

# Factors that impact development of resilience in first responders

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## Introduction

First responders (FR) are exposed to traumatic incidents more often than the general public (Lee et al., 2014). The first responders' profession often puts them at a higher risk for developing PTSD (Berger et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2016). In order to ensure that the mental health of the first responders is not compromised, Lee et al. (2014) suggest enhancing resilience in FR as a strong buffer against PTSD. This research dives into the routines, options and follow-up treatment for FR from the Fire Department and the Police Force in Norway to explore how the organizations enhance their FR's resilience. With a focus on Tromsø municipality, this study will explore the *Lavangsdalen*-accident of 2011 and the *Fagereng*-tragedy of 2019. Case selection is based on the mental health issues which occurred in FR following the two incidents. The study aims to determine the measure the two organizations are using to enhance the resilience of their FR.

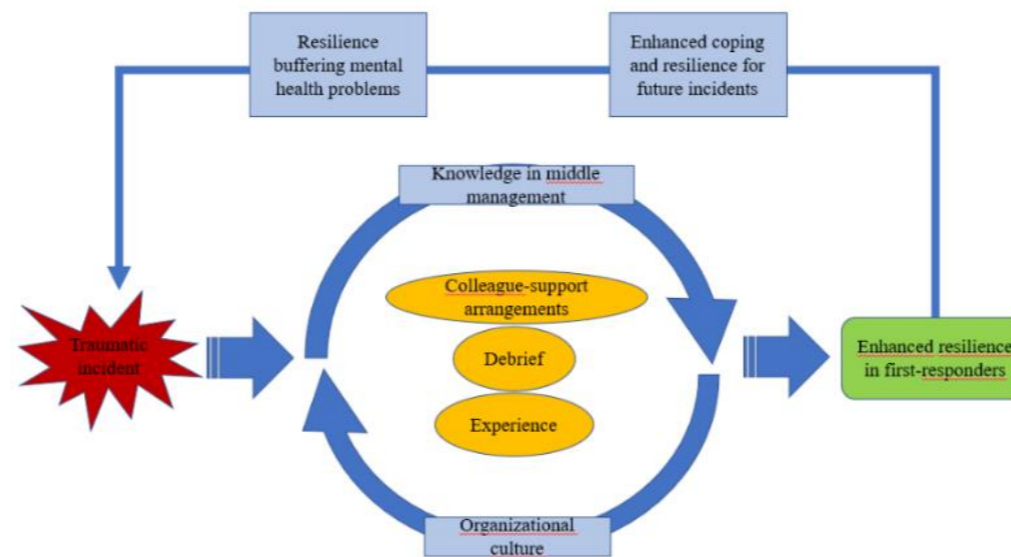
## Methodology

This study is based on existing scholarly literature, organization documents, and 11 semi-structured expert interviews with FR (six from the Fire Department and five from the Police Force). I started with the snowball sampling method to pinpoint respondents of interest. Then I used a purposive sampling method to identify the respondents with the right competence and work experience to ensure I got pertinent respondents

## The theoretical model for resilience enhancing in first-responders

Based on the relevant literature and concepts, I designed a theoretical model for resilience enhancement in FR. I implemented information from emergency services in the

model. The model applies to both the Fire Department and the Police Force. Both units already have frameworks that, to some extent, can result in enhanced resilience and possibly ensure that the mental health of FR is always considered.



## Findings and results

The study reveals severe deficiencies in the organizational structures, which impact how the organizations engage in resilience enhancement of the FR mental health. The deficiencies can leave FR vulnerable to PTSD after incidents:

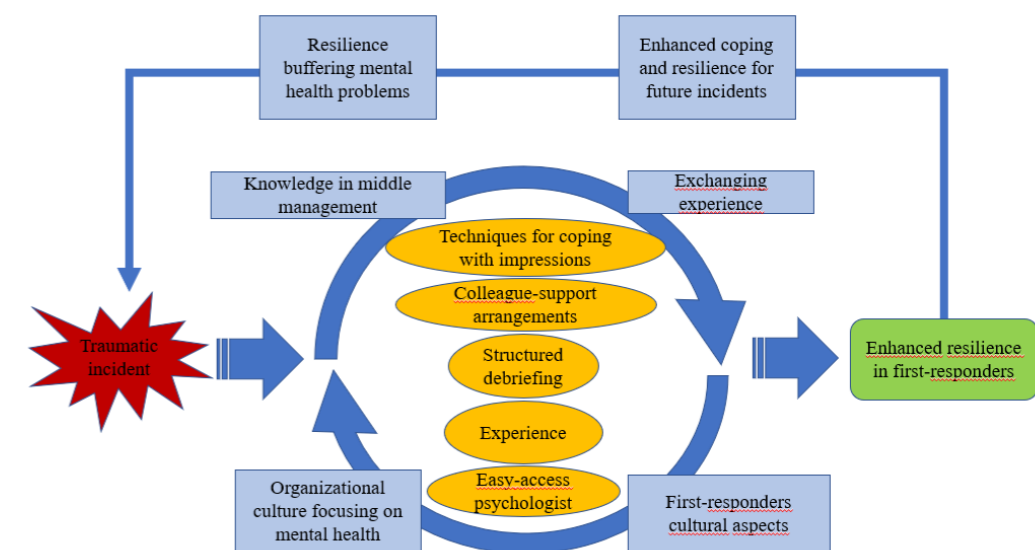
- Lack of trust in the employer's competence makes it easier for FR to discuss mental health problems with their colleagues instead of their employer.
- Lack of communication in the Police Force makes it difficult for FR to utilize the services of available skilled psychologists. The lack of economic incentive at the Fire Department makes it challenging for the FR to utilize the services of psychologists.
- Existing organizational culture (macho) hinders an effective utilization of the *Colleague-support*

*arrangement*, which is classified as highly valuable in improving mental health.

- Existence of culture that does not measure the mental strength of FR's.
- Lack of training or learning programs on how to cope with traumatic events.
- There is a lack of experience exchange programs for FR in the organizations.
- There is a lack of professionalism and structure as regards debriefing after incidents.

## New model for resilience enhancing in first-responders

The study presents an improved model for enhancing resilience in FR. The model can be seen as a framework that can be used after an incident or as a continuous cycle implemented in day-to-day training. With the baseline of theoretical aspects from before, the empirical findings are now implemented, considering the previous shortcomings and missing measurements.



## References

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