The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management agreed in 2008 that the future direction for Australian emergency management should be based on achieving community and organisational resilience. In 2009 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) adopted a whole-of-nation resilience-based approach to disaster management, culminating in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011). As this research underscores, a resilience-based approach is not solely the domain of emergency management agencies. Resilience at the individual level is vital, and as this survey indicates is a product of a person's confidence in his or her abilities to take action (preparedness), which is in turn affected by the levels of cohesion within communities and past experience of natural disasters. This preliminary data, obtained before the recent Queensland natural disasters in 2011, provides an important baseline survey for future research, and will facilitate follow up surveys on whether preparedness and experience in fact assisted effective response and recovery.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011, p 9) identified the important role played by research institutions in advising federal and state and territory policy makers, and that "[p]olicy makers at all levels of government need to strengthen their partnerships to develop a coordinated response to the changing risk environment." With various projects underway, supported by high calibre researchers and practitioners-in-residence, CEPS is well positioned to assist in plugging knowledge-gaps and influence the future direction of policy in this field.

Professor Simon Bronitt
Director

Living in Queensland –
Preparedness for Natural Disaster

By Ms Emma Antrobus and Professor Lorraine Mazerolle

Executive Summary

The Living in Queensland study (also titled the Social Wellbeing study) is a longitudinal study originally designed to focus on Health and Well-being in Queensland. This study examines a range of factors associated with living in Queensland. The study is conducted by researchers from the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR), University of Queensland, led by Professor Paul Boreham, Professor Mark Western, Associate Professor Warren Laffan and Associate Professor Geoff Dow. The core study is funded by the Australian Research Council and the Queensland Public Sector Union (QPSU).

The third wave of this survey was administered in October 2010, just 2 months before Queensland experienced a series of severe natural disasters affecting the large majority of the state. These disasters led to 99% of the state's total land area being activated under the State and Federal Government natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements. Within this third wave of the survey, in addition to questions asking about well-being and features of their community, we used Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS) funding to add a new module to the core survey and ask participants about their experiences in natural disasters and terrorist events. Participants were also asked about and how prepared they felt they, and the local, state, and federal governments were to deal with these kinds of events, and their own preparatory behaviours.

A random sample of participants (N = 2360 in Wave 3) was recruited through random digit dialing and data were collected through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). The random sample was stratified by six regions across the state of Queensland, with regions defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Statistical Local Area (SLA) boundaries.

This survey offers a unique opportunity to explore people's perceptions and experiences of natural disasters in Queensland before these disasters struck. Initial findings suggested that a majority of Queenslanders were unprepared and did not think a natural disaster would personally affect them in the near

future. Of particular interest was the impact of community cohesion on the feelings of preparedness and preparedness behaviours. Community cohesion is the "glue" that holds a community together, and therefore may provide additional feelings of support to people in times of extreme events. Also of interest was the impact of previous experience with natural disasters on feelings of preparedness. Previously experiencing a natural disaster may allow a more realistic assessment of personal responses, and therefore may alter beliefs and behaviours surrounding preparedness.

As this survey forms a part of a longitudinal study, there is potential to survey these participants again in the months following the natural disaster events to assess how these natural disasters may impact on perceptions of community cohesion and preparedness in previously affected and non-affected areas, and the implications that this may have for Queensland's disaster preparation and recovery plans.

Key Findings

Presence in Previous Natural Disasters
Of the sample of 2360 Queenslanders, 44% (n = 1021) had previously been present during a natural disaster, with almost 90% of these disasters occurring in the community in which they were living at the time.

People who had previously personally experienced a natural disaster were significantly more likely to think a natural disaster would occur somewhere in the nation, in their community, and to affect their home, than those who had not previously experienced natural disaster. Sixty one percent of people who had previously experienced a natural disaster had taken some kind of action (e.g., developed emergency plans, stockpiled supplies, purchased things to make themselves safer, and duplicated important documents) to prepare for a natural disaster, compared to only 38% of people who had not previously experienced a natural disaster.
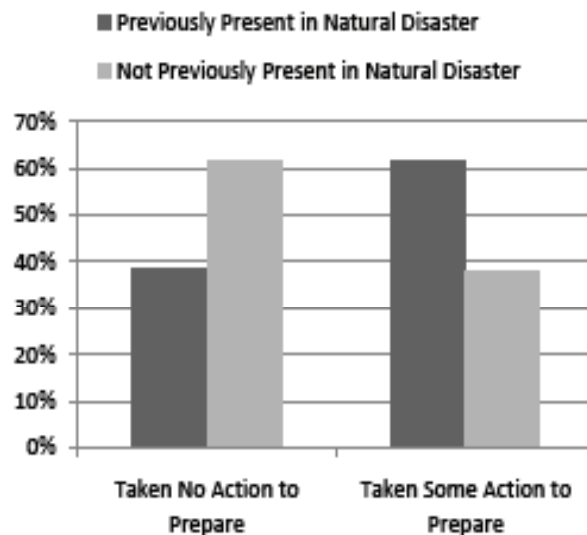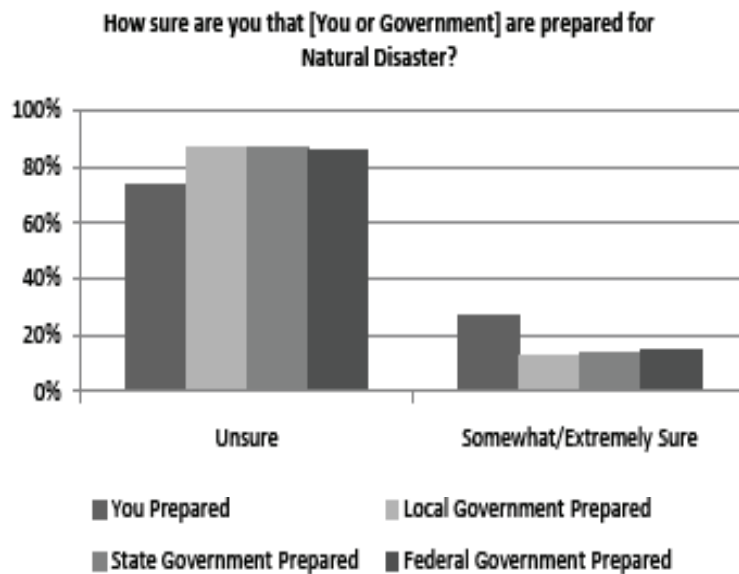

Preparedness for Disaster
Seventy-three percent of people thought a natural disaster was somewhat or very likely to occur somewhere in the nation within the next 6 months. However, only 25% of people thought a natural disaster was likely to occur in their community, and 14% thought this was likely to affect their home.

In general, the more likely people thought it was that a natural disaster would occur in their community or affect their home in the near future, the more likely they were to have taken preparatory action. How likely people thought it was that a natural disaster would happen somewhere in the nation had no impact on their preparedness behaviours, indicating that it is the localised experience of disaster affecting preparedness.

People also had more confidence in their own personal preparedness for natural disaster than in the preparedness of government (local, state, and federal). However, this confidence was typically quite low; less than 27% of participants feeling somewhat or extremely sure about their personal preparedness, and less than 14% feeling somewhat or extremely sure about the governments' preparedness. No differences existed between the perceptions of preparedness of the local, state, or federal government.

How sure are you that [You or Government] are prepared for Natural Disaster?

Legend:
- You Prepared
- State Government Prepared
- Local Government Prepared
- Federal Government Prepared

The Impact of Community

People who had a more cohesive community and people who had been present in a natural disaster felt more personally prepared for future disasters. However, the impact of community on personal preparedness depended on whether people had previously experienced a natural disaster. For people who had not previously been physically present, there was a significant positive relationship between cohesiveness and personal preparedness. The more cohesive the neighbourhood, the more personally prepared they felt. The relationship was not significant for people who had previously been present in a natural disaster.

People who had a more cohesive neighbourhood felt more sure about the government's preparedness. However, participants' presence during a previous disaster did not impact their feelings about government preparedness, indicating that people who had previously experienced a natural disaster, and therefore experienced the government's response to disaster, were no more sure about the preparedness of the government to deal with a natural disaster than those who had not had this experience.

About the Authors

Emma Antrobus is a Research Fellow in the ARC Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS) at the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR). Emma has a background in psychology and jury decision-making, particularly in relation to the special measures involved with child witness testimony. Her current research interests are focused on randomized controlled trials examining the impact of legitimate policing, and interventions for young people at risk.

Lorraine Mazerolle is an ARC Laureate Fellow and Research Professor in the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) at the University of Queensland. She is also the Foundation Director and a Chief Investigator in the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS), a Chief Investigator in the Drug Policing Modeling Program, and the ISSR "Policing and Security" Program Director. Professor Mazerolle leads a team of highly talented research scholars with expertise in experimental criminology, urban criminological theories, survey methods, advanced multi-level statistics and spatial statistics. She is the recipient of numerous US and Australian national competitive research grants on topics such as community regulation, problem-oriented policing, police technologies, civil remedies, street-level drug enforcement and policing public housing sites. Professor Mazerolle is a Fellow of the Academy of Experimental Criminology, previous Vice President and now President-Elect of the Academy and author of scholarly books and articles on policing, drug law enforcement, regulatory crime control, displacement of crime, and crime prevention.

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M10_3.01
Mt Gravatt Campus
170 Kessels Road
NATHAN QLD 4122
Ph: 07 3735 6903
Fax: 07 3735 1033

www.ceps.edu.au