
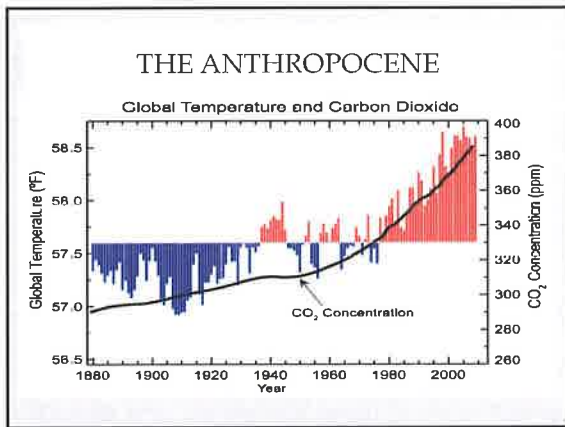


MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE
DISRUPTION: WHAT CAN WE
EXPECT? WHAT CAN WE DO?

MICHAEL FORSTER
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI







SESSION OVERVIEW

- Direct effects of mounting environmental disruption will fall most heavily on the most vulnerable – the poor, the aged and disabled, migrants and refugees, people of color, the homeless and the mentally ill. Moreover, the eco-crisis will certainly arise in a context of increasingly severe stressors: income inequality, severe shrinkage of material, social and mental health service supports, and a range of highly disruptive political-economic and ideological conflicts. It is imperative that mental health professionals educate themselves in the anticipated impacts of ecological disruption and prepare to struggle strenuously on behalf of marginalized populations most affected.

OBJECTIVES

- Participants will be able to identify major health and mental health related impacts of climate disruption.
- Participants will be able to recognize the intersection of political pressures and mental health stress associated with climate disruption.
- Participants will be able to articulate three mental health practitioner responses to stress related to climate disruption.

SOME DEFINITIONS



Weather — conditions of the atmosphere over a short period of time

Climate — conditions of the atmosphere over long periods of time (30 year standard averaging period)

Mental health — a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community



CHALLENGE OF "GETTING" CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Understanding climate change is difficult:

- Hazards are experienced differently based on location, population, and season
- Many effects of climate are unknown and uncertain
- Impacts cannot be identified by personal experience alone
- We rely on scientific models and expert judgment, often through the lens of mass media

CLIMATE CHANGE DENIER-IN-CHIEF



KING DONALD COMMANDS THE OCEAN to BACK OFF

POST-HARVEY HOUSTON



POST-IRMA FLORIDA



POST-MARIA PUERTO RICO



AND THEN THERE ARE WILDFIRES...



GLOBAL ECO-THREATS

- Ecological degradation
 - Emissions and chemical poisoning
 - Aridification and soil depletion
 - Water and depletion
 - Deforestation
 - Rising sea levels (melting ice caps and glaciers) and coastal erosion
 - Ocean acidification
 - Biological timing disruption
 - Likelihood of irreversible "tipping points" (e.g. glacial melting prompts very rapid temp rise)

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

- If anything was ever a "game-changer," this is it
- 'EAARTH' – the planet is *already* different
- No progress toward curtailing carbon emissions; undiminished commitment to fossil fuels
- Population explosion (3 billion in '60; 6 billion in 2000; headed for 9 billion in 2050)
- Deforestation and disappearing habitat
- Biodiversity loss, species death; 6th "great extinction"
- Human threats abound:
 - Heat crises; chemical poisoning; shifting disease vectors; soil, water and other resource depletion; food production disruption; more frequent and intense 'natural disasters'; cascading/reinforcing and amplifying effects
- Denial is not a (viable) option

CDC GRAPHIC

The infographic is a circular diagram with a central hub labeled 'Climate Change' and 'Human Health'. It is divided into several colored segments, each representing a different impact area:

- Heat:** Heat-related illness and death; cardiovascular failure.
- Air Pollution:** Asthma; cardiovascular disease; Malaria, dengue, meningitis, pertussis, influenza, Lyme disease, Chikungunya, West Nile virus.
- Water and Food:** Water and food supply impacts; Malnutrition, diarrheal disease; Changes in vector biology; emerging infectious diseases, zoonotic pathogens, harmful algal blooms.
- Extreme Heat:** Forced migration, displacement; mental health impacts.
- Extreme Heat (continued):** Heat-related illness and death; cardiovascular failure.
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MAJOR MISSISSIPPI CLIMATE CHANGE HEALTH THREATS

- There is significant vulnerability to:
 - Extreme heat
 - Infectious diseases
 - Allergens and air pollution
 - Drought
 - Flooding
 - Hurricanes and tornados, other extreme weather
 - Sea level rise
 - Water supply depletion



PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE



- * Psychological effects of climate change are likely to be gradual and cumulative, as well as at times acute
- * The connection to climate change may not always be clear to those most affected, extending and exacerbating stress
- * Stress manifests both as discrete and continuous, in turn fueling other more defined psychological effects

GENERAL REACTIONS TO THE REALITY
OF CLIMATE CHANGE

- Fear
- Sadness
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness/despair
- Anger
- Anticipatory grief

MAJOR ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH
IMPACTS

- Trauma and shock; PTSD
- Compounded stress and anxiety
- Substance abuse
- Depression
- Strained social relationships
- Related direct physical health impacts can include memory loss, sleep disorders, immune system suppression, disrupted digestion

KATRINA EXAMPLE


- Research indicates that among a sample of people living in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005:
 - Suicide and suicidal ideation more than doubled;
 - 1 in 6 people met diagnostic criteria for PTSD
 - 49 percent developed an anxiety or mood disorder such as depression

MAJOR CHRONIC MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS

- Higher rates of aggression and violence
- More mental health emergencies
- Increased sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and fatalism
- Intense feelings of personal loss – treasured objects, relationships, experience of place, occupational identity, etc.
- Declining sense of community well-being and cohesion; fractured solidarity

IMPACT ON SENSE OF PLACE

- Places are "nested collections of human experience, locations with which people and communities have particular affective relationships."
- Ties to a place are a part of identity
 - Familiarity
 - attachment
- Climate is fundamental to an individual's understanding of place



PLACE, CONT.

- Place is a key determinant of exposure to the impacts of climate change
- Climate change may alter look and feel of the defining attributes a place
- "Solastalgia": palpable sense of dislocation and loss felt when changes to a local environment are perceived as harmful
- The loss of a connection to place and sense of belonging in that place undermines mental health
- Attachment to place may be so strong that it can be a primary driver of inaction

SO, WHY ARE WE HERE?
ECONOMIC CRISIS

- Wall Street vs. Main Street (2008 meltdown; wow!)
- Globalized finance and unrestricted capital movement
- Deregulation, anti-tax mania, and "small government" ideology ("neoliberalism")
- Corporate concentration and domination
- Inequality of both opportunity and result
- Structural, long-term unemployment; off-shoring of jobs
- Falling wages, disappearing middle class
- Consumer debt explosion, government/military debt
- Austerity – hello "Tea Party," goodbye "safety net"

POLITICAL CRISIS

- Politicians bought and paid for by big donors
- 'Special interest' lobbyist glut
- 'Too big to fail' bank looting of the U.S. treasury
- Legitimation of money dominance – *Citizens United*
- Ideological and regulatory capture
- Compressed political spectrum (no "left" left)
- 'Death of the liberal class' – unions, journalism, education, religion and the arts without critical voice
- Political illiteracy and citizen disengagement
- Propaganda and repression
- Plutocracy behind a façade of democracy

THREATS TO CIVIL COMMUNITY
(THINK CHARLOTTSVILLE)

- Social and political "warping"
 - Forced migration, refugee explosion
 - Conflict over scarce resources
 - General erosion of social capital and fraying of social compact
 - Overtaxed public infrastructure and services
 - Strengthened "fringe" elements
 - International conflict, war and terror
 - Authoritarian temptation ("all-right")

WHAT WOULD BREAKDOWN
LOOK LIKE?

- Not an apocalypse, but an "unraveling"
- Economic/financial disruption
 - Commodity scarcity, price instability, permanent underclass, widespread hardship
- Political impotence of system critics
- Localization – prosperous enclaves v. "sacrifice zones" (e.g. Camden, Pine Ridge, West Virginia)
- Shredding of the "safety net"
- Fear, scapegoating, sharpened conflict, and the potential for violence
- "Crisis cults," surging "survivalists" and "preppers," and internal terror
- "Security state" militarization, curtailment of civil liberties, and the potential for fascist "democracy"

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Overall goal – Build resilience through preparation, mitigation, intervention, recovery
- Tips to support individuals
- Tips to support communities
- What individuals can do
- What mental health professionals can do

SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS

- Build belief in one's own resilience
- Foster optimism
- Cultivate active coping and self-regulation skills
- Maintain practices that provide a sense of meaning
- Promote connectedness to family, culture, and community
- Become civically engaged

SUPPORT COMMUNITIES

- Assess and strengthen community mental health infrastructure
- Reduce disparities and pay attention to populations of concern
- Engage and train community members in how to respond
- Ensure adequacy and equitable distribution of resources
- Clearly communicate the realities of climate change impacts
- Attend to macro as well as micro issues

PERSONAL ACTION

- Make and practice household emergency plans
- Prepare for adversity and adaptation through increased awareness and mindset training
- Care for oneself through healthy habits, routines, and sustaining rituals
- Build strong social networks with family, friends, neighbors; cultivate individual and group collaboration, sharing, reciprocity, and solidarity
- Act politically to address policy

PROFESSIONAL ACTION

- Become a climate-literate mental health professional; resist the pull of denialism and phony optimism
- Engage fellow health and mental health professionals
- Be a vocal model leader in your home community
- Support local, state, national, and international efforts to address the existential challenge of climate change
- Advocate and organize for enhancing our capacity to respond to health and mental health impacts of climate change



ACTION FOR MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS NOW?

- Acknowledge known and projected threats to health and well-being, locally and globally
- Plan to prevent, mitigate, and adapt where possible
 - Advocate strongly for planning and public infrastructure
- Educate the professions, educate the public
- Watch and be prepared to intervene
 - Sharpen relevant skills, especially community organizing, conflict resolution, planning
 - Form alliances with progressive groups
- Act to address root causes
 - "Keep it in the ground"; "blockadia" actions
 - Embrace alternatives to the current extractive system

ESSENTIAL HUMAN SERVICE WORK SKILLS

- Reality-based assessment, evaluation
- Multi-systemic, "big picture" planning
- Communication
- Organizing and administration
- Critical analysis/questioning/reframing
- Direct treatment of individuals, families, groups, communities
- Crisis intervention
- Conflict resolution
- Advocacy
- Use of self (engagement, "skin in the game")
