

# Risky world

Concomitant to any study of risk in the human and physical worlds are the geographical concepts of **place**, **space** and **scale**. It is important to understand the spatial patterns of risk (where the risk is), the **scale** of the risk (how big the risk is and how bad the effects might be) and the influence of **place** on risk (what physical and human characteristics make a location risky). Geographers are by no means the only people interested in this. Businesses such as insurance companies, governments, environmental agencies and planners also analyse risk in the world, often with the aid of GIS. The purpose of this module is to explore the world of risk from a personal scale to a global scale. The media can seem full of stories about how we are at constant risk from crime, natural disasters, climate change, international terrorism and global epidemics. But who in the world is most at risk from natural or human disasters and is it possible to manage these risks/hazards?

Starting with the local area and looking at neighbourhood statistics pupils compare their level of risk of being a victim crime or an accident compared to regional and national figures. The students may already have personal experiences of these which they can discuss or map. The module then puts this in a global perspective by looking at how mortality risk is distributed globally. These spatial patterns, distributions can be described, analysed and often explained by reference to social, economic, environmental and political processes. In some areas of the world people are exposed to greater risk or are more vulnerable to risks than others owing to a combination of these processes. For example, large populations in parts of Asia are most at risk from cyclones and storm surges owing to climate change and rising seas. The futures aspect of climate change and understanding that the physical and human dimensions of the environment are **interdependent** through **environmental interaction and sustainable development** is essential in helping students to understand the need to participate in informed and responsible action to mitigate against these risks as global citizens.

Zooming back into the national scale and with particular reference to recent and widespread fluvial flooding, the UK is considered as a risky place. Students consider the causes, effects and whether they are at risk in the future. New Orleans has long been known to be at high risk of a devastation by hurricane but when Katrina hit some people believe poor risk management led to some vulnerable groups being effected disproportionately.

Carrying on the theme of hazard risk management, students consider whether much larger scale events, with international impacts, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami could be managed more effectively. The module ends by considering why populations of countries at different states of development are disproportionately at risk and why, even within countries, certain vulnerable groups are often most at risk from natural and human disasters.

## **Focus on Key Concepts:**

**Place**

**Space**

**Scale**

**Environmental Interaction and sustainable development**

**Human and Physical Processes**