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Recent Research Abstracts

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EFFECTS OF DROUGHT

Stayner, R and Barclay, E. (2002). Welfare and support services for farm families. Barton, ACT: Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HCC/02-042.pdf

During the periodic crises in the farm sector such as those arising from extreme climatic events or commodity price collapse, the acute financial condition of many farm businesses creates stresses that can have severe consequences for the well-being of farm families. This project, undertaken during 1997-98, reviews the experiences of farm families and service providers during the extended drought of the 1990s, and critically examines the current mix of policies, programs and services which address the needs of farm families undergoing stress, in order to propose improvements which would reduce its personal, community and industry costs. Case studies were undertaken in three regions: north-west and central-west New South Wales, and south-western Queensland. The towns roughly at the centre of the regions studied were Roma, Moree and Condoblin.

Calder, C. (1998, May). Drought Support Project. *Mental Health in Australia*, v.8 no.1 - no.2

The overall goal of the drought support project described in this paper is to improve health outcomes for rural people by enhancing the ability of rural GPs to identify and respond to the mental health effects of the drought. The issues of depression and hopelessness, social withdrawal, bereavement and loss, self blame and guilt, and physical and behavioural responses are addressed. Questionnaire results are discussed, supporting the predictions of the focus group that farmers are unlikely to talk about their underlying problems straight away and that building trust takes time.

Stehlik, D; Bulis, H; Gray, I; Lawrence, G. (1996, November). Rural families and the impact of the drought of the 1990s. *Papers of the Fifth Australian Family Research Conference, Brisbane*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
www.aifs.gov.au/institute/afrcpapers/stehlik.html

The long term impact of drought on the consciousness of families and on their relationships with their communities forms the basis of a two year collaborative study undertaken in two regions - Central Queensland and the Riverina in New South Wales. This paper begins to explore the preliminary analysis emerging from a series of interviews and focus groups with farm families undertaken in the first year of the study. Early analysis indicates that the costs to families and communities can be measured not only in loss of stock and depletion of resources, including the closing down of infrastructure support, but also in deterioration of family cohesion, loss of community networks and a sense of hopelessness. However the researchers are also identifying possible strategies for survival as farm families make decisions about their lives, their properties and their communities which enable them to remain on the land. Issues explored include how families manage the loss of supportive networks as their communities decline and what kind of rural community and rural family will emerge in the next century.