

## **Firefighters and EMTs: The 2% Who Run Toward Chaos**

Firefighters and EMT personnel know a thing or two about stress. Every time the tones drop, our heart rates spike, and we get hit with a peculiar mix of excitement and apprehension. Most calls? They're nothing major—helping someone off the floor or navigating a false alarm. But every now and then, we're dropped into a scene straight out of a disaster movie: devastation, screaming bystanders assuming command, hazards like fire, jagged glass, and downed power lines. And let's not forget the occasional well-meaning responder who somehow manages to make things worse. It's a stressful gig we've signed up for—and we keep coming back for more.

So, it's not exactly shocking that many of us lean on... let's call them "outside resources" to manage the stress. A recent study by The National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that about 29% of firefighters struggle with alcohol abuse, and up to 10% battle prescription drug addiction. Volunteers in the field? Their numbers are even higher, possibly due to less peer support and fewer accountability structures. Coping mechanisms in this line of work aren't always as effective as we'd like to believe.

The stats tell a tough story: nearly 72% of EMS personnel are sleep-deprived, 36% wrestle with depression, and close to 20% face PTSD. But most of us? We slap on a brave face, crack a joke, and say, "I'm fine." Statistically speaking, though? Not so much.

One of the hardest parts of this job isn't the chaos we face in the field—it's the isolation. First responders make up just 1.5–2% of the U.S. population. That means 98% of people don't have a clue what it's like to do what we do. Even our closest friends and family, bless their hearts, often can't fully understand. And honestly? That's not their fault. But knowing that doesn't make it any easier.

So, what does all this mean? Are we doomed to silently suffer? Absolutely not. Here's the thing: we're wired differently. We do this work because we *want* to. Maybe it's the thrill of being the one to sprint into a burning building or the satisfaction of wrapping up a bleeding wound while others faint. Maybe it's the weird superpower of creating order in chaos. Whatever the reason, we're built for this.

But we're still human. And humans need support. If you're struggling, reach out. A fellow first responder—a brother or sister in the trenches—will get it. They'll understand in a way no one else can. Look into resources for healthy coping skills. And if you're one of the lucky few who's not struggling, be the lifeline for someone who is.

We are the 2%. Let's take care of each other—on and off the job.

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