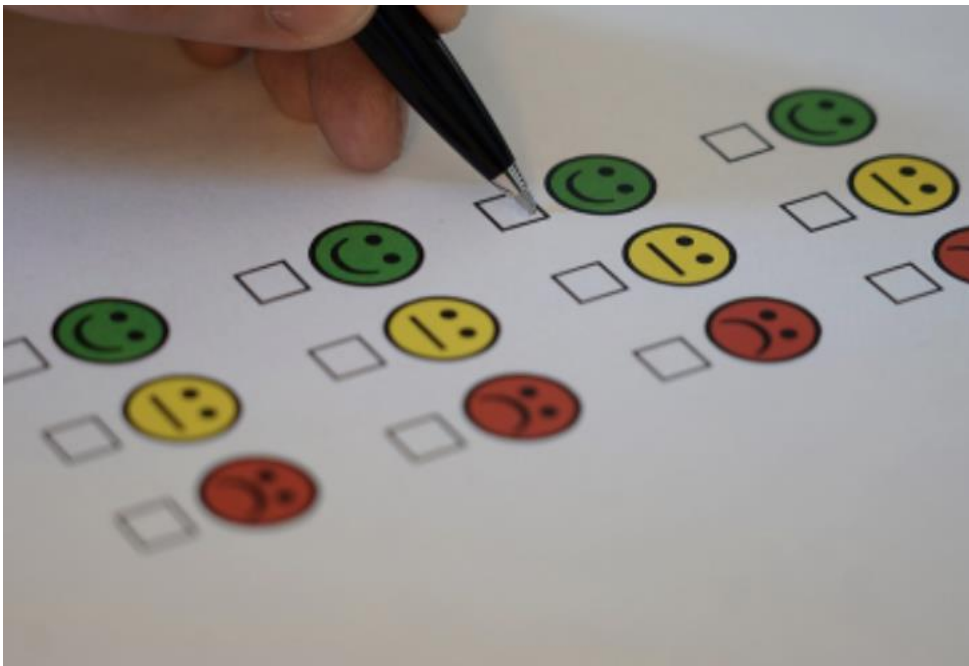


THE CAPLAN INTERNATIONAL FIRE SERVICE PSYCHOSOCIAL MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

CONFIDENTIAL

Survey Period: January 15 - February 28, 2024



AUTHORISATION

This survey has been commissioned and approved by:

Dr. Helena Reeves

Chief Medical Officer

Caplan International Fire Service

Digital Signature: H.Reeves.MD

Commissioner James Blackwell

Fire Service Director

Caplan International Fire Service

Digital Signature: J.Blackwell.CIFS

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Conducted by: Firefighter Wellbeing Institute

Lead Researcher: Dr. David Ware

Introduction

Firefighting is one of the most physically and emotionally demanding professions in the world. Firefighters are routinely exposed to high-stress incidents and traumatic events that can have a lasting impact on their mental well-being, resilience, and overall quality of life. Despite the known risks, many fire services lack structured, evidence-based mental health support systems, leaving firefighters vulnerable to anxiety, depression, burnout, and post-traumatic stress.

Recognising this urgent issue, Caplan International Fire Service launched a dynamic e-learning course focused on psychosocial mental health assessment and support. The aim was to educate firefighters on recognising early warning signs of mental health concerns, developing healthy coping mechanisms, utilising peer support, and understanding when to seek professional help.

As part of this initiative, 1,000 firefighters enrolled in the course, completing both the training and an end-of-course test. Following this, they were invited to participate in our completely anonymous and confidential survey, designed to capture honest insights into the psychological challenges firefighters face daily. This report is based on the findings from that survey.

A Truly Anonymous and Data-Driven Approach

Our survey was designed with robust privacy safeguards to ensure firefighters could speak freely without fear of repercussions. Individual responses could not be traced back to participants, allowing for a level of honesty that traditional workplace surveys often fail to achieve.

By analysing the collective data, this report provides Fire Service leadership with invaluable insights into the real psychological impact of emergency work. It highlights key trends, resource gaps, and opportunities for meaningful intervention—enabling organisations to develop targeted support programs based on actual firefighter needs, rather than assumptions.

Purpose of This Report

By examining the results of this groundbreaking survey, we aim to:

- Identify the psychosocial mental health risks firefighters face.
- Highlight areas where progress has been made and where urgent action is still needed.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations for fire services to strengthen mental health support structures, improve firefighter resilience, and create a safer, more supportive work environment.

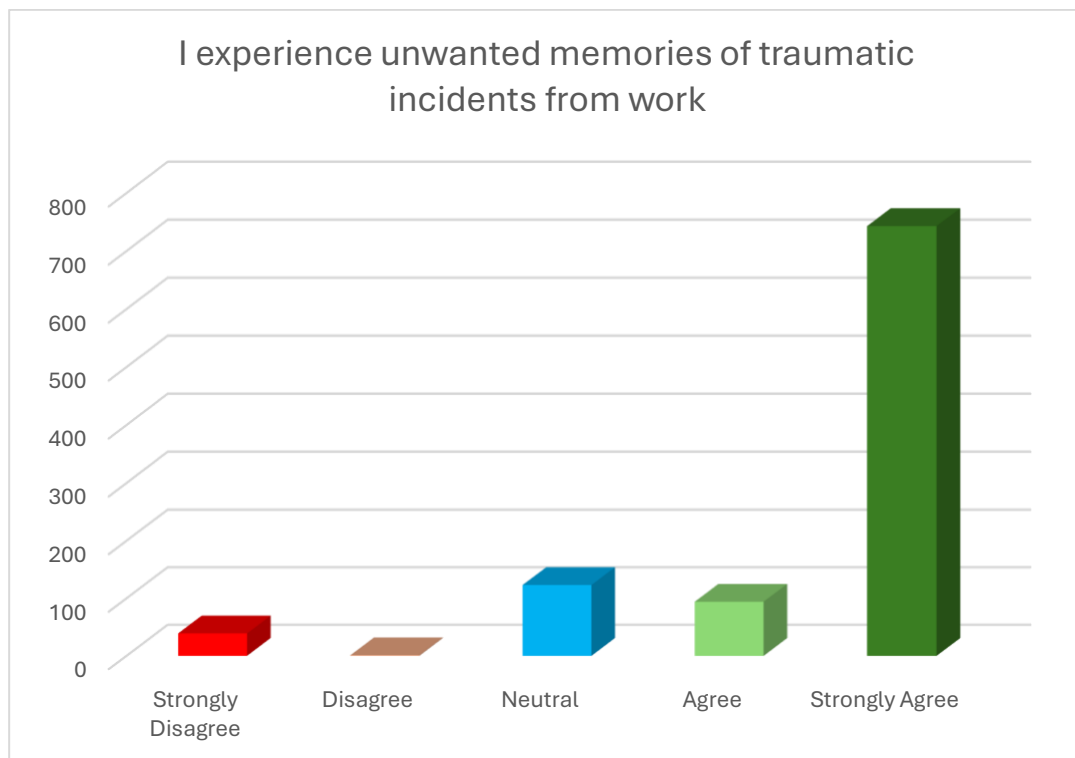
This report is not just a collection of statistics—it is a call to action to ensure the mental well-being of every firefighter is prioritized.

Survey Overview

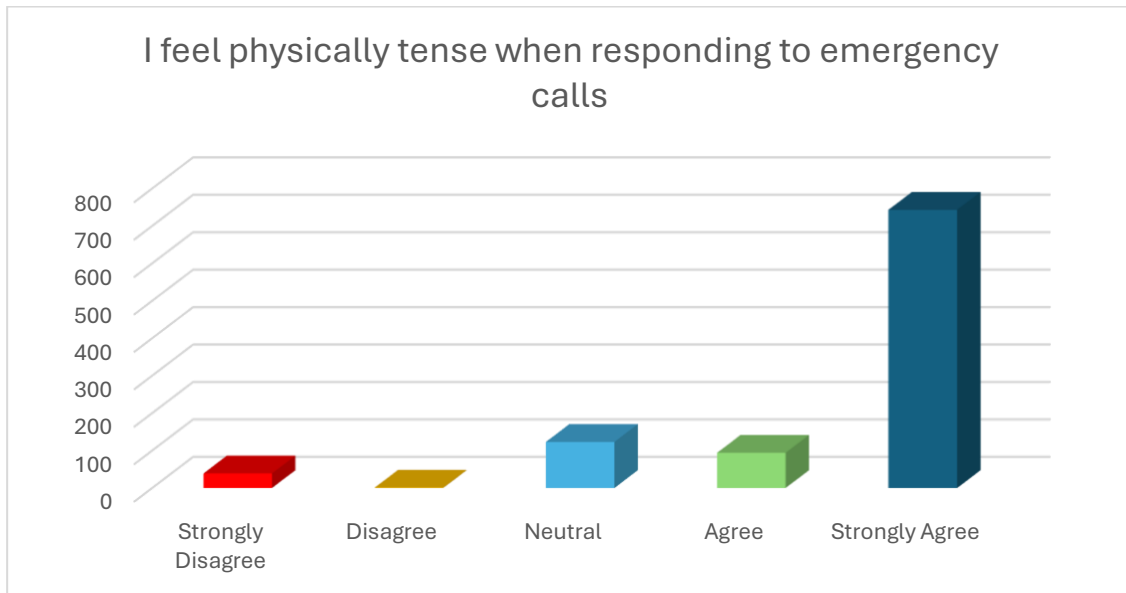
This survey was designed to assess the key psychosocial risks affecting firefighters and evaluate their coping mechanisms in response to workplace challenges. It focuses on four critical areas of firefighter mental health, with each section consisting of five questions measured on a 0-4 scale, providing a data-driven insight into the well-being of firefighters.

Section 1: Trauma Exposure & Stress Response – Evaluates the psychological impact of repeated exposure to traumatic incidents and emergency situations.

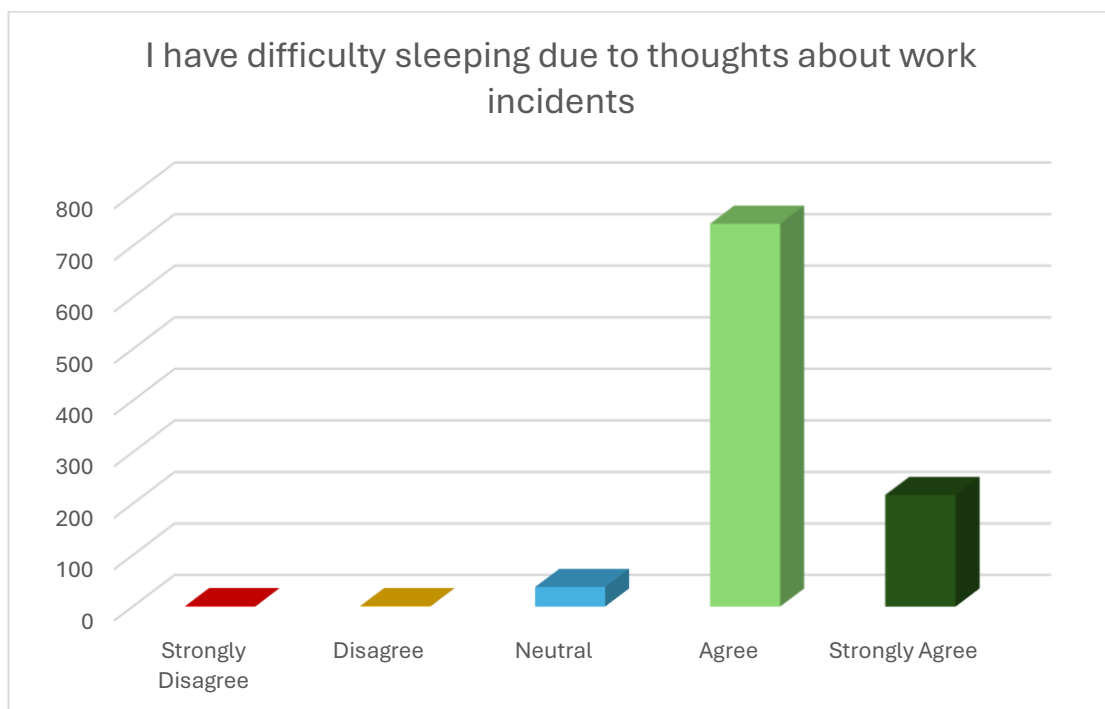
Q1. I experience unwanted memories of traumatic incidents from work



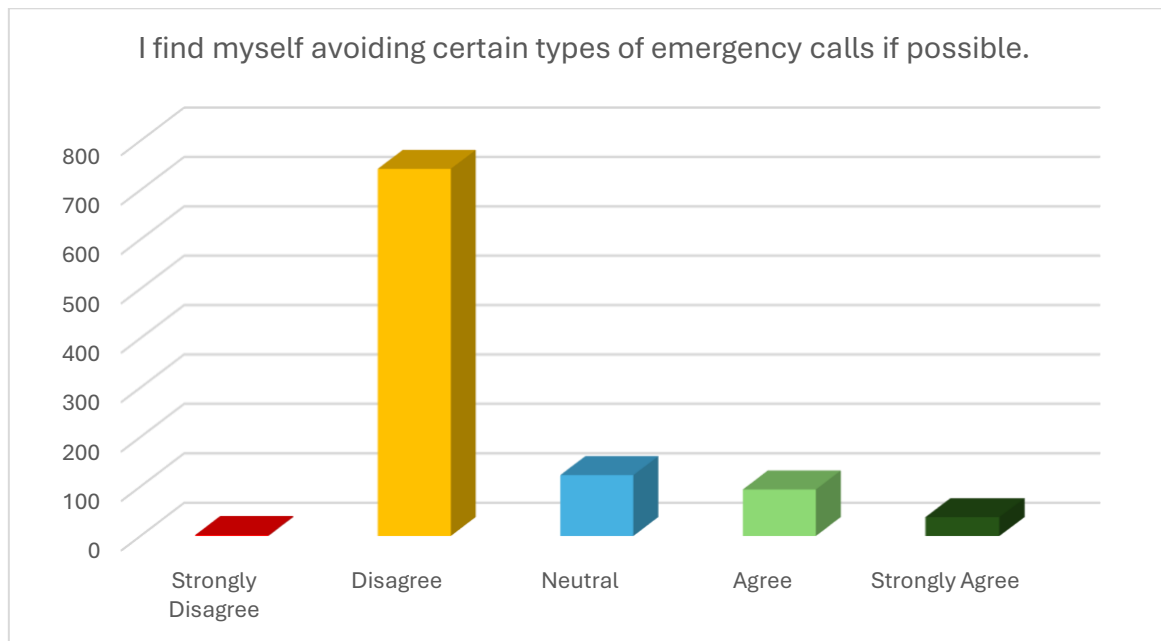
Q2. I feel physically tense when responding to emergency calls.



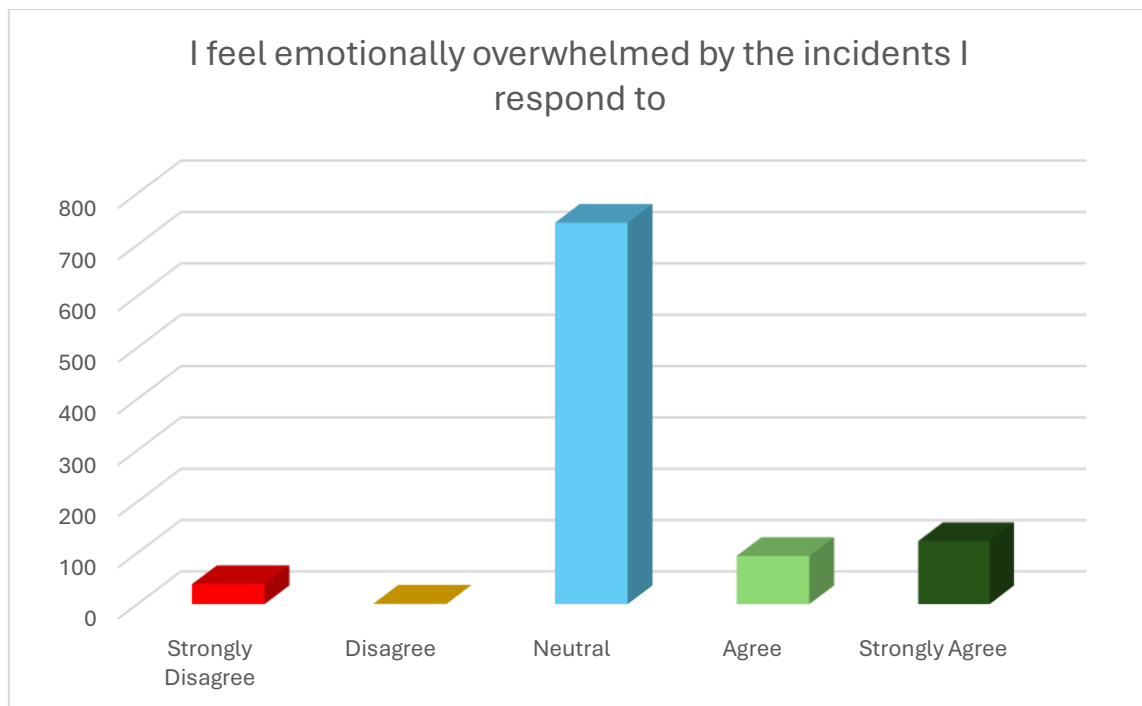
Q3. I have difficulty sleeping due to thoughts about work incidents



Q4. I find myself avoiding certain types of emergency calls if possible

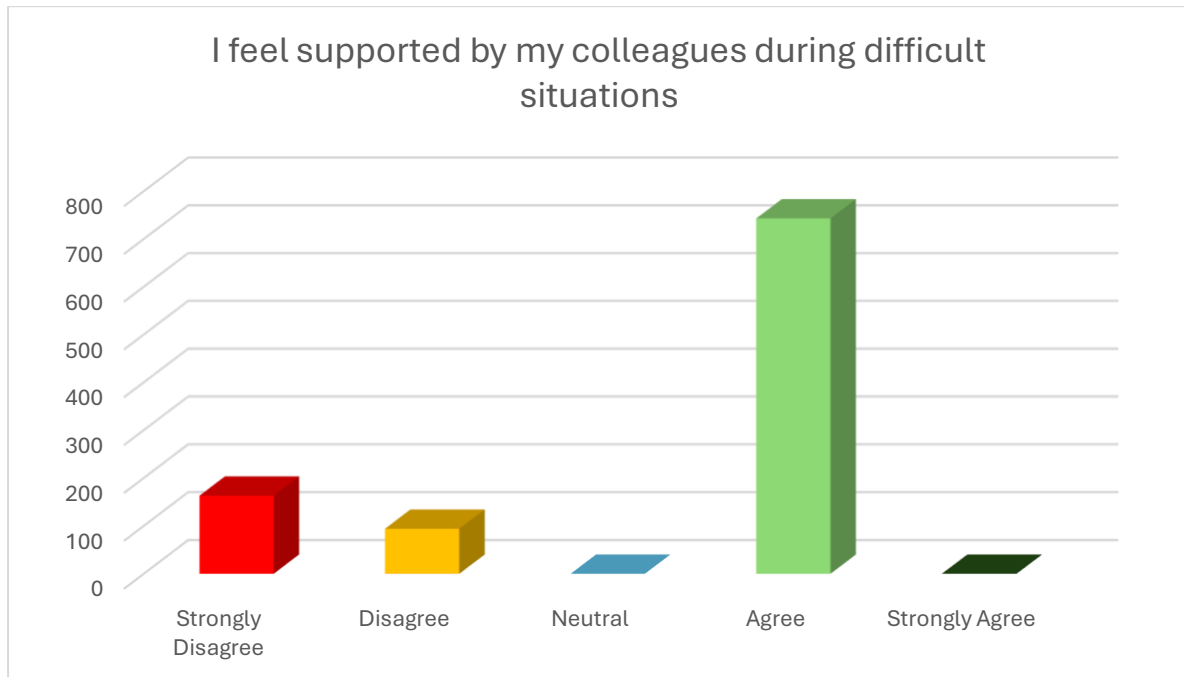


Q5. I feel emotionally overwhelmed by the incidents I respond to

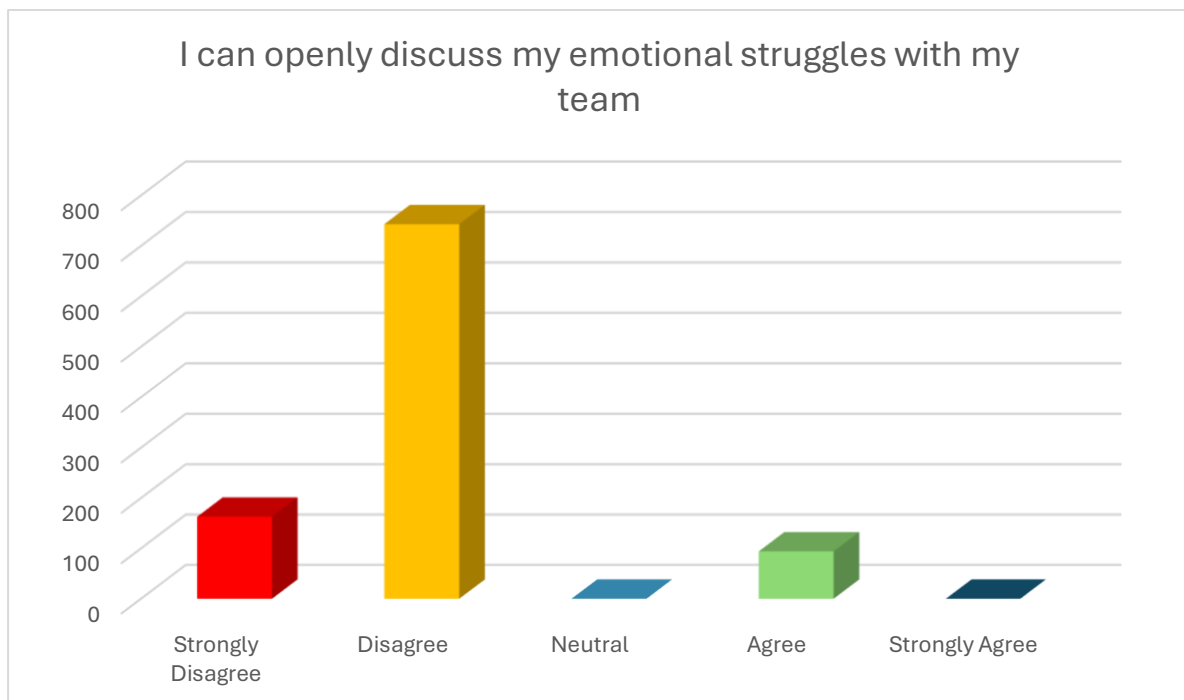


Section 2: Workplace Relationships & Support – Assesses the quality of interpersonal relationships within the fire service and the availability of emotional and professional support.

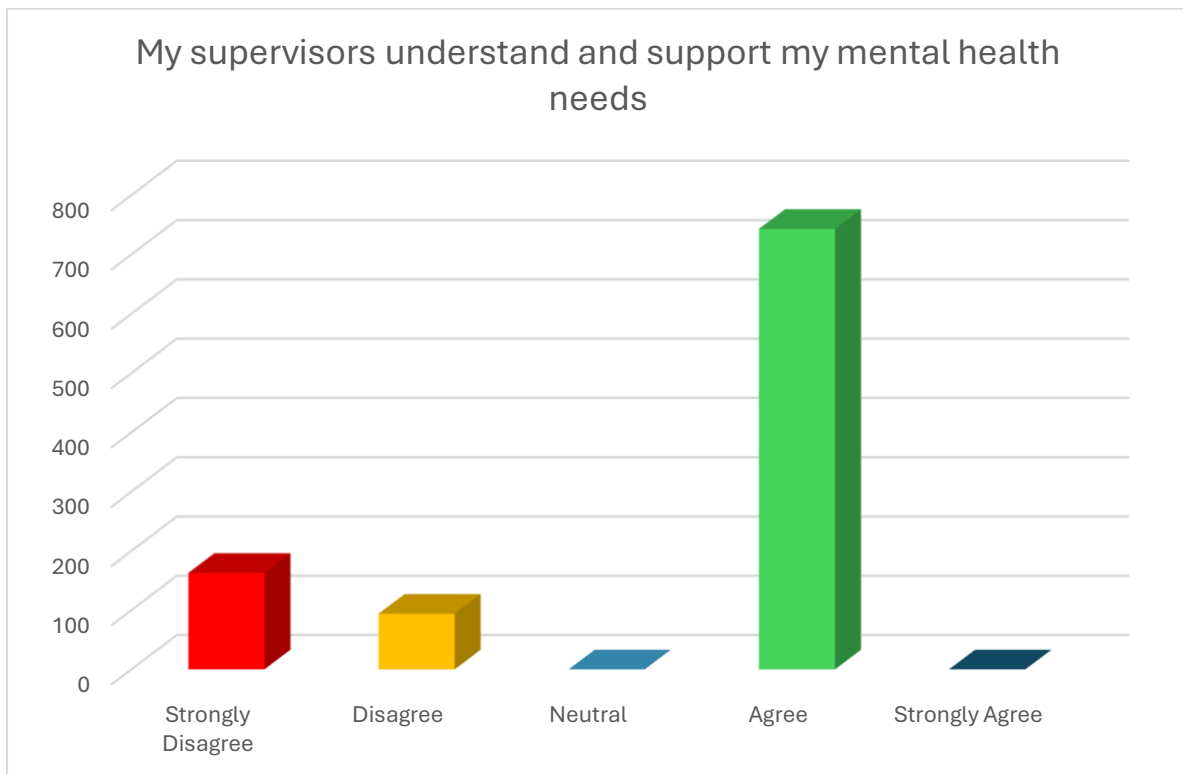
Q6. I feel supported by my colleagues during difficult situations



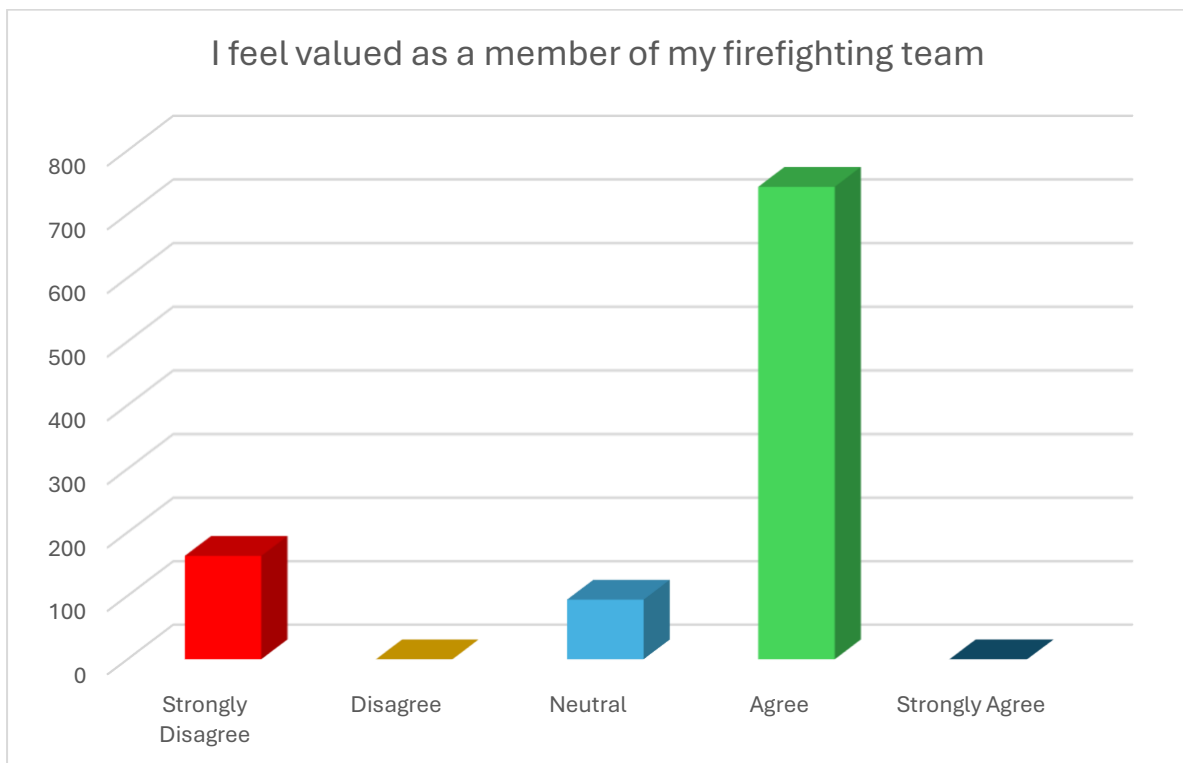
Q7. I can openly discuss my emotional struggles with my team



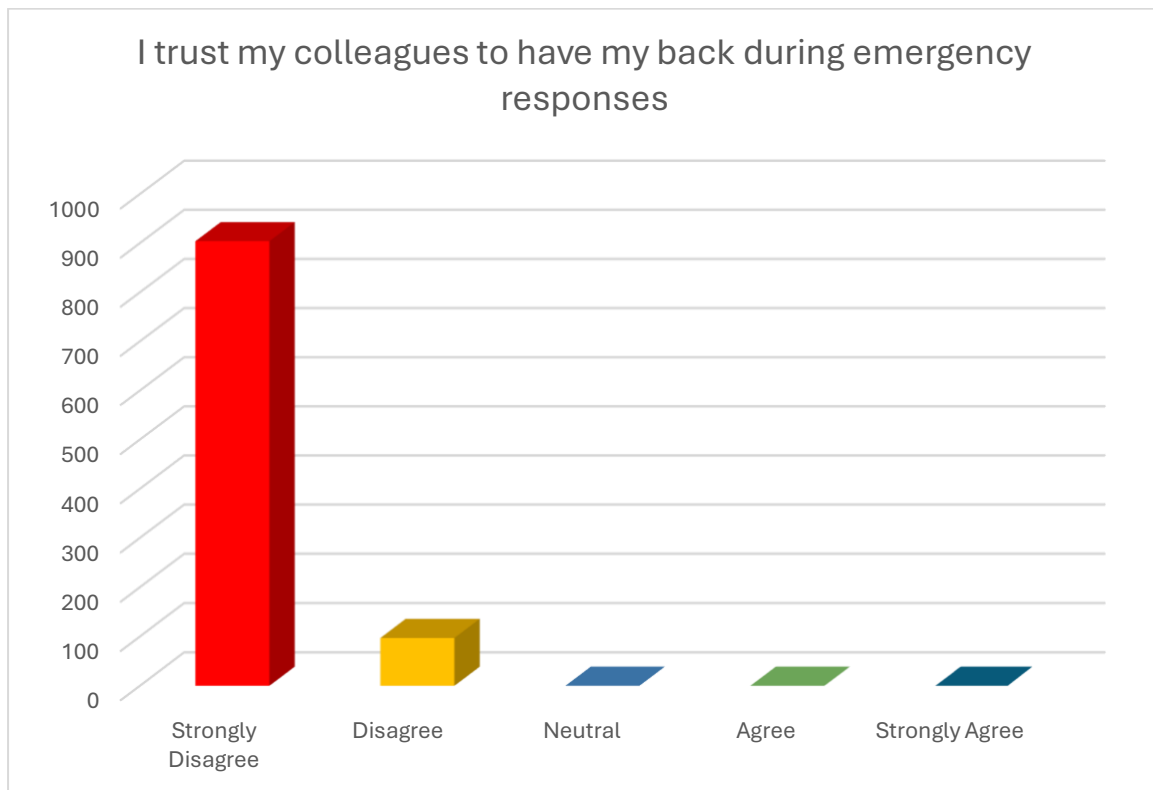
Q8. My supervisors understand and support my mental health needs



Q9. I feel valued as a member of my firefighting team.

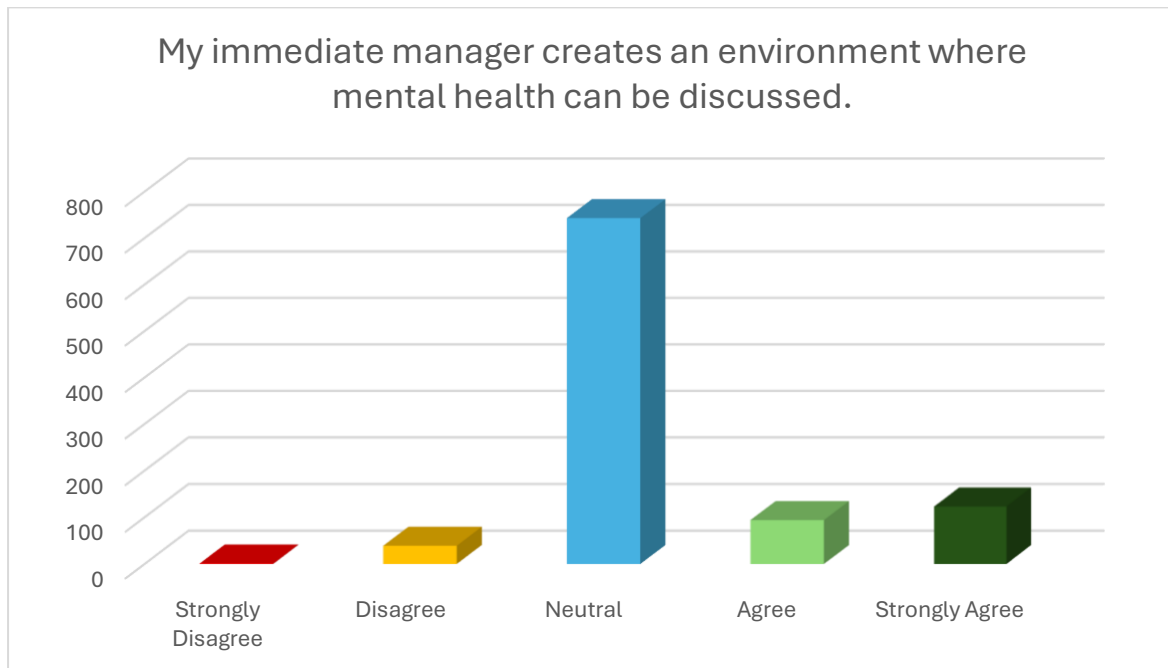


Q10. I trust my colleagues to have my back during emergency responses

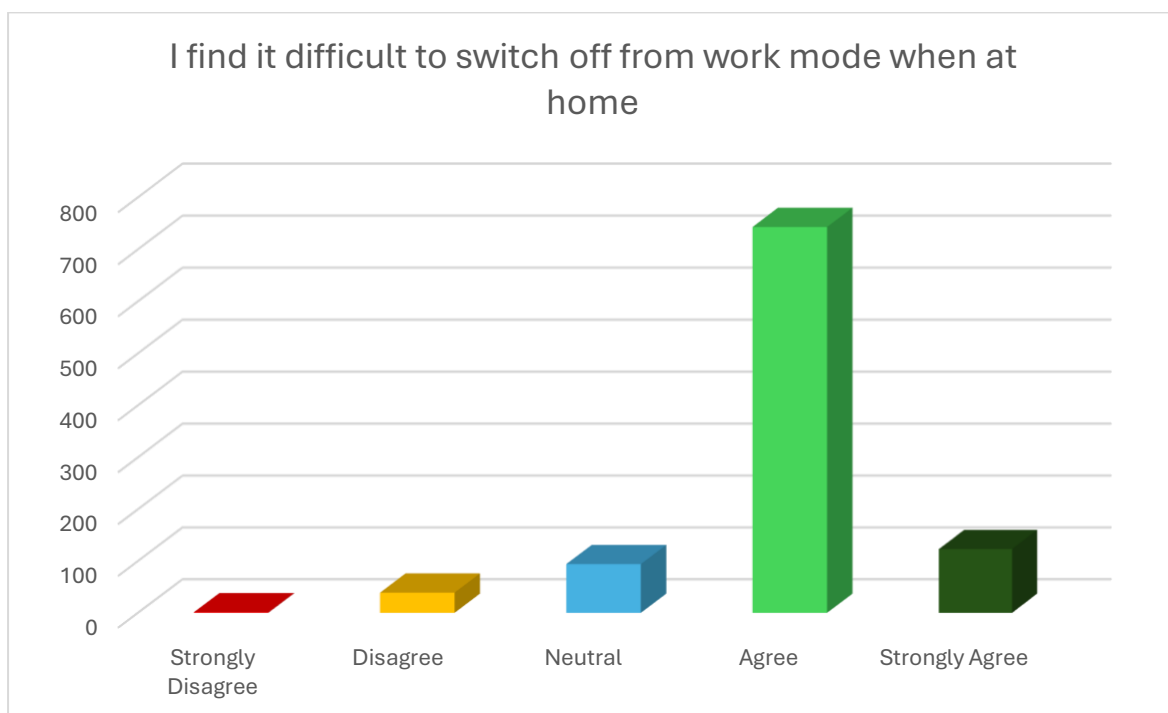


Section 3: Work-Life Balance & Personal Relationships – Examines how firefighting responsibilities affect personal well-being, relationships, and overall life balance.

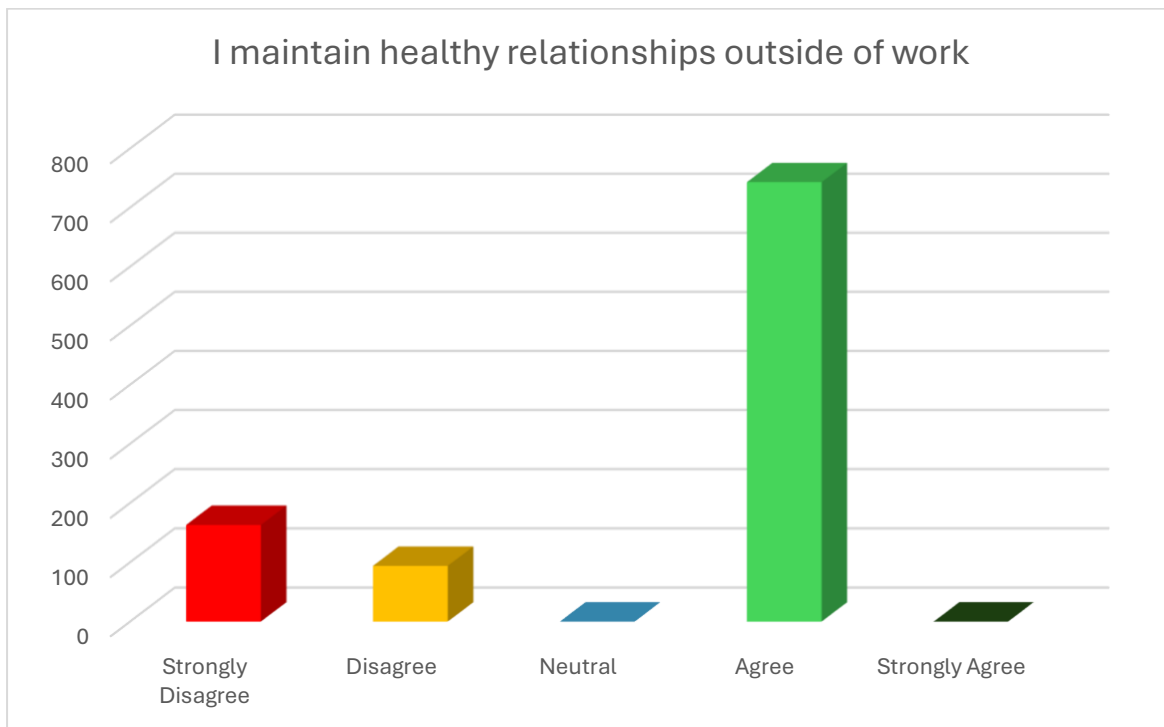
Q11. My work schedule negatively impacts my family relationships



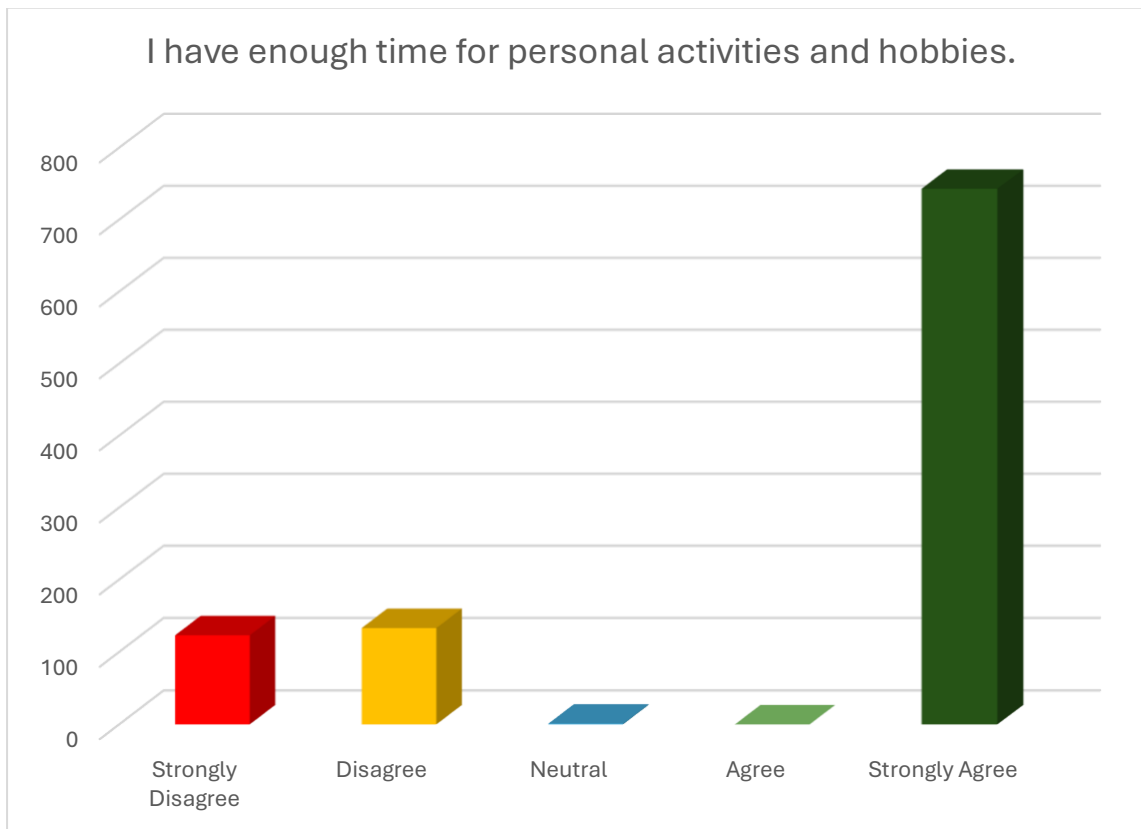
Q12. I find it difficult to switch off from work mode when at home



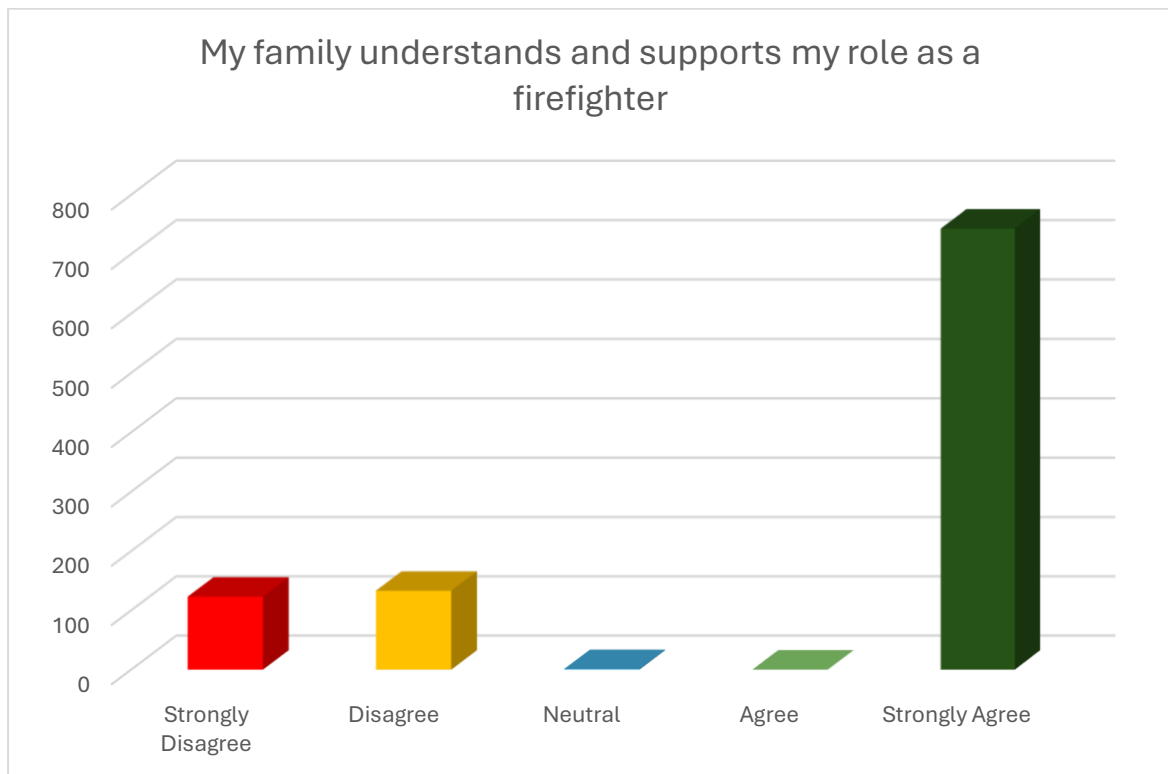
Q13. I maintain healthy relationships outside of work



Q14. I have enough time for personal activities and hobbies.

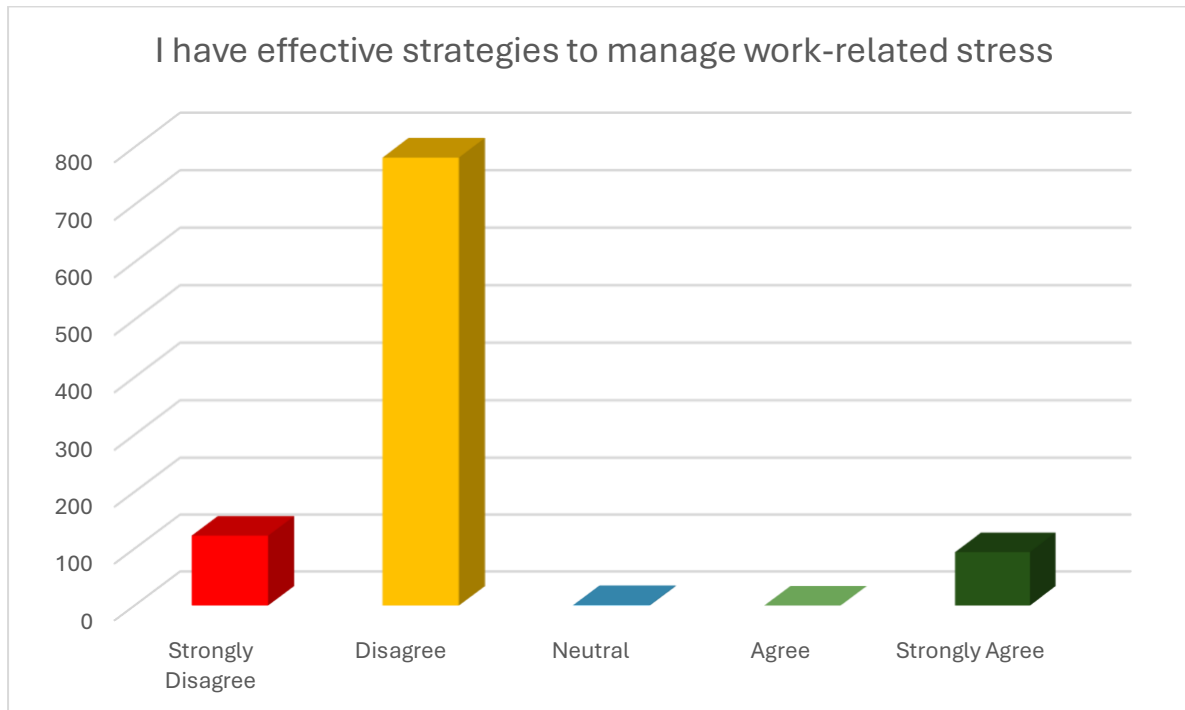


Q15. My family understands and supports my role as a firefighter

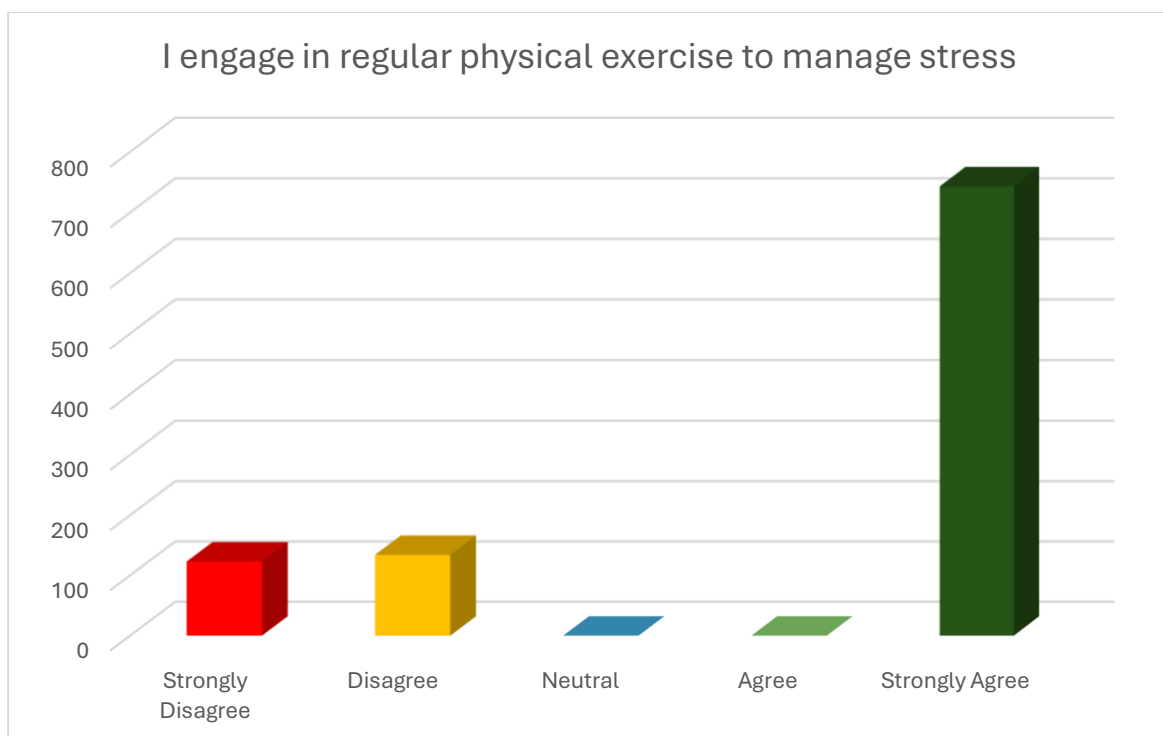


Section 4: Coping Mechanisms & Resilience – Identifies the effectiveness of coping strategies used by firefighters and their ability to manage stress and maintain resilience.

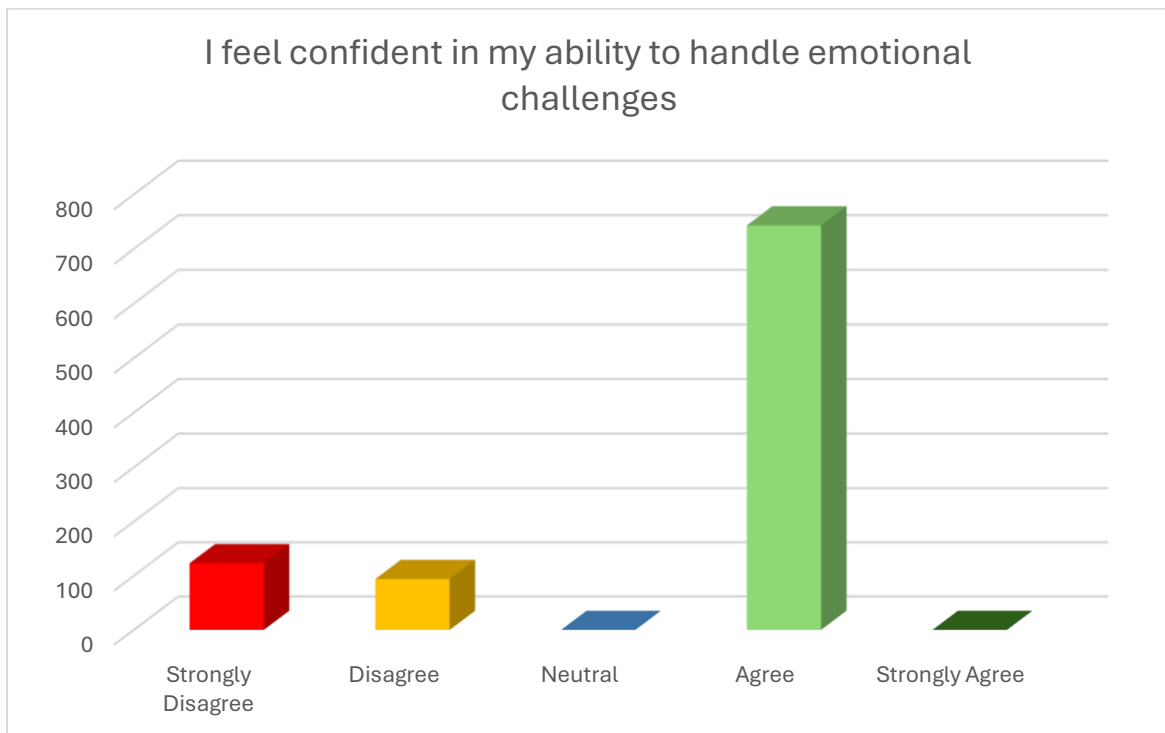
Q16. I have effective strategies to manage work-related stress



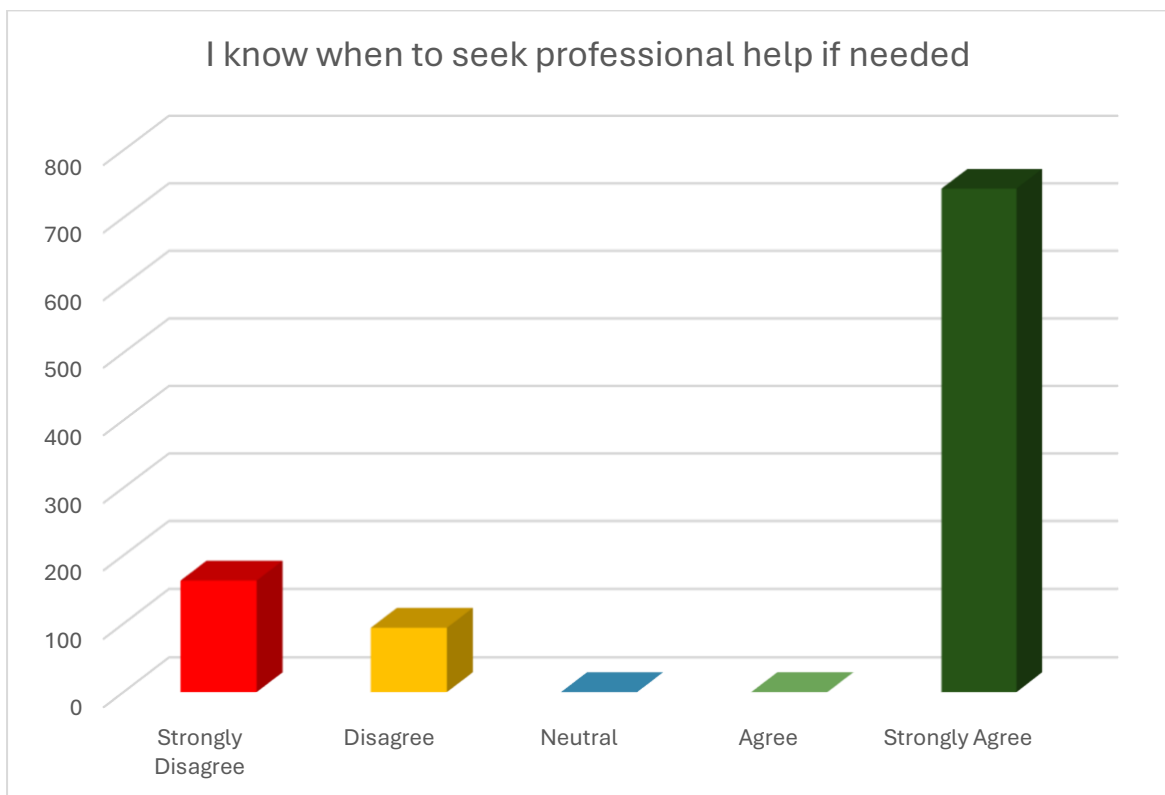
Q17. I engage in regular physical exercise to manage stress



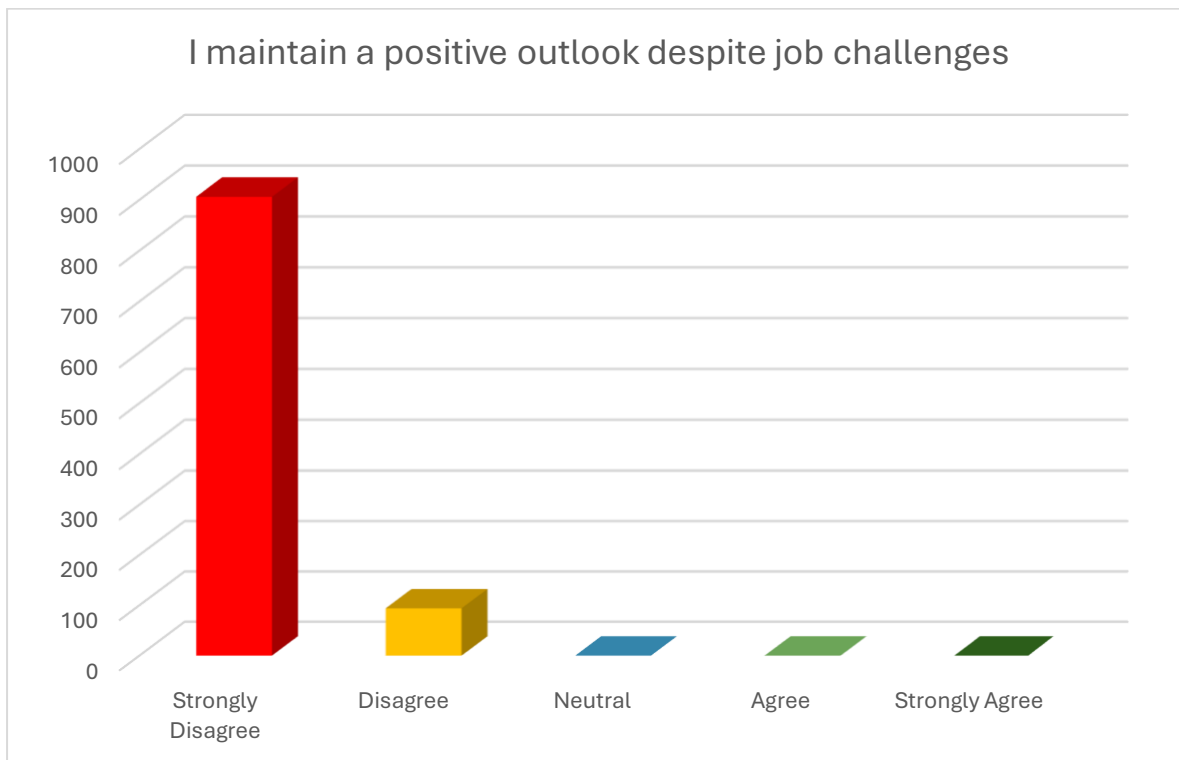
Q18. I feel confident in my ability to handle emotional challenges



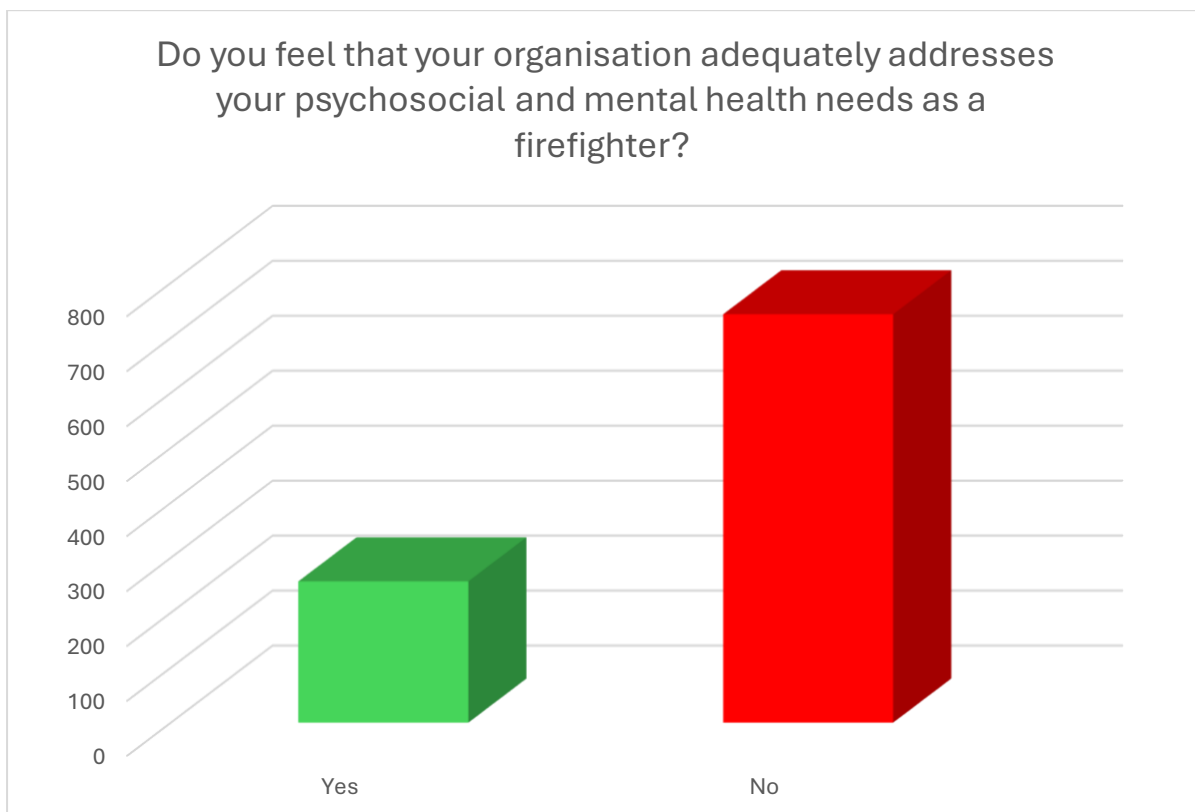
Q19. I know when to seek professional help if needed



Q20. maintain a positive outlook despite job challenges.



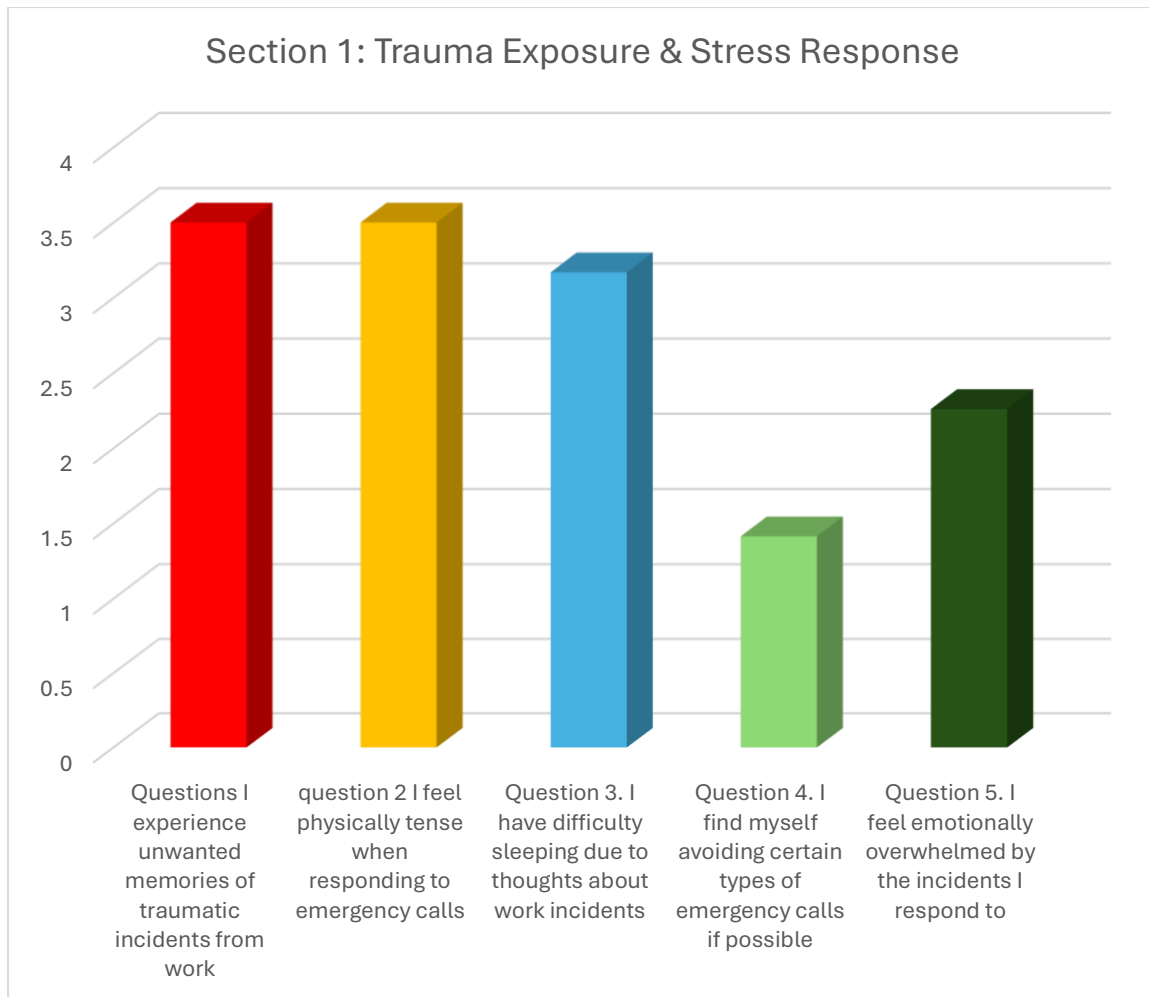
Q21 Do you feel that your organisation adequately addresses your psychosocial and mental health needs as a firefighter?



Data Analysis

In this section, we will analyse the average scores for each question and overall section to identify key trends in firefighter psychosocial mental health. This data-driven approach will provide the fire service with clear insights into priority areas for intervention, helping to focus efforts on reducing the impact of mental health challenges and improving overall well-being within the workforce.

Section 1: Trauma Exposure and Stress Response



Key Findings:

The results in this section highlight significant trauma-related stress among firefighters. With scores ranging from 0 (excellent) to 4 (severe concern), the data shows several critical mental health risks that require immediate attention.

Severe Concerns – Unwanted Memories & Physical Tension (Scores: 3.501)

- High scores indicate that firefighters frequently experience intrusive memories of traumatic incidents and physical tension when responding to emergencies.
- Impact: This suggests symptoms of post-traumatic stress, which can lead to long-term anxiety, emotional distress, and physical health issues if left unaddressed.

Moderate Concern – Difficulty Sleeping (Score: 3.17)

- A high score here suggests that a large number of firefighters struggle with sleep due to work-related thoughts.
- Impact: Poor sleep can worsen stress, reduce cognitive function, and increase fatigue on duty, potentially affecting decision-making and performance.

Lower Concern – Avoiding Certain Emergency Calls (Score: 1.415)

- A relatively lower score suggests that avoidance of specific emergency calls is not a widespread issue, meaning most firefighters still engage with all types of calls despite the stress involved.
- Impact: This indicates that trauma exposure is high, but most firefighters do not engage in avoidance behaviours, a positive sign of operational resilience.

Moderate Concern – Feeling Emotionally Overwhelmed (Score: 2.261)

- While not as high as other areas, this result still suggests that a significant number of firefighters struggle with emotional exhaustion from repeated exposure to traumatic incidents.
- Impact: If left unaddressed, this can contribute to burnout, anxiety, and increased emotional withdrawal from colleagues and family.

Recommendations for the Fire Service

Enhance Trauma & Stress Management Support

- Increase access to trauma-informed counselling services to help firefighters process distressing experiences.
- Regular debriefings after critical incidents, led by trained professionals, can help prevent long-term stress buildup.

Implement Resilience & Relaxation Training

- Provide stress-reduction training, such as mindfulness, controlled breathing, and guided relaxation to help firefighters manage physical tension and sleep disturbances.
- Offer training sessions on coping mechanisms to reduce emotional overwhelm and intrusive memories.

Improve Sleep & Fatigue Management Strategies

- Educate firefighters on healthy sleep habits, including limiting caffeine before bed, managing work-related thoughts, and using designated rest areas effectively during long shifts.
- Consider adjusting shift patterns or implementing fatigue management protocols to mitigate the effects of sleep disruption.

Promote Peer Support Networks

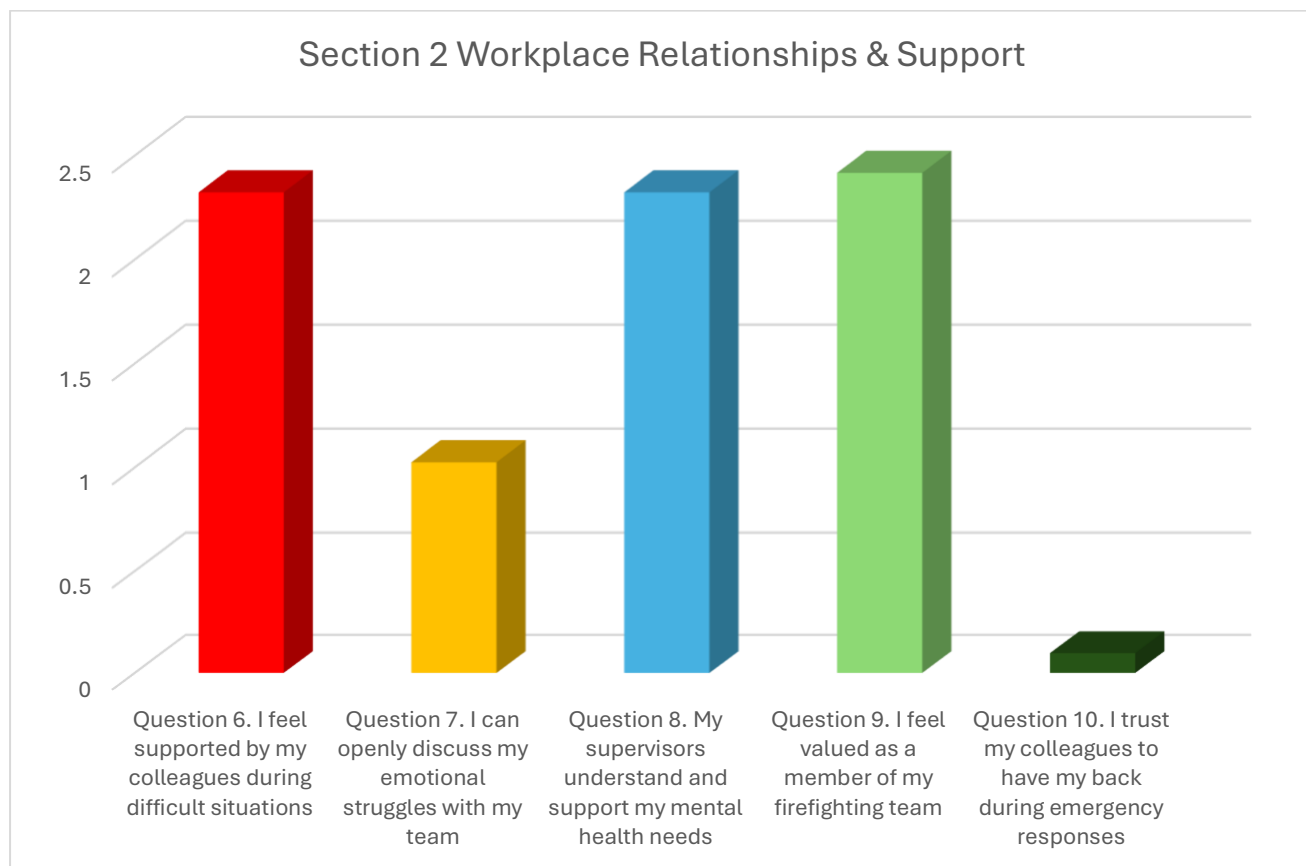
- Encourage open discussions on mental health within teams to reduce stigma and isolation.
- Train and assign mental health advocates within crews who can provide informal support and guide colleagues toward professional help if needed.

Conclusion

This data indicates high trauma-related stress, difficulty sleeping, and physical/emotional tension, all of which could lead to long-term psychological strain if not properly managed. Immediate interventions in mental health support, stress reduction, and sleep management are necessary to protect firefighter well-being and operational effectiveness.

By prioritising mental resilience training, counselling access, and peer support, fire services can better safeguard their teams against the lasting impact of trauma exposure.

Section 2: Workplace relationships & Support - - Analysis & Recommendations



Key Findings

This section reveals a distinct pattern that merits careful attention: a critical disconnect between operational trust and emotional/psychological support within your fire service. This "trust paradox" represents both your greatest challenge and your most promising opportunity for impact.

Strengths Identified

- Exceptional Operational Trust (0.10/4.0): Personnel report extraordinary levels of confidence that colleagues will support them during emergency operations—a fundamental building block for psychological safety.

Areas for Development

- Limited Emotional Disclosure (1.03/4.0): Despite strong operational trust, personnel report significant barriers to discussing emotional struggles with teammates.
- Inadequate Supervisory Support (2.32/4.0): Firefighters perceive supervisors as having limited understanding of mental health needs.

- Moderate Colleague Support (2.32/4.0): General support during difficult situations is present but not optimal.
- Concerns About Value (2.42/4.0): Personnel express doubts about being fully valued as team members.

Strategic Recommendations

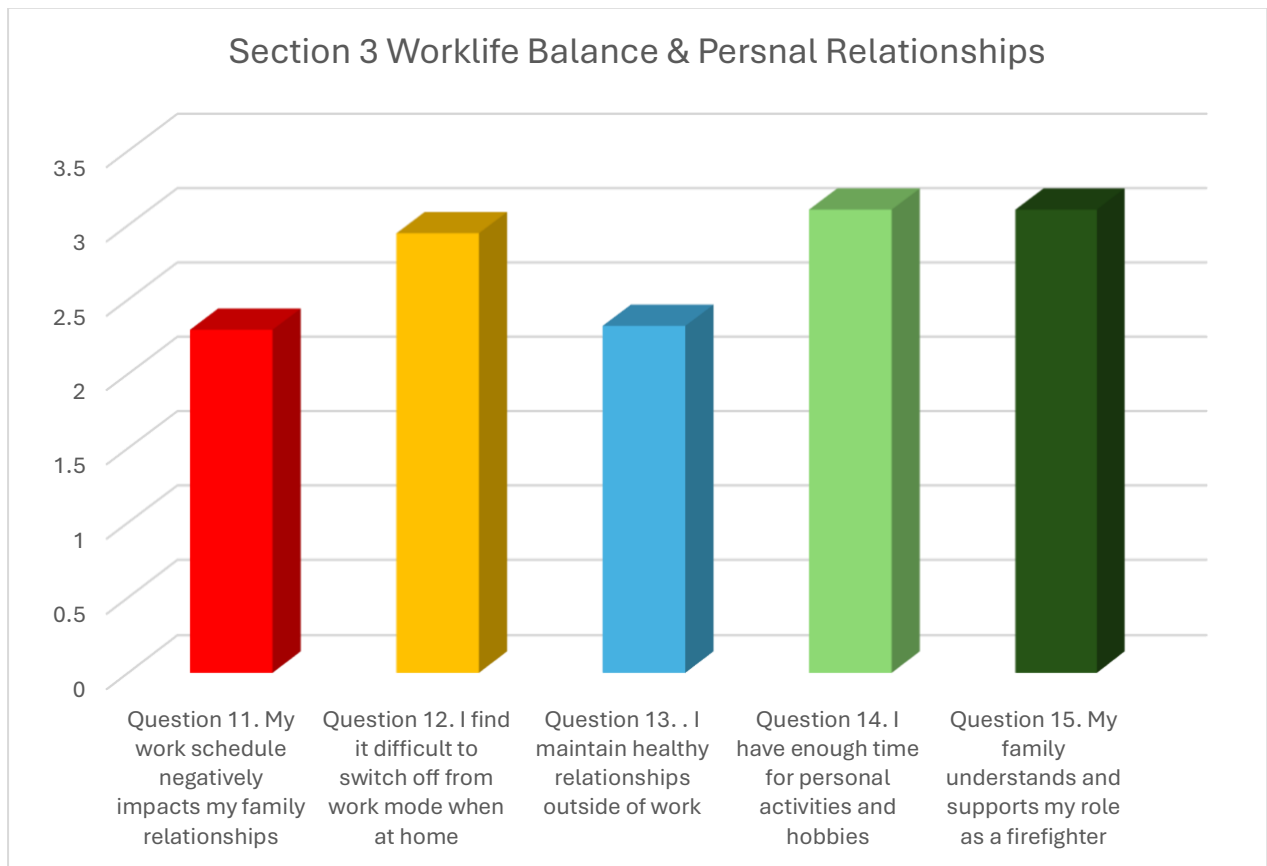
1. Bridge the Operational-Emotional Support Gap
 - Leverage the strong foundation of operational trust to build emotional trust
 - Implement structured "After Action Reviews" that explicitly include psychological impacts
 - Train crew leaders to model appropriate vulnerability after difficult calls
2. Supervisor Mental Health Training
 - Develop mandatory mental health literacy training for all officers
 - Create clear protocols for supervisors to follow after potentially traumatic incidents
 - Establish accountability metrics for supervisory mental health support
3. Team Vulnerability Building Program
 - Implement progressive small-group sessions that gradually normalize emotional disclosure
 - Utilize experiential learning activities that demonstrate how psychological safety enhances operational effectiveness
 - Create "psychological PPE" protocols that mirror physical safety procedures
4. Organizational Recognition Initiative
 - Develop specific recognition mechanisms that acknowledge personal well-being practices
 - Incorporate mental health support behaviours into promotion criteria
 - Highlight members who effectively support colleagues' psychological well-being
5. Peer Support Enhancement
 - Expand and strengthen peer support programs with specialized training
 - Create informal opportunities for relationship building outside operational contexts
 - Establish "wellness champions" within each station or shift

Implementation Priority

The exceptional operational trust score (0.10) provides a solid foundation upon which to build psychological safety. This represents your department's greatest asset for mental health improvement. By explicitly connecting the operational trust that already exists with emotional support practices, you can create a coherent culture where psychological wellbeing is recognized as essential to operational excellence.

Begin by focusing on initiatives that leverage your operational strength while addressing the emotional disclosure gap, as this represents your most promising opportunity for immediate impact with limited resistance.

Section 3: Work life Balance & Personal Relationships – Analysis & Recommendations



Interpretation of Results

This section reveals significant concerns about the impact of firefighting duties on personal life domains. With an overall average of 2.76/4.0, work-life balance represents a critical area requiring comprehensive intervention. The data highlights a concerning pattern where work demands are substantially disrupting personal wellbeing and family functioning.

Areas of Critical Concern

1. Limited Personal Time (3.11/4.0): Personnel report severe restrictions on time for personal activities and hobbies, indicating insufficient recovery opportunities.
2. Family Support Challenges (3.11/4.0): The high score suggests firefighters perceive limited understanding and support from family members regarding their role.
3. Difficulty Disengaging (2.95/4.0): Personnel struggle significantly to transition out of "work mode" at home, suggesting psychological boundary blurring.
4. Schedule Impact on Family (2.30/4.0): Work scheduling creates moderate to severe disruptions to family relationships.
5. Relationship Maintenance (2.32/4.0): Maintaining healthy relationships outside work presents notable challenges.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Family Integration Program

- Develop "Family Academy" sessions to educate families about firefighter experiences
 - Create family-inclusive social events that build support networks among firefighter families
 - Provide resources specifically designed for spouses/partners on supporting first responders
2. Schedule Optimization Initiative
 - Review shift patterns and consider alternative scheduling models that research shows minimize family disruption
 - Implement protected time blocks for important family events
 - Create predictable scheduling practices that allow better family planning
 3. Psychological Decompression Training
 - Develop formal "end of shift" rituals that facilitate psychological transition
 - Train personnel in specific cognitive-behavioural techniques for "switching off"
 - Create physical transition spaces at stations where personnel can properly decompress before returning home
 4. Recovery Infrastructure Development
 - Establish formal policies protecting time off from interruptions
 - Create department-supported hobby/interest groups that facilitate non-work identity development
 - Implement "recovery days" concept after particularly demanding operational periods
 5. Family Support Services
 - Provide specialized counselling resources specifically for firefighters' families
 - Develop peer support programs for spouses/partners
 - Create communication resources that help firefighters effectively discuss work impacts with family members

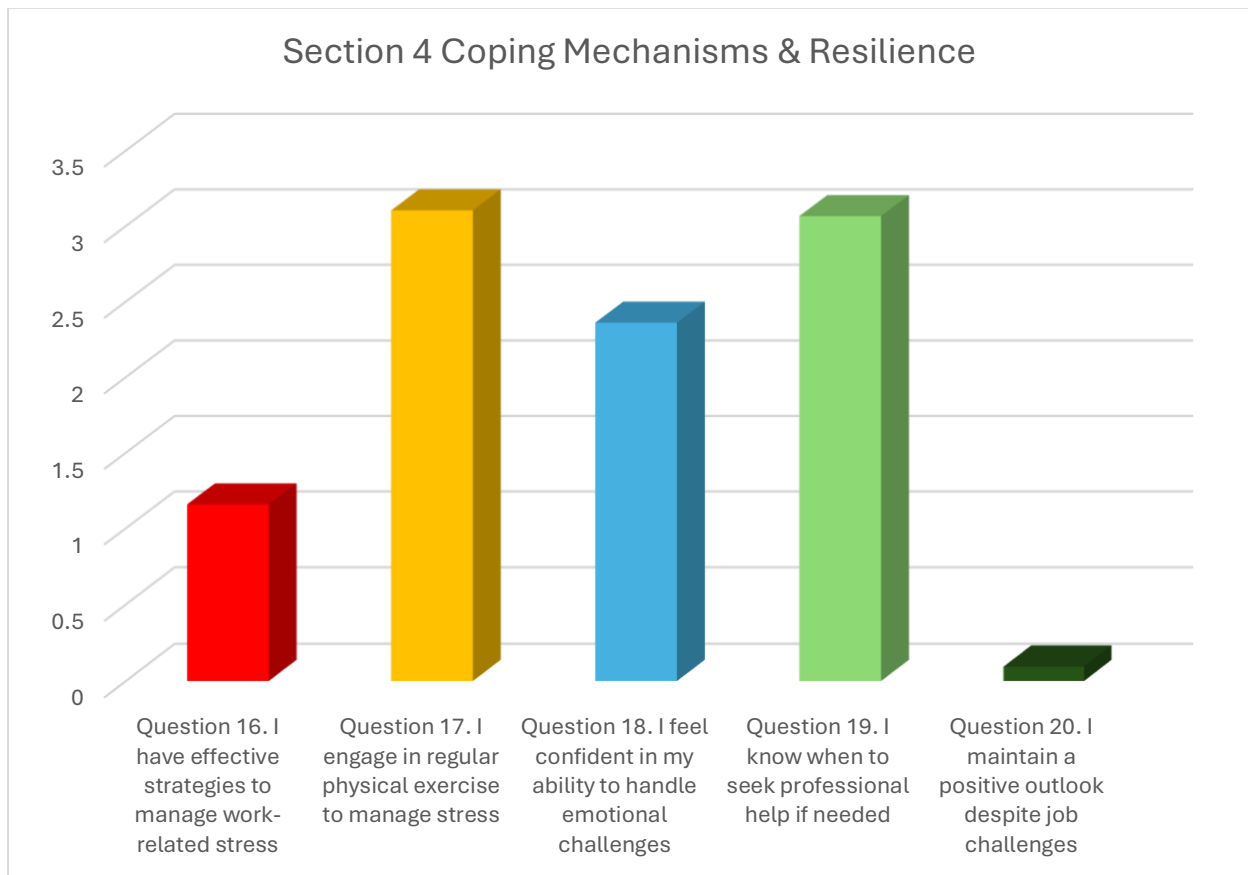
Implementation Guidance

The data strongly suggests that work demands are significantly compromising personal life domains, creating substantial risk for burnout and relationship deterioration. This work-life imbalance likely compounds the trauma exposure concerns identified in previous sections, as inadequate recovery time and limited personal support systems reduce resilience to operational stressors.

Prioritise interventions that simultaneously address schedule optimization and psychological decompression techniques, as these represent opportunities for immediate impact. The family integration programs should follow once these foundational elements are addressed.

Given the high scores across all questions in this section, these interventions should be considered critical for organizational sustainment rather than optional wellness enhancements. Without addressing these work-life integration challenges, other mental health initiatives may have limited effectiveness.

Section 4: Coping Mechanisms & Resilience – Analysis & Recommendations



Key Findings

This section reveals a striking contrast between internal resilience resources and external coping behaviours. Your personnel demonstrate remarkable psychological resilience in certain domains while showing significant deficits in practical coping strategies and help-seeking behaviours.

Strengths Identified

- **Exceptional Positive Outlook (0.09/4.0):** Personnel maintain an extraordinarily positive perspective despite job challenges—a powerful psychological protective factor.
- **Effective Stress Management Strategies (1.16/4.0):** Respondents report having relatively good coping mechanisms for work-related stress.

Areas for Development

- **Limited Physical Exercise (3.10/4.0):** Despite its proven benefits for stress regulation, personnel report minimal engagement with exercise as a coping strategy.

- **Help-Seeking Barriers (3.07/4.0):** Firefighters demonstrate significant uncertainty about when and how to seek professional support.
- **Moderate Emotional Self-Efficacy (2.36/4.0):** Personnel express some doubts about their ability to handle emotional challenges.

Strategic Recommendations

1. **Optimised Physical Wellness Program**

- Develop on-shift exercise opportunities integrated into daily routines
- Create department-wide fitness challenges with team-based incentives
- Implement education on exercise as stress management rather than just physical performance
- Provide specialized programs addressing common firefighter physical limitations

2. **Help-Seeking Pathway Development**

- Create clear, confidential pathways to professional support
- Develop specific guidelines about when to seek help (concrete indicators rather than subjective judgment)
- Train supervisors to facilitate appropriate referrals without stigma
- Implement a "warm handoff" system where trusted peers facilitate initial connection to support resources

3. **Emotional Competence Training**

- Develop skill-building workshops focused on emotional regulation techniques
- Implement scenario-based training addressing common emotional challenges
- Create peer discussion forums for sharing effective emotional management strategies
- Provide specialized tools for managing difficult emotions specific to emergency services

4. **Integrated Coping Skills Development**

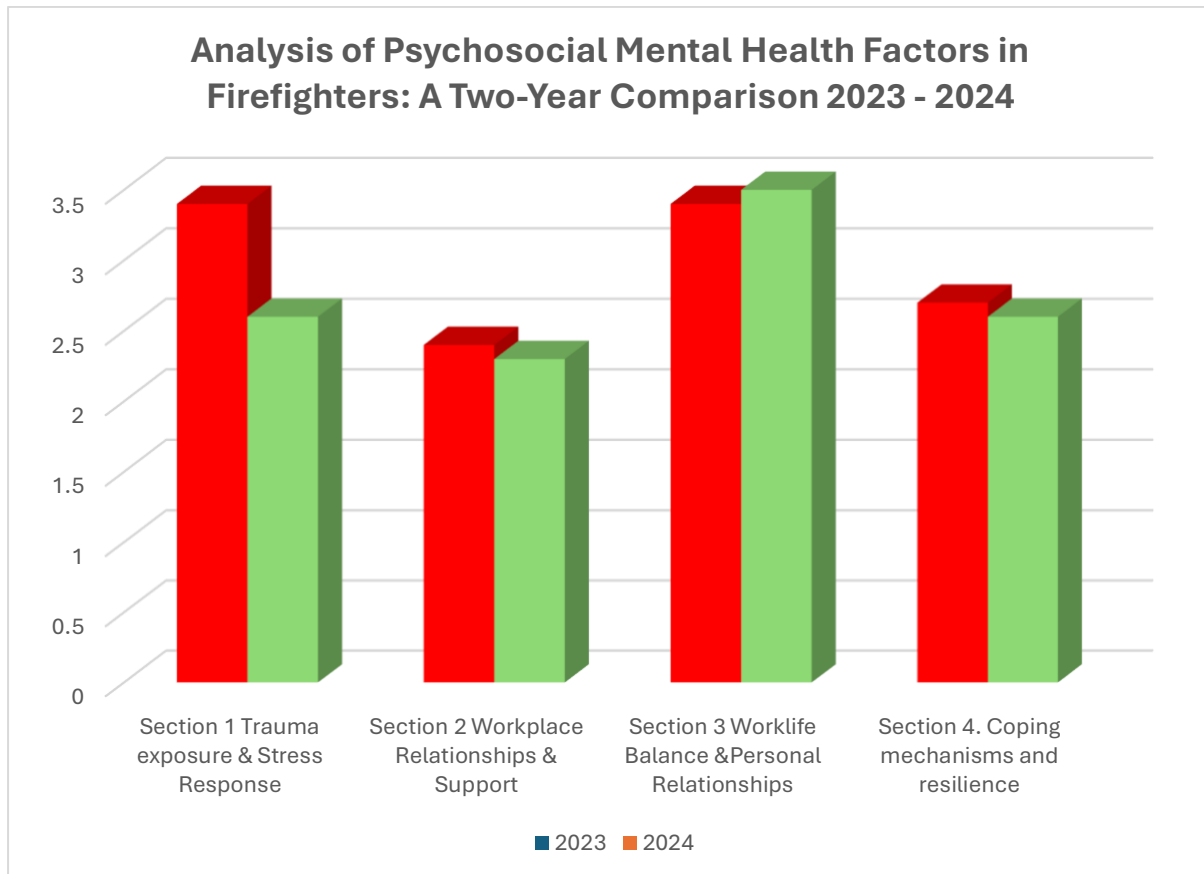
- Create a comprehensive "psychological toolbox" tailored to firefighter-specific stressors
- Develop practical skill-building in multiple coping domains (cognitive, emotional, physical, social)
- Implement regular "coping check-ins" during existing operational meetings
- Create specific protocols for stressor-matched coping strategies

Implementation Priority

The remarkable positive outlook score (0.09/4.0) represents a profound psychological asset within your department. This exceptional resilience factor can be leveraged to address the identified deficits in help-seeking and physical coping strategies.

Begin by developing programs that bridge the gap between this internal resilience and external coping behaviours, with particular emphasis on reducing barriers to professional support and integrating physical activity as a stress management approach. The existing positive outlook provides a strong foundation upon which to build more comprehensive resilience practices

Comparison of Psychosocial Mental Health Factors in Firefighters 2023 – 2024



Our two-year assessment of firefighter psychosocial health reveals a complex pattern of both encouraging improvements and persistent challenges. The data presents two measurement approaches—average scores (0-4 scale) and cumulative totals—both indicating similar trends but with notable nuances. This longitudinal analysis provides critical insights to guide the strategic direction of our mental health support initiatives.

Key Findings

Areas of Significant Improvement

- Trauma Exposure & Stress Response:** Both measurement approaches show substantial improvement in this critical domain (3.4→2.6 average; 13.8→9.0 total). This 24% reduction in traumatic stress indicators suggests that targeted interventions implemented after the 2023 assessment have effectively enhanced personnel's capacity to process and integrate operational trauma.
- Workplace Relationships & Support:** A modest but meaningful improvement (2.4→2.3 average; 8.2→5.0 total) indicates strengthening organizational cohesion and team-based psychological safety. The more dramatic improvement in the cumulative score suggests that while overall support has improved slightly, specific high-concern areas have seen substantial positive change.

Areas Requiring Continued Focus

1. **Work-Life Balance & Personal Relationships:** This domain presents a concerning contradiction between measurement approaches. The average scores show a slight deterioration (3.4→3.5), while the cumulative scores show dramatic improvement (13.8→7.0). This suggests that while severe work-life conflicts may have been successfully addressed, moderate challenges have become more widespread.
2. **Coping Mechanisms & Resilience:** Similar to work-life balance, this domain shows contradictory data. The average scores indicate slight improvement (2.7→2.6), while the cumulative scores show substantial deterioration (9.8→14.0). This suggests that while most personnel maintain adequate coping strategies, a subset may be experiencing significant resilience depletion requiring targeted intervention.

Strategic Implications

This longitudinal data reveals a department in transition—one that has made meaningful progress in addressing acute traumatic stress and improving workplace support systems. However, the data also suggests an emerging pattern where operational demands continue to challenge personnel's ability to maintain work-life balance and sustainable coping mechanisms.

The contradictory findings in Sections 3 and 4 merit particular attention. They suggest that while organizational initiatives have successfully addressed the most severe manifestations of distress, underlying challenges persist that may undermine long-term resilience if not addressed.

Recommendations for Sustainable Progress

1. **Targeted Work-Life Integration Support:** Develop customized interventions addressing the specific work-life challenges identified in follow-up qualitative assessment. Focus particularly on addressing the apparent increase in moderate work-life conflicts while maintaining the improvements in severe conflicts.
2. **Resilience Enhancement Program:** Implement a comprehensive resilience development initiative focused on sustainable coping strategies, particularly targeting personnel identified through confidential screening as experiencing resilience depletion.
3. **Proactive Monitoring System:** Establish regular assessment protocols that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative measures to identify emerging challenges before they impact operational readiness.
4. **Consolidated Trauma Management Program:** Build on the successful trauma management improvements by institutionalizing effective practices and ensuring consistent implementation across all stations and shifts.

The department has demonstrated meaningful progress in addressing traumatic stress and enhancing workplace support—two fundamental components of firefighter wellbeing. By applying similar focused attention to the identified work-life and resilience challenges, the fire service is well-positioned to achieve comprehensive and sustainable improvements in personnel wellbeing, retention, and operational effectiveness.