

Briefing

Feeling threatened, feeling ready and being ready: what drives risk perception and preparedness?

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What we did

Using data from the Lloyd's Register Foundation's World Risk Poll and multiple studies conducted by our team over the last 15 years, we have assessed the predictors of risk perception, preparedness and expectations about future climate and weather risk in the UK and internationally.

What we found

- Perceived weather and climate risk is strongly and consistently linked to negative weather experience across countries. However, experience does not consistently correspond with perceived preparedness, this is country dependent ^[1].
- Women tend to have greater weather risk perception and perceive lower national-level disaster risk preparedness. This is consistent across countries ^[1].
- Expectations about future risks are closely related to weather experience, particularly recent experience ^[2]. This can lead to attenuation of risk perception

when the weather has not been recently experienced (e.g. perceive risk from severe heat following a cooler than normal summer) ^[3].

- In the UK, we find that people are particularly concerned about future weather and climate risks related to disruptions to food supply and pricing, water-supply and threats to health. People are most likely to prioritise preparedness initiatives that align with these concerns ^[4].
- In the UK, specific types of preparedness differ between demographics. Overall, older adults are more likely to report having most types of supplies (e.g. food supply, first aid kit, radio, spare glasses). Higher income households were more likely to have equipment (e.g. torch, thermal blanket, powerbank). Gender differences were limited, though women were more likely to report having supplies of medicine and supplies for children, while more men have radios.
- Concerningly, those reporting that their health was poor are less likely to report having most types of supplies.

Recommendations

- Understand that people worldwide tend to be more concerned about risks they have experienced before, but this does not always lead to greater feeling prepared or being prepared.
- Be aware that people may find it more challenging to judge the threat posed by emerging or novel risks (e.g. increase in wildfires in the UK) than risks they have experienced.
- In developing risk preparedness strategies consider how to support those with the poorest health, who report having fewer preparedness supplies and items in their homes, and often face the greatest barriers to acting on warnings.

References:

- [1] Taylor, A.L, Thompson, J, Summers, B, Jenkins, S., Siu, Y. L. and Dessai, S. (2025) Briefing Note: Predicting disaster risk perception and preparedness around the world.
- [2] Taylor, A., De Bruin, W. B., & Dessai, S. (2014). Climate change beliefs and perceptions of weather-related changes in the United Kingdom. *Risk Analysis*, 34(11), 1995-2004.
- [3] Lefevre, C. E., de Bruin, W. B., Taylor, A. L., Dessai, S., Kovats, S., & Fischhoff, B. (2015). Heat protection behaviors and positive affect about heat during the 2013 heat wave in the United Kingdom. *Social Science & Medicine*, 128, 282-289.
- [4] Sambrook et al. (2024) New evidence of a strong public mandate for climate change adaptation in the UK, University of Leeds

Find out more

To talk about these findings and wider implications/ next steps for your organisation, please contact

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About us

This research was conducted by academic researchers at Leeds University Business School's Centre for Decision Research and the Sustainability Research Institute, School for Earth, Environment and Sustainability.

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