

Climate change and its impact on mental health of children and adolescents

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Climate change is an increasingly urgent global issue with widespread implications for public health, particularly among vulnerable populations such as children and adolescents. As environmental shifts result in more extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and disruptions to ecosystems, the mental health of young people is at risk. Children and adolescents are uniquely susceptible to the emotional and psychological stressors associated with climate change due to their developmental stage, limited coping mechanisms, and dependence on stable environments. Disasters like floods, wildfires, and hurricanes can lead to immediate trauma, displacement, and loss, while long-term environmental changes such as droughts and poor air quality may cause chronic stress and anxiety.

Research indicates that exposure to environmental threats can lead to a range of mental health outcomes in young people, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and behavioural problems. The fear of an uncertain future, coupled with witnessing or experiencing the impact of climate events, may heighten feelings of helplessness and existential distress. Furthermore, socio-economic inequalities exacerbate these mental health challenges, as children in disadvantaged communities often face greater exposure to climate-related risks and have fewer resources to mitigate the impact.

Given the critical nature of this issue, it is essential for mental health practitioners, policymakers, and educators to address the intersection of climate change and adolescent mental health. Comprehensive strategies that focus on building resilience, providing trauma-informed care, and fostering a sense of agency among young people are crucial. Promoting environmental literacy, supporting mental health services, and engaging youth in climate action can empower them to cope with the psychological toll of climate change while contributing to long-term solutions for the planet's future. Addressing this complex challenge is vital to safeguarding the mental well-being of future generations.