A Quiet Rise in Wildland Firefighter Suicides

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The Atlantic [1]

As wildland fires become more severe, suicide rates among the firefighters who battle them appear to be rising. Efforts are underway to better understand and address risk factors for suicide in this understudied population. Experts believe that such risks may include the high-stress and inconsistent nature of the work, as well as the stoicism and reluctance to seek help that characterizes firefighting culture. As seasonal workers, wildland firefighters often lack the year-round support, such as health insurance and trauma training, provided to structure firefighters, i.e., people who fight fires in buildings. In an effort to address these risks, the government agencies that handle wildfires have adopted a training program in suicide prevention and mental health promotion. The program has helped reduce negative associations with help-seeking and opened up a dialogue about suicide, according to Nelda St. Clair, manager for the Bureau of Land Management Critical Incident Stress Management program for national wildland fire. “We’re still working on breaking those stereotypes down, but now it’s more acceptable to have a dialogue about the warning signs,” she said.

Spark Extra! Learn more about suicide in the wildland fire service [2].

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