

Floods severely affect children and young people—it's time to stop ignoring their experience

September 23 2016



Credit: Lancaster University

Research with flood-affected children reveals serious impacts on well-being but also a desire to take on a role in flood risk management.

Lancaster University researchers found that factors impacting on [children](#)'s well-being include: loss of valued personal and family possessions, friendship networks, familiar spaces, education; experience of fear, anxiety, poverty, isolation, unfairness, destruction, stress, uncertainty, being ignored/misunderstood; lack of sleep and recreation; deterioration in diet, space and housing conditions; lack of flood education provision in schools for children and all staff.

But the research also shows that children play an important role in recovery from flood disasters, by helping families, neighbours and the wider community and they certainly do not want to be kept in the dark.

"Adults need to know that children become more scared and worried when they do not know what is happening" (Helena, aged 10)

The study shows that having an active role in flood risk management actually helps with children's recovery. Yet current flood and emergency planning policy either ignores children or positions them as 'vulnerable', rather than treating them as citizens in their own right. The report proposes children should be given more information before, during and after flooding because they have a right to know how to prepare, what to expect and how they can contribute.

The report, authored by Maggie Mort, Marion Walker, Alison Lloyd Williams and Amanda Bingley of Lancaster University and Virginia Howells of Save the Children, details children's and young people's experiences of the UK winter 2013/14 floods. 'Children, Young People and Flooding: Recovery and Resilience', launched today (September 22) in London at a meeting of policymakers, practitioners, and the insurance industry was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Researchers worked with two groups of children: a primary age group in rural South Ferriby, Lincolnshire, where a tidal surge breached the banks of the Humber; and a high school group in urban Staines-upon-Thames, Surrey where the Government declared a state of emergency and the army was drafted in to assist emergency services cope with tidal, rainfall, river and groundwater flooding.

Six core themes emerged:

- Children's feelings of isolation are connected with the long-term,

ongoing impact of flooding – and there is a value in them getting together to share experiences

- A better understanding of children's strengths and vulnerabilities and arming them with better information before, during and after flooding enables them to be seen as active citizens and not passive victims
- There is a need for systematic and statutory flood education programme in schools and the wider community
- There is also a need for schools and the community to acknowledge and understand the range of losses experienced by children – for example: personal 'precious' items that embody memories, familiar spaces, friendships, social networks and loss of time
- Insurance companies must improve assessment and approach to repairs to acknowledge children's needs. For example, living in temporary accommodation was worsened by a lack of space and, sometimes, having to relocate several times before returning home prolonged periods of uncertainty
- There is a need to recognise that flood-affected children actually have the experience to help themselves and others understand the measures that should be taken to prepare, protect and adapt to flooding – and the very clear message that all households need to make a proper flood plan

The project resulted in the production of Children's and Young People's Manifestos, the staging of several stakeholder events, a six-minute film, Ten Tips for the Insurance Sector on how to better support flood-affected children and young people, and the development of a flood suitcase 'toolkit' for use in schools and youth centres.

Professor Maggie Mort said: "Flooding is recognised as a major and chronic national hazard and it is time to recognise that children and young people are severely affected, yet still have no voice in policy that

affects them. It is time to bring together the agencies that work on flood response, recovery and resilience to address their exclusion.

"These children and [young people](#) have issued a powerful and persuasive call to the Government and flood risk managers to 'join the dots' across departments and agencies. Their sustained work during this project was based on their own hard won experience. We hope that their efforts will be repaid by the Government and industry responses to this report."

More information: The report can be downloaded from:
www.lancaster.ac.uk/floodrecovery

Provided by Lancaster University

Citation: Floods severely affect children and young people—it's time to stop ignoring their experience (2016, September 23) retrieved 23 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-09-severely-affect-children-young-peopleit.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.