PLACE ATTACHMENT: A PREDICTOR OF BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS IN REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

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Summary

People's attachment to their homes and local areas was hypothesised to have an effect on the fire mitigation activities people undertake on their homes and properties. The current project aimed to measure people's place attachment to their homes and local areas to see if attachment predicted physical preparation. Results showed that attachment to home significantly predicted fire preparation in regional areas but not on the urban-fringe. Attachment to the local area did not predict individual preparedness.

Background

Place attachment is the bond between people and their environments (Jorgenson & Stedman, 2001). It has been conceptualised as containing two dimensions: place identity and place dependence. Place identity is an emotional and symbolic connection between people and their environments and place dependence is a functional, resource dependent connection (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Previous studies have found place attachment to be a motivating factor for disaster preparedness (Mishra, Mazumdar, & Suar, 2010; Paton, 2012).

Method

Participants Participants in the Shires of Collie, Augusta-Margaret River and Kalamunda and in the City of Armadale were contacted by telephone at the beginning of the 2012/2013 fire season. There were 150 participants on the urban-fringe and 150 regional participants. The mean age of participants was 57.84 years, with a standard deviation of 16.48 years, ranging from 18 to 93. 176 of the participants were female.

Measures Participants completed a place attachment survey that was adapted by Brown and Raymond (2007) from Williams and Roggenbuck (1989). The survey was comprised of six questions measuring place identity (emotional attachment) and five questions measuring place dependence (functional attachment). Participants also completed a checklist of 36 physical preparedness items, of which they were asked to indicate if they had or hadn't implemented them, or if they were not applicable. Demographic characteristics such as age, income, education and whether participants owned their homes were also collected.

Procedure Participants completed the questionnaire by telephone, the questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Results

There was no significant difference in preparedness levels between the regional (M = 62.94, SD = 11.81) and urban-fringe (M = 61.66, SD = 12.18) samples, with both implementing a similar percentage of applicable preparedness measures.

Place attachment did not significantly predict preparedness in the urban-fringe sample. The only predictor of preparedness in the urban-fringe sample was home-ownership, this accounted for 4.7% of the variance, t (149) = 2.12, $p < .05$. Income was the only demographic predictor of preparedness in the regional sample, accounting for 3.4% of the variance, t (149) = 2.11, $p < .05$, however, it ceased being a significant predictor when the place attachment variables were entered in step two. Place dependence to local area was not significantly correlated with preparedness and thus was not used as a predictor in the regression model. Place attachment accounted for a further 9.6% of the variance in preparedness, with the overall model accounting for 13% of the variance. Place identity to home, t (149) = 2.49, $p < .05$, and place dependence to home, t (149) = 2.19, $p < .05$, both predicted preparedness but place identity to local area did not. Thus, attachment was only found to be a predictor of preparedness in the regional sample.

Table 1. *Hierarchical regression showed that place identity and place dependence to home predicted preparedness in regional areas.*

	B	S.E.	β
Regional			
Step 1			
Constant	57.68	2.91	
Home-owner	5.38	3.26	.13
Income	2.10	.99	.17*
Step 2			
Constant	35.52	6.75	
Home-owner	2.83	3.17	.07
Income	1.58	.97	.13
PI (home)	.74	.30	.23*
PD (home)	.55	.25	.21*
PI (local area)	.21	.23	.08
Urban-Fringe			
Step 1			
Constant	58.32	2.55	
Home-Owner	6.40	3.01	.17*
Income	1.55	.86	.15