

Should I stay or should I go?

Increasing natural disaster preparedness and survival through animal attachment



Background

Pet owners are at risk during natural disasters by being less likely to evacuate than non-owners (1). If they do evacuate, they are likely to return to try to rescue them (2).

Proposition

Rather than see pets and other animals as a risk factor for disaster survival, people's desire to protect them could act as a protective factor (3). That is, the desire to save animals could be innovatively leveraged to motivate people to develop better emergency preparedness and response compliance. (4). By educating people about the risk their animals face due to poor household preparedness for disasters, and by emphasising the benefits of early evacuation for the chances of animal survival, people could be encouraged to engage in protective behaviour that increase their own survival.

Major aims

1. Determine how animals can be reconfigured as protective factors for survival of natural disasters
2. Understand/theorise how risk-taking is impacted by:
 - Different types of disasters (i.e. flood and fire)
 - Different types of animals (i.e. pets, livestock and wildlife)
 - Different locations (i.e. Urban, peri-urban and rural areas)
 - The animal owner (e.g. gender, age, income, animal attachment)
3. Develop innovative and effective emergency preparedness public health campaigns by using multiple interventions to target different risk groups

Method

1. Secondary Data: Analysis of interviews already undertaken with bushfire survivors
2. Primary Qualitative Data: Animal-specific interviews with survivors of natural disasters
3. Primary Quantitative Data: Online national survey



Photo: Genevieve Cooper

Significance

Australia has some of the highest pet ownership levels in the developed world (5), and is characterised annually by 'fires and floods' that are expected to intensify with climate change (6). Using animal attachment to promote disaster preparedness and survival offers a significant opportunity to save Australian lives. By treating human and animal as inseparable, we could simultaneously address their safety and survival.

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References

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