

Geo-psychiatry: an Emerging New Discipline in Psychiatry

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There has been ample evidence that mental health problems are increasing significantly over the last few decades. It is generally estimated that around 25–30 % of general population will experience some type of psychological distress and findings from pooled across studies indicate that on average one in five adults (17.6%) experienced a common mental disorder within the past 12 months and 29.2% across their lifetime (1). Similarly, Global Burden of Disease 2019 study showed that mental disorders remained among the top ten leading causes of burden worldwide, with no evidence of global reduction in the burden since 1990 (2).

The influence of geopolitical, social, and political determinants on mental health and mental illnesses are well known. Effects of disasters, wars, conflicts, and climate change aggravate the underlying psychological distress with an increased anxiety and depression among general population (3). While many such factors are linked with the increased incidence & prevalence of psychiatric & psychological morbidities, new dimensions are being explored in this context of prevention and therapeutic interventions. Similarly, evidence showing the acute and chronic mental health effects of climate change has become a focus of attention in recent empirical research.

Geo-psychiatry, a new discipline in psychiatry, is emerging as an important field of mental health and is gaining widespread recognition (4). While linking the casual chain of geographic risk factors, it looks at the influence of geopolitical, social and political determinants on mental health and mental illnesses and proposes interventions to help the clinicians, health planners and policy makers for future work.

Geo-psychiatry is an intersectoral and multiprofessional field that involves various professionals looking at climate change, traumas, disasters, and geopolitics & socio-economic transformations in understanding and explaining the mental health and mental illness processes (4). Several systematic reviews of the literature have published the public health impacts of global climate change. It has been emphasised that to understand the scale and scope of mental health impacts linked to climate change is an important step before making plans for developing

Highlights

- Mental health impacts of global climate change are of significant importance.
- Geo-psychiatry examines the influence of geopolitical determinants on mental health.
- Consequences of global climate change are essential aspects of developing services.
- Inclusion of this topic in related curriculums needs to be a high priority.

services to treat or prevent the consequences of these changes. The impacts include both direct and indirect effects. It is important to plan delivery of services in response to acute and extreme weather events, but long-lasting climate-related changes will also require development and implementation of new strategies like public health education and promotion of positive psychological outcomes associated with climate changes (5).

Although, new research is emphasizing about the acute and chronic mental health effects of climate change, but, despite its apparent importance & evident impacts, this area is still developing both at service delivery and policy making stages. While delivery of services in response to acute and extreme weather events may appear to be of greater priority at the present time, subacute and long-lasting climate strategies like public health education, personal engagement in environmental conservation, and promotion of positive psychological outcomes associated with climate change are also important. We also need to know, what services are needed & how they are developed & implemented and by whom.

There is an increasing global awareness that during the coming years, the world is approaching a period of extensive climate changes. There is

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thus a need to safeguard humankind from the worst harms of the climate catastrophe. In view of the increasing interest in climate changes and their impacts on mental health and mental well-being, there is a need to highlight the influences of such factors in our day-to-day teaching and training in clinical and academic psychiatry. A need is, therefore, felt to include the underlying dynamics of climate change and its wider influences on approaches to acknowledge, prevent, and manage mental health issues on the affected populations.

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