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## Profiles of Resilience: Examining the Stories of First Responder and Military Families

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## **Profiles of Resilience: Examining the Stories of First Responder and Military Families**

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## Abstract

**Background:** Social support is a key factor in the development of resilience and is often derived from spouses and other family members. The current literature is limited in that there is no consensus about how resilience is defined and developed among individuals in high-stress occupations. Considering this, we aimed to interview military and first responder couples and examine how couples define resilience and navigate challenging experiences together.

**Methods:** We collected five distinct family stories wherein a member of the dyad was in a high-stress occupation (i.e., law enforcement and military personnel). All participants completed screeners to determine eligibility for this study, provided additional demographics as a follow-up, and participated in semi-structured interviews that were between 40-90 minutes long. The study was approved by the KSU IRB #IRB-FY22-525.

**Results:** Participants reported examples of adverse experiences they faced including health-related issues, financial instability, family separation, and occupation-related stressors.

Participants reported that their faith and sources of social support were essential in helping them overcome challenges. Most participants benefited from support from within their organization (i.e., leaders and peers) and from seeking help from others such as religious leaders and professional counselors. Aligned with the prevailing literature, the participants largely reported that resilience is an individual's ability to work through and adapt to challenges, and resilience is strengthened through exposure to stressors.

**Discussion:** The participants reported that the support provided to families in challenging times is key to sustaining healthy performance while serving in high-stress occupations. Future research should focus on refining the definition and components of resilience as described by this population to provide appropriate implementation of resilience-oriented interventions.

*Keywords:* family, resilience, high-stress occupation, challenge, and story.