

First Responders

Screams shatter the still summer calm as passerby's heads whip towards the catastrophic scene at hand. Fires are raging, bullets are flying, and the body count is quickly piling up. There's only a short time to react before the next victim is down. The scene is frantic. And then suddenly, it's over. Immediate help is administered to the unfortunate victims, but what about the people who rushed first into the scene? Accidents like this one happen every day, which is why first on scene responders are vital to society. Their role, however, is often overlooked or taken for granted. A First Responder is someone who is trained to provide basic assistance during an emergency until more professional help arrives. 'First Responder' encompasses fire fighters, police, and emergency medical personnel (EMS). The following paper will explore the meaning behind being a first responder and what it demands, both physically and emotionally.

First Responders, and medical assistance in general, was birthed out of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which was a humanitarian movement founded with the goal of 'protecting human life and health, ensuring respect for all human beings, and preventing and alleviating human suffering'. The infamous white flag with a bold red cross in the middle is one of the symbols that came out of the movement. The rank of First Responder was created as an intermediate position between that of someone trained in advanced first aid and that of official EMT personnel, i.e. a paramedic, doctor, or nurse.

As previously mentioned, First Responder training was founded in order to fill the gap between First Aid and EMT-Basic training. Intermediate training was

provided with the goal of helping the victim(s) till more advanced medical personnel could take over. First Responders are generally trained in securing the scene and providing basic medical assistance till other help arrives. Common necessary skills also include written or oral communication with distressed victims. The training differs, however, depending on which of the three job titles is in question.

Firefighters, the first category, must learn to not only drive fire trucks, but also be competent in using the accompanying equipment. Their training further centers heavily on fire management, and maintaining the subsequent safety of the victims as well as for themselves. Police Officers, the second type, focus on improving the quality of life for all citizens, which includes maintaining law and order, guarding the surrounding community and its members' property, and stopping crime. Lastly, there is Emergency Medical Service (EMS) training. Any public volunteer can choose to become EMS certified and will remain on call, catering to the emergency medical situation while the ambulance is on its way. EMS training calls for an associate's degree in emergency medicine or a related field.

When there is a medical emergency, First Responders are the first on scene. The central focus of a First Responder is to promote safety for all. When arriving at the scene, a First Responders' primary duty is to establish authority and evacuate and secure the perimeter of any unwanted bi-standers. Other responsibilities depend on the nature and training of their job. So for example, while firefighters deal with fires and subsequent damage, police officers restore order to the surrounding area. Furthermore, emergency medical services (EMS) attend to cases needing immediate medical care until the paramedics arrive on scene.

Once an accident scene is cleared and the emergency personnel go home to their beds, is the day's trauma actually over? In the world of First Responders, the exposure to death, emotional stress, and encounters with patients with severe diseases and illnesses are predicted. Often times professional help is sought for those on both ends of accident trauma, especially after extreme situations. Generally, for many, it sticks with them in their day-to-day life. Consequently, the line between home life and work becomes blurred. There are programs in existence that are designed to help First Responders personally deal with emotionally taxing situations. Such programs not only target training for First Responders to optimally assist the stressors in their time of need, but also aid in the incorporation of work stress and life.

Getting a Closer Look

Interviews with First Responders allow for a more personal look on the job life. I found it very interesting to immerse myself into the minds of two first responders, one a police officer and the other an EMS personnel, and see the real life repercussions of the job. The first interview was conducted on a police officer and is as follows:

Ring, ring, ring

A gruff male voice drifted into my ear. "Hello, this is Officer H." Proper greetings were exchanged as I settled in for our discussion. Before I begin, however, I'd like to say that I have been obsessed with reading crime and police novels since forever ago. Through the books, I imagined myself as a homicide detective or serial killer profiler in a high-crime urban area. Needless to say, I was really excited to explore the action packed life of a police officer

through this interview. **"So, I guess I'll start by asking what sparked your interest in the police force?"**

Officer H: "I'd have to say that as a young boy I was often around the influence of my dad and granpa who were both police officers. I guess you can say its always been in the family. I've also always found it a passion of mine to make some kind of positive impact on someone's life." Noble, I thought. I proceeded to ask next question.

"Ok, what is your typical job routine throughout the day?"

Officer H: "A typical day... well, let's just say that as your day is ending, I'm just barely waking up to get ready and start mine. I usually have the twelve-hour graveyard shift starting at nine. It starts off with me patrolling the streets, and checking around businesses and neighborhoods while looking for any suspicious activity. To tell the truth, you can never predict what will happen each night. During my rounds, I also answer any service calls directed over the radio about things from personal theft to car accidents to dealing with curfew violations. The job also requires a lot of paper work and writing reports."

I'm not going to lie, after hearing about the dreaded graveyard shift, I was a bit put off from the whole detective thing. While these thoughts drifted through my head I went on to ask the next question, **"When you arrive on the scene of an accident, what is your first and number one priority?"**

Officer H: "There's usually more than one officer at the scene of an accident working together to make sure it's safe. Some of us start by fencing off the perimeter and breaking up any unwanted bystanders, while the rest administer to any medical emergencies till an ambulance or fire truck arrives on scene."

"Does the site of blood or injury bother you?"

Officer H: "At first it did, but after awhile you see enough to get used to it. It's just one of the things that comes along with the job." Check. I could handle that.

With his answer in mind I asked, **"Do you find it difficult to separate your life from work after experiencing critical accidents?"**

Officer H: “Yes and no. The sight of a victim’s mourning family or of a serious injury really follows you after your shift ends. Normally though, doing the paper work coupled with the drive home soothes some of the lingering stress from the high-tension environment at the accident site.”

It must be a different world to constantly live in stressful environment. Through his answer I really respected his psychological and physical sacrifice for his community. I moved on to ask my last question, **”How do you deal with stresses of the job?”**

Officer H: “The most important thing is to not dwell on past cases since they are very stress inducing. Also taking on the emotional burden of the victim’s families and friends is very taxing so I try to keep a work perspective in mind and not take it personally.”

Interview concluded.

From the interview I not only concluded that the life of a police officer is not for me, but I also gained a genuine high esteem for all the existing officers in the line of duty. The second interview was conducted over email with an EMS personnel and, coupled with my thoughts, is as follows:

Hello,

1. What made you interested in becoming a EMS first responder?

I always knew that I wanted to work in the medical field, but not as a doctor or anything like that. It was when I was a senior in high school and I went to this job fair my school was having that I first got interested in EMS-Basic training. I am a volunteer EMS member which means that I am always on call for the local medical and law enforcement centers.

2. Would you tell me your typical job routine throughout the day?

I'm typically responding to calls all day regarding a variety of medical emergencies such as car accidents, street and domestic violence calls, and fires. As a medical personnel I typically tend to victims safety, making sure they are stabilized till the ambulance arrives.

3. What is your first and number one priority when arriving on scene?

Usually by the time I arrive on scene there are other first responders there like fire fighters or police. But I help to secure the accident and tend to any of the victims. When the ambulance arrives, I'm not necessarily relieved of my duties so I go and help out wherever I'm needed.

4. Does the site of blood or injury bother you?

I've never been that squeamish when it comes to blood. I think it might have been all the zombie and war video games I played when I was younger.

5. How do you deal with the stresses of the job?

It takes a toll on anyone to witness the amount of accidents you do when you're a first responder. You sometimes have to take it at face value so it doesn't get too much to you.

I hope my answers helped!

Interview concluded.

Even though this second interview was much more formal and to the point, I was still able to get a better grasp from both interviews of what being a First Responder means and where I stand on the subject.

Conclusion

My choice in topic originated from my interest in the impact of critical accidents on the medical personnel who cater to the frantic scene. Many focus on the victim's trauma, but what about that of the people administering the care? As an outsider, I identified myself one of the many who does not fully understand or respect the importance of First Responders, and decided to devote my Autoethnography to educating myself and the public. It was interesting to look through the eyes of a First Responder and see their side of the story and its repercussions. Furthermore, the

necessity for First Responders has been exemplified time and again through grand scale tragedies, such as 9/11, the Boston bombings, the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting, and the Colorado Theater Shooting. In conclusion, it takes more than just training to be a First Responder. It takes bravery and general selflessness that I have come to fully respect throughout this project.