

The Mental Health Impact on People Displaced by Climate Change

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Issue: An increasing number of people around the world are being displaced by climate change–induced extreme weather events and chronic environmental changes, such as drought. By some estimates, more people are leaving their homes due to climate change–related weather events and environmental degradation than there are political refugees fleeing areas of conflict. This forced migration from their homelands and the associated loss of homestead and livelihood are associated with adverse mental health outcomes for these people. Persons displaced by climate change may experience anxiety and stress, as well as other mental health conditions, such as trauma, rooted in the secondary effects of both climate change and forced migration. The APA has previously expressed its concern that climate change poses a significant threat to mental health and noted that those suffering from mental illness are particularly vulnerable to its effects. The APA supports efforts to raise awareness about the role of climate change in forced displacement of communities and the associated adverse impact this displacement has on all individuals’ mental health.

APA Position:

Due to the mental health impact of being displaced by climate change, efforts are needed to identify at-risk individuals and communicate and coordinate strategies, such as access to mental health providers who practice culturally competent care and prioritize cultural humility. Funding should be allocated to research the impacts of climate displacement on mental health and to develop interventions to support affected communities and individuals.

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