

Red Cross - Flooding and Mental Health

8/12



Key Points

Red Cross produced two reports on Flooding and its health impacts - 'Living in Fear of the Rain' (2010) and 'Cut off by the Floods' (2012).

Aim - research impact of flooding on individuals, communities and businesses in flooding 'hot-spots.'

Found the need to engage flooding in a 'people-centred' way.

Homogenised understanding of flooding impacts on health in NI and across UK

Adaptation must sometimes take place on a human level

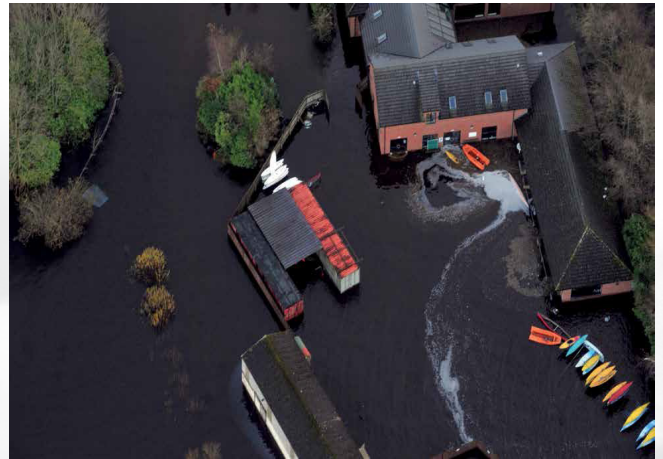
This case study details the creation of two reports by the British Red Cross on the subject of flooding impacts on health in Northern Ireland. It sits within the 'flooding' action category of the Northern Ireland Adaptation programme.

In the last four years the Red Cross has published two reports: 'Living in Fear of the Rain,' which dealt with flooding in Greater Belfast, and 'Cut off by the Floods,' which discussed the impacts of flooding in rural Northern Ireland. Both centre on the issue of the impacts of flooding on victims' health.

In 2010, the British Red Cross published its first report, 'Living in Fear of the Rain,' which discussed the impact of flooding in Greater Belfast. Belfast City Council recognised that the impact of flooding on people living in high-risk flood areas in Greater Belfast needed to be assessed. It approached the Red Cross to undertake research in 2008.

The second report, 'Cut off by the Floods,' was published in 2012. It outlined the difficulties experienced by rural populations who had been faced with flooding, focusing mainly on County Fermanagh and Beragh, County Tyrone. It was a comparative study examining the impact of flooding on rural communities as opposed to those in more urban areas.





Flooding in Fermanagh, 2009. Used in 'Cut off by the Floods.'

Aims/objectives

'Living in Fear of the Rain' (2010)

To determine the impact of flooding for people and communities living in high-risk flooding 'hot-spots' in Belfast.

To determine people's main needs and any vulnerability at the response and recovery stages, including practical, social and welfare issues.

To review current integrated emergency management models in Northern Ireland.

'Cut off by the Floods' (2012)

Examine the short and long-term impact of flooding on individuals, communities and businesses in identified flooding 'hot-spots.'

Identify needs at the response and recovery stages, including practical, social and welfare issues.

Identify specific vulnerable groups through engagement at a local level.

Provide a comparison between rural and urban contexts with regard to the causes and effects of flooding.

Identify examples of community resilience in rural communities.

Use the research information to better prepare and inform strategic partners. This may include the civil contingencies community, emergency services, local resilience partners and policy makers.

Sampling Procedure

A purposive sampling procedure was used for both projects. People were invited to participate by giving an open narrative account based on their experience in or experience of flooding. The data collection procedure also involved semi-structured interviews with emergency services and statutory responders. Previous research from other flooding reports in Northern Ireland and UK Red Cross reports was also included.

Challenges

There were a number of challenges to both projects:

The organisational challenge of managing the large number and range of responders.

Managing participant expectation of what would change as a result of their participation.

The task of identifying individuals and properties affected by flooding in each area.

Research fatigue for respondents living in badly-affected areas.

“We strongly recommend direct engagement with people living in flooding hotspots in order to assess their needs and the support required to help them prepare for future flooding.”

Red Cross, ‘Cut off by the Floods’

Successes

Some of the major successes of each project included:

‘Living in Fear of the Rain’

The examination of the long-term complex needs of people victimised by flooding.

A new focus on the need to engage flooding in a ‘people-centred’ way; directly communicating with those at risk to increase preparedness.

The ability to highlight vulnerable groups like single parents and low income families, whose needs require further specific research.

Engagement from other organisations with an interest or responsibility for flooding.

Detailed analysis of key flooding terms such as resilience, community and vulnerability.

‘Cut off by the Floods’

Gained positive feedback from participants who were happy that the reports accurately conveyed their experience of flooding impacts.

The report is a driver for the development of new community resilience initiatives.

The research was cited by a range of other organisations and by the Red Cross when asked to present its findings and recommendations to a range of bodies.

Climate Adaptation

The mission of the Red Cross is to provide humanitarian assistance to people in crisis and to help them be better prepared. In this case they have fulfilled their mission. Adaptation is not just about the physical concrete structures or innovative designs used to protect our infrastructure. Adaptation must sometimes take place at a human level.

Flooding has a real impact on the mental wellbeing of people in at-risk areas. With the frequency and intensity of floods due to increase with climate change, reports like these allow people to understand how they can be affected, not only economically, but socially and mentally. With this understanding, organisations like the Red Cross can take action to help people adapt to the situation in the most efficient and successful way.

Reports like these also further the cause of homogenising opinion on the impacts of flooding on health, not only in Northern Ireland but across the UK.

Lessons learned

The research demonstrated that flooding affects people in very different ways. One particular research gap identified was the effect on young people.

The Red Cross has taken it upon itself to continue with its work and continue to represent flood victims through a range of forums.

It has used the findings in two very practical ways:

It piloted a ‘flooding roadshow’ which provides information that respondents said they required in the report. Information included insurance advice, flood defence advice and health and safety advice.

The findings have been incorporated into the emergency response that the Red Cross offer. During the January 2013 storm surge, it delivered sandbags and provided emotional support to vulnerable people.



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Funded by



Administered by



Neil McKittrick

Services Manager
British Red Cross Society
nmckittrick@redcross.org.uk

Joanne McKenna

Senior Services Manager
British Red Cross Society
jmckenna@redcross.org.uk

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jane@climatenorthernireland.org.uk



[@climateni](https://twitter.com/climateni)

