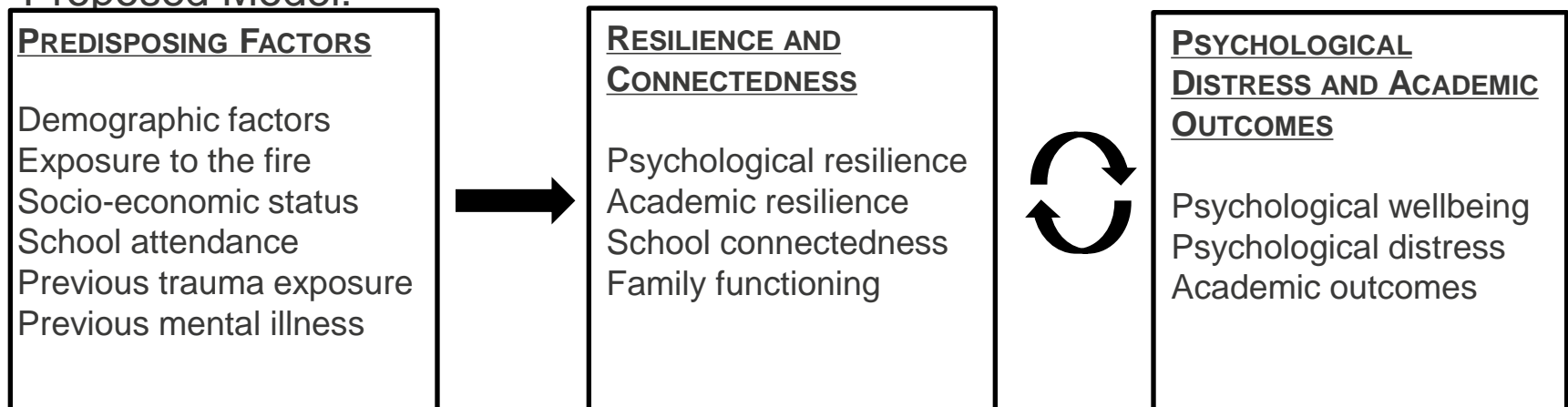


Schools Study – Emily Berger

The aim of the Schools Study is to determine whether exposure to smoke from the Hazelwood coal mine fire is associated with psychological trauma and distress in school-aged children, as well as to assess factors associated with resilience.

Proposed Model:



Schools Study Design

- Children in years 3, 5, 7 and 9
 - Selected to provide a representative sample and allow evaluation of educational outcomes based on NAPLAN results.
 - 323 children surveyed from 20 schools in Morwell and wider Valley region.
- Survey
 - 13 item Children's Revised Impact of Events Scale (CRIES) was used as the primary measure to understand the impact.
 - Other measures included the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Family Functioning Questionnaire, etc.
- Interview
 - 69 interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of children to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and impact of the event from the children's perspective.

Preliminary Findings

- The survey asked children about:
 - How often they still think about the event;
 - How often they avoid reminders of the event; and
 - How often they are more alert or watchful to warning signs (of similar events).
- Children from Morwell schools scored on average higher than non-Morwell children on the questions above, however this is partly explained by differences in age.
- Younger children scored higher than older children.
- Note that this is only a preliminary analysis of the data and much more analysis is needed, including analysis of relocated schools vs other schools, analysis of NAPLAN data, etc.



Preliminary Findings

- In the interview, children reported concern regarding the physical impact of the event on them and their family (e.g., trouble breathing).
- Children spoke about the impact of school relocation on their education and engagement in school.
- Some children reported trouble concentrating and sleeping, and reoccurring thoughts about the event.
- Children reported multiple coping responses and resilience during and after the event, including positive thinking, engagement in activities, talking to parents, etc.



Potential outcomes

- Determine the level of distress experienced by school-aged children and adults as a result of the Hazelwood smoke event.
- Better understand the challenges faced by schools during and following the event, with a view to inform future disaster response planning for the region and beyond.
- Better understand the interplay between child, family, school and social factors in relation to wellbeing and educational outcomes.



Next steps

- Collate information from parents, teachers, NAPLAN and education departments.
- Administer follow-up surveys and interviews with children in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in 2017.
- Analyse 'Adult Survey' data regarding the psychological impact of the event on adults.