

CHILDREN IN DISASTERS: THE ROLE OF HOUSEHOLD PREPAREDNESS



Dr Ilona McNeill¹ & Prof Kevin Ronan²

¹ School of Psychological Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

² School of Health, Human and Social Sciences, CQUniversity, Queensland, Australia

CHILDREN FORM A VULNERABLE DEMOGRAPHIC IN BOTH THE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY PHASES OF NATURAL DISASTERS. IN A TWO-WAVE LONGITUDINAL STUDY, THE AUTHORS EXAMINED THE POTENTIAL ROLE PLAYED BY HOUSEHOLD PREPAREDNESS. MORE SPECIFICALLY, THEY EXAMINED WHETHER BUSHFIRE PRONE HOUSEHOLDS WITH VERY YOUNG, YOUNG, OR TEENAGE CHILDREN ARE MORE OR LESS PREPARED FOR BUSHFIRES THAN HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT CHILDREN, AND WHY. RESULTS SHOWED THAT HOUSEHOLDS WITH YOUNG AND VERY YOUNG CHILDREN WERE LESS PREPARED FOR BUSHFIRES THAN THOSE WITHOUT CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY AT THE START OF THE FIRE SEASON. THE FORMER GROUPS ALSO REPORTED SLIGHTLY LOWER LEVELS OF MOTIVATION TO PREPARE AND LOWER PERCEIVED ABILITY TO PREPARE. MOST OF THESE RESULTS WERE EXPLAINED BY THE YOUNGER AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS WITH YOUNG AND VERY YOUNG CHILDREN AS COMPARED TO THE AGE OF THOSE WITHOUT CHILDREN, RATHER THAN BY THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF YOUNG OR VERY YOUNG CHILDREN.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- ▶ Do households with very young, young, and teenage children prepare better or worse for natural hazards than households without children? And if so, why?

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Households with young and very young children completed fewer property preparedness actions at the start of the bushfire season than childless households, but by the end of the season there was no difference between the households in property preparedness.
- ▶ Households with very young children had also completed fewer planning actions at the start of the season than childless households, and this difference remained significant by the end of the bushfire season.
- ▶ Households with younger children reported relatively lower motivation to prepare, higher difficulty of preparing and greater lack of time to prepare than childless households.
- ▶ The age of residents was positively related to property preparedness and planning, and motivation to prepare, and negatively related to perceived difficulty of preparing and perceived lack of time to prepare.
- ▶ Finally, results showed that differences in property preparedness and planning, motivation to prepare, and perceived difficulty to prepare were best explained by the age of the respondent rather than the presence vs. absence of younger children in the household.
- ▶ However, in relation to perceived lack of time to prepare, adults in households with younger children perceived a greater lack of time than childless adults, even after controlling for participants' age.

METHOD

Wave 1 sample (start of the 2014/2015 bushfire season):

- Bushfire prone residents of VIC, NSW, WA, SA, TAS
- Total Sample N = 998
- 59% f, 41% m: Age M = 52.7
- Years lived in property M = 12.4
- 23% had children < 18 years

Key measures:

- Household composition (children < 6 yrs vs. children < 12 yrs vs. children < 18 yrs vs. no underage children);
- Motivation to prepare;
- Ability to prepare: perceived difficulty of preparing and perceived lack of time to prepare (both measured on 9-point scale);
- Bushfire preparedness: property preparedness and planning for bushfires (both measured as % of relevant actions completed).

Wave 2 sample (end of the 2014/2015 bushfire season):

- Total N = 514: RR = 66.9%
- 57% f, 42% m: Age M = 53.6
- Years lived in property M = 12.7
- 21% had children < 18 years

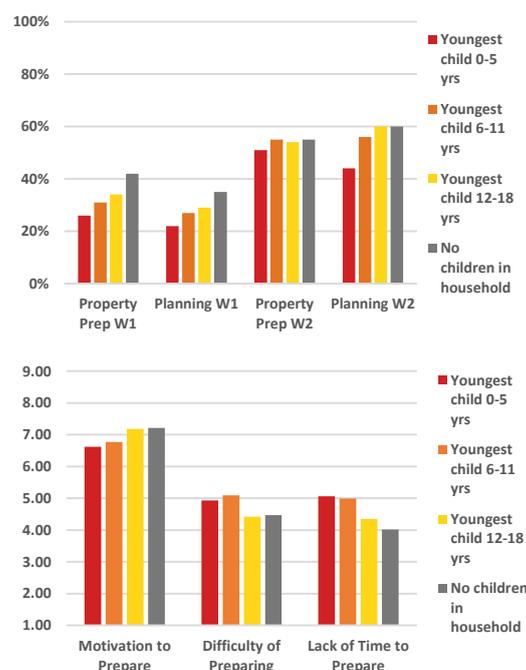
Key measures:

- Bushfire preparedness: property preparedness and planning for bushfires (both measured as % of relevant actions completed).

END-USER STATEMENT (Andrew Richards, *New South Wales SES*):

The Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CC-DRR) project led by Prof Kevin Ronan has involved ongoing consultations with end users children, parents, teachers and school personnel with a view to reconciling a top-down and bottom-up approach to research. Its primary focus is to build best practice in Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction research to establish whether it works, is effective, scalable and sustainable. The project has involved a review of agency and NGO programs to establish whether they are effective and the key contributors to their success. Agencies have benefitted from a review of programs in terms of disaster risk reduction theory and student learning objectives to better understand how the impact of agency programs can be enhanced.

RESULTS



IMPLICATIONS

These results indicate that it would be especially fruitful to target young adults in communities and find ways to increase their preparedness. However, given that young children in general tend to have younger adults as parents, campaigns specifically targeting these households with young children are also warranted.

