

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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Why look at the effects of climate change on mental health?

1. Understanding impacts is critical to **preparing for them** (on a community level)
2. Describing the impacts can **improve understanding of climate change**
3. Health impacts can **personalize the issue** and **transcend the partisan divide**

How could climate change affect mental well-being?

The multi-level impacts of climate change

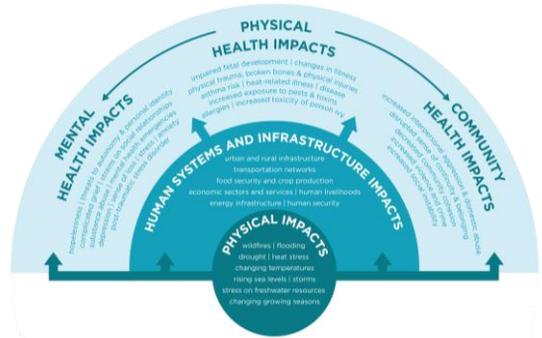
1. **Direct and indirect effects**
2. **Acute and gradual changes**
3. **Experience and perception**



Source:
EcoAmerica
<http://ecoamerica.org/research/#PsychImpacts>



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Direct effects

- PTSD
- Depression
- Domestic abuse
- General anxiety
- Suicide and suicidal ideation
- “Complicated grief”
- Substance abuse
- all of which may last several years or longer

E.g., effects of Hurricane Katrina

49% developed an anxiety or mood disorder
 1 in 6 developed posttraumatic stress disorder¹



¹Galea, S. et al. (2007). Exposure to hurricane-related stressors and mental illness after Hurricane Katrina. Archives of General Psychiatry, 64, 1427-1434.

Indirect effects

- Due to
- economic difficulties
 - damage to physical and social infrastructure
 - environmental degradation
- All possibly requiring migration

Indirect effects

--Natural disasters in 2014 cost \$25 billion in the US²
 (this includes earthquakes) (Do, Q NYT-8/5/15)
 --and \$110 billion worldwide³ (Munich Re)
 Natural disasters in 2014 displaced 19 million people
 worldwide. (Norwegian Refugee Council)



Broad implications

Diminished **sense of self**

- loss of place and disruption of place bonds
- loss of occupation
- loss of lifestyle and culture
- lowered autonomy

Reduced **social cohesion**

- weakened social ties
- increased conflict

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Uncertainty about climate change

Individual responses

- lack of **control**,
- anxiety** about unpredictability

Intergroup tensions

- over **meaning**
- due to perceived **inequity**



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Effects of anxiety about the future

Stress

Hopelessness



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Who will be affected?

Not everyone will be affected equally

- **At greater risk:**
 - Women, children, members of **marginalized communities**
 - Those already suffering from **mental illness**

HOW are children vulnerable?

Physical vulnerability:

Immaturity can enhance the risk of disease, impact of persistent stress, and effects of malnutrition.

Stress itself, along with malnutrition and lack of clean water, makes the body more vulnerable.

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HOW are children vulnerable?

Social vulnerability:

Disruption to education

Psychological vulnerability:

Dependence on others

Need for security

Effects will depend on the child's developmental stage as well as sources of resilience.

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What can be done? Promoting resilience

Factors associated with resilience

Practical support
Community ties
Sense of optimism



- Plan ahead
- Establish the infrastructure to encourage adaptation
- Strengthen social networks
- Provide resources to cope with disasters, including informational resources and mental health support
- Educate
- Encourage optimism and sense of efficacy

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Mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder!

Climate change presents an opportunity

- to examine the social and physical infrastructure of our communities
- to consider opportunities of enhancing well-being

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More You Can Do

1. Communicate about the health effects of climate change
2. Get involved in disaster preparedness efforts
3. Health practitioners: do more research, and incorporate into practices
4. Coordinate and support with others involved in addressing climate change

Thank you!
Questions?

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