

New Report Examines Ties Between Climate Change and Mental Health



Most people are aware of the impacts of climate change on the environment. Some may also be aware of the impacts on people's physical health. But do you know that climate change can impact individuals' mental health as well?

A new report, *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance*, from the American Psychological Association, Climate for Health and ecoAmerica examines the ties between climate change and mental health. The goal of this report is to increase awareness of the psychological impacts of climate change on human mental health and well-being.

The impacts of climate change on people's physical, mental and community health arise directly and indirectly. Some human health effects stem directly from natural disasters exacerbated by climate change, such as floods, storms, wildfires and heatwaves.

Other effects surface more gradually from changing temperatures and rising sea levels that cause forced migration. Weakened infrastructure and less secure food systems are examples of indirect climate impacts on society's physical and mental health.

For example, the circumpolar north is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average. As a result, local indigenous peoples are at the frontlines in experiencing climate change effects. Inuit in Canada still carry out traditions of hunting, trapping, fishing, foraging and harvesting, and as a result, even a subtle alteration in the climate and environment can impact their mental well-being. (The report discusses five Inuit communities in Nunatsiavut, NL that have been working together to proactively study the relationships between climate change and mental health in the North.)

Factors that may increase sensitivity to the mental health impacts include:

- Geographic location

- Presence of pre-existing disabilities or chronic illnesses
- Socioeconomic and demographic inequalities, such as education level, income and age.

The connection between changes in the climate and impacts on a person can be difficult to grasp. But people's willingness to support and engage in climate solutions is likely to increase if they can relate the solutions to local experiences or if they see the relevance to their own health and well-being.

For more on climate change, see these OHS Insider resources:

- A study on climate change and heat stress
- How climate change can increase OHS risks to workers
- A report on the impacts of climate change on human health, which found that increasing concentrations of GHGs lead to an increase of both average and extreme temperatures.

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