

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN WELL-AND UNDER-PREPARED COMMUNITIES

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Community Context

Lesson s 2 and 4 from McLennan, Elliott, and Beatson 2010:

“Communities influence decision making by individual members via shared beliefs about bushfire risk.”

“What others are observed to be doing is an important determinant of an individual’s decision making.--especially in a situation characterised by uncertainty.”

Community and social context play a vital role in influencing individual community members’ decision making and behaviour, both in the lead up to a fire and on the day.

We know from social and organisational psychology that individuals turn to others as guides when seeking to interpret ambiguous stimuli. Thus community norms or attitudes towards bushfires are a potentially powerful influence on the behaviours of individuals

Preparedness and Resilience

Figure 1 shows the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Aizen, 2006) with modifications to reflect the potential role of the community context

Control Beliefs

Community members’ beliefs about their ability to control emergency situations may be shaped by factors such as physical layout (e.g. Only one exit road), SES (e.g. Unable to afford pumps or plumbing)

Attitudes

There is evidence that communities shape newer members’ attitudes toward preparatory actions, such as back burning, clearing fuel on one’s property (Brenkert-Smith et al., 2007)

Normative Beliefs

Individuals are likely to be influenced by what they believe to be the community’s approved fire preparation actions

AFAC (2009) “The most crucial aspect of the warnings system is the continued development of community survivability strategies that are in place well before any emergency event occurs.”

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of communities which predict preparedness for and resilience to bushfires?
 - Structure (e.g. Physical location, rural/tree-change/peri-urban)
 - Demography (e.g. Age, SES, number of children)
 - Community networks (Fairbrother & Fein, 2010)
 - Social capital and community competence
 - Previous experience with disasters
 - Trust in relevant agencies
2. In what way does the community context moderate the relationship between warning messages and resultant behaviours?
3. What is the profile of a well prepared and resilient community?
4. Is there scope for community level interventions that aim to improve overall preparedness of community members?

Methodology

In collaboration with Peter Fairbrother and John Fein (RMIT)

- Select a range of communities across the nation
- Consult with key stakeholders and community members
- Undertake analyses of the objective properties of communities

Conduct interviews and focus groups with community members

Structured self-report assessments (e.g. Community attitude surveys)

Roll out community interventions on selected communities to gauge impact.

Proposed Deliverables

1. Community Bushfire Preparedness/Resilience Barometer.
2. Community-level interventions designed to improve preparedness and resilience to bushfires.
3. Improved understanding of how communities can shape the interpretation of official messages and warnings

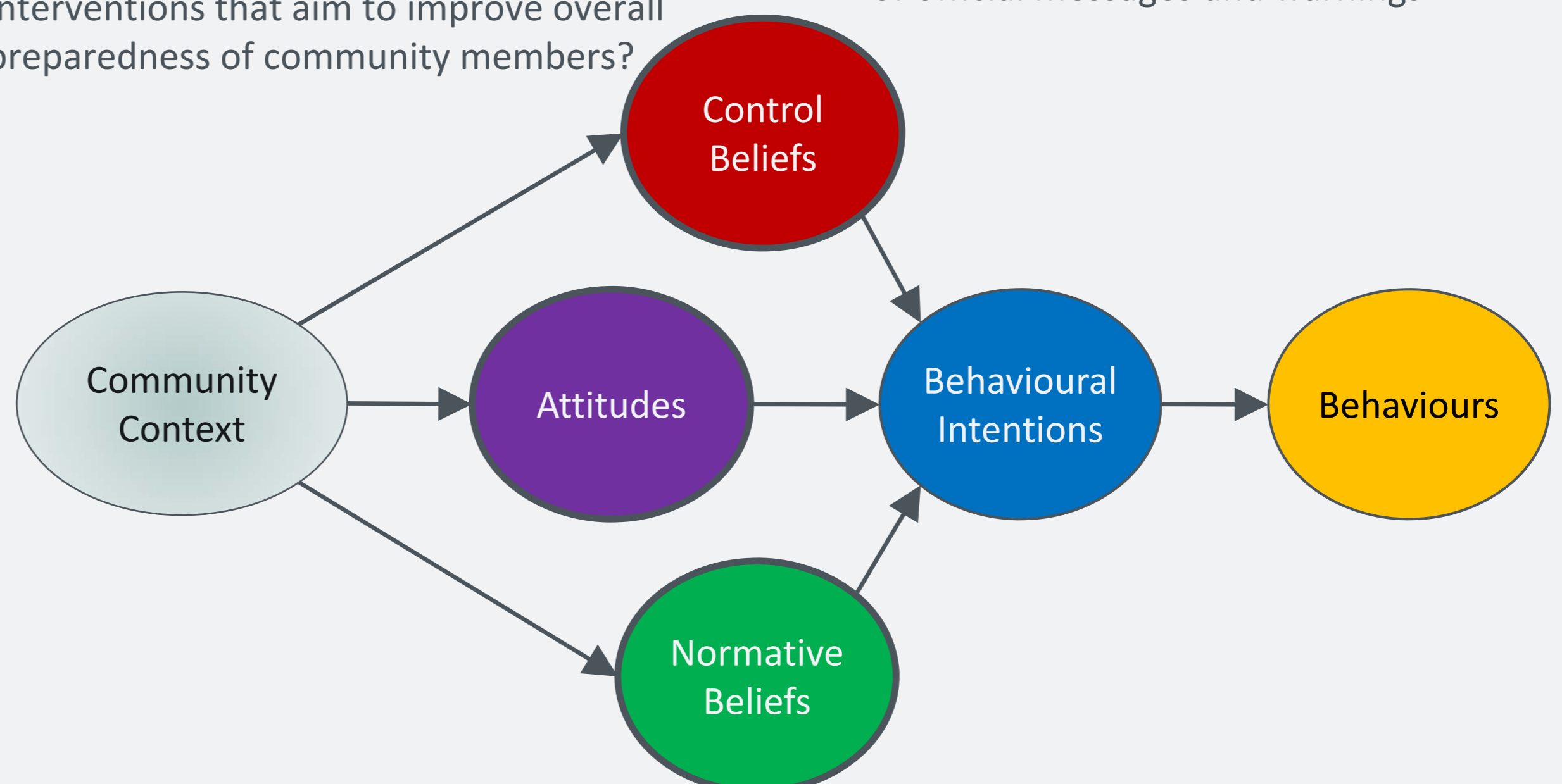


Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (Aizen, 2006) modified to incorporate the community context.