



Flooding and resilience: the important role children and young people can play

Provocation

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Summary

Our research shows children play an important role in recovery, helping their families and neighbours and the wider community. We found that children understand more readily than adults that there will be future floods, and recognise the need for adaptation. Children and young people want to have a role in developing flood prevention and preparedness in their communities and families. Current flood policy either ignores children and young people or positions them in a group marked 'vulnerable' (along with disabled people, older people and pets). This patronises and disenfranchises children and young people. Understanding their perspectives and capacities could inform more effective policy, enhance resilience and reduce the impact of future emergencies. Children have the right to be heard and actively participate in matters that affect them, in particular flood management. They say they are more afraid when they do not know what is happening.

Our work in Kingston-upon-Hull in the UK with people affected by the 2007 floods revealed that nobody was paying much attention to children and young people. It showed that children experienced different kinds of problems, particularly with recovery. After the 2013/14 winter floods in England, we wanted to work closely with a wide age range of children and young people to explore their ideas for how they could be better supported before, during and after floods. Disaster research tells us that it is very important to listen directly to those affected, not so-called 'experts'. The children and young people we worked with are the experts. Their experience is extremely valuable for policymakers and practitioners in addressing flooding – the most severe environmental risk facing the UK.

Children as active citizens

The research project 'Children, young people and flooding: recovery and resilience' worked with children and young people who were directly affected by flooding in England following the winter storms of 2013/4 in both an urban and a rural setting.¹ Participants developed Children's and Young People's Flood Manifestos, giving recommendations for more effective local and national flood prevention, mitigation and adaptation. These Manifestos together with the project film also demonstrate a key problem – that flood policy in the UK (prevention, preparation, response, recovery) is currently too fragmented to be able to respond to the children's concerns, since those concerns often fall between the responsibilities of different government departments.²

What are the effects of flooding on children?

Children and young people are acutely affected during and after floods. When they are displaced, they also lose friendship networks, school connections, and familiar surroundings. At the same time, they see adults under great strain. Flood displacement can take many forms. Children may have to leave their homes, stay in unsuitable or damp homes, or be unable to attend their usual school. Floods have a significant impact on children's emotional well-being, and they often live in fear of it happening again.

Key points raised by the children and young people in their Flood Manifestos

Health, well-being and recovery

- Recognise that floods cause poverty. Displaced families need help with the extra cost of food, washing clothes and transport
- Set up peer groups in schools for children who have been affected by floods, so they can talk and get support
- Recognise that floods can lead to poor health, such as bad diets if people can't afford healthy food or don't have the means to prepare it
- Disabled people need more specialised help before, during and after a flood

Flood defences and protection

- There should be more grants to help make homes more resilient, and help with red tape
- Support the development of community flood fund initiatives – to help people who are flooded, or may be in future
- All families and communities should have a flood plan
- Flood warnings need to be clearer, so people understand them and know what to do and when

¹ www.lancaster.ac.uk/floodrecovery

² The film and the Children and Young People's Flood Manifestos are available to view on the project website: www.lancaster.ac.uk/floodrecovery

- Awareness should be raised using different media; information should be put up in the community, as it is for fire safety

Flood education

- This should be given in all schools, from Reception level onwards. There should be lessons on emergencies and flooding: how to prepare, understanding priorities when it floods, where to go, survival and first aid. Include 'flood tests', flood simulation events such as fire drills and online flood preparation games
- Teachers need training about floods, and how they affect children and their education

The Children, Young People and Flooding www.lancaster.ac.uk/floodrecovery collaboration between Lancaster University and Save the Children is funded through the Economic and Social Research Council Urgency Grants Mechanism. Creative methods helped to understand the children's experiences and develop their ideas for policy and practice. Research team: Professor Maggie Mort, Dr Marion Walker, Dr Amanda Bingley, Dr Alison Lloyd Williams (Lancaster University) & Virginia Howells (Save the Children).

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