

Presenter



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Climate change and mental health:

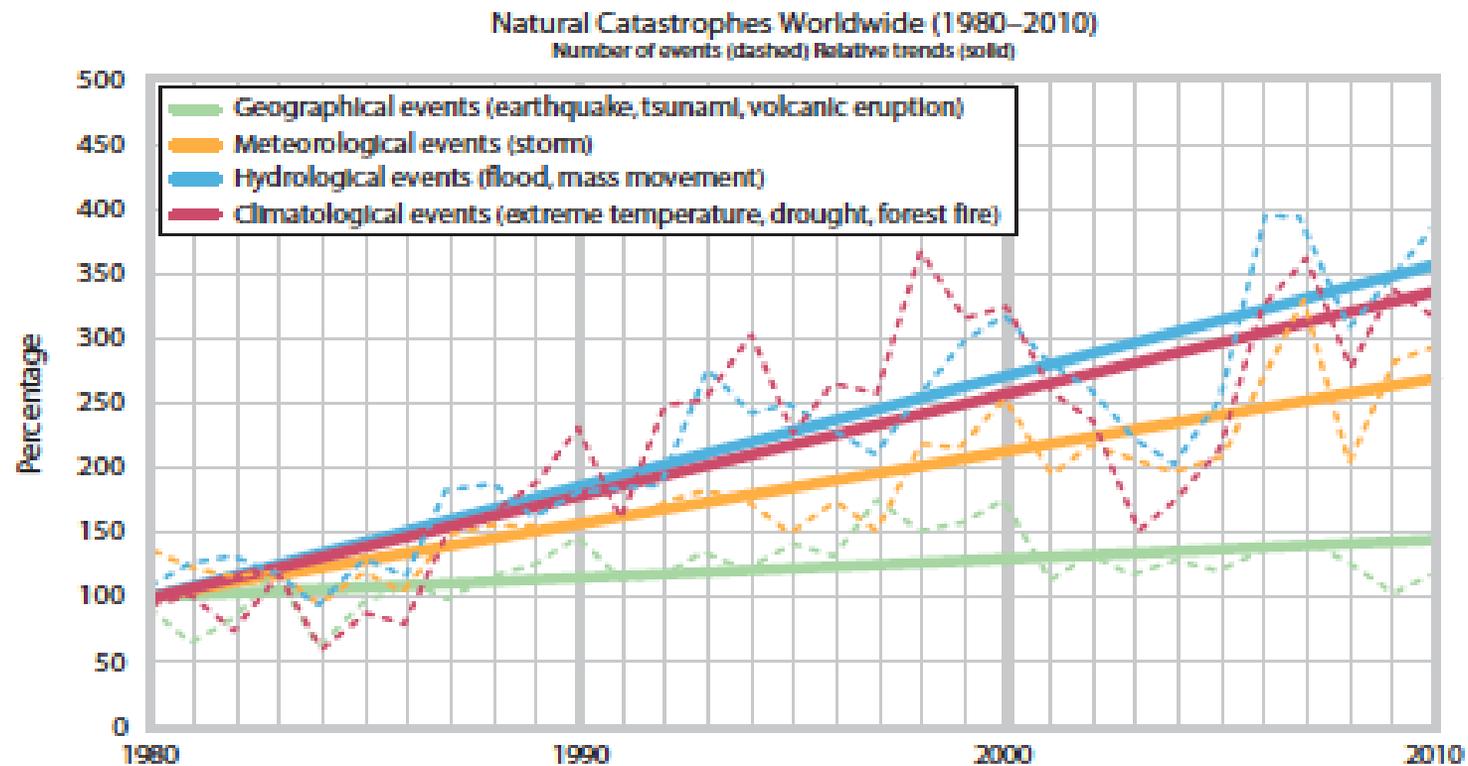
Psychosocial impacts

Susan Clayton, the College of Wooster
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How can climate change affect psychological well-being?

- + Acute impacts from natural disasters
- + Gradual impacts from changing temperatures, sea levels, and patterns of precipitation
- + Indirect impacts on the ways we think about ourselves, each other, and the world

Natural disasters are on the rise



Data from D. Guha-Sapir, R. Below, Ph. Hoyois - EM-DAT: International Disaster Database - www.emdat.be - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium.

Resulting trauma

- + Mental health problems
 - + PTSD
 - + Depression, anxiety
 - + Substance abuse
 - + Suicide and suicidal ideation
- + These effects may be prolonged
- + They may not be prioritized by emergency responders

E.g., Hurricane Katrina

- + 49% developed an anxiety or mood disorder
- + 1 in 6 developed posttraumatic stress disorder
- + Suicide and suicidal ideation more than doubled



Community impacts

- + Domestic abuse
- + Violence and conflict
- + Stress of indirect impacts
 - + Economic insecurity
 - + Infrastructure problems

Vulnerable populations

- + Women, children, the elderly, members of marginalized communities
 - + The elderly are particularly vulnerable to heat
- + Those already suffering from mental illness
 - + Mental health care is often disrupted by disasters
 - + Psychotropic medication is a risk factor for heat-related death

Inequality itself is a threat to mental health

+ Risk factors:

- Reduced personal autonomy
- Negative self-perception
- Stress
- Social isolation
- Insecurity

Gradual climate changes



Effects on physical health

- + Infectious diseases, heat waves, ground-level ozone, allergies, nutritional deficiencies

Increased levels of stress

+ Due to

- economic difficulties
- damage to physical and social infrastructure
- environmental degradation

+ *All possibly requiring migration*

Migration presents a health risk

- Immigrants are more likely to develop psychosis
 - A German report recently described levels approaching 50% for PTSD and depression
- Mental health is worse even among second-generation immigrants
 - showing that it is the social context post-migration and not the pre-migration factors that matter.
- Unlike survivors of discrete traumas, refugees experience stressors that accumulate over the pre-flight, flight, exile, and repatriation periods.

Indirect consequences

- + Perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world we live in



Thinking about ourselves

- + Diminished sense of *self*
 - + loss of occupation
 - + loss of lifestyle and culture
 - + loss of autonomy

Relating to others

- + Stresses on social *relationships*
- + Diminished opportunities for social interaction
- + Disrupted social bonds

Thinking about the world

- + “Our gardens have had to die because our house dam has been dry.... It’s very depressing because a garden is an oasis...that’s all gone, so you’ve got dust at your back door” (Australian farmer coping with drought)
- + “You think your house is permanent... When you lose your house and everything you own, you learn everything is temporary” (Hurricane Sandy survivor)



Solastalgia

Loss of *place* and disruption of place bonds

Loss of solace from valued places

Loss of security

Promoting resilience

- Most people do recover from trauma
- Post-traumatic growth is possible
- Becoming actively involved in addressing climate change can help people to cope with the stress of worrying about it
- + *"We learned first-hand that the best way for us to heal from our devastation and loss was to help others recover." (Hurricane Sandy survivor)*

Factors associated with resilience

- + Practical support
- + Community ties
- + Sense of optimism
- + Active coping strategies



Components of resilience

- *Readiness*
 - Educate people about what to expect and how to adapt
- *Monitoring*
 - Conduct a vulnerability assessment
- *Cooperation*
 - Establish the social infrastructure to withstand changes and encourage adaptation

Acting on climate change can protect health

- Burning fossil fuels emits pollution that is associated with 4 of the 5 leading causes of death in the U.S.
- Coal-burning plants are also the leading cause of mercury pollution, which affects the brain
- 3.2 million people a year die from factors related to physical inactivity. Choosing to walk or cycle instead of driving can have strong positive health impacts.
- Eating less meat, especially red meat, would reduce risk of heart disease and death while reducing carbon emissions.

Health is not just the absence of disease

- + Climate change presents an *opportunity*
 - to examine the social and physical infrastructure of our communities
 - to consider opportunities of enhancing well-being

