Climate Change Impacts on Spiritual/Psychological/Psychosocial Resilience

Building Personal and Psychosocial Resilience to Climate Change
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Psychological Egoism

Climate Summit

What if it's a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?

- Energy Independence
- Preserve Rainforests
- Sustainability
- Green Jobs
- Livable Cities
- Renewables
- Clean Water, Air
- Healthy Children
- etc. etc.

Humans are always motivated by self-interest
What Is the Problem?

• Left unaddressed, the harmful human mental health and psychosocial reactions to climate change are likely to be as bad as the physical impacts.

• Post-trauma treatment is important, but too late, deals mostly with acute traumas, and response systems will never be robust enough.
Climate Change Influences on Health

Direct effects
- Storms
- Drought
- Flood
- Heatwave

Indirect effects
- Water quality
- Air pollution
- Land use change
- Ecological change

Social dynamics
- Age and gender
- Health status
- Socioeconomic status
- Social capital
- Public health infrastructure
- Mobility and conflict status

Health impact
- Mental illness
- Malnutrition
- Allergies
- Cardiovascular diseases
- Infectious diseases
- Injuries
- Respiratory diseases
- Poisoning
Psychological Considerations in Response to Climate Change

A key characteristic of climate change risks is that they are psychologically distant for many people.¹

• Temporal, social and geographic and uncertain.
  • Lower Psychological distance – higher concern.
  • Various strategies to increase positive actions to climate change by reducing the distance of reality to peoples lives to become more real, local, relevant and immediate via risk communication strategies.
    • Issues related to skepticism and uncertainty. – future events not impacting them directly now.
    • Temporal issues, no direct impact in locale (more distant geographic concerns) and people, future considerations.
    • Skepticism enhances unsustainable actions and cognitive dissonance (i.e., CC is too complex and uncertain to be understood).
    • Uncertainty transfer may occur where a change or greater prominence given to one aspect of CC could lead to similar changes in other aspects of certainty, uncertainty and skepticism when the risk is not well defined and communicated,
  • Relevancy of CC to people in their geographic locales is essential to elicit sustainable behavioral change and preparation.

¹ Spence, Poortinga, Butler and Pigeon (2011) and Pidgeon. Schools of Psychology at University of Nottingham, Cardiff University.
Psychological effects of climate change are likely to be gradual and cumulative.

The connection to climate change may not always be clear to those affected.

Manifests as two types of stress:
- Discrete
- Continuous
Perception of climate decline are causing rising levels of secondary trauma:
- Moral distress
- Compassion fatigue
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness

Research shows that 25-50% of the people impacted by extreme weather events experience:
- Anxiety
- Depression
- PTSD
- Increased suicides
- Family dysfunction

Experimental and correlational research shows a casual relationship between rising heat and:
- Increased interpersonal aggression
- Assault
- Rape
- Increased abuse of alcohol and drugs

Climate Change produces Toxic Stresses that can include distress of coping with:
- Long Term Heat waves and droughts
- Emerging and reemerging infectious disease
- Job loss
- Disruption of social networks

Perception of climate decline are causing rising levels of secondary trauma:
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- Compassion fatigue
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness

Increasing Levels of Chronic Toxic Stresses

Psychological Effects of Extreme Weather Events

Psychological Effects of Rising Temperatures

Mounting Levels of Vicarious or Secondary Trauma
Vulnerability

Degree to which individuals and systems are susceptible to, or unable to cope with, the adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Integration of:

Regional
Economic
Social
Infrastructure & Services

Overall Vulnerability

Need to identify and address the vulnerability components individually and together for specific communities.
Vulnerable Populations

- Chronic medical conditions including mentally ill, clients with special needs
- Socially isolated
- Costal Communities
- Poor & vulnerable communities
- Subsistence Farmers
- Required medical treatments (Dialysis)
- Outdoor workers
- Very young children
- Elderly suffer the greatest effects of heat-waves (impact on mortality greater in women)
Children may understand and experience the threat of climate change very different than their parents or grandparents.

Children so troubled by the state of the world that they honestly believe it will come to an end before they get older.

The psychological impact on children has been compared to the impact on children worried about nuclear arms during the Cold War Era.

Children are more emotionally vulnerable to increased family violence and the occurrence of natural disasters.
The psychological impacts of climate change and extreme weather

Climate ↔ Weather

Changing and contested views of climate change
- Media images and social narratives
- Perceptions of risk and vulnerability

Mediators

Direct & Acute Impacts
- Extreme Weather
- Heat, Drought, Floods
- Landscape Changes
- Impaired Place Attachment
- Mental Health Issues
- Psychological Trauma

Psychosocial Impacts
- Chronic Disaster Adjustment
- Heat-related Violence
- Intergroup Conflict
- Displacement & Migration
- Reactions to Impact Disparities
- Decreased Access to Thriving Ecosystems

Indirect Impacts
- Anxiety & Worry
- Depression & Despair
- Grief & Mourning
- Unconscious Defenses
- Numbness & Apathy
- Vicarious Psychological Trauma

Moderators
- Sources of Vulnerability & Resilience, Time Scale

Source: Doherty and Clayton The psychological impacts of climate change AP 2011
## Disasters and Mental Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Vulnerabilities:</th>
<th>Community Vulnerabilities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Proximity to the disaster</td>
<td>• Outdated emergency plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low socioeconomic status</td>
<td>• Shortage of mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low social connectedness</td>
<td>resources at time of event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Existing mental illness</td>
<td>• Repeated exposure to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disaster or crisis</td>
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</table>
### Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change

#### Personal reactions to the awareness of climate change include:

- Sadness
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Helpless and Hopeless
- Anger

#### After the Disaster: Mental Health Outcomes are Cumulative:

- Displacement
- Family Illness or Death
- Fractured Social Networks
- PTSD
- Lack of Housing
- Loss of Control Over Life/Confusion
- Loss of Employment
- Loss of Personal Possessions

#### Living in Areas Prone to Disaster:

- Cumulative Mental Health Impacts are Associated with the Repeated Exposure to Natural Disaster
  
  Ongoing uncertainty, anxiety, dread can cause a build up of stress before disaster occurs
Climate Change and Religious Affiliation: What is the Message?

Climate Change Concern Index by Religious Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Very Concerned</th>
<th>Somewhat Concerned</th>
<th>Somewhat Unconcerned</th>
<th>Very Unconcerned</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td>White Catholic</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PRRI/AAR, Religion, Values, and Climate Change Survey, November 2014
Climate Change: Health Effects Continuum

Medical and Physical Health
- Changes in fitness and activity level
- Heat-related illness
- Allergies
- Increased exposure to waterborne and vector-borne illness

Mental Health
- Stress, anxiety, depression, grief, sense of loss
- Strains on social relationships
- Substance abuse
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

Community Health
- Increased interpersonal aggression
- Increased violence and crime
- Increased social instability
- Decreased community cohesion
Psychological/Psychosocial Impacts of Climate Change

Please welcome our newest member, the Dungeness Crab.

Global Warming Group Counseling

Jillian Mara - 2015
Homeland Security

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