Bushfire CRC 2010-2013
Effective Communications: Communities & Bushfire

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Presented by Dr Susan Chaplin

Gender and Bushfire: The need for research

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• Disasters are social events

• The social construction of gender is an important element in understanding disasters and disaster mitigation and recovery

• This is recognised in international literature on disaster

• This is not yet recognised widely in regard to bushfires in the Australian context

Gender Matters

The international literature on gender and disasters makes clear that there are gendered differences in regard to all elements of disaster preparation, response and recovery, including:

- Risk perception and exposure
- Preparedness behavior
- Warning communication and response
- Physical and psychological impacts of disaster
- Recovery and reconstruction efforts

	International Disaster Research	Australian Bushfire Research
Exposure to Risk	*Substantial research.* Women are at greater risk from the effects of disaster. Women are over-represented in death-toll statistics.	*Limited research.* Traditionally men are more at risk from the effects of bushfire in Australia. An increasing number of women are now dying in bushfire events.
Risk Perception	*Substantial research.* Men (especially non-minority men) tend to perceive the risk of disaster as lower than women. Women recognised as more likely to be risk-averse. This is seen positively.	*Lack of in-depth research.* From preliminary research it appears men are more likely to perceive the risk of disaster as lower than women. Women (tacitly) acknowledged by fire agencies to be more risk-averse. This is often seen negatively.
Preparedness	*Substantial research.* Women more likely to favour evacuation. Women less likely to have formal knowledge of emergency / disaster preparedness and procedures.	*Limited research.* Preliminary research and secondary data suggest women are more likely to favour "leaving early". Preliminary research and secondary data suggest women are less likely to have formal knowledge of bushfire preparedness and procedures.

	International Disaster Research	Australian Bushfire Research
Communication	*Limited research.* Women are less likely to receive official disaster warnings. Women are more likely to spread disaster warnings through informal networks.	*Research in progress.* Not known. From preliminary research, women are more likely to spread disaster warnings through informal networks.
Response	*Extensive research.* Women are largely excluded from formal disaster and emergency response but participate in important informal ways. Emergency services are substantially male dominated.	*Limited research.* Women are largely excluded from formal disaster and emergency response but participate in important informal ways. Emergency services substantially male dominated.
Recovery	*Substantial research.* Women's care-giving roles play an important and generally unrecognised part of the recovery process. Women at increased risk of domestic violence following a disaster event.	*Lack of in-depth research.* Not known but unlikely to differ significantly from international research. Newspaper reports suggest women are at increased risk of domestic violence following a bushfire event, but there is only limited research to support this.

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"There is evidence of disagreements as the fire approached. In virtually all cases this was between women who wanted to leave and take the men with them and men who either wanted to stay and defend or who felt they had to support others in that role. In some cases it appears that the difference in opinion was long standing, in other cases it was only acknowledged at the last minute…There are instances where women who fled under these circumstances survived. Conversely, there is also evidence of such disagreements where males refused to leave, but relatives decided to stay, leading to additional fatalities…"

(Handmer *et al.*, 2010).

Bushfire and Gender – Areas for future research in Australia:

- Rural gender roles

- The social construction of bushfires as "men's business"

- Gender dynamics of decision making at the household level

- Role strain in regard to bushfire preparedness in and around the home

- The gendered nature of preference to evacuate or "stay and defend"

- Men's over-representation in bushfire fatalities

Rural hegemonic masculinity – A framework for understanding?

Settler Mentality /
Man Against Nature

Physical Strength

Risk Taking

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