



The April 2022 Floods in KwaZulu-Natal

22 April 2022

PsySSA is the professional body representing psychology professionals in South Africa. PsySSA has, since its inception, been dedicated to making a significant contribution to solving the pressing human development problems in South Africa. PsySSA is committed to the transformation and development of South African Psychology to serve the needs and interests of all South Africa's people. PsySSA advances psychology as a science, profession and as a means of promoting human well-being (<https://www.psytssa.com>).

The April 2022 Floods in KwaZulu-Natal

The Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) is saddened by the loss of life and the destruction caused by the April 2022 floods in KwaZulu-Natal. The floods have taken the lives of over 440 people and many families are still searching for loved ones. The flood waters have destroyed homes, families and communities, with the effects likely to be felt for years.

Individuals, families and communities are in desperate need of assistance of all types, including material and psychosocial support. In times of natural disaster such as the KZN floods, the approach must first be to ensure safety and security. Accommodation, food and environments of safety are critical needs. The various rescue and relief agencies are working tirelessly in this respect, and their efforts are to be lauded. Much of the relief services are being provided by NGOs and government agencies, but ongoing work by government departments is going to involve the provision of alternate housing for the thousands of people left without accommodation. In the immediate aftermath, these basic essentials are crucial.

This disaster has brought extreme hardship, loss and psychological distress to many communities, which can persist well after the flooding event has ceased. While it is not possible to remove the grief or undo the trauma, mutual support among community members, relatives, friends, colleagues and even strangers, will go a long way to bring comfort and relief to distressed individuals. Knowing that someone cares and is willing to listen to one's experiences helps a great deal. It is also important that schooling for children can resume as quickly as possible. Routine and structure are known to play a significant role in children's adjustment following a disaster. Keeping children safe and as close as possible to significant others will help them feel more secure. Since children derive meaning out of situations and experiences based on the responses of significant caregivers, promoting parental/caregiver wellbeing is important.

Multi-sectoral efforts to minimise the secondary effects related to the flooding, such as financial hardship and infrastructure failures, which preclude a return to normalcy are urgently required. Interventions to prevent future flooding events are essential in order to prevent further loss of life and bring assurance to communities that they are safe. The need for extensive planning to provide timely and effective public mental health responses is underscored by this natural disaster. Ongoing efforts to promote and strengthen social cohesion in our communities will make us more

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resilient in the face of hardship. PsySSA is making an appeal to its members to widen its support and counselling services, and include those who have experienced the recent trauma and need assistance. Hospitals and clinics with mental health services should also be accessed if help is needed.

A great deal of financial and other aid is being channelled towards helping those affected by the floods, although much more will be needed. Like several other organisations, PsySSA expresses its concern and hope that the funds and other resources are managed in a transparent and corruption-free manner, so that they reach those who desperately need the assistance.

As an organisation steeped in the sciences, PsySSA has raised its concerns over the impact of human behaviour on our environment, climate and weather patterns. As we witness the climate extremes in our country and globally, it is clear that this is a serious problem, and we add our voice to the call for greater international efforts to reduce the damage being inflicted on our planet.

We wish good health to all of our people, and especially those affected by the floods. We are holding those that have lost loved ones in our thoughts.

Mental Health Emergency Contacts:

- The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG): 011 234 4837
- Suicide Crisis Lifeline: 080 0567 567
- Trauma Helpline: 080 020 5026

Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA)
Johannesburg, South Africa

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