

# Presenter



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# Climate change and mental health:

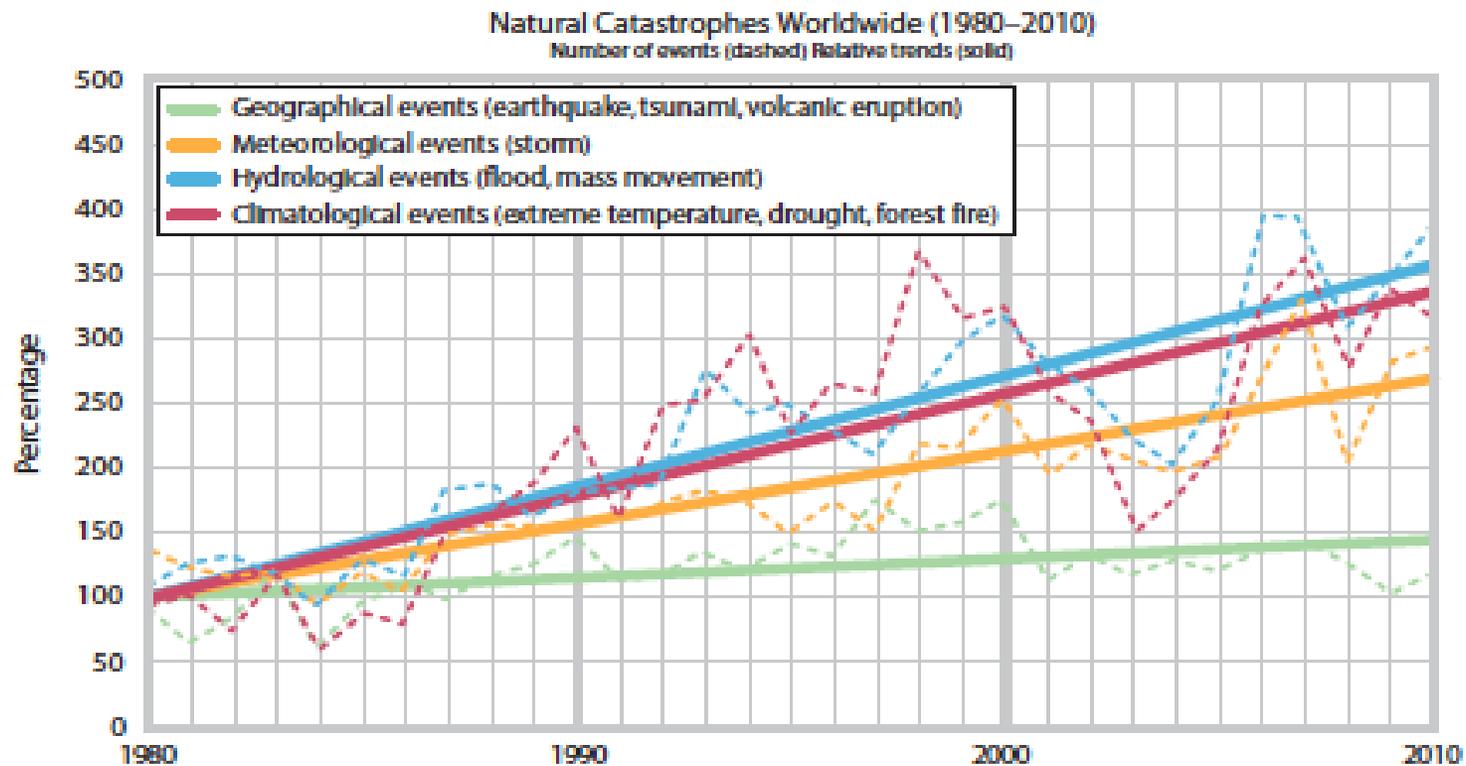
## Psychosocial impacts

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# How can climate change affect psychological well-being?

- + Acute impacts from natural disasters
- + Gradual impacts from changing temperatures, sea levels, and patterns of precipitation
- + Indirect impacts on the ways we think about ourselves, each other, and the world

# Natural disasters are on the rise



Data from D. Guha-Sapir, R. Below, Ph. Hoyois - EM-DAT: International Disaster Database - [www.emdat.be](http://www.emdat.be) - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium.

# Resulting trauma

- + Mental health problems
  - + PTSD
  - + Depression, anxiety
  - + Substance abuse
  - + Suicide and suicidal ideation
- + These effects may be prolonged
- + They may not be prioritized by emergency responders

# E.g., Hurricane Katrina

- + 49% developed an anxiety or mood disorder
- + 1 in 6 developed posttraumatic stress disorder
- + Suicide and suicidal ideation more than doubled



# Community impacts

- + Domestic abuse
- + Violence and conflict
- + Stress of indirect impacts
  - + Economic insecurity
  - + Infrastructure problems

# Vulnerable populations

- + Women, children, the elderly, members of marginalized communities
  - + The elderly are particularly vulnerable to heat
- + Those already suffering from mental illness
  - + Mental health care is often disrupted by disasters
  - + Psychotropic medication is a risk factor for heat-related death

# Inequality itself is a threat to mental health

## + Risk factors:

- Reduced personal autonomy
- Negative self-perception
- Stress
- Social isolation
- Insecurity

# Gradual climate changes



# Effects on physical health

- + Infectious diseases, heat waves, ground-level ozone, allergies, nutritional deficiencies

# Increased levels of stress

## + Due to

- economic difficulties
- damage to physical and social infrastructure
- environmental degradation

+ *All possibly requiring migration*

# Migration presents a health risk

- Immigrants are more likely to develop psychosis
  - A German report recently described levels approaching 50% for PTSD and depression
- Mental health is worse even among second-generation immigrants
  - showing that it is the social context post-migration and not the pre-migration factors that matter.
- Unlike survivors of discrete traumas, refugees experience stressors that accumulate over the pre-flight, flight, exile, and repatriation periods.

# Indirect consequences

- + Perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world we live in



# Thinking about ourselves

- + Diminished sense of *self*
  - + loss of occupation
  - + loss of lifestyle and culture
  - + loss of autonomy

# Relating to others

- + Stresses on social *relationships*
- + Diminished opportunities for social interaction
- + Disrupted social bonds

# Thinking about the world

- + “Our gardens have had to die because our house dam has been dry.... It’s very depressing because a garden is an oasis...that’s all gone, so you’ve got dust at your back door” (Australian farmer coping with drought)
- + “You think your house is permanent... When you lose your house and everything you own, you learn everything is temporary” (Hurricane Sandy survivor)



# Solastalgia

Loss of *place* and disruption of place bonds

Loss of solace from valued places

Loss of security

# Promoting resilience

- Most people do recover from trauma
- Post-traumatic growth is possible
- Becoming actively involved in addressing climate change can help people to cope with the stress of worrying about it
- + *"We learned first-hand that the best way for us to heal from our devastation and loss was to help others recover." (Hurricane Sandy survivor)*

# Factors associated with resilience

- + Practical support
- + Community ties
- + Sense of optimism
- + Active coping strategies



# Components of resilience

- *Readiness*
  - Educate people about what to expect and how to adapt
- *Monitoring*
  - Conduct a vulnerability assessment
- *Cooperation*
  - Establish the social infrastructure to withstand changes and encourage adaptation

# Acting on climate change can protect health

- Burning fossil fuels emits pollution that is associated with 4 of the 5 leading causes of death in the U.S.
- Coal-burning plants are also the leading cause of mercury pollution, which affects the brain
- 3.2 million people a year die from factors related to physical inactivity. Choosing to walk or cycle instead of driving can have strong positive health impacts.
- Eating less meat, especially red meat, would reduce risk of heart disease and death while reducing carbon emissions.

# Health is not just the absence of disease

- + Climate change presents an *opportunity*
  - to examine the social and physical infrastructure of our communities
  - to consider opportunities of enhancing well-being

