

COUPLE'S DECISION-MAKING ABOUT FORMING A BUSHFIRE PLAN

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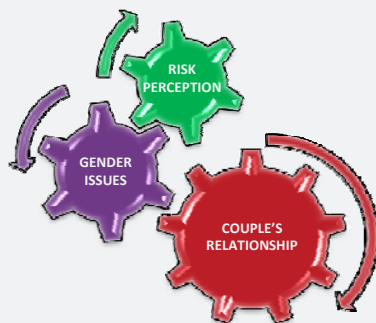
Communicating Risk: Human Behaviour Under Stress (2)

INTRODUCTION

In the past, 'bushfire' has been dealt with mostly as a problem of forestry and meteorology. It is now accepted that improved community bushfire safety will only be achieved through better understanding of how members of households in at-risk communities understand their situation in relation to bushfire risk. Hitherto, most researchers have approached this at an individual level. This project targets issues at the couple/family level.

RESEARCH

Several issues are likely to be important:



BUSHFIRE RISK: PERCEPTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Research has found dramatic differences between perceptions of general risk and perceptions of family risk.

GENDER ISSUES

There is evidence that men and women may differ in: their perceptions of family risk; their understandings of bushfire safety issues; and how these should be addressed via a family bushfire plan.

COUPLE'S RELATIONSHIP

In the case of decision-making about forming a family bushfire plan, relational dynamics add to the already complex situation. Marital (or couple) decision-making processes have consequences at the couple level, not just at the individual level.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

The findings will generate a better understanding of couples' psychological processes involved in decision making about forming a bushfire plan. These insights will inform stakeholders involved in community bushfire policy and practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What psychological processes are involved in joint decision making by couples about long-term planning and preparation for bushfire threat?
- What are the key relational dynamics which sustain couple's long-term planning and preparation decisions about bushfire safety?
- What kinds of relational, cognitive, and affective processes are likely to decrease the likelihood of safety-compromising decisions in relation to family bushfire safety?



METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive literature review is under way. At this time it is proposed to conduct the research in three stages.

- Examine the ~640 interview transcripts from two recent Australian fires; Black Saturday (7 February 2009) and Lake Clifton (10 January 2011). Analyse content relating to couple/marital decision making about household bushfire safety and survival.
- Survey residents in selected at-risk communities about bushfire safety issues and decision making, with a focus on family relationships.
- Study in-depth approximately 60 couples recruited via the survey.

GOAL OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

To assist fire and emergency services agencies and local government in delivering effective community bushfire education and safety programs targeted specifically to help families develop bushfire plans appropriate to their circumstances.