

Symposium | Global Mental Health : [Symposium 79] Symposium on Climate change and mental health

 Sun. Sep 28, 2025 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM JST | Sun. Sep 28, 2025 12:00 AM - 1:30 AM UTC  Session Room 2 (Main Hall B)

[Symposium 79] Symposium on Climate change and mental health

Moderator: Meryam Schouler-Ocak (Charité University), Tsuyoshi Akiyama (World Federation for Mental Health)

[SY-79]

Symposium on Climate change and mental health

Misari Oe¹, Ruta Karaliuniene², Susanna Every-Palmer³, Sefanaia Qaloewai⁴, Meryam Schouler-Ocak⁵ (1. Kurume University (Japan), 2. Rheinmosel Fachklinik, Academic Hospital at Mainz University (Germany), 3. University of Otago (New Zealand), 4. Department of Mental Health, Child Care and Adult Medicine, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Fiji National University (Japan), 5. Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin (Germany))

[SY-79-01]

Awareness of Climate Change Issues in Japan, a Country Frequently Affected by Natural Disasters

*Misari Oe¹ (1. Kurume University (Japan))

[SY-79-02]

Climate change and mental health in Australasia and the Pacific

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[SY-79-03]

Climate change and mental health in forcibly displaced people

*Meryam Schouler-Ocak¹ (1. Psychiatric University Clinic of Charité at St. Hedwig Hospital (Germany))

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The consequences of climate change are stress factors for mental health. Therefore, as global warming progresses, an increasing incidence and prevalence of mental illness is to be expected. Thus, climate change is likely to have a significant impact on population mental health. Vulnerable groups, such as those with pre-existing mental illness, children, and adolescents, need to be protected. People affected by climate change and involuntary migration are significantly more mentally stressed than the general population. Furthermore, people in low income countries and minority communities are particularly vulnerable to experience the most severe impacts now and in the coming decades. While most climate-related events cannot be completely avoided, many of the health risks could be prevented through building climate-resilient health systems with improved risk reduction, preparation, response, and recovery. Conducting vulnerability and adaptation assessments and developing health system adaptation plans can identify priority actions to effectively reduce risks, such as disaster risk management and more resilient infrastructure. Moreover, climate change and mental health represents a rapidly growing area of research, which needs to accelerate and broaden in scope to respond with evidence-based mitigation and adaptation strategies, e.g. resilience through community solidarity and cultural practices. To safeguard mental health, it is vital to integrate psychological support into climate adaptation strategies. In this context, psychiatrists have a role to play in preparing for, and developing mitigation strategies against such effects. At the same time, there is a need for further systematic research on the mechanisms of action and effects of climate change on mental function.

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[SY-79-01] Awareness of Climate Change Issues in Japan, a Country Frequently Affected by Natural Disasters

*Misari Oe¹ (1. Kurume University (Japan))

Keywords : impermanence、 climate change、 awareness

Located in the Pacific Rim, Japan is a country prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and typhoons. Data shows that 17.9% of earthquakes with a magnitude of 6.0 or higher occur in Japan. On the other hand, there are survey results showing that Japan is not at high risk from climate change related to global warming. In a 2023 public opinion poll on climate change, the percentage of people who are aware of the issue of climate change is high, and they are also aware of the heat in summer, but the perception that climate change affects flooding, etc. is not particularly high, especially among young people. Why is there not a high level of awareness of the effects of climate change in Japan? I will put forward three hypotheses: 1) There have been many natural disasters in the past and there is a sense that climate change is one of them, 2) There is a sense of the impermanence of nature that nothing can overcome (Hōjōki (1212)), 3) There is a mindset that if it can be scientifically proven, it can be dealt with. A sense of the impermanence of life may be a characteristic of the Japanese people, but it has both pros and cons, and in terms of preventing future disasters, it is a disadvantage.

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[SY-79-02] Climate change and mental health in Australasia and the Pacific

*Susanna Every-Palmer^{1,2}, Sefanaia Qaloewai³ (1. Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago, Wellington (New Zealand), 2. Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand (New Zealand), 3. Department of Mental Health, Child Care and Adult Medicine, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Fiji National University. (Fiji))

Keywords : Climate change、Mental health、Anxiety

Background: Anthropogenic warming of the climate system is recognized as “unequivocal” and considered by the Lancet/UCL Commission to be “the greatest threat to human health of the 21st century.” Many of the postulated health impacts of climate change involve mental health, and these are likely to be great.

Objectives: To consider (i) the likely impact of climate change on population mental health based in Australasia and the Pacific (ii) the role of psychiatry in climate change mitigation.

Methods: Review of extant literature on climate change and mental health.

Findings: We present the evidence around the predicted psychiatric morbidity and mortality associated with climate change, with an emphasis on Australasian and Pacific Island data. We show that the effects of climate change are already starting to impact on the psycho-social, economic and cultural determinants of mental health, with these effects likely to increase exponentially over time. For low low-lying and island communities, a key stressor is the existential threat posed by rising sea levels. Many Pacific Islanders face the prospect of losing their homes, ancestral lands, and cultural heritage. This displacement leads to ‘climate anxiety’ especially amongst younger people. Additionally, the degradation of natural resources essential for livelihoods—such as fishing and agriculture—creates economic instability. This financial strain not only fuels anxiety but also undermines traditional support networks.

Conclusions: Climate change is likely to have a significant impact on population mental health. While Pacific Peoples demonstrate remarkable resilience through community solidarity and cultural practices, to safeguard mental health, it is vital to integrate psychological support into climate adaptation strategies. Psychiatrists, both individually and collectively, have a role to play in preparing for, and developing mitigation strategies against such effects.

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[SY-79-03] Climate change and mental health in forcibly displaced people

*Meryam Schouler-Ocak¹ (1. Psychiatric University Clinic of Charité at St. Hedwig Hospital (Germany))

Climate change is an increasingly powerful driver of forced displacement, with millions uprooted by rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity. Beyond physical harm, climate-related displacement has profound mental health consequences. Displaced people often experience elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, alongside feelings of grief, uncertainty, and loss of identity. At the same time, their mental health needs frequently remain unmet. Access to appropriate care is hindered by structural barriers such as limited health infrastructure, lack of culturally sensitive services, language obstacles, stigma, and precarious legal status. These challenges not only exacerbate psychological distress but also undermine resilience and long-term recovery. This presentation will focus on the intersection of climate change, forced migration, and mental health, with particular attention to unmet needs, healthcare access, and barriers to care. It will call for integrating comprehensive, accessible, and context-sensitive mental health support into climate adaptation and displacement policies.