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# Reducing the mental health and wellbeing impacts of flooding: Informing cross-policy action in Scotland

Claire Niedzwiedz<sup>1</sup>, Rhian Thomas<sup>2</sup>, Chiara Hill-Harding<sup>1</sup>, Mhairi Campbell<sup>1</sup>, Thomas Rochow<sup>3</sup>, Hannah Salamon<sup>3</sup>, Fiona Henderson<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, Clarice Pears Building, 90 Byres Road, Glasgow G12 8TB.

<sup>2</sup>School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, University Avenue, Glasgow G12 8QQ.

<sup>3</sup>Centre for Public Policy, University of Glasgow, University Avenue, Glasgow G12 8QQ.

<sup>4</sup>Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow G4 0BA.

## Challenges

Flooding is a growing risk in Scotland due to climate change, bringing more extreme weather, heavier rainfall, and rising sea levels. Flooding is not only an environmental and economic issue, but also a public health challenge, particularly for mental health. Adverse mental health impacts arise from experiencing damage to homes, and from ongoing stresses like financial strain, disruption to daily life, and uncertainty about the future. People affected by flooding face an increased risk of mental health problems, with impacts that can persist well beyond the flood event itself. Although research has explored how flooding affects mental health, there is still limited evidence on which actions are most effective to reduce the adverse impacts on mental health and wellbeing, especially for vulnerable, and/or higher risk groups, such as older people and children. More work is needed to understand how different measures, like home adaptations or community support, can help reduce the risk factors for poor mental health outcomes before, during and after flooding.

## Aim

To understand how different policies can be brought together to help to reduce the adverse effects of flooding on people's mental health and wellbeing in Scotland, via a review of research studies and policies.

## Research questions



What kinds of actions (like financial support, healthcare, home protection, nature-based solutions, and community support) can help reduce the negative effects of flooding on people's mental health and wellbeing?



How well do these actions work in Scotland and how do they impact people who are more at risk of flooding or poor mental health?



What are other similar countries doing to reduce the mental health and wellbeing impacts of flooding and what can Scotland learn from them?



How can different parts of government and services in Scotland work better together to support people's mental health and wellbeing before, during and after flooding?

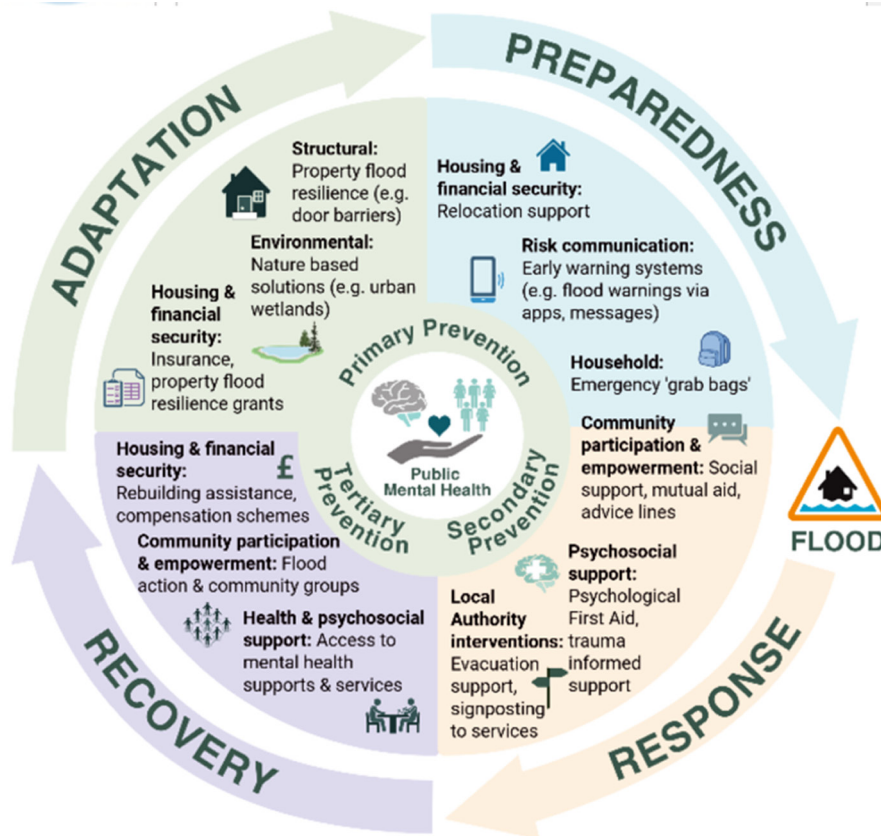


Figure 1: Infographic summarising the different types of interventions reviewed, ordered according to stage along the flood resilience and public mental health pathways<sup>1</sup>.

## Opportunities

There are a range of actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of poor mental health and wellbeing across the flood resilience and public mental health pathways (Figure 1). Early warning systems may be one of the most effective measures, as they give people more time to prepare and can reduce feelings of fear and uncertainty. Property-level flood resilience measures, such as flood barriers or home adaptations, may also improve wellbeing by helping to make people feel more safe and in control. Community support is another important protective factor. Strong social networks and local support can help people cope during and after floods, although this support may need to be sustained over time to remain effective.

Access to mental health support and services is also crucial for people who need it. Psychological first aid and trauma informed responses are important to reduce distress in the immediate aftermath of a flood. Interventions such as counselling and digital support

may also benefit people who require extra support later during the recovery phase. Improving coordination between services, including housing, insurance, health, and financial support, is likely to reduce the stress people face during recovery.

The report also points to the potential of nature-based and place-based solutions, such as green spaces and natural flood management, which may reduce flood risk while supporting wellbeing. However, more evidence is needed to confirm any mental health benefits, and for which groups of people.

There is a need for a cross-policy approach that brings together different sectors and services to address flooding as both a climate and public mental health issue. Scotland is seen as well placed to adopt this approach because of its existing policy frameworks and commitments to improve population health and reduce health inequalities.

<sup>1</sup>Created in BioRender. Niedzwiedz, C. (2026) <https://BioRender.com/mrrzddh>. Flood alert icon from Environment Agency, licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

## Recommendations

Overall, there is an important opportunity to move from a reactive, siloed approach to a more proactive and integrated one, where mental health and wellbeing are embedded into the whole flood resilience journey. By improving early warning systems, strengthening communities, supporting disadvantaged groups, and coordinating policy more effectively, Scotland has an important opportunity to reduce the adverse mental health impacts of flooding and build greater resilience and wellbeing for the future.

There are important gaps in the current evidence and the way in which current policy is organised. Most research focuses on recovery after a flood, rather than on preventing adverse mental health outcomes before flooding occurs, via adaptation or preparedness measures. There is also limited evidence on which interventions are most effective, when they are most

effective and for what groups of people. In addition, current systems are often fragmented, with different sectors such as health, housing, and environmental planning working separately. A summary of the recommendations is found in Figure 2, with full details in the main report.

## Conclusion

Despite notable gaps in the evidence base and in how policies are currently integrated, Scotland has a strong opportunity to lead in tackling the adverse mental health and wellbeing impacts of flooding. This can be achieved through coordinated action across policies, making better use of existing governance structures and data, and investing in Scotland-specific evaluation and implementation of evidence-informed interventions throughout the flood resilience pathway.



Figure 2: Summary of recommendations. Please see the main report for the full list of recommendations.

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**To access the outputs for this project, please visit:** <https://www.crew.ac.uk/publications/reducing-mental-health-and-wellbeing-impacts-of-flooding>  
Please contact [enquiries@crew.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@crew.ac.uk) to request report in alternative format

For further information on the related CREW project, 'Household Flood Plans in Scotland', please refer to the publication page: [www.crew.ac.uk/publications/household-flood-plan](http://www.crew.ac.uk/publications/household-flood-plan)