

AJEM readership favourite papers



**Associate Professor
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Since 1986, AJEM has published an estimated 2,000 peer-reviewed research papers from Australia, New Zealand and around the world.

This growing body of knowledge has documented the tremendous expansion in emergency management planning and policy, the growth in rigour in academia and practice, the transfer of research within the sector and the adoption and testing of improved approaches to much of how we plan, respond and renew after disaster events.

In its 40th year of publication, AJEM is publishing reflections from readers around the world to recall their favourite and most influential paper(s).

The importance of queer community resilience

By **Billy Tusker Haworth**

Volume 37(1):31–32, 2022

<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-january-2022-the-importance-of-queer-community-resilience>

Submitted anonymously

Why is this paper significant to you and why has it held your attention?

LGBTQIA+ vulnerabilities remain a key challenge for disaster management research, policy and practice. It also takes an opportunity to highlight the capacities and resilience qualities of LGBTQIA+ people and groups.

How has this paper influenced your work? Or, how has this paper had a significant influence in this area of emergency management?

I am now embarking on a research PhD on LGBTQIA+ personnel's experiences working in Australian emergency services.

Beyond 2026, what's next in this field of research or practice that builds on this paper?

Addressing the challenges of translating research into disaster policy and practice.

► NEWS AND VIEWS

The importance of queer community resilience

Billy Tusker Haworth
University of Manchester

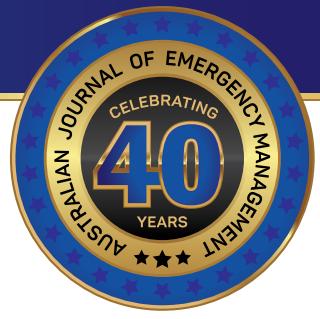
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New approaches to assessing vulnerability and resilience

By Phillip Buckle, Graham Mars and Syd Smale

Volume 15(2):8-14, 2000

www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AUJEmMgmt/2007/17.pdf

Submitted by: Melissa Parsons

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Why is this paper significant to you and why has it held your attention?

This paper introduced me to disaster resilience. As an environmental scientist, I had been doing river research using the Resilience Alliance body of work about resilience in social-ecological systems. When I started writing and teaching a unit on natural hazards I came to realise, with the help of the definitions and ideas in this paper, that disaster resilience was a divergent social science concept that I should delve into. So, I guess that Buckle et al. seeded an interest that has led to my ongoing learning, teaching, and research in disaster resilience. Perhaps most importantly, the Buckle et al. paper explained the differences and similarities between disaster vulnerability and disaster resilience. That Australian communities may simultaneously be at risk, vulnerable, and have agency and resilience remains one of the most important highlights from this paper for me, and one of the most important practice foundations to disaster preparation, mitigation, response and recovery.

How has this paper influenced your work? Or, how has this paper had a significant influence in this area of emergency management?

The paper also introduced me to the idea that agency and capacity could be operationalised into elements that support resilience (such as sustainability of social and economic life, established networks, resources and skills, and social infrastructure) and that these could subsequently form the basis for assessing resilience. My research to develop the Australian Disaster Resilience Index applied the same idea, where we assessed disaster resilience as a set of 8 capacities (or elements) that represent our defined system of supporting resources.

New approaches to assessing vulnerability and resilience

Introduction

Identifying who exactly are the vulnerable people in the community has been accepted for some time as a necessary part of effective emergency and disaster planning. With the introduction of emergency management throughout Australia to a risk management approach to emergency management, the need to identify vulnerabilities has been a major impetus (Sather 1997). The authors are particularly interested in developing the concept of vulnerability and its relationship to the process of assessing that vulnerability. However, it seems to us that there is still a limited understanding of what the terms vulnerability and resilience mean.

This lack of understanding often constrains the effective practice of emergency management. As well as dealing with a range of potential risks, emergency managers have to deal with a range of potential needs and potential capacities of the community and the communities and agencies about which they have only a partial and incomplete understanding. This is necessary for the options that can be developed to reduce risk to the community. Equally, individuals, communities and agencies have an equal responsibility to manage their risks, hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities. As a result, understanding of options for effective risk management as well as for supporting local capability are also limited.

Some people, of particular note Ken Granger and his colleagues (e.g. in Citeau, Granger et al. 1997), are developing a better and more detailed understanding of risk and vulnerability. However, there is still a significant number of additional facets to resilience and vulnerability that need further exploration as we discuss below.

In this paper, we discuss specific issues that are central to a proper and complete understanding of vulnerability and resilience.

As we progress in our study of vulnerability and resilience we hope to incorporate these elements into a coherent framework that is capable of systematic application by emergency managers and community members to generate informed

By Phillip Buckle, Manager, State Emergency Recovery Unit, Dept of Human Services, Victoria; Dr Graham Mars, Lecturer, School of Social Science and Planning, RMIT University; and Rev Syd Smale, State Disaster Recovery Coordinator, Victorian Council of Churches

the process of risk assessment and risk management planning more thoroughly than is currently the case. This will be a practical and applied aim.

We also expect to develop a better theoretical basis for the concepts of vulnerability and resilience and to integrate with other disciplines such as community development, social psychology, community economics and management.

Background

Recent events in Victoria and elsewhere have stimulated an interest in assessing the vulnerability of the elderly. This is evident and has been demonstrated in significant ways. The January 1992 bushfires in the Dandenong Ranges were managed with the help of a range of support and recovery process. The lead by local government, and the level of support provided by the local community, were managed with the guidance of local coordination and management.

However, there are some indications that it took some time for the recovery to be fully successful. The elderly, in particular single parent families, usually with low incomes and typically with one or two children, were a significant part and comprising just over 10% of the total population, may have lacked opportunities to fully participate in some community recovery processes.

Families in remote areas lacked access to child care facilities (either a lack of facilities or a lack of funding) when funding was shortly due to cease; other people in remote areas had very considerable distances to travel to access services and support; in some of the farming areas an aged population faced difficulties in recovering from their losses and the whole area was made more vulnerable by the fact that 2 years of drought preceded the floods.

Vulnerability was as much a result of experience of 2 years of drought as many years of environmental deterioration, and the effects of isolation (extended travel time, poor communications and so forth), as it was to the passing effects of the flood itself.

The Gas Shortage of September 1998 in

Victoria also highlighted particular vulnerability issues for the elderly when gas restrictions were applied. Aged people, new born babies and infants, people with chronic illnesses, people with terminal illnesses requiring palliative care, people on life support systems, and the disabled all had special requirements that were not met by the aged who were expected to be vulnerable actually cope better than was expected by emergency managers. The elderly had opportunities to use gas that were not available to younger people, that they had gained from working through previous life difficulties, such as the Great Depression and the Second World War.

Of less immediate priority were a number of other groups. People off from work, particularly those in unexpected reduction in income, businesses forced to close temporarily and people that had to purchase electrical cooking and heating.

On a broader scale still, there were groups of people that remained at home, including the elderly, as a result of the loss of gas in terms of alternative cooking and heating options, the safe disposal of food and other putrescible materials, and the need to obtain and using water for bathing.

These events, and the ways in which they have highlighted community needs, occurred in the context of a changing hazard based focus on emergency management to a risk based focus, set a starting point for our consideration of vulnerability as it applies to emergency management.

Australian Journal of Emergency Management

Beyond 2026, what's next in this field of research or practice that builds on this paper?

Concepts of disaster risk, vulnerability, and resilience have been studied and applied almost in a decades long sequence, and generally as separate concepts. I'd like to hope that in an era of increasing natural hazard complexity and impact, that theoreticians and practitioners can integrate the cognate ideas of risk, vulnerability, and resilience into new and thoughtful ways to support and serve communities.

Changing the rules of the game: mechanisms that shape responsibility-sharing from beyond Australian fire and emergency management

By Blythe McLennan and John Handmer

Volume 27(2):7–13, 2012

<https://search.informit.org/doi/epdf/10.3316/informit.476937774529897>

Submitted by: Jim McLennan

Adjunct Professor, La Trobe University School of Psychology and Public Health

Why is this paper significant to you and why has it held your attention?

The paper was the first critical analysis I read of the then Federal government's newly announced policy of 'shared responsibility'. Because I was so heavily involved in post-Black Saturday field research involving interviews with householders who had been impacted by disaster-level bushfires I had not really paid attention on the emergence of the policy. Due to my background in industrial and organisational psychology, I was not really attuned to the importance of the wider socio/political contextual issues for any programs aimed at improving community and householder bushfire safety. The paper by B McLennan and J Handmer was an eye opener.

How has this paper influenced your work? Or, how has this paper had a significant influence in this area of emergency management?

It made me sadder, but wiser. In its wake I became less naively optimistic about improving levels of community and householder bushfire safety amid climate change and the increasing frequency and severity of natural hazard dangers.

To contribute

We want to hear from you about your favourite or most influential paper. All you need to do is to revisit AJEM's vast content and reflect on the paper(s) that have been novel, inspirational and even transformative. Provide a few short answers to questions about why that paper was significant to you, how it has influenced your practice and what might be built on from the paper. Selected reflections will be published in AJEM throughout 2026.

Changing the rules of the game: mechanisms that shape responsibility-sharing from beyond Australian fire and emergency management.

By Blythe McLennan and John Handmer,
Centre for Risk and Community Safety, RMIT University.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we look beyond Australian fire and emergency management to compare ways that responsibility-sharing – broadly conceived – has occurred in other places and sectors where risks to community safety are faced. Responsibility-sharing, in some sense, is collective action, and formal and informal institutions provide the "rules of the game" that prescribe how responsibility should be shared amongst the parties involved. We have spread samples of risk research literature in order to examine by what mechanisms responsibility-sharing institutions have been shaped in other places and sectors where risks to community safety are faced. Our review revealed more alternatives for shaping responsibility-sharing institutions than are widely considered by policy and decision makers in Australian fire and emergency management. It therefore raises an important question about why certain mechanisms are chosen, prioritised, overlooked or resisted in this sector. An alternative approach to assessing and pursuing shared responsibility is also discussed. ©

general idea and that is embedded in a particular context, place and time. A broader view that compares the goals and processes of sharing responsibility across a wider range of risk and safety contexts may therefore provide more valuable food for thought about confronting local challenges.

In this paper, we therefore look beyond Australian fire and emergency management to compare ways that responsibility-sharing – broadly conceived – has occurred in other places and sectors where risks to community safety are faced. Importantly, finding ways to share responsibility amongst multiple parties, in a range of sectors, including business and communities, is a challenge faced across a wide range of sectors. Risk research literature abounds with examples of responsibility-sharing mechanisms in fields such as air pollution (Bickerstaff & Walker 2002), public health (Buttman & Plessier 2001), workplace safety (Brennan, Bannister, & Dyer 2001), emergency & Ward 2010), transportation (Sanne 2008), policing (Hughes & Rose 2007), and new technologies (Black 2008). This paper is a contribution to this literature in order to examine by what mechanisms responsibility-sharing was shaped. A more detailed account of the mechanisms for responsibility-sharing is available elsewhere (McLennan & Handmer 2016).

In this paper, we focus on conceptualising the idea of responsibility-sharing in a cross-sectoral, context-independent way, presenting key results, and outlining broad implications from this cross-sectoral review for Australian fire and emergency management.

Responsibility-sharing institutions
To begin, we need to be clear about what we mean by 'shared responsibility'. We take a broader view than the understanding most common in Australian fire and emergency management.

In the context of risk, the concept of responsibility incorporates the notion that certain parties have an obligation (be this moral, social or legal) to undertake actions to manage risk, either their own risk or the risk of others (Bickerstaff & Walker 2002).

These obligations stem from the expectations, rules,

and norms in society about the roles of various parties

with respect to risk (see also Breitnacher 2001).

They are forward-looking because they exist prior

Beyond 2026, what's next in this field of research or practice that builds on this paper?

I am no longer actively involved in community and householder bushfire safety research. But I remain convinced that the focus must remain on raising community-level awareness of natural hazard threat and preparedness so that this translates in householder awareness and preparedness. The power of so-called 'descriptive norms' remains unsurpassed: householders tend to do what they see other householders (like 'them') do about potential hazards.

Make your contribution at https://unesurveys.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4Ts0FudXh0tpZQ

This call for contributions will remain open up to end of August 2026.