

Occupation-Specific Psychosocial Hazards and Burnout among Older Firefighters

1 Background and Aims

- Until 2004, the compulsory retirement age for UK firefighters was 55 years. Changes to the pension arrangements will result in many firefighters working beyond this point, resulting in possible increased exposure to psychosocial hazards.
- Psychosocial hazards experienced by ageing firefighters remain unclear, as does the burnout profile of this group. Information on these issues could usefully inform policies to promote the workability of older firefighters.
- Aim of this research: to profile and examine relations between exposure to occupation-specific psychosocial hazards and burnout in older firefighters.

2 Research Method

- Two focus groups involving firefighters aged $40 \geq$ were conducted to identify psychosocial issues perceived as problematic ($N = 11$, $M = 46$).
- Transcripts were thematic analysed to inform a bespoke survey of occupation-specific psychosocial hazards.
- Alongside this survey the Maslach Burnout Inventory was administered to assess the three subscales of burnout; emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment.
- Bivariate correlations examined relations between psychosocial hazard exposures and burnout.

3 Results

- Focus groups identified five categories of psychosocial hazard:



- 112 firefighters (45% response rate) completed the questionnaire. All respondents were male and ranged in age from 40 to 62 ($M = 46.46$; $SD = 4.29$).
- The mean score on each burnout dimension was substantially below that found in normative data, suggesting low degrees of burnout in the current study.
- Significant correlations of moderate strength were found between burnout and reports of eight psychosocial hazards

4 Conclusions

- These findings suggest that the psychosocial work environment might have important implications for the health of older firefighters. Longitudinal studies are required to examine cause-effect relations between the variables, the results of which could further usefully inform risk management activities to promote health and productivity of older firefighters