

Floods: Assessing the psychological cost

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In July 2007 the mid-west of England was exposed to torrential rain and severe flooding causing unprecedented damage and disruption to large areas of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Studies measuring the psychological impact experienced by flood victims are few in number and little is known about the extent of distress caused by floods, particularly in the UK. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is classified in ICD-10 and DSM-IV as a debilitating anxiety disorder following trauma exposure. The aims of the present study are to assess the psychological impact of the 2007 floods, to estimate the prevalence rate of PTSD and to identify risk factors of PTSD. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Worcester ethics committee. Participants were selected from the flood affected areas through 2 local councils and through individuals contacting the study team. Each household received a questionnaire pack, an informed consent form, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and a pre-paid self-addressed envelope. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions, the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ), the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL) and the Coping Strategies Questionnaire (CSQ). Gaining a better understanding of the aetiology, course and maintenance of PTSD will enable early detection and prevention mechanisms to be designed and implemented following a natural disaster. Furthermore, health providers and government agencies will be able to benefit from information generated by the study and apply it to improve the immediate and long term response to communities affected by disasters in the future.