

# Beyond the Call of Duty: A Systematic Review of First Responder Motivation

#IAEM25

Bikash Adhikari



Competitive Division – Student (Graduate)

## Introduction

### Role of First Responders

- Frontline professionals: first at emergencies, saving lives & property (Feng & Cui, 2021; Lepore, 2020).
- Work marked by sacrifice, dedication, and readiness for unpredictable crises (Perry & Lindell, 2003).
- Unlike standard jobs: extended hours, higher stress, and safety risks (Lafauci et al., 2011).

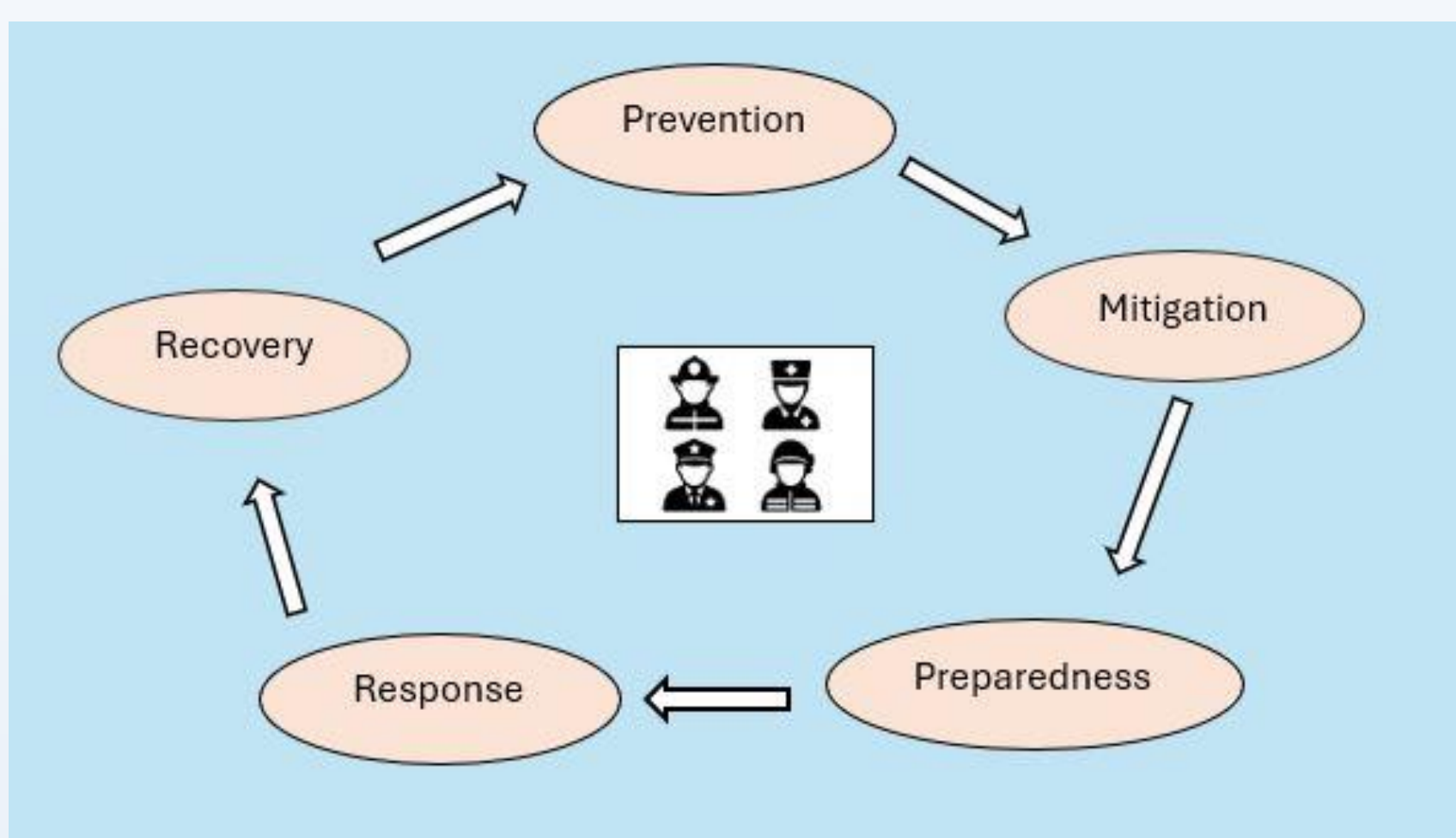


Fig.1: Different phases of emergency management and the role of first responders.

### Understanding Motivation

- Motivation = internal drive shaping needs and behavior (McClelland, 1987).
- In public service: managers inspire employees toward collective goals (Behn, 1995).
- Motivation is associated with performance, satisfaction, and job retention in emergency management (Sandrin et al., 2019)

### Research Questions

- What are the main themes identified in the existing literature?
- What practical recommendations exist for leaders and organizations?

### Research Significance

- Supports designing policies, training, and leadership practices, as well as recruitment strategies
- Systematize the findings and guide future research.

## Method

Literature selection followed the **PRISMA** (the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses ) **framework**, a widely used protocol across social sciences, emergency management, and education (Liberati et al., 2003).

Table 1: Description of selection criteria

Items	Description
Databases	Web of Science, EBSCOHost, JSTOR, Proquest, Google Scholar
Criteria	Only peer-reviewed journals; Title, abstract, and keywords search
Language	English
Search terms	Motivation, Police, Sheriffs, First Responder, Emergency responder, Fire fighters, Paramedic, Search and Rescue, Emergency Medical Team, SAR, EMT
Inclusion criteria	Focus on the motivation of full-time professional first responders.

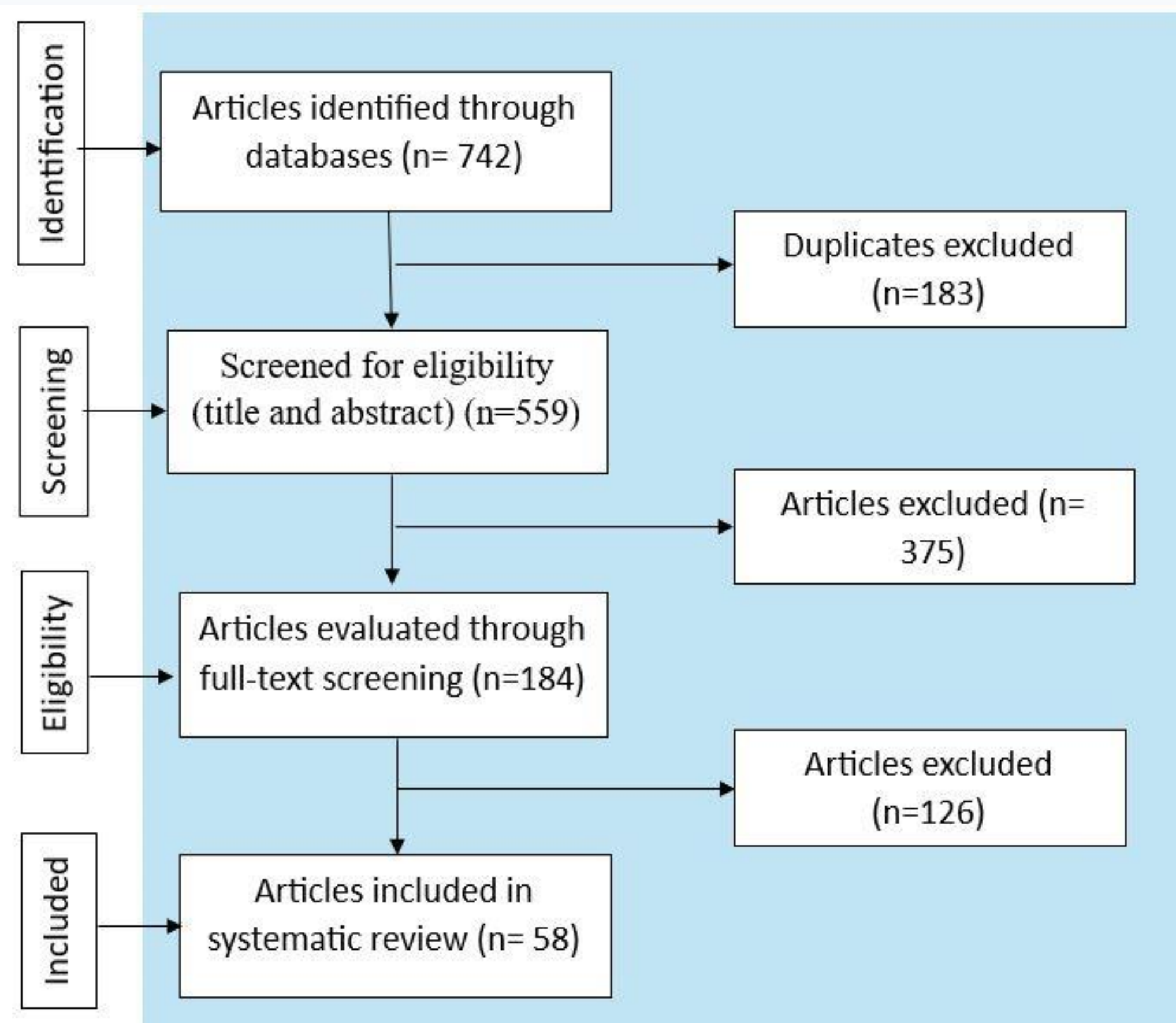


Fig. 2: Flow of the paper selection process based on the PRISMA framework.

## Results

### Qualitative analysis

- **Motivational Factors**– Intrinsic (altruism, compassion) (Grant, 2008; Liu et al., 2023) and extrinsic (security, pay) (Schuck, 2021; Turapan et al., 2021) both matter.
- **Different Professions, Different Drivers**
  - ❑ Police: Job security/benefits (Shuck, 2021; White et al. 2010),
  - ❑ EMS : Job security and service (Rantung et al., 2022),
  - ❑ Firefighters: Altruism (Firman et al., 2018).
- **Demographics Matter** - Motivation is shaped by gender, culture, race, age, and education (Schuck, 2021; Shen, 2022).
- **Boosts Outcomes** – Strong link to job satisfaction (White et al., 2022), engagement (Gillet et al., 2013), performance (Sandrin et al., 2019), and resilience (Liu et al., 2021).

Table 2: Practical Recommendations

Theme	Key Recommendations	Citations
Recruitment & Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Emphasize job security, career advancement, and education;</li><li>➤ Ensure culturally relevant and fair hiring.</li></ul>	Raganella & White (2004); Shen (2022); Wallace & Neptune-Figaro Malisa (2022)
Equity & Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Provide gender-sensitive facilities, mentorship, and flexible schedules;</li><li>➤ Align benefits with diverse motivations.</li></ul>	Murphy (2006); Sehgal (2007)
Workplace Climate & Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Encourage autonomy, learning-oriented cultures, transformational leadership, and transparent recognition.</li></ul>	Andersson Arntén et al. (2016); Smith et al. (2020); Songul et al. (2020)
Well-Being & Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Resilience training, Mental Health First Aid, balanced shifts, and strong peer/supervisor support.</li></ul>	Chiu et al. (2023); Gillet et al. (2013); Kelsey et al. (2017); Mizuno et al. (2016)
Capacity Building & Fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Training on resilience, PSM, and disaster preparedness;</li><li>➤ Peer-led fitness and continuous growth.</li></ul>	Yang (2024); Yi-An et al. (2022)

## Conclusion

- Most of the first responders are motivated by a mix of **extrinsic, altruistic, and intrinsic factors**.
- **Motivation is central** to first responders’ performance, satisfaction, and resilience.
- **Research gaps:** Focus remains on police and health professionals in developed countries; developing contexts are understudied.
- **Future directions:** Broaden research to developing/hazard-prone countries and integrate organizational and cultural contexts.

## References

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For the full list of references, please refer to this QR code.

