



Study Update

It has been some months since we last sent an update for the Beyond Bushfires study. During this time, the research team has been busy analysing the responses from just over 1,000 participants who completed our survey. We have also begun conducting in-depth interviews for the qualitative part of our study, as a way of exploring in detail how people are getting on and how they are feeling about their communities and the changes occurring there over time. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to the surveys which is allowing us to understand trends and patterns occurring within bushfire affected areas in Victoria, and also the interviews which are providing more detailed insights into personal experiences over time and place.



Places of significance identified by participants

Survey Results

While analyses of the survey data are continuing, we have some early findings that we would like to share with you:

Impact on mental health and wellbeing - The majority of survey participants reported that they were not experiencing psychological distress 3-4 years after the 2009 bushfires. However, there are still a significant number of people, greater than would be expected in the general population, who are reporting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, psychological distress or heavy drinking. Not surprisingly, these symptoms are more common in the most highly impacted communities. However, notably, among those with elevated distress, more than a third have not visited a health professional concerning these feelings. These findings will help to inform service-providers about the continuing need for support for affected individuals and communities. We are also currently exploring how those who have relocated from affected areas are faring.

Survey Results Continued

Child services – An analysis of recovery-funded services for children and youth highlighted a focus on mental health based initiatives and programs promoting social connections, particularly for secondary school aged youth. This analysis raised interesting questions concerning the extent to which younger children's needs were catered for and the capacity of funded programs to build children's sense of safety and stability. There were promising indications that services were supporting opportunities for young people to take a leadership role in the post disaster recovery context.



Community visits and sharing the findings

An important focus for the Beyond Bushfires team is visiting participating communities to discuss our preliminary findings. This process will allow us to work together to refine our interpretations and determine their local relevance. Community feedback is very valuable to us, as is input and feedback from our government and agency partners. Both are essential in putting together our findings and understanding their service and funding implications. We have also recently shared our early findings via media interviews to assist those in the NSW bushfires in planning for recovery at both an individual and community level.

If you would like us to visit your group or organization to discuss the Beyond Bushfires study, please send us an email (snowdone@unimelb.edu.au) or call 9035 8287.



Take care

Finally, we are conscious that the news about the bushfires that have been occurring in NSW may cause some distress or bring up memories of your own personal fire experience. Take care during this time. If you are feeling distressed, please remember that you are not alone and that there are services available to help if needed.

Lifeline Phone: 13 11 14 or see our website for further service contact details:
<http://beyondbushfires.org.au/resources/help>

Best Regards,
The Beyond Bushfires Team