

Climate Change's Impact on Mental Health: Preparedness and Policy Interventions to Support the Affected Individuals and Communities



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Key Highlights

- In recent years, climate change impacts and disaster events have increased in frequency and intensity, caused loss of lives, assets and infrastructure and affected the mental health and wellbeing of communities/ citizens.
- Floods are the most common form of a major disaster.
- Flood damage recovery periods are often long and strenuous for the state and individuals.
- Other disaster events such as landslides may last for minutes, however their impact can last long-term as people have to evacuate, relocate, or are forced to migrate
- The negative consequences on psychosocial wellbeing and mental health are apparent.
- Strong link between natural disasters and mental disorders, affects on mental health in unpredictable.
- Some condition like anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety are prevalent and others unique to abnormal climatic situations.

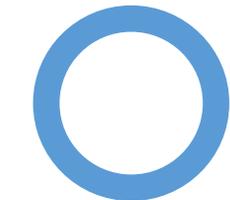
Position Paper and Policy Brief

We conducted a comparative perspective of impacted individuals, community, services and health care providers on the mental health implications of climate change-related disasters.

Evidence from 3 case studies representing developed, developing and emerging economies to reveal a multitude of psychosocial challenges and mental stress faced by communities.

Captured the perception by the affected community, gaps and needs in existing response measures and health provision and strategies to address mental health impacts related to climate change-related disasters from available data/info

Outlined a series of recommendations for national, regional, and global policymakers to address the needs and fill the gaps to ensure that effective services are provided for the diverse requirements of affected communities



Starting with Media Discourse

“The impact of climate change will vary depending on where you live on the planet, were the worst-hit areas tend to be low-income countries that are least responsible and can least afford it. (‘Martin Montague’, BBC, 2022).

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“Natural disasters can affect mental health even among those who haven't been directly impacted (‘Bonnie Schneider’, CNN Health January 28, 2022)

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“Vicious circle of climate impacts, trauma and depression must be broken, say

scientists (The Guardian, 26 May 2021)

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While WHO is increasingly directing its attention to the health impacts of climate change, mental health has generally remained absent from these conversations (Charlson et al., 2021)

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As climate change intensifies and the public becomes more aware of its dire consequences, more people are suffering severe mental health symptoms generally referred to as eco-anxiety (Cianconi, Betrò, and Janiri, 2020).

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The loss of ecosystems, landscapes, species and ways of life becomes a lived experience for more and more people, whereby ecological grief is a natural response to such loss (Comtesse, et al (2021).

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Psychological science not only provides solutions to encourage environmentally-friendly behaviors, it is also important in helping people adapt to climate change (Participants in ISPGH, Nov. 2019)

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All of us must work together to better understand the implications of climate change mainly "grief", while also expanding debates on what might be done (Cunsolo and Ellis (2018).

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Scholars and Academics



Stakeholders, policymakers and community scale organizations

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Climate Change affects Mental health in in a number of ways such as strains on social relationship, substance abuse for coping, post traumatic stress disorder and increased anxiety and depression, (NIHCM Published: March 17, 2022).

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“ *Rapidly increasing*

climate change poses, a rising threat to mental health, (IPCC Published: February 28, 2022).

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Mental health impacts by climate change must be given greater attention in policy, practice and research, (IPOL/ENVI-EU December, 2020).

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Case Study 1: Developing state with a high frequency of disaster (floods, storms) events: **Bangladesh**

Climate change is increasing the vulnerabilities of developing countries, where Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to severe effects by climate change due to a paucity of economic, social, technological, and institutional resources.

Effective mental health programs and focused health interventions for psychosocial wellbeing remain limited in Bangladesh. This can be attributed to socio-cultural and limited socio-economic dimensions. For instance, in "Bangladesh" as well as many other communities in other parts of the world, the acceptance of mental health is interdicted.

“The lack of appropriate services, professionals, and overarching stigma connected to mental health increased the suffering of those afflicted by natural disasters in Bangladesh (Hasan et al., 2020)

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“Bangladesh is a unique country, with unique climate vulnerability, where people are facing multifaceted exposure to a wide variety of environmental stress (Hayward and-Karlsson (2021)

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Case study 2: How are emerging economies building a holistic climate resilience – **focus on Indonesia**

Extreme climate events and disasters are negatively influencing overall life satisfaction in the country.

The cascading risks from disaster events such as landslides and the destruction it renders are very sudden.

People explain their experiences by comparing the response with an illusory quality such as a “nightmare” and unreal “didn’t want to believe” (Rahman, et al., 2022).

Survivors report feelings of extreme loss, hopelessness, and “deep, deep sorrow”, pain and anguish compounded by disbelief and shock (Burrows et al., 2021).

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Many affected individuals by landslides described the abrupt and unexpected loss of members of their community, even those they had spoken with “just that morning” (Burrows et al., 2021).

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Climate disasters in Indonesia do not significantly affect happiness, but they negatively affect life satisfaction substantially (Rahman, et al., 2022).

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“When the Chips are Down, People Come out and Help”: This represents the Canadian community Responses to Flooding (Woodhall-Melnik and Grogan, 2019).

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Case Study 3: Local and Indigenous Communities in **Canada** responding to climate- induced mental health concerns

- The impact of the 2018 St. John River flood on the mental health and well-being of communities that experienced residential damage and/or displacement was examined by Woodhall-Melnik and Grogan (2019).
- **The study pointed out that:**
 - ✓ The post-disaster mental health conditions and the supposed support needs show that people who experienced the loss of a house/dwelling or were displacement due to flooding have had negative mental health impacts during and post-event with typical responses such as exhaustion, and stress, anxiety, worry, and feeling of uncertainty. The residents described the fear and isolation as they experienced flood events.
 - ✓ While the larger body of literature in this context reflects that people and community show solidarity in the setting of crisis, in this case, some people felt guilty as they could not participate in the community response and help their community members/neighbours while trying to save their own houses.
 - ✓ A point that talks to the community health concept, people are thankful for the support received- through community engagement and that proved to be a positive experience w.r.t mental health in a post-disaster setting.

Gaps and Needs



Overall, the services and resource access by people and communities are often hampered by economic and political inequalities.

In many settings/scenarios when disasters happen, the response measures are mainly focused on relief supplies, water, and sanitation needs, and emergency trauma treatment kits, however, mental health care is a relatively under reflected dimension in existing post-disaster institutional measures, response systems, and disaster risk management strategies.

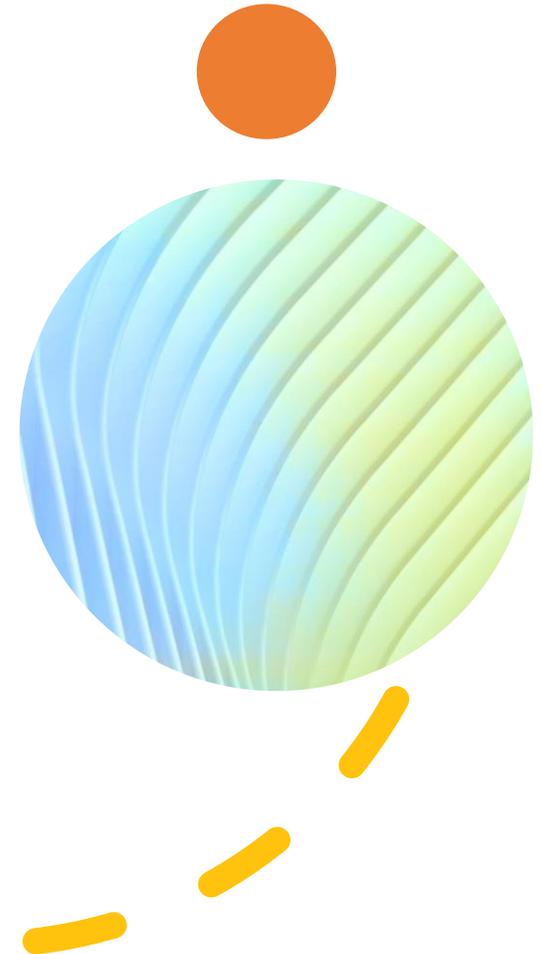
It is increasingly noted that structures, instruments, and institutions to address the psychosocial impact of disasters, in developed, emerging, and developing economies lack proper facilities, experts, and are often viewed with underlying stigma, when framed in the mental health context, this gap extends the suffering of individuals, households, citizens and communities, and obstructs their decision to access support, if such is available.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There was a similarity between those who experience residential damage or displacement due to flooding experience negative impacts on mental health both during and following flooding whether in developing or developed countries as well as relying on government intervention.

However, the lack of appropriate services, professionals, and overarching stigma connected to mental health increased the suffering of those afflicted by natural disasters in underserved settings such as in Bangladesh, while the impacted individuals by floods in Canada, feeling connected to their communities, grateful and thankful for the support and help they received.

The government and NGOs had no specific action plans and initiatives to address these issues and support the mental health of affected population. There was a visible gap in finding effective ways to provide affected people with the required mental health & psycho-social services (MHPSS).



Conclusion and Recommendations

Accordingly;

- As communities continue to respond to disasters, it is important that we test coping frameworks to learn how practitioners, responders, and academics can intervene and provide support to persons who are displaced or experience significant damage to their homes.

- Future research on climate change-mental health nexus should aim for aggregation of rigorous and methodological approaches and sound evidence and solutions to address mental health implications of climate change/disaster events through therapies, policy support, and boosting the community health agenda.

- Individuals, communities, and health systems require immediate action to safeguard their mental health and enhance their resilience to fast climate change.

- Climate-specific mental health outcomes training and policy action may help build resilience and enable health systems to improve individual and community mental health.





Thank you
for your attention