample to fit their question. Unlike random or probabilistic sampling techniques, nonprobability methods do not infer from sample to population but seek to iterate until theoretical saturation is achieved (Vagle, 2018). Consequently, nonprobability sampling techniques allow me to target participants who give usable results and are considered effective qualitative study methodologies. As noted above, this study used snowball sampling as the sampling procedure.

Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique. Also known as referral or chain sampling, snowball sampling involves the researcher getting help from study subjects to get other participants (Sinha et al., 2018). The technique assumes that people facing one phenomenon often know each other as the situation brings them together. Several researchers have noted the technique as effective in the identification of samples. According to Smith (2015), the chain sampling method effectively looks for patterns within the data, as participants provide vital data about the following topic.

Following the leads of other participants with the same challenges, I can quickly identify women with familial responsibilities that affect their ability to perform their roles as first responders. As they work together, women will realize their everyday challenges and form groups for social support to avoid the consequences of familial responsibilities at their work. Sinha et al. (2018) noted that women tend to share both work- and family-

related issues at work with the hope of learning solutions. Moreover, it is common to share with someone who experiences similar circumstances (Sinha et al., 2018).

Consequently, if I identified the first participant, identifying the rest would not be as challenging. Therefore, the task was my responsibility as the researcher to identify the first participant for the research. Therefore, the use of social networks was the most appropriate method of identifying targets for this study.

Data Collection

The first step in data collection is the acquisition of approval from authorized boards that oversee the research. Seeking ethical approval is necessary before research involving human participants can begin or how data on people will be collected (Smith, 2015). At Walden University, researchers must have ethical approval to ensure that the research meets the ethical standards expected for both graduate and undergraduate students. I will present the research tools, including in-depth interviews with the University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Further information will be given on the procedures and the measures that I will take during the research to ensure confidentiality and privacy of information acquired from the participants.

Data protection protocol is a vital determiner of the level of compliance with ethical requirements for qualitative research (Vagle, 2018). Therefore, the measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality were considered and prioritized for approval during the board's presentation. Also, a copy of informed consent was provided to the IRB for review to ensure conformity with set standards of practice.

Apart from the university, approval from organizations where research will be conducted is also significant. For this research, organizations involved in emergency response played a key role in providing research participants. Moreover, I carried out interviews and focus group discussions on the premises. Consequently, the research sought approval from management to research these places. This process involved explaining the research process, including the type of data collected from the participants. However, I conducted interviews at the place of choice of the participants.

This study used in-depth interviews to collect data from the subjects. I had one-on-one interaction with the participants. According to Smith (2015), one-on-one interviews require that a researcher meets in person with participants. The in-depth interview method allows the subjects to be spontaneous and free with the interviewee (Vagle, 2018). Information from an in-depth interview is not influenced by psychological pressure, leader effect, or copying behavior.

With the flexible structure of in-depth interviews, personalized prompts help develop what the individual can add to the data. I used open-ended questions. However, the level of freedom achieved by the participants is highly dependent on the amount of time the interviewer takes to create rapport with them, the assurance of the relevance of the research, and the level of confidentiality assured. Consequently, I needed to ensure the proper introduction of the research and observe the ethical procedures during in-depth interviews (Vagle, 2018).

The original intent for this study was to conduct the interviews in person, but due to the pandemic, interviews were conducted via Zoom. After successfully identifying

participants, I created rapport with them while explaining the research and its purpose, procedures, and how the information was collected. I informed the participants about their rights, including informed consent and how to stop the interview at any point during the process. Questions from the participants were also encouraged for clarity. From here, I continued to present the questions to the participant.

Confirmability

In terms of confirmability, a researcher must show a degree of correlation to the results obtained by other similar studies. One way of ensuring confirmability is by playing the devil's advocate. A researcher actively looks for negative instances where data presents contradictions with previous observations (Vagle, 2018). The study protocol was to conduct interviews with individuals to get one-on-one experiences. Then, I gathered all participants' responses to be compared against their recorded statements. In addition, objectivity on my part to avoid bias is an effective measure of ensuring confirmability. I will keep both written and audio records of the interview during data collection to compare for accuracy for three years in a password-protected computer to which I have the only key. After three years, all research study materials will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

The transcription process for the audio involves acquiring the services of a professional to transcribe data. At the end of the in-depth interviews, I gave audio records to a transcriptionist for analysis and transcription. The audio records did not include the identity of the participants in order to protect their identity. Instead, numbers were used to

conceal information about the participants. After transcription, information was compared with the short notes taken during the interview to identify any inconsistencies.

Through repeated analysis of the transcripts, I arranged the data collected from the interviews into themes. The themes involved identifying problems to determine the challenges that the participants face as first responders. I followed the recommendations of Vagle (2018) to analyze the data from the transcribed documents.

As the researcher, I applied the first step to reduce and eliminate data acquired from the participant. The process of reduction and elimination involves first determining if the data is relevant to the conditions. Second, I determined if it can be extracted and used to answer the research questions.

The second step in the process is thematization and clustering for the core experiences of the participants. Finally, there is the identification of constituents and themes that concern the project. Checking for discrepancies in the data to avoid the consequences of bias and participant failure is also critical in the final stage of the data analysis. In addition, verification of accuracy is required for each part of the research for congruence.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness refers to validity and reliability.

Triangulation is a standard method used in research to ensure that results are credible and usable for completing the research. Being methodical and using specific procedures helps eliminate bias. The study used rigorous evidence, eliminating the need for factors that may raise questions.

Credibility

Also known as internal validity, credibility refers to measures to ensure consistency and show the study's evidence (Vagle, 2018). This involves taking field notes, regular entries, documentation, and accurately describing the phenomenon under study. I ensured the data remained on course to answer the research questions.

External Validity

According to Vagle (2018), external validity is the ability to generalize and transfer research results into the general population. Keeping the importance of the study in mind while conducting research is one way that I ensured the quality of results and whether they could be transferred to the general population. I also considered the sample size and used standard procedures for sample size calculation.

Dependability

The stability of the research process includes proper planning and control of procedures, which are vital to the research process. Vagle (2018) defined dependability as the ability of findings to reflect participants' lived experiences. This study used complementation as the primary method to ensure the dependability of the research.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical procedures included in this research included approval from the IRB, informed consent, protection of privacy and maintenance of anonymity, and protection of research data. Participants were assigned numbers, and their names were not used in any recorded data to ensure anonymity. The participants were informed of their right to decide the study, including leaving during the research process. By addressing the

participants' concerns regarding the fate of their information and private data, I created an environment of trust. I increased the potential of people becoming part of the results. Data handling was also controlled, including transcription and analysis. Moreover, vulnerable participants were protected from any consequences due to their participation in the research.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the participants and the human aspect of the research. Anonymity and privacy were the critical points of the chapter. I ensured the information provided by the research participants could be confirmed and validated and that the phenomenon of concerns does exist not just within the state and within the emergency management world. However, this study could be used for further research outside of emergency management and outside Western Regions. The next chapter introduces the lived experiences that comprise the phenomenon.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the World Health Organization declaring a health emergency and the U.S. federal government declaring a state of emergency. The pandemic led to people working remotely and a sweeping closure of learning institutions across the country. In some areas, a lockdown was paramount at borders. With the cancellation of social gatherings and school closures, work environments changed to help minimize the spread of the virus through social distancing measures (Layne et al., 2020).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, little data existed regarding emergency responders and their dependent care plans. This qualitative study highlights the challenges women in emergency response roles face when responding to a no-notice disaster when they have familial responsibilities. This study was conducted to address a gap in the literature regarding women working in emergency management and their challenges.

The recent pandemic made it easier to highlight concerns about childcare or adult care that emergency managers face daily because the rest of the United States was experiencing the same challenges. Due to COVID-19, children across the United States and elsewhere could no longer attend in-person school, resulting in parents needing to adjust their schedules to provide childcare and supervision. Schedule adjustments sometimes trickled down to adults caring for other adults as well. Dependent care became critical in the pandemic for all families. Dependent care is only an example of the challenges women emergency managers face while activated for an emergency.

In this chapter, I present the data collected and analyzed and the results of this qualitative study to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles?

RQ2: How can these perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles be eliminated or minimized?

RQ3: What are the challenges that women first responders experience in needing to respond to urgent work calls when they have no one to look after their families?

Data needed for this study were collected through interviews. A research method dictates the research design and tools used (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This chapter includes the setting, participant demographics, and the guidelines for data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and the trustworthiness of the results.

Setting

Participants in this study were women emergency managers in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region X, including Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, representing 271 Tribal Nations. Two private organizations (one regional and one national with a regional chapter) agreed to send out a recruiting email to their members on my behalf. Criteria to participate in the study were women working in the emergency responder field (with no-notice call-outs) who have a unique familial makeup such as being a single parent or a foster parent or taking care of an adult family member. Another criterion to participate in the study was that these women had no one to

assist them in their caretaking duties. The women interested in being a participant in the study contacted me directly for additional information. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews scheduled for a time and date that was convenient to the participant.

When conducting qualitative research, interviews are trusted to provide reliable data. Interviews help a researcher collect information from the participants. Researchers must understand the power of using interviews in research (Banerjee et al., 2018). An interview brings the interviewee and the interviewer together; the two communicate without a third party. When sharing information, there are different ways to determine whether the information is reliable. One method is the number of people who share the information (Banerjee et al., 2018). From a communication point of view, when information passes through several sources or vessels before reaching the end-user, there are chances the information is altered. A researcher should always use data that have not been altered. Given that an interview promotes data credibility, it becomes essential to collecting data.

The suitability of an interview to collect data for a study cannot be ignored in this case. The reason behind this is associated with the data that have been collected. In this case, the type of data I was looking for was descriptive data (Banerjee et al., 2018). This means that statistics were not as crucial as data that explained the phenomenon identified in the study. I sought detailed explanations about the research and wanted to focus more on the phenomena women were experiencing.

An interview is not only suitable for collecting data but also for storing it. When conducting interviews during research, it is easy to refer to the data presented through the

script (Hollerbach, 2020). Technology has affected many areas, including research (Banerjee et al., 2018). Data collection has become advanced and more accurate, and dependable. Traditionally, researchers use pen and paper to take notes and conduct interviews; however, it is cumbersome (Betts et al., 2020). The use of phones and computers has changed this because electronic devices allow for an interview to be recorded; thus, the data can be retrieved and analyzed.

Diversity of data is essential in a study. When there is a wide variety of data, the researcher has choices (Bruschini-Chaumet et al., 2019). It is essential to have diverse data to ensure the research team tackles research from different perspectives in research. People in a focus group can engage in arguments and debates, especially if they have opposing views (Bessen et al., 2019). The process of entertaining such discussions and ideas is essential because it helps to know how many people support the topic and how many hold opposing views (Watkins et al., 2019).

I used Zoom online video conferencing software to conduct the interviews to collect data in this study. The participants provided me with times they were available for an hour for interviews and the email address where they wanted me to send the Zoom link. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, I did not use the video function of Zoom. I did not ask the participants to use it either; most participants preferred not to be on video. However, I preferred to meet and conduct the interviews in person; the COVID-19 pandemic and related social distancing measures made virtual meetings the preferred method. Meeting in person would have provided me with social or nonverbal

cues. However, I could still consider voice inflection. Participants' chosen location and time allowed for more in-depth sharing of their perspectives and experiences.

I provided the interview questions to the participants before the scheduled interview time to allow them time to digest questions and formulate responses; this allowed participants to make notes in advance regarding critical points they wanted to communicate. The questions were self-developed and consisted of semi-structured and open-ended questions; interviews took 15–45 minutes to complete. No follow-up questions were needed, but clarifying information from the SurveyMonkey data was necessary, and I obtained it during the interviews.

Demographics

I provided a SurveyMonkey link to people who expressed interest in being a participant in the study. I used the survey questions to determine their candidacy to participate in the study; nine of the 13 women who responded were selected for interviews.

The following SurveyMonkey questions were used to determine the study eligibility criteria:

- What is your age group?
- What is your racial, ethnic, or cultural identity?
- Are you employed in the emergency management field?
- Do any of the choices apply to you? Single parent or foster parent; single woman providing more than 50% of an adult dependent's income; or single woman caring

for an adult parent, sibling, or spouse/partner; partner; p of a person who leaves for extended periods?

- Is there someone else who assists you in caring for another person?
- Is alternate care an item that needs to be planned in case of a disaster/emergency that requires your response?

I had nine participants for the study. All were women who worked in Washington state, were in some form of an emergency responder role with no-notice response requirements, and had a family makeup that resulted in work-family– challenges. Four potential participants were not selected in the interviews: two were men, and one was not within the designated region. One person was identified as not having familial challenges when activated or deployed (their spouse had a flexible work schedule).

The total years' experience in the emergency management field varied among all participants. Participants with 20 or more years' experience represented 33.3% of the participants. Participants with 10–19 years of experience represented 44.4%; two had nine years or less. While answering the questions on SurveyMonkey, all participants declined to answer the age and race demographics questions. Participant demographics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1*Participant Participant Demographic Information, N = 9*

Demographic response	<i>n</i>	%
Job location		
Local/city	3	33.3%
State	2	22.2%
Federal	3	33.3%
Military	1	11.1%
Years of experience		
9 or fewer	2	22.2%
10–19	4	44.4%
20 or more	3	33.3%
Family makeup		
Single parent/foster parent	3	33.3%
Care for another adult	3	33.3%
Partner leaves for an extended period	2	22.2%
Partner is another first responder	1	11.1%
Additional help		
Another family member	3	33.3%
Colleague	1	11.1%
Spouse	2	22.2%
No help at all	3	33.3%

Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval, I collected data from the participants who met the research criteria based on their response to the survey on SurveyMonkey. The primary source of data collection was in-depth structured interviews conducted with eight emergency management professionals and one retired emergency responder. Members from two professional emergency management organizations who expressed interest in participating in the study contacted me via email to receive the SurveyMonkey web link. I contacted the participants through the email address provided in the SurveyMonkey questionnaire and scheduled individual interviews. All participants reviewed the informed consent form and consented to participate in the study through SurveyMonkey.

I conducted the in-depth, structured interviews via Zoom and used the interview questions I developed (see Appendix). The study participants consented to the interview recording before the interview started and were recorded through Zoom. The length of the interviews ranged from 15–45 minutes; the interviews were conducted over two weeks. No deviations arose from the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3, and no discrepancies occurred throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I used the NVivo transcription service to transcribe the interviews and compared the transcript with the audio of the Zoom recordings to ensure accuracy and alignment. The research questions were aligned with the research purposes; discussing the questions, collecting data from participants, and, ultimately, answering the research questions are the goals of most research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). NVivo

transcription services transcribe audio data into a Word document; after the interviews were transcribed, I uploaded the documents to NVivo to create a data set. Using NVivo, I was able to code by the question, case, and individual. The interview questions are provided in the appendix.

Once I created the data set, I was able to develop themes to analyze the data. While relistening to the audio recordings and coding interview data, I quickly realized that all participants shared similar experiences and phenomena. I looked for common themes and identified five: (a) increasing number of women in emergency response roles, (b) women face discrimination, (c) women face familial challenges as responders, (d) women responders are heads of household or primary breadwinners, and (e) women with unique family makeups should be considered when developing response plans.

Even though women working as emergency responders face numerous challenges, their number has increased (Oliveira et al., 2020). In this study, I focused on women emergency managers and first responders. The presence of women at the manager or director level suggests the industry is changing and that more women are pursuing these careers (Chopko et al., 2019). Women have long been actively involved in the healthcare sector and childcare or adult care. The fact that women are present in departments and are in high-level positions indicates that the number of women embracing such careers may be increasing and might continue rising (Vaughan et al., 2016).

One research participant described what she has noticed attending industry conferences the past “several years” because she is “noticing more and more women each year and fewer men.” Women appear to be entering emergency management careers. A

participant stated this has led to “leadership becoming more aware of their home life needs and encouraging more work-family– balance.”

More than half of the women participating in the study were hopeful that the pandemic has shown that incident management can be conducted virtually. Conducting incident management without physically needing to leave on short notice may help women with family and work responsibilities. Technology, as one woman noted, “is only as good as it works.” One participant claimed, “that solution only helps if the infrastructure is still standing.” All research participants commented that they lived and worked in a region where the predominant threat was earthquakes. Conducting incident management virtually may still be a challenge for them. “Not responding physically” could cost them their place in their career, said the participant that recently retired. According to one participant, “If you live in Region X, you have to plan on that no-notice call out because it is going to happen when that earthquake hits.”

Based on the analyzed data, it is evident that employers are not doing enough to close the divide, which is seen in how the needs of women employees with family responsibilities are met. Chopko et al. (2019) noted that the needs of women need to be considered and separated from the requirements of men. The consideration needs to happen without hostility from coworkers if their family make-up is different. However, this is not something that the employment sector is doing. Employees need resources and support to be effective, which is one of the challenges identified through the data (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). When meeting the needs of the employees, employers have failed to make sure that there is a work-family balance.

Six of the women participating in the study stated that there were more men in leadership roles early in their careers, and now they are in leadership positions. One woman said, “I had to prove over and over again that I could do the job just as good as a man.” She said she had to prove that she was better [than a man] to advance to her next level. More than half of the participants agreed that they feel embarrassed when asking for time off for a child’s appointment. One participant said, “because I take care of my parent, her needs are not even recognized.”

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the issues that women emergency workers have been facing over the years. The pandemic has highlighted work-family balance issues for women working in emergency management. Bhumika (2020) defined work-family balance as having effective functioning both at work and in the family domain. Balance means one has to avoid conflict between the two domains. It is challenging to manage this balance, and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic make it even more difficult. Women have to juggle between work and familial responsibilities, and women in emergency management encounter disasters daily.

Women who work in emergency management face added challenges. One woman participating in the study said, “there are not enough hours in the day.” Not only are women emergency managers worried about no notice responses, but during a disaster or emergency, there is the added challenge of getting to the child or adult in time if they are being cared for at a facility before they closed. Women in careers that involve multiple periods could have to be gone overnight. Five study participants said “overnight childcare is impossible” or “nonexistent” for them if not previously arranged.

More women, not just women working in emergency management, are becoming the head of their households. Two participants said they wished they could have “a house husband.” However, their spouses cannot help during no-notice events as well. Several study participants are single and find their jobs challenging because they have no one to help them. One participant said, “it is almost impossible to be single [mother] and be an emergency manager.”

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Reviewing the data collection strategy was complex because of the COVID-19 situation. There was a need to ensure that the study was carried out safely. Credibility refers to measures to ensure consistency and show the study’s evidence (Vagle, 2018). To ensure that the study was credible, I had to undertake various methods such as taking field notes, regular entries, documentation, and accurately describing the phenomenon under study. All data were recorded and entered for analysis as it was collected from the field. All documentation from the study is available for future references and other authentication purposes.

According to Vagle (2018), external validity is the ability to generalize and transfer research results into the general population. Having the importance of the study in mind while doing the research is one way that ensured that the quality of results was transferred to the general population. The results of the study are based on factual data. The testimony of the participants confirms transferability in the way the study can be conducted with other organizations, other career fields, and other groups of individuals.

The concerns and challenges will remain similar when it comes to the work-family challenges within the family unit.

To ensure that the interpretation of the data was accurate, some of the participants' actual words were used throughout the research section. Capturing the participants' actual words ensured the information was interpreted to convey what the responders meant. In addition, no information was taken from the participant's personal information.

The stability of the research process includes proper planning and control of procedures which is vital to a research process. Vagle (2018) defined dependability as the ability of findings to reflect participants' lived experiences. Voices on the recordings were aimed at collecting data and confirming that the participants feel appreciated and valued. Personal accountability ensured the data was ethical, authentic, and unbiased. The information was recorded as received and interpreted as it was supposed to be. The results of the study were separated from personal feelings.

Extensive research was conducted to support the study, and all materials borrowed from external sources are cited. The literature from resources helped supplement essential parts of the study, such as the introduction, literature, and recommendations. The methods used to collect data affect the results differently (Chopko et al., 2018). Based on the collected data and the procedures used, it is evident that the procedures have passed the test of credibility. During each interview, I took notes, which document the phenomenon studied herein. The notes focused on the stories or experiences that were shared with other participants.

The results include verbatim statements from participants. Confirmability also eliminates any potential for biases. The data were checked and rechecked to ensure it was transcribed correctly and captured the critical moments of the research as desired. The research process for the study is open to investigation. All the data collection tools are available and contain all the information provided in the results section. The research process and interpretation of data for the research are consistent with the literature and the methodology for the research and topic.

The procedures I used to collect data are within the scientific guidelines of research (Uddin, 2019). Based on the transcribed scripts, I followed proper procedures. Participants were allowed to share as much data as desired (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018) with guaranteed anonymity. Also, there were no strict rules regarding engagement or format, giving participants a chance to share data without restrictions.

In every stage of a study, ethics play a critical role. In research, there are rules and guidelines that researchers must follow. The reason why they are in place is to make sure the credibility of research is promoted. Violation of ethical considerations in a study puts the research project at risk. I will outline all ethical considerations of this study alongside their advantages.

Ethics, integrity, and honesty are essential in any study and must be considered at every stage (Gonzalez et al., 2019). This study observed ethics from the initial stages and continued to do so throughout the later stages. It is important to note that data manipulation can occur to feed my biases as the researcher. All ethical guidelines must be considered to ensure that does not occur (Chopko et al., 2019).

Respecting participants' privacy is not only in collecting data but also in addressing the results. Results should not be attached to any participant directly. Moreover, the identity of the person who contributed to the research should not be revealed. I assigned numbers to the participants, which means that one could not figure out the exact person who presented the information.

Besides maintaining the participants' privacy, it is essential to maintain each individual's anonymity. To achieve that goal, I employed the word 'speaker' followed by a number to connote the different members of the study. I ensured that each individual was anonymous enough to protect them from the repercussions of their contribution to the research. Assuring the responders' anonymity was key to increasing their willingness to participate in such research.

Relevance is of the essence in any study. I ensured that all data used provided relevant results (Chopko et al., 2019). For this, I used two methods. The first pertains to the scope of the study. The data that were used to file the results were within the scope of the study. The second method pertains to the topic of the research. Researchers should provide knowledge on their topic of research. A study's results must conform to the research question, meaning that all data analyzed must be within the research topic.

Results

In Chapter 1, three main research questions were developed to guide the study. The research questions developed were meant to guide the creation of data collection tools as well. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are the perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles?

RQ2: How can these perceived underlying causes of work-family conflict for women serving in emergency response roles be eliminated or minimized?

RQ3: What are the challenges that women first responders experience in needing to respond to urgent work calls when they have no one to look after their families?

One participant said she experienced challenges with childcare during the pandemic because she and her husband had not planned for this specific disaster. This participant and two others noted that they had not planned for a pandemic or the disruption of childcare/adult care and schools. Several women joked that they had never thought to plan for a global pandemic. One participant said, “the one I did not plan for was the one that knocked us out.” One participant (with an unmistakable chuckle in her tone) said, “you would think after everything that happened with H1N1, we would have prepared better for a pandemic”.

The challenges that women with families working in emergency management face became front-page news when all Americans were suffering the same challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. When working in no notice response roles, women’s childcare and adult care challenges were challenges that most women in America with familial challenges would face. The COVID-19 pandemic did not just disrupt women’s lives but also affected men with familial challenges. Parents with children began to panic when schools were canceled, and the students were asked to self-quarantine in the early stages of the pandemic. In this pandemic, single parents or single women taking care of adult

family members had to balance their job, child/adult care, and finances. Most employers did not offer opportunities for the displaced children to go to their parent's place of employment.

Events of a pandemic create a lot of panic and distress among people. Federal and state governments place recommendations and policies to ensure that communities are safe while reducing contamination and infections. As schools and other public facilities became restrictive, women with familial challenges had to make necessary adjustments to make their schedules work with their lives while facing a global pandemic. Most American people can be said to be of the working class. A large population who lives from paycheck to paycheck and relies on an hourly wage, where absenteeism from work means inability to cater to the family's basic needs, felt the effects of the pandemic the most. This population cannot afford last-minute increases in the cost of childcare or adult care.

Emergency management responders play a significant role in the event of the outbreak of a pandemic. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when all roles within emergency management felt a surge of hours added to their already packed schedules. More than half of the study participants claimed that the pandemic put theory into practice, as they were not working professionals in this field during the H1N1 outbreak. The need to respond to the disaster came from many avenues this time around. Apart from the context of public health facilities and departments, other definitions of front-line workers emerged. Grocery store workers and food service workers worked for more hours than usual, maintaining safety first and balancing their families and work.

Different women with familial makeup had to work when others called in sick or did not want to work. Six of the nine participants stated that the pandemic was a way for the community to see what they had to typically experience and felt that a change was imminent due to the recent pandemic.

It is almost impossible for an emergency manager to stay home during emergencies. Emergency managers should be present during all hazards and threats within the definition of emergency management and an expectation from a job in this field. Whereas other parents or adult caregivers could benefit from working from home, women emergency managers could not use that opportunity in most cases. However, on the opposite spectrum, many organizations offered employees a broader range of services conducted from home. Proving that more can be done from home helps argue that employees do not need to be physically located in their workplace.

Furthermore, women emergency managers feared contracting the virus because their primary duty was to save lives, protect property, and help the public keep up with the effects of a pandemic. Women emergency managers were expected to be present, increasing their risk of contracting the virus. Not considering their protection is concerning (Stratton, 2020). Two participants expressed that they were required to be present at work due to the nature of their positions, and no other arrangements were allowed. One woman was in the military, and one woman was married to another emergency responder who also had to be present at work. One participant said that even though some aspects of her job required her to be on-site, her employer allowed some

flexibility and ensured that others were trained and could conduct those functions. This flexibility allowed her to tend to her adult family member in an emergency.

Emergency responders are generally understaffed, mostly from absenteeism. Emergency responders can either physically respond to the location they need to be or do not want to respond to the call of duty. This means employers can expect significant absenteeism during such testing times. Reasons for not wanting to respond to the event can range from a lack of no notice child/adult care to the fear of being separated for long periods from the family or contracting the virus.

The participants who have partners stated that their challenge becomes problematic depending on whether their spouse also works in emergency response. The effect causes anxiety to family members in adapting to how schedules and needs are addressed. This added stress comes from having their original plans disrupted. Five women noted that they did not get enough quality off-time with their children or other adults they care for because they were away longer at work. The participants with partners expressed that their partners also felt neglected. Two women with partners said their partners needed a break away from their children because they were with them more due to the increased hours.

Similar to how SARS and Ebola outbreak cases caused a significant risk to responders, COVID-19 also poses a high risk of infection to healthcare and emergency response workers. Reliable information is usually not available in the early stages of a pandemic or disaster striking, which calls for proper safety standards to mitigate the effects. A balance needs to be maintained between controlling anxiety, maximizing

output, and spending time with family. The traumatic events that responders are exposed to cause depression and significant anxiety in life and may cause alterations in the family's daily routine and how they perceive their home life (Gullion, 2014).

One participant identified that "COVID-19 presented a unique challenge for women and home responsibilities because even with backup plans, most people could not count on those backup plans. Everyone was dealing with the same backup problems". Another participant said that during the pandemic, most options that the woman first responder thought would take care of the family would not for fear the first responder would be in contact with the virus and as a result, "most women working as the first responder had to deal with the situation where their backup plans failed."

Guo et al. (2020) suggested that the psychological impact of COVID-19 on women health workers affects their decision-making and overall wellbeing. There is a high proportion of depression, stress, and anxiety among women health workers during the pandemic (Guo et al., 2020). This high number is because these health workers have witnessed growing numbers of people getting infected or dying while still worrying about their family's wellbeing. Other issues that women in emergency management face are familial responsibilities and persistent gender inequities. The problems presented by the pandemic forced some female emergency managers to isolate themselves from their families to avoid infecting them.

The roles and responsibilities bestowed on first responders usually double in a crisis. However, responders have anxieties about family needs, such as spending time with children; they may panic when critical information is not available about the nature

of the pandemic and when myths circulate with the spread of infections. It is the responsibility of an emergency manager to dispel incorrect information and provide accurate data to the public. This sense of responsibility is an added challenge to women, especially if they are already dealing with discrimination.

Women emergency managers lead the charge of preparing and planning for the family in case of emergencies. Family members cannot always be flexible to accommodate the changes in their routine (Gullion, 2014). All the women interviewed who had someone else helping them expressed that they were grateful for their situation's flexibility. Without the support of their supervisors, family, or friends, they would not have been able to continue their work. Working outside of a designated care plan can add additional stress and anxiety without a robust support system.

Even though it has been seen as uncommon in society, women started working as emergency managers long ago (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). One participant stated that she started to see women in the responder disciplines (e.g., firefighting, police, EMS) in the early 1980s. Based on this information, it could be expected that many women would be working in the field currently. However, this is not the case. The study participants' complaints can be used to explain why the trend has been slow. The frustrations that come from fellow workers and management are some factors that have slowed down the pace of enrollment of women in the emergency management departments (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018).

The study participants made a statement in some form that they felt their main challenge was "it is a men's club" or a "good ol' boy network." Oliveria et al. (2020)

concluded that working in a male-dominated field being a challenge is a notion that members of society embrace, affecting women who are emergency managers. These challenges trickle into the employment sector, where some positions are dominated by men (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018).

Apart from the pressure of balancing work and family, there is the challenge of not getting the support that an employee needs from other employees and the organization's management (Oliveira et al., 2020). When men dominate a field, some organizations do not consider women and their challenges when designing the infrastructure and meeting the employees' needs to provide services. In this case, it means that women employees might not have what they need to become effective employees. More than half of the women participating in the study felt that they did not want to bring up their family concerns with their employer because of comments made by coworkers. Comments made along the lines of "always needing time away" for children/other adult issues or wishing they had a family to "get more time off."

Women have faced challenges when balancing raising a family and working in emergency management since women have entered the workforce (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). Women emergency managers have been facing the issue of not being available to bring up families. Three participants opted to wait to have families or chose to focus on their careers first, and one participant was afraid to start a family because of what her supervisors would think of her. When the woman in the military and one of the women who worked for the state found themselves pregnant, they both heard the phrase "typical, trying to get out of work." This attitude makes women not want to continue the work or

hide their families from their employers, and it is the attitude that all study participants felt at one point in their career.

Society expects that a woman is responsible for bringing up children. It becomes challenging for most women to balance wanting a family or working in emergency management (Oliveira et al., 2020). A woman who takes care of a parent stated that she did not choose to take on the role, but it was her only choice. When a woman chooses the role of an emergency manager, it becomes challenging for her to meet society's expectations. The issue might escalate to the extent of the woman doubting her abilities to be a good parent for wanting a career. Three of the nine research participants mentioned the added pressure of balancing their lives and looking strong to the public they serve.

Some women working as emergency managers do not have children, but they have family members they are taking care of. One study participant said, "there is a bigger picture that most women are ignoring, and it is the fact that some women take care of more than just kids." She said that "some women look after their grown-up parents and siblings as well as sick individuals." One participant said that she does not have children but has an ill husband that she needs to care for. Her husband cannot stand for long periods for physical work, which means she attends to home responsibilities, including most chores. Another participant takes care of a disabled parent who lives with her. These women do not have anyone else to assist them with their added responsibilities and have experienced issues needing to be present for no notice disasters. Both of them have maneuvered through this challenge in their lives with the help of friends. When asked

how they deal with the challenge of not responding, they said they had a friend stay with the husband/parent.

One other group of women that is emerging in the emergency management field is women becoming breadwinners. Besides the problems and barriers women face at work, some positive aspects were observed from the women who participated in this study. For example, women become breadwinners, and more men stay at home to look after the family and home. Some participants said that unlike in the past, where they would be required to find solutions to their problems, men were stepping in to help women become family breadwinners. Some single mothers working as emergency responders were the sole breadwinners for their families. Four participants said they were the sole breadwinners for their families.

From the various responses provided during the interviews, it was evident that emergency managers must be physically and mentally present to perform their duties both at work and at home. In addition, most woman responders engage in training and physical work, as they need to be mentally and physically fit to carry out their duties. With emergency management, there is a need for one to be physically capable of meeting the requirements of an emergency responder. The data shows that most of the responders were engaged in various forms of physical training to maintain the ability to compete with their male counterparts. It was also evident that their work requires women to have the best psychological balance between work and personal life. Women emergency managers with families said they had to be emotionally available for their families and be psychologically strong to carry out their duties at work with the needed attention. Women

emergency managers must have the right attitude and perception of the role to fulfill their duties.

Based on the data collected from the interviews, the participants agreed that there are challenges to working and succeeding in a field long dominated by men. One participant admitted that she got stuck within her pay grade and was disciplined several times for calling out the discrimination in her organization. It was not easy for her to continue in her role. The military member noted that she was disciplined on several occasions because she also made it public that her treatment differed from her male counterparts. They worked in an environment where men dominate; it can be challenging because some men frustrate their woman colleagues instead of supporting them. One participant said that knowing that women started working in emergency management longer than initially thought has helped her cope with her situation. She claimed that serving in such positions in the 1980s was not easy, especially because people had misconceptions about women's performance in the military.

Women have demonstrated to the world that they can work in the same field and the same capacity as men. This evidence has been seen in the dedication of women in male-dominated fields. Women in emergency management are working hard to make emergency management accessible to the communities they serve. However, there are challenges that women still face. The assumption of assigning responsibilities to genders is not new. It is an issue that has been transferred from one generation to another.

Traditionally, women are not given roles that need high physical input (Dawes et al., 2017). For this reason, most police departments have only a few women (Gonzalez et

al., 2019). The same can be said for firefighting jobs. These careers require people to be physically capable of doing their jobs. The assumption has been negatively affecting women because some women who have been interested in entering male-dominated industries have chosen different careers.

Participants noted that the negativity surrounding the challenges women face mainly revolves around the attitudes of their male counterparts. One of the participants is a Black woman; she said that she was not promoted despite opening an opportunity. The leader saw her as incapable of filling the open position. The negative attitude of male coworkers has significant implications for women's success in various emergency roles (Dawes et al., 2017). It makes women feel unwanted within their teams and that their input is unwelcome or unappreciated by various other team members (Dawes et al., 2017).

The data also show that men support women working in emergency management. Some participants shared information about how their spouses have been there throughout their career journeys. Even though most men have been termed as significant discriminators against women, there is a percentage of supportive men (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). One participant talked about how challenging it is for a woman to work in emergency management, as one can be called anytime to respond to any hazard or disaster (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). Employees who work in emergency management could potentially work during odd hours as well. She confessed that if she were alone, the case would not have been the same. Her husband spends time with their children when

she is at work. Another participant shared the same sentiments. The second speaker stated that emergency management is not an easy task, especially if there is no support.

Women with families comprising school-aged children or another adult to take care of faced particular challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant said she had difficulty during the pandemic because they had not planned for the situation with her husband or her husband's employer. The latter is also an emergency responder for the city. Therefore, they were activated together most of the time, and they had difficulties dealing with their two young children's schedules and childcare. Another participant, a single mother, had to ask her mother to pick up her child when she could not do it due to activation. One participant said that, even though she has help from her in-laws, help requires advance notice and not if that help has any prior plans. Three participants mentioned that there were times when they could not respond to an event because they "just did not have the care or help." All three participants expressed gratitude for their employers being "understanding" of their circumstances and willing to work with them. The sentiment was the same: they felt that it was essential to have that conversation early in employment with the supervisor as it helped ease their concerns.

Women typically have more responsibilities at home. Most participants said they are mothers and have to take care of their young children, forcing them to become part of the call-up team for most emergencies and not the responding team. Women have to balance work and family more often than their male counterparts.

Women who work in emergency management need to stay prepared and do proper planning. Most participants said they had plans to call relatives or friends to take

care of their families during emergencies. One woman said she plans to have her older children take care of the younger ones once the former is old enough to take this responsibility. Three women said they had no family or friends to call in case of an emergency.

Seven of the nine participants mentioned that they felt “stuck” in trying to advance within their organization and felt that it was because of the work challenges they experienced. Demotivation at work can lead to quitting, transferring, retiring, or changing career paths altogether. From the data gathered, there is evidence that these women have often had to work harder than their male counterparts to be recognized for their work. Participants noted that women who get to a significant leadership level or get promoted had not experienced the same challenges as many others.

Women face discrimination when it comes to being rewarded for their hard work. In various cases, the participants said they were not promoted even when all indications showed that they should have been promoted. A few participants said that they were overlooked for promotions given to fewer people; this was so demotivating that they had to quit or go into early retirement. One participant said that being stuck in one position meant that she retired before being promoted. That promotion would have meant she would become the first female in her next assignment. Instead, the organization hired a man through nepotism at a significant leadership level.

Some participants noted that women are not seen as a perfect fit to work in emergency response teams. Some organizations’ leaders employ women just to meet a hiring law requirement and not based on their merit. One participant said that she has

seen some female colleagues quit because they lack the necessary support at work. Lack of support at work means more workload and increased stress because they feel they are not part of the team. Consequently, when they feel overwhelmed and feel that there is no support, they quit.

Study participants said that women lack equal opportunity because the emergency management career has been more suited to men. The study participants used the terms “less tied down” and “more adept” when discussing what their coworkers said about more women not working in the field. Most participants advocated equal representation and mentioned that they were overlooked for promotions while their male counterparts were promoted. One of the contributing factors is the attitude that women are seen as weaker than their male counterparts, both physically and emotionally.

Two participants felt that jobs were given to individuals who already knew someone in the organization and inequitable hiring practices. One participant claimed that moving up in their organizations was “impossible unless someone died or retired.” Lack of equal opportunities shows that, according to one participant, most of the emergency management world has not left the old “boys club” mentality. Emergency management was seen as a place for men because of the physical and mental demands required by the job.

When an employee becomes a manager, they must have demonstrated that they are worth the position (Sinha et al., 2018). However, the study participants felt differently. Five out of the nine women interviewed conveyed that women in emergency management are likely to be demotivated about being overlooked over their male

counterparts, leading to women not wanting to work in the field. When women wanting to continue to work in the responding environment do not get promoted, they are likely to feel frustrated, affecting their daily performance at work. Participants noted that women needed to feel like a part of the team and appreciated in their jobs.

Continuously being overlooked for promotions can result in women leaving the emergency management world faster than planned. Being overlooked can lead to retiring early. One participant said that she was overlooked multiple times, so she decided to retire from her job. When there is no concern or awareness about the challenges women with familial challenges face in the workplace, women are likely to continue leaving the workforce (Sinha et al., 2018).

Gender-based discrimination impacts the welfare of women in emergency management. One of the common stereotypes that 6 participants of the study agreed upon was that women are “emotional.” When it comes to emotions, it is easier to trigger a woman’s emotions than to trigger the emotions of a man. In emergency management, emotions can positively or negatively affect the scenario (Sinha et al., 2018). In some cases, emotions might lead a person to more danger. In such a case, it becomes essential to control emotions (Sinha et al., 2018).

Four of the women interviewed did not have other people available to help them when needed at work. As single women with familial responsibilities, they lacked sufficient support to help them cope with work-family balance. Women with spouses who traveled or had unreliable schedules were in the same position. Women responders should have people who can stand in for them while they are attending to other

responsibilities. For example, one of the participants said that she had to look for young, single individuals in her department to stand in for her when she wanted “to attend the burial of her husband’s friend.” Five of the nine participants had not been able to respond to an event previously. Two of those five women had childcare issues. Three of those women could not go in because they were hindered by weather and could not leave when the call came in. All five women did not get disciplined, and their absence was not an issue for the employer.

Summary

This chapter includes the research setting and demographics of the participants and the guidelines for data collection and analysis. The chapter also addresses the trustworthiness, results, and summary of the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I sought to understand the familial challenges affecting women working in emergency response. Because women are generally responsible for most child-rearing and household chores, they often face more challenges than men in emergency careers (Agocs et al., 2015). With familial responsibilities, women may not be able to respond to emergencies effectively and rapidly. Therefore, in this study, I sought to understand precisely how women are affected by familial roles in their response to emergencies and how they respond to these challenges. In this chapter, I outline the key findings of the research and their implications. All sections in this chapter reflect the data collected and analyzed how the findings could impact women as emergency managers.

One finding in the data related to the past and current status of women in emergency management. Based on the responses from the participants, emergency management is shifting into a field accessible to all genders. Many study participants agreed that supportive leadership or a sound support system at home has helped them succeed. One participant said, “Back in the 1990s, only a few women were working in emergency management.” However, based on the data collected, it appears this narrative may be changing, with more women joining this male-dominated field. Young girls and women at the junior high school and high school levels know that they want to become emergency managers in the future and begin working toward achieving that goal (Burde et al., (2016).

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's findings show that women emergency managers continue to face persistent challenges. The participants identified having emotional and physical challenges when an increased workload occurs, such as activations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants indicated being torn between home responsibilities that involve emotional stress for the families and work responsibilities that cause psychological and physical fatigue. One participant stated that she needed to ensure her kids were adequately taken care of because her husband was in isolation during the pandemic, as he was also a first responder. She indicated feeling stretched between attending to the kids' needs and attending to the needs of her job, which included being ready to respond to every emergency call.

Women working as emergency managers during the pandemic face challenges as they try to balance family and work. The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads through droplet contact, which means first responders contend with the dangers at work while also worrying about infecting their families at home. The International Labor Organization (2020) identified that 70% of workers globally during the COVID-19 crisis were women. Thus, some women have to cope with emotional exhaustion and mental pressures as they try balancing work demands and family responsibilities during the pandemic.

Gender inequalities have persisted for centuries, and the pandemic exposed the level of these inequities women health workers perform four hours and 25 minutes of unpaid work on average compared with their male counterparts who only perform one

hour and 23 minutes of unpaid work on average (International Labor Organization, 2020). The pandemic has increased the number of working hours for all workers (Power, 2020), and the statistics show that women health workers are bearing most of the work during the pandemic. The number of working hours affects how these women emergency management workers relate to their families (Power, 2020). Over half the participants claimed they work over 12 hours a day in typical activation scenarios. A few participants noted that they go home to partners and children, and one woman noted that she goes home to her parent, whom she takes care of.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to forced curfews and imposed restrictions, making it difficult for children to find babysitters and caregivers for adults. Additionally, medical facilities and other services were reduced, leaving people without necessary caregiving support providers. Some women have had to work from home due to familial responsibilities, reducing emergency managers on the frontline (Power, 2020).

As some participants identified, working as first responders means they could not be an active part of their kids' lives. One participant noted that she had missed her child's first steps. Another participant said that she had not had sufficient time with her kids during the pandemic because of the increased number of times they were being called in to address work-related issues. One participant said, "women emergency managers have been more negatively impacted during emergencies because the nature of their job has them working at night, on holidays, or weekends sometimes." According to the participants in this study, the set off-shift hours leave them feeling they are not getting enough time with their families.

According to the participants, some women working in response roles have been overextending themselves during the pandemic. Participants indicated that these experiences have significantly affected their capacity to tend to their household needs and have ultimately led to fatigue or burnout. In families where participants' partners do not sufficiently understand their role, conflict can arise. Ensuring that all team members' work and family lives are balanced is essential.

Participants indicated that women face various discriminations which can make them feel out of place and demotivate them from staying in the emergency management field. Women need support from their colleagues and supervisors. The issue of discriminating and stereotyping women originates from society (Betts et al., 2020). Creating awareness in the community and across all institutions responsible for shaping the careers of professionals can help address this discrimination (Vaughan et al., 2016). The work environment is the most critical area where women need to feel and support (Feeney & Stritch, 2017). One participant said that she spends more time with her coworkers than with her family. Based on participant responses, it seems that most women working as first responders lack sufficient time with their families. While activated for emergencies and especially during a pandemic, these women spend substantial time with coworkers, working more than 12 hours a day.

Women in emergency management need the support of their leaders to meet the demands of their careers. Women need to feel they are part of the team (Feeney & Stritch, 2017). Women emergency managers need to ensure that their teammates treat them as equal colleagues. Colleagues can offer moral and physical support to women

responders and make them feel comfortable and part of the team. When asked what would have helped them ease their concerns, all participants stated that they would have been more at ease in their roles if supported at work. Two participants mentioned that if a coworker had offered to assist them, their jobs would have been more enjoyable at the time. Five participants, including a member of the U.S. military, shared the sentiment that if their coworkers had understood what their home life was like, then their work lives would not have been as challenging.

Participants said that leadership in emergency management needs to know what challenges their employees will face while being activated to respond to an emergency. Some participants noted that women need leader protection from discrimination and should not be forced to choose between family and career. Leadership should ensure equal treatment of women emergency managers with equal opportunities. Most participants said that they felt “stuck” in their work. Leaders can ensure that women do not feel stuck by mentoring them or finding a mentor and rewarding them when they deserve recognition. The expectation is that leaders will step in when nepotism is shown or when a promotion practice is unfair.

Women also face challenges related to their wellbeing when dealing with issues in emergency management roles (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Some organizations have failed to consider that a woman’s wellbeing needs to be looked into from different perspectives (Gonzalez et al., 2019), especially if that woman has specific additional challenges, such as childcare or adult care.

Most study participants felt the psychological and physical strain of working as emergency managers. Eight of nine participants identified other responsibilities to attend to, such as additional or collateral duties. Moreover, several women are getting involved in their communities, e.g., acting as board members of committees, coaches, or volunteers. Consequently, these women feel stressed when there are emergencies if nobody else can look after their other duties. The challenge becomes more critical when one parent works remotely in the house while the other parent is an emergency responder and has to go out for work over long hours. It creates anxiety, stress, and panic among parents and poor work outputs due to the situation (Kickbusch & Leung, 2020).

One of the participants said that sometimes she gets home exhausted from an emergency call “just to have to turn around and go back.” She asked, “What was so important that I specifically had to go back and someone else could not do the task?” Working for long hours for an extended period can result in depression, and the absence of avenues to address that depression during a pandemic leads to a compounding problem.

Depression in first responders can be observed through excessive fatigue accumulated over a long period. It can also be identified in women when they lack enthusiasm, leading to guilt and exhaustion. Women are more likely to feel guilt and hopelessness, especially when they feel overwhelmed by work and unavailable for their families. For example, women working as emergency managers are likely to lose sight of their families and make more sacrifices for work.

The situation is different for an emergency manager who cannot work remotely and requires physical participation. They need to spend time with children at home due to the closure of schools. When the pandemic hit, people across the country were making adjustments to their schedules and relied on neighbors to watch the kids. For emergency managers who have family members to take care of, there is increased pressure at work because they want to get off work in time to attend to non-work-related responsibilities, such as appointments, events, or general quality time together. As some participants identified, working as first responders means that they may not be available for most of their kids' lives.

One participant said, "People working as first responders experience episodes of stress, especially when they feel like the work is overwhelming. There is no one to look after them or stand in for them when they are unavailable." She and three other participants had encountered episodes within their emergency management team where they had to step in to address their other duties. During the pandemic, women working as emergency managers faced a risky situation because it exposed them to the virus. They were considered essential personnel, and a majority of the study participants had to be physically present. One participant said that she worked at a military base during the pandemic where no one wore a mask in their workspaces. There were worries that she might get exposed to the virus and affect her and her loved ones and colleagues at work because she worked and lived with higher-risk people.

Bhumika (2020) explained the emotional exhaustion that workers are experiencing during this pandemic. One participant identified that she had missed an

opportunity to respond to a large-scale situation because she did not have anyone to leave her kids with, and it was her day off, so no other plans were made for care. First responders can be called into work at any time. Despite all the challenges emergency managers experience, all nine participants said that the job is their passion and will continue doing the work. Regardless of the challenge thrown their way, all participants noted that they enjoyed working in this field and would find a way to address the challenges.

Women first responders have increased stress because they are forced to work long hours and attend to other duties, both at work and home. Women first responders are either sisters, daughters, wives, or mothers to someone, and they take up other roles in the home or community when they leave their duties as emergency managers. Those who are not wives or mothers may have other people to care for at home. This is where leadership must understand their employees' specific challenges to define if they will be considered essential or find another solution.

The results of the study are significant to leadership. The leadership of any organization or department affects the activities that take place within it. Findings show that there is a lot to ensure that women emergency managers are empowered and protected. The administration must ensure that equality is promoted at their place of work. When findings demonstrate that a particular department's leadership has not been promoting balance, it means that it is not playing the role it should play (Bruschini-Chaumet et al., 2019).

Research is conducted to analyze data to answer the research question and reveal the truth about the data (Betts et al., 2020). The findings of this study have helped in identifying areas of concern. The leadership that is in place can use these findings to implement changes. For example, the findings have proved that some emergency departments' working environments require changes. With this information, the leadership of the sector or organization can make sure that changes are implemented to meet employees' needs. As recommended in the sections above, changes can be implemented via interagency collaboration to look at the problem broader.

Limitations of the Study

This study has some possible limitations, and most of them are associated with data collection (Gonzalez et al., 2019). The first limitation was related to the information that the study targeted. Participants play an essential role when it comes to providing data. However, the willingness of the participants to provide data can be an issue. The study focused on a contentious issue, which means that presenting data might be challenging (Sinha et al., 2018). When participants fear sharing information, they limit the study because the research team might not collect credible data as needed. Because of the anonymous nature of the study, information sharing was not an issue here. One other limitation was whether the participants would be truthful or inflate their experience. This, too, was addressed through precautions to protect anonymity.

A significant limitation associated with the study is the COVID-19 pandemic. The world is currently dealing with a pandemic that has affected operations across all fields. Even though some people were available, the concern was if the study would have

enough participants. Because the study was phenomenological and qualitative by design, nine participants were sufficient for data saturation and observing the shared phenomenon. Many organizations have changed how they handle things, and some organizations have been forced to let some employees work from home. Some employees have been laid off, which means a shortage of participants.

Time is a constraint in any activity, but it was a limitation herein. In a study that pays attention to human participants, there is a need to have as much time as possible. However, the challenge when working with emergency managers is that their schedules are constantly shifting. It is associated with time dictates if the researcher will collect all the data needed to complete the study (Bruschini-Chaumet et al., 2019).

It is vital to have an intervention or strategy that will help deal with every limitation. I dealt with these three limitations in different ways (Sinha et al., 2018). The first method is associated with participants' limitations regarding not being comfortable talking about the issue at hand. In this case, I promoted maintaining confidentiality. The main issue is that participants might present information that may reach their employers and lead to negative consequences (Sinha et al., 2018). Thus, I will not share the names of the participants. In addition, the employees were interviewed in privacy to ensure that none of them came to know the others. The second limitation was associated with the current pandemic (Gonzalez et al., 2019). There are safety guidelines that have been put in place to deal with COVID-19. This study used those safety guidelines. Instead of meeting the participants, I collected data through interviews conducted via Zoom.

The best data source is a participant who understands the research topic or has experience with the research topic (Banerjee et al., 2018). However, there are challenges when it comes to accessing such participants. For this study, identifying participants was a challenge. It is important to remember that the research is looking into an issue that affects women. Males dominate the explored field, so it might take longer to locate a woman participant (Bruschini-Chaumet et al., 2019). The study looked even further into women's challenges with a unique familial make-up, so participation was even more limited.

Recommendations

The research problem is significant because it touches on an issue affecting a majority of society. It is important to remember that even though women are equal members of society, they have a significant role in sustaining society and ensuring that generations continue (Gonzalez et al., 2019). The research problem is essential because it will positively affect how emergency management serves the community (Uddin, 2019).

Organizations are in a position to offer employee support during emergencies. Three study participants identified that leaders in organizations could help their women workers during activations by offering help to families with children in modern organizations when no notice activations are conducted. One parent said that she notices that some organizations are providing care for their employees' kids, such as providing onsite childcare. In contrast, the employee is activated or deployed for no notice disasters and cannot make other arrangements. She says it is an "excellent option for the emergency management team and the incident management team while they are

activated.” Incident management team refers to a team or a group of trained individuals to deal with emergencies. All members of an incident management team with no other childcare/adult care options would benefit from this service.

In emergency management work, employees can be activated while they are supposed to be off the job. Childcare support efforts are essential because women employed as emergency responders should not worry about their families during a disaster. Having a location close to where the parent is working will help with childcare issues and separation concerns. Having designated childcare facilities with engaged, trained individuals to help the children feel comfortable will ultimately help the parent focus on the task at hand. Such arrangements will provide the necessary support to women with young children for no notice emergencies.

By creating family-friendly policies, organizations can make women feel supported. Organizations with an emergency management function where women are part of the team should have policies addressing the various work-family balance. Policies should also address emergency childcare/adult care and the requirements and expectations of employees in terms of challenges related to responding to emergency calls. One of the main challenges most study participants faced was a lack of managerial and supervisory positions. They felt that having a woman supervisor would help them. Most of their statements contained the phrase “another woman would understand” when discussing work and life challenges. Women have more complex needs than men; thus, their problems require a better understanding of whether they are unique or different.

The increased presence of women working in leadership roles in emergency management will likely increase the number of women working in the field. One participant was “surprised” when a woman was selected to be their new director because she was sure the role would be a male due to nepotism. One woman was told that the assistant director’s role in her organization was given to someone that the leadership “had in mind” and was only announced “because they were required to” and had to make it “look official.” All study participants agreed that changing the work environment would change their departments’ needs (Bessen et al., 2019). It is essential for the departments to know and understand women’s needs at work (Hallinan et al., 2020).

Women form an integral part of all working groups in society because they have different perspectives on problems than men and contribute to emergency management in unique ways.

Women emergency managers need to feel they have the essential support from the people closest to them to venture into professions such as emergency management. The family and friends of emergency responders are the primary support system. People close to individuals, including family, friends, mentors, and supervisors, provide the necessary support system. The study has shown that women with parents, siblings, or partners who offer physical and psychological support do not have to worry about a single woman who faces the same work demands. If a woman has extra help, there is a likelihood that women will succeed in their profession no matter how difficult the job.

Women who do not have children still have their families, friends, responsibilities, and maybe have pets. There are concerns that some of these things are

not well attended to due to the work environment. Workplaces need to establish plans to listen to women's family and social needs when they activate them for emergencies. Such arrangements can ensure that women first responders are not stressed about emergency activations. When first responders are assured of such services, they are more likely to attend to their duties at work with undivided attention, as they are not stressed about other responsibilities.

One of the participants said she wished that people working as emergency responders could learn to talk about stress and stress management. She felt "it is like saying that the work is stressful, and there is a need to know the best way of handling the pressure." The participant further stated that she wished those future generations would learn to talk about stress and manage stress better. Three other participants also mentioned stress management as a possible solution to their challenges.

When employees work in a high-stress environment, such as emergency management, they need to address the stress. Working in emergency management may make it difficult to get time away to get help dealing with stress. One participant said,

The pressure became too much for me, so I sought professional mental help. I am grateful that (my organization) supported the move without consequence and did not make me feel bad about my choice to get help. With reassurance from my leadership, I felt I was allowed to get better, and it helped me mentally heal faster.

Women working as first responders endure a significant amount of stress because of the demands of their work. One participant said that talking about stress is one way of knowing how to deal with stress. Sharing what they are experiencing at work is among

the many coping mechanisms emergency managers employ. She also says that emergency managers must know the best way for them to manage stress. One of the participants said that she has a “great and responsible team that works for her.” When she is out to attend to personal responsibilities, they are willing to stand in for her. She said that her team is “competent and capable and willing to learn what her job is” so that she can take time off if she needs to.

Two participants claimed that their coworkers could have offered to check in on their families or allowed their families to remain together. One participant said, “they could have offered,” and the other participant acknowledged that “she also could have asked if I could leave my parent with their spouse and kid.” These recommendations are tied back to leadership knowing their employees’ unique circumstances. One participant said that “knowing what the challenges are increases the number of solutions or options.”

As identified, women are stretched between home and work responsibilities, resulting in faster burnout. Increased stress can have short- and long-term implications for women’s capacity to deliver on their jobs. Consequently, burnout is often forgotten in planning. In emergency management, it is necessary to ensure that counseling services are available to look after their psychological well-being. As one participant put it, women first responders often come across “horrible experiences,” leading to post-traumatic stress disorder. It is the responsibility of management to ensure that employees care for their wellbeing, including receiving mental help if needed.

The study found that the number of emergency managers feeling fatigued or burnout has been higher during the pandemic, with emergency managers being “stretched

thin” as the primary cause. Consequently, some emergency managers have more responsibilities at home due to their children not being in school during the day or healthcare or other facilities not supporting the need for care. Increased work time means that they have little time to do other things, including rest or fitness activities, resulting in more fatigue and increased cases of burnout. Additionally, services that help alleviate stress or burnout are also at reduced capacity due to the pandemic.

Another recommendation offered by a study participant was calling for extra support from volunteers who may be retirees or people with experience in the field. Some organizations are already using this practice. They have called in a reserve corps or retired individuals living locally to augment the responding force during long events or events that stretch over multiple periods. Calling on retirees or people with such skills could increase the number of individuals available for activation during emergencies. It would also mean that emergency management would have more options to alternate the available teams and eliminate some of the consequences of working for too long under stress.

Implications

This study focused on the challenges faced by women working in emergency departments. The data presented is credible, which means that it can be used as secondary data in another study. This study has set the benchmark for research as far as the research question is concerned (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). Future researchers will know where to start when exploring this issue. The results and findings shared in this study have implications for further research in this area (Lewis-Schroeder et al., 2018). This study is

likely to have significant implications for women working in emergency management, employers, childcare/adult caregivers, and other groups and organizations.

Implications of the study include understanding the challenges women face when working in emergency management and how their family makeup is different from their coworkers. For leaders, the study provides a ground for understanding work-family challenges for their employees. The implications bring a social change when it is realized that not all family dynamics are equal, and the term single parent encompasses more definitions than in previous decades.

Without forgetting that research helps answer questions and helps people in real life, the findings of this study can also guide employers. The information used in this study will be shared among people who have worked in organizations and departments with emergency management functions. Additional studies would go a long way in improving the welfare of emergency management personnel across the world.

As a result of increased work for first responders during the pandemic, some implications may arise. The research findings revealed that the number of women working in emergency management has increased over the years. Different reasons have been associated with this increase. One reason is associated with the changing notion of women's role in society (Arble & Arnetz, 2017). Traditionally, a woman was not welcomed in an industry that men dominated. As opposed to decades ago, women are now receiving attention and favor. As a result, more women learn skills and get educations in fields dominated by men not long ago.

Consequently, more women are emerging in fields that men have dominated for a long time. However, some challenges face these women. Even though there is a lot to be done to ensure that a sufficient number of women invest in fields that men largely dominate, it would be unfair to state that women have not demonstrated interest (Arble & Arnetz, 2017). Women are showing interest, and they have motivated young girls interested in working as emergency responders. Statistics indicate that the number of women joining emergency management has been rising over the years (Power, 2020). If emergency management departments implement the findings and recommendations in studies like the current research, the field will see a boom in women interested in emergency management.

Apart from balancing work and family, women face challenges at the place of work (Bruschini-Chaumet et al., 2019). A supportive working environment is essential in any working space (Banerjee et al., 2018). Firefighting departments and the police force are areas that men dominate, and there has been an issue in meeting the needs of women in such departments and areas (Betts et al., 2020). For example, one participant said showers, lockers, and changing spaces for men in her department. The women did not get lockers, and their changing space was the restroom.

All participants expressed gratitude and enthusiasm and were excited about the study. The excitement was for the implications of the findings of the study. The participants believe this study will highlight some of the challenges women working in emergency management face, and leadership will pay attention to these challenges. They

were also excited about the outcome and the possible solutions that can be implemented to make women feel valuable while working in emergency management.

Conclusion

Women in emergency management face different challenges when working within the field and competing with their male counterparts. The employment sector and society members are responsible for these challenges (Betts et al., 2020). Stereotyping has affected how people perceive women, discouraging many women from taking up the roles they are interested in (Arble & Arnetz, 2017). This study's findings will help answer the questions that emerged in the study. The results revealed that women are still facing an unexpected challenge of delivering in a field that is highly dominated by men (Betts et al., 2020).

The resources women in emergency management need to be effective should be provided (Bessen et al., 2019). Over the years, the number of women working in emergency management has increased because some barriers have been identified and addressed. There is an increased awareness of gender equality, representation, and equal pay in various workplaces. It has become imperative to consider that women's familial makeup may not be conventional and need additional support.

Supervisors have a responsibility toward emergency managers; they must ensure that they do not suffer from burnout. Therefore, they should know if their woman employees are experiencing any challenges in the workplace. This type of intrusive leadership ensures that employees are prepared for the next cycle without fatigue or

stress. Intrusive leadership ensures proper human resources planning as leaders are more concerned about the organization's success (Walton et al., 2020).

When asked if they would keep doing their jobs if challenges kept presenting, the participants' responses were as follows:

“Working as an emergency manager is a passion and not like any other job.”

“Working as an emergency manager is a sacrifice.”

“It is not a job that one moves into when they lack anything else to do in life.”

The research participants believe that their roles are a passion that requires self-motivation. When asked about whether they would quit their jobs when there were family issues, most participants openly said they could not quickly leave their profession because it is their passion, something they have always wanted to do in their lives.

Employers are wise to ensure that individuals are motivated to continue working even when faced with such challenges. Through such motivation, they can work in their careers without feeling the pressure or desire to quit.

Future research should be narrowed down to increase the understanding of the issue at hand (Banerjee et al., 2018). Instead of generally looking at the challenges women face, future research could pay attention to work-family balance or improving an unfavorable working environment for women.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Number	Question
Q1	What is your role in emergency management?
Q2	Do you perceive your role to be different from those of the opposite sex? If so, how?
Q3	How many years of experience do you have in emergency management?
Q4	What is your family's make-up?
Q5	What different issues/concerns have you experienced while working in emergency management that disrupt your home-work balance?
Q6	What is the primary issue that gives you work-life conflict?
Q7	If some no-notice incident occurred, do you have childcare/adult care concerns?
Q8	How have you adapted to the challenges you face when you respond to an emergency, and it is no notice?
Q9	Do you feel that some/all those issues and concerns could be making you perform less than optimally?
Q10	Do you feel that if your work/life conflict continues to exist, would you continue to work in emergency management?
Q11	Have you ever been unable to respond to an emergency? If so, what were the repercussions?
Q12	Please tell me about a time; if there was one, you were requested to respond to an emergency. What issues did you face, and how did you deal with them?
Q13	What resources do you suggest being put into place to eliminate family challenges so that you can focus on your role in emergency management?
Q14	Based upon your experience, what is the biggest challenge women in emergency management face today?
Q15	What can be done to help reduce or minimize these challenges?
Q16	Are there any final thoughts you want to share that might benefit future women considering emergency management?
