

Preface

Climate change is one of the most significant global challenges facing us in this century and beyond. The work of this volume has been inspired and preceded by various efforts and events, which continue to pave the way for including mental health and psychosocial well-being aspects in the global discourse on climate change. Aspects of mental health and well-being are still largely missing from the global public health agenda, and climate change is no exception. We hope that this volume will contribute to encouraging others to consider multiple and complex effects on climate change on the most vulnerable groups and populations and to provide better-informed interventions and policies that are culturally informed and participatory.

This volume grew from different initiatives and events taking place at the United Nations and elsewhere around the topic of global climate change and civil society engagement. The 60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference at the United Nations in New York (September 5 to 7, 2007), had the theme “Climate Change: How it impacts us all.” This conference brought together United Nations agencies with various actors from different civil society organizations across the globe around the common goal of addressing the challenges of climate change. Conference participants included 1726 individuals representing over 500 nongovernmental organizations from more than 62 countries (DPI/NGO Drafting Committee, 2007). I participated in this conference as an NGO representative of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and Department of Public Information. I was fortunate to be able to contribute, along with other psychologists and stakeholders, to the drafting of the “60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference Declaration Climate Change Threats – An NGO Framework for Action” (DPI/NGO Drafting Committee, 2007). The declaration affirmed that “climate change is mainly anthropogenic and is one of the most serious threats to humanity and our environment” and recognized “significant psychological and emotional distress to individuals and communities” as one of the many impacts of climate change. The declaration called for working over a period of the next 12 months to elaborate on a “Framework for Action” that would recognize challenges and opportunities and propose NGO solutions to the threat of climate change. The framework discussion was going to “culminate in an internet-based

progress report to be submitted to the Secretary-General in one year,” with the goal of a more long-term dialogue, which would bring together a network of NGOs that might not otherwise typically collaborate by bridging the spectrum of NGO concerns interconnected by climate change” (DPI/NGO Drafting Committee, 2007). Under the leadership of Larry Roeder (NGO representative and drafting committee member), the DPI/NGO Executive Committee established a working group and then a nonprofit NGO (ClimateCaucus.net), which facilitated online working groups, and a report on climate change from the NGO perspective, which was delivered to the UN Secretary General in December of 2009. I led one of the working groups that produced a chapter on climate change and mental health as part of this report. The chapter was produced together with others from various civil society organizations and academic disciplines and formed one of the starting points for this book. The literature connecting mental health and climate change was scarce at that time, with an electronic database (PsychInfo) only returning one relevant article on the topic (Fritze, Blashki, Burke, & Wiseman, 2008). At the same time, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2009) assembled a task force to produce a report outlining theoretical foundations, potential contributions, and policy recommendations for addressing climate change informed by the field of psychology. Furthermore, the second Annual Psychology Day at the United Nations in 2008 explored climate change as one of the aspects of social justice. As outlined in this volume, climate change is expected to have the most devastating effects on low-resource and developing countries, who contribute relatively little to climate change compared to more wealthy nations. Addressing the threat of climate change is therefore not only an urgent issue but also a social responsibility among more industrialized nations. With the 2009 Copenhagen conference, momentum and discussions around climate change continued to grow. Yet, the implications and impact on mental health and well-being were mostly absent from discussions about climate change (Page & Howard, 2010). However, the literature on climate change and mental health and well-being continues to grow in scope, and it is hoped that such efforts will result in tangible benefits for the most at-risk populations and groups. The purpose of the book is to contribute to such efforts by shedding light on current scientific and empirical evidence on the impact of climate change on psychosocial well-being and mental health from different perspectives. The book is organized into three complementary sections, the first on the impact of climate change, the second on special populations, and the third on specific recommendations. Each of the chapters in this book explores one key aspect of climate change and well-being, which is informed by multidisciplinary perspectives. The chapters comprising this book provide various examples of how collaboration, dialogue, and the synthesis of ideas can happen across different schools and disciplines, resulting in recommendations for research, practice, and policy.

Chapter 1 gives a general overview of the projected impact of climate change (climate-induced processes such as temperature rises, climate variability, and extreme weather events) and its relevance for human well-being, including mental health and psychosocial factors. Previous work of psychologists and mental health professionals is discussed and put into context, highlighting social justice aspects

and the complex direct and indirect effects of climate change. This chapter sets the stage for a more-detailed examination of different aspects and implications for human well-being in this volume.

The psychological threat of climate change is examined in Chapter 2, written by Joseph Reser, Shirley Morrissey, and Michelle Ellul at the School of Psychology at Griffith University. Dr. Reser has been part of the task force of the American Psychological Association, and has generated a report on the interface between psychology and global climate change (APA, 2009). Dr. Morrissey is a clinical and health psychologist with extensive experience in the disaster area and anxiety management. This chapter makes clear not only that devastating environmental effects of a changing climate will impact health and well-being but that public perceptions and construction of this threat can have a significant impact with the potential of increasing distress and anxiety. The chapter draws from various interdisciplinary perspectives and examines the social construction and public perception of the climate change threat, concluding with a discussion of potential contributions of psychologists.

Chapter 3 is written by Dr. Glenn Albrecht, who is Dean and Professor at the School of Sustainability at Murdoch University in Australia. Dr. Albrecht was the one to first coin the term “solastalgia” to describe the psychological distress caused by climate-related environmental changes and degradation in rural Australia and beyond. It is suggested in this chapter that climate change, which compromises the healthy link between people and their home territory, can increase the prevalence of “psychoterratic illnesses” such as solastalgia or “eco-anxiety”. Dr. Albrecht’s work has contributed to raise awareness of potential psychological effects of climate change, which has been picked up by other scholars and the popular media.

The effects of extreme weather-related events such as disaster on mental health in the context of climate change are covered in Chapter 4. Dr. David Simpson is professor of community development and director of the Center for Hazards Research and Policy Development, while Dr. Sandra Sephton is a professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at the University of Louisville. This chapter is an example of a collaboration of different disciplines, examining the effects of disaster from biobehavioral and disaster preparedness and response perspectives. The chapter outlines effects of extreme weather events and offers recommendations for policy and practice.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the emerging literature on climate change and humanitarian crises with that on mental health and psychosocial support. Jennifer Czincz is currently completing her internship in clinical psychology at Yale University. She has written on the role of psychology in international affairs and completed global projects in different locations such as the Philippines. This chapter discusses shortcomings and challenges in providing psychosocial and mental health interventions during humanitarian crises and outlines current recommendations and best practices based on empirical literature and agency guidelines.

The potential implications of climate change for security and violent conflict are critically explored in Chapter 6. This chapter draws on the extensive experience and knowledge of Dr. Chad Briggs who currently serves as Minerva Chair of Energy &

Environmental Security at the US Air Force. He is also a senior associate at Adelphi Research in Berlin and a Fellow at the Institute for Environmental Security in The Hague. Dr. Briggs was previously senior adviser for International Security Affairs to the US Department of Energy's Energy and Environmental Security Directorate and professor of International Relations and Environmental Risk at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. He has also conducted research and field work in eastern and southeastern Europe. This chapter outlines the complexities and controversies surrounding potential links between climate change and conflict and offers perspectives from the field of peace psychology.

In Chapter 7, Dr. Anita Wenden explores the role of women as one specific group affected by climate change and as a potential change agent. She is cofounder of Earth and Peace Education International (www.globalepe.org) and director of Peace Education and Research for the organization. She is Professor Emerita of York College, City University of New York, where she cofounded and served as director of the College's Cultural Diversity Program. She is the main NGO representative for the International Peace Research Association at UN headquarters in New York City, where she established and chairs the NGO Committee on the Status of Women's Subcommittee on Women and Climate Change. The chapter describes how socially constructed gender roles contribute to the vulnerability of women to climate change and offers perspectives on how adapting to climate change can challenge women to take leadership in their communities.

Rising sea levels and coastal flooding as well as other adverse environmental conditions such as droughts or disasters may cause further large-scale population displacement or "environmental refugees." Chapter 8 offers a multidimensional perspective on the impact on mental health and well-being among such refugees within various theoretical frameworks. Dr. Michael Hollifield has published extensively in the area of refugee mental health and is currently working as a scientist at the Behavioral Health Research Center of the Southwest (a center of Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation) as well as an adjunct associate professor, at the University of New Mexico and University of Louisville. Dr. Mindy T. Fullilove is a research psychiatrist at New York State Psychiatric Institute and professor at the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Dr. Fullilove's work on the mental health effects of environmental processes, health problems caused by inequity, and the connection between mental health and sense of place is well known and has specific relevance in the context of climate change. Dr. Stevan Hobfoll is the Judd and Marjorie Weinberg Presidential Professor and Chair at the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Rush University Medical Center. He has developed the "conservation of resources" theory and made substantial contributions in the area of stress and trauma. This chapter discusses aspects of the refugee experience such as loss of resources and of a sense of place and identity and concludes with recommendations for preventing and responding to effects on mental health and well-being.

In the context of disaster and crises, the emphasis is shifting from identifying vulnerabilities and what is missing in crisis to considering people's own strategies for coping and adapting. Chapter 9 explores concepts such as resilience,

posttraumatic growth, and spirituality, which have increasingly been recognized as important to individual and community recovery. This chapter draws on field-work conducted by Dr. Tamasin Ramsay after the Orissa cyclone in India and on theoretical foundations of constructing meaning, re-authoring, and posttraumatic growth. Dr. Ramsay, a paramedic and anthropologist, has made contributions to understanding the relationship between faith, response to disaster, and forms of outreach and care. Dr. Lenore Manderson is a medical anthropologist and social historian at Monash University whose research examines social relationships and identity within cross-cultural contexts. This chapter describes emerging concepts of culture, resilience, and spirituality within the context of climate change and offers practical recommendations.

Climate change and weather-related events can overwhelm local capacity, especially in settings with lower resources. Chapter 10 provides insight into the concept of community resilience within the context of climate change. Taegen Edwards is a Research Fellow of Climate Change and Social Justice and Dr. John Wiseman is director of the McCaughey Centre, VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing at the School of Population Health at the University of Melbourne. The chapter synthesizes evidence about the characteristics that strengthen community resilience to the threats and challenges of climate change and outline locally relevant actions that can help communities reduce risk and adapt.

Chapter 11 highlights key aspects of previous chapters and offers conclusions for addressing the global impact of climate change on human well-being, while considering research, practice, and policy implications within a framework of cultural competency.

Together, the chapters of this book highlight not only the urgent needs and challenges but also the opportunities for collaboration and for pursuing common goals to reduce the threat of climate change and mitigate effects on mental health and psychological well-being. We hope that this book will benefit mental health professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, as well as social science researchers, public health professionals, development and humanitarian workers, policy makers, and students from various disciplines. This volume also represents a call for not only joining the global dialogue on climate change but also contributing to specific and tangible actions at the local and global levels, with the aim of improving mental health and well-being and reducing inequities worldwide.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-9741-8>

Climate Change and Human Well-Being
Global Challenges and Opportunities

Weissbecker, I. (Ed.)

2011, XVI, 220 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4419-9741-8