An Exploration of the Experiences of Firefighters and Their Transition into Retirement.

by Anne Maria Langford

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Advanced Facilitation Skills for Promoting Health and Wellbeing.

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AnnMaria Langford.

Statement of originality and ownership of work

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Name: ANN MARIA LANGFORD.
I confirm that all the work submitted in this dissertation is my own work, not copied from any other person's work (published or unpublished) and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment on any other course, in any other institution.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACFO Rank, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

SO Rank, Station Officer

CI Critical Incident

CIS Critical Incident Stress

CISM Critical Incident Stress Management

HSE Health Service Executive

IPA Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

PTSD Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

QoL Quality of Life

TERMONOLOGY

On Call... ....firefighter or senior officer makes themselves available for emergencies usually by means of a pager system which is activated through a regional control as a response to a 999/112 call.

On Station.. Term used to describe being present at the fire station.

Turn out.... To turn out to an incident from the station.

On scene.... At the scene of an incident.

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Abstract.

There is a significant amount of literature which documents the negative effects of frontline emergency service work. However, no studies to date have explored what it is like to experience the sudden transition from being operational to retirement, specifically in the fire service. The aim of this research is to explore what life is like for the retired firefighter and to investigate the supports that are available to aid the adjustment.

Method.

A qualitative approach was employed incorporating purposeful and snowball sampling. One to one interviews were conducted with retired fire service personnel (n=4). The audio was recorded and then transcribed verbatim. This data was then analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Findings.

From the data analysis three major themes emerged. The importance of preparation for retirement was highlighted and the value of support from colleagues and friends in this transition from operational to civilian life.. Findings also showed a need for more structured and tailored support at organisational level in order to assist retirees before during and after retirement.

Chapter 1. Literary Review

1.1 Introduction.

The role of the firefighter has changed considerably over the last few decades. With improvement in technology and advances in fire prevention systems the numbers of calls to actual fires have reduced. The statistics on fire stations service personnel and call outs are held by the Department of Housing, Planning and local Government and the following data are from 2016. In Ireland, there are 218 fire stations around the country. These are run by the local authorities and employ 3,245 personnel. Of these, 1,206 are fulltime and 2,039 are retained. Full time firefighters work structured shifts usually 9 and 15, 12 or 24-hour rotations. Retained firefighters work on an on-call basis usually 24/7. They are alerted by means of a pager and they are required, when called, to be in attendance at the fire station within a designated time which can be anywhere from 5 to 9 minutes. This requires them to live in close proximity to the station and when on call, stay within the area. In 2016, fire brigades in Ireland (excluding Dublin) attended a total of 24,550 call outs. Of these, 13,159 were to fires and the rest were to other incidents such as extrication from vehicles at road traffic accidents (3,510), removal of persons from water (220), medical emergencies (316) and other non- fire rescues (616) and the rest were false alarms (Department of Housing, Planning & local Government 2016).

Because of the diverse nature of the job and advances in areas such as fire suppression methods, constant training and up skilling are an integral part of a firefighter's career in order to be proficient in the use of ever changing technologies and equipment. This along with constant physical and mental demands makes this a very challenging and rewarding profession. These emergency service workers are ordinary people who dedicate themselves to

learning and developing specialist skills and endless training, and whose duties require them to regularly perform extraordinary tasks in challenging environments for the service, safety and preservation of life within the community (Mitchell & Bray, 1990).

On average, a firefighter will spend around one third of their life at the fire station (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016). The nature of crew structures and shift work fosters workplace solidarity and a protective element. Crew members watch out for each other and understand how important it is to have confidence in themselves as individuals and in their team. This facilitates the formation of strong intimate bonds between crew members within this private family like community within the firehouse (Thurnell, Read, Parker, 2008). After retirement, this support and sense of identity and belonging may no longer exist, but the impact of a career demands can have a lasting effect on physical and mental wellbeing (Beaton, Murphy, Johnson, Pike & Corneil, 1998).

An occupational hazard of the professional firefighter is exposure to danger and trauma while helping those who are at risk in emergency situations. The effect of this exposure can have an impact on well being which can cause health issues later into retirement (Wagner, Heinrichs & Elhert, 1998).

There is a reluctance to address issues like mental health for fear of showing weakness to the outside world whose perception of a firefighter is of this strong heroic rescuer (Hill & Brunsden, 2009). This public perception of bravery and heroism can impose an added psychological burden on firefighters and display of emotion is historically seen a sign of vulnerability and possible weakness (Violanti, 2010).

The purpose of this research is to shed a light on what life is like for a firefighter after retirement. It will look at how a career, which by its nature exposes its personnel to traumatic and unexpected events, and ask how this affects their overall view on life.

Being a firefighter involves living with and working closely with other crew members as part of a team in which each member has a vital role. Being part of a crew brings its own unique sense of belonging and support both from comrades and the organisation. A fulltime firefighter has to retire at age 55, retained at age 58, and he or she will literally be operational one day and retired the next. The transition from operational to retirement can appear to be very abrupt. After retirement this support may no longer be accessible and this research will explore how this was/is for retired firefighters.

1.2 Occupational Stress

Although firefighters fit under the umbrella of emergency service workers, they are quite specialised in many ways. Firefighting can be considered a high-risk occupation and personnel are regularly expected to perform tasks which are physically and mentally challenging (Wagner & O'Neil 2012). There is some evidence about the mental health of firefighters where suicide and suicide ideation in firefighters was researched. Suicide accounts for the leading preventable cause of death and according to W.H.O. 2014, suicide accounts for more that 800,000 deaths each year worldwide. A study by Stanley et al., (2015) showed exceptionally high career prevalence rates of suicide in firefighters in comparison to the general population. There is also evidence to suggest that a range of suicide ideation and behaviours has significantly higher lifetime prevalence amongst firefighters (Martin, Trac, Buser et al 2017). Both studies state that this increased risk of suicide ideation within the fire service may be attributed to the occupational challenges and stresses.

1.2.1. Long working hours

The nature of the shift structure of firefighters can be very demanding. Some fire departments work on rotation shifts of 9 hour day shifts and 15 hour night shifts. Others work on 12 and

24 hour rotations. Within these shift patterns, a particular incident could turn out to be protracted and so require extended duration which can be physically and mentally challenging. In order to accurately assess the effects of long working hours, other factors need to be considered. The specifics of the job structure and demands are important variables. The shift pattern of firefighters tends to be unique and tailored according to specific needs of the community and fire authority in question. Disrupted sleep patterns and extended work hours have also been shown to contribute to workplace stress (Härmä, 2006). Moreover, firefighters are also required to deal with life threatening situations and critical incidents. Research suggests that this, along with the particular work structures of firefighters, can all increase stress and overall fatigue (Murphy et al., 2002; Corneil, Beaton, Murphy, Johnson & Pike 1999; Cnp report 2016). As well as mental health issues, firefighters have been reported to have alarmingly high morbidity rates due to heart attacks and other cardiac disorders (Henderson,Van Hasselt, De Luc & Couwels 2016). Along with the physical and mental consequences of shift work, attention should be given to families of shift workers. A study by Roth and Moore (2009) states that shift work has a considerable impact on family life, disrupting plans for holidays, family routines and even changes in family roles which may result in tension and stress within the family unit. From this we can conclude that working shifts and extended hours can have an impact on health on many levels.

Along with being a cause of stress, these shift patterns can have adverse effects on physical as well as mental health (Sofianopoulus, Williams & Archer 2012; Elliot & Kuehl 2007). Tours of duty vary and it is not unusual for a firefighter to work back to back 15-hour shifts or even 24 and 48-hour shifts. Evidence suggests that night and rotation shifts can be a factor in developing bad eating habits which may increase the risk of digestive and intestinal problems (Poissonett & Vernon 2000). Firefighters are also at increased risk of sleep

disturbances and depression; this can be partly attributed to occupational hazards and exposure to traumatic events (Hom et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2015).

1.2.2 Exposure to Trauma.

Research on the health implications of exposure to trauma in the workplace suggests that in comparison to other occupations, this population of emergency service workers are at increased risk of workplace stress (Haslam & Mallon, 2003). Some of the incidents which firefighters described as most disturbing were those which involved persons known to them, injury or death of a child, injury or death of a colleague in the line of duty, multiple casualties, and suicide of a co-worker (Mitchell & Everly,1995).

Since the global impact of the events of September 11th, 2001, there has been attention given to research into the impact of exposure to serious trauma amongst emergency service workers. The endless and heroic efforts of emergency service personnel was noted in a report commissioned by the American Government after events of 9/11 (Commission and Overdrive Report 2011**).**

It has been well documented that those who respond to emergencies and critical incidents may be classed as high risk when it comes to the development of psychological disorders (Harris, Baloğlu & Stacks 2002). Indeed, exposure to traumatic situations which entail human suffering, injury and death is much greater with emergency service personnel in comparison to the general population and this puts firefighters at greater risk of development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.) and other mental health issues (Bryant & Guthrie, 2007).

It is also suggested that the exposure to these critical incidents can contribute to stress related disorders and the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Bryant and Harvey 1996).

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a concept that has only been categorised in the past 20 to 30 years, according to Tehrani (2004).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (D.S.M. III) in 1980 definition posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is "*a mental disorder that potentially follows an event in which the individual experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with either actual or threatened loss of life or serious injury invoking a response of fear, helplessness, or horror*". With each revised edition of the D.S.M. the diagnostic criteria for P.T.S.D. has changed substantially (Pai, Suris & North 2017). The subjective interpretative words "*fear, helplessness, or horror"* have been removed.

Firefighters are routinely exposed to traumatic events. Although this is an unavoidable occupational hazard and one which professional firefighters are trained and expected to deal with, there are other risk factors for PSTD. Evidence suggests that pre-existing characteristics such as low self-efficacy and hostility can contribute to later development of PTSD. Conversely, high levels of the same characteristics can be seen as protective factors (Henrichs et al.,2005). Henrichs also suggests that personal development training focusing on self-efficacy and hostility management may be helpful in the development of coping skills which may be beneficial for prevention in high risk populations. Indeed, according to Mitchell and Bray (1990), two protective measures which can offset the effects of trauma are training and preparation and organisational and peer support. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a service which is currently available to fire service personnel. This includes defusing and debriefing as well as peer support programmes. It also provides referral on to counselling services where appropriate.

1.3 Social support

The long-standing idea of the brotherhood and the significant social connection between firefighters is recognised universally (Cosby 2007). As a consequence of living together in the firehouse and working closely as part of a team for extended periods fosters an unspoken trust and mutual respect and loyalty. This social bonding and the support that comes with it is an important protective factor when dealing with distress (Carey, Al-Zaiti, Dean, Sessanna, Finnell 2011). Carpenter (2015) also suggests that this type of social support can be a protective factor and may reduce suicide ideation amongst professional firefighters. Indeed, this is in line with other research which supports the suggestion that firefighters have a deep connection and often turn to each other for support after a critical incident (Hill & Brunsden, 2009). This trust and fellowship has been harnessed and used in a very proactive and positive way in the form of CISM and peer support programmes. Evidence shows the value of such programmes in increasing awareness and reducing stigma around mental health issues among firefighters (Henderson,Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016).

However, this culture can foster an attitude of "them versus us" and so this brotherhood can also be a risk factor in so much as it may be a barrier to help seeking behaviours (Henderson et al., 2016). Evidence shows that support from family and friends and even the wider community for example church and clubs are all protective factors in respect of mental health (Dervic et al., 2004).

The occupational stresses of this job can have a negative impact on a firefighters' health which in turn can adversely affect quality of life not only while in service but also into retirement (Wagner, Heinrichs & Elhert 1998) and the provision of social support has been found to be important in order to promote positive health outcomes over a lifetime and into old age (Sherbourne, Meredith, Rogers & Ware 1992).

1.4 Retirement

With significant increases in life expectancy in Ireland and overall decrease in mortality rates by 16.7% since 2006 the population aged 65 years and over increased by 102,174 to 637,567 (19.1%) in 2016 and predictions see this number doubling between 2016 and 2031(Central Statistics Office, 2016). People will increasingly spend a larger proportion of their lives in retirement. Retirement is a phase of life which is ever changing with more people aspiring to lead more active and productive lifestyles. Retirement can have far reaching health implications and may be influenced by factors such as income and existing health behaviours (Skeffington, Rees & Mazzuccelli, 2017).

There are considerable life changes and adjustments associated with retirement which may have a knock on effect on relationships, income, daily routine and health (Jungmeen & Moen 2002). These changes in circumstances and loss of status can lead to feelings of boredom, lack of motivation and sense of purpose (Lazarus & Lazarus, 2006). Indeed research has shown that in some cases retirement can evoke a grieving like process (Antonellis, 2017). Something that has in many ways defined the person, no longer exists, and their services that were once so valued are no longer required (Neids, 2007).

It takes many years of training, mentoring and experience to become an accomplished firefighter (Antonellis 2017) and in that time as a firefighter, it seems possible that this role becomes part of that person's identity. On retirement, after the move from operational to civilian life, there can be an attendant loss of identity (Wang, 2007). Indeed Antonellis (2017) goes on to compare this loss of a career, which had become an integral part of their identity, with grief that is felt with the loss of a loved one.

It has also been suggested that this transition from operational to retirement and the consequential loss of identity and camaraderie may also be a factor in suicide ideation (Paul & Thompson n.d.). In cases where a firefighter retires at age 55 and they are still well and fit, their wealth of experience is now essentially redundant. So this transition from a uniformed

disciplined organisation into civilian life may have its challenges. A study into this transition of military personnel back into civilian life by Brugner, Serrato and Ogden (2013) looked into the notion of the shift in the sense of self and loss of identity when adjusting to civilian life. It showed that one of the primary themes was one of loss. For some it was the loss of the sense of belonging and solidarity with comrades, and others expressed feelings isolation and loneliness. There is limited research on retired fire service personnel internationally and even less in Ireland. It is also evident from this research and from others (Bracken- Scally, 2016) that organisational support and policy around retirement from the emergency services is limited at best.

This study will ask participants about their experience of this transition from the fire service into civilian life.

The principle purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the transition of firefighters from being operational to retirement. The specific areas of interest were:

1. what supports are in place for firefighters pre and post retirement
2. what supports are needed for firefighters pre and post retirement
3. What are the experience of firefighters' transition into retirement.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design.

With this study, an interpretative phenomenological (IPA) approach was used. Phenomenological research strives "to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 41). In this instance the phenomenon is the experience of individuals after retirement from operational fire service, from their own perspective. This research looks at the individual and shared experience of participants as they adjust to life after a career as an operational firefighter. It will look at what life is like without the dependable support that goes hand in hand with being a firefighter and a member of a crew. This support can be in the form of individual and crew camaraderie as well as from management and the organisation as a whole, i.e. employee supports such as Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP). However, it is important to note that this is not just a simple descriptive methodology and differs from descriptive phenomenology as its purpose is to hear the story of the participants' experience of the phenomenon and then the researcher interprets the story and tries to clarify and contextualise the experience in the broader social sense (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). According to Smith et al., (2009) IPA is used in exploring how a person makes sense of major life experiences and is often used to look at the experience of major life transitions. Therefore, it fitted well in this research which explores the experience of firelighters' transitioning from operational to retirement.

In IPA, while the participants' own perspective is central, the interpretation by the researcher is also plays a vital role in the development a clear thematic analysis (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011) which will be discussed in section 2.4.

2.2 Sampling.

Because of the specific nature of the population who have experienced this phenomenon, the sampling technique used was a combination of purposive and snowball. That is the participants were chosen specifically because they have retired from the fire service in this case for at least a year. With IPA the recommended number of participants is six to ten, (Smith et al., 2009), however due to the limitation in the amount of time available for recruitment and analysis this number was limited to four. In order to meet the desired number of four, referrals from willing participants were also used. These retirees were recruited from both the retained fire service and full time service and included one female in order to be some way representative of a particular phenomenon rather than a population. Although compulsory retirement age is at present 55 for full time firefighters and 58 for retained firefighters, some people do retire before time for various reasons, hence there is no age exclusion

First, as the researcher, I am employed as a firefighter, so I personally contacted retired firefighters who are known to me or have been referred to me by other firefighters. At that point I explained the purpose of the research and clarified what exactly was involved. Assurances were given with regards to confidentiality and right to withdraw at any stage without reproach. This communication was then followed up by a written request via email. This included information outlining the research (Appendix A) and also included a consent form which was signed both by the participant and me the researcher (Appendix B), one copy was retained by the researcher and one was given to the participant. A profile of the participants will be outlined in the findings chapter.

2.3 Data Collection

2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were deemed the most appropriate method of data collection considering the subject matter, where conversations may unearth sensitive and emotive subject matter. For this reason, it is important to establish a good level of trust and empathy in order to acquire depth of information. The fact that I, the interviewer have considerable experience as a firefighter will instil a certain confidence and rapport with interviewees. It was important that the participant was allowed to tell their story, recount their experience of life in the fire service and the transition into retirement. According to Eatough and Smith (2008), and Smith and Osborn (2008), IPA interviews are the most common way to gather this type of data. These types of interviews are by nature participant led using open ended inductive questions allowing time and space to explore the phenomenon (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

It was necessary to construct a topic guide (Appendix C) which was designed to encourage participants to relay their stories and to feel that their contribution was valuable. Questions were open ended to encourage conversation with the view that this would lead to an organic process. This will facilitate gaining insight into the participants lived experience of being a firefighter and the transition from this to retirement and civilian life. The aim was to have the questions free from assumptions and not to be leading in any way. The intention was to use the topic guide *"as an aide-memoire,...."* *to enhance the consistency of data collection"*(Ritchie & Lewis, 2014 p.115) rather than as a strict structured questionnaire. In this way the participant had a degree of control as to where the conversation went and the questions were used simply as a guide in order to stay somewhat on track. These questions were devised in consultation with my supervisor and were approved by the appropriate ethics committee.

This research is exploratory in nature and the purpose is to allow the participant to tell their story in a safe and comfortable environment. In order to gather a significant amount of data for analysis, participants were interviewed individually using a semi structured format. This approach allowed flexibility for the researcher to ask follow on questions where responses required clarification or more detail (Gray, 2009). Moreover, because the aim of this research is to explore the individuals lived experience of being a firefighter and the transition from operational into retirement. IPA approach was used and the most common way to collect data for this type of research is to interview (Smith & Osborne 2008). Kvale (1996) best describes an interview as, "*An interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data.*"

For these reasons, and considering the subject matter, where conversations may unearth sensitive and emotive subject matter, interviews were deemed the most appropriate method of data collection. It is important to establish a level of trust and empathy in order to acquire a good depth of information.

2.3.2 Procedure for Interviews

Once consent forms were signed and collected, a follow up phone call gave the participants the opportunity to clarify any queries and arrange for a date for interview. A time was arranged for interview which was amenable to both parties. The allocated venue was WIT Library Cork Road Waterford. This venue was chosen for its privacy, neutrality and security. Interviews varied in duration from 25 minutes to 50 minutes.

The interview began with an open ended question "tell me about your career as a firefighter and when you retired". Care was taken to give participants ample time to consider each question posed and to be allowed time and space to tell their story. This was facilitated by the

researcher being mindful of the participants' humanness and being empathic and patient as they relayed their story. Data was collected by means of recording audio of interviews with a Sony Dictaphone and observation of any non-verbal communications such as gestures, facial expressions etc.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data collection, analysis and reporting are often concurrent and interlinked within the qualitative research process because of this, collection and analysis may overlap and it may be difficult to have a clear distinction between the two (Thorne, 2000). Therefore, the thematic analysis six phase process (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used as a guide. Although presented in a step by step form, analysis may not always follow these separate phases. It is in fact a reflective process which moves in and out of different phases and evolves over time (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). This six phase framework can be very useful for this type of analysis.

Phase 1: Familiarisation with data.

Data was read and re read several times to ensure that the researcher is familiar with not just the text but also with any observations or thoughts which were noted during interviews.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes.

Once familiar with the data, initial codes were noted. These codes were developed through re visiting data and reflecting on emerging themes. This allowed the researcher to create a structure to developing codes from which broader themes emerged across the data.

Codes need to be quite rigid with boundaries making sure that they are not interchangeable or redundant (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Peer reviewing and making reflexive notes all add to the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

Phase 3: Searching for themes.

After listing initial codes, themes were developed.

Once data has been examined and initial codes were listed, themes and sub themes were developed. At this stage initial codes were combined and narrowed down to form overarching themes which were representative of the data. An inductive approach was used where themes were strongly linked to data collected. So data was coded independently of any pre existing framework or preconceptions on the part of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis 1998).

However, at this juncture, it is important not to disregard any codes or themes which do not seem to fit within the identified themes. Themes which may seem insignificant at this stage, may later be of value with other themes or in adding to background detail of the study and therefore can be valuable in supporting the overall credibility of the study (Nowell et al., 2017). At the end of this phase, all coded data was grouped relevant to each theme.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes.

This phase involved the refinement of devised themes and subthemes. Consideration was also given to the validity and relevance of these themes. Coding is an ongoing dynamic process where existing themes are refined, or combined or discarded, and indeed where the need is identified, new codes are introduced. The researchers' task is to reduce the data into more manageable significant themes which accurately represent the text (Nowell et al., 2017). Themes should fit together in a meaningful way while remaining clearly distinct from each other (Braun & Clarke 2006). It is important that the researcher is clear about how the themes were devised and in order to test the accuracy and validity, the original data may be reviewed and compared to the developed themes to ensure that themes are supported by the data (Lincoln & Gubba 1985) .This was done by keeping a reflexive journal throughout the process.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes.

This phase involved further refining and defining themes. The aim of this phase according to Clarke and Braun (p92, 2013) is to identify the "essence " of each theme. When the content and scope of each theme can be clearly defined, the next phase may be addressed (Clarke & Braun 2006).

Phase 6: Writing up the report.

This is the final analysis and production of the finished report. The aim of this report is to provide a clear and concise description which presents a coherent and persuasive account of the data . In order to give readers an in depth understanding of the richness of the data, it is not enough to merely describe the various themes, the researcher must relay their interpretation of theories derived from the in depth analysis and relate this to relevant literature. This final report should inform the reader of the significance of each theme in relation to the subject matter (Nowell et al., 2017).

Transcripts were read and re read several times and points of interest were noted at this point. They were then read using thematic analysis to establish any themes or commonalities which were emerging. With familiarisation and further analysis, emerging themes were coded (Kvale, 1996).

It was important to be aware of my own pre existing beliefs and views at this stage (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) but not to let these prevent me from becoming immersed in the data. Each transcription was analysed individually and sub themes were formulated and the significance of these subthemes was noted. Each emergent theme was documented and supported by examples from the transcripts. Commonalities as well as differences in each transcription were also examined.

Because of the unquantifiable nature of the phenomenon in question, this research is somewhat descriptive as it endeavours to illuminate the individual and shared experiences of participants. Descriptive research is "aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method" (Fox, & Bayat, 2007) .

2.5 Ethical Considerations.

Ethical approval was obtained from Waterford Institute of Technology ethics committee [SHS/MAAFSHWB/009]. Written informed consent was provided by all participants prior to data collection.

2.5.1 Risks to Persons

The risk to participants was minimal but as with any encounter involving recounting of personal events, difficult issues or events may come to mind.

With in depth interviews and recollection of past experiences, it is possible for a participant to become upset or distressed. In this case I drew on my own facilitation skills, and empathy as a firefighter to support where necessary. External support contact information was given to all participants at the beginning of the interview.

With regard to the safety of the interviewer/ researcher, if interviews took place in a pre booked meeting room at W.I.T. library, Cork road campus. I , the researcher also had in place my own supervision/ support.

Participants were informed of potential risks, in this case, conversations may cause emotional distress when recounting events experience. A letter of consent (Appendix B), was sent to each participant outlining the requirements and rights of participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants was respected at all times and participants were allocated numbers

in place of names to uphold their anonymity. Any locations mentioned in this paper were replaced with XXX All recorded audio was deleted after transcription and data was kept in password protected cloud storage as per the Data Protection Act 2003. Hard copies were secured in locked filing cabinet. Only the researcher and supervisor had access to this data. I have read and understood the Data Protection Act 1988 & 2003.

2.5.2 Trustworthiness of the research findings

When research is deemed to be trustworthy, it goes a long way towards convincing all involved, that the findings are deemed to be credible and worthy of the attention of both the readers and the researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln & Gubba (1985), certain criteria need to be met to be classed as trustworthy, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This mirrors the traditional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability.

Credibility

In order to reduce the risk of bias, the researcher kept reflective log throughout the process to highlight preconceived ideas/bias.

The researcher is a firefighter and so has a significant insight into the unique culture of the fire service. The concern here was that neutrality would be maintained. This was done through regular engagement with the supervisor and the maintenance of meticulous records throughout the process. Construction of the topic guide, (Appendix C),which directed the questions during interview, was devised in consultation with the supervisor in order to insure that questions were open ended and not leading in any way. During interviews, the researcher made every effort to remain neutral to allow the interviewees to tell their story. Logs were kept detailing the process before and after each interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. As codes and themes were being identified, logs were kept detailing the analytical

process of how the final sub themes and themes were arrived at. Constant revision was employed in order to ensure analysis was accurate.

Credibility is achieved through constant engagement and observation of the process and checking that the views of the researcher(s) are in line with those of the participants whose experience is being recounted (Nowell, Norris, White et al., 2017). This was done through rigorous engagement in the process by the researcher.

Transferability

The participants were all retired fire service personnel and as stated in section 2.2 the number of participants was n=4. With this small number, the study cannot be representative of a population, i.e., retired firefighters but rather the phenomenon in question, i.e. the experience of the transition from operational into civilian life. The experiences varied in that n=2 retired with full service and n=2 retired before they reached the age of retirement for different reasons but all had considerable service. The fact that the researcher is a firefighter with considerable service enhanced the trust and openness of the participants. The researcher is confident that this study could be replicated on a larger scale with retired fire service personnel and skilled interviewers.

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the study. This can be achieved by providing detailed information of methodologies employed (Lincoln & Gubb 1985).

Dependability

Dependability was gained by supervisor debriefing of the processes adopted and supervisors role with coding/code books etc,.

Dependability is achieved by the researchers ensuring that the process is well documented and traceable which will allow for easy auditing (Koch, 1994) and this all adds to the trustworthiness of the study. A study is deemed to be auditable when given the same situation

and the same data, a researcher can clearly follow the decision process and determine similar findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Confirmability

Confirmability is strengthened by the documentation of the process of interpretation and detailed explanation of how findings were extracted from the data in question (Nowell et al., 2017). The participants confirmed that transcripts were accurate and true. The researcher is confident that the participants will confirm the findings. Due to time constraints, this was not possible to complete prior to submission. However, all participants will be given a copy of the finished research document in due course.

In summary, this chapter outlined the procedure of recruiting participants, the methodological and ethical considerations adopted and the findings are detailed in the results chapter that follows.

Chapter 3. Findings

3.1 Introduction

The findings are outlined from thematic analysis of data from one to one interviews which were conducted with four retired fire service personnel. Two were from the retained service and two from the fulltime service. Of the four, one was female, three male. Two were ranked officers, a station officer (S/.O) and a senior assistant chief fire officer (SACFO) and two were firefighters. The key themes are outlined below and are explained using quotes. The main findings which were identified in relation to the research questions are supports which are available (section 3.1), retirement and the transition into retirement (section 3.2), and workplace stress (section 3.3).

3.2 Availability of supports.

All employees of the local authority are offered a generic pre retirement course. This is a *one size fits all* course designed with a 65/68 year old employee in mind. Current fire service policy in Ireland does not include support for personnel once retired. The impact of career demands which may have a lasting effect on well being (Beaton, Murphy, Johnson 1998), coupled with the abrupt nature of retirement from the fire service can add to the stress experienced by firefighters in the transition into retirement.

3.2.1. Organisational support.

The transition from being operational to civilian life can be very abrupt and so organisational support both before and after retirement would be very helpful. It was clear from all four interviews that the participants perception of provision of support from the organisation for retirees was limited at best:

> "*Unfortunately there is no work support.*" (P01.).

"There's no support from work anyway, none" (P02).

"There was nothing.... It's like literally, you just cut the ties and that was it.... One day you're there and the next day you're not, yeah". (P03)

Similarly, when asked what supports were made available on approach to retirement (P04) replied:

"Zero....I would say zero...there's no follow-up there. There's no lead-up to it"(P04).

Where pre-retirement courses were provided by the organisation, participants said they weren't really relevant to the fire service:

"*Because most of the courses that they used to have years ago was somebody coming in from an insurance company coming telling you what to do with your money... They didn't tell you about, you know, you know, you get your payments; get yourself a pair of flip-flops and grow your hair long"* (P02).

"*You're walking out of a job on your retirement and taking everything they say at face value and it's true..... And nobody knows what they're entitled to or what … you know, what you should be doing afterwards "*(P02).

Some participants (n=2) expressed the need for support from the organisation with perhaps the provision of training and courses outside the requirements of being a firefighter. Participants pointed out that specific training while in service, and perhaps after retirement, could be adapted to include courses which would be of use after retirement

"I think there should be something there, and even afterwards, there should be something there, you know?.... Even if they only contacted … or there was a meeting of retirees, or if they brought them back or … "(P03).

"you know, they'll give you training because it's determined by the department that this is the type of training they're needing. But, ehm, they don't decide that oh, we'll

spend a few extra bob on training about, you know, this is what you're going to have to do when you retire or if you're interested in this, that and the other"(P02).

All participants expressed the view that organisational support to help with the transition into retirement would be helpful in a very practical way. For example with organisation of finances and pension entitlements, up skilling for future employment and acquisition of information available resources.

3.2.2. Social support

Although perceived supports from the organisation were limited, great value was placed on support from colleagues and family. Regular informal meetings with other retired fire service personnel were common to all four participants and a common theme was the fact that conversations usually came back to the job and reminiscing.

"I'd know one or two in XXXX. We'd all meet up. And I meet up with one or two in (nearby town)... *We'd have a coffee; we'd meet and chat.... and you'll always go back to the fire brigade with conversation"* (P04).

Some participants also expressed the importance of the connection that exists and the long lasting friendships gained as a consequence of working closely together as a team (crew) and in particular the bond which develops as a result of shared experiences on the job, memories which stay and are still vivid even after retirement:.

"I miss, I miss my old crew as such... Because we had, we had great crack. We ... and we slotted well together, like".(P03)

"we had great fun, as well as there's memories we've all shared that aren't so nice, but at least you know that, that between us-we have that link".(P03)

"Well my own brigade, would be always with me, certain individuals would have been always great to me. They would be like brothers to me, or sisters..... And great

friends. I got great friends from the brigade. My best friends are from the fire brigade.... And still are, like"(P04).

Notably, participants also expressed the therapeutic value of chatting to colleagues about past experiences.

"we'd often just sit, have a cup of tea and have a chat.. And sometimes things come up and you know. And you have a chat about it or whatever. And then gone again, like. It's great" (P03).

Also when asked about the importance of connecting and talking with colleagues, two participants in particular mentioned the black sense of humour which is part of the natural affinity shared by emergency service workers. Because of the extreme and critical incidents which firefighters experience, the boundaries of what is acceptable humour are often challenged.

"You're talking in work about something, you know? And there's a, a black humour involved in it, which is a kind of a stress relief for dealing with something like that. But, you know, me view of outside of life is totally different than inside"(P02).

Again, the awareness of the value of keeping that connection was expressed consistently.

"We get together every six to eight weeks for a coffee in a different centre..And there's a little bit of banter there, because again, the fire brigade is a unique organisation, insofar as that you see an awful lot of very unusual and very, very weird things. You meet a lot of people in distress. But there is this black comedy that you've got to have at the back of it all, which is a kind of a little relief. And sometimes we relive this, especially over things that happened on training courses and things that would have happened, people etc. etc. So that's still an element that's there. It's a little vent , if you like".(P01).

These friendships which were forged in service were maintained into retirement.

3.3 Retirement.

Moving into retirement is a phase in life which is associated with major changes and adjustments which have a knock on affect on daily routines, relationships, income and health. Two of the participants it was their ambition to be a firefighter from an early age.

> *"I always wanted to become a fireman "*(P01).
>
> *"Well, I joined in 1990, ehm, Lismore fire brigade, I would have been probably in my early twenties then... Loved it; loved the job* ".(P04)

and all four had considerable service. Because of the nature of retirement from the fire service, that is the abrupt and sudden change in circumstances from years of being an operational firefighter to being a retired civilian can be life changing. One participant described the experience as follows-

> *"I compare it to driving cars at 100 miles an hour for 39 years, which I was. And all of a sudden then, somebody takes the car off you...And you can't go anymore"* (P01).

3.3.1. Preparation.

Due to the suddenness of retirement, especially with full time fire service personnel, the importance of being prepared was expressed, in particular in terms of finances, pension entitlements, education and up skilling especially in the area of i.t. with the view to reemployment and remaining productive.

(W) who felt he was ready and prepared to retire after 39 years of service, realised the importance of easing into the process:

> *"I was all set to retire, and I wanted to retire.... I felt I needed to slow down for the want of a better word"*(P01).

The same participant also commented on the importance of taking responsibility for their own physical and mental well being as well as their own and family's finances with the view to enjoying a happy and healthy retirement with friends and family.

> *"Make sure you've got your mortgage paid for, your kids are in college, if they're of that vintage, and so on like that . But don't retire on a whim, and don't retire unprepared, either yourself mentally, yourself physically . I get … eh, I call it an MOT to the doctor once a year. I think that needs to be done as well. You've got to care for yourself. So mentally and physically, you're okay. Look at your family. At the end of the day, if you're hanging around the house all day, there will be friction, if your family isn't able for you, or you're not able for your family. That's very, very important, I think. And, eh, above all, enjoy it, because it does go extremely fast, extremely fast"*(P01).

Others pointed out the fact that good health plays a big role in the quality of their retirement and in the enjoyment of retirement and also the value of a positive outlook, live in the moment.

> *"it's nice to get out of work in relatively good health-*
>
> *Ehm, like physically and psychologically, you know? That's a big plus as well... I mean, this motto now is do it now, because in ten years' time, you mightn't be able to do it"*(P02).

For one retained participant who retired early, the financial loss was a factor which warranted consideration. But this had to be weighed up against other factors such as the commitment and resulting sacrifices to family time and health and well being.

> *"This is a wage gone as well, like.. And see, my health then as well"*(P04).
>
> *It (the job) ran my life completely...And do you know, like, at some point obviously, you made that decision after consulting with your … probably your family, your*

doctors, everything"(P04).

A similar view around financial loss was expressed by (P03) another retained firefighter who retired early:

"So like, there was the financial uncertainty"(P03).

And of course this had to be weighed up against the everyday constraints of being on call.

"you couldn't plan anything without having to plan around the fire brigade . So it was like instead of planning around your own family, you've to plan around the fire brigade first".(P03).

The importance of preparation and the fact that retirement came up again and again.

"You know? I look at it now and say to meself, 'Jeez, you know, some of them fellas coming up to retirement just don't know what's ahead of them.' Like, you know, that they're sauntering along.. not preparing... (P02).

You know. And I'd hate to be going back preaching to people about what you should be doing? You know, you should be doing this course; you should be doing that course"(P02).

3.3.2. The transition

There are considerable life changes and adjustments associated with retirement which have a knock on effect with relationships, income, daily routine and health. To become an accomplished firefighter takes considerable time, effort and dedication.

It was clear from these interviews that all four participants were extremely dedicated and still have a deep love of the job. P01 recounted with some affection how he started his 39 year career in the service-

" *I started off as a water squirter. Then I started to drive. Then I started to write specifications for fire engines. Then I used to test drive those before they were*

delivered. And I got a great buzz out of that end of it".

"I still have an interest. And even now, if I'm down the town and I'm hear a siren , I'm going to stop and have a gander and see what it is. And I get terrible slagging from the family, because they still think I'm a little bit mad" (P01).

It was clear that the unique experiences of these firefighters' influenced their lives in ways that will stay with them to some degree always.

" what you've learned and what you've done and what You know? It's a thing. The fire brigade seems to be a unique... You're in it, it's, it's in your blood and that's it. It's hard to lose it as well. Even when you're out of it, it's hard to lose it, I think, yeah. I miss it as a, as a job... Because I loved it. Yeah"(P04).

Interestingly (P04) described the career as vocation like

"*You know, you say the church is a calling, but I think the fire brigade is, is something similar. Yeah.. You have to be someone-who's really cut out for it, yeah".*

While (P02) commented on the institutionalisation around this uniformed service and questioned if this might be a disadvantage in adjusting to civilian life.

"you know, when you're institutionalised ... and you are institutionalised - in a job like that, because do you know, they buy our clothes; they buy your ... they tell you what to do. And when you, you leave that place, you think, oh, I'm going to ... I'm not going to be able to do anything if I'm made do this. But if, if you put your mind to it and say, 'Right, it's just another step".

Given the serious nature of the job, it is understandable that for most situations there is a sense of urgency and crew members depend on each other and literally trust each other with their lives. Later in the interview, (P02) did comment on this reciprocated trust which is ever present amongst crew and colleagues and that this reliability seems to be absent in the "people outside" which for him is frustrating.

" Dealing with normal, run of the mill people . You know, when you're dealing with people in the fire brigade, they're people that you're working with. You have a fair amount of trust in what they say, or what they ... going to say they're going to do.... You know, if something needs to be done, it's done immediately .... Whereas when you're dealing with people outside, you can't believe a word out of their mouths"

It is also interesting that (P02) identifies himself as apart from the "run of the mill people" . Part of the adjustment to retirement is the fact that you are no longer a firefighter.

Ending - Suddenness

Participants expressed difficulty and a sense of sadness in leaving behind this career which has been such a central part of their lives for years. In particular the loss of identity both as an individual who is highly respected and as part of the crew with which there is a strong bond and unity which comes from sharing everything from living quarters to food to experiences, good and bad:

"It's actually ... it's very ... it was very hard.. to sort through. Because you're kind of part of that scene and then all of a sudden, you're not"(P03).

*Because you're not one of the lads anymore(J)*identity

"Once you're done... Bye-bye... Literally to the day of your birthday."(P04).

"*-ex firefighter now.. Ex in front of everything now "*(P03).

It is not surprising that such involvement in one's job affects ones view on the world which carries on into retirement.

When asked if experiences in the service have had an impact on his philosophy on life, (P02) responded-

"course it has, without a doubt. And as I'm sure everybody in the fire brigade will … even the guards and ambulance will tell you exactly the same. You know?

"You just get a very, ehm … you know, I don't … I look at … you know, people say, 'Oh, so and so is sick, and they're not well.' And you say, 'You know, it's tough.'

That's it, you know/ It gives you a real hard attitude about life, you know, and people don't understand that sometimes. Eh, comes across differently, you know? You know yourself"(P02).

So for P02, he identifies this attitude as hard, but maybe it's more about an understanding of the fragility of life and living in the moment, appreciating what you've got .

" I mean, this motto now is do it now, because in ten years' time, you mightn't be able to do it."(P02).

For others it was more about being safety conscious and again, this can be seen as valuing life and protecting yourself and those you love because again the experiences of accidents and loss of life and witnessing how life can be changed forever in an instant increases awareness around the importance of safety.

"it makes me more aware of driving and traffic... And I pass that on to my family. I've three girls, and I'm always on to them to keep your distance... be careful. And I'm the same myself, because down through the years … I was only in the fire brigade about a week and a half, and there was a serious road accident that killed four people . And that was my first introduction to it"(P01).

"you know, you look at your family different.. You look at what you do different, your.. attitude to people. Even your attitude to life even, would be different. Ehm, oh, God, I think it's a life experience to be in the fire brigade ..But definitely, the fire brigade would teach you things that you'd never learn if you were never in it" (P04).

"You see sides of life, you know, people in accidents. And you see sides of life that most people would never see and would not want to see" (P04)..

" I suppose, I, I know I'm a lot more safety conscious definitely". (P03).

Unemployability

(P04) highlighted the fact that part of the preparation for retirement from the service is important bearing in mind the difficulty in finding another job which will value the skills gained in the service.

" before you come up to, to start, start planning something.. It's like you're going to hit a wall when you get there.. And if you've nothing kind of half planned, you're going to be there in limbo land for a while. Because I feel I'm still a little bit in limbo land... you should be thinking of some career. It's very hard to get anything from being in the fire brigade.. I couldn't get anything" (P04).

The reality of the situation is that all the years of training and developing highly specialised skills are in most cases not recognised or valued outside the emergency services.

"And I think, you know, years in the fire brigade, they're as good as any qualifications. They don't look at them, but they should. They're life learning qualifications , like. skills you have, it's very hard to put a label on them"(P04).

Specialist skills that were highly valued in the fireservice were no longer appreciated.

"Because look, when you come out of the fire brigade, be honest about it, nobody's interested in ... that you did ehm, a night-time navigation course on a speedboat. You know, who cares, like.. and, you know, that ehm, oh, I have a breathing apparatus course done or it was a high ... you know, working with heights ..When you're never going to work with heights again"(P03).

As a firefighter, one may be highly skilled from years of training, and may be valued and respected in the community. This appreciation does not take from the fact that once retired, at 55, one is not given the same regard when it comes to looking for employment.

> *"Don't come out of work thinking that somebody owes you something, or- that you're going to get a job. You're not. The discrimination is rife. Age discrimination is rife"* (P03).

Coming to terms with retirement has its related stresses and indeed the nature of the work has its own related stressors and challenges.

3.4 Workplace Stress

Even though the issue of workplace stress was not directly addressed in the research questions or indeed the topic guide, the fact remains that it has been well documented that those who work in the frontline services are routinely exposed to trauma and difficult working conditions which may be carried with them into their retirement. I felt that in order to be true to the participants and the data, this needed to be represented. Even though the issue of workplace stress was not directly addressed in the research questions, it is a theme which was evident in all four interviews, as was anticipated. These accounts highlight how stress was part of their working lives as firefighters. The discussion will address the connection between firefighters' working lives the absence of these stressors in retirement. From analysing the transcripts the sources of stress around their work varied from conflict between family and work commitments, difficulty with the organisation, and working hours as well as the burden of responsibility and accountability .

3.4.1 Commitment.

Being a firefighter demands a great deal of dedication and commitment. The nature of the working hours can often encroach on normal everyday life. Sometimes a firefighter may be rostered to be on call for emergencies. This is the case for retained firefighters and for senior officers and the duration varies from 24/7 for a week on and a week off, or in the case of some retained stations it can be a constant unless cover has been pre-arranged.

Of the four participants interviewed, two were from the retained service. This meant that they were on a pager system. They carried an alerter which would page them in the event of a call. They were required to drop whatever they were doing and make their way to the station within a designated time, in this case, five minutes, to turn out to that call. Within that five minutes, on the way to the call, the firefighter switches from possibly being fast asleep to jumping out of bed and into the car, trying to make it to the station as quickly as possible, safely, and all the time adrenaline is being released in anticipation of what may be required of them. P03 accounts for this by staying:

> " I *don't miss it But I don't miss that walk up the mountain; I can tell you* (referring to forest and bush fires which can be very physically demanding). *Definitely not. Or the three o'clock beeps , you know, in the morning, when you know it's not going to be good if it's that hour of the morning, like. Switch into that mode and then get in the car...And on a frosty night then, you've to defrost the car"*(P03).

> *"In my case my family was prepared for it,* (retirement) *and again I think they* (family) *were looking forward to it to a certain degree because when your bleep goes off in the middle of the night, the house is awake and you're jumping around, looking for your tracksuit, put on your shoes, the light has to go on, and depending on what it is, they may bleep you a second time if it's a real push job etc etc "*(P01).

Being on call meant that one had to be ever ready to shift in and out of normal everyday life into the role of the rescuer/firefighter. Baring in mind that this could mean jumping from a leisurely dinner with the family, to a life or death situation which may be extremely physically and mentally challenging.

> *"I suppose intrudes on your normal life "*And then," *slip back into, into normal life"*(P03).

For all four participants the nature of the working hours and shifts meant that occasions like Christmas and bank holidays held no special significance, they were just another rostered shift. This of course meant that family occasions and holidays were regularly missed out on highlighting the difference with retirement:

> *"I didn't miss working the weekends; I didn't miss the nights.. you know, I mean, all the Christmases that you miss, you know . All the Easters, all the birthday parties that you couldn't go to.."*(P02).

In the case of the retained service, being on call meant that it was more difficult to plan because of the chance of getting a call and the uncertainty of the duration etc. For example:

> *"you might be planning to go* (to a family occasion) *or you might get the time. And then before the time comes that you have planned to go off you might get a, a call an hour beforehand, which takes 3-4 hours, and then you still can't go.... The chances are, you get a call, and that's it. I missed my nephew's christening because of it"* (P03).

This is also highlighted when (P03) talks about how she enjoys a freedom which wouldn't be possible if still in the retained service:

> *"It, it was a great freedom.. , because my daughter, like, she plays camogie.. And*

actually, the year that I had actually left, she got on the county panel, the under-14s county panel. And, ehm, so it meant that I was free to take her to camogie- to take her to the matches, to actually go see her play, like"

P02 also agreed that there was a great sense of freedom in being retired insofar as he no longer had responsibility of being on call.

"Yeah, there's a huge freedom involved in it"(P02).

When asked about the biggest difference between retired life in comparison to when working, the answers clearly indicated the considerable amount of pressure they were under in relation to time constraints it is not surprising that with retirement from the service comes a huge sense of relief and freedom.

"The biggest difference is unaccountability. I don't have to account to anybody. That's the first one. The second one is time. I don't wear a watch most days. Where as in the past, I had to be at a certain place at a certain time. Everything was timed. If you were going to a call, you were clocked from the time when you started to a time when you get there to the time of when you go back So all that for me was a huge huge relief, that I didn't have to have to be under clock and pushed pushed pushed! it is just total relaxation, for me for when I retired"(P01).

This sentiment was echoed by other participants-

"It was actually a relief to come out of it at that time"(P04).

3.4.2 Responsibility.

Even though commitment and responsibility are related, in this research, the pressure of responsibility and accountability seemed to be more prominent with the two ranked officers: W who progressed through the ranks to SACFO (senior assistant chief fire officer), and P04

who was promoted as far as SO (station officer). Both ranks carry the burden of responsibility and accountability which was reflected in their interviews for example:

> *"....as a senior officer you're on call. So the problem is, that as you get older, jumping out of bed in the middle of the night really puts a strain on your system. Then again, your driving skills are being put to the test because you're in all sorts of weather, you're solo in the car. You're listening to messages on the radio, you're making decisions based on that, which can have a big effect either way down the road"*(P01).

When there are difficulties in dealing with senior management, especially when employees feel unsupported which was clearly stated in section 3.2.1. above. For P04, a major source of stress was dealing with the hierarchy and feeling unsupported. This coupled with the burden of responsibility of senior rank ultimately lead to him retiring ten years earlier than he had hoped:

> *"I had got as far as station officer, which probably I don't know should I have ever went for it. I wasn't wanted to be station officer in [*name of brigade*] anyway. Put it that way; the hierarchy didn't want me to be a station officer"*(P04).

This stress and pressure had a negative effect on his mental health and in the end, on the advice from his doctor, he reluctantly retired:

> *" Through advice from my doctor and advice from myself basically, Ehm, I was after kind of getting a form of depression. I suppose the stresses of the job...Twas stress from the hierarchy is what it all came from...Which is sad, like, I was kind of forced out of it"*(P04).

"it's (the stress) *affecting your health, then it's going to affect it on the scene . And I would always take that first, the fire brigade first. It's too much of a responsibility at the station officer's level. You're answerable to everything, yeah"* (P04).

3.5 Summary

Even though it wasn't a named question, the theme of workplace stress was clearly present in all interviews. The source of stress ranging from working hours to conflict with family commitments to frustration with the lack of support from the organisation.

Another first key theme which was identified was that of the supports which retirees felt were available to help with the transition from active duty into civilian life. It was clear from all four participants that the organisation had failed to be supportive. The supports drawn from were more social, coming from family friends and their own resourcefulness.

Also worth noting was the actual retirement itself and the abrupt nature of it and the adjustment required to settle into life outside the service.

3.6 Other Findings.

In order to be true to participants and the data collected, it is important to include the following finding. The number of participants was small (n=4) in this study but yet the subject of suicide of colleagues did come up and more than one participant mentioned that they had lost colleagues through suicide. These firefighters were retired and close to retirement.

These findings show that participants gained great support from family and colleagues. However, for situations when this support system, for whatever reason, breaks down, more specialist aid may be required. This highlights the necessity for a more robust mental health policy which provides more structured support for firefighters both pre and post retirement.

Chapter 4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The principle purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the transition of firefighters from being operational to retirement. The specific areas of interest were:

1. what supports are in place for firefighters pre and post retirement
2. what supports are needed for firefighters pre and post retirement
3. What are the experience of firefighters' transition into retirement.

The findings showed that for these participants, being in the fire service was more than just a job. Because of the enormous commitment on many levels, it was more a way of life which became part of who they are, it was "in their blood". This deep connection with the job and colleagues, for these participants, was carried into retirement. This was reflected in a residual curiosity as to what's going on when they hear the two tones and see the blue flashing lights of appliances on their way to some call or other.

While in the service, the commitment to, and burden of responsibility, not only affected firefighters on a personal level, it also impacted on family life to some degree. Participants told of how they don't miss the disruption of night calls and the conflict of having to miss out on family occasions and the constant reminder that at times, life had to be organised around the job. However, they also told of how they miss the camaraderie and other aspects of the job (section 3.2). The value that these participants placed on support from family and friends was evident as was the need for more structured organisational support in the area of helping with the transition from the service into retirement.

4.2 Organisational Supports

One of the stark findings from this research was the perceived lack of support by all participants from their organisations. The language used by the participants when talking about their organisations support around their retirement was noted because, it seemed quite negative. It appears that this lack of support reflected feelings that they weren't valued by the organisation and were given no recognition of the years of dedicated service.

This feeling of being forgotten coupled with the abrupt nature of retirement, that is, one day being operational, totally immersed in the role of rescuer, to, literally, on the day of your birthday, you're gone, can make this adjustment challenging. This is where support from the organisation could be beneficial. Although pre retirement courses are provided by the local authority, these tend to be generic in nature and are more suitable for workers retiring at 65 from other typical nine to five occupations. Provision of courses to employees prior to retirement may be of benefit in helping them to deal with such issues as finances for example, pension entitlements, and the possibility of providing training in different areas which might go some way towards helping retirees to find new employment or indeed advising on how best to adjust to their new circumstances. Notably, two of the four participants expressed that they had difficulty in finding out what their entitlements were and also in receiving the correct remuneration on retirement.

This uncertainty about life as a retired firefighter and feeling of lack of support can all contribute to workplace stress and have a negative effect on personnel (Mitchell, 2011). Armstrong (2014) highlighted the fact that organisational stressors can have a negative impact on firefighters and suggests that conversely if organisations fostered a sense of value and belonging that this supportive environment could serve as a protective factor in the face of stress resulting from traumatic exposure. There is also evidence to suggest that

organisational support for emergency service workers leads to a reduction in levels of distress (Regehr, Hill, Knott, & Sault, 2003).

A recent study by Bracken-Scally, McGilloway and Mitchell (2016), highlighted the fact that here in Ireland, organisational support for retirees in the fire service is limited. This study also suggests that recognition of service given by firefighters can have an impact on motivation. It was also pointed out the importance of the provision of retirement support from employers, both pre and post retirement in order to facilitate a smooth transition.

4.3 Social support

It was clear from this research that all four participants realised and appreciated the value of support from friends and family. These retirees also spoke about how they made efforts to stay in contact with friends. They also expressed the importance of keeping connected with colleagues with whom long lasting friendships had developed. It was clear that all participants had a great fondness for, and felt deeply connected with colleagues, in particular those with whom they had worked closely with on the same crew. Efforts were made by participants to stay in touch through social occasions and regular coffee meetings where, these retirees, would just chat and catch up and enjoy the familiarity of the company. The therapeutic value of these conversations, which always managed to come back to the job, was expressed in some way by all participants. These connections were developed through shared experiences and a mutual understanding of the challenges that firefighters face, challenges that for the most part the outside world doesn't know about. So while friends and family are supportive in some ways, this connection and understanding creates a unique support that can only come from colleagues.

Indeed, this finding is in line with other research which supports the suggestion that firefighters have a deep connection and often turn to each other for support after a critical

incident (Hill & Brunsden, 2009). This is more often than not done informally over a cup of tea back at the station. Typically after a call, when the appliances and crew return to station, there is immediate work to be done in checking that equipment and trucks are replenished and made ready for the next call, which can come at any minute. Then, crews can sit and regroup and gather support where it is needed. It is worth noting that there is evidence to support the fact that this type of camaraderie has been shown to serve as a protective factor in mental health (Herbert, 2013; Tuckey & Hayward, 2011). This form of support was also deemed important for retirees in a recent study by Braken-Scally (2015), which suggested that such relationships were important for retirees as they felt able to identify with each other and maintain social contact. This is in line with findings here which indicate the importance of maintaining connections and friendships into retirement. Other evidence also documented that this significant social connection promotes the notion that organisations should facilitate this continued connection which may play an important role in the health and well being of ex fire service personnel (Pazzim & Marin, 2017).

A study by Stanely et al., (2015) highlighted the exceptionally high career prevalence of suicide in firefighters in comparison to the general population and indeed evidence also suggests that a range of suicide ideation and behaviours has significantly higher lifetime prevalence in firefighters (Martin, Trac, Buser et al., 2017). All the more reason to foster and facilitate as much as possible the type of social support and camaraderie which is strengthened by connections made during service and these bonds remain strong because of the shared experiences which carry on into retirement. Carpenter et al.,(2015) suggests that this connection and support is a protective factor and may reduce suicide ideation in this population. It is clearly documented that suicide amongst firefighters is prevalent (Carpenter et al.,2015, Antonellis, 2007; Stanley et al., 2015) and here is also evidence to suggest that a range of suicide ideation and behaviours has significantly higher lifetime prevalence amongst

firefighters (Martin, Trac, Buser et al., 2017). As previously outlined the subject of suicide in the fire service needs to be addressed and requires much more research. A study by Carpenter et al., (2015), concluded that the association between occupational stress and suicide ideation may be reduced by social support. This study has demonstrated that these retired firefighters benefit greatly from support provided by comrades and work colleagues. However, in the absence of this kind of support, there is a need for a more structured support system to be put in place in the fire service. This support system needs to address the potential mental health issues during service as well as into retirement.

There is evidence to support that early intervention and support can significantly mitigate stress responses in frontline emergency service personnel (Mitchell & Bray, 1990) and familial and social support can be protective factors in suicide and suicide ideation (Paul & Thompson n.d.).

With the introduction of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) organisations within the emergency services both in Ireland and internationally are making strides to address the effect of stress reactions on well being of its staff. CISM is an intervention procedure which was developed to deal with the effects of exposure to traumatic events. Initially this protocol was developed for use with military personnel and then was modified and adapted and now is widely used in civilian life for helping those involved in critical incidents to cope and to seek professional help if required . CISM was introduced into the ambulance service in 1997 and then into the fire service around 2007 (CISM Network Ireland). CISM is composed of the following: pre-crisis preparation; demobilisation; defusing; Critical Incident Stress Debriefing; one-to-one crisis intervention/counselling; family crisis intervention; and follow-up and referral (Everly & Mitchell, 1997). A peer support system was also introduced in which a member of each crew was trained to be a first responder within the station.

Notably, in this study, support at management level, as well as amongst colleagues, has also been emphasised as being of great importance and research consistently reports links between social support and mental health outcomes (Pazzim & Marin, 2017). For example, a lack of support from those in leadership roles has been found to predict lower job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion (Sterud et al., 2006). Supports in work and leading up to retirement can all help in coping with stress which may have positive health outcomes into retirement.

4.4 Retirement

It was clear that for all participants, the transition into retirement from the fire service had an impact on their lives. At one time this retirement phase of one's life was the shortest, recent statistics suggest that this has changed. For example, a generation ago, in 1986, the expected number of years spent in retirement was 12.8 for men, and 15.8 for women. Today, according, OECD data, those numbers have increased significantly; in 2016 for men it was 16.7 years and 22.2 for women (OECD 2016). Life expectancy has also increased from 73.50 years in 1986 to 81.80 years in 2016 (C.S.O.2016).What this means is that the amount of time spent in retirement is significant for fire service personnel. Retirement in general is a transition which involves considerable changes in relationships, roles, income, daily routines, and health (Jungmeen & Moen 2002). However this is not your stereotypical retirement in so far as retirement age for firefighters in Ireland is 55, and usual retirement age is 66 (OECD 2015), therefore potentially increasing the number of years in retirement by ten. Organisations have a duty of care to provide assistance to support this transition to facilitate retirees to enjoy a productive and healthy life after the fire service. A recent study by Braken-Scally et al., (2016) suggested that retirement from the fire service is not typical insofar as it does not follow the more familiar model of transition into retirement which is directly linked to the end of participation in the labour market. A broader approach to this transition is

perhaps necessary, which will allow the process to begin pre retirement. This can be done gradually by introducing phased retirement which could incorporate less working hours or taking on a more administrative role, in essence winding down allowing for gradual adjustment and an opportunity to make more informed decisions for the future .

It takes many years to become an accomplished firefighter (Antonellis, 2017) and in that time being a firefighter becomes part of who you are. On retirement, there can be a sense of loss of identity (Wang, 2007) and indeed Antonellis (2017) describes this as grieving over the loss of a career which had become part of their identity. So this transition from a uniformed disciplined organisation into civilian life may have its challenges. The fact that all participants still had some connection with the job or past colleagues, shows a lingering sense of identity with the past role. One participant stated how he found it easy to separate things that happened at work but could never fully separate from the job itself(section 3.2). Others remarked on how they missed certain aspects of the job and in particular, the camaraderie.

In most cases when a firefighter retires at age 55 they are still well and fit and also have a wealth of experience which is now essentially redundant. Something that has in ways defined the person, no longer exists, their services that were once so valued are no longer required (Neids 2007).This change in circumstance and loss of status can lead to feelings of boredom and lack of motivation and sense of purpose (Lazarus & Lazarus 2006).

One participant (P03) commented on how he would like to get other employment which would be similar in that it would involve dealing with the public in a helper capacity. He also commented on how after he had retired, he felt like he was “in limbo” and expressed a sense of feeling a bit lost and lacking direction (section 3.2.2). Another challenge expressed by participants was the difficulty they had in finding other employment. They spoke about the fact that even though a firefighter is highly skilled in specialist areas and had a wealth of experience, these attributes are not easily transferable or indeed appreciated by those outside

the fire service (section 3.3.2.). This ties in with other findings around the transition from a uniformed disciplined organisation into civilian life. For example, study by Brugner, Serrato and Ogden (2013) looked at the transition of military personnel back into civilian life. This study examined the shift in the sense of self and the associated loss of identity when adjusting to civilian life and one of the primary themes was one of loss . For some this sense of loss was about belonging to a unit and the solidarity which comes from working together as a team, and for others it was a loneliness and a sense of isolation. Other findings also support the theory which suggests that with retirement comes a sense loss of identity, loss of friendship, loss of purpose, almost like a mourning (Braken-Scally 2015). On retirement, the identity associated with the role played in work does not end. In fact, according to Reitzes and Mutran (2006) identity associated with previous work role can continue to have an impact on a person's behaviour and self esteem well into retirement. Reitzes and Mutran (2006) go on to suggest that lingering identities from other roles such as being a parent or a student may also continue to be part of how a person identifies themselves throughout their lives. This worker identity can have a positive effect in the adjustment process into retirement as it can provide a sense of support and consistency which can aid adjustment into retirement as well as adaptation into new stages of life.

4.5 Preparation.

This study showed that retirement is a process which starts in pre retirement preparation and continues into adjustment in retirement. Indeed the importance of preparation for retirement was evident with all four interviews. In particular with regard to finance and getting pension entitlements in order. Since there was little or no support or guidance from the organisation on this front, the retirees had to be proactive in this area in order to help make the transition easier. This finding is supported by other research which suggests that the appropriate time to

plan for retirement is midlife or even sooner (Rich, Sampson & Fetherling 2000). There seemed to be varied levels of preparedness or acceptance of this life change amongst the participants. P01 felt he was ready and wanted to retire and had adopted a holistic approach. He had prepared by getting his work affairs in order and by attending to his financial future and as he said himself, by slowing down, thus preparing mentally. This organisation and sense of security made for a very happy retirement for him.

While B expressed some apprehension on approach to his retirement, he again was proactive in preparing himself by engaging in various courses and pursuing hobbies outside the fire service. All of which added to his contentment in retirement. Both these participants report to be happy and healthy in their retirement.

This supports the findings in this research that preparation and support, both organisational and social have an impact on the quality of the retirement experience.

There has been widespread research on how changes in health affect retirement (Belgrave, Haug, Gomez-Bellenge,1987). Dwyer and Mitchell (1999), however studies on the impact of retirement on health are scarce and ambiguous (Dave, & Spasojevic 2007).There is conflicting evidence on the effects of retirement on health. Some evidence suggests that while retirement can have a positive effect on mental health, it can also have a negative effect on physical health and there is also evidence which shows both mental and physical improvements in retirees (Dave & Spasojevic, 2007). Other research reports no relationship at all between retirement and well being. However there is evidence to suggest that major life transitions such as retirement should be viewed as a developmental complex process that extends over time (Dave & Spasojevic 2007). Relationships and social context will influence retirement decisions which can impact on the quality of the experience (Kim & Moen 2001).

This supports the findings in this research that preparation and support, both organisational and social have an impact on the quality of the retirement experience.

Notably, in section 3.2.1., participants acknowledged the importance of good health, bearing in mind the relatively young age (55) of retirement. This finding is in line with other research on emergency service retirees which shows an awareness of the impact of good health on QoL of both emergency service retirees and their families (Braken -Scally 2015).

Given the stressful nature of emergency service work and the possible implications of such an occupation on long term health, it is in their interests to take good care of their mental and physical health throughout their career.

4.6 Workplace stress.

Firefighters are routinely exposed to traumatic events; *"they see the devastation, smell the odour of lost life, and hear the cries of families and victims alike"* (Eriksson, Foy & Larson, 2004, p.246) . This is an occupational hazard which these professionals are trained to deal with.

This exposure to trauma and PTSD were not really addressed in this research however the subject was touched on by all participants in a very subtle way by mentioning generally, that in the course of their work, they have seen things that most people don't ever and perhaps don't wish to see. P01 recounted an experience, early on in his career, a car accident, in which there were multiple fatalities. This incident occurred over forty years ago, but remains vivid in his memory. This, along with the fact that all participants stated that when they meet with former colleagues, conversation always manages to come back to work and shared experiences, shows that there are residual effects from the experiences at work. This residual impact is supported in findings from a study which examined the potential long term impact of emergency service work on retirees from the emergency services (Bracken-Scally, McGilloway, Gallagher, & Mitchell, 2014). The study in question, demonstrated that the levels of PTSD symptoms in a sample of retired emergency service personnel were similar to

those found in those currently employed emergency service personnel. This indicates the potentially longer term residual impact of emergency services work and trauma exposure on those who have retired.

The consequences of such exposure can be negative in the case of PTSD and or positive i.e. post traumatic growth (PTG) (Armstrong, Shakespeare-finch, and Shochet, 2014). Indeed, participants demonstrated a certain amount of resilience which is in keeping with other findings which show that in comparison to the general population, emergency service workers demonstrate higher levels of hardiness (Alexander & Klein, 2001), and resilience (Gayton & Lovell, 2011). Participants expressed a particular attitude which they felt developed through exposure to various incidents encountered through their work. This attitude manifested itself in a few different ways. For example for some, it emphasised the fragility of life and the need to be vigilant when it comes to personal safety. For others, it promoted an intolerance for self pity and need to just get on with life and make the most of it while you can (P02, section 3.2.2).

However, what was interesting about the findings in this study, is that the biggest source of workplace stress, as expressed by interviewees, was more to do with the burden of responsibility, the constraints of the working hours i.e. the impact on family life, and conflict with management and the organisation, and not so much exposure to critical incidents as was expected. Indeed participants stated that they won't miss the stress of turning out to calls in the early hours and the family time sacrificed over the years and they are happy to embrace the freedom of retirement.

4.7 Commitment

For retained firefighters there is a huge commitment and this is often at the expense of time spent with family. This means that unless they have made arrangements to get cover from a colleague, they are expected to be available for emergencies usually on a 24/7 basis, although some stations operate on a week on/ week off basis. Nonetheless, for that week, the firefighter is on call 24/7. In section 3.3.1. interviewees highlighted how the restriction of being on call, impacts everyday life.

With the fulltime service, shifts are rostered to cover the designated area 24/7/365. Family life has to be organised around the job and missing out on family occasions is commonplace. Being constantly on high alert and the conflict arising from lost family time was of concern and a source of stress for all participants and are areas which require further research and exploration. Again, this is an aspect of the work that participants expressed that they won't miss.

For ranked officers, the subject of responsibility and accountability was major theme. Participants commented on the burden of accountability and how decisions made, sometimes under enormous pressure, can literally be a matter of life or death. This was a part of the job that all participants stated clearly that they won't miss and expressed a sense of relief and freedom, now that they no longer have the responsibility and restrictions of life as a firefighter. The freedom from this restrictive aspect of rostered shift work may be more relevant to emergency service workers due to their high levels of commitment (Keef & Harcourt, 2001). From the time of alert, whether that be the pager for on call personnel, or the bell, for firefighters on duty in the station, until arrival at scene I believe is a time frame that has been given little or no attention by researchers. When the alarm rings, (bear in mind, the firefighter may be in a deep sleep in the early hours, or in the middle of training on station, or tending station duties), straight away there is an adrenaline rush in anticipation of what may

be facing them. On the way to a call, whether it's the driver or personnel in the back, for that few minutes until arrival at the scene, their mind is in on what lies ahead as they are listening for radio messages as information and more detail filters through. Once on scene, the team gets to work straight away and it's almost like an automatic reaction where personal feelings or sensitivities are temporarily put on hold and the urgency of the task in hand takes priority. The effects of exposure to trauma and critical incidents within the fire service has been well documented especially in the wake of 9/11, (Galea, Nandi, & Vlahov 2005; Berninger, Webber,Niles, Gustave,Lee,Cohen,... & Prezant, 2010; Bromet, Hobbs, Clouston, Gonzalez, Kotov,& Luft, 2016). Other research suggests that an accumulation of trauma over time can increase instances of other mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety later in life (Dulin & Passmore, 2010). However, the effects of the highly intense moments en route to an incident on a health and well being had to my knowledge not been explored. This is an important aspect of the job and retirement and consideration should be given to the possible effects of such stressors on long term health and well being which could have an impact on QoL of fire service retirees.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has discussed the key themes which emerged from this study. The importance of support in the transition from operational to retirement was expressed, in particular the need for additional support from the organisation both pre and post retirement was highlighted. One source of workplace stress was the nature of the rostered shift work and the restrictions and commitment of being on call. Another was the burden of responsibility and accountability, and although retirement was a major life event with which participants associated the sense of loss, a sense of enjoyment and an appreciation of the freedom of retirement was also expressed. According to a study by Bracken-Scally, McGilloway and

Mitchell (2016), current policy for emergency service personnel does not incorporate the provision of support post retirement. It is worth exploring the merits of developing such policies for future retirees.

Chapter 5

5.1 Limitations

One feature of this study which could be seen as a limitation is the small number of participants n=4 which prevented reaching data saturation. That is, the researcher believes that there are potentially more codes and themes which could be extracted from this data, given additional time and resources. This study, even with small number has collected rich data. Therefore it not representative of a population, i.e. retired firefighters, however it endeavours to be representative of the phenomenon in question, which essentially is their experience.

The researcher plays an important part in the end result of the study. As a novice researcher, awareness around the use of the personal lens is vital. Personal bias is something which was of particular concern here since the researcher is a firefighter with considerable operational service and is approaching retirement from the service. A researcher with special investment in the subject matter needs to be guarded against what Bernard (2012) calls the *shamen effect* which is when data may be inadvertently influenced or overshadowed by personal bias. With this insight into the particular topic, the researcher, on reflection noticed that participants used the phrase" *you know yourself* on occasion". This was in relation recognition of the shared experiences and unspoken understanding between the participants and interviewer. While this trust and recognition potentially was instrumental in facilitating very open and honest interviews, it may have lead to missed opportunities on the part of the researcher to probe further and expose more explicit data which may lead to a greater understanding on the part of the reader.

5.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

Firefighters consider their profession to be an integral part of who they are. The job requires a great commitment and dedication. This dedication often demands sacrifices which can impact on family life. Firefighters are regularly exposed to extreme situations and workplace stress is an accepted occupational hazard.

A number of issues were highlighted in this research. The main themes which emerged were around support for firefighters with the transition into retirement. The importance of preparation was also evident on a practical level with regard to entitlements etc., and psychologically because of the nature of the work and the impact it has on firefighters both while in the service and after retirement. With the introduction of CISM into the fire service (circa 2007), great strides have been made to promote awareness around the of the nature of exposure to critical incidents and the value of first response. From this programme, peer support programmes have also been rolled out in stations around the country. However there is a need for further development to make these programmes more inclusive. That is, not just to focus on CI and effects of exposure to trauma related stress but to incorporate other stressors which may need attention with the view to providing means to develop a range of effective coping skills. In order for policy to be effective it has to be evidence based. This can be done by looking at studies such as this and by doing a needs assessment with the stakeholders. Along with a needs assessment, it may be beneficial to consult with retirees and use their experiences to tailor an appropriate programme. The benefits of this could be seen as twofold.

i) Creating an opportunity for retirees to become involved and feel appreciated by using their wealth of experience to inform those in the fire service.

ii) Acquisition of knowledge about retirement, i.e. pension entitlements, resources which are available etc. and, generally create an awareness around how a career in the fire service can affect your life on various levels pre and post retirement.

As the role of the firefighters changes, there is a need for flexibility and consistent evaluation to allow for programmes to develop and change in tandem with changing needs.

A way of avoiding the abrupt and sudden nature of the departure from the service is to introduce a structured gradual retirement. This could be done through a reduction in working hours, and re training, gearing towards more administrative or advisory roles over time. Fire stations are run by the local authority. These are big organisations with various departments and personnel. A recommendation of this study is that firefighters at age 55 be given the choice to relocate and continue to work until retirement age. This would go some way towards alleviating pressure for those who may not have full service and therefore would not benefit from a full pension at age 55. Similar recommendations of introducing phased retirement have also been identified elsewhere (Braken -Scally 2016.)

Another recommendation of this study is to increase support for firefighters after retirement. This would involve retraining to help with re employment or to encourage involvement in the community on a voluntary basis. These retirees have a wealth of knowledge in the area of fire safety and road safety which would be of benefit to any community.

This study was exploratory in nature. It is clear that support is needed for these retirees both pre and post retirement in the areas of health promotion for both physical and mental well being. Further research is needed to fully assess the impact of retirement on firefighters. Evidence from such studies can influence the development of policy which can facilitate a more gentle and healthy transition into retirement. These people are ordinary people doing an extraordinary job. Standing by in the background, prepared and ready to assist where needed.

5.3 Personal Learning

This was a huge learning curve for me. Every step seemed to bring a new insight into the nuances of qualitative research. A concern for me from the start was my own personal lens, my bias. This is a subject which is very pertinent for me. However I feel I managed my bias effectively along the way.

Initially, I felt that the topic guide was quite restrictive. During interview I felt I wanted to ask so many other questions and was concerned that the richness of the experiences would be lost. However, on reflection, especially during the latter half of analysis, it became very clear to me that this restriction was very necessary and useful in keeping me on track.

I feel I was able to extract very rich data from the text, and here, my insight aided me in understanding the subtleties of latent analysis. It was however a very thin line between insightful analysis and bias, but with reflexive notes and guidance from my supervisor, I feel that overall I managed to stay as objective as I could.

If I had to do it over, (and I'm thankful that at least for now, I don't!) I might consider the possibility of using case study as opposed to T.A. because each of these participants' experiences is a story in itself.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Dear .....,

the following contains information outlining my proposed research study and what will be expected from you as a participant.

The title of the study is "An exploration of the experiences of Firefighters and life after retirement". The purpose of this study is to shed a light on what life is like for a firefighter after retirement. I would like to hear what your life was like as a firefighter, your experiences and how transitioning from being operational to retired has impacted, if at all on your life now.

This will involve a one to one interview with me which will take approximately one hour. This interview will basically involve you telling your story. This will be recorded on Dictaphone and some written notes. Data will be transferred to password protected cloud storage to await transcription. Once transcribed, files and notes will be deleted in accordance with the Data protection Act 2003.Transcriptions will be stored on password protected cloud storage.

The only people present during the interview will be you the participant and me, the researcher. This will take place at a dedicated interview room at W.I.T. or in your home.

Participation is totally voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without reproach.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly maintained. Numbers will be used in place of names. Only myself and my supervisor Mairead Barry W.I.T. will have access to this data. All stored data will be deleted after analysis. No information will be shared with a third party unless explicit written permission is given by the participant.

You will be required to sign a letter of consent (enclosed) stating that you fully understand what your participation will involve. On receipt of the completed consent form I will be in touch to arrange a suitable time for interview.

If you require any further information or have any queries for me or my supervisor, contact information is as follows-

- AnnMaria Langford: email: annmarialangford@gmail.com. mobile: 087 2808264
- Mairead Barry: mlbarry@wit.ie phone:051-302165

Kind regards,

AnnMaria Langford.

Appendix B

Letter of Consent

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. A copy will be sent to you for your records.

I ---------- understand the purpose of the research study "An exploration of the experiences of firefighters and life after retirement". I understand fully what my participation entails and I voluntarily consent to take part in the study. I am aware that there are no payments or rewards for participation but information gathered may contribute to further development of policies which may be supportive to future retirees form the fire service.

Name: ----------

Address line 1: ----------

Address line 2: ----------

Town and County: ----------

Contact Information: ----------

Signature Participant: ---------- Date:----------

Signature Researcher: ---------- Date:----------

Contact Information:

AnnMaria Langford
MA Student, WIT **email:** annmarialangford@gmail.com **Mobile:** 0872808264
Supervisor : Mairead Barry **email:** mlbarry@wit.ie **phone**:051-302165

Appendix C.

Topic Guide

The interview will be semi structured. I will use guiding open ended questions in an effort to encourage conversation which will lead to an organic process which will facilitate gaining insight into the participants experience. So this topic guide is just that, a guide to prompt the participant and open up the conversation.

- Tell me about your career as a firefighter and when you retired.
- What was it like for you as you were approaching retirement?

  -Did you feel ready to go?

  -Would you have liked to have stayed on?

  -Were you prepared?

  -Could you have done anything differently in preparation?
- What is retirement like for you?
- Do you think that the experiences you've had over the course of your career have coloured your outlook on life now?
- What supports were available to you ? What supports would you have liked?
- What supports do you have now? Do you feel that you need support?
- If you had your way back, would you do anything different?
- Is there anything you'd like to add?

Thank you.