



Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY

Tune In & Tune Up

Drought and
Wellbeing
Webinar Series

the
power of
humanity



CRISIS CARE COMMITMENT



Webinars

1. Maintaining wellbeing through drought & prolonged stress (Wed 17 June)
2. The drought cycle; adaptation and strengthening resilience (Wed 1 July)
3. Wellbeing after the rains (Wed 15 July)
4. **Family wellbeing in the face of ongoing stress (Wed 29 July)**
5. Preparing for tough times (Wed 12 August)



This Session

- Recording:
<https://bit.ly/2MqY7ez>
- Q&A
- Chat box

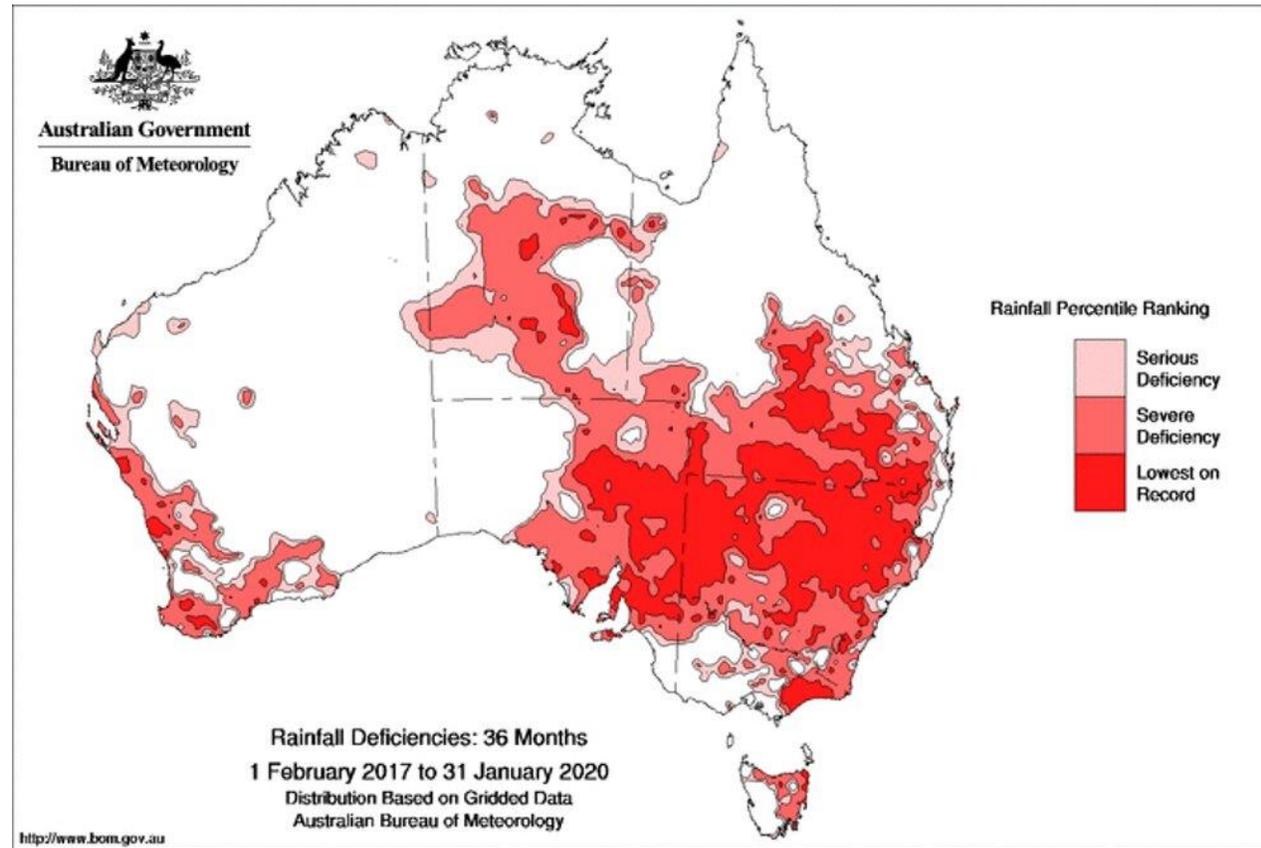




*Family Wellbeing
in the face of
Ongoing Stress*

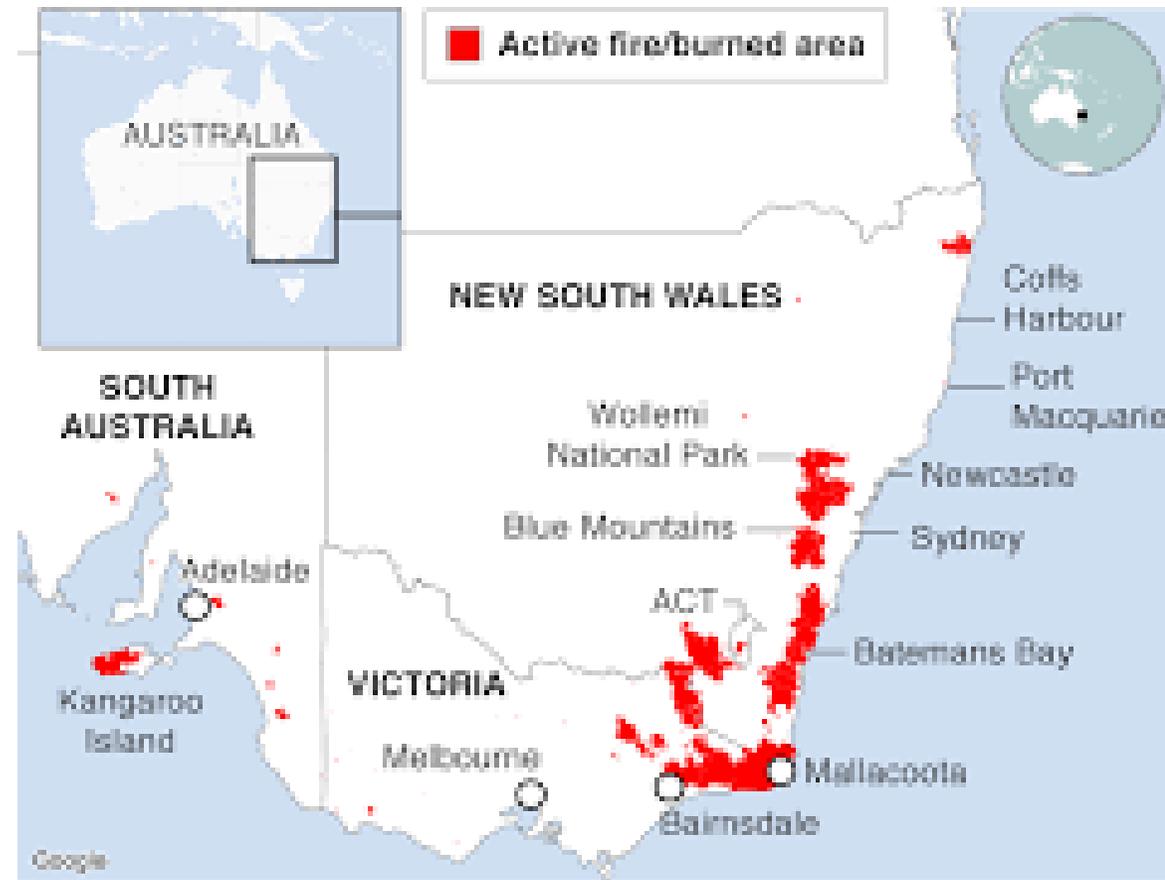
PROFESSOR MARGARET ALSTON OAM
UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

Rainfall 2017-2020



Some areas experienced drought and fires

Major bushfires in Australia

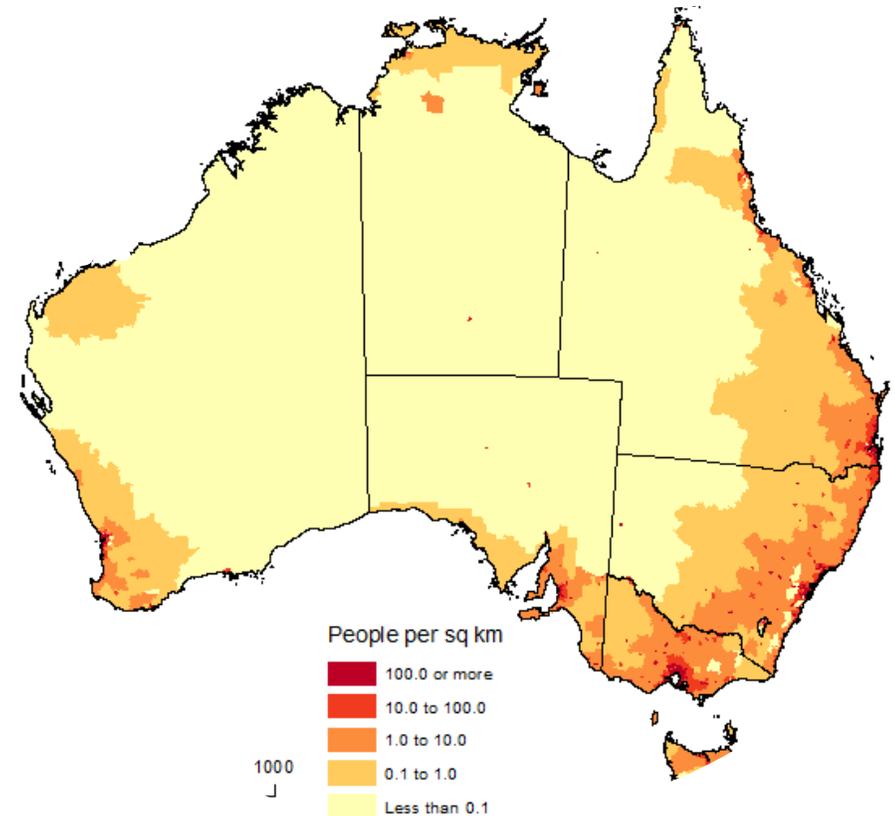


Source: NSW Rural Fire Service / Victoria Country Fire Authority, 31 Jan



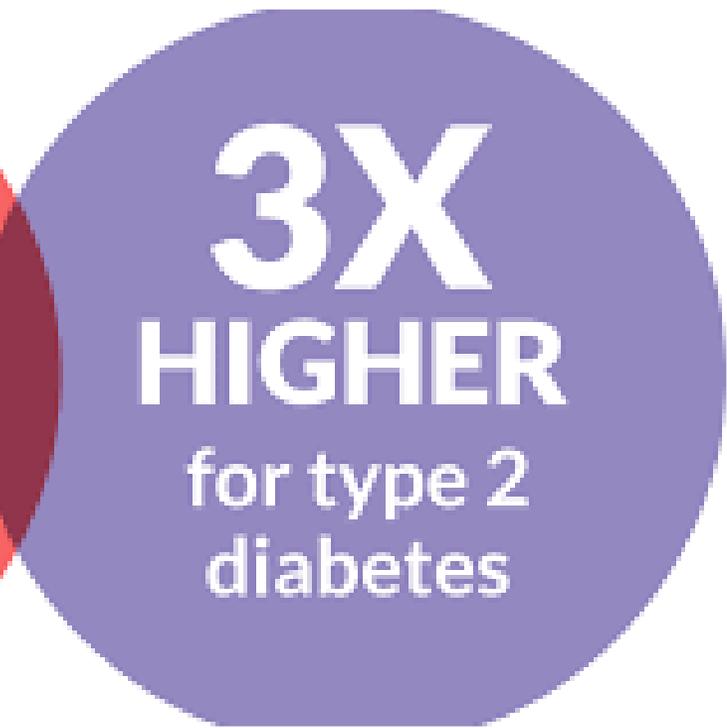
What is happening in rural and remote communities and on-farms in drought areas?

- Around 29% (7 million) of Australians live in rural and remote areas
- More women in cities (51%) than in remote areas (46%)
- Older overall population in rural and remote areas – young people tend to leave for work and education

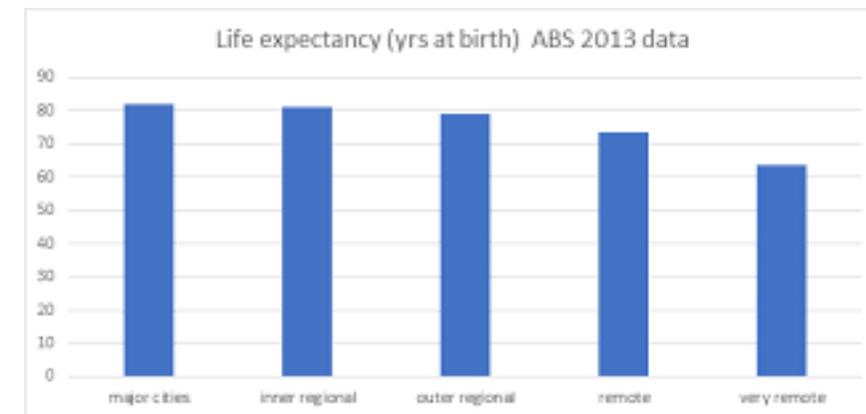


Rural and remote health

- ABS suggests rural and remote Australians have poorer health and welfare but greater life satisfaction
- Higher injury rates in rural and remote and
- Less access to medical facilities



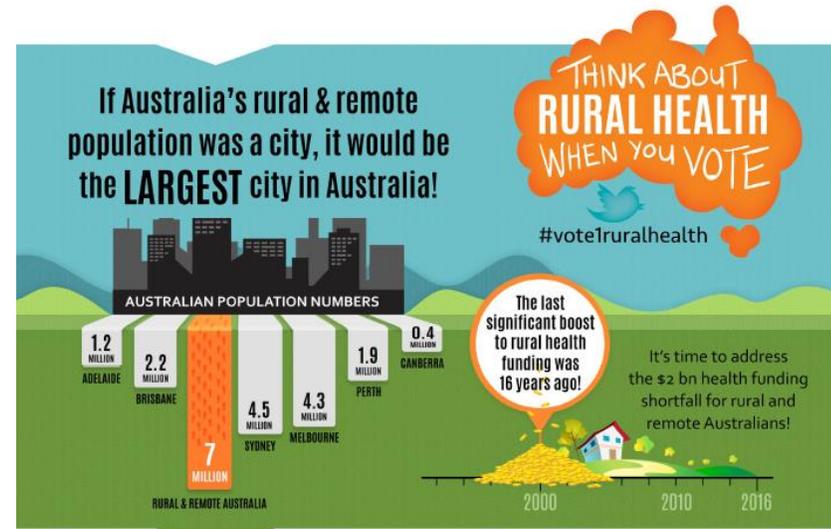
- Australian Institute of Health and welfare – life expectancy higher in cities





- Poorer health overall and more health risk factors – smoking, risky drinking, physical inactivity and obesity
- Access to GPs similar ((but often longer waiting times) but
- Access to other rural and remote health services are fewer and less available (eg dentists, physios etc)

Covid much lower numbers in rural areas – advantages to isolation



There is currently a **\$2 BILLION** deficit for rural & remote health every year. (See our fact sheet for more info)

THE RURAL & REMOTE HEALTH DEFICIT:

- MEDICARE: \$881 MILLION
- PHARMACY: \$850 MILLION
- DENTAL: \$340 MILLION
- ALLIED HEALTH: \$260 MILLION
- AGED CARE: \$500 MILLION
- HOSPITALS: \$829 MILLION (OVERSPEND)

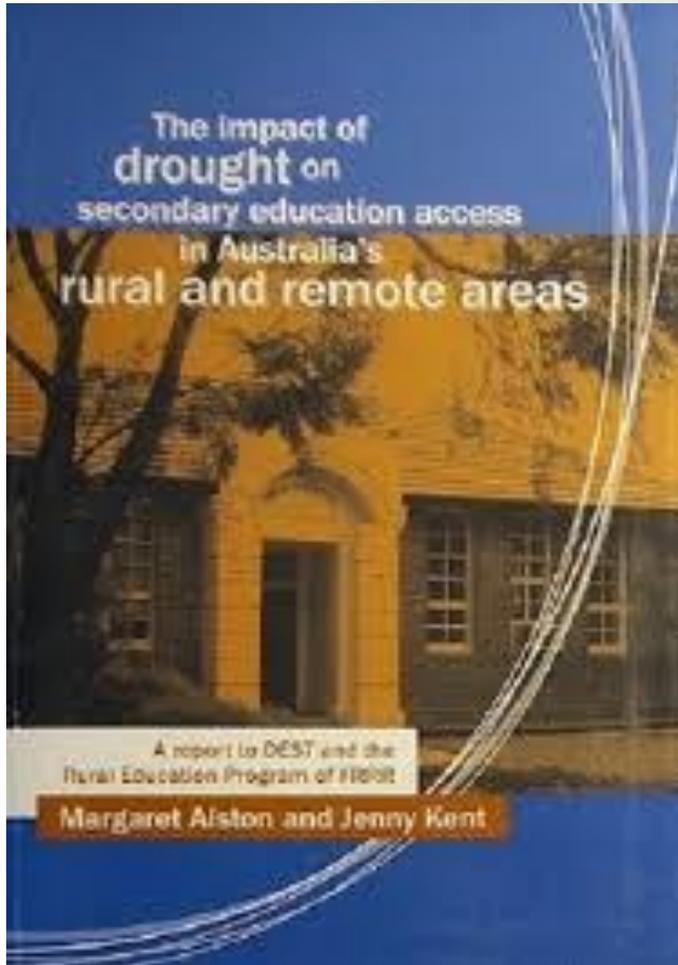
WHAT DO WE NEED?

We need a focus and commitment by the major parties and their candidates to addressing the rural health funding disparity. We don't want more funding than those in the city, we just want our fair share of the health budget, and opportunities provided to enable that share to be most effectively used in rural and remote areas.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Find out what the major parties and their local candidates are doing to support rural and remote health care.
- Send this information to your friends and family. Spread the word!
- If your community is having a town hall meeting, get along and raise this issue. The more people that speak up, the more powerful we are.
- Consider what your local candidates and their parties are saying and doing about rural health services when you make your vote on 2 July.

Education



- RRR residents have less access to education
- HSC completions – city (80.3%), outer regional (63.9) and remote (48.5)
- Bachelor and above city (39.7); outer regional (18.9); remote (16.3).
- RRR students – less likely to complete high school; apply for higher ed; take up their uni offer; more likely to defer; and less likely to complete
- **(National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy, Commonwealth of Australia 2019)**
- We also found – children whose farms and families impacted by drought may tell parents they are not interested in uni because they think that will ease financial stress
- We found some children going to school hungry and schools were instituting breakfast clubs
- We found that School of Air difficult for parents to supervise when they working on farms
- Some families delaying boarding school

Community changes

- Decline in farm worker roles and hired labour
- Led to some farm families and farm worker families leaving the community and a consequent loss of services

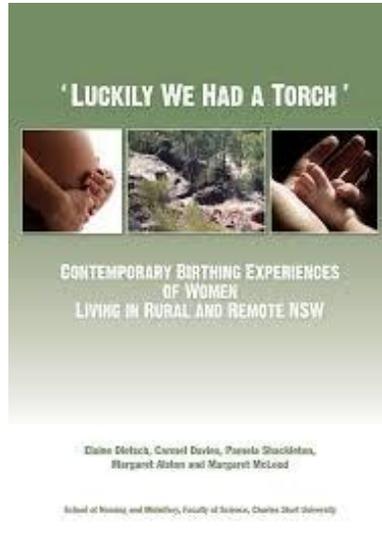


loss of population, loss of neighbours, empty farm houses, fewer people to do community work and to maintain community organisations, and buildings like community halls,

Loss of school numbers, reduction in teacher numbers, reduction in subject options, closure of small schools, loss of school buses, loss of children's friends

However – areas of high amenity, closer to regional communities experiencing population increase





Service infrastructure

- Small hospitals – some loss of services such as birthing
- Sometimes poor road infrastructure
- Loss of businesses



Lack of secure, reliable IT services

- Inadequate or non-existent IT services and mobile coverage
- lack of telecommunications - economic and safety issue
- Impacts farm business efficiency
- Impacts women's safety in isolated circumstances and on the roads



What rural communities renowned for

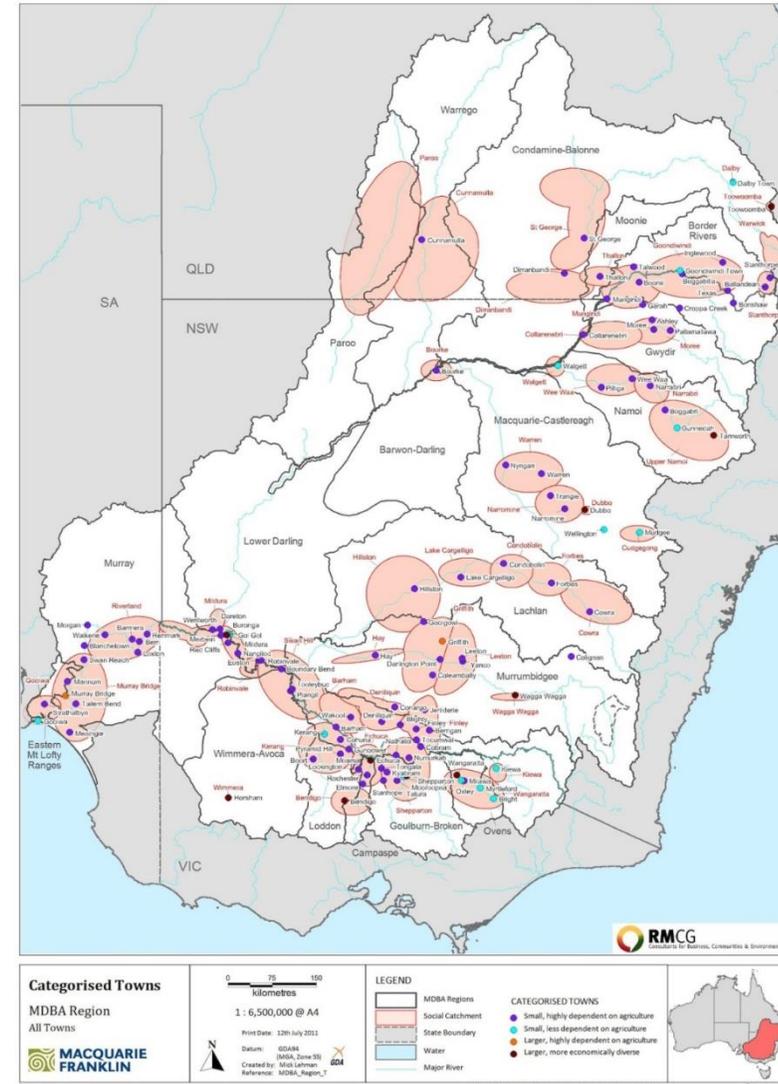
- Vibrant supportive communities
- Neighbours helping neighbours
- Informal support services
- Rich networks
- Local community gatherings

'But this support may soon be a thing of the past. Australia's rural communities are facing a looming volunteering crisis, driven in part by a rapidly ageing population, and residents moving away from rural communities. This is combined with volunteer burnout as the government defunds essential services in these areas, leaving volunteers to pick up the slack'. (Davies, Holms and Lockstone-Binney 2018)

Murray-Darling Basin – Australia's food bowl – reduced water for irrigation – climate change outcome – 2014-7



Focus groups, interviews and questionnaire in three dairy regions of northern Victoria 2013-6. Especially vulnerable communities – smaller populations, high dependency on ag, high irrigation (EBC et al 2011)



- Smaller farms reliant on off farm income earned most often by women
- Larger farms – women working on the farm, often in dairies
- Health issues
- Uncertainty, stress, declining commodity prices, water markets
- Rearrangement of work roles
- Erosion of resilience over long period of change



Women's contribution to farm income in Australia

- More than 50% of Australian farms are dependent on off-farm income and 80% of this is done by women.
- Depending on level of remoteness, between 42% and 46% of Australian farm women work off-farm and they contribute 49% of real farm income through their off- and on-farm work (Sheridan and Haslam-McKenzie 2009).





ARC study in MDB with dairy farm families 2014-7

- **Increased on-farm work** – 48.3% men and 44.8 women reported had increased hours of work on-farm.
- 15% of women noted they would **need to increase their off-farm work** over the next twelve and
- 46% noted they would **need to increase their off-farm work** over the next five years.
- 93% of women - simply were **not the jobs available** for women to supplement their income in their local communities requiring involuntary separation.
- The lack of jobs in rural communities and the multiplicity of roles women must undertake has led to a **precarious work/life balance**.



*In these
circumstances
social
vulnerability
exacerbated*

- Constant change – policies and ag production
- Higher work loads
- loss of family, friends community members (out-migration)
- reduced terms of trade
- lack of trust in water governance /govt
- no capacity to influence
- stress
- loss of industry power

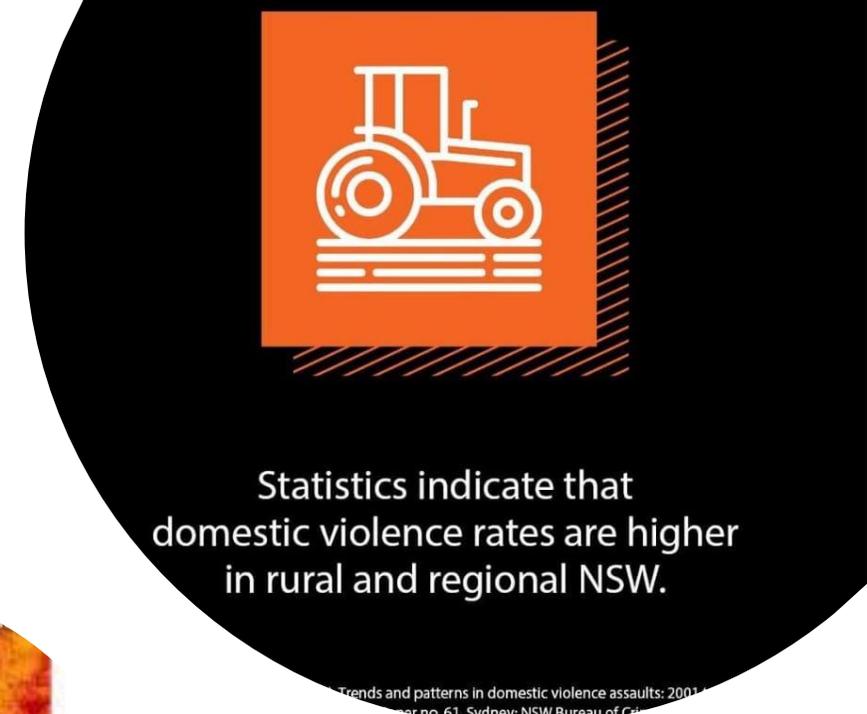
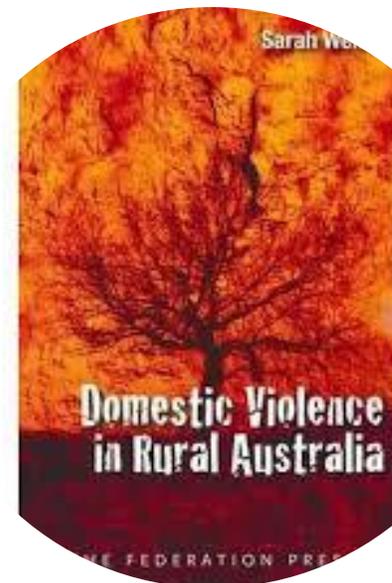
Invisible Farmer and Visible farmer study

- 32% of agricultural work now done by women
- Changing profile of farm roles

Silent issues

- Increase in domestic violence exacerbated by drought, fires and pandemic
- Stress and anxiety
- Fear about the future
- Worry about children and their futures

- Domestic violence is a leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness for women aged 15–44.
- Women in rural and remote areas – violence is a terrifying experience. Often no escape and no services.



WOMEN'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

Landscapes

State of knowledge | July 2015

Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural women's coping experiences: *State of knowledge paper*



What we know

- Violence against women increases during and after a disaster – fire, flood, drought
- Increases according to bill cycles
- Women are reluctant to report for a number of reasons – shame, family pressure, no support, captive, partners well known, not believed, lack of perpetrator accountability, isolation

Experiences of violence

- 17% of Australian women have experienced violence from a partner or former partner
- Study in South Australia with rural women seeking help as a result of experiences of violence found women in the study experienced coercive control and a range of abusive behaviours such as physical, sexual, psychological, social, and economic abuse
- Experiences led to social isolation
- Seeking help complex and dependent on support networks
- Wendt, S., Chung, D., Elder, A., & Bryant, L. (2015). *Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural women's coping experiences: State of knowledge paper* (ANROWS Landscapes, 04/2015). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

- 
- generally cope on their own for long periods of time by:
 - trying to understand their partner's behaviour, placating him, positioning themselves as responsible for helping their partner, and keeping their family together
 - Shame and embarrassment, dignity and pride prevented help seeking – can lead to isolation
 - Disasters like drought magnify women's reluctance to report
 - Family and friendship circles are usually first approach – listen and respond

- 
- relationship violence and divorce have increased in the wake of disasters across the world
 - Services dealing with mental health and domestic violence routinely report increases of approximately 50% following the disaster – often in relationships where there has been no previous violence

- 
- Mental health issues for men increase when not able to control the environment or to live up to expectations
 - Stoicism

***Issues raised by women in
agriculture
Research conducted over several
years***

- Work pressures – multiplicity of roles
- Lack of child care
- Lack of validation of their work
- Involuntary separation for work
- IT problems
- Emotional stress
- Experiences of violence
- Coping / resilience
- Monitoring others (emotional labour)
- Ignoring own health
- Hiding stress
- Gendered expectations
- Compliance with the dominant discourse





Adult Relationships During Drought and Prolonged Stress

Stephanie Schmidt
Clinical Psychologist, Farmer, Wife, Mother

cultivatepsych@gmail.com

www.cultivatepsych.com.au

Relationships take work – Especially in Stress

Watch out for the **DRAIN** in your relationship

- **D**isconnection
- **R**eactivity
- **A**voidance
- **I**nside your mind
- **N**eglecting Values

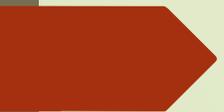
➤ Adapted from Russ Harris "Act with Love"

Choose to Act with LOVE

- **Let Go** - let go of the stories your mind tells you
- **Open up** - make space for painful feelings
- **Valuing** – Take action guided by your values
- **Engaging** – Be present

- **Relationship Values** – What's most important to you and how do you want to be as a person in your relationship?
 - 3 core values:
 - Connection, Caring, Contribution

- **Magic Ratio** – 5:1 Positive to Negative Interactions



Rupture and Repair



- **SOW** the seeds of connection
- **Slow Down**
- **Observe/Open Up**
- **What Matters**



Additional Resources

- Russ Harris, MD – ACT with Love – www.actmindfully.com.au (additional resources)
- Gottman Institute – Drs John and Julie Gottman
 - The Gottman Institute on Facebook
- 5 Love Languages – Dr Gary Chapman
 - Love Nudge App
- Smiling Mind App – Relationships program, Stress Management Program

Emerging Minds

Bringing your own knowledge
and experience

Dr Margaret Nixon

Senior Researcher

The Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network

The Australian National University

ANU Medical School

Margaret.Nixon@anu.edu.au



Emerging Minds

Drought impacts whole-family
and whole-community



Emerging Minds

How does drought impact the family unit?



Emerging Minds

How do children respond to stressful challenges and changes?



Emerging Minds

How can families support children through times of drought?

Supporting Children During Drought

- 1 Try to look after yourself so you can look after your children**
 Parents play a vital role for children in times of drought. Your capacity to cope during drought impacts your children's response to stress and their wellbeing during and after the event. Self-care is vital so it is important that you seek out any help you need so you are better able to support your kids.
- 2 Try looking at things through your child's eyes and see things from their perspective**
 If possible, try to imagine the drought from your child's point of view. This may help you to understand some of their reactions and behaviours. It may also assist connecting and supporting them.
- 3 Keep an open conversation so they can come to you any time**
 Let your children know that you are available to talk with them when needed. Encouraging children to talk about their feelings will help them understand their experiences. Sometimes children don't have the words to describe their feelings, however you can reassure them that their feelings are normal and that they will come and go.
- 4 Be on the look out for changes in your child's behaviour as this can indicate they need support**
 At times of stress, children can respond in different ways. While most have a natural resilience, a minority of children will find the impacts of drought more difficult to deal with. If you are concerned about your child, it may be helpful to link them in with additional support.
- 5 Support your child's social connections with family, friends, school and hobbies**
 Children need positive time spent with family, friends and doing activities they enjoy. Most of all, they need time to be kids, which includes regular routines at home and school.
- 6 Give your child the opportunity to make decisions and have their voice heard**
 Drought is notable for the sense of powerlessness it creates, which is why giving children choices and asking their opinions, can help them feel more empowered and positive.
- 7 Focus on the positive future for you, your kids and your community**
 It is important to remind yourself and your kids that this drought will pass. Trying to do fun activities together or even making a list of things you are all looking forward to will help in keeping a more positive future in focus.



National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health
 Delivering partners: 
 The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program.
 emergingminds.com.au

Emerging Minds

National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health

How can I support children during a drought?

What can I do to help the kids I know?

Look after yourself so you can better look after others.

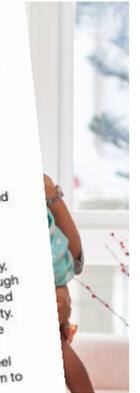
Research shows that adult and parents' wellbeing and ability to cope are strongly linked to how well children recover during and after traumatic or stressful events. Your behaviour and moods impact children in terms of their stress levels, and their relationship with you. It is important you seek out any help you or your children may need, including from family, friends, community or from other sources such as online support in order to support your children.

Kids learn about stress from watching adults. You will teach children around you how to deal with stress and hardship because children look for adult guidance on how to manage feelings. If you have a bad day or get angry, rather than beating yourself up, speak to your children afterwards about what happened, that you are feeling stressed but you are OK. This will help reassure them that it's not their fault and help them make sense of what is going on.

Try looking at the drought through your children's eyes.

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Children are shaped by their interactions with family, friends, and community. Their ability to navigate tough times is directly impacted by the reactions of trusted family members and the support of their community. Children's reactions and behaviours can also make more sense when we imagine what they might be experiencing. Asking children directly how they feel or what they may be worried about supports them to



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Emerging Minds

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so you can look after your children

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Questions!





ARC Drought Resilience Program

- Support the Supporter
- Psychological First Aid
- Resilient Leaders
- Mentor Program
- Farm First Aid
- Outreach
- Expert advice
- Wellbeing resources





Thankyou!

- Recordings and Registering: <https://bit.ly/2MqY7ez>
- Questions: drought@redcross.org.au
- Next Webinar: **Preparing for tough times** (Wed 12 August)
Hope to see you there!

