



Charles Sturt
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The Disaster Fatigue of Community Leaders: A Case Study

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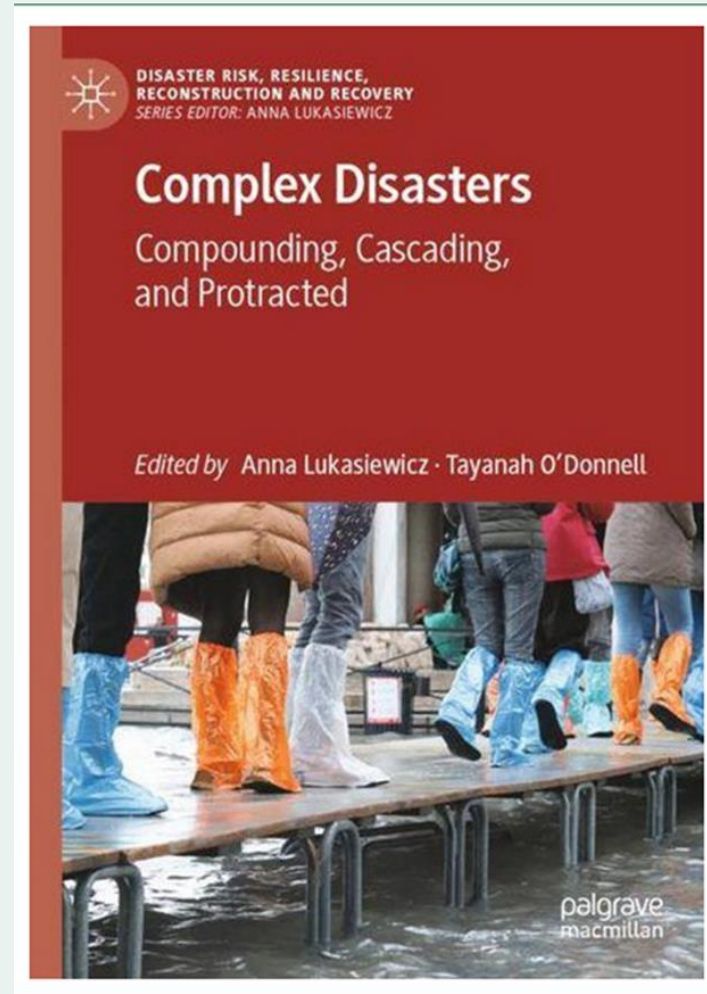
A/Prof Val Ingham
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in Bangladesh



Dr Lucia Wuersch

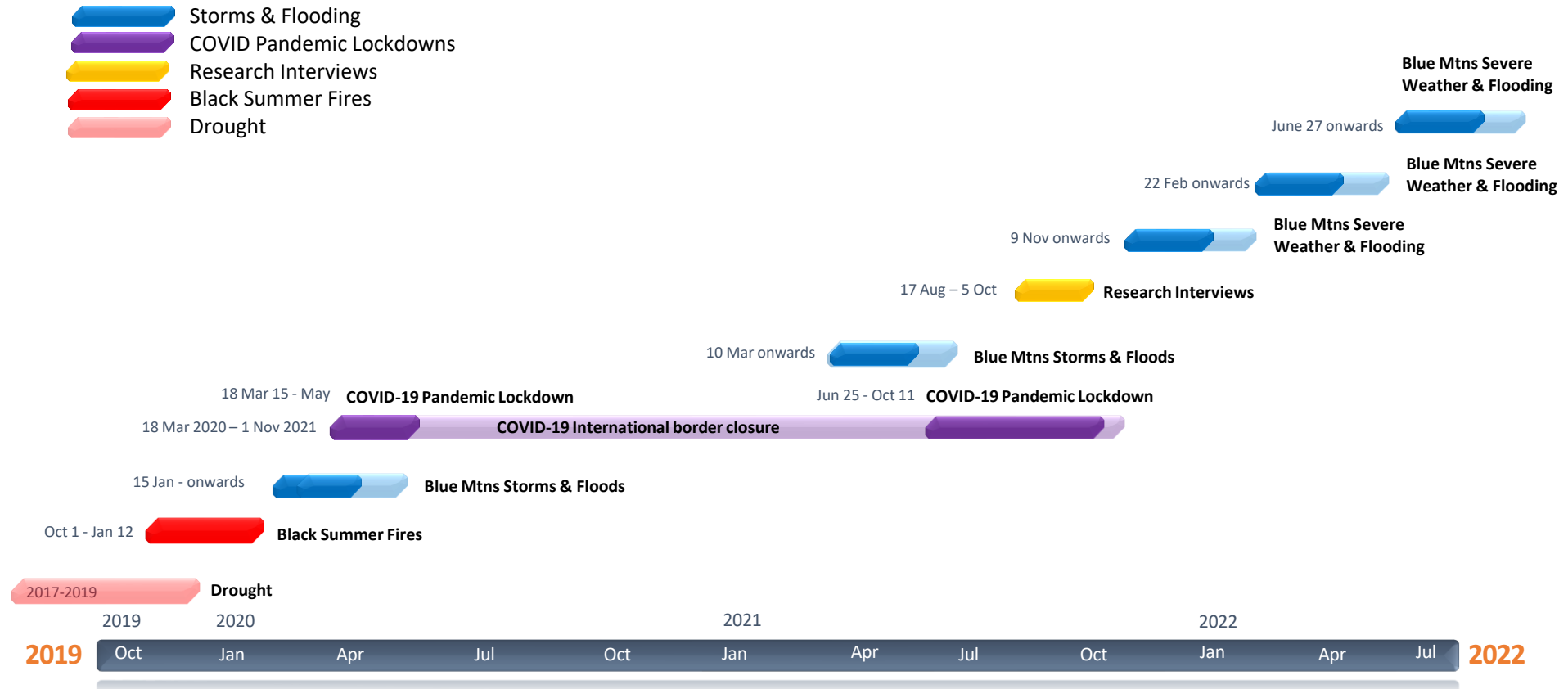
Our purpose: To highlight issues concerning local disaster preparation and support for local leaders before, during and after a disaster.

Compounding & Cascading Disasters



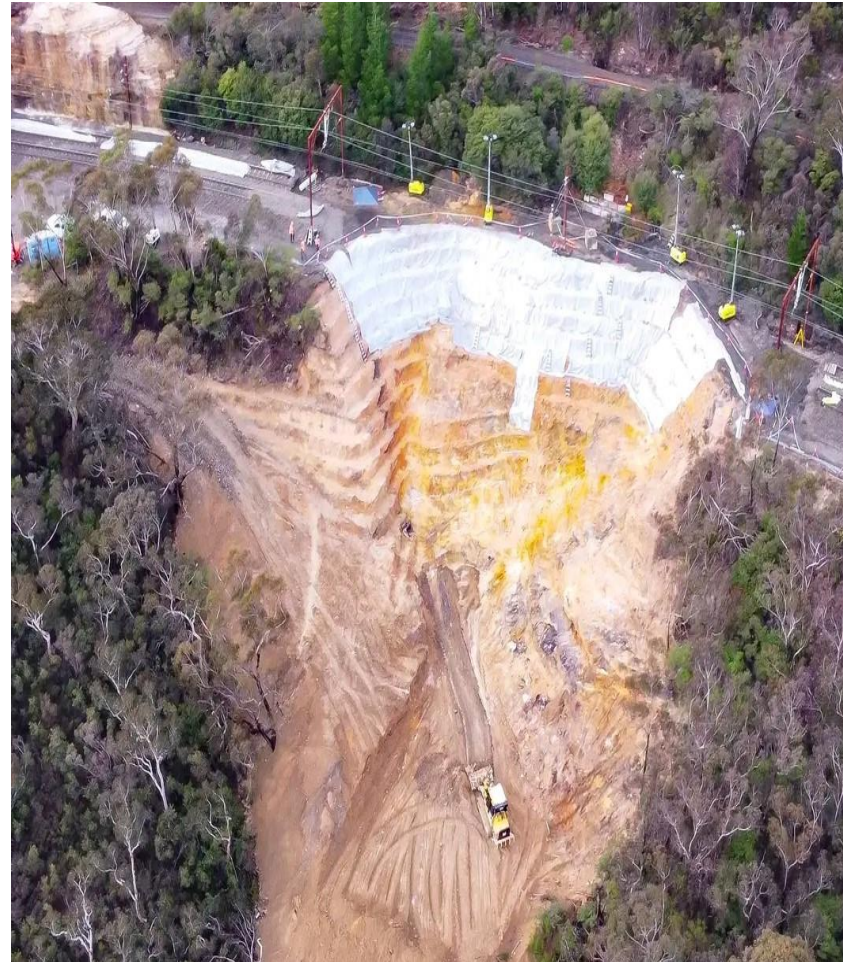


Disasters affecting the NSW Blue Mountains October 2019 – July 2022





Mt Victoria landslip
July 2022



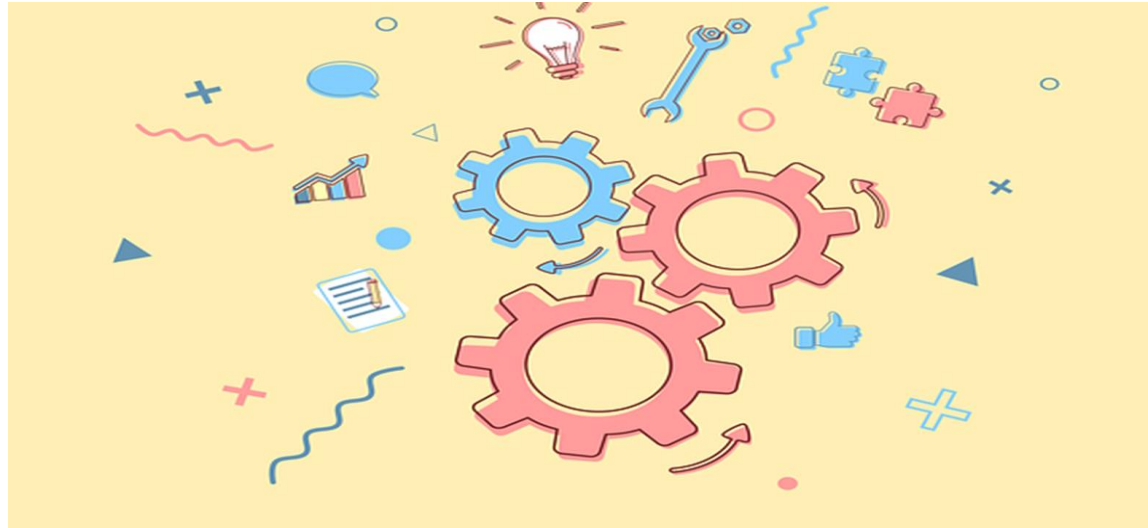
Research Questions

What are the effects and consequences of disaster fatigue on community resilience in a compound and cascading disaster situation, such as the case study community?

How sustainable is the push for 'community resilience' in the face of disaster fatigue due to a compound and cascading disaster situation?



Method




- Ethical approval from CSU
- Interviewed 13 local leaders
- Thematic analysis of transcripts

Interview questions

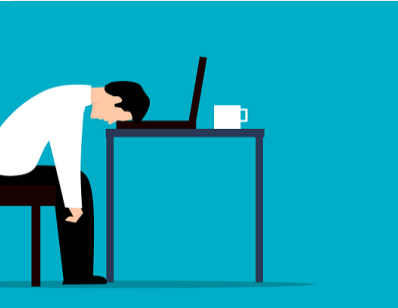
- what activities their role usually entailed and what changes had occurred as a result of the compound and cascading disaster situation
- disaster fatigue from three perspectives: the resilience and preparedness of the community, mental health and wellbeing, socio-economic issues
- strategies they may have developed and/or implemented to counter the disaster fatigue in their workplace, and the community they serve




Defeatism, deterioration & lack of planning

Components of community disaster fatigue	Themes drawn from the research	Indicators of community disaster fatigue drawn from the research
(A) Defeatism, deterioration & lack of planning	General effect of cascading disasters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anticipatory anxiety and fear about what's coming next• Momentum knocked out of kilter• Declining ability and opportunities for community-based initiatives• Community becomes unresponsive and lacks focus or purpose
	 Disaster fatigue of community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhaustion, compounded by no additional resources• Little or no support to assist in the moment• Work never gets caught up on• Community leaders noticed their own decreased decision-making ability and slowed responses• Left out of regional and State level decision making• To take advantage of volunteer influx means having to train new recruits when exhausted after extended disaster engagement
	Disaster fatigue of the team and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lockdowns meant no opportunity for informal team debriefs• Resistance of paid workers to return to work• Volunteers became reluctant to participate and resisted turning out

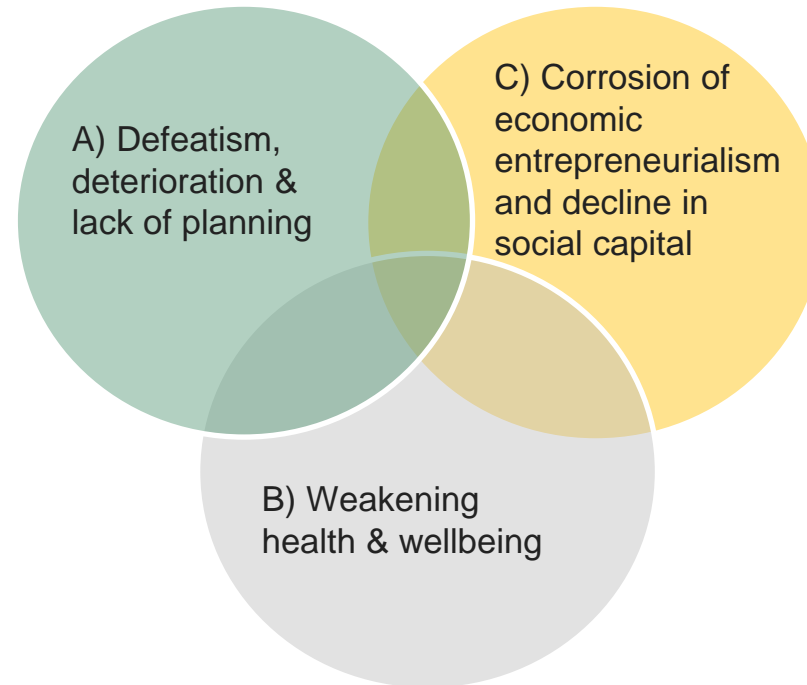
Weakening health & wellbeing

Components of community disaster fatigue	Themes drawn from the research	Indicators of community disaster fatigue drawn from the research
(B) Weakening health and wellbeing	Anxiety, stress, and burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased demand for various mental health and community support services • Collective trauma and helplessness
	Disengagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with trauma through disengagement to protect self e.g. switching off mentally during briefings • Resignation as a survival strategy • Mistrust of other communities fed by social distancing e.g. not wanting tourists to visit as they may bring COVID-19. • Reduction (either temporary or permanent) in organised social activities.
	Role confusion, job security and feelings of guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mandated structure in local disaster plans for community organisations to do anything to address mental health issues
	Inability to continue working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in workers compensation claims • Volunteers resigning
	Experience vicarious trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leader focus is much more on their clients than on themselves • Withdrawal of emotional investment that people have in the early stages of recovery • Visible agitation

Corrosion of economic entrepreneurialism and decline in social capital

Components of community disaster fatigue	Themes drawn from the research	Indicators of community disaster fatigue drawn from the research
<p><i>(C) Corrosion of economic entrepreneurialism and decline in social capital</i></p>	<p>The economic impact of disaster</p>	<p>Waning production and closure of local businesses Creative arts, 'Mountains Made', and casual hospitality work halted One business failure has multiple ripples throughout the community Closure of landmark businesses</p>
	<p>The people impacted</p>	<p>Virtual technologies in the human services sector did not service vulnerable clients as effectively as F2F meetings Decline in the quality of workforce skills Sub optimal decision-making due to poor information flow and time pressure</p>
	<p>Capital</p>	<p>Sources of capital equipment were diminished or expended Poor internet speed Revenue reduction and disruption</p>
	<p>The people impacted</p>	<p>Virtual technologies in the human services sector did not service vulnerable clients as effectively as F2F meetings Decline in the quality of workforce skills Sub optimal decision-making due to poor information flow and time pressure</p>

Components of Community Disaster Fatigue



3 Key Learnings

1. Community organisations are essential to local recovery.
2. Community leaders are suffering disaster fatigue due to their organisational commitments in a cascading disaster situation.
3. To continue their contribution, local community leaders and their organisations require surge-funding to be put in place.



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AGRN	Name of disaster affecting the Blue Mountains NSW	Start Date	End Date	Source
1025	NSW severe weather and flooding	27 June 2022	onwards	https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations
1012	NSW severe weather and flooding	22 Feb	onwards	https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations
	Hawkesbury Floods	23 Feb 2022	9 March 2022	https://councillorzamprogno.info/2022/03/24/the-hawkesbury-nepean-river-floods-march-2022/
987	NSW severe weather and flooding	9 Nov 2021	Onwards	https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations
	Research Interviews with Community Leaders in the BM LGA	17 Aug 2021	5 Oct 2021	Research Diary
	COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown	25 Jun 2021	11 Oct 2021	https://www.timeout.com/melbourne/things-to-do/a-timeline-of-covid-19-in-australia-two-years-on
	Hawkesbury F960loods	18 Mar 2021	29 Mar 2021	http://www.extremestorms.com.au/hawkesbury-river-major-flooding-21-to-24-march-2021/
960	NSW Storms and Floods	10 Mar 2021	Onwards	https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations
	COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown	18 Mar 2020	15 May 2020	https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Pages/NSWpublichealthrestrictionstodealwiththeCOVID19pandemic.aspx
898	NSW Storms and Floods	15 Jan 2020	Onwards	https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations
871	NSW Bushfires (Black Summer Fires)	1 Oct 2019	12 Jan 2020	https://www.bestofthebluemountains.com/after-the-fires-the-blue-mountains-black-summer/ https://www.nsw.gov.au/disaster-recovery/natural-disaster-declarations
	NSW Drought	2017	to Jan 2020	http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/knowledge-centre/previous-droughts.shtml