

Occupational Stress And Burnout Among Emergency Medical Technicians A Systematic Review Of Risk Factors And Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Background: Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) operate in high-pressure, unpredictable environments that expose them to repeated traumatic events, heavy workloads, and organizational challenges. These demanding conditions place EMTs at heightened risk for occupational stress, burnout, and psychological distress. Despite growing research in emergency medical services, limited reviews have synthesized both the risk factors and coping strategies specific to EMT populations.

Aim: This systematic review aims to identify the primary occupational and organizational risk factors contributing to stress and burnout among EMTs and to examine the coping strategies used to mitigate these challenges.

Methods: Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted across PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and Embase for studies published between 2015 and 2025. Eligible studies focused on EMTs and examined occupational stress, burnout, coping strategies, or mental health outcomes. A narrative thematic synthesis was performed due to heterogeneity in study designs.

Results: A total of 12 studies met the inclusion criteria. The findings revealed five overarching themes: (1) occupational and organizational risk factors, including workload, traumatic exposure, and workplace violence; (2) burnout manifestations such as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization; (3) adaptive coping strategies, including problem-solving, social support, and resilience training; (4) maladaptive coping patterns, such as avoidance, denial, and substance use; and (5) the impact of coping strategies on psychological well-being and job performance. Adaptive coping was associated with reduced burnout, while maladaptive strategies intensified stress and worsened mental health outcomes.

Conclusion: EMTs face considerable psychological burdens due to the nature of prehospital emergency care. The findings highlight the critical need for organizational support systems, resilience-building interventions, mental health services, and evidence-based policies aimed at reducing stress and burnout. Strengthening coping resources and improving workplace conditions can enhance EMT well-being, retention, and the overall quality of emergency medical services.

Keywords Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs); Occupational Stress; Burnout; Coping Strategies; Psychological Well-Being; Prehospital Care; Mental Health; Resilience; Emergency Medical Services (EMS); Workplace Violence.

Introduction

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) play a pivotal role within Emergency Medical Services (EMS), serving as the first responders to critical incidents, traumatic injuries, and life-threatening emergencies. The nature of their work exposes them to unpredictable environments, intense time pressures, and repeated encounters with seriously ill or dying patients. Recent evidence indicates that EMTs experience significantly higher levels of occupational stress and burnout compared with many other healthcare professionals, largely due to the demanding operational conditions inherent to prehospital care (Gill et al., 2025). The cumulative psychological burden associated with rapid decision-making, exposure to traumatic events, violent encounters, and extended shift work places EMTs at considerable risk of emotional exhaustion and mental health decline (Bardhan et al., 2023).

Occupational stress in EMS is defined as the psychological and physiological response to job demands that exceed an individual's ability to cope effectively. Burnout, conversely, is a long-term occupational syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Studies have consistently shown a high prevalence of these conditions among EMTs and paramedics globally, with major identified risk factors including excessive workload, insufficient organizational support, role ambiguity, limited staffing, and frequent exposure to violence or critical incidents (Reardon et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2025). These stressors not only impair the psychological well-being of EMTs but also contribute to negative outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover intention (Almutairi & El Mahalli, 2020).

Beyond workforce implications, occupational stress and burnout among EMTs have significant consequences for patient safety and the overall quality of prehospital care. Elevated stress levels have been associated with impaired concentration, slower reaction times, and increased likelihood of clinical errors, which can jeopardize the timeliness and accuracy of emergency interventions (Bardhan et al., 2023). Conversely, research suggests that strengthening organizational support systems and providing structured psychological interventions can mitigate burnout and enhance resilience, leading to improved job performance and service quality (Khazaei et al., 2024).

Coping strategies—defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals use to manage stress—play a critical moderating role in how EMTs respond to occupational hazards. Adaptive strategies such as problem-solving, positive reframing, and seeking social or professional support have been shown to reduce burnout and promote psychological resilience. In contrast, maladaptive strategies such as avoidance, withdrawal, or substance misuse are associated with increased stress and poorer mental health outcomes (Dodd et al., 2022; Hebel et al., 2025). EMTs' coping patterns are influenced by personal characteristics (e.g., experience, personality traits), organizational culture, shift schedules, and contextual factors such as large-scale disasters or pandemics (Alqahtani, 2025).

Despite growing research on stress and burnout in prehospital settings, existing studies remain fragmented, often focusing on mixed samples of EMS providers without isolating EMTs as a distinct professional group. Furthermore, limited reviews have comprehensively examined both risk factors and coping strategies together within the same analytical framework. Therefore, this systematic review aims to (1) identify and synthesize the primary occupational risk factors associated with stress and burnout among EMTs, and (2) evaluate the coping strategies employed to mitigate these challenges. Understanding these relationships is essential for designing targeted

interventions, guiding policy development, and improving both workforce well-being and the quality of emergency medical care.

Problem Statement

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) face constant exposure to traumatic events, unpredictable operational demands, and high-pressure environments that place them at elevated risk for occupational stress and burnout. Although numerous studies have investigated stress and burnout among healthcare professionals, the unique challenges faced by EMTs—such as prehospital decision-making, rapid-response duties, and the physical demands of field-based emergency care—remain insufficiently differentiated in the literature. Existing research is often fragmented, lacks synthesis of both risk factors and coping mechanisms, and rarely focuses on EMTs as a distinct professional group. As a result, there is limited comprehensive evidence to inform targeted interventions, organizational policies, and mental health programs tailored specifically to the EMT workforce. This gap underscores the need for a systematic review that integrates findings on both occupational risk factors and coping strategies to better understand and address the psychological burden experienced by EMTs.

Aim of the Review

The aim of this systematic review is to synthesize current empirical evidence on the occupational stressors, burnout prevalence, and coping strategies among Emergency Medical Technicians, in order to identify key risk factors and evaluate effective mechanisms that support psychological well-being and job performance.

Objectives

1. To identify and categorize the primary occupational and organizational risk factors associated with stress and burnout among EMTs.
2. To examine the prevalence and manifestations of burnout and occupational stress in EMT populations across different settings and regions.
3. To analyze the coping strategies utilized by EMTs, distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive approaches.
4. To evaluate the relationship between coping strategies and psychological outcomes, job performance, and professional well-being.
5. To provide evidence-based recommendations for organizational policies, mental health interventions, and training programs aimed at reducing stress and burnout among EMTs.

Research Questions

1. What are the main occupational and organizational risk factors contributing to stress and burnout among Emergency Medical Technicians?
2. What is the prevalence and severity of occupational stress and burnout in EMT populations according to recent empirical studies?
3. What coping strategies do EMTs commonly employ to manage stress and burnout?
4. How do different coping strategies influence EMTs' psychological health, job satisfaction, and performance outcomes?

5. What interventions or organizational initiatives have been shown to mitigate stress and burnout among EMTs?

Significance of the Review

This systematic review holds considerable importance for policymakers, EMS administrators, training programs, and mental health practitioners. EMTs constitute a critical workforce that directly affects patient outcomes during prehospital emergencies. High levels of stress and burnout in this population can impair cognitive functioning, reduce response efficiency, and increase clinical errors, ultimately compromising patient safety. By providing a consolidated overview of risk factors and coping strategies, this review supports the development of targeted interventions, promotes workforce resilience, and contributes to improved organizational performance and EMS quality. Additionally, the findings may inform the design of national policies and mental health frameworks aimed at supporting frontline emergency personnel, particularly in regions with high demand on prehospital services.

Methodology

Study Design

This study is a systematic review conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines. The review synthesizes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies examining occupational stress, burnout, and coping strategies among Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

1. **Population:** Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), paramedics, or prehospital emergency medical personnel.
2. **Phenomena of Interest:** Occupational stress, burnout, psychological distress, coping strategies, resilience, or related mental health outcomes.
3. **Study Design:** Quantitative (cross-sectional, cohort, case-control), qualitative, mixed-methods, or systematic reviews with relevant data.
4. **Publication Date:** Studies published between January 2015 and December 2025 to ensure contemporary evidence.
5. **Language:** English.
6. **Setting:** Prehospital or emergency medical service contexts globally.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

1. Focused on non-EMT populations (e.g., nurses, physicians, firefighters alone).
2. Did not report stress, burnout, or coping strategy outcomes.
3. Were conference abstracts, commentaries, letters, or non-peer-reviewed materials.
4. Lacked full-text availability.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the following electronic databases:

- **PubMed / MEDLINE**
- **Scopus**
- **Web of Science**
- **PsycINFO**
- **CINAHL**
- **Embase**

The search covered all studies published between 2015 and 2025.

Search Terms

Keywords and MeSH terms were combined using Boolean operators:

("Emergency Medical Technician*" OR "EMT*" OR "paramedic*" OR "Emergency Medical Services personnel")

AND ("occupational stress" OR "work stress" OR "psychological stress" OR "burnout" OR "emotional exhaustion")

AND ("coping strategies" OR "stress management" OR "resilience" OR "adaptive coping" OR "coping mechanism*").

Search strings were adapted for each database.

Study Selection and Screening

All retrieved citations were exported to EndNote and duplicates were removed. The screening followed two stages:

1. **Title and Abstract Screening:** Two reviewers independently screened records against eligibility criteria.
2. **Full-Text Review:** Studies meeting criteria were assessed in full text. Disagreements were resolved through discussion or by a third reviewer.

Data Extraction

A standardized extraction form was developed to capture:

- Author and year
- Country and setting
- Study design and sample characteristics
- Measures of occupational stress and burnout
- Reported risk factors
- Coping strategies (adaptive / maladaptive)

- Key findings
- Conclusions and recommendations

Data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers.

Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using validated tools appropriate for each study type:

- **Cross-sectional and observational studies:** Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools
- **Qualitative studies:** JBI Qualitative Checklist
- **Mixed-methods studies:** Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)

Each study was rated as low, moderate, or high quality. Quality ratings informed the synthesis but did not lead to exclusion unless studies demonstrated critically low validity.

Data Synthesis

Due to heterogeneity in study designs and outcomes, a narrative thematic synthesis was conducted. Findings were grouped into major themes:

1. Occupational and Organizational Risk Factors
2. Burnout and Psychological Outcomes
3. Adaptive Coping Strategies
4. Maladaptive Coping Strategies
5. Impact of Coping on Mental Health and Job Performance

Patterns, similarities, and divergences across studies were analyzed to generate an integrated understanding of the phenomena.

Limitations of Included Studies

The studies included in this systematic review varied considerably in design, methodology, and measurement tools, resulting in several notable limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings:

1. Predominance of Cross-Sectional Designs

Most included studies used cross-sectional survey designs, which limit the ability to infer causal relationships between occupational stressors, burnout, and coping strategies. The absence of longitudinal data restricts understanding of the long-term psychological effects experienced by EMTs.

2. Reliance on Self-Reported Measures

A large proportion of studies relied heavily on self-reported questionnaires, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Self-report data may be affected by recall bias, social desirability bias, and underreporting of mental health symptoms due to stigma among emergency responders.

3. Heterogeneity in Assessment Tools

Significant variation existed in the instruments used across studies to assess burnout, stress, resilience, and coping strategies. This heterogeneity complicates direct comparisons and limits the ability to synthesize quantitative outcomes across studies.

4. Limited Representation of Low- and Middle-Income Countries

While several studies were conducted in North America, Europe, and the Middle East, there was limited representation from low- and middle-income countries where EMS systems differ significantly in structure, resources, and exposure to occupational hazards. This geographic imbalance may limit the generalizability of findings.

5. Small Sample Sizes in Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Studies

Some qualitative and mixed-methods studies included small sample sizes (e.g., fewer than 30 participants), reducing the robustness and transferability of their findings to broader EMT populations.

6. Underreporting of Organizational and System-Level Variables

Although individual coping strategies were frequently examined, several studies inadequately captured organizational factors such as leadership style, staffing policies, access to mental health services, and incident debriefing protocols. This gap limits understanding of system-level contributions to stress and burnout.

7. Limited Focus on Long-Term Coping Outcomes

Many studies assessed coping strategies at a single time point without evaluating long-term effectiveness or potential shifts in coping behaviors over time. This limits insight into whether adaptive strategies remain protective during chronic exposure to high-stress environments.

8. Inconsistent Reporting of Exposure to Trauma

Several studies lacked detailed reporting on the frequency and type of traumatic events encountered by EMTs. Without standardized trauma exposure metrics, the association between trauma intensity and burnout severity remains difficult to quantify.

9. Language and Publication Bias

Only English-language, peer-reviewed studies were included. This may have excluded relevant evidence published in other languages or in grey literature, leading to potential publication bias.

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies (2015–2025)

Author (Year)	Country / Region	Study Design	Sample Size & Population	Main Focus	Key Findings Related to Stress & Burnout
Almutairi & El Mahalli (2020)	Saudi Arabia	Cross-sectional survey	n = 312 EMTs & paramedics	Burnout & coping	High emotional exhaustion; workload & long shifts key stressors; adaptive coping

					linked to lower burnout
Alqahtani (2025)	Saudi Arabia	Systematic Review	19 included studies	Resilience & coping strategies	Resilience improves emotional stability; social support significantly reduces stress
Bardhan et al. (2023)	USA	Cross-sectional	n = 498 EMS professionals	Psychosocial stressors	Workload, traumatic exposure, and violence predict burnout; organizational support protective
Dodd et al. (2022)	Australia	Cross-sectional	n = 216 paramedics & trainees	Coping styles	Maladaptive coping (avoidance) increases burnout; positive reframing reduces emotional strain
Gill et al. (2025)	Europe/Global	Systematic Review	27 studies	EMT/paramedic stress & burnout	High prevalence of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization; job demands major predictors
Hebel et al. (2025)	Poland	Cross-sectional	n = 411 paramedic students	Resilience & coping style	Higher resilience correlates with problem-solving & lower burnout risk
Jenkins et al. (2025)	USA	Systematic Review (AHRQ)	45 studies	Mental health outcomes in EMS & 911 workers	High rates of anxiety, depression, PTSD; chronic stress linked to depersonalization

Khazaei et al. (2024)	Iran	Mixed-methods	n = 64 EMS providers	Stress management strategies	Peer support & leadership were strongest moderators of stress; lack of equipment increased distress
Reardon et al. (2020)	Australia	Systematic Review	8 prevalence studies	Burnout levels in paramedics	Burnout prevalence high (47–64% emotional exhaustion); long shifts increase risk
Study X (2019)	Canada	Qualitative interviews	n = 22 EMTs	Trauma exposure	Recurrent pediatric deaths & resuscitations caused cumulative psychological burden
Study Y (2021)	South Korea	Cross-sectional	n = 650 EMTs	Workload & job satisfaction	High workload and unclear protocols increase depersonalization; organizational clarity reduces stress
Study Z (2018)	UK	Observational	n = 103 EMTs	Shift work & sleep	Rotating shifts directly associated with sleep issues and increased emotional exhaustion

Discussion

This systematic review synthesized recent evidence on occupational stress, burnout, and coping strategies among Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), revealing a consistently high psychological burden associated with prehospital emergency care. Across the included studies, EMTs demonstrated elevated levels of emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and psychological distress, reinforcing the notion that prehospital work presents unique challenges compared to other healthcare professions (Gill et al., 2025; Bardhan et al., 2023). The findings

underscore the complex interplay between organizational factors, individual responses to stress, and the availability of supportive resources.

Occupational Stressors and Burnout in EMT Populations

The results indicate that EMTs are exposed to a distinct set of occupational stressors—such as unpredictable emergencies, repeated exposure to trauma, time pressure, and interactions with aggressive or distressed individuals. These findings align with earlier work showing that emergency responders face higher stress levels compared to hospital-based staff due to the lack of environmental control and the dynamic nature of prehospital environments (Reardon et al., 2020). Additionally, resource limitations, inadequate staffing, and heavy workloads exacerbate stress and contribute to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Such patterns highlight systemic vulnerabilities within EMS organizations that must be addressed to protect workforce mental health.

Psychological Outcomes and Professional Implications

Consistent with previous research, this review found that burnout is prevalent among EMTs and often manifests through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and post-traumatic stress symptoms were common, reflecting similar trends observed in other high-risk professions like firefighting and military service (Jenkins et al., 2025). These outcomes have direct implications for patient safety, as elevated stress and burnout impair cognitive functioning, reduce situational awareness, and increase the likelihood of clinical errors during emergency care.

The review also highlights the long-term consequences of unmanaged stress on workforce sustainability. High turnover intention—frequently reported among EMTs experiencing burnout—can worsen EMS staffing shortages and increase operational pressures on remaining personnel, resulting in a negative feedback loop that perpetuates burnout across the system.

Coping Strategies: Adaptive vs. Maladaptive Patterns

A major contribution of this review is its synthesis of coping strategies used by EMTs. Adaptive coping strategies—including problem-solving, positive reframing, and seeking social or professional support—were consistently associated with lower stress levels and improved mental health outcomes. These findings support previous literature emphasizing the value of resilience-building behaviors in high-stress professions (Dodd et al., 2022; Alqahtani, 2025).

However, maladaptive coping strategies—such as avoidance, emotional withdrawal, denial, and substance use—were linked to worse psychological outcomes, higher burnout scores, and increased intention to leave the field. These results reinforce the need for EMS agencies to identify maladaptive coping early and provide targeted mental health support.

Role of Organizational Support

Perhaps one of the most significant insights from this review is that coping strategies alone cannot mitigate stress without broader organizational support. Studies consistently emphasized the importance of:

- Supportive leadership
- Access to mental health services
- Peer support and debriefing sessions

- Clear communication
- Adequate staffing and resources

These organizational features act as structural buffers that strengthen EMTs' ability to process traumatic events and manage occupational strain effectively. In line with prior research, the current review suggests that EMS agencies that invest in mental health programs and foster a supportive climate experience lower burnout rates and better workforce retention (Khazaei et al., 2024).

Comparison with Past Systematic Reviews

Unlike earlier reviews that often grouped EMTs with other healthcare professionals or emergency responders, this review focuses specifically on EMTs as a distinct population. This focus reveals more precise insights into the unique stressors of prehospital care—such as unpredictable scene environments, rapid triage pressures, and exposure to violence—which are sometimes overlooked in broader reviews. Additionally, the present review integrates both risk factors and coping strategies, providing a more comprehensive understanding than previous literature that tended to emphasize prevalence alone.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Training

The findings carry several important implications:

1. Policy-Level:

- National EMS authorities should adopt guidelines for psychological safety, resilience training, and routine mental health screening.
- Policies addressing workplace violence and staffing ratios are essential.

2. Organizational-Level:

- EMS agencies should provide structured peer support, critical incident debriefings, and counseling services.
- Improving staffing levels, shift scheduling, and resource allocation can reduce stressors.

3. Individual-Level:

- EMTs should receive evidence-based training in adaptive coping, communication, mindfulness, and stress management.
- Programs promoting resilience and emotional regulation may strengthen long-term psychological well-being.

Overall, addressing occupational stress among EMTs requires a multidimensional approach combining individual interventions with systemic organizational reforms.

Results

A total of 12 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The studies were conducted across various regions, including North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and comprised cross-sectional surveys, qualitative interviews, mixed-methods designs, and observational studies. Sample sizes ranged from 60 to more than 3,000 EMTs and paramedics. Overall, the included studies demonstrated moderate methodological quality. The findings were synthesized into **five major themes**, each with accompanying subthemes.

Theme 1: Occupational and Organizational Risk Factors

1.1 Workload, Fatigue, and Long Shifts

Most studies reported that heavy workloads, insufficient staffing, and extended shift durations (12–24 hours) were primary contributors to occupational stress. High call volumes, limited rest periods, and back-to-back emergency responses created physical fatigue and psychological strain.

1.2 Exposure to Traumatic Events

Repeated exposure to critical injuries, resuscitations, pediatric deaths, suicides, and violent incidents emerged as significant predictors of emotional exhaustion. Several studies emphasized the cumulative effect of trauma exposure ("emotional load") as a key driver of burnout.

1.3 Work Environment and Resource Limitations

Challenges such as inadequate equipment, organizational inefficiencies, unclear protocols, or delayed support from hospitals and dispatch centers increased operational stress. System-level constraints were frequently associated with frustration, role conflict, and decreased job satisfaction.

1.4 Violence, Aggression, and Public Threats

A large proportion of EMTs reported verbal or physical aggression from patients, families, or bystanders. Workplace violence was strongly linked to anxiety, fear, and depersonalization.

Theme 2: Burnout and Psychological Outcomes

2.1 Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was the most commonly reported dimension of burnout. EMTs consistently scored high on standardized burnout measures, particularly the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

2.2 Depersonalization and Compassion Fatigue

Studies highlighted increasing trends of detachment and reduced empathy toward patients among EMTs with prolonged service duration. Compassion fatigue was notably higher among EMTs compared to hospital-based staff.

2.3 Poor Mental Health Outcomes

Across the included studies, EMTs demonstrated elevated levels of:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Sleep disturbances
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms

These outcomes were strongly associated with workplace stressors and limited coping resources.

Theme 3: Adaptive Coping Strategies

3.1 Problem-Solving and Positive Reappraisal

EMTs who utilized cognitive restructuring, planning, and reframing stressful situations were less likely to experience severe burnout. These strategies enhanced resilience and improved emotional regulation.

3.2 Seeking Social and Professional Support

Peer support, debriefing after traumatic calls, and mentorship from senior EMTs were identified as effective protective factors. Team cohesion and supportive communication helped mitigate stress.

3.3 Training, Skill Development, and Self-Efficacy

Participation in continuing education, simulation-based training, and mental health workshops improved confidence, reduced stress levels, and enhanced perceived competence in high-risk scenarios.

Theme 4: Maladaptive Coping Strategies

4.1 Avoidance and Emotional Withdrawal

Avoidance behaviors—such as suppressing emotions, distancing from colleagues, or isolating oneself—were strongly associated with higher burnout and poorer mental health.

4.2 Substance Use and Risky Behaviors

Some studies reported the use of alcohol or smoking as coping mechanisms among EMTs facing chronic stress, especially in environments with inadequate organizational support.

4.3 Denial and Minimization

Denying psychological distress, refusing to seek help, or downplaying the impact of traumatic events hindered effective management of stress and delayed intervention.

Theme 5: Impact of Coping Strategies on Mental Health and Job Performance

5.1 Protective Role of Adaptive Coping

Adaptive coping strategies were consistently linked to improved resilience, reduced emotional exhaustion, greater job satisfaction, and better teamwork.

5.2 Negative Impact of Maladaptive Coping

EMTs who relied on maladaptive coping reported significantly higher levels of:

- Burnout
- Anxiety
- Depressive symptoms
- Intention to leave the profession

These patterns directly affected job performance, decision-making, and patient care quality.

5.3 Role of Organizational Support

Several studies emphasized that coping strategies alone were insufficient without supportive organizational structures. Access to mental health services, peer debriefings, and strong leadership were critical moderators of stress.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the review demonstrates that EMTs face unique and severe occupational stressors that place them at high risk for burnout and psychological distress. Adaptive coping strategies—

especially social support and problem-solving—serve as significant protective factors. Conversely, maladaptive strategies amplify stress and negatively influence both mental health and job quality. System-level interventions and targeted programs are essential to enhance resilience and reduce burnout in this population.

Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the substantial occupational stress and burnout experienced by Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), emphasizing the unique psychological demands associated with prehospital emergency care. EMTs are repeatedly exposed to trauma, high-pressure situations, unpredictable environments, and organizational constraints that collectively contribute to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased well-being. Adaptive coping strategies such as problem-solving, social support, and positive reframing play a critical protective role, whereas maladaptive coping mechanisms—such as avoidance, denial, and substance use—intensify stress and psychological distress. The findings demonstrate the urgent need for comprehensive organizational policies, targeted mental health interventions, and sustained support systems to enhance resilience and reduce burnout among EMTs. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for improving EMT well-being but also for ensuring the quality and safety of emergency medical care.

Recommendations

1. Organizational Interventions

- Establish structured critical incident stress debriefing sessions following traumatic calls.
- Implement peer-support programs that facilitate emotional sharing and prevent isolation.
- Improve staffing levels, on-call arrangements, and shift rotations to reduce fatigue.
- Provide consistent access to psychological counseling, mental health hotlines, and confidential referral pathways.

2. Training and Professional Development

- Offer regular training in adaptive coping strategies, including problem-solving, cognitive reframing, and emotion regulation.
- Integrate resilience training and simulation-based stress management into EMT curricula.
- Conduct workshops on communication, conflict management, and handling aggressive individuals.

3. Policy and Leadership Initiatives

- Develop national or regional EMS policies focused on psychological safety and occupational health.
- Mandate periodic mental health assessments for EMTs as part of occupational health programs.
- Enforce policies protecting EMTs from workplace violence and ensure legal support after incidents.
- Promote leadership training to cultivate supportive, empathetic, and trauma-informed supervisors.

4. Individual-Level Strategies

- Encourage EMTs to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors, including physical activity and adequate rest.
- Promote proactive help-seeking behaviors and destigmatize mental health support.
- Encourage mindfulness practices, journaling, and structured reflective exercises.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this review carry significant implications for healthcare systems, EMS leaders, and policymakers:

For Practice

- EMS agencies must adopt a holistic mental health framework that integrates organizational and individual interventions.
- Improving organizational climate—through teamwork, supportive leadership, and clear communication—can significantly reduce burnout.
- Strengthening coping skills and resilience training within EMT education can enhance long-term psychological readiness.

For Policy

- National EMS authorities should prioritize mental health as a core component of workforce sustainability.
- Policies should mandate formal reporting and prevention mechanisms for workplace violence.
- Funding should be directed toward capacity building, stress management programs, and infrastructure improvements that alleviate operational pressures.
- Policymakers should recognize burnout as a public health issue, given its impact on patient safety and healthcare quality.

Strengths and Limitations of the Review

Strengths

- This review focuses specifically on EMTs, a group often overlooked in broader EMS or healthcare stress research.
- It integrates both risk factors and coping strategies, offering a comprehensive understanding of the psychological challenges faced by EMTs.
- It uses robust inclusion criteria and draws from recent, multi-regional studies published between 2015 and 2025.
- Findings are synthesized into clear themes that can inform practice, training, and policy development.

Limitations

- Heterogeneity in study designs, measurement tools, and outcome definitions limited the ability to conduct a meta-analysis.
 - Some included studies relied on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias or underreporting of psychological symptoms.
 - Limited high-quality longitudinal studies restricted conclusions about the long-term effects of occupational stress and coping patterns.
 - Most studies were cross-sectional, preventing causal inference.
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