

Factors Contributing to Emergency Dispatcher Levels of Stress

Principal Investigator

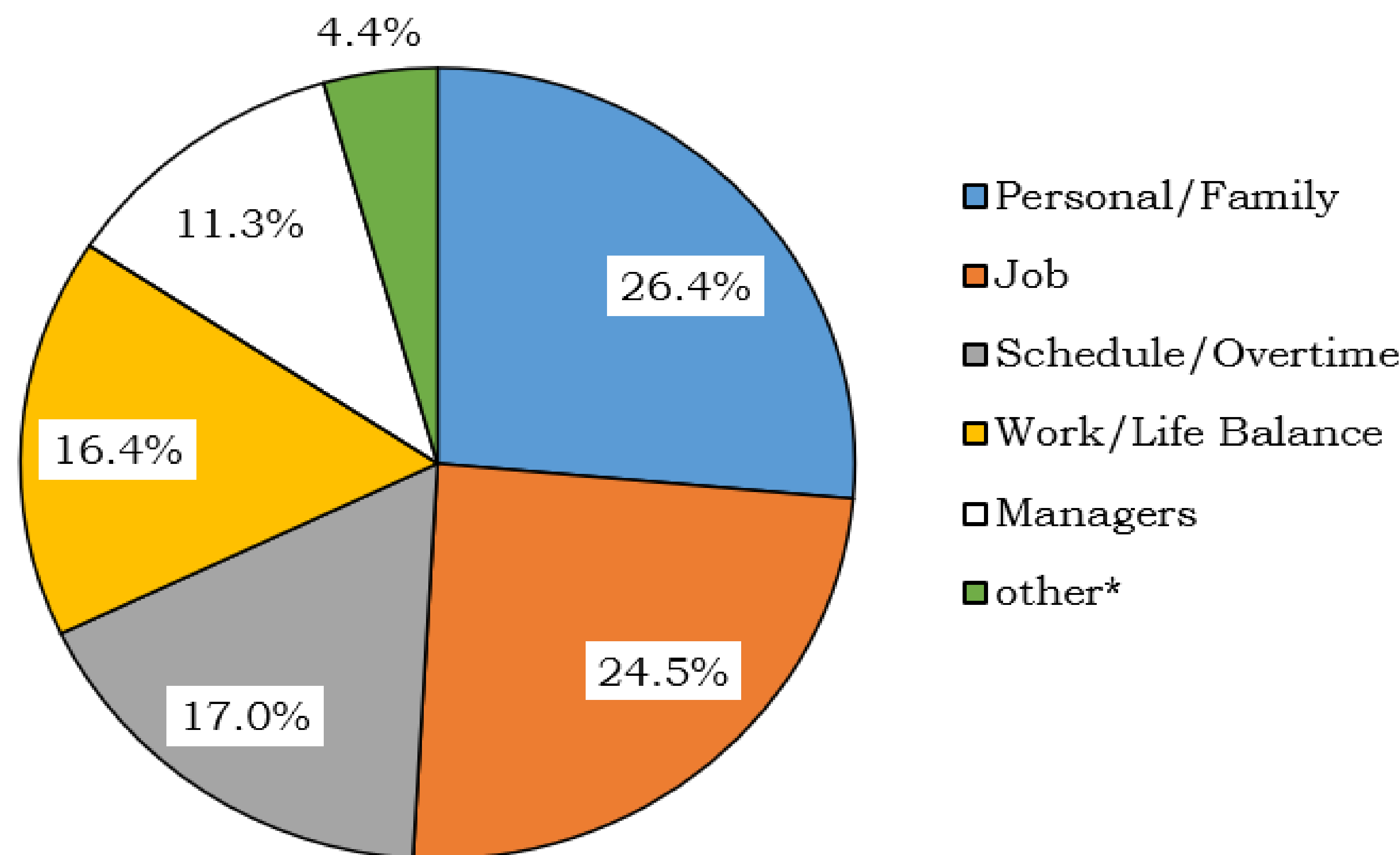
Kate Wahlgren, EMD¹

Co-Investigators

Andre Jones, PhD²; Audrey Fraizer³, Christopher Olola, PhD³; Dawn Faudere, EMD-QI⁴; Isabel Gardett, PhD³; Marc Gay⁵; Mike Taigman, MS⁶; Ronald E. Williscroft, EMD-QI⁷.

¹Snohomish County 911, Everett Washington, USA. ²Hamad Medical Corporation Ambulance Service Medical Communications Center, Doha, Qatar. ³International Academies of Emergency Dispatch, Utah, USA. ⁴Johnson County Emergency Communications, Olathe, Kansas, USA. ⁵Magog, Quebec, Canada. ⁶FirstWatch, Carlsbad, California, USA. ⁷Communications, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, Manitoba, Canada.

DISPATCHER PERCEIVED STRESS FACTORS



Personal /Family Stress Factors

Breakdown of responses categorized as

“Personal/Family” stress:

- Sleep (33.3%)
- Relationship/Family (28.6%)
- Health (11.9%)
- Financial (9.5%)
- Personal (7.1%)
- Housework (4.8%)
- Mental Health (2.4%)
- Legal Issues (2.4%)

Job Stress Factors

Breakdown of responses categorized as “Job”

stress:

- Call Volume/Workload (23.1%)
- Work (23.1%)
- Training (17.9%)
- Policy and Procedure (12.8%)
- Stressful Calls/Callers (12.8%)
- Responsibility (7.7%)
- Subordinates (2.6%)

INTRODUCTION

Studies have cited dispatcher claims of significant emotional, mental, and physical stress as a result of their work, however, there is very little literature that ranks in order of prevalence or severity the factors contributing to overall stress specific to emergency dispatchers. The aim of this study is to collect data that will complement other research findings in this field to inform the development of new programs designed to address specific factors contributing to dispatch stress and build better psychological health among this group.

OBJECTIVES

Emergency dispatchers experience specific work-related stress factors of varying ranks in order of prevalence and/or severity. This study was designed to help determine commonalities among emergency dispatchers in a shared/specific space to complement the work done by others in this area.

Measure (number of respondents)		n (%)
Gender (n=61)	Female	37 (60.7)
	Male	24 (39.3)
Age (years) (n=61)	<18	0
	18-24	4 (6.6)
	25-34	23 (37.7)
	35-44	14 (23.0)
	45-54	15 (24.6)
	55-64	5 (8.2)
Education level (n=61)	65+	0
	High school	1 (1.6)
	Associate degree	11 (18.0)
	Some college	33 (54.1)
Length of service (years) (n=61)	Bachelor's degree	16 (26.3)
	0-5	25 (41.0)
	5-15	21 (34.4)
	15+	15 (24.6)

METHODS

The study conducted at Snohomish County 911 was open on a voluntary basis to all staff emergency dispatchers. Answers were provided anonymously. The survey accessible through SurveyMonkey included questions correlated to the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), demographics, and questions pertaining to factors the participants believed contributed to their stress.

PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a validated psychological instrument used widely for measuring the perception of stress—the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful.

- 50% of participants reported moderate stress in response to the PSS questionnaire.
- 36.7% indicated a low level of stress
- 13.3% reported a high level of stress

CONCLUSION

The study findings demonstrate that the top perceived factors contributing to dispatcher stress relate to issues with:

- person or family relationship
- different aspects of the job
- overtime and/or schedules
- work/life balance, and managers

FURTHER STUDY

Findings suggest a long-term/multi-year study to follow changes in stressors and stress levels. A long-term study could also be used to examine the correlation between job stressors and their impact on the subject and/or their personal life.

FOR FULL RESEARCH PAPER VISIT:
EMERGENCYDISPATCH.ORG/SCIENCE

