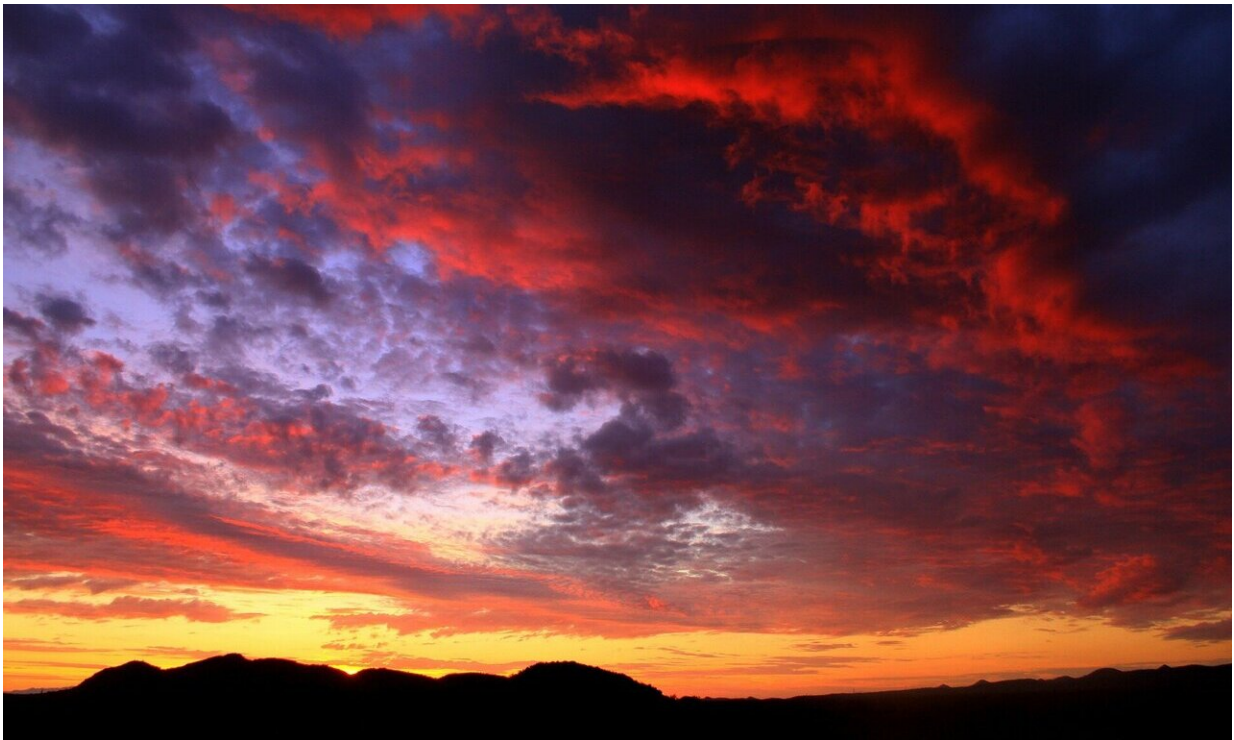


# Study reveals links between extreme weather events and poor mental health

September 5 2019

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

People whose homes are damaged by storms or flooding are significantly more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, according to new research.

The study, led by the University of York and the National Centre for

Social Research, found that the risk to [mental health](#) associated with experiencing weather-damage to your home is similar to the risk to mental health associated with living in a disadvantaged area.

People with weather-damaged homes are more likely to experience poor mental health even when the damage is relatively minor and does not force them to leave their homes, the study suggests.

With scientists saying climate change is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of storms and floods in the UK, emergency planning for extreme weather needs to include mental health support for people affected, the researchers conclude.

The researchers analysed data from a large national mental health survey called the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS). The APMS is the primary source of information on the mental health of people living in England and assesses [mental disorders](#) using [diagnostic criteria](#).

Survey fieldwork took place throughout 2014 and included a question which asked participants if their home had been damaged by wind, rain, snow or flood in the six months prior to interview—this period included December 2013 to March 2014, which saw severe winter storms and extensive flooding in the UK.

Over 4.2 million flood warnings were issued and over 10,000 residential properties were flooded over these months.

Taking other factors known to increase the risk of poor mental health into account—such as social disadvantage, debt and poor physical health—the researchers found that people who had experienced storm and [flood damage](#) to their homes were about 50% more likely to experience poorer mental health.

Lead author of the study, Professor Hilary Graham, from the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, said: "This study shows that exposure to extreme or even moderate weather events may result in 'psychological casualties' with significant impacts on mental health.

"This is reflective of the huge impact storms and flooding have on people's lives as alongside the physical damage to homes and businesses, there is the emotional damage to the sense of security that many people derive from their home."

The number of properties in the UK exposed to at least a 1 in 75-year flood risk is predicted to increase by 41% under a 2°C temperature rise and by 98% under 4°C temperature rise.

Professor Graham added: "With extreme weather events on the rise due to climate change, environmental and health policies need to be brought much more closely together. This means recognising that flood protection policies are also health protection policies and that better protecting communities from floods is also an investment in protecting their mental health."

Julie Foley, Director of Flood Risk Strategy & National Adaptation at the Environment Agency, said: "The impact of flooding on people is devastating, and can last long after the flood waters have gone away. People can be out of their homes for months or even years, and the impacts are even wider if businesses, schools and transport routes are affected. This research highlights the how the consequences of flooding can have a significant impact on mental [health](#) wellbeing.

"Our [flood](#) defences increase protection to thousands of homes around the country but we can never entirely eliminate the risk of flooding, which is why it's crucial to know how to protect yourself when it hits."

Provided by University of York

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