

Disaster in Relation to Attachment, to Community, and to Place: The Marysville Experience.

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Background:

The 7th of February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires devastated the town of Marysville. Over 90% of buildings were destroyed and 36 people died.

The project is at its mid-way point and continues to explore the human dimensions of disaster, specifically, the 2009 Black Saturday event.

Marysville is a microcosm of both pre and post-bushfire experience making it a valuable location for in-depth retrospective post-disaster research.

Approach & Method:

The project is an autoethnography; a mix of autobiography, drawing upon the researcher's own experiences of the disaster, and an ethnography, researching the experiences of some Marysville community members both pre and post-Black Saturday.

Autoethnography, in its twin forms, can be both 'evocative' and 'analytical'. The research utilises both approaches, making use of the researcher's own story to evoke the tragedy and the reality of what occurred and of what has happened since.

The project also takes an analytical approach considering what occurred, and how people have responded, producing outcomes that will be relevant to both emergency services organisations, and agencies involved in disaster recovery and rebuilding.



Included in the project's systematic investigation have been interviews undertaken with a variety of targeted respondents to discover and assess key experiences, issues, and challenges that faced residents before, during and after Black Saturday.

The project is qualitative in nature, using biographic and ethnographic study and the techniques of Naturalistic Inquiry, Inductive Grounded Theory and Inductive Data Analysis.

Attachment and Loss:

In addition, the research will explore the residents' experiences of attachment, loss and grief, in both personal and community contexts, and of how such experiences, issues and challenges have affected their lives, relationships and community by way of resilience and recovery.

Primary literature consists of an examination of 'community', a study of disasters, and an exploration of attachment theory.

Project Significance:

The project will provide a better understanding of what drives human behaviour before, during and after a bushfire, and assist in understanding how communities can be more resilient in recovering from such an experience.

It will provide insights into the health and wellbeing of a post-bushfire community along with information regarding individual and community resilience and recovery after such a major bushfire disaster.

The project has as its end user supporter the Fire Services Commissioner Victoria, and should provide useful material for the Commissioner's Office.