

# STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS INFLUENCING POSTGRADUATE UPTAKE BY SOUTH AFRICAN EMERGENCY CARE PRACTITIONERS



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## INTRODUCTION

The prehospital field of Emergency Medical Care needs a generation of practitioners capable of engaging in research and advancing the profession through evidence-based practice. The paucity of prehospital-specific research necessitates a deeper understanding of the factors that influence agency among Emergency Care Practitioners (ECPs) to pursue or eschew postgraduate education, as this impacts the development of the prehospital emergency medical care field in South Africa.

Accordingly, we employed Archers social realist theory as an analytical framework to explore these factors to synthesis and explain ECPs opinions regarding postgraduate education.

## OBJECTIVE

To identify the structural conditions that influence Emergency Care Providers to pursue or eschew postgraduate education.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method exploratory sequential research design, integrating a qualitative phase framed by social realism to explore the reasons behind Emergency Care Practitioners' motivations to pursue or eschew postgraduate education. This phase included six focus group discussions and two individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 49 and two (2) participants respectively. The data obtained informed a broader subsequent quantitative phase. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data.

## RESULTS

Structural conditions were found to motivate Emergency Care Practitioners to eschew postgraduate education. Three themes emerged as having significant causal powers in motivating Emergency Care Practitioners to eschew postgraduate education.

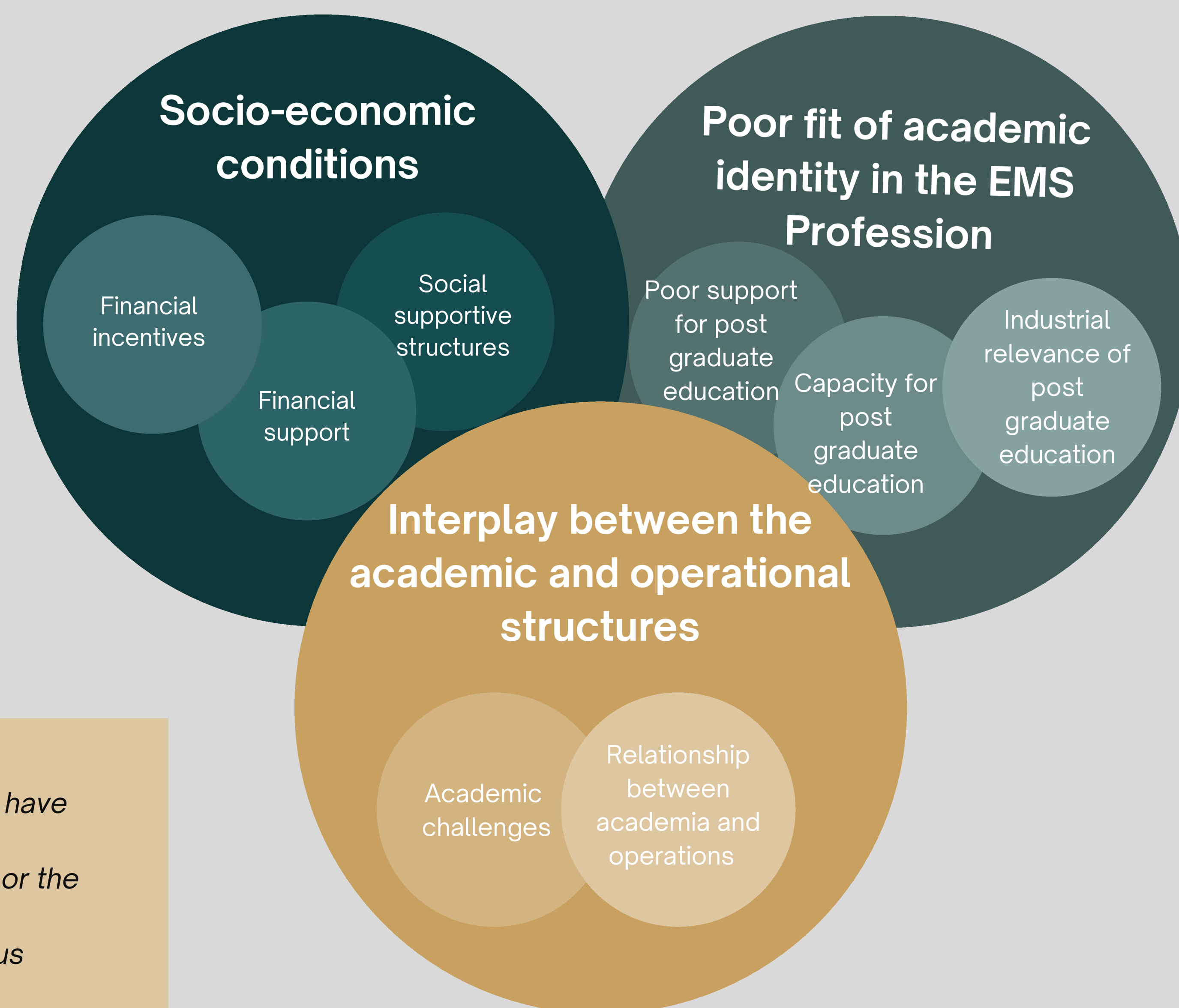


## SOCIO-ECONOMIC

*"The (education) system is there to sort of exclude us. I will use a simple example: I am the first black one to graduate from university in my family, and then you register for a master's. They (the university) say you must look for your own supervisor. (Others have) like uncles, aunties, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law and all those in-laws who have their master's and whatever. He just has to pick up the phone and choose one. So, for me, who doesn't have an auntie or uncle (relatives)? I must go and look at strangers ... Now what about those who follow in my footsteps? This causes them to be excluded from going through this successfully"*

## THE INTERPLAY

*"I am still just an ambulance driver"*  
*"The operations component of EMS needs to have specific positions where they can use me effectively. I do not want to go to the college or the university to lecture."*  
*"Undergraduate education does not prepare us adequately for Postgraduate education"*



## ACADEMIC IDENTITY WITHIN EMS

*"There is no safe working space that allows for these activities, and I need to sit in a communal noisy space or in the ambulance to get work done."*

*"When I need help or guidance, there is no person within my workplace that can aid me."*

*Obtaining a postgraduate qualification won't mean anything, Industry does not have a role for me"*

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC

*"... there is no financial remuneration beyond the degree holder within EMS.*  
*... (and) there is no career progression plan affiliated with (a) master's or PhD studies for them; why should they then do it?"*

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals the influence of structural conditions on the postgraduate seeking behaviour of ECPs. Socio-economic circumstances, the nature of the EMS profession and the academic world experienced within the South African prehospital milieu collectively motivated Emergency Care Practitioners to eschew postgraduate education. These findings give the South African EMS profession insight into the structural conditions that need to be addressed to improve the postgraduate-seeking behaviour of ECPs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing these structural conditions - such as: proving financial incentives, establishing clear career pathways and fostering better integration between academia and operations settings may improve postgraduate-seeking behaviour of ECPs. Future research should explore the development of a prehospital-specific academic identity to motivate postgraduate education and enhance the EMS knowledge economy.

## OUR STUDY

SCAN ME

