AIDR Knowledge Networking Series

In conversation with

Mark Crosweller AFSM

The ethics of disaster risk reduction and resilience

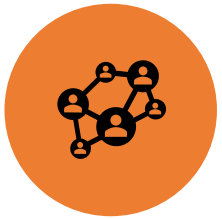
Hosted by

Amanda Leck,
AIDR Executive Director

Disaster management leadership and policy making: a critical examination of communitarian and individualistic understandings of resilience and vulnerability

Mark Crosweller AFSM

The Ethical Premise



The **greatest measure of success** in service to the community is the upholding of public trust and confidence throughout risk reduction, resilience, response, relief, recovery

The **greatest mission** is the reduction of suffering for all Humans and Non-humans and needs to be contemplated throughout risk reduction, resilience, response, relief, recovery

6 Unprecedented (but not surprising) Antecedent Conditions shaping our future

NATURAL HAZARDS ARE MORE FREQUENT AND INTENSE

THE INTERCONNECTED AND INTERDEPENDENT NATURE OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMAN VALUES

PEOPLE AND ASSETS ARE MORE EXPOSED AND VULNERABLE

DISASTER IMPACTS ARE MORE LONG TERM AND COMPLEX

COSTS OF DISASTERS ARE GROWING

MOMENTUM TO ADDRESS FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF A CHANGING CLIMATE IS GROWING

CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT DISASTERS

Severe to catastrophic events are inevitable

We do not need to know where or when events will manifest in order to be better prepared nationally

In most instances, disasters are not ‘natural’

We need to inquire ‘why’ and ‘how’ do naturally occurring events lead to devastating suffering and loss.

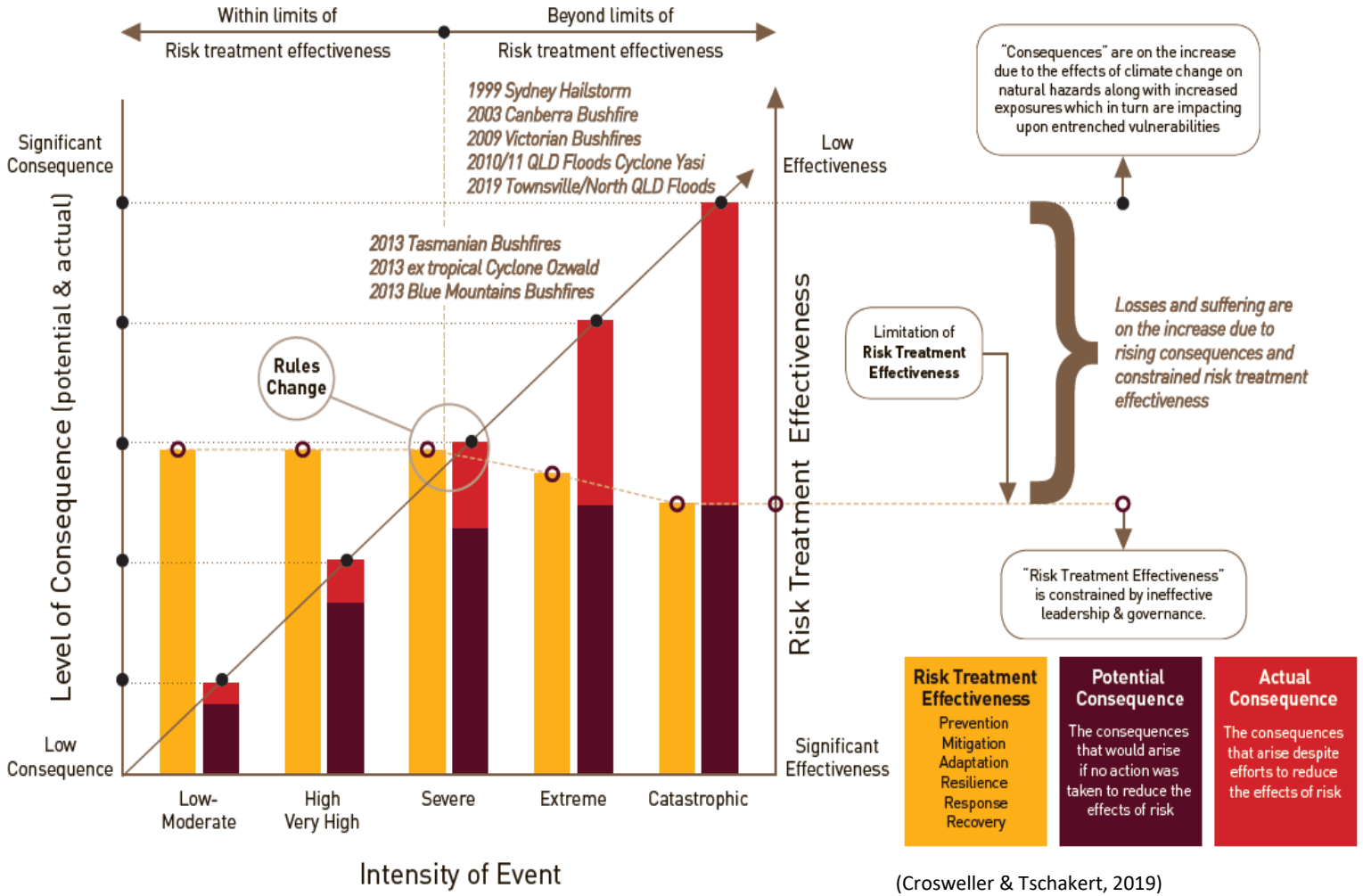
Understanding disaster risk is more than understanding hazards

Vulnerability is the least understood dimension of disaster risk.

What We Know about Vulnerability

- Vulnerability can be defined as both the susceptibility to harm along with the inability to cope and adapt AND as the basis of relatedness and relationships
- Failing to recognise the vulnerability in and of oneself necessarily results in failing to see the vulnerability in and of others
- Social-cultural influences (communitarian / individualistic) that shape perceptions of vulnerability (and resilience) also shape a leader's perspective on climate adaptation, their role as leaders, and their worldview
- These perspectives help shape how they give policy advice and make decisions to protect citizens

Understanding our "Point of Limitation" – Shared Vulnerability Between Society and Institutions



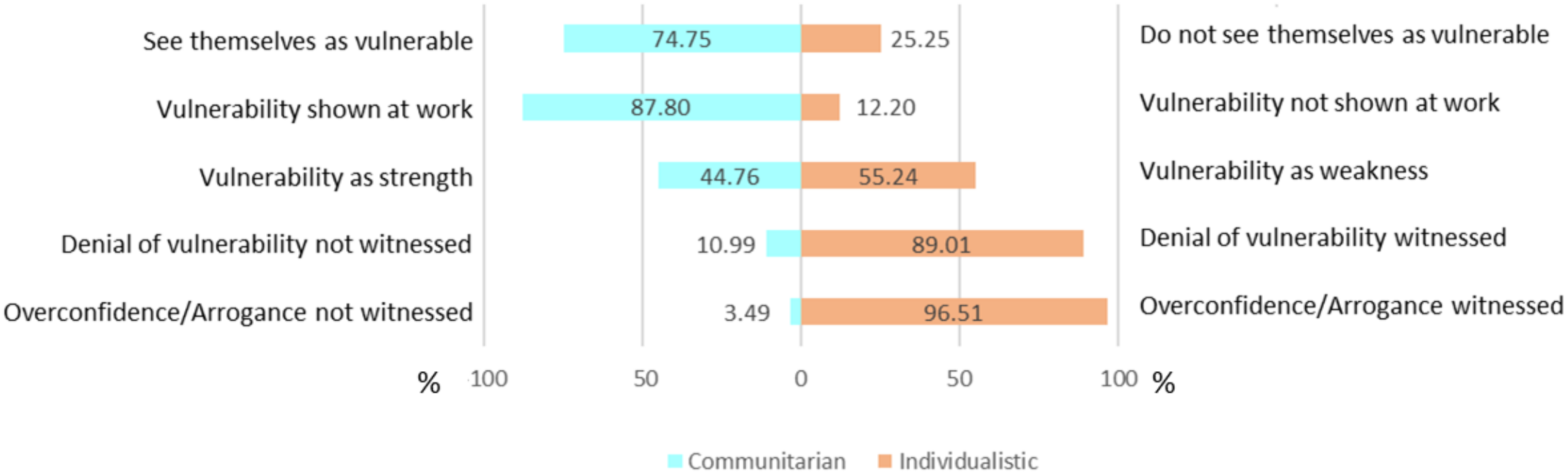
(Crosweller & Tschakert, 2019)

Research Cohort of Interviewees

	Australia (AUS) (n=55)			New Zealand (NZ) (n=18)			United States of America (USA) (n=16)			Total (n=89)
	Frontline1	Senior inst.2	Key informant3	Frontline1	Senior inst.2	Key informant3	Frontline1	Senior inst.2	Key informant3	
Political leader[4]	1	8	1	0	5	0	0	1	1	17
Operational leader[5]	20	9	0	2	3	1	2	7	1	45
Administrative leader[6]	13	3	0	4	2	1	2	2	0	27
Total	34	20	1	6	10	2	4	10	2	89

[1] Frontline leader (direct interface with citizens in the delivery of services); [2] Senior insitutional leader (indirect interface with citizens but influential in policy development); [3] Key informant (recognised leasder of deep expeience and influence); [4] Elected representative at local/state/national level; [5] Uniformed services/emergency preparation and response; [6] Emergency relief and recovery.

How Leaders Conceptualise Vulnerability



"I'm probably getting close to home here, but what I saw after the (XYZ) fire was an organisation, we lost over 100 houses in the community, two people died, and the (leader) said, 'You shouldn't be blaming us. You should have done more to prepare yourselves".

Perceptions of vulnerability

- Vulnerability showed a leader's humanity, made them accessible to others, opened the opportunity for virtue (compassion, trust) and relatedness, and established the capacity to relate to the loss and suffering of others.
- Bullying and harassment were less likely when vulnerability was accepted. Being vulnerable opened them to being compassionate, established the basis for relationships, and improved trust and integrity. It also provided opportunities for organisational learning and growth, shaped better decisions, and gave people latitude to be human.
- If a person's vulnerability became their identity, doubts were cast over an individual's competence, and antagonistic attitudes emerged.
- Perceptions of weakness further entrenched existing vulnerabilities, constrained relationships, undermined compassion and trust, promoted fear and indecision, and stifled effectiveness whilst increasing costs.
- However, denial of vulnerability exposed leaders to bullying, undermining their ability to lead, and subjecting them to criticism.
- Leaders became hardened and insensitive to the suffering of others and masked mental health challenges that led to self-harm. Compassion, trust, respect, emotional courage, and effectiveness were all compromised. Mistakes and errors were denied, promoting ignorance whilst stifling learning and growth. Denial promoted blame and shifted responsibility unreasonably onto individuals.

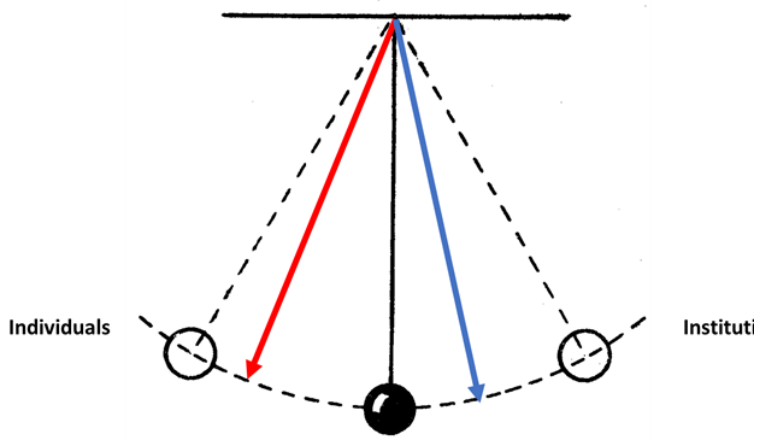
Six things to remember about vulnerability

- Vulnerability is a fact of the human condition, and our shared experiences form the basis of ethical obligations that can compel ethical responses to others.
- Vulnerability (susceptibility to loss and suffering) can be perceived as negative and something to be managed and minimised ***or*** denied and ignored.
- Managing and minimising vulnerability leads to decreases in loss and suffering
- Denying or ignoring vulnerability leads to increases in loss and suffering
- Vulnerability can also be perceived as positive as a universally shared space of affectivity, openness, trust, compassion, and community and the basis for relatedness and relationship.
- Viewing vulnerability as both negative (denied or ignored) and positive sets up a tension that can lead to very different outcomes in response to the potential for loss and suffering from natural hazards influenced by climate change.

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

"Unprecedented is not a reason to be unprepared. We need to be prepared for the future" (p.7)

"Implementing our recommendations calls for a cohesive and unified national effort. National natural disaster arrangements are a shared responsibility. Failure by governments to act on our recommendations will shift risk to others" (p.33).



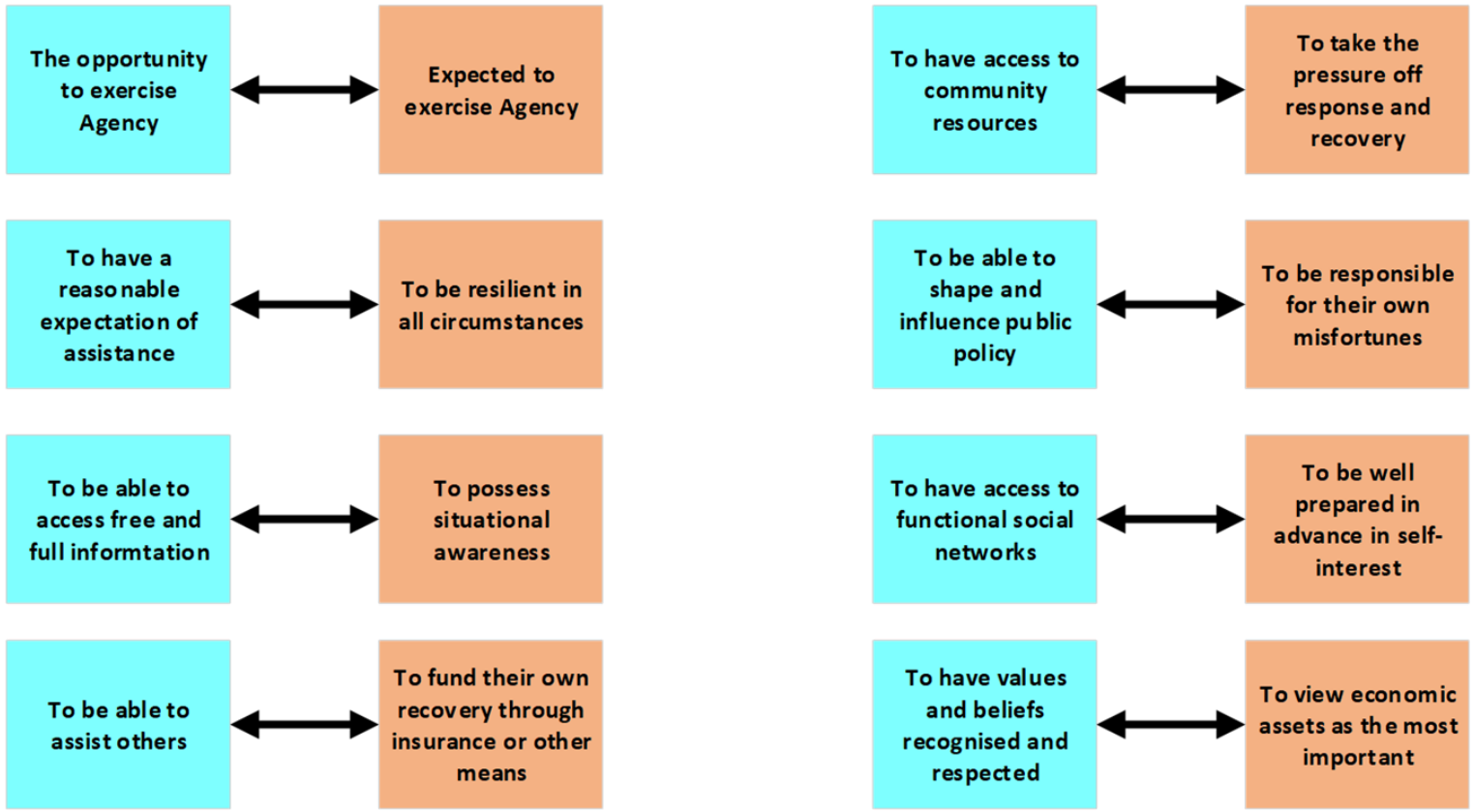
Resilience: Intention vs Reality

Definition: The capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation (IPCC, 2014).

Intention: Adaptability, anticipatory learning, and innovation are key ingredients for reducing vulnerability and increasing adaptive capacity. Likewise, policy actions such as poverty and inequality reduction as well as improvements to water and food security and health conditions help to reduce vulnerability.

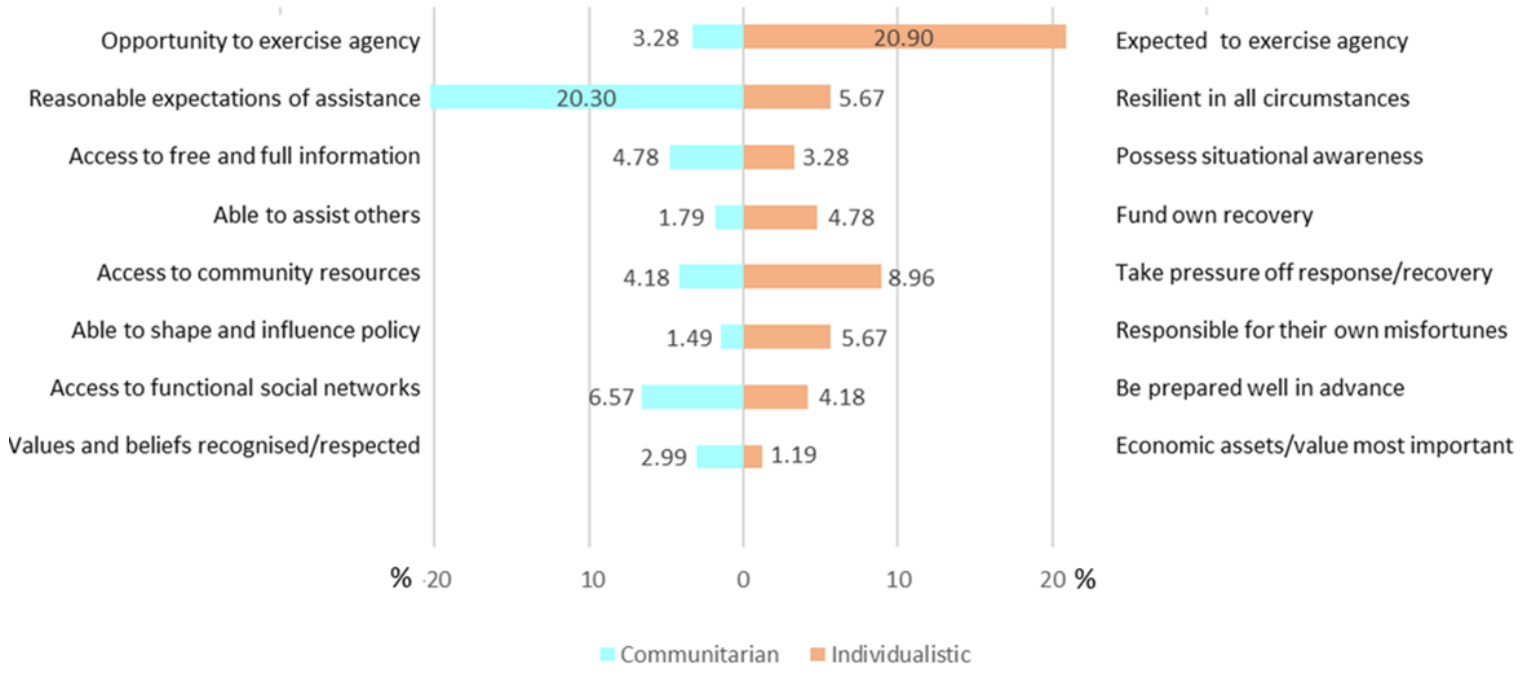
Reality: Individualistic (neoliberal) approaches aim to de-couple reduction in vulnerability and increases in adaptive capacity and instead foreground self-managed individual resilience as the means to address climate risk.

Resilience Policy Challenges – Individualistic vs Communitarian

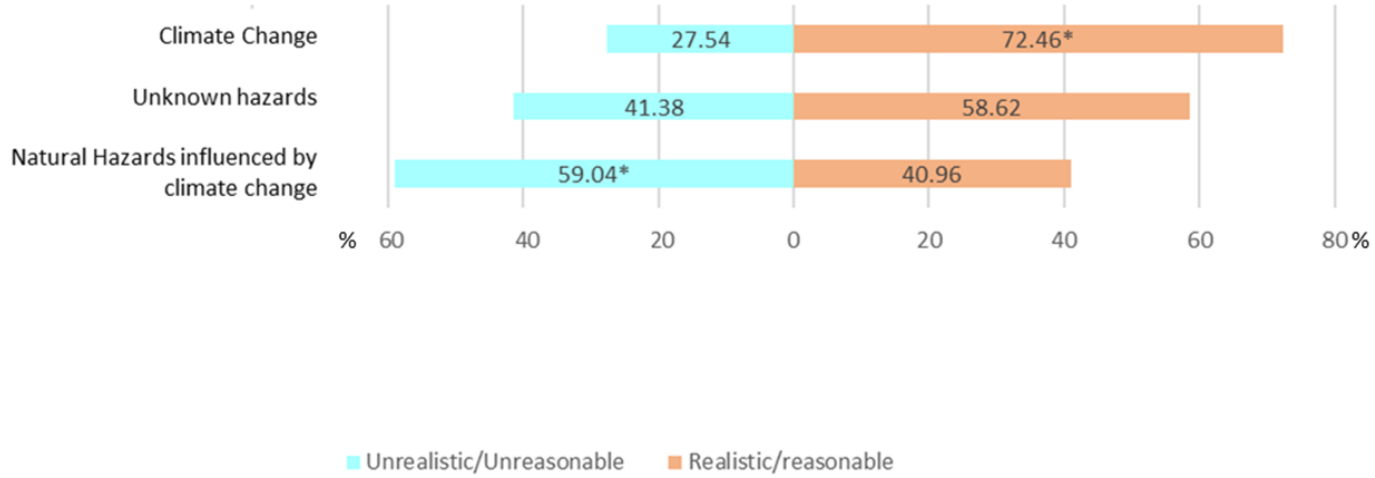


(Crosweller & Tschakert, 2020)

Transcript Analysis



Reasonable or unreasonable to expect citizens to be resilient



Case Study Example – North Wagga NSW

EXCLUSIVE

JACK MORPHET

HUNDREDS of homes in the state's west are at extreme risk of catastrophic flooding, their stressed owners living in "complete and utter fear", amid claims their council hasn't acted on official reports recommending the vital heightening of an old levee.

Instead, Wagga Wagga Council started building a bike track on top of the levee bank on the Murrumbidgee River which is supposed to protect North Wagga, before stopping work as debate about the levee rages.

Wagga Wagga mayor Greg Conkey has publicly downplayed the need for increased flood protection for North Wagga, saying: "People of North Wagga live on a flood plain, when they bought those properties they realised it was on a flood plain and they had limited protection over there."

But the levee bank on the Murrumbidgee River that once protected North Wagga from a one-in-20 year flood has been weakened by vegetation and construction of the Wagga CBD, and now only affords protection from a one-in-eight year flood.

The last bad flood, in 2012, has the more than 700 resi-

Thank you!

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Group Question

To what extent do you see yourself as vulnerable?

To what extent does that perception:

- shape how you view others?
- provide advice to them?
- provide advice on their behalf to others?

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