

Charting A Path Towards Understanding and Mitigating the Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change: An Introduction to the Inaugural Issue of the Journal of Mental Health and Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

The inaugural issue of the Journal of Mental Health and Climate Change aims to illuminate the complex interplay between climate change and mental health. This issue consolidates research and insights into four principal themes: (1) the need for integrative paradigms in understanding climate-mental health relationships, (2) the exploration of mechanisms for motivation and coping with climate-induced distress, (3) the importance of social connectivity and resilience in mitigating mental health impacts, and (4) the need for equitable responses for key populations. The articles collectively call for a holistic approach that merges socio-cultural, psychological, and environmental perspectives. The issue identifies youth and other marginalized communities as both vulnerable groups and agents of change. It serves as an invitation for further interdisciplinary research and actionable solutions in this pressing public health arena.

Keywords: *Climate change; Mental health*

EDITORIAL

It is a profound honor to introduce the inaugural issue of the Journal of Mental Health and Climate Change. The range of articles presented in this issue exemplifies the multidimensional complexity inherent in the intersection of climate change and our mental, emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and psychological health. We launched this journal to encourage a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of mental health and climate change and emphasize the urgency of this work. The studies

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included here highlight success on this front. Indeed, the contributions to this issue present key perspectives, empirical findings, and innovative intervention strategies. We extend our deepest gratitude to the contributing authors for laying the foundational groundwork of this journal, and acknowledge that much more remains to be discovered and examined.

We were impressed by the messages of these articles. Four key themes stood out to us: (1) the need for interdisciplinary paradigms to understand and address climate-mental health relationships, (2) exploration of key mechanisms driving the association between mental health and climate change, (3) the central importance of connection, community, and resilience to addressing the mental health impacts of climate change, and (4) the pressing need to adopt an equitable climate justice response to reduce or eliminate inequities related to climate change. We discuss each of these four themes in greater depth below:

First, there is a clear need for an interdisciplinary response to address the mental health effects of climate change. **Henley (2023)** emphasises this point noting that an iterative study of causal mechanisms requires an integrated exploration of socio-cultural and psychological factors. This sentiment is echoed by **Joshi et al. (2023)**, who engages Fundamental Cause Theory to elucidate how socio-economic status and mental well-being intersect with climate vulnerabilities. These works signal a departure from conventional siloed perspectives and advocate for frameworks that synthesize socio-cultural, psychological, and environmental determinants. In both instances, the authors call for greater rigor and theoretically informed empirical work to understand the climate crisis. We agree that such work is needed and are confident that, in time, this journal will be a venue in which it is shared.

Second, the studies included in this issue suggest that various psychosocial constructs can function as both drivers for climate action and coping mechanisms for climate-induced stress. **Rhodes et al. (2023)**, for example, develop the Meaning, Awareness, Purpose (MAP) model that focuses on motivational theories for climate action and well-being, while **Syropoulos et al. (2023)**, introduce the notion of 'personal legacy motivation' and 'generativity' as potential psychological scaffolds for climate resilience. Both underscore the need for strategies that link external climate challenges with internal psychological resources, presenting a bidirectional relationship between climate activism and mental health.

Third, multiple articles explore the role of social and relational factors in either exacerbating or mitigating climate-related mental health issues. **Card et al. (2023)**, investigate the association between social disconnection and climate anxiety, suggesting that community-building may serve as an antidote. **Barraclough et al. (2023)** and **Klassen et al. (2023)** delve into youth perspectives, emphasizing that community-centered rituals and educational support can be vital for navigating complex climate emotions.

Fourth, the articles converge on the idea that young people and other marginalized communities are particularly vulnerable to climate impacts and also pivotal agents in forging solutions. For example, **Takaro's (2023)** reflections articulate how climate action, including non-violent civil disobedience, can serve as therapeutic avenues to mitigate mental burdens associated with climate inaction and how Indigenous peoples are uniquely positioned to protect their lands and communities—particularly when appropriately supported by allies and governments.

In sum, these articles collectively argue for a radical reorientation in how we conceptualize, study, address the intersections between mental health and climate change and contribute to the frontline of responding to the multiple mental health impacts of the changing climate. They emphasize the need for integrative frameworks, actionable coping and motivational mechanisms, a renewed focus on social and communal resilience, and the importance of supporting equitable responses to climate

change. Yet, despite these insights, we recognize that there is much yet to be discovered and understood. As such, this issue stands as an invitation for further scholarship and practical application in this critical area.

We hope that these contributions will inspire continued academic inquiry and serve as catalytic agents for transformative change. Thank you to our esteemed authors and readers for embarking on this scholarly journey with us.

DECLARATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the authors who submitted to this issue for their valuable contributions.

FUNDING

None.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

Not applicable.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare they have no competing interests.

PUBLICATION DATES

Received: Not Applicable

Accepted: Not Applicable

Published: 01 October 2023