

Knowledge and Confidence in Psychological First Aid Among Bureau of Fire Protection Responders at District IV, Metro Manila

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the level of knowledge and confidence in facilitating PFA among Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) responders assigned in District IV, Metro Manila, and examined the relationship between these variables. A descriptive, comparative, correlational, and cross-sectional quantitative design was utilized among 697 BFP responders from seven fire stations and the district headquarters. Data were collected from April to May 2026 using a validated questionnaire adapted from the World Health Organization Psychological First Aid Trainer's Handbook. Results revealed that respondents demonstrated adequate knowledge of PFA, with self-care for responders obtaining the highest mean score (WM = 3.58, SD = 0.56). However, confidence in facilitating PFA was only moderate, with Self-Care and Team Support receiving the highest confidence rating (WM = 3.33, SD = 0.63) and Linking to Services and Recognition of Distress obtaining the lowest scores (WM = 2.99). Significant differences in knowledge were observed according to age, rank, and years of service, while age, sex, rank, and PFA training significantly influenced confidence levels ($p < 0.05$). A significant moderate positive relationship was found between knowledge and confidence ($r = 0.464$, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicated that although respondents possessed adequate baseline knowledge, only 7.5% had received formal PFA training, and confidence remained moderate. Therefore, implementing a structured, institutionalized 16-hour PFA training curriculum was recommended to enhance psychosocial readiness among BFP responders.

Keywords: *Psychological first aid, Bureau of Fire Protection, disaster response, emergency responders, psychosocial support*

INTRODUCTION

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed intervention that reduces distress, ensures safety, and improves emergency psychological care (World Health Organization et al., 2013; Ruzek et al., 2007; Corey et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) responders frequently encounter individuals experiencing psychological distress during emergencies under Republic Act No. 10121. However, empirical data regarding BFP responders' PFA knowledge and confidence in District IV, Metro Manila remain limited. Evaluating these competencies is necessary to identify training gaps, improve responder readiness, and strengthen overall emergency psychosocial support.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the knowledge and confidence in facilitating Psychological First Aid (PFA) among Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) responders in District IV, Metro Manila.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

What is the profile of the BFP responders in terms of age, sex, civil status, rank, highest educational attainment, years of service, and PFA training?

What is the respondents' assessment of their knowledge of Psychological First Aid in terms of recovery patterns, best practices, and self-care?

What is the respondents' assessment of their confidence to provide Psychological First Aid in terms of crisis support and safety preparedness, recognition and response to distress, and culturally appropriate supportive listening?

Is there a significant difference in the respondents' knowledge of Psychological First Aid when grouped according to their profile variables?

Is there a significant difference in respondents' confidence in providing Psychological First Aid when grouped according to their profile variables?

Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' level of knowledge and their level of confidence in providing Psychological First Aid?

Based on the findings of the study, what measures, interventions, or recommendations can be proposed to enhance the PFA capabilities of BFP responders?

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on assessing the Psychological First Aid (PFA) knowledge and confidence of active-duty Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) operational personnel, specifically those involved in firefighting, search and rescue, and emergency medical services, stationed across District IV, Metro Manila (District HQ, Marikina, Pasig, Pateros, Taguig, Mandaluyong, and San Juan Fire Stations). The study excluded administrative staff and responders on extended leave. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected between April and May 2026 using a validated questionnaire adapted from the PFA Trainer's Handbook by the World Health Organization, War Trauma Foundation, and World Vision International (2013). The study is delimited by its reliance on self-reported survey measures, which are susceptible to response and social desirability biases, and its findings are limited to the specific sample, preventing broad generalization to all BFP personnel or other emergency response organizations nationwide.

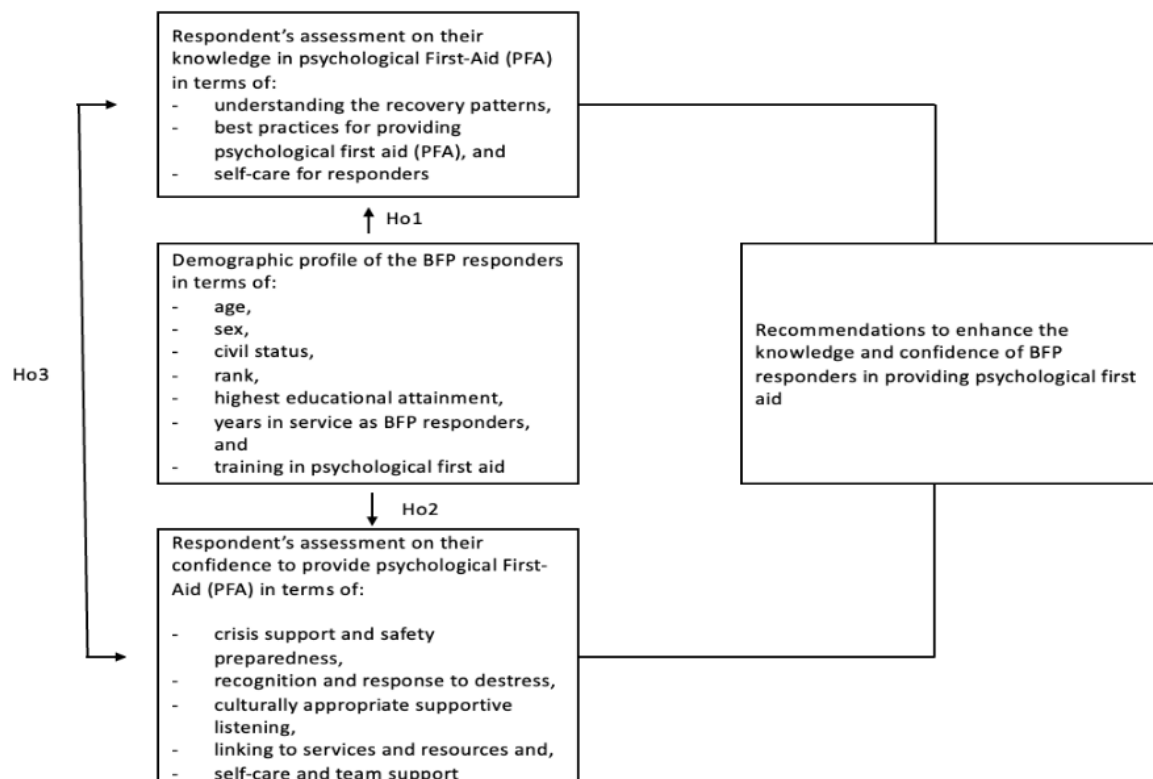
Review of Related Literature

Psychological First Aid (PFA) serves as an evidence-informed intervention designed to alleviate acute psychological distress, foster adaptive coping, and connect disaster survivors to resources through practical, compassionate assistance rather than formal therapy (World Health Organization et al., 2013). Because PFA targets immediate emotional needs and promotes long-term resilience without requiring specialized mental health credentials, it is an essential tool for frontline emergency personnel (Ruzek et al., 2007). Moreover, structured PFA training improves responders' communication skills, operational confidence, and distress management capabilities during crisis intervention (Corey et al., 2021). From a theoretical perspective, Hobfoll's (2023) Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that baseline knowledge, formal training, and institutional backing act as vital psychological resources that mitigate burnout and occupational stress among first responders. Together, these frameworks emphasize the necessity of building PFA competencies among frontline staff and establish the theoretical groundwork for evaluating Bureau of Fire Protection personnel.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily anchored in Bandura's Self-Efficacy and Social Cognitive Theories, which posit that an individual's confidence in performing tasks is shaped by knowledge, training, prior experience, and skill mastery. In the context of Psychological First Aid (PFA), responders equipped with adequate knowledge and structured training are expected to exhibit greater confidence when delivering psychosocial support. The study is further reinforced by Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory, which emphasizes that first responders must leverage internal (knowledge, confidence) and external (training, organizational support) resources to manage stress during crises, as well as Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which highlights how cognitive appraisals and coping resources buffer against psychological demands. Together, these theoretical perspectives illustrate how knowledge, training, and psychological assets interact to shape the confidence and emergency preparedness of Bureau of Fire Protection responders.

Conceptual Framework



METHODOLOGY

This study outlines the systematic process for assessing the knowledge and confidence of Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) responders in District IV of Metro Manila regarding Psychological First Aid (PFA).

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative, cross-sectional research design. It utilized three specific sub-designs: descriptive-evaluative to assess baseline levels (Doyle,

2020), descriptive-comparative to evaluate group differences (Devi, 2023), and descriptive-correlational to analyze relationships between variables (Essel et al., 2022).

Research Steps

The research commenced with the adaptation of an anonymous online survey based on the WHO PFA Trainer's Handbook (2013). The instrument was validated by mental health experts and pilot-tested to ensure high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.836$). Following instrument validation, data collection was conducted, followed by quantitative analysis to test relationships and group variations.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Data collection occurred from April to May 2026. Using stratified random sampling, 697 participants were selected from 766 eligible operational BFP personnel in District IV of Metro Manila, achieving a 90.9% response rate. Administrative staff and personnel on leave were excluded to maintain focus on active operational responders.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained prior to survey completion. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were strictly preserved, and operational staff were assured that non-participation would not impact their employment status.

Data Analysis Methods

Data were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Polit & Beck, 2021). Descriptive statistics measured knowledge and confidence scores, while comparative and correlational statistical tests evaluated significant differences across demographic profiles and the relationship between knowledge and confidence.

Research Hypotheses and Validation

Statistical hypothesis testing was conducted to determine whether significant differences exist in knowledge and confidence when responders are grouped by profile, and to validate if higher knowledge significantly correlates with higher PFA confidence among BFP responders.

RESULTS

SOP 1: Respondent Profile

Out of N=697 BFP responders, the majority are aged 30–39 years (58.7%), male (72.3%), married (53.8%), hold the rank of Fire Officer 1 (49.6%), have 1–5 years of service (39.0%), and possess a Bachelor's degree (92.8%). Additionally, 92.5% report having no formal prior training in Psychological First Aid (PFA).

SOP 2: Level of PFA Knowledge

Respondents demonstrated a high level of perceived knowledge across all subscale domains:

Self-care for Responders: Weighted Mean ("WM") = 3.58 (Strongly Agree)

Understanding Recovery Patterns: "WM"=3.49 (Agree)

Best Practices for Providing PFA: "WM"=3.44 (Agree)

SOP 3: Level of PFA Confidence

Respondents reported a moderate level of confidence across all operational domains:

Self-care and Team Support: "WM"=3.33 (Moderately Confident)
 Culturally Appropriate Supportive Listening: "WM"=3.15 (Moderately Confident)
 Crisis Support and Safety Preparedness: "WM"=3.08 (Moderately Confident)
 Linking to Services and Resources: "WM"=2.99 (Moderately Confident)
 Recognition and Response to Distress: "WM"=2.99 (Moderately Confident)

SOP 4: Knowledge Differences by Demographic Profile

Statistically significant differences in PFA knowledge were found based on previous PFA training ($p<.05$). Respondents with prior formal training demonstrated significantly higher knowledge scores compared to those without.

SOP 5: Confidence Differences by Demographic Profile

Statistically significant differences in PFA facilitation confidence were identified according to age, sex, and previous PFA training ($p<.05$), with male responders and those with prior PFA training reporting higher confidence metrics.

SOP 6: Relationship Between Knowledge and Confidence in PFA

A statistically significant, moderate positive relationship was revealed between respondents' PFA knowledge and their facilitation confidence ($r=0.464$, $p<0.001$). Higher levels of PFA knowledge directly correspond to greater confidence in facilitating Psychological First Aid.

SOP 7: Recommendations / Action Plan

Based on the findings, the following actions are recommended:

Mandatory PFA Training: Implement institutionalized and regular PFA training programs, as training significantly enhances both knowledge and confidence.

Targeted Capacity Building: Focus training initiatives on female responders, younger officers, and new recruits to bridge gaps in confidence.

Field Application & Simulation: Design practical, scenario-based modules specifically targeting lower-confidence domains such as Recognition and Response to Distress and Linking to Services and Resources.

DISCUSSION

The empirical findings highlight an operational paradox within District IV, Metro Manila: while Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel display high perceived knowledge of Psychological First Aid (PFA) concepts—particularly provider self-care ("WM"=3.58) and occupational burnout awareness—they demonstrate only moderate confidence when executing complex field tasks like emotional de-escalation ("WM"=2.96) and referral navigation ("WM"=2.95). This gap is rooted in a severe lack of formal training, with 92.5% of responders untrained. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory explains this deficit, as operational confidence requires structured training and mastery experiences to build true self-efficacy. Supported by a significant moderate positive correlation between PFA knowledge and confidence ($r=0.464$, $p=0.000$), enhancing foundational knowledge directly builds field confidence and improves survivor care. Furthermore, younger, junior responders (FO1, 20–29 years old) reported significantly higher perceived knowledge and confidence than senior officers, reflecting their direct, daily immersion in frontline emergency operations compared to the administrative focus of senior leadership.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) responders in District IV, Metro Manila demonstrated adequate Psychological First Aid (PFA) knowledge, particularly regarding self-care, yet

possessed only moderate confidence in facilitating PFA. Knowledge and confidence levels varied significantly across demographic and professional traits (age, rank, tenure, sex, and prior training), with a significant, moderate positive relationship indicating that cognitive mastery directly drives operational self-efficacy, aligning with Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. To fulfill Republic Act No. 10121 mandates and bridge this training gap, the BFP must institute targeted PFA education, experiential training, and simulation-based learning.

To operationalize these findings, four strategic actions are recommended: first, institutionalize a mandatory, standardized 16-hour PFA training curriculum emphasizing practical simulations, WHO "Look, Listen, Link" principles, communication strategies, and emotional de-escalation; second, establish clear referral mapping and local networks in partnership with the Department of Health (DOH) and local government units; third, deploy peer support programs and mandatory post-incident debriefings to prevent operational burnout and safeguard long-term staff resilience; and fourth, prioritize equal, gender-inclusive access to training opportunities across all rank and demographic cohorts.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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