

Inside Trauma



A Word from the Editor



Drought and bushfires are often not things we want to think about or consider happening to us. However they do happen and we should prepare for them. Unfortunately, for survivors, there is often a traumatic effect that has influenced their way of life, having to oftentimes start over again.

This newsletter will outline how even though the event has passed, the emotional effects may still linger and continue to for a long while after. Bushfire trauma and recovery will be outlined, along with drought and its after effects. Trauma in and around these major events will be discussed and how to help better manage and recognize symptoms will be touched on as well.

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Time To Heal

The arrival of the summer months is most often accompanied by a sense of expectation and adventure. After the melancholy grey of winter, summer promises redemption by way afternoons spent at the beach, family BBQs and backyard parties.



Yet for many, the onset of summer brings memories of past trauma. This is particularly the case for those who have experienced the devastation of bushfires and drought- those seemingly permanent features of the harsh Australian climate.

A close friend of mine lost both his sisters in the Black Saturday inferno of 2009. The twin girls were attempting to save their horses when the bushfire roared with staggering speed straight towards them.



The subsequent loss- which he observed first-hand- has forever changed him. Where he was once charismatic and vivacious, he

The difference between a good life and a bad life is how well you walk through the fire – Carl Jung



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is now quiet and withdrawn. There is a sadness to his eyes that will never quite go away. Despite this tragedy, my friend has been able to reconstruct his life. Through specialised counselling and the support of friends and family, he has been able to move on from that dreaded day.

Yet the past still haunts him. It is now 10 years since the apocalyptic destruction of Black Saturday. Some might expect this to be enough time to heal from the worst of the grief, but there is no set timeframe in which to heal from traumatic events.

Everyone reacts to grief and loss differently, and it is helpful for us to remember this when we encounter the presence of trauma in those around us.

Ryan Buesnel
Alcohol and Other Drugs Placement Student

Drought and the *Ripple* Effects

Drought as a concept is not often considered deep enough by the people contributing to it. It seems the nation as a whole are concerned for others suffering it, but not that concerned as to continue developing cities, urban growth, increasing technology usage and enjoying a long, hot shower. People are morally concerned but not willing enough to change their actions either. Amongst this unwillingness there are farmers with their livelihoods draining away before they know it, their crops turning to dust, their livestock malnourished and witnessing the oftentimes deaths of these animals first hand. Not being able to provide for families in remote areas can also induce human suffering and ultimately lead to a widespread financial, emotional and environmental loss. The recovery, if any, can be very traumatic. The effects are long lasting and ongoing considering acres of crops need to be revived, stock replenished, only for the worry and heartache to be possible again in the future.

What needs to be considered are preventative methods opposed to reactive methods once the damage is done. Being aware of the causes behind drought is often insightful for the greater

**For the sake of our
children and our future,
we must do more to
combat drought – Barack
Obama**

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**What matters is how well
you walk through the fire
– Charles Bukowski**

**You cant go back and
change the beginning, but
you can start where you
are and change the ending
– C.S. Lewis**



good. Things such as urban development are indirect causes of drought as deforestation causes the soil underneath to dry out quicker and become more susceptible to erosion. Increased power usage increases pollution which in turn affects climate change and heat levels. Over farming (adversely affecting the soil quality) and over irrigating (over using water supplies) are also causes toward drought suffering.



The ideal management of catastrophic events such as a drought is coming together as a community and doing your part to help out the town, suburb, or nation. Volunteering a helping hand, donations, being careful and precautious of all water usage and general environmentally safe practices. Avoiding misuse or over-usage of water is crucial when preventing drought or even management of a drought.

The after effects of drought such as post trauma are often seen as not as important as the drought itself, but it is important to recognize symptoms and seek help. Flash backs, nightmares, old memories, hopelessness, and anxiety are all signs of post trauma to look out for.



Lauren Chester
Postgraduate Counselling Student

**What fire does not destroy,
it hardens – Oscar Wilde**



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The Trauma of Continuous Drought

While drought is a common narrative of the Australian landscape, people from the marginalised dry and barren land are at their emotional, physical and mental wits end.

Our environment has been hit by bushfires and drought and while bushfires are an acute traumatic event, a drought is relentless, ongoing and traumatic.



The extremes of climate present problems including depression, post traumatic stress, alcohol/drug abuse and suicide. A drought is a special type of disaster – it can creep to several dry years and over time leads to significant psychological distress. ‘Research links the drought to suicide among male farmers.’ (Hanigen Butler., Kokic & Hutchinson, 2012.) Continual exposure to unwanted change in the environment reduces the farmers sense of control which affects how they control their lives. Longer term to acute and gradual effects of disaster can also transform individual and communities in the aftermath of adversity. There can be resilience, strength and positiveness built however, optimism and even spiritual practice help some people manage and find meaning through suffering adversity.

The challenges to ones self esteem is destructive; the sense of failure and guilt when sweat and tears have been heavily invested in the land, fail. The overwhelming emotional and mental fatigue consume every waking thought. The need for mental health support in rural settings continues to grow. The impacts of drought will vary and depend on the continuous frequency and intensity of drought. This impact of human wellbeing will develop from various pathways. The communities continuous responses

There is a lot that happens around the world that we cannot control. We cannot stop earthquakes, we cannot prevent droughts and we cannot prevent all conflict, but when we know where the hungry, the homeless, and the sick exist, then we can help –
Jan Schakowsky

The world is a drought without love –
Brandon Boyd

to climate change further add salt to the wounds of many farmers suffering from year in year out fields of dead stock, no green paddocks and instead dust bowls of land.



Well being is a concept which does require a broader interpretation than just being the absence of injury or disease. Wellbeing and mental health is about flourishing and resilience. Severity of a drought is reflected in three ways:

- impact on mental health
- impact on physical health
- impact on community health

Recognition of the above systems under stress are not just short term but exert systematic and gradual effects on people leaving the land and a way of life. Family having to re-adjust to a future of unknowns. Water is the lifeblood of human existence - and droughts further breakdown human infrastructure by restricting drinking, showering and sewerage. These fundamental living amenities break down the human spirit.

A realisation that additional stressors add to the initial psychological burden of the disaster; current burden dealing with paper work and negotiation with insurance companies all add psychological burden.

Peter Horton

Founding Director of Trauma Centre Australia

Some of the key impacts of climate change on mental health include:

- Trauma
- Shock
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Complicated grief
- PTSD/Major Depressive Disorder
- Strains on social relationships
- Substance abuse
- Mental health emergencies
- Sense of loss
- Hopelessness, fatalism, and resignation
- Loss of autonomy and sense of control
- Loss of personal and occupational identity



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