



Gender & Disaster Australia

The Work of Gender and Disaster Australia

NEMA 2024

Gender and Disaster - International Research

- **1993- 2020** - 50 studies on gender-based-violence in disasters in 14 different countries, and 16 multi-country studies
 - **2005** – Hurricane Katrina (USA) - A 98% increase in the prevalence of physical victimisation of women, from 4.2% to 8.3% of women.^
 - **2011** – Christchurch Earthquake (NZ) - A 53% increase in family violence call outs on the weekend of the Christchurch earthquake in NZ.**
- **2020** - UNFPA predicted that for every 3 months that COVID lockdowns continued an additional 15 million cases of domestic violence would occur worldwide.^

Sources:

*Parkinson, D. (2022) Gender-based Violence and Disasters. In Benouar, D. (Ed.), The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Natural Hazard Science. Oxford University Press.

^Schumacher, J.A. Coffey, S.F. et al (2010) Intimate Partner Violence and Hurricane Katrina: Predictors and associated mental health outcomes. Violence and Victims 25(5), 588-603;

**Houghton, R., Wilson, T. et al. (2010) If there was a dire emergency, we would never have been able to get in there: Domestic violence reporting and disasters. International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters 28(2), 270-293

^^ Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (2020) Responding to the 'Shadow Pandemic': Practitioner views on the nature of and responses to violence against women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions. (https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf UNFPA)

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GADAus/Australian Research - Gender & Disasters

- Over 15 years of research on gender and disaster in Australia
- First Australian research to interview women about their experiences of family violence during and after disaster, providing evidence from 16 women of **new or exacerbated violence linked to Black Saturday Fires** *
- Women in communities worst affected by the Black Saturday fires were **seven times more likely** than their peers to have experienced violence.^
- First research to include men's experiences following disaster and LGBTIQ+ peoples' access to response and recovery services.



Australian research contd..

Covid 19

- During the initial stages of COVID two thirds of women who had experienced domestic violence said it had started or escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- This research is vital in:
 - including women's voices and experiences of family violence, and
 - including men's and LGBTIQ+ peoples' disaster experiences in the emergency management cycle of prevention, planning, response, recovery and reconstruction.
 - The ongoing development of evidence-based, national gender and disaster guidelines and policies.

Source: *Parkinson, D., & Zara, C. (2013) The hidden disaster: Violence in the aftermath of natural disaster. *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 28(2) **and** Parkinson, D. (2019) Investigating the Increase in Domestic Violence Post Disaster: An Australian Case Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(11), 2333–2362. Online version (2017);

^Beyond Bushfires 10 years report, Melbourne University, (2021);

**Boxall, H., Morgan, A. and Brown, R. (July 2020) The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical Bulletin 28, Australian Government Institute of Criminology;

^^Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (2020)



Bushfires: Women's experiences of family violence

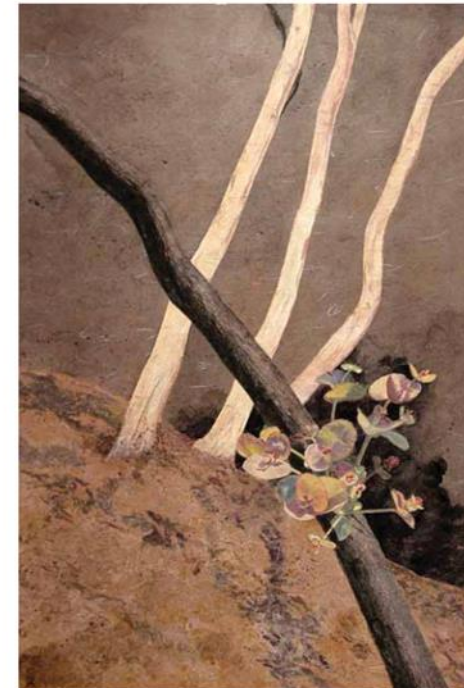
Women's traditional reluctance to report violence against them was exacerbated in the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires.

Parkinson, D. (2011) *The way he tells it: Relationships after Black Saturday*. Women's Health Goulburn North-East, Wangaratta

Qualitative research with 47 workers and 30 women affected by the Black Saturday fires.

'The way he tells it ...'

Relationships after Black Saturday



Bushfires: Increased family violence

[T]hat night he started punching his fist into the car when we got home ... He tried to hit me but he was so drunk I just dodged him ... He's punched me ... pulled hair ... before it might have gotten bad once or twice a year but never to that point ... I don't want to go but I feel like it's just I'm on borrowed time. (Louise)

He was on edge and you could feel it, so many times. He pushed me into the fridge, threw things at my son, and threw my daughter ... One time he took a knife and was threatening to kill us all. (Kylie)

Barriers to seeking help

One woman's counsellor...said, 'You're pretty well off. I know ... couples that are so badly damaged there's no hope for them, and their kids are damaged and everything's a total mess. So you and James are comparatively easy.'
(Christina)

I deliberately told her [the counsellor] I was frightened three times during that session ... And [later in a joint session] she said to me in front of [my husband], 'Are you frightened physically?' and I said 'No' because I wasn't about to say yes in front of him because God knows what would have happened if I had said that. And she never followed up ... We played phone tennis and then I gave up.



Bushfires: Men's experiences

- Increased pressure on men to conform to rigid, damaging masculine stereotypes during and following disaster i.e. during response and recovery.
- Fear of failing to live up to a hyper-masculine ideal during disasters.
- Fear of Losing Work

Men on Black Saturday

Risks and opportunities for change



Increased pressure to conform

During the Disaster

Every man thinks there are expectations on men to stand up and be brave and be the stalwarts of the family and all those kind of somewhat Aussie ocker images ... I think a lot of people were absolutely shit scared and didn't realise that that was a perfectly natural and normal feeling ... but I'm sure a lot of those who were, feel it was a weakness. (Rod)

After the Disaster

Expectations? OK, to get things back to normal, to make things better, to rebuild, and I think to appear effective ... And Christ, the [men] really needed to appear as if they were effective, productive, constructive members of the community. (Edward)



Fear of losing work

People would be worried about the confidentiality, whether there was any feedback that came around the back saying, 'Keep this guy away from big fires'. (Matthew)

I was at work the other day and I just felt like crying. My Dad had passed away and my marriage was struggling, and I just really wanted to have a cry. But I knew if I did, it would be social suicide (Jay – construction worker)^

^ The Conversation; ^Anecdotal report to social worker



Our Watch – the gendered drivers of violence against women*

1. Condoning of violence against women
2. Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control

*The gendered drivers are taken from Our Watch(2021). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch



Drivers of violence against women after disasters

Drivers

1. Increase in existing gender inequalities.
2. Increased pressure to conform to rigid, binary gender stereotypes.
3. Privileging men and their suffering as an excuse for violence.
4. Promotion of unrealistic versions of masculinity and 'male' forms of heroism.

Contributing Factors

- Reduced or no employment
- Grief and loss
- Financial stress
- Homelessness
- Media coverage
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Rebuilding/red tape
- Trauma
- Perceived unfairness

*



In her own words Sharon



The gendered impacts of disaster

The increased polarisation of gender stereotypes under disaster conditions involves an amplification of the already unequal relations between women and men.

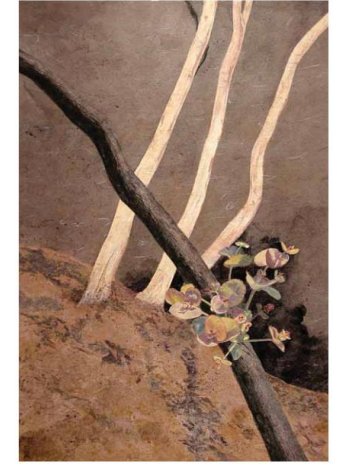
The increased gendered expectations lead to:

- men feeling they have failed as 'protector and provider'
- women expected to put their own needs last for the good of the man and the children
- increased risk of violence by men against their female partners

Disaster impacts can be severe and long-lasting for men and women.

'The way he tells it ...'

Relationships after Black Saturday



Men on Black Saturday

Risks and opportunities for change



About GADAus

Intent:

- to reduce the risk of gendered harms, including domestic and family violence, in all phases of disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery and;
- in collaboration with communities at risk of disaster, influence improved outcomes.



GADAus Lessons in Disaster Training

- Delves deep into the profound effects of gendered expectations before, during and after disasters.
- Recognises and addresses the safety needs of women, men, LGBTIQ+ people and other minority groups in disaster planning, response and recovery.
- Assist organisations to develop strategies for:
 - ✓ Raising awareness of damaging stereotypes and gendered expectations in emergency management settings
 - ✓ including awareness of family violence and diversity in emergency planning, response and recovery.



Lessons in Disaster: Training sessions

SESSION 1

Gender and disaster: The evidence

SESSION 2

Gendered drivers of family and domestic violence

SESSION 3

Disaster, gender and diversity

SESSION 4

Working towards change



The Context..

- Australia has always experienced disasters and extreme weather events, but their frequency, severity and costs are increasing as climate change progresses.
- Academic research in Australia and around the world shows FDV increases in disasters by up to 400%.
- With disasters increasing in frequency and severity, it follows that Australia faces a major issue now that will only compound in years to come.



The aim of GADAus is to reduce the risk of gendered harms in all phases of disaster

- Training. 'Lessons in Disaster' (LIDs). Fully subsidised by the Commonwealth Government under the National Plan to end Violence against Women and their Children.
- Advocacy & Promotion. Raising awareness of damaging stereotypes and gendered expectations in emergency management settings. Including awareness of FDV and diversity in emergency management planning, response & recovery.
- Evacuation Centre Exercises – GADAus trainers attend council evacuation centre exercises and observe planning and processes through a gendered lens.



The Evidence...

- Worldwide; A recent systematic review showed exposure to disasters can increase DFV through an increase in contributing factors; an exacerbation of underlying drivers of DFV; an increase of enabling environments for DFV to occur – including evacuation centres (Thurston et al 2021)
- This review included studies examining the horrific events that unfolded in evacuation centres after Hurricane Katrina



The Evidence..

- Lismore, Australia; “The support provided through the establishment of evacuation centres was critical to establishing shelter, however, participants described unmanaged risks. An absence of triaging to create discrete sections resulted in women and children sharing spaces with DFV perpetrators, sex offenders & those withdrawing from addictions. Participants reported gender-based violence & sexual assaults resulting in pregnancies. The lack of access to pharmacies or contraception were noted as a problem” (Foote, et al 2023).



The Evidence..

- GADAus research from Black Saturday showed some people were willing to take their chances in the disaster rather than encounter risks in evacuation centres.



What do we see in Evacuation Centre Exercises?

- Great commitment and work of councils.
- Limitations of centres – these are places of last resort. There is no way to avoid all risk or cater for every situation.
- BUT we *can* always strive to do better.



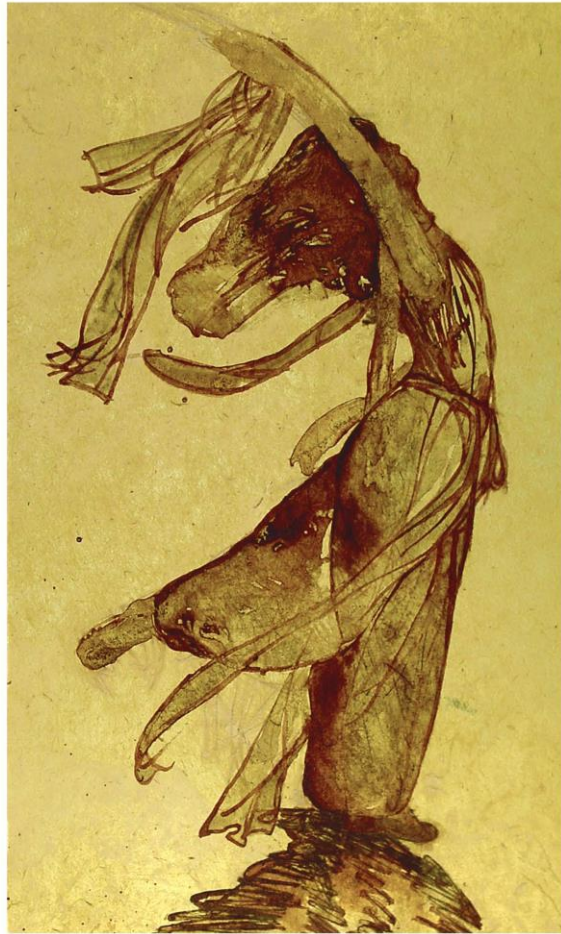
What do we look for?

FDV

- Registration processes (Red Cross, Council).
- Security
- Triage
- Awareness (training)
- Information.
- *Women experiencing FV can be silenced and forgotten in the hierarchy of needs in disasters and in evacuation centres.*



Disaster is No Excuse for Violence Postcards – 4 step process



disaster is no excuse for family violence

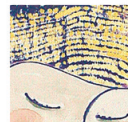
You can help in just 4 steps:

1. **ASK:** Are you safe at home?
2. **NAME IT:** What you've just described to me is violence and it's a crime.
3. **RESPOND:** Give contact details of the local Domestic Violence Service, CASA and Police.
4. **FOLLOW UP:** 'Last time you spoke about your safety. I'd like to know how you are now.'

www.genderanddisaster.com.au

(Adapted from 'Raped by a Partner')

'She dances on the wind' by Ona Henderson (03) 9712 0393



Gender & Disaster Pod

An initiative of WHGNE, WHIN & MUDRI

Safe Steps 24/7* – 9322 3555 or 1800 015 188. Support, info or referral to safe accom. www.safesteps.org.au

CASA 24/7 – 1800 806 292 Centres Against Sexual Assault www.casa.org.au

Police & Ambulance* – 000

1800RESPECT 24/7* – 1800 737 732 Support for sexual assault, family violence and abuse. www.1800respect.org.au/inclusive-practice/violence-in-times-of-disaster

Yarning Safe'n'Strong 24/7 – 1800 959 563, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families who need to have a yarn with someone about their wellbeing

Kids Helpline 24/7* – 1800 55 1800, phone and online counselling service for people aged 5 to 25. www.kidshelpline.com.au

Men's Helpline 24/7* – 1300 78 99 78, phone and online counselling service for men. www.mensline.org.au

QLife – 1800 184 527 Anonymous LGBTIQ+ peer support & referral, 3pm – midnight every day. qlife.org.au

Men's Referral Service 24/7* – Support for men who use violence and abuse. 1300 766 491 (Toll Free). www.ntv.org.au

* Interpreters available



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Other Gendered Considerations..

- Women have many specific needs that must be considered.
- At any one time, women may be pregnant, about to birth, post-natal, menstruating, breastfeeding, bottlefeeding, parenting, caring...
- Men also have multiple roles but generally not as extensive. *Also* Gender inequalities are increased in disasters – a 50 year setback! Men *expected* to be heroes, women *expected* to care for others.



The Evidence...

- 2024 Study from Black summer showed;
- Having very young children & infants profoundly impacted caregivers bushfire experiences
- Mothers often on their own with multiple small children & elderly. Partners stayed behind to defend or were involved in the emergency response.
- Evacuation is more complex with very young children and infants – participants were not prepared and often presented at evacuation centres without necessary supplies. (Gribble, 2024)



The Evidence...

- In the evacuation centre women with very young children and infants were uncomfortable feeding in overcrowded conditions.
- Mothers focus on feeding and safety of young children meant they often overlooked their own needs – including food and water.
- Bottlefeeding parents often used unhygienic bathrooms for washing and filling of bottles.



The Evidence...

- There is an assumption that caregivers know how to look after children and are coping
- Larger centres were often overcrowded and resource limited, smaller centres or centres with multiple rooms provided a better experience (Gribble, 2024).



Other Considerations

- Period needs
- Contraceptive needs
- Incontinence needs – new 2024 Deloitte report shows 4.8 million women and 2.4 million men are living with some form of urinary &/or faecal incontinence in Australia.
- There can be embarrassment and shame associated with these things and if evacuation has happened quickly, often these things are left behind.



LGBTQIA+

- LGBTQIA+ people can be marginalised and neglected in the urgency of disaster.
- Limited facilities in evacuation centres – change tables needed in male or unisex bathrooms.
- Clear Signage or visual rainbow signage on allocated bathrooms and in family area.
- Access to separate medical refrigeration.
- GADAus research has shown unintended discrimination from some volunteers or faith-based organisations (Parkinson & Leonard, 2018).



GADAus Evacuation Exercise Work...

- Two GADAus trainers attend each council exercise
- Offer feedback in real-time
- Provide a comprehensive feedback report based on the GADAus GEM Guidelines.
- Provide physical resources – ‘Disaster is no Excuse’ postcards, rainbow signage, allocated room signage, young children and parent guides for emergency management, etc.
- Ongoing support
- Post-disaster debrief & feedback



Disaster Ready Grant - Round Two

- All councils in Victoria
- NSW pilot – the six most at risk councils according to the State Mitigation Plan
- Disaster Ready Grant – Round Three
- Councils QLD
- Councils WA
- All councils NSW



GADAus Resources

- GEM Guidelines Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines – these are for organisations, communities, local councils and state governments to implement in their emergency management planning to prevent gendered harms caused by increased severity and frequency of disasters
- Webinars & Presentations on request – raise awareness & capability.
- LIDs training - register your organisation or as an individual for training to understand and prevent gendered impacts of disaster and emergency
- Literature Reviews
- Disaster Context Sheets
- PARTNERSHIPS!



Discussion Exercise

- Scenario One;
- A mother presents to the evacuation centre with a newborn infant and a toddler;
- What needs to be considered?
- What assumptions may be made?
- Consider complimentary overlays – intersectionality, DFV.

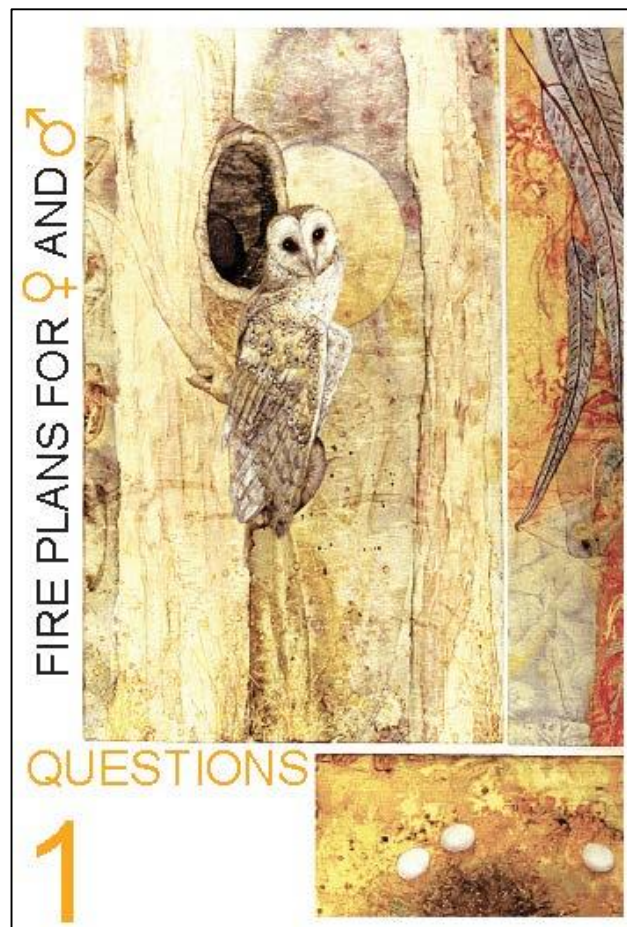


Discussion Exercise

- A woman with 2 young children and 2 dogs enters the evacuation centre. On the Red Cross intake form she indicates her information cannot be shared due to FDV.
- What needs to be considered?
- How are these considerations enacted?
- What barriers to ensuring safety might there be?



Postcard project



Having a gender lens in fire planning will increase community preparedness, survival and resilience

In the event of a high risk day, where will you be? And your partner?^[1] Where will the kids be?

What do you plan to be doing on a high risk day?

If you're thinking, 'I'm a man so I should stay and defend property' or 'I'm a woman, so I should leave with the children/others/alone':

- ♦ What do you think is **behind each of your decisions?**
- ♦ In your case as a couple, and a family, **does it make sense** for you **(the man) to stay and try to defend property?** Does it make sense for you **(the woman) to try to escape?**
- ♦ If the plan is to leave early, **what is early?**
- ♦ Will you **(the woman) be happy to drive away leaving your partner alone** to defend the house on a high risk day?
- ♦ Is **trying to persuade** him to leave with you **likely to delay** your leaving?
- ♦ **What's the worst that could happen**, if you follow your original plan (of him staying, her leaving)?
- ♦ Do you know that **over 40% of those who die in bushfires are female?**
- ♦ Does it still seem like the **best option?**

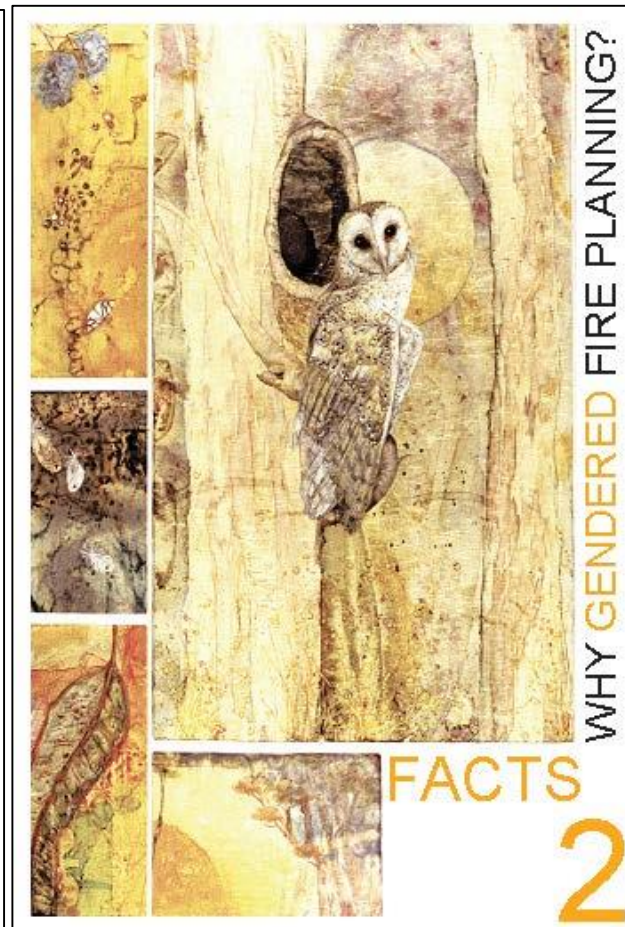
See Postcard 2: 'The Facts'

1. These postcards focus on heterosexual couples and fire plans, recognising the constraints on women's autonomy.



Gender & Disaster Pod

Front Image: 'Bringer of the Dawn' by Ona Henderson (03) 9712 0393
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'Why gendered fire planning?'

♦ On Ash Wednesday in 1983, "Most people **died during late evacuations** and the majority of those were **women and children**, whereas most of the **men killed had been defending property**".^[1]

♦ "There is evidence of disagreements as the fire approached. In virtually all cases this was between **women who wanted to leave** and take the men with them, and **men who either wanted to stay and defend** or who felt they had to support others in that role."^[2]

♦ Expectations of **heroic masculinity set men up for failure**: Bushfire CRC researchers write: "Societal pressure sees **men attempt to perform protective roles** when the fire threatens that many have neither the knowledge nor ability to fulfil safely".^[3]

♦ "The kids where the **parents fought about leaving**, there was **trauma afterwards**."^[4]

♦ **Women escaped alone or with children**, often in terrifying circumstances, or had limited autonomy.^[5]

♦ I have first-hand knowledge that there are **women, wives, on Black Saturday who wanted to leave town** and their **husband said, 'No, we're staying to fight this'**. And they stayed to fight and they both died.^[6]

♦ "**We never had a fire plan**. You thought he'd be here. My fire plan was him."^[7]

♦ Only **five per cent** of people have a written fire plan.^[8]

See Postcard 1: 'Questions'

1. Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) (2010) The lessons learnt Volume 1: The Fires and the Fire-Related Deaths, p. 336.
2. Handmer, J., Chiel, S., & Vulliamy, D. (2010). Bushfires Final Report: Review of fatalities in the February 7, 2009, p.22.
3. Whitaker, J., Eklund, C. & Haynes, K. (2010) Gendered responses to the 2003 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, Australia, p.205.
4. Long-term Disaster Resilience (2016) www.genderanddisaster.com.au, p.79.
5. What's so hard about writing a fire plan? (2016) www.genderanddisaster.com.au.
6. Men on Black Saturday (2015) p.37. genderanddisaster.com.au
7. The Way He Told It (2011) p. 104. genderanddisaster.com.au
8. McLennan, J. (2015) Capturing Community Resilience: Hazard Note-4. Melbourne: BNHCRC.



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Front Image: 'Bringer of the Dawn' by Ona Henderson (03) 9712 0393
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Thank You



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