

Summary

Beyond Storms & Droughts: The Psychological Impacts of Climate Change

The *American Psychological Association*, the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, and the nonprofit organization *ecoAmerica* recently released a new report, **Beyond Storms & Droughts: The Psychological Impacts of Climate Change** on the impacts of climate change on Americans' health and psychological well-being. The two organizations produced the report to raise awareness about this new class of climate impacts, provide guidance to communities about how to prepare for and communicate about them, and catalyze future research on the issue.

Here are the report's main findings:

Climate change is already having, and will continue to have, significant impacts on Americans' health and psychological well-being as climate change accelerates (as per the 2014 National Climate Assessment).

Likely impacts include:

- **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** from experiencing major weather-related disasters;
- **distress, depression, and anxiety** from both experiencing major weather-related disasters and dealing with the aftermath of disasters;
- **hopelessness** from experiencing adverse effects of climate change or watching others experience them;
- **increases in violence, aggression, and crime** due to rising temperatures and other factors; and
- **strains on social relationships** attributable to the stress of relocating and adjusting to new environments.

Everyone will be affected by climate's psychological impacts, but children, women, and communities with fewer resources will be especially vulnerable.

- **Children** may be at higher risk for both a) exhibiting psychological symptoms like depression, clinginess, and aggression following weather-related disasters and b) having psychological symptoms persist.
- **Women** are especially prone to adverse psychological outcomes following disasters, including PTSD, and thus may be particularly impacted by the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters.
- **Communities with fewer resources** (e.g. communities with lower educational levels, outdated infrastructure, higher levels of poverty, etc.) may be more vulnerable to physical, and consequently, psychological impacts.

While the psychological impacts of climate change will be significant, communities and individuals can take action to prepare for them.

- **Strengthening existing social groups and networks** (like those associated with faith based organizations or neighborhoods) and involving the community in preparedness planning processes are some of the best ways to prepare for climate change's psychological impacts.
- **Taking steps to prepare for the psychological impacts can also bring other benefits**, like increasing community cohesion, improving health and well-being, and reducing disaster risk.
- **Communities can strengthen preparation for natural disasters and climate change by collaborating across organizations to integrate planning for mental health impacts into existing disaster preparation efforts.** Public health and health officials, emergency personnel, faith groups, climate-focused organizations, and other organizations can work together to help communities prepare and respond to these impacts.

To read and download the report, visit ecoamerica.org/research/#PsychImpacts