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The Effect of Flooding on Mental Health as Perceived by Parents and Students in a Selected Rural Community in Galle District: A Qualitative Study

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Background: Sri Lanka has two distinct monsoon seasons and commonly experiences seasonal flooding due to extreme rainfall. Particularly Southern region is more susceptible to flooding during South-West season. During the period of 2005–2015 floods affected 64% of the total population in Sri Lanka. Flooding can pose substantial social and mental health problems that may continue over extended periods of time. Qualitative data are crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the impact that floods have on the mental health of people affected and can be helpful in the design of policies and strategies to mitigate the impact of floods on mental health.

Objective: To understand the psychological burden of flood in a selected community in Tawalama area, Galle district

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted in flood affected area in Thawalama in Galle district. Four focus group discussions (FGD) with students (n = 36) and two with mothers (n = 13) were carried out to explore psychological burden after a flood. A pre-tested interviewer guide was used and data were collected until the point of saturation. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Results: The two major themes emerged; replaceable and non-replaceable and secondary stressors. Secondary stressors, such as disputes with insurance and construction companies, problems with personal relationships (at home, work and with friends), lack of understanding, economic problems and problems with employment, ultimately led to mental health problems. Replaceable and non-replaceable (loss of loved ones, loss of home and other personal possessions) as well as the resulting displacement had a strong impact on their mental health.

Conclusions: Flooding was a stressful experience and the stress continued for a long time even after water receded. Thus, providing long-term mental health support for affected individuals is important.

Keywords: *Flood, Galle district, Mental health*