

Empowering Women in Emergency Response: Knowing the Capacity and Advancement of Female Firefighting Crew

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Abstract: The study focused on the ability, empowerment, institutional assistance, and professional capabilities of female firefighters assigned and working in the La Trinidad Fire Station in La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines. The study was conducted due to the increased need for gender perspective in the field of emergency response services, especially considering that firefighting agencies have been considered bastions of masculinity. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach that centered on understanding the experiences of female firefighters regarding their work in emergency operations, preparedness, institutional support, and difficulties faced at work. Data collection involved the use of semi-structured interviews for 8 female firefighters, 6 female firefighters for focus group discussion, and documentary analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted using themes emerging from the narratives informed by the empowerment theory and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Results indicated that the female firefighters played multiple roles including provision of emergency medical care, logistics, documentation, and engaging the community. Although the female firefighters had high motivation and competency, the experiences of empowerment were tied to their involvement in decision making, recognition of their contributions, and development of skills. It was concluded from the study that enhancing the capacity of the emergency management organizations to be gender-sensitive not only involved having more women in the ranks, but equally important was their equal access to training and opportunities within the organization. It was necessary to ensure that inclusive policies were maintained within the fire stations.

Keywords: Empowerment, Emergency response, Female firefighters, Gender responsiveness, Workplace gender dynamics.

1. Introduction

The participation of women in emergency response services, particularly in firefighting, has steadily grown over the past few decades, challenging long-standing gender norms in one of the most male-dominated professions worldwide (International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services, 2024). Historically, firefighting was perceived primarily as a physically demanding and high-risk occupation that necessitated a workforce composed almost entirely of men (Hollerbach et al., 2017). While this perception has gradually evolved, the integration of women into fire service

organizations remains constrained by social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence their capacity, empowerment, and career advancement. In the Philippine context, the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) has made strides toward gender inclusivity by increasing the recruitment of female firefighters; however, gender disparities in training opportunities, leadership roles, and workplace culture persist (Velasco & Barlaan, 2024).

The La Trinidad Fire Station in La Trinidad, Benguet, serves as a microcosm of these broader gender dynamics within the Philippine fire service. The station operates under the mandate of the BFP to ensure fire safety, respond to emergencies, and engage in community disaster preparedness (La Trinidad Government, 2015). In fulfilling these responsibilities, female firefighters play crucial roles not only in direct emergency response but also in public education, prevention programs, and support operations. Despite these contributions, the recognition of their professional capabilities often competes with ingrained gender biases and institutional limitations that may hinder their full potential (Gaillard et al., 2017). This raises important questions about whether female firefighters in such local contexts feel adequately trained, empowered, and supported to perform their duties effectively.

Research has demonstrated that the inclusion of women in emergency response teams contributes to improved service delivery and community relations. Female firefighters often bring valuable perspectives in crisis management, community engagement, and public health outreach, particularly in culturally diverse or gender-sensitive contexts (Lee et al., 2022). In the Philippines, where disaster risk reduction and management is an integrated function across various public agencies, female participation in the firefighting service aligns with the principles of the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710), which mandates equal opportunities for women in all fields of public service (Philippine Commission on Women, 2009). Yet, despite these legislative frameworks, workplace realities can differ significantly from policy ideals, with gaps in mentorship, promotion pathways, and recognition of gender-specific needs in the field (Gaillard et al., 2017).

At the operational level, female firefighters in the Philippines

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face challenges that intersect both gender and occupational hazards. These include limited access to gender-appropriate equipment, inadequate facilities for privacy and hygiene, underrepresentation in advanced tactical training, and perceptions of physical inadequacy compared to male peers. Such factors can diminish morale, reduce retention rates, and potentially affect performance during critical incidents. Furthermore, societal expectations of women—particularly in rural and semi-urban regions—may place additional burdens on female firefighters, who often balance professional responsibilities with domestic roles (Velasco & Barlaan, 2024).

The La Trinidad Fire Station operates in a geographic and socio-cultural environment that makes this inquiry particularly relevant. Benguet is a mountainous province prone to natural hazards such as landslides, flooding, and wildfires, necessitating a well-trained and responsive firefighting force (La Trinidad, 2020). In this high-risk context, the capacity of female firefighters is not merely a matter of representation but of operational necessity. Understanding how these women perceive their readiness, empowerment, and access to career advancement opportunities can inform targeted interventions that strengthen the station's overall effectiveness.

The concept of empowerment in public administration encompasses both individual and institutional dimensions. Individually, empowerment refers to the perception of self-efficacy, autonomy, and confidence in carrying out assigned duties (Modise, 2023). Institutionally, it involves creating organizational structures, policies, and cultures that support equitable participation, career growth, and leadership development (World Bank, 2012). In the context of firefighting, empowerment translates into providing equal access to training, ensuring non-discriminatory task assignments, and fostering inclusive leadership practices (Garrick et al., 2024). Evaluating these factors among female firefighters in La Trinidad can yield actionable insights for policy and practice within the BFP and similar agencies.

Given the Philippine government's commitment to gender and development (GAD) principles, as enshrined in Executive Order No. 273 and further operationalized through agency-specific GAD plans, public institutions like the BFP are required to integrate gender-responsive measures into their operations. However, compliance often focuses on numerical representation rather than substantive equality in opportunities, training, and career progression. Thus, a study centered on the female firefighting crew in La Trinidad Fire Station can help assess whether these policy commitments translate into tangible empowerment outcomes on the ground.

This research is particularly significant for public administration because it bridges the gap between gender equity policies and frontline service delivery in high-stakes emergency contexts. By examining the roles, competencies, institutional support systems, and challenges faced by female firefighters, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gender empowerment within the firefighting service. The qualitative approach, using surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs), will capture the depth and complexity of these experiences, allowing for recommendations that are

contextually grounded and operationally feasible.

In summary, while global and national trends indicate progress in the inclusion of women in firefighting, significant challenges remain particularly at the local station level, where resource limitations, cultural norms, and organizational practices intersect to shape the experiences of female personnel. The La Trinidad Fire Station, as a focal point for this study, offers a valuable setting to explore how these dynamics play out in a specific Philippine municipality. Insights from this research can inform both policy formulation at the BFP level and broader public administration strategies aimed at achieving gender-responsive emergency services.

A. Theoretical Framework

This study is framed primarily by Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000) with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) acting as a complementary, supporting theory. Together these theoretical lenses provide both a normative and an explanatory scaffold for understanding how female firefighters at La Trinidad Fire Station experience, develop, and are constrained in their capacity, empowerment, and career advancement. Empowerment Theory centers the study on agency, resources, and behavior at multiple levels of analysis (individual, organizational, community), while the JD-R model explains how occupational demands and institutional resources interact to shape well-being, engagement, and performance in high-risk occupations such as firefighting. These theories therefore allow the researcher to interpret participants' narratives about competence, institutional support, barriers, and advancement in a way that is both practically actionable and theoretically rigorous (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000; Demerouti et al., 2001).

1) Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) conceptualizes empowerment not as a single trait but as a multilevel process and outcome that operates at psychological (intrapersonal), interactional (cognitive-relational), and behavioral levels. The intrapersonal component refers to an individual's beliefs about their competence, self-efficacy, perceived control, and leadership potential; the interactional component refers to the ways individuals make sense of and access the resources, supports, and power structures that affect outcomes; and the behavioral component refers to concrete actions taken to influence outcomes (participation, advocacy, leadership) (Zimmerman, 2000). This multi-dimensional framing is particularly useful for studying female firefighters because it simultaneously highlights (a) how women perceive their own preparedness and agency during emergency operations, (b) how institutional policies, training, PPE, and mentorship shape access to enabling resources, and (c) how observable career behaviors (seeking promotion, taking leadership in incidents, participating in training) reflect levels of empowerment. Foundational formulations of empowerment thus provide an a priori schema to code and interpret qualitative data (interviews and FGDs) in terms of beliefs, resources, and actions precisely the domains of interest in the research questions.

Recent empirical literature supports applying Empowerment

Theory to public-facing, male-dominated safety professions. Studies in the fire service have shown that leadership practices and empowerment interventions can improve adaptive performance and create opportunities for employees to improvise and lead effectively during complex incidents (Huntsman et al., 2022). At the same time, systematic reviews of empowerment interventions show that capacity-building, life-skills training, and institutionally supported programs improve women's access to resources and agency although persistent gender norms and structural constraints limit ripple effects unless those norms are explicitly addressed (Lwamba et al., 2022). In the firefighting context, empirical work documents concrete interactional barriers poorly fitting personal protective equipment (PPE), training gaps, and limited female-tailored occupational health guidance that constrain women's safety, mobility, and confidence; those constraints are interactional (resource) problems that map directly onto Zimmerman's second component (McQuerry et al., 2023; U.S. Fire Administration, 2019). Together, these recent studies justify using Empowerment Theory as the main interpretive frame for examining perceptions of competence, institutional supports, and career advancement among female firefighting personnel in La Trinidad.

2) *Job Demands-Resources Model*

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) complements Empowerment Theory by offering a parsimonious explanation of how organizational factors relate to well-being and performance. The JD-R model classifies workplace characteristics into job demands (physical, emotional, cognitive aspects of work that require sustained effort; e.g., exposure to heat, heavy workloads, traumatic scenes) and job resources (supports, training, autonomy, adequate PPE, mentoring). According to the model, excessive demands increase strain and exhaustion while resources foster work engagement, buffering the harmful effects of demands; resources can also catalyze motivation and adaptive behaviors (Demerouti et al., 2001). Applied to firefighting, the JD-R model helps explain why institutional investments—targeted training, well-fitting PPE, mentoring, and empowerment-oriented leadership—can reduce exhaustion and enhance the motivational processes that underlie career advancement and adaptive performance. Empirical JD-R research with firefighters confirms these mechanisms: work meaning and resources moderate the relationship between demands and exhaustion; job crafting and resource acquisition predict engagement and performance (Roşca et al., 2021; Dan et al., 2020). Thus, while Empowerment Theory explains the *who* (agency, beliefs, actions) and *what* (resources and behavioral expression), the JD-R model explains *how* demands and resources dynamically produce outcomes relevant to empowerment (exhaustion, engagement, performance).

Synthesis of Empowerment Theory and the JD-R model produces a working conceptualization that is analytically useful for the study's qualitative methods: female firefighters' intrapersonal empowerment (perceived competence, confidence to perform emergency tasks) is expected to be shaped by both interactional empowerment (access to training,

female-appropriate PPE, mentoring, inclusive policies) and job resources (organizational support, autonomy, leadership). Simultaneously, job demands (physical strain, exposure, shift patterns, gendered harassment) can weaken intrapersonal empowerment and behavioral enactment of leadership unless buffered by interactional resources. Empirical evidence from firefighting populations corroborates this combined logic: meaningful work and resource support attenuate the positive relationship between demands and exhaustion and strengthen engagement and adaptive performance (Roşca et al., 2021; Dan et al., 2020), while empowerment-oriented leadership at multiple levels enables improvisation and adaptive response under uncertainty (Huntsman et al., 2022). Furthermore, gender-specific research shows concrete institutional deficits (ill-fitting PPE, lack of female-targeted health guidance, tokenism, harassment) that occupy the interactional space in which empowerment is gained or lost (McQuerry et al., 2023; Lopes et al., 2024; U.S. Fire Administration, 2019). These combined findings justify an analytic strategy that treats empowerment as both an outcome and a mediator shaped by organizational resources and demands.

Practically, the theoretical synthesis informs (1) how interview and FGD protocols are structured (questions probing intrapersonal beliefs, access to resources/policies, concrete behaviors and opportunities for leadership), (2) how coding categories are constructed (intrapersonal, interactional/resource, behavioral, job demands, outcomes such as engagement/exhaustion), and (3) how recommendations will be generated (resource-focused, norm-changing, leadership-development interventions). For example, research questions about perceived competence and preparedness map directly to intrapersonal empowerment constructs; questions about institutional support and training map to interactional empowerment and job resources; and questions about barriers (including gender-based discrimination and tokenism) map to the JD-R demand side and to structural theories of tokenism that many recent qualitative studies report (Lopes et al., 2024). Using Empowerment Theory together with JD-R therefore produces a coherent interpretive logic for analyzing female firefighters' narratives in La Trinidad and for deriving gender-responsive, evidence-based recommendations (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000; Demerouti et al., 2001; Roşca et al., 2021; Huntsman et al., 2022).

Based on the theoretical synthesis and recent empirical work, the study will use the following testable propositions as analytic sensibilities (not quantitative hypotheses): (1) higher levels of interactional empowerment (access to tailored training, PPE, mentoring, and inclusive policies) will be associated with higher intrapersonal empowerment (perceived competence, preparedness) and greater behavioral enactment (leadership, advancement); (2) higher job demands and experiences of gendered barriers (tokenism, harassment, ill-fitting PPE) will be associated with reduced perceived empowerment and career progression unless buffered by job resources; and (3) empowerment practices enacted at multiple leadership levels (immediate supervisors and senior leaders) will amplify adaptive performance and mitigate the negative effects of

bureaucratic constraints. These propositions are anchored in Zimmerman's multidimensional empowerment construct and in the JD-R model's demand/resource dynamics and are supported by contemporary evidence in the firefighting literature (Huntsman et al., 2022; Roşca et al., 2021; Dan et al., 2020; McQuerry et al., 2023).

Using Empowerment Theory as the primary theoretical lens, complemented by the JD-R model, provides a robust and policy-relevant framework for interpreting qualitative data about female firefighters' roles, perceptions of competence, institutional supports, and career advancement at La Trinidad Fire Station. This dual-theory approach foregrounds agency and resources while sensitizing analysis to the occupational demands and structural constraints unique to emergency response work, enabling the researcher to produce findings and recommendations that are both theoretically grounded and practically actionable.

B. Schematic Illustration of the Study

The current study is structured according to the Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework, delineating the logical progression of the research. The paradigm emphasizes the necessity of collecting and analyzing essential data to generate significant results and recommendations that enhance the empowerment of women in emergency response services.

The Input stage of the paradigm identifies the essential components required to address the research inquiries. This includes information about the female firefighters who work at the La Trinidad Fire Station, such as their age, rank, years of service, and level of education. Also, their roles and duties in emergency response operations are looked at to see how they help with disaster preparedness and firefighting. The inputs also include how capable, ready, and empowered they feel to do their jobs, as well as institutional support systems like training opportunities, policies that encourage diversity, leadership roles, and chances for career growth. The challenges and barriers they face are equally significant, especially those arising from gender, organizational culture, and structural inequalities within a male-dominated field. When put together, these inputs make up the basis for measuring both the individual and institutional levels of capacity and progress.

The Process component denotes the methodical strategies employed to convert these inputs into data that can be analyzed and interpreted. A qualitative research design is utilized, incorporating semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with female firefighters to attain a more profound understanding of their lived experiences. Institutional documents, training records, and policy guidelines will be examined to enhance the collected narratives. After that, the data will be looked at thematically to find groups, patterns, and themes that show how empowerment, institutional support, and professional challenges work. Triangulation and validation techniques are used to compare data from different participants and sources to make the results more reliable and trustworthy. This process makes sure that the views of female firefighters are accurately reflected and that they fit into the larger practices of the organization.

The Output of the paradigm is what the research is trying to find out. These include a full understanding of the responsibilities, duties, and working conditions of female firefighters at La Trinidad Fire Station. The study aims to elucidate their perceived competence and empowerment, alongside the accessibility and efficacy of institutional support systems that enhance their capabilities and progression. It will also show the problems and challenges that make it hard for them to grow and help with emergency response services. The study will propose evidence-based methods to develop gender-responsive strategies, enhance organizational inclusivity, and increase professional advancement opportunities for women in firefighting.

Lastly, the paradigm has a way for people to give feedback to show how important the study is in real life. The La Trinidad Fire Station and other relevant agencies will get the research results and suggestions so they can look over, improve, and strengthen their rules and procedures. This feedback process makes sure that the study not only adds to academic discussions, but also directly helps with changes in institutions that give women more power in emergency response services.

The IPO paradigm is the main idea behind this study. The paradigm makes sure that the study's goals, methods, and expected contributions are all in line with each other by putting the research into three groups: inputs, processes, and outputs. It emphasizes the primary objective of the research, which is to assess and enhance the skills, empowerment, and career progression of female firefighters. This helps the bigger goal of making organizations that deal with public safety and disasters more open and aware of gender issues.

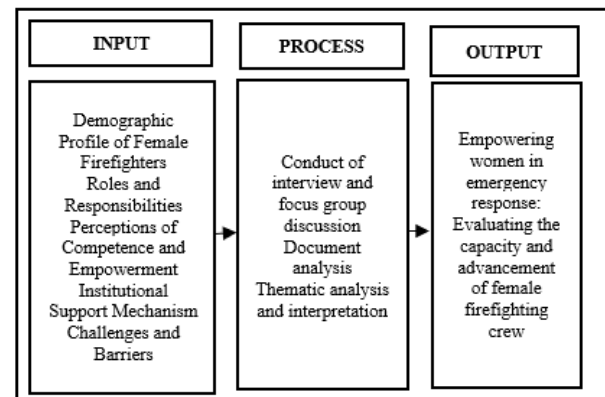


Fig. 1. Schematic Illustration of the Study

C. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses the need for gender inclusivity and empowerment within emergency response professions, particularly in firefighting, a field traditionally dominated by men. By focusing on the experiences and capacities of female firefighters, the research contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for equitable opportunities and representation in public safety institutions. The findings will provide practical, evidence-based recommendations for targeted interventions that promote professional growth, operational efficiency, and gender

sensitivity in emergency services. Presented below are the specific beneficiaries of this study and how each may benefit from its results.

Female firefighters of La Trinidad Fire Station. As the primary focus of this research, the female firefighting crew will benefit directly from the study's assessment of their professional capacity, challenges, and opportunities for advancement. The findings will allow them to better understand their strengths, address skill gaps, and confidently advocate for equitable access to resources such as training, leadership opportunities, and equipment. By amplifying their voices, the study empowers them to take active roles in shaping a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Fire Marshal and administrative officer of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in La Trinidad. The results will equip station leaders and administrators with research-based insights on how to effectively support their female personnel. These insights can inform gender-responsive policies, specialized training programs, and leadership development initiatives. By addressing both operational and gender-related challenges, BFP leaders can strengthen team cohesion, optimize performance, and foster a workplace culture that values diversity and equity.

Public administrators and policymakers at the provincial and regional levels. This study will provide empirical data on the role and performance of women in emergency response, serving as a valuable reference for program planning, budget allocation, and legislative measures aimed at promoting gender equality in uniformed services. In the Cordillera Administrative Region, where cultural norms may influence occupational participation, these findings can support the integration of gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction strategies and governance frameworks (Republic Act No. 9710, Magna Carta of Women, 2009).

Local community of La Trinidad. Residents will benefit indirectly from a more empowered, skilled, and well-supported firefighting team. Enhanced capacity and inclusivity among firefighters can result in faster, more effective emergency responses, ultimately improving public safety, reducing property losses, and building trust between the community and its first responders.

The nation. At the national level, this study's findings can contribute to discussions and reforms that strengthen gender mainstreaming in emergency response agencies. Insights from this research may inform nationwide training programs, policy enhancements, and diversity initiatives within the Bureau of Fire Protection and other uniformed services, aligning with the Philippine Development Plan's objectives on gender equality and disaster resilience (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2023).

The researcher. The conduct of this study will provide the researcher with valuable hands-on experience in qualitative public administration research, particularly in applying gender perspectives to institutional analysis. Engaging directly with the female firefighting crew through surveys and focus group discussions will deepen the researcher's knowledge of participatory approaches and policy-oriented research methods.

D. Statement of the Problem

The role of women in emergency response services, particularly in firefighting, has gradually evolved in recent years. However, despite growing inclusion, female firefighters often continue to face various challenges related to institutional support, capacity building, and career advancement within male-dominated structures. In the context of La Trinidad Fire Station in La Trinidad, Benguet, there is a need to explore how empowered and equipped female personnel feel in fulfilling their roles during emergency response operations. As a frontline institution in disaster preparedness and response, understanding the experiences and perceptions of female firefighters is essential for fostering inclusivity and gender-responsive strategies in public administration.

This study seeks to qualitatively evaluate the capacity, empowerment, and advancement of the female firefighting crew in La Trinidad Fire Station. It also aims to explore institutional support mechanisms and identify existing barriers and enabling factors that affect their professional growth and performance in emergency situations.

To address these gaps, the study is guided by the following specific research questions:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of female firefighters at La Trinidad Fire Station in emergency response operations?
2. What are the lived experiences of female firefighters regarding competence, preparedness, and empowerment in carrying out emergency duties?
3. What institutional support systems (e.g., training, policies, leadership opportunities) are available to promote the capacity and advancement of female firefighting personnel?
4. What challenges and barriers do female firefighters encounter in the course of their profession, particularly in relation to gender?
5. What recommendations can be drawn from the experiences and insights of female firefighters to improve gender responsiveness and empowerment in emergency response services?

2. Methodology

This section presents the research design, population and locale of the study, data gathering tools, data gathering procedure, treatment of the data and ethical considerations.

A. Research Design

This study adopted a purely qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences, capacities, empowerment, and career advancement of the female firefighting crew at the La Trinidad Fire Station, La Trinidad, Benguet. A qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this inquiry because it seeks to understand participants' perceptions, meanings, and social realities as constructed within their professional environment. The gendered nature of firefighting, workplace dynamics, and institutional culture were complex social phenomena that require in-depth exploration through rich, contextualized narratives rather than numerical measurement.

(Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach that aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the participants' experiences. It focused on portraying their operational roles and responsibilities, perceived competence, preparedness for emergency response, and access to training and equipment. Emphasis was placed on capturing their perspectives in their own words in order to faithfully represent their realities. The research also examined their experiences related to career progression, including promotion processes, assignment to specialized roles, leadership opportunities, and perceived pathways for advancement within the organization.

Central to this design was the exploration of how participants understand and describe empowerment and capacity development within their workplace. The study sought to uncover how female firefighters experience inclusion, support, challenges, and professional growth in a traditionally male-dominated field. It attended to organizational factors such as mentorship practices, availability of resources, institutional policies, and workplace culture as experienced and narrated by the participants themselves (Zimmerman, 1995; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). The goal was not to measure or evaluate these elements against fixed criteria, but to understand how they are perceived and lived in everyday practice.

To accomplish the objectives of this qualitative design, data were gathered through multiple qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection strategy, allowing participants to share in-depth personal narratives and reflections. Focus group discussions complemented individual interviews by fostering collective dialogue, surfacing shared experiences, and highlighting differences in perspectives. In addition, relevant institutional documents such as policy guidelines, training records, and related materials were reviewed to provide contextual background and deepen understanding of the setting in which the participants operate. The use of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The choice of a qualitative descriptive design was justified by its suitability for examining complex human experiences in their natural context (Patton, 2015). It enabled the study to foreground the voices of female firefighters while situating their narratives within the broader organizational environment. Through this approach, the research captured both individual and shared meanings, offering a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of women's experiences in emergency response services.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by the study's theoretical framework, which incorporates Empowerment Theory and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model. The analysis involved familiarization with the data, systematic coding, categorization of significant statements, and the development of themes that reflect recurring patterns across participants' narratives. Themes derived inductively from the data while being sensitized by relevant theoretical concepts, ensuring that findings remain grounded in participants' lived experiences.

In sum, the selected qualitative research design was well-suited to uncovering and describing the lived realities of female firefighters. By prioritizing depth, context, and participant voice, the study generated findings that illuminate the meanings, challenges, and opportunities that shape women's professional experiences in the field of emergency response.

B. Population and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at the La Trinidad Fire Station, located in the municipality of La Trinidad, Benguet, in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) of the Philippines. Known as the provincial capital of Benguet, La Trinidad is a first-class municipality that serves as an economic and administrative hub for the surrounding highland communities. The area is recognized for its agricultural productivity, tourism activities, and expanding urban developments. It also has unique topographical and environmental conditions, being surrounded by mountainous terrain and prone to climate-induced hazards such as landslides, typhoons, and occasional structural fires.

The La Trinidad Fire Station operates under the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), a national agency mandated to prevent and suppress destructive fires, enforce fire safety laws, and provide emergency medical services. The station is strategically positioned to serve a densely populated urban core and surrounding barangays, which include both residential and commercial establishments. As a frontline public safety institution, the station's personnel are regularly exposed to high-pressure situations that require physical resilience, technical skills, and emotional stability.

In recent years, the station has integrated more women into its firefighting force, reflecting the BFP's broader gender inclusivity policies. However, given the demanding nature of the job—requiring strength, rapid decision-making, and exposure to life-threatening risks—the capacity and advancement of female firefighters in such a localized setting remain underexplored. La Trinidad's diverse population, combined with its environmental hazards and the station's growing female workforce, makes it an ideal locale to investigate how women navigate the operational, cultural, and institutional challenges of emergency response.

The respondents of this study consisted exclusively of female members of the firefighting crew assigned to the La Trinidad Fire Station. These individuals include both rank-and-file firefighters and officers who are directly involved in core operational duties such as fire suppression, rescue operations, disaster response, and community fire prevention education. Focusing on female personnel allowed the study to capture gender-specific experiences, challenges, and professional growth trajectories within the firefighting profession—an area where women remain underrepresented.

The total number of female firefighters in the La Trinidad Fire Station, based on initial coordination with the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), was relatively small compared to their male counterparts. The study had 14 respondents who actively participated. Given this manageable population size, the study employed a total population sampling approach. This method

was particularly recommended when the entire population is small, and it is vital to gather data from every member to ensure that all perspectives are represented (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Each respondent's contribution was considered valuable in presenting a comprehensive understanding of the capacity, performance, and advancement of female firefighters in the station.

1) Inclusion Criteria

The respondents included in the study were officially employed as uniformed firefighting personnel assigned to the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) La Trinidad Fire Station. They had rendered at least six (6) months of continuous service and had been previously or actively designated to operational duties, including fire suppression, rescue operations, emergency medical services, or other emergency response activities. These criteria ensured that all participants had sufficient operational experience and firsthand knowledge relevant to the study.

2) Exclusion Criteria

Excluded from the study were civilian employees and uniformed personnel who had no experience in operational or emergency response activities. Likewise, female firefighters who were on extended leave during the data collection period or were assigned exclusively to administrative functions without operational field experience were not included, as they could not provide firsthand accounts of emergency response operations. These exclusion criteria were applied uniformly to all prospective participants to maintain consistency in participant selection and ensure that the data reflected the experiences of personnel actively engaged in emergency response duties.

The demographic profile and professional characteristics of the respondents were considered in order to help provide a background for the stories that the female firefighters at the La Trinidad Fire Station shared. This includes their rank, assignment classification, age, civil status, educational background, length of service, and background in terms of training. This provides a way for the study to place the stories that the participants shared in relation to their roles in the Bureau of Fire Protection.

Table 1
Distribution of the respondents according to rank

Rank	Frequency	Percentage
Fire Officer 1 (FO1)	6	42.86%
Fire Officer 2 (FO2)	3	21.43%
Fire Officer 3 (FO3)	3	21.43%
Senior Fire Officer 2 (SFO2)	1	7.14%
Senior Fire Officer 4 (SFO4)	1	7.14%
Total	14	100%

Table 1 shows the number of respondents based on their rank. The results showed that the majority of the respondents belong to the rank of Fire Officer 1 (FO1), totaling 42.86% or 6 respondents. The second rank is Fire Officer 2 (FO2) and Fire Officer 3 (FO3), each totaling 21.43% or 3 respondents each. The least number of respondents is found in the ranks of Senior Fire Officer 2 (7.14% or 1 respondent) and Senior Fire Officer 4 (7.14% or 1 respondent). The results showed that the majority

of the female firefighters at the La Trinidad Fire Station are at the early to mid-level ranks, reflecting the recent but increasing participation of women in the profession. However, the presence of senior-ranking female officers also reflects the fact that women are gradually taking up leadership positions in the Bureau of Fire Protection.

Table 2
Profile of the respondents in terms of their assignment

Assignment	Frequency	Percentage
Administrative	2	14.29%
Operational	12	85.71%
Total	14	100%

Table 2 shows a summary of how many respondents are distributed based on their assigned class. Most of the respondents, 12 female firefighters or 85.71%, are assigned to operational class, which includes active participation in emergency response activities such as fire suppression, rescue operations, emergency medical services, and community response activities. On the other hand, 2 respondents or 14.29% are assigned to the administrative class, which includes activities related to personnel management, training coordination, financial management, and community education. However, both had previous operational designation and had experience on emergency response. This shows that most of the female firefighters in the fire station are actively involved in operations, implying their active involvement in emergency response services.

Table 3
Profile of the respondents in terms of their age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
26–30 years old	4	28.57%
31–35 years old	5	35.71%
36–40 years old	2	14.29%
41–45 years old	2	14.29%
51–55 years old	1	7.14%
Total	14	100%

As shown in Table 3 above, the distribution of the respondents according to their age is presented. From the findings, the largest number of respondents is found among the age bracket of 31–35 years old. From the findings, most of the female firefighters in the station are found to be under the young to middle adulthood stage. This stage is usually characterized by an individual's active involvement in a physically demanding job such as firefighting.

Table 4
Profile of the respondents in terms of their civil status

Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	7	50%
Married	6	42.86%
Widowed	1	7.14%
Total	14	100%

Table 4 presents the civil status of the respondents. The data reveal that 7 respondents or 50% are single, while 6 respondents or 42.86% are married. Furthermore, one respondent or 7.14% is widowed. The data reveal that the female firefighters in the

station have different family backgrounds and personal circumstances. The difference in their backgrounds and circumstances can affect how these women balance their professional and personal/family life, especially considering the nature of their job.

Table 5
Profile of the respondents in terms of their years in service

Years in Service	Frequency	Percentage
1–5 years	3	21.43%
6–10 years	7	50%
11–15 years	2	14.29%
16–20 years	1	7.14%
21–30 years	1	7.14%
Total	14	100%

On the other hand, Table 5 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the years of service in the Bureau of Fire Protection. The majority of the respondents are those who have been serving the organization for 6 to 10 years. There are a total of 7 respondents or 50% who are all female firefighters. On the other hand, there are 3 respondents or 21.43% who have been serving the organization for 1 to 5 years. This shows that they are relatively new members of the organization. There are also 2 respondents or 14.29% who have been serving the organization for 11 to 15 years. There are also 1 respondent each who have been serving the organization for 16 to 20 years and 21 to 30 years. This shows that there are experienced members of the organization.

Table 6 presents the profile of the respondents in terms of their educational background.

Table 6 presents the educational background of the respondents. The result revealed that respondents have different academic backgrounds, including criminology, education, nursing, business administration, hospitality and tourism management, nutrition and dietetics, and technology and livelihood education. The dominant degrees of respondents are Bachelor of Science in Criminology and Bachelor of Elementary Education, each shared by three respondents. The educational background of respondents is diverse, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of personnel recruited by the Bureau of Fire Protection. Despite their differences in academic discipline, all respondents are professionally eligible for service in the firefighting profession.

C. Data Gathering Tools

The primary research instruments for this qualitative study were a semi-structured interview guide and a focus group discussion (FGD) guide. These tools were designed to elicit in-

depth narratives from female firefighters at the La Trinidad Fire Station regarding their capacity, professional advancement, and challenges in the field of emergency response. Since the study was qualitative in nature, the instruments are flexible and allow for follow-up questions or probes whenever necessary, while still ensuring that all core areas of inquiry are addressed.

The first part of the instrument was the introduction and demographic context. This portion sought to establish rapport and gather relevant background information from the participants, such as their current role, length of service, and prior training or qualifications before joining the Bureau of Fire Protection. This section helped to provide context for interpreting the narratives shared in the subsequent parts.

The second part focused on exploring the experiences of female firefighters in emergency response situations. Participants were invited to narrate real-life incidents in which they have been actively involved, describing how they responded, what they encountered, and how they experienced those high-pressure scenarios. They were encouraged to share the skills, knowledge, and strengths they draw upon in carrying out their duties, as well as how they understand and interpret their roles within the team. This section sought to capture detailed accounts of their operational experiences and the meanings they attach to their participation in actual emergency operations.

The third part covered the professional advancement and opportunities. In this section, the guide prompted participants to share their experiences with career growth, additional training programs, and leadership roles. It examined whether they feel women have the same access to opportunities as men and the extent to which organizational structures support their advancement. Participants were encouraged to provide examples of promotions, training, or recognition they have received, as well as instances where they may have felt overlooked.

The fourth part delved into challenges, barriers, and recommendations for empowerment. This section aimed to uncover the difficulties faced by female firefighters, including gender-related barriers in operational duties or career progression. It also provided space for them to share suggestions for improving the empowerment and support of women in their field. Through this part, the study collected practical insights for policy and program development that could benefit female firefighters.

The development of the instrument was based on the statement of the problem, related literature, Bureau of Fire Protection policies, and expert consultations. To ensure content

Table 6
Profile of respondents in terms of educational background

Course	Frequency
Bachelor of Science in Criminology	3
Bachelor of Elementary Education	3
Bachelor of Science in Nursing	2
Bachelor of Secondary Education	1
Bachelor of Science in Home Economics	1
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration	1
Bachelor of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management	1
Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics	1
Bachelor of Science in Technology and Livelihood Education	1
Total	14

validity, the draft was reviewed by a panel composed of a senior BFP officer, a qualitative research academic, and a gender and development officer. Revisions were made to refine question clarity, cultural sensitivity, and alignment with research objectives.

The interviews were conducted individually in a private space within the fire station and lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes, while the FGD involved five to seven participants and lasted about one to one and a half hours. Both were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, supplemented by the researcher's field notes to capture non-verbal cues and relevant contextual observations. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to follow a conversational flow, enabling participants to narrate freely while guiding the discussion toward the themes relevant to the study.

D. Data Gathering Procedures

The data gathering process for this study followed a systematic and ethically sound approach to ensure that the information collected is accurate, credible, and relevant to the research objectives. As the study was qualitative in nature, the primary data will be obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews, complemented by documentary analysis of available reports and records from the La Trinidad Fire Station. The procedure was conducted in several sequential stages to maintain methodological rigor.

The process began with the preparation phase, during which the researcher secured formal approval from the La Trinidad Fire Station and obtained the necessary permits from local authorities. Letters of request were sent to the Fire Marshal, outlining the study's purpose, scope, and data collection methods. Ethical clearance was also sought from the appropriate institutional review board to ensure compliance with ethical research standards.

Following approval, the participant selection phase took place. Purposive sampling was employed to identify female members of the firefighting crew who meet the inclusion criteria—specifically, those with at least six months of active service in emergency response operations within the La Trinidad Fire Station. Potential participants were approached in person and via official communication channels, and the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical safeguards were clearly explained. Informed consent forms were distributed, ensuring that participants understand their rights, including the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Once participants confirmed, the data collection phase will commence. For the FGDs, participants were grouped into small clusters of four to six individuals to promote interactive discussion while ensuring manageability. The discussions were guided by an interview protocol based on the research questions, covering themes such as operational capacity, challenges faced in the field, and opportunities for career advancement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually for participants who cannot attend group sessions or who may provide richer insights in a one-on-one setting. All sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and

supplemented by field notes documenting non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

The documentary analysis was performed alongside the interviews and FGDs, focusing on existing records, reports, and training documentation relevant to female firefighters' performance and advancement opportunities. These materials provided a secondary layer of data to validate and enrich the findings from primary sources.

After data collection, the transcription and verification phase followed. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts (member checking) to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of their statements. Any clarifications or modifications requested by participants were incorporated into the final transcripts.

Finally, all gathered data were stored securely in password-protected digital files and locked physical storage. Only the researcher and authorized personnel had access to the data, ensuring confidentiality and integrity. The entire procedure was designed to maintain trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—principles that guided the analysis and interpretation of the data in subsequent stages of the research.

E. Treatment of Data

Consistent with the qualitative nature of this study, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method widely recognized for its capacity to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning within narrative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytic approach enabled the researcher to explore recurring ideas, shared meanings, and nuanced experiences drawn from the accounts of female firefighters at the La Trinidad Fire Station.

The analytic process began with data familiarization. The researcher repeatedly read and reviewed the verbatim transcripts of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, together with field notes and relevant documents. This immersive engagement allowed a deep and holistic understanding of participants' narratives. Through careful reading, initial insights, significant statements, and recurring experiences related to their professional roles, workplace environment, and career journeys began to surface organically (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

Following familiarization, the researcher proceeded with open coding. Meaningful segments of the text—such as phrases, sentences, or extended narratives—were highlighted and assigned descriptive codes that capture their essence. These codes remained closely grounded in participants' own words and expressions to preserve authenticity. Coding was inductive in nature, allowing patterns and concepts to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories.

After initial coding, related codes were clustered and organized into broader categories and themes through a systematic and iterative process. This stage involved examining similarities, differences, and relationships among codes across participants and data sources. Emerging themes reflected shared experiences, contextual influences, and significant aspects of participants' professional lives. The development of themes was involved in constant comparison, refinement, and

reorganization to ensure coherence and depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interpretation focused on understanding the meanings embedded within these themes. The researcher explored how participants narrate their experiences, how they describe challenges and opportunities, and how they construct meaning around their roles and identities within the firefighting profession. Documentary materials—such as institutional guidelines and training records were used to provide contextual background and enrich understanding of the organizational setting. The inclusion of multiple sources strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through triangulation (Denzin, 2017).

To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary thematic summaries to selected participants. This process allowed participants to affirm, clarify, or elaborate on the interpretations, ensuring that the analysis faithfully represents their perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, careful documentation of analytic decisions and reflective memoing were maintained throughout the process to support transparency and dependability.

The findings were presented in a narrative format organized around the emergent themes. Verbatim excerpts from participants were incorporated to vividly illustrate each theme and to foreground their voices. This thematic presentation ensured that the analysis remains deeply rooted in lived experience while offering a coherent and richly detailed account of the realities of female firefighters.

In sum, the treatment of data through thematic analysis—supported by systematic coding, triangulation, and member validation ensured a rigorous and contextually grounded interpretation that authentically captures the meanings and experiences shared by the participants.

F. Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to established ethical standards in the conduct of qualitative research to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Prior to the commencement of data collection, the research proposal submitted for review and approval by an accredited ethics review committee to guarantee compliance with ethical guidelines.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each prospective respondent was provided with an informed consent form that clearly states the purpose, objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and possible risks associated with the study. The form also explained the participants' right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any point without fear of penalty or negative consequences. Only those who have signed the informed consent form will be included in the interviews or focus group discussions.

Confidentiality was strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants' names and other personal identifiers do not appear in any transcripts, research notes, or published reports. Instead, codes or pseudonyms was assigned to ensure anonymity. All audio recordings, transcriptions, and field notes were securely stored in password-protected digital files

accessible only to the researcher. These records were retained for a period of one year after the completion of the study and will then be permanently deleted.

The researcher did also take into account the potential emotional sensitivity of certain questions, particularly those that address challenges, discrimination, or personal struggles in the workplace. Should any participant feel discomfort, they were given the option to pause, skip, or terminate the interview. Moreover, the researcher maintained a respectful and non-judgmental stance, creating a safe and supportive environment where participants can share their experiences freely.

The study was conducted in compliance with the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). By upholding these principles, the research aimed to protect participants from harm, ensure fairness in selection, and contribute valuable insights toward the empowerment of women in emergency response.

G. Reflexivity

The researcher recognized that her personal background and experiences had influenced the direction and interpretation of this study. Her interest in exploring the capacity and advancement of female firefighters in La Trinidad Fire Station was deeply rooted in her commitment to gender inclusivity in the Bureau.

Being aware of her position, she approached this research with both empathy and a critical eye. The researcher understood that her own beliefs about the capabilities of female firefighters could unintentionally shape the way she framed interview questions or interpreted participants' responses. To address this, she made a conscious effort to remain neutral during interviews, allowing the participants' authentic voices to guide the narrative of the research.

Throughout the data collection and analysis phases, the researcher set aside her personal opinions and beliefs to approach the data with an open mind. This process helped her not to influence the study and to prioritize the participants' perspective over her own.

Additionally, she engaged in discussions with peers and mentors to gain feedback on her interpretations and ensure that her findings were grounded in the data. By practicing reflexivity, she aimed to uphold integrity of this research and honor the stories and experiences shared by the female firefighters of La Trinidad Fire Station.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study on the capacity, empowerment, and professional advancement of the female firefighting crew at the La Trinidad Fire Station. The analysis is based on the data gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and supporting documentary materials. Using thematic analysis, the participants' narratives were carefully examined to identify recurring patterns, shared experiences, and significant insights related to their roles, professional competencies, institutional

support, and challenges encountered in the firefighting profession.

A. Roles and Responsibilities of Female Firefighters in Emergency Response Operations

This section is based on the findings regarding the role and responsibility performed by the female firefighters at La Trinidad Fire Station in relation to emergency response operations. The discussion is based on the degree of their participation in emergency response activities such as fire suppression activities, rescue activities, disaster response activities, fire prevention activities, etc. The role of the participants is also highlighted regarding their day-to-day activities to understand their contribution to the emergency response activities of the fire station. The role performed by the female firefighters is better understood based on the discussion presented by them.

Table 7 presents the emerged themes with regards to the roles and responsibilities of female firefighters in emergency response operations.

The thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four interconnected themes describing the roles and responsibilities of female firefighters in emergency response operations: (1) Emergency Medical Services Participation, (2) Operational Support During Fire Incidents, (3) Documentation and Communication Duties, and (4) Community Relations and Public Information Roles. These themes emerged through repeated coding of participants' narratives, where similar experiences regarding operational assignments, emergency medical services, documentation responsibilities, and community engagement were clustered into broader thematic categories.

The first theme, Emergency Medical Services Participation, consistently emerged across the interviews. Participants described their active involvement in emergency medical response through first aid, wound management, splinting, and patient care. One participant explained:

"Kami po ma'am yung para EMS group... kami sa medical pag may emergencies... lalo na pag may female na kasama na patient." (F1)

Similarly, another participant shared:

"As a female firefighter, my role in emergency response is to provide medical care... first aid." (F7)

The recurring emphasis on EMS responsibilities indicates

that female firefighters are not peripheral responders but are directly involved in life-saving interventions, particularly in situations requiring gender-sensitive patient care.

The second theme, Operational Support During Fire Incidents, revealed that although female firefighters participate during fire incidents, their operational roles are frequently concentrated on support functions rather than interior fire suppression. Several participants explained that they assist in hose handling, logistics, scene safety, equipment preparation, and resource distribution while male firefighters usually perform physically demanding interior operations. As one participant stated,

"Kami yung parang nag-a-assist sa mga male firefighters... pag sa firefighting support." (F4)

Likewise, another participant noted,

"Pag sobrang laki... sila ang pumapasok... support kasi kami." (F6)

These narratives demonstrate that female firefighters remain operationally involved but that task allocation is influenced by organizational perceptions regarding physical demands.

The third theme, Documentation and Communication Duties, also emerged consistently across participants. Numerous respondents reported being assigned incident documentation, photography, report preparation, radio communication, and after-action reporting. One participant remarked,

"Mostly mga babae ang gumagawa ng paperwork." (F4)

During the focus group discussion, participants likewise acknowledged that administrative work, clerical responsibilities, and communication tasks are routinely entrusted to female personnel because they are perceived to be more patient, detail-oriented, and organized.

The fourth theme, Community Relations and Public Information Roles, reflected the participants' contributions beyond emergency response. Female firefighters described serving as speakers during community assemblies, public educators, and public information personnel during fire prevention campaigns. One participant explained,

"Females yung dinadala kung may assemblies... maging speaker." (F1)

This indicates that participants' responsibilities extend beyond emergency operations toward strengthening community preparedness and public safety awareness.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the operational roles of female firefighters are multidimensional, combining direct

Table 7
Roles and responsibilities of female firefighters in emergency response operations

Theme	Definition	Response
Emergency Medical Services Participation	Female firefighters frequently serve as EMS responders providing first aid and patient care.	Participants reported that they are commonly assigned to EMS operations where they assist patients through first aid, wound cleaning, splinting, and patient transport. Many emphasized that they are often tasked to handle female patients to ensure comfort and cultural sensitivity during medical emergencies.
Operational Support During Fire Incidents	Female firefighters contribute through operational support roles during fire incidents.	Several respondents stated that during fire responses they assist in equipment preparation, hose deployment, scene safety, and logistical support such as distributing water, managing equipment, and assisting firefighters at the scene.
Documentation and Communication Duties	Female firefighters are frequently assigned administrative and reporting functions during incidents.	Participants shared that they are often responsible for incident documentation, photography, report writing, radio communication, and post-incident paperwork. Some respondents noted that these tasks are commonly delegated to female personnel during emergency operations.
Community Relations and Public Information Roles	Female firefighters engage in public education and information dissemination activities.	Respondents indicated that they often serve as community educators, public information officers, or representatives during public safety campaigns, assemblies, and community outreach activities related to fire prevention and safety awareness.

emergency response with administrative and community-oriented responsibilities. Rather than occupying a single functional role, participants described performing a combination of medical response, operational assistance, documentation, and public engagement depending on operational requirements and available personnel. These findings reflect organizational flexibility but also reveal an informal division of labor shaped partly by gendered expectations within the station.

The findings support previous studies indicating that women contribute substantially to emergency response not only through operational functions but also through communication, prevention, and public education activities (Gaillard *et al.*, 2017). Likewise, Lee *et al.* (2022) emphasized that gender diversity broadens the range of competencies available during disaster response, particularly in communication, patient care, and collaborative decision-making. From the perspective of Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995), the participants' involvement in EMS, community education, and operational support demonstrates opportunities for meaningful participation and professional contribution. However, the concentration of women in supportive rather than frontline firefighting roles also suggests that empowerment remains influenced by organizational structures that continue to shape role allocation according to gender.

Table 8 presents the emerged themes on the comparison of responsibilities between female and male firefighters

The analysis generated four themes describing how participants compared their responsibilities with those of their male counterparts: (1) Similar Operational Responsibilities, (2) Physical Task Differentiation, (3) Support Roles Assigned to Women, and (4) Situational Gender Sensitivity. These themes emerged from participants' repeated descriptions of equal professional expectations alongside practical differences in task assignment during emergency responses.

Participants consistently acknowledged that both male and female firefighters receive similar training and are expected to function as members of the same emergency response team. During the focus group discussion, participants emphasized that

"Male and female are same responsibilities regardless of gender." (FGD)

Similarly, F7 stated,

"Our responsibilities are same as males because we all work together as a team."

Despite this perceived equality in formal responsibilities, participants consistently distinguished operational assignments

based on physical demands.

The theme Physical Task Differentiation emerged strongly across nearly all interviews. Respondents explained that physically demanding activities such as victim carrying, forcible entry, interior firefighting, and heavy rescue are commonly assigned to male firefighters. F2 acknowledged,

"Male firefighters are more strong... when it comes to ground zero."

Likewise, F1 observed that during incidents involving heavy lifting,

"Usually yung pinapadala... puro lalaki."

Rather than expressing resentment, many participants described this practice as an operational reality associated with physical capability and responder safety.

The third theme, Support Roles Assigned to Women, reflected participants' experiences of being routinely assigned documentation, communication, logistics, and EMS support during large fire incidents. Participants described these assignments as long-standing organizational practices rather than formal policies. During the focus group discussion, one participant commented,

"Old practice that male do the work, female do the talk." (FGD)

Although participants generally accepted these arrangements, several also expressed the desire for more opportunities to participate directly in operational firefighting.

The fourth theme, Situational Gender Sensitivity, highlighted circumstances where female firefighters were intentionally deployed because of their gender. Participants explained that female responders are often assigned to female patients to preserve dignity, privacy, and comfort during emergency medical services. F3 explained,

"Kailangan talagang babae din yung responde."

This illustrates that gender-sensitive deployment also represents an operational advantage rather than merely a limitation.

Overall, the findings indicate that equality exists at the policy and training level, while operational practices remain partially influenced by gender-based assumptions regarding physical capability. Although participants generally accepted these assignments as practical considerations, they also recognized that unequal exposure to frontline operations may influence opportunities for skill acquisition and professional development over time.

These findings are consistent with Hollerbach *et al.* (2017), who argued that firefighting continues to be perceived as a

Table 8
Comparison of responsibilities between female and male firefighters

Theme	Definition	Response
Similar Operational Responsibilities	Male and female firefighters generally follow the same procedures and training standards.	Several participants stated that both male and female firefighters receive the same training and are expected to follow the same operational procedures during emergency responses. Teamwork was emphasized as essential in all response situations.
Physical Task Differentiation	Physically demanding tasks are often assigned to male firefighters.	Participants explained that heavy lifting, forcible entry, and transporting victims are commonly handled by male firefighters due to perceived differences in physical strength.
Support Roles Assigned to Women	Female firefighters are frequently given support-oriented responsibilities.	Respondents noted that women are often assigned roles such as documentation, communication, hose handling outside structures, and assisting in EMS or logistics during large fire incidents.
Situational Gender Sensitivity	Female firefighters are deployed in gender-sensitive situations.	Participants reported that women are usually assigned when responding to female patients or victims to ensure comfort and respect for privacy during emergency medical services.

physically demanding profession in which traditional assumptions about gender influence operational assignments. Similarly, Velasco and Barlaan (2024) observed that women in emergency response organizations often encounter informal role differentiation despite formal policies promoting equality. Viewed through the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001), unequal access to demanding operational experiences may limit the professional resources available to female firefighters, including opportunities to develop specialized competencies and leadership readiness.

Table 9 presents the emerged themes regarding the tasks commonly assigned to female firefighters.

Thematic analysis identified four recurring patterns regarding tasks commonly assigned to female firefighters: (1) Administrative and Documentation Tasks, (2) Communication and Public Engagement, (3) Caregiving and Medical Assistance, and (4) Cultural and Safety Considerations. These themes emerged from repeated participant descriptions of their routine assignments and the organizational rationale behind these responsibilities.

The theme Administrative and Documentation Tasks appeared consistently throughout the interviews. Participants repeatedly described being assigned report preparation, documentation, photography, and administrative responsibilities during emergency operations. One participant explained,

"Mostly mga babae ang gumagawa ng paperwork." (F4)

Similarly, F6 observed that

"More on documentation... mga babae ang gumagawa ng report."

These narratives suggest that documentation has become an informal gendered responsibility within the station.

The second theme, Communication and Public Engagement, reflected participants' involvement in public speaking, community education, and institutional communication. F1 explained that female firefighters are frequently selected as speakers during assemblies because they are perceived to communicate more effectively with community members. During the focus group discussion, participants likewise described women as being assigned community relations because of their communication skills.

The third theme, Caregiving and Medical Assistance, emerged from participants' repeated descriptions of providing first aid, assisting female patients, and supporting vulnerable populations during emergency medical responses. Participants

viewed these responsibilities as consistent with their training while also acknowledging that they were frequently assigned because of cultural expectations regarding caregiving.

Finally, the theme Cultural and Safety Considerations reflected participants' perceptions that task allocation remains influenced by longstanding organizational traditions and assumptions about physical capability. As F5 explained,

"It's been practiced in the bureau... the male counterparts are giving consideration."

Similarly, participants in the focus group discussion referred to these arrangements as

"Old practice that male do the work, female do the talk."

These findings indicate that task allocation reflects both operational considerations and deeply embedded organizational culture.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that female firefighters perform a broad range of responsibilities extending beyond emergency medical services. However, recurring assignment to documentation, communication, and caregiving functions suggests that traditional gender expectations continue to shape everyday operational practices. Although these assignments recognize important competencies possessed by female firefighters, they may also unintentionally restrict opportunities to gain extensive experience in specialized firefighting operations.

These findings support Gaillard *et al.* (2017), who observed that women in emergency response professions frequently encounter organizational cultures that reinforce traditional caregiving and communication roles. Likewise, Velasco and Barlaan (2024) argued that gender-responsive policies alone cannot eliminate workplace practices rooted in historical role expectations. Interpreted through Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995), empowerment involves not only participation but also equitable access to meaningful operational experiences. Consequently, broadening opportunities for female firefighters to rotate across both administrative and frontline operational roles may strengthen individual competence while promoting more inclusive organizational practices.

Table 10 presents the themes emerged with regards to the experiences of female firefighters in performing emergency duties.

Thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four interrelated themes describing the experiences of female firefighters in performing

Table 9
Tasks commonly assigned to female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Response
Administrative and Documentation Tasks	Female firefighters are frequently assigned paperwork and reporting duties.	Participants shared that they are often tasked with preparing reports, documentation, and incident records because they are perceived as meticulous and organized in administrative tasks.
Communication and Public Engagement	Women are often assigned communication-related roles in community and institutional settings.	Respondents mentioned that female firefighters frequently serve as speakers during assemblies, public safety campaigns, and community education programs.
Caregiving and Medical Assistance	Female firefighters commonly handle caregiving-related tasks during emergency responses.	Participants reported that they are often assigned to first aid, assisting female patients or children, and providing medical care during emergency medical services.
Cultural and Safety Considerations	Task assignments sometimes reflect cultural perceptions of gender roles and safety concerns.	Some respondents noted that officers may assign physically demanding tasks to male personnel due to safety concerns, while women are assigned supportive roles even when they are capable of performing similar tasks.

Table 10
Experiences of female firefighters in performing emergency duties

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Fulfilling but Demanding Nature of Firefighting	Firefighting is experienced as meaningful and rewarding despite its intensity, unpredictability, and risks.	Respondents described firefighting as fulfilling because it enables them to save lives and property, although they also emphasized that the work is intense, challenging, and unpredictable.
Developing Professional Competence	Competence is viewed as a skill that is continuously strengthened through training, exposure, and experience.	Several participants rated themselves as beginner, developing, intermediate, or moderate in competence, indicating that they see professional ability as something that improves over time.
Importance of Teamwork and Emotional Control	Effective emergency duty performance requires teamwork, calmness, mental strength, and emotional stability.	Participants noted that quick thinking, teamwork, remaining calm under pressure, and staying emotionally strong are essential in handling emergency situations successfully.
Strong Sense of Service and Responsibility	Female firefighters derive motivation from helping others and fulfilling a duty of care during emergencies.	Some participants expressed that every emergency reminds them why they chose the profession and that helping people in critical moments strengthens their dedication to serve.

emergency duties: (1) Fulfilling but Demanding Nature of Firefighting, (2) Developing Professional Competence, (3) Importance of Teamwork and Emotional Control, and (4) Strong Sense of Service and Responsibility. These themes emerged through repeated coding of participants' narratives describing their operational experiences, professional growth, coping strategies, and motivations for remaining in the profession.

The first theme, Fulfilling but Demanding Nature of Firefighting, emerged from participants' descriptions of emergency response as both meaningful and physically and emotionally demanding. Although respondents acknowledged the risks and unpredictability of the profession, they consistently emphasized the fulfillment derived from helping others. F3 shared that after responding to a critical childbirth case, "Yung feeling na naman the next day na okay na. Yung masaya na may natulungan ka." Similarly, F7 stated that she feels empowered because she is "making difference in the people's life" and recalled an experience where children whom they had previously trained successfully applied first aid before responders arrived. These narratives demonstrate that participants derive a strong sense of purpose from the positive impact of their work despite its demanding nature.

The second theme, Developing Professional Competence, reflected participants' recognition that competence is continuously developed through training and operational exposure. Rather than portraying themselves as fully proficient, many respondents described their competence as evolving. F1 explained, "From being a firefighter we have undergone trainings... namo-mold yung competence mo." Likewise, F7 acknowledged, "I still have a lot of things to learn and understand in performing emergency duties," while F4 described herself as "beginner pa lang" because she still needs more experience. During the focus group discussion, participants collectively described themselves as operating at an intermediate level of competence, emphasizing that continuous learning remains essential.

The third theme, Importance of Teamwork and Emotional Control, emerged from participants' repeated descriptions of emergency response as requiring collective effort, calm decision-making, and emotional resilience. F1 emphasized that emergency response teams are intentionally mixed because "kailangan may isa para ma-balance yung team." During the focus group discussion, participants likewise highlighted that regular emergency responses help them become "physically,

mentally and emotionally prepared" for future operations. These findings indicate that emergency performance extends beyond technical competence and depends heavily on collaboration and psychological readiness.

Finally, the theme Strong Sense of Service and Responsibility reflected participants' commitment to public service despite the occupational demands of firefighting. F6 explained that she reminds herself of the purpose of serving others even during difficult situations, while F5 emphasized that although emergency responses sometimes leave her feeling unsuccessful, she continues striving to improve because helping others remains her primary motivation. These narratives illustrate that participants' professional identity is anchored in service rather than personal recognition.

Overall, the findings suggest that the lived experiences of female firefighters involve balancing demanding operational realities with a strong commitment to public service. Their narratives portray competence as a developmental process rather than a fixed attribute, highlighting the importance of continuous learning, teamwork, and organizational support. From the perspective of Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995), these experiences reflect psychological empowerment, wherein participants develop confidence and professional identity through meaningful participation and repeated mastery experiences. Likewise, the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) helps explain how personal resources such as commitment, teamwork, and professional growth enable participants to cope with the substantial demands of emergency response work.

These findings are consistent with the International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services (2024), which reported that women increasingly contribute to frontline emergency response while continuing to navigate the physical and psychological demands associated with firefighting. The participants' narratives similarly demonstrate that fulfillment in the profession coexists with continuous efforts to strengthen competence and resilience.

Table 11 presents the themes emerged regarding challenging situations encountered by female firefighters.

The thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four major themes regarding the challenging situations encountered by female firefighters: (1) Limited Advanced Technical Preparedness, (2) Pressure During High-Stakes Incidents, (3) Lack of Equipment and Training Opportunities, and (4) Gender-Based Doubt and

Table 11
Challenging situations encountered by female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Limited Advanced Technical Preparedness	Respondents encountered situations that required skills or interventions beyond their current training.	Participants cited challenging cases such as emergency childbirth, severe trauma, and incidents requiring expert-level medical response, which made them feel inadequately prepared.
Pressure During High-Stakes Incidents	Emergency situations create pressure, anxiety, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes.	Respondents expressed feeling pressured during actual firefighting and emergency response, especially when unexpected incidents occurred or when lives were at risk.
Lack of Equipment and Training Opportunities	Challenges are intensified by insufficient equipment and limited access to specialized or advanced training.	Several participants identified lack of equipment and lack of advanced technical training as major challenges affecting their performance.
Gender-Based Doubt and External Scrutiny	Female firefighters experience doubts from bystanders and worry about negative judgments regarding their competence.	One participant mentioned discrimination from bystanders who doubted the abilities of female firefighters, while another feared criticism from observers such as doctors and nurses if mistakes occurred.

External Scrutiny. These themes emerged through repeated coding of participants' narratives describing emergency situations that tested their technical competence, emotional resilience, and confidence in performing operational duties.

The first theme, Limited Advanced Technical Preparedness, emerged from participants' accounts of responding to complex emergency cases that required specialized knowledge beyond their routine training. F1 recalled that emergency childbirth became particularly challenging because, "Education graduate... hindi kami nursing, so parang challenge yun na part na kailangan nating mas i-ano yung training." Similarly, F3 explained that responding to childbirth made her realize the need for additional refresher training, stating, "Kailangan na refresher... kung ano ang dapat gawin ng first responder." During the focus group discussion, participants likewise acknowledged that complex medical emergencies challenged their competence, particularly when their educational backgrounds were not medically oriented. These recurring narratives indicate that participants perceived advanced emergency situations as requiring competencies that could only be strengthened through specialized and continuous training.

The second theme, Pressure During High-Stakes Incidents, reflected participants' experiences of anxiety and emotional pressure while responding to emergencies involving lives at risk. F4 shared that actual firefighting differed significantly from simulations, explaining, "Iba pala pag sa real... maraming tao... kakabahan ka, mapre-pressure ka." Likewise, F6 recounted responding to a bus accident involving numerous victims, stating, "Umiiyak sa harapan mo... gusto mong lahat tulungan pero..." These accounts demonstrate that emergency response involves not only technical execution but also the ability to maintain composure and make sound decisions under intense pressure.

The third theme, Lack of Equipment and Training Opportunities, also emerged consistently throughout the interviews. Participants acknowledged that although they received basic training, limited access to specialized equipment and advanced courses affected their preparedness. F5 emphasized that technical competence could be hindered by inadequate resources, explaining that "if you lack the appropriate equipment... definitely it will impede your performance." Similarly, F2 recommended "more trainings... with complete equipment" to improve operational readiness, while participants in the focus group discussion highlighted logistical deficiencies and limited access to specialized training

opportunities. These narratives suggest that organizational resources significantly influence participants' confidence in handling complex emergencies.

Finally, the theme Gender-Based Doubt and External Scrutiny emerged from participants' experiences of being questioned because they were women. F2 shared that some bystanders would remark, "Ikaw babae ka lang... hindi mo kaya yan," while F7 noted that "some people assume that because we are female we are not capable of being a firefighter." During the focus group discussion, participants similarly recalled hearing comments such as, "Bakit kasi babae yung nag-nozzle?" These recurring experiences illustrate that participants often had to manage public skepticism alongside the operational demands of emergency response.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the challenges encountered by female firefighters extend beyond technical emergency response. Participants simultaneously navigated operational complexity, limited institutional resources, and persistent gender stereotypes. While emergency incidents demanded advanced technical decision-making, external judgments regarding women's capability further intensified the psychological demands of the profession.

Viewed through the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001), these findings indicate that highly complex emergency situations, insufficient equipment, and gender-based scrutiny constitute significant job demands that require corresponding organizational resources, including advanced training, mentoring, and adequate logistical support. Likewise, Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995) suggests that opportunities to strengthen competence through continuous learning and institutional support enhance firefighters' confidence in managing these demanding situations.

These findings are consistent with Velasco and Barlaan (2024), who reported that female firefighters in the Philippines continue to encounter operational barriers related to limited specialized training and organizational support. Similarly, McQuerry et al. (2023) and the U.S. Fire Administration (2019) observed that women in the fire service frequently experience gender-based scrutiny that affects confidence despite possessing equivalent professional qualifications.

Table 12 presents the themes emerged regarding the preparedness of female firefighters in carrying out duties

The thematic analysis generated four interconnected themes describing the preparedness of female firefighters in carrying out their duties: (1) Preparedness Through Continuous

Table 12
Preparedness of female firefighters in carrying out duties

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Preparedness Through Continuous Training	Preparedness is strengthened through refresher courses, simulations, drills, and repeated learning.	Respondents emphasized that refresher trainings, drills, simulations, and regular review of protocols help them maintain readiness for emergency duties.
Preparedness Through Experience and Peer Learning	Readiness is developed through field exposure, personal experiences, and learning from senior colleagues.	Participants noted that experience, advice from senior firefighters, and reviewing previous incidents contribute to their preparedness.
Self-Initiated Efforts to Maintain Readiness	Some respondents undertake personal initiative to improve preparedness through self-study and independent learning.	Respondents mentioned conducting personal research, watching videos, and reviewing content online to enhance their knowledge and capabilities.
Need for More Advanced Resources	Preparedness is present but still seen as incomplete without more advanced training, equipment, and opportunities.	Participants expressed confidence in their readiness but also emphasized the need for more advanced courses, updated equipment, and continued development.

Training, (2) Preparedness Through Experience and Peer Learning, (3) Self-Initiated Efforts to Maintain Readiness, and (4) Need for More Advanced Resources. These themes emerged through repeated coding of participants' narratives regarding how they prepare themselves physically, mentally, and professionally for emergency response.

The first theme, Preparedness Through Continuous Training, emerged consistently across participants. Respondents emphasized that refresher courses, simulations, drills, and protocol updates are essential in maintaining operational readiness. F3 explained that "every now and then... may do's and don'ts... mga updates," while F4 rated her preparedness as "eight out of ten" because of continuous preparation. During the focus group discussion, participants likewise attributed their preparedness to "regular drills, trainings, and actual emergency responses." These narratives demonstrate that preparedness is viewed as a continuous process sustained through repeated practice rather than a competency acquired only during initial training.

The second theme, Preparedness Through Experience and Peer Learning, reflected participants' belief that readiness develops through operational exposure and learning from experienced colleagues. F6 shared that she actively listens to senior firefighters' experiences and remembers them so she would know what to do in future incidents, stating, "Nakikinig ako sa mga sinasabi ng mga kasamahan... para pag nangyari sa akin, alam kong ang gagawin ko." Similarly, participants in the focus group discussion emphasized that actual emergency responses and post-incident reflections significantly contributed to their preparedness.

The third theme, Self-Initiated Efforts to Maintain Readiness, emerged from participants' descriptions of independently improving their competencies beyond formal institutional training. F5 explained that she supplements her learning through "research and videos from YouTube" to stay updated on emergency medical procedures. Likewise, F6 described improvising and continuously seeking additional knowledge despite resource limitations. These narratives indicate that participants assume personal responsibility for maintaining professional competence rather than relying exclusively on organizational training.

The fourth theme, Need for More Advanced Resources, reflected participants' recognition that current preparedness remains incomplete without greater institutional investment. Although respondents generally considered themselves

prepared, they consistently recommended additional specialized training, updated equipment, and more opportunities for advanced professional development. F2 specifically recommended "more trainings... with complete equipment," while F7 suggested increased funding to support continuous capacity development.

Overall, the findings indicate that preparedness among female firefighters is multidimensional, encompassing technical competence, operational experience, continuous learning, and psychological readiness. Participants demonstrated strong personal initiative in maintaining their competencies; however, they also recognized that sustained preparedness requires organizational commitment through advanced training opportunities and adequate operational resources.

From the perspective of the Job Demands–Resources Model, preparedness develops through the interaction between individual resources, such as self-directed learning and experience, and organizational resources, including training programs, equipment, and mentoring (Demerouti et al., 2001). Similarly, Empowerment Theory emphasizes that opportunities for continuous learning strengthen both competence and self-efficacy, enabling individuals to participate more confidently in complex professional roles (Zimmerman, 1995).

These findings support existing literature emphasizing that emergency preparedness depends not only on technical instruction but also on continuous professional development and organizational investment in operational readiness (La Trinidad, 2020). The participants' emphasis on lifelong learning and repeated training similarly reflects international recommendations for maintaining competency among emergency responders.

Table 13 presents the themes emerged regarding the empowerment and disempowerment of female firefighters.

Thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four major themes regarding empowerment and disempowerment among female firefighters: (1) Empowerment Through Trust, Recognition, and Inclusion, (2) Empowerment Through Service and Impact, (3) Disempowerment Through Gendered Role Limitation, and (4) Disempowerment Through Gender Bias and Structural Inequality. These themes emerged from participants' repeated descriptions of situations that either strengthened or diminished their confidence, professional identity, and sense of belonging within the organization.

Table 13
Empowerment and disempowerment of female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Empowerment Through Trust, Recognition, and Inclusion	Female firefighters feel empowered when they are trusted, appreciated, involved, and allowed to demonstrate capability.	Respondents said they feel empowered when entrusted with tasks, included in decision-making, appreciated by patients and communities, and recognized by colleagues for their contributions.
Empowerment Through Service and Impact	Empowerment is experienced when female firefighters see that their work positively affects others.	Participants described feeling empowered when they save lives, teach first aid, help the community, and receive appreciation from those they serve.
Disempowerment Through Gendered Role Limitation	Female firefighters feel disempowered when assigned only to limited, stereotypically feminine, or non-field tasks.	Several respondents reported feeling disempowered when restricted to paperwork, documentation, communication, or picture-taking instead of full field participation.
Disempowerment Through Gender Bias and Structural Inequality	Disempowerment is reinforced by stereotypes, lack of female leaders, physical assumptions, and gender bias in task allocation.	Participants shared that they feel disempowered when women are assumed to be less capable, when few women occupy leadership positions, and when gender bias influences assignments.

The first theme, Empowerment Through Trust, Recognition, and Inclusion, emerged from participants' accounts of being entrusted with responsibilities and recognized for their contributions. F6 emphasized that "Yung trust. Yung sinusuportahan ka sa trabaho," describing organizational trust as an important source of empowerment. During the focus group discussion, participants likewise explained that they felt empowered whenever male colleagues entrusted them with operational responsibilities, noting that such trust demonstrated confidence in their abilities.

The second theme, Empowerment Through Service and Impact, reflected participants' fulfillment from helping others during emergencies. F3 described the satisfaction she experienced after successfully assisting a critical patient, stating, "Masaya na may natulungan ka." Similarly, F7 shared that she feels empowered because she is "making difference in people's life," particularly when members of the community apply the first aid skills she previously taught. These narratives indicate that empowerment extends beyond organizational recognition and is reinforced through meaningful service to the community.

Conversely, the theme Disempowerment Through Gendered Role Limitation emerged from participants' frustration with being repeatedly assigned to documentation, communication, and administrative responsibilities rather than frontline operations. F4 explained that she often felt limited when assigned as "taga-picture taking" or documentation personnel during incidents. Likewise, F1 observed that "ang role lang ng babae is parang taga-communicate." These recurring experiences suggest that participants perceived role assignment as influenced by traditional gender expectations rather than individual competence.

The final theme, Disempowerment Through Gender Bias and Structural Inequality, reflected participants' experiences of persistent stereotypes and unequal opportunities. During the focus group discussion, participants described an enduring organizational mindset characterized as "old practice that male do the work, female do the talk." F6 similarly recalled wanting broader operational responsibilities but eventually accepting assignments based on assumptions regarding women's physical capability. These narratives reveal that participants recognized structural barriers that restricted opportunities for operational experience and professional growth.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that empowerment among female firefighters is shaped by both interpersonal

relationships and organizational practices. Trust, inclusion, and meaningful participation strengthen professional confidence, whereas gendered task allocation and structural stereotypes limit opportunities for competence development and leadership preparation.

These findings strongly reflect Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995), which conceptualizes empowerment as developing through meaningful participation, access to opportunities, and recognition of one's capabilities. Participants' experiences indicate that empowerment is reinforced when institutions provide equitable opportunities to demonstrate competence rather than assigning responsibilities based primarily on gender. Similarly, the Job Demands–Resources Model suggests that equal access to operational experiences constitutes an important organizational resource that contributes to professional growth, confidence, and long-term career development.

The findings are consistent with Modise (2023), the World Bank (2012), and Garrick *et al.* (2024), who argue that empowerment requires both individual self-efficacy and institutional structures that promote equitable participation. Likewise, Gaillard *et al.* (2017) and Velasco and Barlaan (2024) observed that women in firefighting continue to encounter organizational cultures where gender stereotypes influence task allocation and leadership opportunities. The participants' experiences similarly demonstrate that substantive empowerment extends beyond representation and requires organizational practices that actively support equal participation in operational and leadership roles.

B. Institutional Support Systems for Capacity and Advancement of Female Firefighting Personnel

This section is based on the findings regarding the support systems that are provided to female firefighters that contribute to their professional development. This includes various forms of support provided by the firefighting service, which may be effective in enhancing the development of female firefighters. This section also considers various perceptions of participants regarding these support systems in relation to their development as emergency service workers. The purpose of this section is to evaluate the contribution of these support systems provided by the firefighting service in creating an enabling environment for female firefighters.

Table 14 presents the themes emerged regarding the forms of institutional support experienced by female firefighters.

Table 14
Forms of institutional support experienced by female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Training and Refresher Programs	The institution provides formal training courses, refresher sessions, and skill-development activities to enhance firefighters' competence.	Respondents shared that the BFP provides trainings such as ambulance operations, Basic Life Support (BLS), Incident Command System (ICS), communication systems training, and other refresher courses that support their work as firefighters.
Material and Organizational Support	Support is provided through equipment, funding, and assistance from leaders and partner institutions such as the LGU.	Participants reported receiving equipment, financial support, and opportunities supported by both the BFP and local government units, which help improve their capacity and operational readiness.
Informal Mentorship and Encouragement	While formal mentorship programs are limited, some respondents receive encouragement and guidance from senior officers and colleagues.	Some participants noted that there is no structured mentorship system, but senior officers and leaders offer encouragement and occasional support that helps them navigate their roles.
Uneven Access to Advancement Opportunities	Opportunities for leadership, specialized training, and operational advancement exist but are not always consistently accessible.	Several respondents acknowledged that leadership opportunities and advanced training are available, but access often depends on rank, limited slots, or selection practices that may not always be equitable.

The thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four themes describing the institutional support experienced by female firefighters: (1) Training and Refresher Programs, (2) Material and Organizational Support, (3) Informal Mentorship and Encouragement, and (4) Uneven Access to Advancement Opportunities. These themes emerged through repeated coding of participants' descriptions of organizational practices that either facilitated or constrained their professional development.

The first theme, Training and Refresher Programs, was consistently reflected across participants' narratives regarding the support provided by the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP). F2 explained that "may ambulance operations training, Basic Life Support (BLS), Incident Command System (ICS), at communication systems training," while F5 emphasized that refresher programs help firefighters continuously improve their operational competence. Participants in the focus group discussion likewise identified regular training activities as the most visible form of institutional support they received. These recurring responses indicate that professional training serves as the primary organizational mechanism for developing operational readiness.

The second theme, Material and Organizational Support, emerged from participants' discussions regarding institutional assistance beyond formal training. Several respondents acknowledged receiving equipment, logistical support, and assistance from both the BFP and local government units. F6 noted that "may support din galing sa LGU at BFP sa equipment at ibang pangangailangan," illustrating how operational readiness is influenced by organizational resources in addition to technical instruction.

The third theme, Informal Mentorship and Encouragement, reflected participants' recognition that although senior officers often provided advice and encouragement, formal mentoring structures were generally absent. F3 explained that "wala talagang formal mentorship pero may mga senior na nagbibigay ng advice," while other participants similarly described relying on experienced colleagues for guidance during field operations. These responses suggest that mentoring largely depends on informal workplace relationships rather than structured organizational programs.

Finally, the theme Uneven Access to Advancement Opportunities emerged from participants' observations that leadership development and specialized training opportunities

were not always equally accessible. F7 explained that participation in advanced training often depended on "available slots, rank, or selection," while participants in the focus group discussion likewise expressed concerns that opportunities were not consistently distributed among personnel. These narratives indicate that although institutional opportunities exist, participants perceived variability in how these opportunities are allocated.

Taken together, the findings suggest that institutional support within the BFP is strongest in providing technical training but comparatively less developed in promoting structured mentoring and equitable career advancement. While participants acknowledged significant organizational investment in competency development, they also identified limitations in the consistency and accessibility of professional growth opportunities.

These findings may be interpreted through Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995), which argues that empowerment extends beyond individual competence and requires organizational structures that create equitable opportunities for participation, development, and leadership. Although training strengthens individual capability, participants' accounts indicate that empowerment remains incomplete when mentoring systems and advancement opportunities are inconsistently available. Likewise, the Job Demands–Resources Model suggests that organizational resources such as mentoring, career development, and institutional support help employees manage demanding work environments and sustain long-term professional growth.

The findings are consistent with Velasco and Barlaan (2024), who reported that while women have become increasingly integrated into the Philippine fire service, disparities remain in leadership development, workplace support, and access to specialized opportunities. Similarly, the World Bank (2012) and Garrick et al. (2024) emphasize that institutional empowerment requires organizational structures that promote equitable career progression rather than focusing solely on technical training.

Table 15 presents the themes emerged regarding how institutional support systems influenced the experiences of female firefighters.

The thematic analysis generated four themes describing how institutional support systems influenced the experiences of female firefighters: (1) Expansion of Skills and Capabilities, (2)

Table 15
How institutional support system influenced the experiences of female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Expansion of Skills and Capabilities	Institutional support helps female firefighters improve their technical knowledge, confidence, and operational competence.	Respondents shared that training programs expand their capabilities, improve their emergency response skills, and strengthen their ability to perform their duties effectively.
Contribution to Career Advancement	Support systems such as training and field exposure contribute to promotion, broader operational experience, and professional growth.	Participants said that training and support from the BFP helped them advance in their careers and gain exposure to different locations, operations, and roles.
Need for Higher Quality and Advanced Support	Existing supports are helpful but need to be improved in terms of quality, technical depth, consistency, and access.	Several respondents acknowledged that current support systems are effective, but they emphasized the need for better equipment, qualified trainers, broader technical courses, and more specialized training opportunities.
Inconsistent Implementation of Support	Institutional support is beneficial but not always delivered consistently across personnel or contexts.	Some respondents noted that support systems are effective but inconsistent, suggesting uneven implementation and varying experiences among female firefighters.

Contribution to Career Advancement, (3) Need for Higher Quality and Advanced Support, and (4) Inconsistent Implementation of Support. These themes emerged from participants' repeated reflections on how organizational support shaped their competence, confidence, and professional growth.

The first theme, Expansion of Skills and Capabilities, emerged from participants' descriptions of how institutional training enhanced their operational effectiveness. F2 explained that "trainings expand our capabilities and improve our emergency response," while F5 noted that continuous training increased her confidence in handling emergency situations. Participants in the focus group discussion similarly associated institutional support with improved technical competence and greater confidence during field operations.

The second theme, Contribution to Career Advancement, reflected participants' recognition that institutional support extended beyond operational competence to include broader professional development. F6 explained that exposure to different assignments and operational environments helped broaden her experience and prepare her for future responsibilities. Other participants similarly described training and deployment opportunities as contributing to career progression and professional growth.

The third theme, Need for Higher Quality and Advanced Support, emerged because participants consistently acknowledged that existing support systems, while beneficial, could still be improved. F3 recommended "better equipment and more advanced training," while F7 emphasized the need for more qualified instructors and specialized technical courses. These narratives indicate that participants evaluated institutional support not only based on its availability but also on its quality and relevance to increasingly complex emergency situations.

Finally, the theme Inconsistent Implementation of Support reflected participants' observations that institutional assistance was not experienced equally by all personnel. Some respondents explained that training opportunities varied depending on scheduling, available resources, or operational assignments, resulting in uneven access to professional development opportunities across the organization.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that institutional support positively influences professional competence, confidence, and career development. However, participants also emphasized that the effectiveness of these support systems

depends on their consistency, accessibility, and quality. Uneven implementation may create disparities in preparedness and career advancement despite the overall availability of institutional programs.

These findings are consistent with Empowerment Theory, which explains that organizational support strengthens empowerment when institutions provide continuous opportunities for learning, participation, and professional growth (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). Participants' experiences indicate that institutional support contributes to empowerment by enhancing competence and confidence; however, inconsistent implementation may weaken these positive outcomes by limiting equal access to developmental resources.

The findings likewise support Gaillard *et al.* (2017), who emphasized that female firefighters' operational effectiveness depends on sustained institutional support rather than individual capability alone. Participants' accounts of expanded skills, improved confidence, and career development similarly demonstrate the important role of organizational investment in strengthening emergency response capacity.

The thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four themes describing participants' recommendations for improving institutional support: (1) Equal Access to Training Opportunities, (2) Need for More Localized, Frequent, and Advanced Training, (3) Improvement in Equipment and Training Quality, and (4) Stronger Mentorship and Leadership Development. These themes emerged from participants' repeated suggestions regarding organizational changes needed to strengthen women's professional development within the Bureau of Fire Protection.

The first theme, Equal Access to Training Opportunities, emerged from participants' concerns regarding fairness in the allocation of specialized training. F2 emphasized that "dapat equal opportunities sa lahat, hindi lang sa selected personnel," while several participants during the focus group discussion likewise advocated for transparent and equitable selection processes for operational training. These narratives indicate that participants viewed equal access as an important component of institutional support.

The second theme, Need for More Localized, Frequent, and Advanced Training, reflected participants' desire for continuous technical development that is accessible within their respective regions. F5 explained that advanced courses were often unavailable locally, making participation difficult because of

Table 16
Suggested changes and additional forms of institutional support for female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Equal Access to Training Opportunities	Female firefighters seek fair and non-selective access to technical, advanced, and operational training.	Respondents recommended that all personnel be given equal opportunities to participate in firefighting, rescue, EMS, and disaster response trainings rather than only selected individuals or units.
Need for More Localized, Frequent, and Advanced Training	There is a need for regular, regionally accessible, and technically specialized training programs.	Participants shared that access to advanced training is limited due to lack of authorized trainers and that more localized and frequent training opportunities are needed in every region.
Improvement in Equipment and Training Quality	Support should include better quality equipment, more realistic training, and more competent instructors.	Respondents emphasized that some trainings are too compressed or unrealistic and that equipment quality and instructor competence need to be improved.
Stronger Mentorship and Leadership Development	Institutional support should move beyond training and include mentorship, operational leadership opportunities, and broader career pathways for women.	Several participants noted that the support system focuses mostly on training, with little mentorship and limited leadership opportunities, especially in operations.

Table 17
Challenges experienced by female firefighters in their career

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Physical Demands of the Profession	Female firefighters experience difficulty in physically strenuous tasks such as lifting, carrying, and handling demanding field assignments.	Respondents identified the physical aspect of firefighting as a major challenge, particularly in tasks involving heavy lifting and other labor-intensive operations.
Gender Bias and Stereotyping	Female firefighters encounter assumptions that women are weaker, less capable, or less suited for demanding firefighting roles.	Participants shared experiences of being underestimated by colleagues, doubted by the public, and excluded from difficult assignments because of prevailing beliefs about women's limitations.
Limited Field Exposure and Skill Development	Women are sometimes given fewer opportunities for direct fieldwork, reducing operational experience and professional growth.	Some respondents said that women are not always immediately assigned to difficult tasks or actual emergency responses, which limits their field exposure and skill development.
Gender-Specific Practical and Health Challenges	Female firefighters face practical and personal barriers such as ill-fitting gear, health conditions, and emotionally taxing experiences in the field.	Participants mentioned issues with equipment designed for men, health-related limitations, and the emotional burden of working in a physically demanding and male-dominated environment.

limited authorized trainers and geographical constraints. Other participants similarly recommended more frequent region-based technical training programs to improve operational readiness.

The third theme, Improvement in Equipment and Training Quality, emerged from participants' observations that the effectiveness of training depends on both instructional quality and available resources. F6 remarked that "minsan mas quantity kaysa quality ang equipment," while others described some training activities as overly compressed or insufficiently realistic. These responses indicate that participants evaluated institutional support based not only on the availability of programs but also on their practical effectiveness.

Finally, the theme Stronger Mentorship and Leadership Development reflected participants' recognition that professional growth extends beyond technical instruction. F7 explained that women also require structured mentoring and leadership opportunities to prepare them for broader organizational responsibilities. Participants in the focus group discussion similarly recommended formal mentoring systems to complement existing training initiatives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that participants seek institutional support systems that are not only available but also equitable, comprehensive, and sustainable. Their recommendations extend beyond increasing the quantity of support toward improving its accessibility, quality, and contribution to long-term career development.

These findings align closely with Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes that empowerment requires organizational structures that promote equitable participation, leadership development, and access to opportunities (Zimmerman, 1995). Participants' recommendations demonstrate that meaningful

empowerment involves creating institutional environments where women are provided equal opportunities to develop technical competence, assume leadership roles, and progress professionally.

The findings also support Gaillard *et al.* (2017), who observed that women in fire service organizations continue to encounter barriers related to mentoring, promotion, and organizational recognition despite increasing workforce participation. Likewise, Velasco and Barlaan (2024) emphasized that strengthening institutional resources, leadership opportunities, and equitable access to professional development remains essential for advancing women's participation in the Philippine fire service. These recommendations further reinforce the principles advanced by the World Bank (2012) and Garrick *et al.* (2024), which advocate for institutional policies and organizational cultures that promote substantive equality rather than mere inclusion.

C. Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Female Firefighters in the Profession

This section centers on the challenges and barriers that female firefighters face in the course of their job, specifically those that pertain to their gender. The section delves into the experiences that the participants encountered in their difficulties in their job, interactions in the workplace, and opportunities in a predominantly male-dominated profession. The results also raise awareness about some of the challenges that female firefighters face in terms of gender stereotypes, physical and emotional demands, opportunities, and structural barriers that can impact their performance and opportunities. The section highlights the lived realities that show the complex barriers that impact the professional experiences of female

firefighters in La Trinidad Fire Station.

Table 17 presents the challenges experienced by female firefighters in their career.

The thematic analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated four themes describing the challenges encountered by female firefighters in their profession: (1) Physical Demands of the Profession, (2) Gender Bias and Stereotyping, (3) Limited Field Exposure and Skill Development, and (4) Gender-Specific Practical and Health Challenges. These themes emerged from repeated coding of participants' narratives describing barriers that influenced their day-to-day operational experiences.

The first theme, Physical Demands of the Profession, emerged consistently across participants' accounts of performing physically strenuous emergency response duties. Several respondents associated firefighting with lifting heavy equipment, carrying victims, and working under physically demanding conditions. One participant explained that "the physical aspect of the job is often challenging because of heavy lifting," while another acknowledged that although these tasks are difficult, they remain capable of fulfilling their responsibilities. These recurring narratives indicate that respondents viewed the physical requirements as inherent characteristics of the profession rather than limitations unique to women.

The second theme, Gender Bias and Stereotyping, reflected participants' experiences of being underestimated or judged based on traditional assumptions regarding women's capabilities. One respondent remarked that "women are not immediately given difficult assignments because people think they are not suited for heavy work," while another observed that male personnel are often perceived as more capable during emergency operations. These coded responses demonstrate that participants experienced barriers arising not only from operational demands but also from gender-based perceptions that influenced task allocation and professional recognition.

The third theme, Limited Field Exposure and Skill Development, emerged from participants' observations that opportunities for direct operational experience were sometimes restricted. Respondents explained that women were not always assigned to high-risk emergency responses, thereby reducing opportunities to strengthen operational competence and gain experience necessary for career progression.

Finally, the theme Gender-Specific Practical and Health Challenges reflected participants' accounts of barriers

associated with equipment, physical health, and emotional demands. Several respondents discussed protective gear designed primarily for male body dimensions, health-related considerations, and the emotional burden associated with responding to traumatic incidents. Together, these narratives illustrate that female firefighters experience operational challenges that extend beyond physical demands to include organizational and environmental factors.

Taken collectively, the findings suggest that the barriers experienced by female firefighters are multidimensional, encompassing physical, organizational, and sociocultural dimensions. Although the operational demands of firefighting affect all personnel, participants perceived that gender stereotypes and unequal access to field assignments further intensified these challenges by influencing opportunities to demonstrate competence and develop professionally.

These findings can be interpreted through Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000), which argues that empowerment depends not only on individual capability but also on organizational environments that provide equitable access to participation and opportunities. Participants' accounts indicate that gender bias and restricted operational exposure may limit opportunities for competence development despite individual readiness. Likewise, Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) suggests that mastery experiences are fundamental sources of self-efficacy. Reduced exposure to challenging assignments may therefore influence confidence and professional growth by limiting opportunities to acquire successful performance experiences.

The findings are consistent with previous studies showing that women in firefighting continue to encounter structural, cultural, and institutional barriers despite increasing representation within emergency response organizations (International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services, 2024; Velasco & Barlaan, 2024). Similarly, McQuerry *et al.* (2023) and the U.S. Fire Administration (2019) reported that gender-specific equipment limitations and persistent stereotypes continue to influence women's operational experiences in fire services.

Table 18 presents the emerged themes with regards to how challenges shaped the experiences, roles, and career journey of female firefighters.

The thematic analysis generated four themes describing how workplace challenges shaped the experiences and career journeys of female firefighters: (1) Effects on Morale and

Table 18

How challenges shaped the experiences, roles, and career journey of female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Effects on Morale and Confidence	Challenges influence the emotional state, self-confidence, and motivation of female firefighters.	Respondents noted that gendered dynamics and limited exposure can affect morale, confidence, and willingness to assert themselves in the field.
Restricted Career and Skill Development	Limited access to actual field tasks can slow the development of competence and reduce opportunities for career progression.	Participants shared that being excluded from direct emergency response work lessens their opportunities to improve skills and advance professionally.
Adaptation and Acceptance of Workplace Realities	Some female firefighters cope by accepting the realities of gender differences and bias within the profession.	Several respondents indicated that they have learned to accept these challenges as part of the job, even if they recognize them as unequal or limiting.
Reduced Duties Due to Personal and Operational Limitations	Health issues, physical constraints, and workplace barriers may reduce assigned duties and affect performance.	Some respondents stated that reduced duties due to health or operational limitations have had a direct impact on performance and career movement.

Table 19
Personal strategies and sources of support used by female firefighters in navigating challenges

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Self-Motivation and Positive Mindset	Female firefighters rely on internal motivation, resilience, and determination to cope with challenges.	Respondents emphasized self-motivation, maintaining the proper mindset, and using challenges as motivation to prove their capability.
Acceptance and Adjustment	Some firefighters cope by accepting workplace realities and adapting their roles based on circumstances and limitations.	Participants described acceptance, tolerance, and learning through experience as ways of dealing with workplace inequalities and practical limitations.
Continuous Learning and Skill Improvement	Female firefighters respond to challenges by seeking training, updating skills, and actively improving their capabilities.	Respondents mentioned personal research, continuous training, and skills updating as key strategies in becoming more capable and prepared.
Seeking Support from Others	Support from senior colleagues, peers, family, and communication with leadership helps female firefighters navigate difficulties.	Participants shared that they seek mentorship from seniors, communicate with administrators, and draw strength from female peers and family support.

Confidence, (2) Restricted Career and Skill Development, (3) Adaptation and Acceptance of Workplace Realities, and (4) Reduced Duties Due to Personal and Operational Limitations. These themes emerged from participants' reflections on the personal and professional consequences of the barriers they encountered throughout their service.

Participants consistently described how workplace barriers affected their confidence and professional identity. One respondent explained that "these situations sometimes affect the morale and confidence of female firefighters," while another acknowledged that repeated exposure to unequal treatment could influence willingness to participate fully during emergency operations. These responses formed the theme Effects on Morale and Confidence, demonstrating that gender-related challenges extended beyond operational performance to psychological well-being.

The second theme, Restricted Career and Skill Development, emerged from participants' accounts of limited operational exposure. Respondents explained that exclusion from difficult assignments reduced opportunities to acquire field experience necessary for promotion and competence development. One participant stated that limited exposure to emergency operations negatively affected career progression because it restricted opportunities to strengthen practical skills.

The themes Adaptation and Acceptance of Workplace Realities and Reduced Duties Due to Personal and Operational Limitations reflected participants' coping responses to persistent workplace barriers. Several respondents explained that they gradually accepted unequal practices as part of organizational reality, while others discussed how health concerns or operational restrictions occasionally reduced their assigned responsibilities. These narratives suggest that participants demonstrated resilience while simultaneously recognizing structural limitations within their work environment.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that workplace challenges influence both the psychological well-being and long-term professional development of female firefighters. Reduced operational exposure may create fewer opportunities for mastery experiences, potentially affecting confidence, competence development, and future leadership opportunities.

From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, repeated mastery experiences strengthen self-efficacy and professional confidence. Consequently, when women receive fewer opportunities to participate in demanding operational

assignments, their professional development may be constrained despite possessing the capability to perform these tasks. Likewise, Empowerment Theory suggests that organizations promote empowerment by ensuring equitable participation and access to developmental opportunities rather than merely providing formal inclusion.

These findings support Velasco and Barlaan (2024), who argued that meaningful gender equality within fire service organizations requires equitable access to operational assignments, training, and career advancement rather than representation alone. Participants' experiences illustrate the continuing gap between inclusive organizational policies and everyday workplace practices.

Table 19 presents the emerged themes with regards to the personal strategies and sources of support used by female firefighters in navigating challenges.

The thematic analysis identified four themes describing the strategies female firefighters used to navigate workplace challenges: (1) Self-Motivation and Positive Mindset, (2) Acceptance and Adjustment, (3) Continuous Learning and Skill Improvement, and (4) Seeking Support from Others. These themes emerged from repeated coding of participants' descriptions of how they sustained motivation and professional commitment despite experiencing workplace barriers.

The first theme, Self-Motivation and Positive Mindset, emerged consistently across participants' narratives emphasizing resilience and determination. One respondent explained that "self-motivation helps me believe there is always a way to accomplish the task," while another described using workplace challenges as motivation to demonstrate women's capabilities. These responses indicate that participants actively reframed adversity into opportunities for personal growth.

The second and third themes, Acceptance and Adjustment and Continuous Learning and Skill Improvement, reflected participants' efforts to adapt while simultaneously strengthening their professional competence. Respondents described accepting certain workplace realities while continuing to pursue additional training, conduct personal research, and improve technical knowledge. These narratives suggest that adaptation did not necessarily indicate resignation but rather reflected practical strategies for functioning within existing organizational conditions.

The final theme, Seeking Support from Others, emerged from participants' recognition of the importance of mentoring, collegial relationships, family support, and communication

Table 20
Suggestions to make emergency response services more Gender-Responsive

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Equal Opportunity in Training and Field Exposure	Female firefighters recommend fair access to training, operations, and responsibilities regardless of gender.	Respondents emphasized the need for more training and exposure so women can demonstrate that they are also capable of performing tasks usually assigned to men, as well as equal opportunities in all aspects of emergency response.
Gender Awareness and GAD Education	Participants recommend seminars and awareness programs to strengthen gender sensitivity and mutual understanding in the workplace.	Several respondents proposed more Gender and Development (GAD) seminars, diversity and inclusion training, and regular gender awareness briefings for both men and women.
Skills-Based and Realistic Task Assignment	Task assignments should be based on actual skills, strengths, and interests rather than gender stereotypes.	Some participants recommended assigning women to roles that realistically match their skills and abilities while still ensuring equal chances in leadership and operational tasks.
Supportive and Inclusive Team Culture	Respondents recommend building a workplace culture characterized by fairness, teamwork, non-discrimination, and mutual skill development.	Participants suggested eliminating favoritism in training, promoting a give-and-take culture in teams, and ensuring clear policies on gender equality and fair opportunities.

with supervisors. Several respondents emphasized that encouragement from senior firefighters and peers strengthened their confidence and helped them manage workplace challenges more effectively.

Overall, the findings indicate that female firefighters rely on both internal and external coping resources to navigate demanding work environments. Their strategies demonstrate resilience, continuous learning, and collaborative support while highlighting the importance of maintaining professional competence despite organizational barriers.

These findings align with Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that self-efficacy develops through mastery experiences, verbal encouragement, and social support. Participants' reliance on mentoring, continuous learning, and positive self-beliefs reflects these important sources of efficacy. Likewise, Empowerment Theory suggests that while individual agency is essential, sustainable empowerment also depends upon institutional structures that provide equitable opportunities and organizational support. Participants' experiences demonstrate that personal resilience complements—but cannot replace—organizational responsibility for creating inclusive workplaces.

The findings are consistent with Lwamba et al. (2022) and Huntsman et al. (2022), who reported that institutional support, leadership practices, and capacity-building initiatives strengthen women's resilience and professional participation within male-dominated occupations. Participants' reliance on informal mentoring and personal initiative further suggests that these resources remain valuable but should ideally be reinforced through formal organizational support systems.

D. Recommendations of the Respondents to Improve Gender Responsiveness and Empowerment in Emergency Response Services

The current section will outline the recommendations derived from the experiences, insights, and reflections of the female firefighters on how the gender responsiveness and empowerment of the emergency response services can be improved. This discussion will outline the suggestions of the female firefighters on how to enhance the institutional support, provide equitable opportunities, enhance the workplace conditions, and address the gender needs in the fire service. This discussion on the recommendations will provide a significant basis for the development of a more inclusive and empowering environment for the women involved in the

emergency response operations.

Table 20 presents the emerged themes with regards to the suggestions to make emergency response services more gender-responsive.

The findings indicate that female firefighters view gender-responsive emergency response services as those that provide equal opportunities, fair treatment, and intentional awareness-building within the organization. A dominant recommendation from the respondents was the need for equal access to training and field exposure so that women can demonstrate their competence beyond traditionally assigned support roles. One participant stated that there should be “more training and exposure... to show that women can also perform tasks usually given to men,” while another emphasized that “both men and women should be given equal opportunities in all aspects of emergency response.” These responses show that the respondents do not merely seek symbolic recognition, but concrete access to operational experiences that validate and strengthen their professional capabilities.

Another significant finding is the recommendation to institutionalize gender sensitivity through awareness programs and stronger workplace culture. Respondents suggested seminars, GAD activities, and inclusion training that would involve both male and female personnel. One participant recommended “more information dissemination and Gender and Development (GAD) seminars,” while another called for “clear rules and policies regarding gender equality and equal opportunity.” These statements suggest that respondents recognize gender responsiveness not only as an issue of individual opportunity but also as a matter of organizational culture, requiring deeper shifts in awareness, policy implementation, and day-to-day team interactions.

The results indicate that for emergency response services to become gender responsive, the focus must shift from the mere inclusion of women to a focus on equality in access, participation, and treatment. This means that women firefighters are seeking a chance to be exposed in operations based on their competence rather than their gender identity. This calls for a re-evaluation by the institution on the extent to which women are exposed in operations without being relegated to less visible roles.

The results also indicate that gender responsiveness in emergency response services goes beyond the policies; it involves a change in the learning culture of the institution. This

means that seminars, workshops, and other programs that promote gender awareness can help break the stereotype that women are less capable than men in emergency operations. This will help create a workplace that is not only gender responsive but also a workplace where women feel free to participate in emergency operations.

These findings are further supported by literature that states that although there has been a marked increase in the number of women participating in firefighting services, the integration of women in fire service organizations is still subject to the influences of social, cultural, and institutional factors on their capacity and development (International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services, 2024; Velasco & Barlaan, 2024). The respondents' emphasis on equal opportunity and exposure is a reflection of the continued need to address issues on gender disparities in the actual implementation of emergency response work.

The results are also in line with the gender and development principles enshrined in the Magna Carta for Women that provides for equal opportunities for women in all fields of public service (Philippine Commission on Women, 2009). In line with this, literature has shown that there are disparities between workplace practice and policy on issues like mentorship support, recognition of roles, and equal opportunity for women (Gaillard *et al.*, 2017). The respondents' emphasis on GAD seminars, equal field exposures, and anti-favoritism measures is a reflection of the continued need to bridge the gap between actual workplace practice and gender equality principles.

From the perspective of public administration and empowerment, the above results are consistent with the argument that empowering is associated with structures or cultures that are conducive to equitable participation, non-discriminatory task assignment, and leadership development (World Bank, 2012; Garrick *et al.*, 2024).

Table 21 presents the themes emerged with regards to the initiatives, programs, or changes that could further support and empower female firefighters.

The findings reveal that female firefighters envision empowerment not only in terms of equal treatment, but also through specific programs that build competence, confidence, visibility, and well-being. A strong recommendation among participants was the creation of skill-building initiatives that help women function more independently and confidently in

operational contexts. One respondent suggested “driving lessons for female firefighters to give them the necessary skills and not rely solely on men,” while another emphasized that “simulation exercises are important so men can actually witness women performing various emergency response tasks.” These responses indicate that respondents want empowerment programs that make women more visible as capable responders and reduce assumptions of dependency.

The results also show a demand for more structured and women-focused support systems, including mentorship, leadership development, and recognition. One participant recommended a “formal mentorship program for women in firefighting,” while another suggested “recognition of female firefighters’ achievements and contributions.” Some respondents even supported the idea of all-female response teams as a way to showcase women’s operational capacity. These findings suggest that empowerment, from the perspective of the respondents, involves both the acquisition of technical skills and the creation of institutional spaces where women are guided, seen, trusted, and affirmed.

This implies that the interventions for the empowerment of female firefighters should, in the near future, take a more deliberate path to a more multifaceted empowerment strategy. This means that, beyond the opportunity for equal treatment, women should be provided with opportunities to build their leadership, confidence, skill sets, and emotional well-being. This can ensure that, not only are women included in the profession, but they are also enabled to contribute to the profession in a variety of ways.

Further, the results suggest that empowerment can be enhanced by the provision of formal structures of support for women, as well as the acknowledgment of their contributions. This can create a sense of belonging for the women, as well as a sense of legitimacy within the profession. This means that, when institutions deliberately create these structures, the female firefighters are more likely to perceive the organization as a place for their growth, as well as a place that values their contributions.

These observations are also supported by literature that states that female firefighters are likely to encounter institutional issues pertaining to mentorship, leadership visibility, gender-appropriate equipment, and specialized opportunities (Gaillard *et al.*, 2017; Velasco & Barlaan, 2024). The respondents’ suggestions pertaining to mentorship, leadership programs,

Table 21
Initiatives, Programs, or Changes that could further support and empower female firefighters

Theme	Definition	Sample Response
Specialized Training and Skill-Building Programs	Female firefighters recommend additional programs that build operational confidence and reduce dependence on male counterparts.	Respondents suggested driving lessons, simulation exercises, leadership training, confidence workshops, and skill-building programs to strengthen the readiness and independence of female firefighters.
Formal Mentorship, Leadership, and Recognition Mechanisms	Women seek structured support systems that develop leadership, provide guidance, and recognize their contributions.	Participants recommended formal mentorship programs for women, more leadership opportunities, visibility programs, and recognition of female firefighters’ achievements.
Women-Centered Operational Initiatives	Some respondents support all-female teams or women-focused initiatives as ways of demonstrating women’s capability in emergency response.	Participants proposed forming all-female response teams and strengthening women’s roles in investigation, reporting, and emergency operations to prove their competence in the field.
Holistic Support for Well-Being and Empowerment	Respondents recommend mental health support, safe spaces, gender-appropriate PPE, and supportive inter-agency learning to empower women comprehensively.	Participants suggested mental and emotional training, safe spaces for discussing stress and discrimination, gender-appropriate PPE, and benchmarking with agencies such as the PNP and BJMP.

women's teams, and gender-appropriate PPE are directly related to these issues that women are likely to face in firefighting work. The respondents' suggestions also imply that empowerment programs need to be designed based on actual women's experiences in firefighting work instead of relying on general institutional support.

The study's results are also consistent with literature that states that empowerment programs and institutionally supported programs are likely to increase women's access to resources and empowerment, particularly in male-dominated professions (Lwamba et al., 2022). The study is also consistent with literature that states empowerment programs are likely to increase adaptive performance and create opportunities for firefighting personnel to demonstrate leadership in firefighting work (Huntsman et al., 2022). The respondents' suggestions pertaining to leadership programs, mentorship, and leadership visibility are also consistent with this literature that states empowerment programs are likely to increase adaptive performance and create opportunities for firefighting personnel to demonstrate leadership in firefighting work.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sought to investigate the capacity, empowerment, support systems, and challenges faced by the female firefighters of La Trinidad Fire Station in the province of Benguet. The study utilized qualitative methods to gather information on the roles and responsibilities of the female firefighters, their lived experiences during emergency response operations, the support systems provided to the female firefighters, the challenges they face in the line of duty, and their recommendations. The findings of the study are presented under the research questions.

A. Roles and Responsibilities of Female Firefighters in Emergency Response Operations

The results of the study indicated that female firefighters in the La Trinidad Fire Station play various roles in emergency response operations. Some of their roles include involvement in emergency medical services, operations in fire response, documentation, and community relations. Most of the female firefighters are involved in first aid, patient care, and medical response in emergency operations, especially when responding to emergencies involving females or vulnerable people in society. The women are involved in fire scene operations, especially in preparing equipment, deploying hoses, and logistics in fire response operations.

Additionally, the female firefighters are involved in documentation and communication work during emergency situations, which involves radio communication, reporting, and recording of incidents. The contribution of the female firefighters to the enhancement of disaster preparedness, as well as the awareness of fire prevention within the community, can be seen through their involvement in educating the members of the community. Although the training requirements for both male and female firefighters are the same, the contribution of the female firefighters to the operational effectiveness of the fire station can be seen through the roles played by the members during the actual operation, which are often perceived from a

traditional point of view. Physically demanding work is often carried out by male firefighters, while the female members are often involved in supporting roles.

B. Lived Experiences of Female Firefighters in Terms of Competence, Preparedness, and Empowerment

The study found that female firefighters experience their role in emergency response work as both fulfilling and challenging. The study found that the women have a strong sense of purpose in their role as firefighters who serve the community and assist people in emergency situations. The women highlighted that the opportunity to save lives is one of the motivating factors for their role as firefighters. The study also found that the work is challenging for the women.

In terms of competence, the majority of the respondents perceived their professional competence as a construct that continues to evolve with training, experience, and repeated exposure to emergency situations. The majority of the participants perceived their level of competence as that of a beginner, developing, or intermediate level. This suggests that the participants perceived their competence as a learning construct. The preparedness construct entailed training, drills, simulations, as well as experience gained from actual emergency situations. The participants also emphasized the value of learning from seniors as well as self-initiated learning from research.

Empowerment of the female firefighters was mostly related to their experiences of trust, recognition, and contribution within the organization. The participants experienced empowerment when they were entrusted with roles, included in the decision-making processes, and recognized for their contributions. Conversely, the participants experienced disempowerment when they were restricted to non-operational roles, gender stereotypes were used for role assignments, or there were limited women leaders within the organization.

C. Institutional Support Systems for the Capacity and Advancement of Female Firefighting Personnel

The results show that there are different forms of institutional support available for female firefighters, especially in the training and refresher programs offered by the Bureau of Fire Protection and other organizations. The respondents mentioned different training programs such as ambulance operations training, Basic Life Support training, Incident Command System training, and skill development training that can help them in their job.

Institutional support can also be in the form of equipment support, financial support, and motivational support from the institution and local government partners. While training and development programs are recognized as essential for all firefighters, respondents mentioned that other forms of institutional support such as mentor programs and leadership development programs are less available. The respondents mentioned that access to training and development programs sometimes depends on one's rank and sometimes depends on the selection process.

The results further revealed that institutional support systems

have a positive impact on the professional development of female firefighters in that they help expand their skills and make them more operationally ready and ready for career advancement. However, the respondents indicated that these support systems need to be enhanced in terms of quality and accessibility. The quality of equipment, trainers, and technical training were identified as key areas that need development.

D. Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Female Firefighters in the Profession

The study found a number of challenges and barriers experienced by the female firefighters in the line of duty. One of the challenges facing the female firefighters is the physical demands of the job. This is mainly due to the nature of the job, where one is required to carry out strenuous activities. Although the female firefighters are able to perform the job, the strenuous nature of the job is one of the challenges facing them.

Another challenge facing the female firefighters is the existence of gender bias. According to some of the respondents, they have experienced instances where they are not taken seriously by fellow workers or the public due to the assumption that they are not capable of carrying out some tasks. This assumption is mainly due to the stereotypical roles assigned to women.

Another barrier that was noted is the limited exposure to the field and the opportunity for skill development. When female firefighters are deployed to support roles instead of the actual operations, it may affect their opportunity to gain experience in the field. Other barriers include the practical barriers of equipment designed for male body types, health barriers, and emotional barriers due to the high-risk nature of emergency situations.

However, the female firefighters were able to cope with the barriers through personal coping strategies such as self-motivation, learning, mentorship from colleagues, and support from colleagues and family. This has helped the female firefighters to maintain confidence and continue to enhance their professional development despite the barriers encountered in the field.

E. Recommendations to Improve Gender Responsiveness and Empowerment in Emergency Response Services

Based on their experiences, the female firefighters provided some recommendations for improving gender responsiveness and empowering women in emergency response services. The first recommendation was the provision of equal opportunities for training, exposure to the field, and leadership positions regardless of their genders. The female firefighters emphasized that their female counterparts have the opportunity to take part in the same activities as their male counterparts to demonstrate their ability and confidence.

The second recommendation was the provision of Gender and Development training to raise awareness about the issue of gender to promote a positive workplace culture among firefighters. The provision of policies regarding equality between men and women was also recommended to ensure that tasks are allocated based on ability rather than assumptions

based on gender.

In addition to that, the respondents were able to identify a number of initiatives that could be implemented to further support and empower female firefighters. This includes training programs such as driving training, simulations, leadership training programs, as well as skill-building programs. The development of mentorship programs for female firefighters, as well as recognition programs for the contributions of female firefighters, were also recommended. The development of initiatives or teams for women that could be used to show the capabilities of female firefighters could also help to encourage more women to take up the profession.

F. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Female firefighters in La Trinidad Fire Station play a variety of significant roles in emergency response operations, which include emergency medical services, operations, documentation, and community engagement.
2. Female firefighters perceive their job as both significant and challenging, where competence and preparedness are learned in a gradual manner.
3. The institutional support systems, which are training programs, are important for the growth of the professional capabilities of the female firefighters, although the opportunities for training are limited.
4. The challenges that the female firefighters face are many, including the gender factors, which are the physical demands of the job, gender bias, stereotyping, limited field exposure, and the practical challenges, which are the equipment used for the job and the health factors.
5. The female firefighters, despite the challenges, are resilient and motivated, as shown by the fact that they are learning, motivated, and supported by their colleagues and networks.
6. Enhancing gender responsiveness among emergency response services involves not just increasing the number of women in these services, but also building a gender-inclusive organizational policy that provides equal opportunities for skills development and leadership for women firefighters.

G. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Strengthening Equal Opportunities in Training and Operations*

The Bureau of Fire Protection can ensure that female firefighters are provided with equal opportunities to be involved in fire operations and training to enhance their professional skills.

2. *Development of Formal Mentorship and Leadership Programs*

Fire service institutions can develop mentorship programs

for female firefighters to enable them to advance professionally and take up leadership positions.

3. Enhancement of Training Quality and Accessibility

Institutions can improve the quality of training for female firefighters to ensure their technical skills are enhanced for better performance.

4. Implementation of Gender Sensitivity and Awareness Programs

The Gender and Development seminars can be conducted to ensure that fire response institutions are made aware of the need to be sensitive to the issue of gender to promote an inclusive workplace environment.

5. Provision of Gender-Appropriate Equipment and Facilities

Fire service organizations can invest in equipment and facilities that meet the physical needs of their female firefighters by considering their requirements for personal protective equipment and a conducive workplace environment.

6. Promotion of Supportive Workplace Culture

The Bureau of Fire Protection can promote a culture that supports and appreciates the contributions of female firefighters in all aspects of fire emergency response operations. Such a culture can be promoted by the fire service organizations to create a conducive environment for all firefighters.

7. Future Research

Future studies can be conducted to explore gender responsiveness and empowerment in other fire stations or regions to create a more comprehensive understanding and development of strategies for effective gender-inclusive fire emergency response services.

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