

Literature highlights

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Helping families after natural disasters

Tackling tough times: Drought mental health initiative. Greig, J., Crockett, J., & Tonna, A. (2008). *Auseinetter*, 30, 6–8. Available online at <www.auseinnet.com/resources/auseinnet/netter30/auseinnetter_30.pdf>

The Drought Mental Health Assistance Package (DMHAP) for New South Wales was announced by the state government in October 2006. Its aim was to deal with prolonged stress in rural communities affected by drought through increasing capacity in individuals, service providers and communities. Awareness of mental health issues and early intervention was raised through a range of activities, including: Mental Health First Aid workshops to improve individuals' ability to respond to their own and others' emerging mental health needs; Service Network meetings to improve links among service providers; community events, called Tackling Tough Times gatherings, to increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma and identify local pathways to care; and development of mental health resources for consumers and service providers working closely with Beyondblue. This article describes the implementation and outcomes of the DMHAP project and identifies factors critical to its success, particularly the active participation and collaboration of government and non-government sector organisations. It discusses how the 2007 DMHAP experience can inform the 2008 DMHAP project.

Solastalgia: The distress caused by environmental change. (2007). Albrecht, G., et al. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 15, s95–98.

As opposed to nostalgia—the melancholia or homesickness experience by people when they are separated from a loved home—solastalgia is the distress produced by the impact of environmental change on people while they are directly connected to their home environment. This paper focuses on two contexts in which researchers have found solastalgia to be evident: experiences of persistent drought in rural New South Wales, and the impact on individuals of a large open cut coal mine in the Upper Hunter Valley. The paper examines research into these lived experiences

of drought and mining to explore the potential uses and applications of the concept of solastalgia for understanding the psychological impact of environmental changes worldwide that challenge sense of place and identity.

Drought and its effect on mental health: How GPs can help. (2007). Satore, G-M. Kelly, B., Stain, H. J. *Australian Family Physician*, 36(12), 990–993

Drought has been a major stressor affecting rural New South Wales communities since late 2001. While much is known about the effects on mental health of acute natural disasters, there is less research available on the effect to communities of chronic natural disasters. Of great concern for Australian rural communities is that independent of drought, the rate of suicide for some groups is higher in rural than urban communities, while access to mental health services is less. This article explores how general practitioners can identify and respond to the drought related mental health needs of farming residents. Early intervention is a critical task in improving the mental health of rural communities. Early intervention provided by GPs will be enhanced through: working closely with other community agencies to promote early effective intervention for mental health problems, improve access to advice and initial consultation, and facilitate urgent consultation when needed; increasing access to services for farmers and responding promptly to needs; and utilising the support of rural organisational workers.

Children's fears post September 11. (2006). Campbell, M., Gilmore, L. In: M. Katsikitis (ed.) *Psychology bridging the Tasman: Science, culture and practice* (Proceedings of the 2006 joint conference of the APS and NZPsS). Melbourne: Australian Psychological Society (pp. 55–59).

Increasingly, the Internet and global media are exposing children to images of war, disaster and terrorism. Parents seem to be more protective of children because of their own increasing fears of child abduction, sexual abuse, drug use, bullying and internet paedophilia. Parents also seem to be more indulgent of children's unrealistic fears, often allowing them to avoid non-dangerous situations,

being overprotective and encouraging less independence in their children. This paper reports on a study that investigated whether children today have more worries and fears than did previous generations of children. The Fear Schedule Survey–Revised (FSSC–R) was administered to 220 children aged between 6 and 12 years, and the results for self reported frequency, intensity and content of fears were compared with those of similar studies 10 and 20 years ago using the same instrument. The implications for helping parents understand and cope with children’s fears are discussed.

It’s really not easy to get help: services to drought-affected families. (2007). Alston, M. *Australian Social Work*, 60(4), 421–435.

The present paper details the results of research conducted with drought affected farm families in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The study reveals the significant health and welfare stresses experienced by families and the lack of access to services and support. The research was conducted in three sites in rural and remote areas of NSW in 2003. Farm family members, service providers and other community key informants were interviewed. The paper outlines ways that the social work profession can respond to significant natural disasters.

Community responses to bushfires: The role and nature of systems of primary sociality. (2007). Goodman, H., Healey, L., & Boulet, J. *New Community Quarterly*, 5(1), 11–25.

The importance of social networks in linking family, friends and neighbours are often ignored by emergency service operations in cases of bushfires and other threats to life. This article argues that multiple levels of sociality must be integrated in such situations, because local people’s experiences and knowledge should inform the processes of the state’s response. The article uses local people’s experiences of the Wangary fire on the Lower Eyre Peninsula in January 2005 as evidence of the need to integrate technical resources, social resources and personal ecological awareness in order to improve fire and disaster preparedness and prevention. It focuses on the importance of primary sociality in living with and responding to natural threats.

Helping children to cope with media coverage of traumatic events. (2007). Tansey, S. *Putting Children First*, 21, 10–13. Available online at <www.ncac.gov.au/pcf/Helping_Children_Cope_Media_Coverage_Mar07.pdf>

Media coverage of tragic events in the community or further afield can affect children negatively. This article discusses the types of events reported in the media that may affect children, how they may be affected, how they can be protected from disturbing media reports, how to

limit children’s exposure to harmful media, Internet safety, supporting affected children, and appropriate exposure to media reported events. The discussion is directed at both parents and child care workers.

Managing critical events in children’s services. (2006). Tansey, S. *Putting Children First*, 20, 16–19. Available online at <www.ncac.gov.au/pcf/Managing_Critical_Events_in_Children%27s_Services_Dec06.pdf>

Child care services can reduce the negative impact of critical events, such as local or distant natural disasters, the death of a family member, or witnessing violence, by providing support to staff, children and their families during and after the event. Other services and professionals including emergency services, counsellors and health and safety authorities can help child care services manage critical events. This article presents advice on preventing critical events, preparing for a critical event, critical event management plans, and responding to critical events. It discusses how critical events can affect children and adults, the impact of events outside the service and supporting children and adults after critical events.

Stone in a pond: The ripple effect of mental health first aid education, on fire- and drought-affected rural communities. (2005). Malone, G., Ahrens, J., & Bourke, G. In: *Program and Papers: 8th National Rural Health Conference, 10–13 March 2005*, Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Deakin, ACT: National Rural Health Alliance. Available online at <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/conferences/docs/8thNRHC/Papers/malone_bourke.pdf>

The impact of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) education on fire and drought affected rural communities in north east Victoria is examined in this paper. The paper reports on research that investigated rural participants’ perceptions of the impact that MHFA education has had on their roles, relationships and identity as individuals, within their families and in a broader community context. The paper discusses mental health in rural regions, the impact of drought and bushfires on the rural economy and the consequences for stress levels and subsequent mental health issues. It describes the MHFA course, reasons people attended, outcomes and themes of MHFA courses.

Supporting children through disasters. (2005). Elliott, A. *Every Child*, 11(3), 12.

News coverage of disasters can have a severe impact on children. This article discusses the effects on children of exposure to images of natural disasters or terrorist attacks, and suggests ways in which parents and educators can protect and support children through these events.

Effects of financial stress on families.

Financial stress: The hidden human cost. (2009). Wesley Mission. Sydney, NSW: Author. Available online at <www.wesleymission.org.au/news/finstress/images/wesley_report.pdf>

This report provides important comparative results with Wesley Mission's 2006 report (see below). In late 2008, Wesley Mission carried out a survey to gauge the impact of financial stress on households across Sydney. The survey was carried out in the current worsening economic climate and this factor is apparent in the findings that show how the changing conditions are having an unmistakable impact on Sydney households.

Financial stress and its impact on the individual, family and the community. (2006). Wesley Mission. Sydney, NSW: Author. Available online at <<http://www.wesleymission.org.au/news/publications/finstress/>>

This report explores financial stress on Sydney households. It identifies how financial stress impacts on personal wellbeing, family interactions and community relations. The report links financial stress with factors such as marital breakdown, gambling, violence and substance abuse. It is based on a survey of 400 telephone interviews conducted by Urbis Keys Young in 2006.

Impact of financial hardship on parenting behaviour: Final report. (2006). Ng, C. Collingwood, Vic: Anglicare Victoria. Available online at <www.anglicarevic.org.au/index.php?action=filemanager&doc_form_name=download&folder_id=806&doc_id=4027&pageID=6102§ionID=5948>

International research has demonstrated a link between economic hardship and parenting difficulties. This report presents the results of a pilot study seeking to determine whether the relationship between financial hardship and adverse parenting behaviour is also true for parents in Victoria. This behaviour may be manifested in parents being less responsive to children's needs, showing less affection to their children, and being inconsistent and more punitive in disciplining their children. Children may show the effects of this parenting behaviour by being more aggressive, hyperactive and being disciplined at school more frequently than other children. The report includes a literature review, a description of the study methodology and a discussion of its findings.

The flipside of Gen Y: Social background and full-time engagement; personal and financial stress; social inclusion; satisfaction with life. (2006). Long, M. Clayton, Vic: Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, Monash University. Available online at <<http://www.dsf.org.au/get/index.php?id=144&n=The+Fl>

[ipside+of+Gen+Y&ext=pdf&p=%2Fmedia%2Ffiles%2Fresourc%2F144.pdf](http://www.dsf.org.au/get/index.php?id=144&n=The+Fl)>

Young Australians who are not in full time study and work experience more financial and personal stress and disappointments, have lower levels of participation and integration in many social activities, and are less satisfied with their lives. This report uses data from the 2002 General Social Survey and 2004 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey to examine issues relating to young people and geography, household and social economic status, educational attainment, health, family relationships, engagement with wider social networks, educational opportunities and outcomes, employment, financial resources, living arrangements, personal safety, computer usage and access to transport, and young people's satisfaction with aspects of their lives.

Stability among low income families. (2006). Rawsthorne, M. Just Policy, 40, 25–31.

What are the experiences of low income families as they undergo family breakdown and repartnering? This study involved interviews with single and partnered women who were receiving parenting payments. The article discusses instability in low income families; the experience of events that caused stress within participants' relationships; the effects of domestic violence and financial crisis; and the influence of economics in relationship decisions.

Making marriage, domestic relationships and family work: Part XVIII. (2005). Burnard, D. Relatwell, 9(3), 8–13.

The effects of stress on marriage and family life are discussed in this article. The article looks at aspects of stress; causes of stress, including work related stress, financial causes of stress, modern lifestyle and stress, environmental causes; warning signals of stress; how to cope with and reduce stress; and preventative measures.

Review of evidence on the impact of economic downturn on disadvantaged groups (Working Paper No. 68). (2008). Bruce S., & Deirdre D. Department of Work and Pensions. Available online at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/wp_abstracts/wpa_068.asp>

This UK desk-based research reviews the evidence on the impact of the recessions of the early 1970s, 1980s and 1990s on disadvantaged groups, ex-offenders and the self-employed. The review draws upon a variety of contemporary sources to identify key trends and findings and proposes some policy recommendations. The review was conducted by Bruce Stafford and Deirdre Duffy from the International Centre for Public and Social Policy, University of Nottingham.