

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS: THE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS SCALE

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Psychological Preparedness

Bushfires are complex and uncontrollable events that can elicit a negative emotional response (e.g. Stress, fear and anxiety). While such emotions are normal in response to perceived threat, an inability to manage stress can lead to a number of negative outcomes (Driskell & Johnston, 1998) such as:

- Cognitive disruption e.g. Disorientation and problems with attention and memory,
- Poor decision making and judgement,
- Maladaptive behaviours e.g. Denial and avoidance, and
- Negative psychological outcomes post-disaster e.g. Post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety.

Psychological preparedness is the ability to manage and cope with one's emotional response during a bushfire, with the purpose of bettering one's cognitive and behavioural response (Australian Psychological Society, 2009).

Rationale

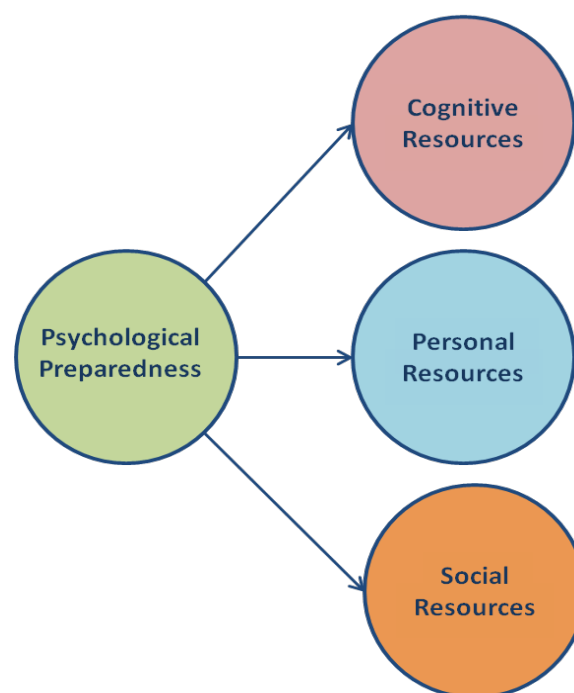
A review of the literature has identified that there is currently no accepted or well validated measure of psychological preparedness for a bushfire. In the absence of such a measure:

- Individual's living in bushfire prone areas are unable to evaluate their ability to cope with their emotional response to a bushfire.
- Practitioners are unable to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies.
- Researchers are unable to develop and evaluate theories that are dedicated to shaping and promoting bushfire safe behaviours.

Proposed Measurement Model for Psychological Preparedness

This research aims to draw from proactive and resource-based theories of stress and coping, such as the Conservation of Resources Model (Hobfoll, 1988), the Warning and Response model (Lindell & Perry, 1992), and the Proactive Coping model (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), to develop a self-assessment tool that measures psychological preparedness for a bushfire.

Therefore, it is argued that psychological preparedness can be measured in terms of the actions an individual takes to gain and maintain cognitive, personal and social resources to reduce their vulnerability to stress in the future.



The **Cognitive Resources** component will assess an individual's knowledge and experience with bushfires. This includes:

- Substantive knowledge e.g. How a bushfire behaves, mitigation procedures (Bostrom, Fischhoff, & Morgan, 1992),
- Knowledge about one's likely emotional response (Gohm, Baumann, & Sniezek, 2001),
- Direct and vicarious experience (Staal, 2004).

The **Personal Resources** component will assess an individual's characteristics that aid in resisting stress (Hobfoll, 1988). This include:

- Self-efficacy,
- Locus of Control,
- Dispositional optimism, and
- Preferred coping style.

The **Social Resources** component will assess the quality of an individual's social support (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). This includes:

- Appraisal support,
- Emotional support, and
- Informational support.

Research Questions

- What variables conceptualise psychological preparedness?
- Can a subjective measure of psychological preparation be developed that has adequate psychometric properties and adequate validity?

Methodology

