

### **Mindfulness Surrounding Eating Among Current Firefighters, Law Enforcement Officers, and Military Personnel and Its Relationship to Weight Status**

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**Objectives:** Obesity among first responders and military personnel is a major concern for personal health and occupational performance, with 40% of law enforcement (LE) officers obese, 70–75% of firefighters overweight/obese, and about 25% of the military personnel overweight/obese. There is also high occurrence of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, emotional strain, sleep disturbances, and suicide among these groups. A point of connection is mindfulness surrounding eating, as it is related to obesity, such that as mindfulness during eating decreases, body mass index (BMI) increases from excess calorie intake. The purpose of this study was to determine level of mindfulness surrounding eating among current firefighters, LE officers, and military personnel and how it relates to weight status.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study employed an online survey shared via social media and email, including demographics, physical

activity level, diet type and perceived healthfulness, BMI, and 20-item mindful eating questionnaire (MEQ). Descriptive statistics assessed level of mindfulness of the tactical groups. Correlation coefficients were calculated to determine relationships between MEQ scores and demographics, physical activity level, diet type and perceived healthfulness, and BMI.

**Results:** Preliminary data from 120 surveys (85% fire, 2.5% LE, 12.5% military) indicate MEQ scores for all tactical groups ranged from 2.50–4.47 out of 5. Average MEQ score ( $\pm$  standard deviation) for all tactical groups was  $3.13 \pm 0.46$ , with a score of 3 indicating mostly neutral/lack mindfulness surrounding eating. MEQ scores were similar across tactical occupations (fire =  $3.12 \pm 0.47$ , LE =  $3.33 \pm 0.80$ , military =  $3.17 \pm 0.70$ ).

**Conclusions:** Considering negative consequences of obesity among these groups for themselves, one another, and those they serve, investigating mindfulness surrounding eating indicates ambivalence and need for further research, including intervention, in this area.

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