

**Exploring Rural Paramedics' Experience of Meaningful Work and Wellbeing During the
COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Undergraduate Honours Thesis

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May 5, 2025

Abstract

Past research on a broad range of EMS workers' during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that this group of workers experienced a heightened workload as well as high levels of stress, burnout, and depression. However, the unique experiences of being a *rural paramedic* during the pandemic has not been deeply investigated. The present study draws on qualitative interviews conducted as a part of a larger study on rural healthcare workers during COVID-19. The current study focused on the experiences of 11 rural Manitoba, paramedic participants, with interviews conducted in summer of 2021. Through thematic analysis of the interviews, the current study aimed to observe paramedics' perceived wellbeing, how they experienced their work as meaningful, and how they experienced social connection during the pandemic. The results indicated four major themes including *burnout, unsupported and undervalued, social connection, and connecting with patients*. The reports of paramedics' experiences during the pandemic were conceptualized along a spectrum, with one end including the factors that contributed to feelings of burnout and the other end of the spectrum including factors that contributed to paramedics' wellbeing.