

# WHY I'D STAY, AND WHAT I'VE DONE TO PREPARE FOR IT: THE ROLE OF GOALS AND WORRIES IN BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

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## Background

In case of a bushfire, residents of areas under threat have a choice between staying and defending their property or leaving, preferably early when it's still safe to do so. They are encouraged by local government to choose a bushfire plan well ahead of the fire season and to prepare for their chosen plan accordingly. However, it is currently unclear what makes people choose one bushfire plan over another, and how psychological factors influence the manner in which they prepare for their plan. An exploratory field study was set up to start answering these questions.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were recruited from eight communities identified by FESA as being at high risk of bushfire threat. Research teams worked in pairs and, using a door-knock approach, interviewed and surveyed a total of 190 individuals (50% female). The modal age bracket was 56-65 years and the average time that participants had lived in their respective communities was 13.5 years (SD = 12.2 years). Participants were interviewed initially and then asked to complete an electronic survey which was hosted on an iPad.

**Fire plan and goals.** In order to elicit the goals underlying participants' fire plans, we asked people what their intended fire plan was (stay and defend, wait and see, or leave early), and why they chose this plan.

**Preparatory behaviour.** We measured 4 types of preparation behaviour by counting the number of preparatory actions taken:

1. *Preparing to defend* (17 items; e.g., have buckets, protective fire clothing, enough drinking water)
2. *Preparing the house* (7 items; e.g., removed all burnable material around the house)
3. *Preparing objects for evacuation* (7 items; e.g., have decided what documents and personal effects to take, stored them appropriately)
4. *Preparing people for evacuation* (7 items; e.g., whole family knows evacuation route, have suitable planned destination)

**Worrying, anxiety, fear, and proactive coping.** We measured differences in three types of worrying, anxiety, fear, and proactive coping, via iPad, on 5-point Likert Scales:

1. *Worrying about self-worth/work* (6 items; e.g., I worry that others think I'm an undesirable person, I worry that I leave work unfinished)
  2. *Worrying about the world around you* (9 items; e.g., I worry that my community may be badly hit by a future bushfire, I worry that people treat each other terribly all over the world)
  3. *Worrying about self-efficacy/money* (6 items; I worry that I feel insecure, I worry that I can't afford to pay the bills)
- ❖ *Anxiety* (8 items; e.g., Sometimes I feel nervous without really knowing why)
  - ❖ *Fear* (8 items; e.g., I don't mind doing jobs that involve dangerous work)
  - ❖ *Proactive coping* (14 items; e.g., I always try to find a way to work around obstacles; nothing really stops me.

## Results

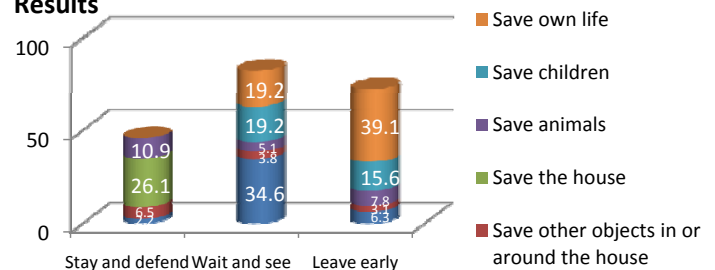


Figure 1. Percentage of people mentioning goal as reason for fire plan.

The two fire plans and the undecided (wait and see) have different goals attached to them:

- ❑ Intending to stay and defend is connected to saving the house, but not saving one's life.
- ❑ Planning to leave early, however, is more connected to saving one's life and that of the children rather than saving the house.
- ❑ Saving one's life and that of the children is also an important goal of the undecided, but they want more info before following through. The house is not mentioned.
- ❑ Correlations between different types of preparedness were low (all  $r < .36$ ), suggesting that there are different ways people prepare for bushfires, and that preparing well in one way will not necessarily mean preparing well (or not) in another way.

Table 1. Correlations (>.15) between Different Types of Preparedness and Different Types of Worrying, Anxiety, Fear, and Proactive Coping.

	Worry (self-worth/work)	Worry (world)	Worry (self-efficacy/money)	Anxiety	Fear	Proactive Coping
Preparing to defend	.24*				-.27*	.16
Preparing the house						
Preparing objects for evacuation	-.16*			-.19*		
Preparing people for evacuation	-.20*		-.27**	-.27**	-.27**	.19*

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

- ❑ Also, the 4 types of preparation showed distinct relations with different types of worrying, anxiety, fear, and proactive coping.
- ❑ Worrying can have both a positive and negative relation with preparedness, depending on the type of worry and type of preparedness.
- ❑ Anxiety and/or fear are negatively related to all types of preparedness except preparing the house for a fire.